



**3** Kuwait records 486 new COVID cases; one death



**7** Cameroon 'forgotten' war leaves refugees in a limbo



**8** Equities rise; Powell soothes rate fears; oil close to \$120



**12** Chelsea survive FA Cup scare; Club up for sale



# Iran and Saudi cannot get rid of each other: Saudi Crown Prince

## Saudi Prince calls for peaceful coexistence

**RIYADH:** His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister has affirmed that Saudi Arabia is trying to evolve based on what it has - the economic assets and utilizing its potential. The Saudi prince during an interview with The Atlantic said "we are not trying to be like Dubai or America. We are trying to evolve based on what we have. We are not disparaging our beliefs, because that is our soul. The Holy Mosques are in Saudi Arabia and no one can remove it. We have a responsibility to put our country on the right path for the sake of our people, the region, and the whole world based on our belief in peace."

"We are going back to the real teachings of Islam: the way that the Prophet (PBUH) and the four Rightly Guided caliphs lived, which was open and peaceful. They had Christians and Jews living under their rule. They taught us to respect all cultures, all religions regardless. The teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) and the four Caliphs were perfect. We are going back to the root. What happened was that the



His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia.

extremists hijacked and changed our religion to something new for their own interests," the Saudi Crown Prince added.

He slammed those with extremist views. "They

are trying to make people view Islam their way. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Ikhwan played a huge role in creating all these extremism views. They were the bridge that took others to extremism. When you talk to them, they will not seem to be extremists, but they lead you to extremism. Osama bin Laden was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood; Al-Zawahiri used to be a member of the Muslim Brotherhood; the leader of ISIS used to be a member of the Muslim Brotherhood," he pointed out.

About Wahhabism, the Saudi prince said that Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab was neither a prophet nor an angel. "He was just a scholar like many other scholars who lived during the first Saudi state. The problem at that time in the Arabian Peninsula was that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's students were the only people who knew how to read and write and history was written from their own perspective.

"Saudi Arabia has Sunnis and Shiites. Among the Sunnis, we have four schools while the Shiites have

different schools - and all of them are represented in number of religious boards. Today, no one can push one of the schools' views to make it as the only way of seeing religion in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a monarchy which is based and founded on that model. Beneath the monarchy, there is a complex structure of tribal and urban monarchical system like tribal chiefs and urban leaders. I cannot change Saudi Arabia to another type of system, because it has been based on a monarchy for over three hundred years, and this complex monarchical structure of tribal and urban systems have been part of how people lived in the past and it is part of a Saudi Arabia today," he explained.

On Iran, he said "Iranians are our neighbors forever. We cannot get rid of them and they can't get rid of us, so it's better for both of us to work it out and to look for ways to coexist. We have had four rounds of negotiations and we heard statements from Iranian leaders.

Continued on Page 2

## 'Not our war': GCC resists pressure to raise oil output

**DUBAI:** Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sent energy prices surging, but the oil-rich Gulf monarchies have so far resisted Western pressure to raise output, prioritizing their own strategic and economic interests. The price of a barrel of West Texas Intermediate crude topped \$115 yesterday, the highest since 2008, as the war and sanctions against Moscow stoked fears about global supplies.

Russia is the world's second biggest crude exporter after Saudi Arabia, which is close to Western governments but also to Moscow. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies (OPEC+), led by Riyadh and Moscow, failed Wednesday to respond to a call to produce more and faster, despite pressure on the Gulf states in particular.

The group argued that the "current volatility is not caused by changes in market fundamentals but by current geopolitical developments," according to a press release. "Gulf countries are testing their ability to have a strategic autonomy, to defend their own national interests," Hasan Alhasan, a Middle East specialist at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, told AFP.

The Gulf countries, which had suffered from declines in oil prices since 2014, now seem all the more reluctant to take immediate action as they benefit from the short-term price surge. If the barrel stays above \$100, this will mean that none of the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries will face a budget deficit by 2022, wrote researcher Karen Young of the Washington-based Arab Gulf States Institute.

Amena Baker, an analyst with Energy Intelligence, said that according to OPEC+ "there is no physical shortage of crude in the market." "The impact of the Western sanctions against Russia's hydrocarbon exports is still unknown," she said. Baker said the only two OPEC+ countries able to truly open the floodgates are Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, but that even they would be unable to make up for Russian exports.

"Overall our calculations put spare capacity of OPEC+ at 2.5 million barrels per day and that's much less than what Russia exports... Russia's exports are closer to 4.8 million bpd," she said.

Continued on Page 2

## US, United Arab Emirates relations facing 'stress test'

**ABU DHABI:** The United Arab Emirates and the United States are facing a "stress test" in their relationship, a senior Emirati diplomat said yesterday, as Russia's war in Ukraine strains ties. Yousef Al-Otaiba, the Emirati ambassador to the US, was speaking days after the UAE abstained in a UN Security Council vote on a resolution demanding a Russian withdrawal from Ukraine.

## Ukraine pounded; Russia seizes city ahead of talks

**KYIV:** Ukraine's leader vowed yesterday that Moscow would be made to pay to rebuild his shattered country, as the warring sides readied for ceasefire talks following the fall of the first major city to Russian forces. The invasion, now in its eighth day, has driven one million Ukrainians from their homes and plunged Russia into deepening isolation as a global pariah in the worlds of finance, diplomacy and sports.

The UN has opened a probe into alleged war crimes, as the Russian military bombards cities in Ukraine with shells and missiles, forcing civilians to cover in basements. "We will restore every house, every street, every city and we say to Russia: learn the word 'reparations'," Ukrainian

President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a video statement.

"You will reimburse us for everything you did against our state, against every Ukrainian, in full," he said.

Zelensky claims thousands of Russian soldiers have been killed since Russian President Vladimir Putin shocked the world by invading Ukraine, purportedly to demilitarize and "de-Nazify" Western-leaning threat on his borders. Announcing its own toll for the first time this week, Moscow said it had lost 498 troops, and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin would praise their sacrifice at a meeting with his security chiefs later Thursday.

"It's a huge tragedy," Peskov told

"Our relationship with the US is like any relationship," he told the International Defense Industry, Technology and Security Conference in Abu Dhabi. "It has strong days where the relationship is very healthy, and days where the relationship is under question." "Today, we're going through a stress test, but I'm confident that we will get out of it and we will get to a better place," Otaiba added.

The wealthy Gulf state hosts US troops and has been a strategic partner to Washington for decades, but its economic and political ties with Russia are growing. The UAE, which currently holds the UN Security Council presidency, on Friday abstained from voting on a US-Albanian draft resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Three days later, the Security Council vot-

ed to extend an arms embargo to all of Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels. After Russia, which is close to Iran, voted in favor of the UAE-supported resolution, diplomats suggested a deal was cut between Moscow and Abu Dhabi.

The Gulf state has also shown no interest in increasing oil production after prices were sent sky-rocketing by the Russian invasion, saying it remains committed to the OPEC+ alliance, which is led by Saudi Arabia and Russia and controls output levels. The recent developments come after US forces fired Patriot interceptors to help thwart a Houthi missile attack on Abu Dhabi in January. Three oil workers were killed in an earlier attack.

In December, the UAE threatened to scrap its mega-purchase of US F-35 fighter jets, stressing

Continued on Page 2



ZHYTOMYR: A Ukrainian man stands in the rubble in Zhytomyr, following a Russian bombing the day before. — AFP

reporters in Moscow. "But we also admire the heroism of our soldiers. Their exploits will enter into the history books, their exploits in the struggle against the Nazis." The Kremlin has been condemned for likening the government of Zelensky, who is

Jewish, to Germany's in World War II. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov kept up a verbal barrage, however, accusing Western politicians of fixating on "nuclear war" after Putin placed his strategic forces on high alert. — AFP

## Is 5G truly green, or will it burn up more resources?

**BARCELONA:** The tech industry has long tried to align with the green movement, though its leaders are often accused of spouting nebulous slogans and making hard-to-test pledges. The Mobile World Congress, an industry get-together in Barcelona, certainly saw some sloganeering. But Huawei, Orange and industry body GSMA attempted to flesh out some of the green claims made about 5G.

The next-generation mobile network is being rolled out across the globe, with promises of super-fast

internet going hand-in-hand with claims of massive benefits for the environment. Laurence Williams of Sussex university in the UK recently led research assessing the available evidence on the supposed green gains of 5G. He told AFP how the industry's claims stack up.

Jean-Marie Chaufray of Orange hailed power-saving features such as "sleep modes", whereby components are switched off when they are not being used, and more energy efficient antennae and other hardware. He told the MWC that 5G would be "10 times more efficient" than 4G by 2025. Laurence Williams: "Energy efficiency is only half of the equation. The total amount of data traffic being transmitted across mobile networks clearly matters too.

"Mobile data traffic is set to continue growing dramatically in the coming years. It is increasingly acknowledged that 5G will at least in part be the cause of this data traffic growth. "Various estimates

have been put out by the industry—some suggest network energy consumption will fall, others that it can remain flat, at least one estimate suggests that network energy consumption will rise due to 5G.— AFP

"A recent study from Finland estimated that electricity consumption of the main mobile networks in 2017 was roughly 10 percent higher than in 2010. The authors argue that this was due to rapidly increasing data usage and new functionalities, especially video streaming. "Whilst this study relates to the period just before 5G started to be rolled out across the world, it nonetheless demonstrates that improvements in the energy efficiency of networks do not guarantee reductions in the energy consumption of networks."

GSMA's Emanuel Kolta boasted that telecoms companies were "among the leading private sector companies" for committing to net-zero goals. And he marked out the path to achieving those aims through

Continued on Page 2



## Local

# Malta hails Kuwait's Al-Babtain foundation's peace efforts

## Mediterranean University of Albania awards Babtain honorary doctorate



VALETTA: Maltese President George Vella speaks during the World Forum for Culture of Peace. — KUNA photos



Speaker of Kuwait National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem (third from left) attends the forum.

VALETTA: The scheduled World Forum for Culture of Peace, organized by the Kuwaiti Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation, kicked off in Malta yesterday. Among the leading participants in the forum is Speaker of the Kuwait National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, who arrived in the Mediterranean country late on Wednesday. Sponsored and attended by Maltese President George Vella, the forum, themed "leadership for just peace," will see three sessions, said the foundation secretary general, Abdulrahman Khaled Al-Babtain. 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.



President of the Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation Abdulaziz Al-Babtain receives an honorary doctorate from Mediterranean University in Albania.



Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem (second from right) attends the ceremony to confer the honorary doctorate to Abdulaziz Al-Babtain.

### Culture of peace

President Vella hailed the efforts of Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Foundation to support the culture of peace. In his speech at the inauguration of forum, Vella thanked the foundation for choosing Malta to hold the forum, at a time when the world is witnessing an attack on democracy, the sovereignty of countries, and peace. The forum, themed "leadership for a just peace", aims to promote the values of peace, something a world filled with conflicts and wars needs badly these days, said Vella.

On the forum sessions, 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, includes 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.

### Honorary doctorate

Meanwhile, the Mediterranean University in Albania awarded an honorary doctorate to the president of the Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation. The poet Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain was

awarded for his distinguished contribution to supporting and promoting a culture of peace in the international community, establishing cooperation mechanisms through the dissemination of culture, education, and dialogue for future generations.

President of the Mediterranean University Prof Dr Anastas Angeli awarded Al-Babtain the certificate in the presence of the President of the Republic of Albania Ilir Meta. This award is the 15th doctoral degree given to the poet Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain from Arab and foreign universities. — KUNA

## Fantasy World sponsors ASCC singing competition

KUWAIT: February has always been the most festive time during the year due to Kuwait's national celebrations. The Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Centre (ASCC) was at the focal point of the country's national festivities with its fantastic array of events, workshops and competitions that entertained, educated and enlightened all visitors during the national holiday season. The shows included a laser and dinosaur show as well as a parkour show by Kuwait's most popular parkour team starring Mohammad Al-Attar. A macaw show was also held on ASCC's grounds

by the Kuwait Free Flight Team. The diverse assortment of workshops that were available on a daily basis included the following:

- Build your own turbine
- Make your own tornado
- Fossil hunting
- Scientists' Tales: Sons of Mousa and Ibn Al-Haitham
- Animal monitoring
- Fire safety
- Kuwait wildlife
- 3D printing
- Oil spills

Apart from the photography competition held by the Kuwait Photographic Society, ASCC created three competitions of its own including the poetry competition "For the Love of Kuwait," the Animals in Kuwait's Wildlife photography competition and lastly, the "For Kuwait We Sing," a singing competition for 5 - 10-year-old

children. The competition's rules were simple: Record oneself singing any national song for a chance to win a SingTrix Party Bundle Premium Edition Home Karaoke System and to also get the opportunity to perform the song live on ASCC's outdoor stage. The talented winner who wowed the crowd at the recognition ceremony held at ASCC on February 28 was eight-year-old Abdullah Soud Al-Quaid.

Fantasy World was delighted to be associated with this event where children's imagination and talents are promoted. "ASCC's singing competition in celebration of Kuwait's national day was a perfect event to sponsor where kids sing with full zest and patriotism, we had to sponsor it," said the spokesperson from Fantasy World. "Singtrix is the perfect gift for one of Kuwait's future singing talents, so the winner may practice his skills in the comfort of his home to make us all proud in the future."



## Iran and Saudi cannot get rid of...

Continued from Page 1

We are going to continue through the details of the negotiations. Hopefully, we can reach a position that is good for both countries and is going to create a brighter future for our country and Iran."

The Saudi Crown Prince said he simply doesn't care whether US President Joe Biden misunderstands him or not. In an interview yesterday, Prince Mohammed said his aim is to strengthen Riyadh's long, historical relationship with Washington, but he was not concerned about whether Biden misunderstood him.

"Simply, I do not care," the Crown Prince was quoted as saying. "It's up to him to think about the interests of America. We have a long, historic relationship with the United States. For us, our aim is to keep it and to strengthen it. We have a political interest, we have economic interests and we have a security interest. It

is huge. We have a huge opportunity to boost all of these things. There is also a big possibility it could be downgraded in many areas. If you ask Saudi Arabia, we want to boost it in all areas. You don't have the right to interfere in our internal affairs. That's about us - Saudis," he added.

"Let me give you an example. We didn't get rid of slavery 60 or 70 years ago because we had any pressure. We had good influences from foreign countries. Saudi people studied abroad and American companies, European companies and different companies are doing businesses in Saudi Arabia. Their influence is strong. At a point, we realized slavery wrong - so we got rid of it. Pressure doesn't work," he said.

The Crown Prince pointed out that Saudi Arabia is a G20 country. "You can see our position five years ago: it was almost 20. Today, we are almost 17th among the G20 countries and we are aiming to reach a place more advanced than 15 by 2030. Saudi Arabia is not a small country. It is growing very fast. American companies have a huge concentration here. We have more than 300,000 Americans in Saudi Arabia and some of them are Saudi-American. The interest is obvious - whether you want to win in Saudi Arabia or lose, it is up to you," he said. —Agencies

Obama's vice-president, quickly shifted back to a somewhat tougher stance on human rights and arms deals. He also reopened negotiations with Iran, long accused by Gulf states of creating regional chaos.

Otaiba said the UAE's focus has shifted to "partnering" with big economies such as the US in areas such as defense and technology, rather than just "buying." "I think it's fair to say that 10, 20 years ago, the UAE was considered or viewed as a traditional buyer of advanced technology," he said. "Today, in 2022, I think that that framework is not still the same. I think today we are more of a developer... We're not interested in just buying. — AFP

## Is 5G truly green, or will it burn up...

Continued from Page 1

uptake of renewable energy, more efficient batteries and "low-hanging fruit" like using artificial intelligence to enable component shutdowns in less busy periods. Laurence Williams: "Encouragingly telcos are increasingly signing up to climate targets and committing to use renewable energy to power their networks. "While some operators already power their

## 'Not our war': GCC resists pressure to...

Continued from Page 1

However, producing countries are aware that high prices risk depressing the global economy and accelerating the energy transition away from fossil fuels, at a time of fragile post-COVID recovery.

"What is most important for Saudi Arabia is oil price stability," said Alhasan, who added that the kingdom counts on Russia's cooperation in this. The last time Saudi Arabia and Russia clashed over production quotas, it led to a price war and a collapse of prices, he recalled. Baker agreed that "keeping Russia as part of OPEC+ is also seen as very important by member states ... That's the only way to ensure an effective market managing tool in the years to come."

networks with 100 percent renewable energy, a 2021 benchmarking study from GSMA suggested that looking across 31 networks in 28 diverse countries an average of 46 percent of energy consumption was supplied by renewable sources with significant variation between countries.

"The operational energy required to power mobile networks is important, but so is the 'embodied energy' required to produce network infrastructure. "A lot of research looking at the energy use implications of 5G only looks at operational energy. "At the very least, we should be sceptical about the claimed energy saving potential of strategies that require the large-scale introduction of new infrastructure based on assessments that fail to consider the embodied energy costs of that infrastructure." — AFP

The International Energy Agency announced Tuesday that member countries would release 60 million barrels of oil from their strategic reserves to stabilize global markets. Half, 30 million barrels, will be released by the United States. Alhasan said the pressure the United States has exerted on its close Gulf partners has been "limited" so far, adding that "we'll see if the pressure will increase in the coming days". According to the analyst, the "Gulf countries have said: 'This isn't our war.' A very similar message, by the way, to the one consistently sent by the US to the Gulf states on Yemen... over the past several years."

Saudi Arabi and the UAE-close diplomatic and military partners of the United States-have intervened in Yemen since 2015 to support government forces against Huthi rebels, who are backed by Iran. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi would like stepped-up support from Washington against the rebels, but the US has been reluctant to engage further in a conflict where all parties have been accused of war crimes. — AFP

## US, United Arab Emirates relations...

Continued from Page 1

stringent conditions set by Washington over concerns on China. UAE ties with the US had warmed under former president Donald Trump, after a cooler period during Barack Obama's tenure. But President Joe Biden, who was



Local

# Kuwaiti oil price remains well above \$100 per barrel threshold

## Crude at \$112.96 pb amid turbulence caused by Russia-Ukraine crisis

KUWAIT: Price of the Kuwaiti crude oil has remained well above the \$100 per barrel (pb) threshold, amid global turbulence caused by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis. In a statement early yesterday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), the umbrella of the Kuwaiti oil companies, said in a statement that the Kuwait oil price rose, further for the second day in a row, by \$10.65 to hit as high as \$112.96 pb on Wednesday, compared to \$102.31 pb the day before.

Meanwhile, in international markets, forward contracts of the Brent crude rose by \$7.96 to \$112.93 pb, while identical deals for the West Texas Intermediate crude followed suit, climbing by \$7.19 to hit \$110.60 pb. On Wednesday, the KPC said the Kuwaiti oil went up by \$4.18 to \$102.31 pb on Tuesday as opposed to \$98.13 pb on Monday. During the same period, prices of the Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate also made a gigantic jump by \$7 and \$7.69 respectively, putting both crudes at \$104.97 per barrel and \$103.41 pb. Rates of the Kuwaiti oil and crudes of other oil-producing countries have been soaring amid ripples of the Ukraine-Russia crisis that has also impacted other key sectors of global economies and businesses.



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



### Int'l market prices follow suit

On Wednesday in Vienna, the 26th OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial virtual meeting concluded after examining oil market conditions in shadow of oil prices' record hike. In a statement, the members noted, "current oil market fundamentals and the consensus on its outlook pointed to a well-balanced market, and that current volatility is not caused by changes in market fundamentals, but by current geopolitical developments." The statement added, "the OPEC and participating non-OPEC oil-producing countries decided to reaffirm the decision of the 10th Ministerial Meeting on April 12, 2020, and further

endorsed in subsequent meetings including the 19th Ministerial Meeting on July 18, 2021."

"Reconfirm the production adjustment plan and the monthly production adjustment mechanism approved at the 19th Ministerial Meeting and the decision to adjust upward the monthly overall production by 0.4 mb/d for the month of April 2022, as per the attached schedule," the statement said. "Reiterate the critical importance of adhering to full conformity and to the compensation mechanism taking advantage of the extension of the compensation period until the end of June 2022," the statement added. "Compensation plans should be submitted in accordance with the statement of the 15th Ministerial Meeting," the statement noted, adding members will "hold the 27th OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial Meeting on March 31, 2022," the statement concluded. — KUNA



WASHINGTON: MP Obaid Al-Mutairi (center) speaks during the talks. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti MP leads delegation in talks with US-based bodies

WASHINGTON: A Kuwaiti lawmaker is leading a national delegation for talks with US-based organizations, including the World Bank, over the rapidly changing global developments, he said on

Wednesday, in reference to the Russia-Ukraine crisis that has degenerated into an all-out war triggered by military operations in Ukraine. The talks focused on the "potential ripple effects" these developments can have on the global economy, in addition to matters ranging from anti-corruption efforts to civil liberties and democracy, Obaid Al-Mutairi said. He highlighted the talks with a plethora of American-based organizations and renowned US political figures as "significant" given the current turn of events, saying it would give his side a "better understanding" of how Washington intends to deal with these developments. — KUNA



## KRCS funds surgical operations for needy in Nepal

KUWAIT: A medical delegation, associated with Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), conducted surgical 35 operations for the less fortunate in Nepal, an official said yesterday. Head of medical services at KRCS Manhal Al-Enezi said that this was the second

mission of its kind for the society to help those desperately in need, adding that the benefactors included patients from far-flung towns and destitute areas. The main purpose of the mission is to cover the need for operations for those who cannot afford it, he indicated, pointing out that similar medical aid missions reach refugees in Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and beyond. Meanwhile, top physician and consultant at the Amiri Hospital Dr Abdullatif Al-Turki said that the second mission in Nepal would further benefit those desperately needing surgery. He thanked the KRCS and the fellow Nepali physicians as well as medical staff who took part in providing the medical aid to the Nepalese. — KUNA



## Kuwait records 486 new COVID-19 cases, one death

KUWAIT: Kuwait recorded 486 new coronavirus cases and one death yesterday, raising the total number of cases to 621,466 and deaths to 2,541. The number of people who recovered from the virus is 1,086, raising the total number of recoveries to 611,381. The rate of recoveries compared to infection rate is 98.4 percent, Ministry of Health's official spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. He added that 44 patients in ICU and the total number of patients in COVID-19 wards is 741, while the number of swabs taken is 13,734, with a total number of 7,691,556. The rate of infection compared to the number of swabs is 3.5 percent. — KUNA

On the occasion of the



Subscribe or renew your subscription  
KD 20 instead of KD 30 for 1 year

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext: 353-355-356





## Local

**Kuwait Times**  
Established 1961  
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher  
**YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN**

Editor-in-Chief  
**ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN**

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 353/3561  
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

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

## Kuwait FM, Irish counterpart discuss bilateral relations

**KUWAIT:** Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah made a phone call yesterday to Ireland's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defense Simon Coveney. During the phone call, the two discussed the close bilateral ties that link both countries, ways of developing them in various fields, as well as the latest developments on the regional and international arenas. — KUNA



Sheikh Dr Ahmad  
Al-Sabah



Simon Coveney

## Arab ministers renew three security strategies

**TUNIS:** The 39th Session of Arab Interior Ministers' Council decided on Wednesday to renew commitment to the strategy to combat the non-medical use of narcotics, the civil defense strategy and the anti-terrorism strategy for the coming three years. The decisions renew the anti-narcotics strategy for the 10th time, the civil defense strategy for the sixth time and the anti-terrorism strategy for the ninth time. During the meeting, hosted by Tunisia, the ministers discussed the security risks facing the Arab region, including terrorism, illicit drugs, cybercrime and illegal immigration. They debated and approved the report of the secretariat of the Arab Interior Ministers' Council on the activities of the Council since its last session and the outcomes of multilateral meetings held with regional and international policing organizations.

The ministers also approved the report of the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences' (NAUSS) activities since the last session of the Council and support given to the university by the government of Saudi Arabia. They decided to set up a panel to prepare for launching a cybersecurity agency, a human rights office and tasked the panel with reporting on its activities for the coming session of the Council. They welcomed the outcomes of the First Euro-Arab Border Security Conference, held in Amman, Jordan, on December 1-2, 2021. Kuwait's Acting Minister of Interior, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr Mohammad Al-Fares represented his country in the meeting.

Minister Fares on Wednesday held two separate meetings with his Egyptian and Yemeni counterparts Mahmoud Tawfiq and Ibrahim Haidan respectively, on the sidelines of the 39th session of Arab Interior Ministers' Council. Fares discussed several issues of common concerns with the two Arab ministers and lauded joint efforts and cooperation, mainly in the security area. The Egyptian minister, meanwhile, extolled mutual collaboration between Egypt and Kuwait. During his meeting with Haidan, Fares discussed also some security issues and touched upon plans and programs in this field. — KUNA



Dr Mohammad Al-Fares



Photo Feature

# National flag colors light up Kuwait's nights



**KUWAIT:** Lights colored with green, red, white and black - the colors of Kuwait's national flag, lit up buildings of main government institutions and key landmarks around Kuwait, lighting up the country's nights during Kuwait's National Day and Independence Day celebrations. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh







Mutilated bodies, gang wars shock Ecuador

## Mozambicans haunted by insurgency's horrors

Page 7

Page 6



IRPIN: This Maxar satellite image shows a damaged bridge and destroyed armored vehicles in Irpin, western Kyiv, Ukraine. — AFP

# 'Locals shooting at locals'

## Kyiv hunts Russian saboteurs; Fear of Russians disguising as locals

**IRPIN:** The Ukrainian special forces commander inspected the remains of a bridge his teams had blown up at the gates of Kyiv and explained his strategy for fighting Russian "saboteurs". "We have our agents living with the locals," Spear unit commander Viktor Chelovan said. "If strangers come into our villages, people send us signals, call us, and we go out and take care of these saboteurs."

A fear of Russians disguised as locals is gradually gripping Ukraine. It crept into Kyiv when Russian paratroopers dropped into a local airfield on the northwestern edge of the city in the first hours of their invasion of Ukraine last Thursday. The precise number who landed-or who survived the Ukrainian counter-offensive-is unclear. But residents of the neighboring village of Irpin have been reporting strange things in

their woods ever since. "We have people who look like locals shooting at other locals," said Irpin resident Andriy Levanchuk.

The 39-year-old financial adviser was using a perilous-looking crossing made of pipes and wires to get to the other side of the small but surprisingly rapid Irpin River. The regular bridge above him was blown up by Ukrainian forces to halt the Russian advance. "These are Russian paratroopers who hide in the woods, enter people's apartments, take their clothes, change and try to walk around in civilian clothes," Levanchuk said. Military analysts believe Levanchuk's hunch about strangers in the woods might be right.

### Local lookouts

Mykola Beleskov of Kyiv's National Institute for Strategic Studies said Russia was "employing special forces of

different kinds en masse" to try and capture the Ukrainian capital. "They are trying to combine airstrikes, artillery and infiltration commandos, who basically provide support for a very gradual advance," he said. The Russian advance on the historic city seemed imminent when the paratroopers arrived.

But Ukrainian forces put up a stiff resistance at the city's northern entrance and then recaptured the airfield. They then started blowing up bridges and setting up barricades across the city to stall the invasion by any means possible. Kyiv residents such as 19-year-old student Ibrahim Shelia further took matters into their own hands. Shelia and his friends began digging a trench in front of their building to lob Molotov cocktails at the Russian tanks.

Yet they also decided to keep a close eye out for people who look like they do not belong. "The other day, with my

guys, we stopped a car that some local people had tipped us off about," Shelia said a few minutes before Kyiv entered its nightly curfew-another measure aimed at better fighting intruders. "There were four people inside with two maps of Ukraine, two laptops and everyone had two Ukrainian passports: the first was the new version, the second the old one," he said. "We immediately called the police. Everyone was arrested and taken away."

### 'Kill the leaders'

The mayor of Irpin also said his men had picked up some Russians after a tip from one of the local villagers. "Of course there are saboteurs," mayor Oleksandr Markushin said while inspecting the remains of his town's main bridge. A few policemen nearby argued about how long it might take to

repair their town's crossing to Kyiv once the war ends. But the special forces commander had no time for idle chitchat and tried to steer the conversation toward the threat at hand. "There are three types of saboteurs," he said. "There are the Russian special forces and GRU (military intelligence) planted here before the war. Their main job was to assist the Russian invasion," he said.

Chelovan said the second group was sent in "to destabilize daily life" with various attacks. "The third group are intelligence agents whose only goal is to kill various Ukrainian leaders," said the commander. A group of volunteer soldiers were trying to maneuver a new shipment of Kalashnikovs across the makeshift river crossing as he spoke. "But most importantly, they are trying to kill the leaders of the people's resistance movement," Chelovan said. — AFP

## US experts: Militarily, the Russian invasion is a disaster so far

**WASHINGTON:** The Russian military's initial invasion of Ukraine has been a surprising strategic and tactical blunder marked by food and fuel shortages, abandoned armored vehicles, aircraft losses and troop deaths, US experts say. But the failures of the first days, including vastly underestimating the Ukrainians' willingness to fight back, could lead to a frustrated Moscow deciding to unleash all its power and indiscriminately destroying large swathes of Ukraine, they said.

US specialists who study the Russian military say they have been astonished by the mismanagement of the campaign, which has seen invading columns stalled, apparently hundreds of Russian armored vehicles lost, and the Ukrainians preventing the Kremlin's air force from controlling the skies. "If you were going to screw it up two or three weeks in, I might understand it," said Scott Boston, a senior defense analyst at the Rand Corp. think tank. "But if you, like, tripped over the doorframe on the way into the house, you have another issue," he said.

The Pentagon and private sector experts expected Russian President Vladimir Putin's army to quickly destroy Ukraine's ability to fight back, undermining its command and control of the 200,000-strong Ukraine military, wrecking its missile defenses and destroying Kyiv's air force. None of that has happened in the first six days.

And, although there are no reliable estimates of the dead, injured and captured Russian troops, the numbers appear to be much higher than what would have been expected in a well-managed invasion.

"This is a colossal intelligence failure that vastly underestimated Ukrainian resistance, and military execution has been terrible," Michael Vickers, former US Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, said this week at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "His main attack has been underweighted. It's been piecemeal. His reconnaissance elements have been captured, columns have been destroyed," he said. "It's just a disaster, through and through."

An assessment by military experts of the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center pointed to the crucial failure of the Russians to quickly seize and hold an airport just outside Kyiv. The fight over the airport left it likely too damaged to use as planned to invade Kyiv, they said. Moreover, they said, "Russian aircraft and helicopter losses have been surprisingly high and unsustainable," because they did not destroy the Ukrainians' air defenses. Also surprising was the limited or ineffective deployment of electronic warfare weapons, which most analysts expected would have a significant role in attacking the Ukrainians' ability to communicate. — AFP

## Russia missiles tear civilian lives apart

**ZHYTOMYR:** Oleg Rubak wept for love of his wife Katia, crushed in the rubble of his family home, and for hatred of Vladimir Putin, whom he blames for the missile strike that killed her. The 32-year-old engineer was playing with his baby daughter in the living room of the couple's brick-and-timber house in Zhytomyr, 150 kilometers west of Kyiv.

On Tuesday night at around 10:00 pm in the Ukrainian crossroads town, home to a military garrison, a first missile struck near the family home. A second crashed down behind the building, tearing a five-metre-deep crater, now full of dirty water and the smashed remnants of Rubak's house. "Her name was Katia. She was 29 years old. One minute I saw her going into the bedroom, a minute later there was nothing," Rubak told AFP, standing by the ruins in jogging bottoms and a fleece. "I hope she's in heaven and all is perfect for her."

He sobbed, apologized, and continued: "I want the whole world to hear my story." He points out a pile of rubble among the others. "That's where I was with our one-and-a-half-year-old daughter. But you can see, it's no longer a house, it's not even a room, it's... maybe it's hell," he said. When the second blast struck, Rubak was thrown under debris as a terrifying sound followed by the icy winter night ripped into his home. Reaching out with his fingertips he found his mobile phone, turned on the torch, and found his daughter.

"She wasn't moving, and my whole



ZHYTOMYR: Three men stand in the rubble in Zhytomyr, following a Russian bombing the day before. — AFP

world fell in, but I took her hand and she started to cry. It was the most beautiful sound I'd heard in my life," he said. Katia, however, was still under bricks and ceiling beams. Oleg desperately dug her out with his bare hands, he said, showing the red welts and scars. He found her corpse, as he had feared. The first explosion had left her with no chance. "Katia was a housewife. She loved two things, me and our daughter," Rubak's father, battling his own grief, tries to comfort him, urging him to wrap up against the bitter cold, but the angry son stood straight once again, trying to focus.

"I have to stay strong. I'm not cold. I just want the whole world to know what happened," he said, turning his fury on Putin, Russia's president. Moscow's week-old invasion of Ukraine has been marked by missile bombardments that ended up hitting civilian homes and infrastructure-

and ending civilian lives. "I want him dead," Oleg said of Putin. "Let him roast in hell for all eternity." According to Zhytomyr officials, Tuesday night's bombings killed at least three people and wounded 20 more, including several young children.

In the city centre on Wednesday, dozens of residents were cleaning up the remains of a wrecked market, just opposite the city's large military academy. Among them, 28-year-old Katarina Chternova, does not hide her fear, but local solidarity reassures her. "We are all together, we help each other," she told AFP. "Because this is our land, and we want to save it... we don't give up". Rubak, on the other hand, is more pessimistic in the face of the Russian advance. In Zhytomyr, he says, "many people would like to leave, but today, no one knows where to go". — AFP



## International

## Mutilated bodies, gang wars shock once-peaceful Ecuador

## Two corpses dangling from a bridge

QUITO: A headless body discarded in the street. Two corpses dangling from a bridge. An intensifying drug war has shocked once-peaceful Ecuador with scenes of horrific violence. Experts say the two crimes committed within a single week last month evoked the savage methods of Mexican narco gangs which, according to the government in Quito, has infiltrated the South American country of 17.7 million people. "The cruelty is something new," Daniel Ponton, dean of the security and defense school at Ecuador's ISEN university told AFP. He blamed "emulation" by local criminals of the well-documented atrocities committed by drug lords in Mexico or Colombia. The local gangs soon learn, he added, that "violence has a value in itself" as a tool "to intimidate rival criminal gangs (and) diminish the will of the State... and the general population" to fight crime.

Wedge between Colombia and Peru—the world's largest cocaine producers—Ecuador long managed to escape drug violence even as the illegal but lucrative trade started showing benefits for its economy and domestic consumption grew. The country used to be a drug transit and storage point favored by foreign traffickers for its porous borders, dollarized economy and major Pacific seaports for export. But the ports—especially at Guayaquil—have since become battlegrounds themselves as the presence of local gangs has exploded, and murder figures with it.

In January and February this year, 468 people were killed in Ecuador — 277 more than in the same two months of last year. More than 320 of this year's victims have been inmates—many dismembered and

burnt in grisly wars between rival prison gangs allied to drug cartels beyond Ecuador's borders. In 2021, the country recorded a rate of 14 murders per 100,000 inhabitants—nearly double the 2020 figure, though still not among the highest in the world.

Especially hard hit is Guayaquil, a city of 2.8 million people home to Ecuador's main commercial port, and the violence is increasingly filtering through to the streets. On February 20, residents of Guayaquil were shocked when the body of a 21-year-old man was thrown from a moving vehicle in a city street, followed by his severed head. Six days

bodies were so publicly displayed.

He blamed previous governments for allowing "microtrafficking" to find a foothold in the country, only to be swiftly followed by gangs and their territorial disputes. For Renato Rivera, a researcher at the Latin American Network for Analysis of Security and Organized Crime, the mutilated corpses were meant as "super-violent messages" of warning. The victims are often killed as punishment for being short on a drug delivery—possibly after police seizures—while at the same time serving as "a message of intimidation for rivals," he added.

Faced with the expanding violence, Lasso's government recently ordered troops to Guayaquil to retake control of the city and "prevent the entry of drugs from the north (Colombia) or weapons from the south (Peru)." The president also replaced the commander of the police, an entity widely seen as unwilling or unable to address the growing crime wave. So far this year, the authorities have seized 37 tons of drugs. The number was 210 tons for the whole of 2021.

For Ponton, the escalating violence was "a kind of cumulative and growing time bomb," for Ecuador. "The problem of Ecuador is that the state's response capacity is totally weakened in key areas: intelligence, criminal investigation, arms control," partly due to corruption. According to a Transparency International report on corruption perception, Ecuador scored 36 in 2021 on a scale on which 100 represents clean government. This was lower than the average score of 43 for the Americas. "Organized crime cannot live without corruption," said Rivera.— AFP



## 468 killed in Ecuador

earlier, in the nearby town of Duran, the bodies of two men were found handcuffed and hanging from a pedestrian bridge.

Since late last year, five decapitated bodies have been found in Duran and Guayaquil, authorities say, and last month a head was found stuffed in a backpack at the port of Puerto Bolivar to the south. There have also been neighborhood shootouts, a previously alien phenomenon. "Drug trafficking has gained ground in Ecuadorian society," President Guillermo Lasso said last month after the latest



DURAN: Police officers look at two bodies hanging from a pedestrian bridge in Duran, Guayas province, Ecuador. The brutality of drug traffickers is cornering Ecuador after being safe from its violence. — AFP

## Iranian campaigner jailed; new Internet curbs loom

PARIS: Iran has jailed a prominent freedom of speech campaigner as parliament prepares to adopt legislation that will further severely restrict internet freedom in the country, activists and his family say. Hossein Ronaghi, a journalist and rights activist, vanished on February 23 and is now on hunger strike in Tehran's Evin prison, his brother Hassan wrote on social media channels. Ronaghi had vehemently criticised legislation being discussed in the Iranian parliament which if adopted would effectively cut the country off from the global internet, according to opponents.

"Hossein is still on hunger strike and his life is in danger," Hassan Ronaghi wrote on Twitter on Wednesday, adding that bail attempts had so far not worked and urging the authorities "not to play with the lives of political prisoners". Ronaghi was detained a day after tweeting on February 22 a lengthy thread denouncing the so-called "User Protection Bill" which he said had been ordered by supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei because "virtual space must be controlled".

UN human rights experts on Tuesday also issued a statement urging Iran not to adopt the legislation, which they said would "effectively isolate the country from the global internet". The experts noted that if ratified by parliament, the bill will likely block any remaining websites and platforms run by foreign companies still operating in Iran, require people to use IDs to access the internet and criminalize the distribution and sale of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs). VPNs are widely used to access news and social media sites based abroad that are blocked in Iran.

## 'Could land me in prison'

"This bill represents a worrying step towards the consolidation of a digital wall in Iran," the experts said, adding the legislation could be adopted this month in a fast-track process. Twitter, Youtube, Facebook, Telegram and Signal are among the platforms banned in Iran, they noted. Instagram still works, while Iranian officials use Twitter to communicate their arguments abroad.

Campaigners are also concerned the focus of the international community on Russia's war in Ukraine will divert attention from the internet legislation and Ronaghi's fate. "We call on the international community to react and not allow the Islamic Republic to use the lack of attention on Iran, to quietly kill human rights defenders," said the director of the Norway-based Iran Human Rights NGO, Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam. Ronaghi had in October published a lacerating op-ed in the Wall Street Journal accusing Western media of knowingly turning a blind eye to the extent of rights abuses by Tehran.

He said the image of Iran presented to the outside world by Western media was "defined by a pesky nuclear negotiation" while the reality "is much worse". "It is a religious police state where we live in fear, with countless red lines that most dare not cross. It is a country of repression, censorship and violence. "Writing this could land me back in prison. But if that's the price for giving a voice to the voiceless, it will be worth it." — AFP

## Baidoa: Crossroads of despair in a drought-ravaged Somalia

BAIDOA: Under the blazing sun, Salado Adan Mohamed puts the finishing touches to her makeshift shelter, cobbled together from branches and fragments of discarded cloth. She has just arrived in the southwestern Somali city of Baidoa, the last refuge for people fleeing the worst drought in the country in a decade. Along with her three children, the 26-year-old mother walked for five days "without eating" to make the 70-kilometre trek from her village to Baidoa.

She settled in Muuri, one of 500 camps for displaced people in the city, where aqals—traditional dome-shaped huts—have been hastily built in recent weeks. Desperate, hungry and thirsty, more and more people are flocking to Baidoa from rural areas of southern Somalia, one of the

regions hardest hit by the drought that is engulfing the Horn of Africa.

According to the UN's World Food Program, nearly 13 million people, mostly farmers and herders, are going hungry in the region: 5.7 million in Ethiopia, 2.8 million in Kenya and 4.3 million in Somalia—a quarter of the country's population. In Somalia, the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA said this month that the number of people who have left their homes in search of water, food and pasture has doubled to more than 554,000.

Mohamed says she and her husband saw their crops devoured by swarms of locusts that have ravaged many parts of East Africa in recent years. Within just a few months, what little they had left was wiped out when the rains failed for a third straight time since the end of 2020. "We had three camels which died during the drought season, 10 goats—we ate some, others died and the rest were sold—and all five cattle perished because of the lack of water and pasture," she says. "We have nothing left."

With her husband and children, Mohammed started out from her home village for Baidoa, the last hope for many in the stricken region. But her husband, who has tuberculosis, did not make it all the way. Too weak to continue, he turned back. She has not heard from him since. The countryside around Baidoa is under the control

of the Al-Qaeda linked Al-Shabaab Islamist group, which held the city itself for several years at the height of the insurgency before being driven out in early 2012 by Somali-led forces.

But the persistent insecurity means almost no aid can be sent out of the city. Even in Muuri, Mohamed says she struggles to provide even one meal a day for her children. "Sometimes we get something to eat, sometimes not... If there's not enough, I sacrifice for my children," she says, a weary look on her face.

Humanitarian organizations have been ringing alarm bells on the deteriorating situation in the Horn of Africa for weeks, with fears of a repeat of the 2011 famine in Somalia that cost the lives of 260,000 people. Insufficient rainfall since late 2020 has come as a fatal blow to populations already suffering from locust invasions between 2019 and 2021 and the COVID-19 pandemic. "We had our usual reserves of sorghum, but we have eaten through them in the last three years. They are now finished," says Ibrahim Mohamed Hassan, a blind 60-year-old who walked about 60 kilometers with his family to Garas Goof camp in Baidoa. He says 30 of the 50 families in his home village have fled. "The others will follow," he predicts, adjusting his sunglasses which are held together with a rubber band. — AFP

## Cairo's newspaper vendors go silent as sales collapse

CAIRO: Newspaper sellers were once a dime a dozen on Cairo's bustling streets, but now the vendors hawking hot-off-the-press editions have fallen almost silent. As elsewhere in the world, Egypt's print media has been in sharp decline as news has moved mostly online and readers tend to stay up-to-date via their smartphones. In Egypt, a country of 103 million people, the trend has been especially stark since the government, which publishes most newspapers, has also raised their prices.

"No one buys newspapers anymore, especially since they got more expensive," said a vendor in her 50s known as Umm Mohammed, wearing a woollen shawl against the winter chill. Critics also bemoan the homogeneity of the press in a country tightly ruled by army-marshall-turned-President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, where censorship and self-censorship are common. The stacks of newspapers and magazines before Umm Mohammed have hardly shrunk all morning, she said, sitting at her kiosk in Cairo's western Dokki district.

Between 6 am and 3 pm, she said she had earned just 15 Egyptian pounds, or about \$1. The government three years ago raised prices of dailies from two to three pounds, and of weeklies from three to four

pounds, citing costlier raw materials and dwindling subscriptions. This dampened print circulation in the Arab world's largest country, where the average family income is around 6,000 EGP, or \$380, per month.

Sales collapsed further last July when the government scrapped evening newspaper print editions. "People used to come by to get the evening paper and then pick up a couple of other issues on the way," said Umm Mohammed. "Now we don't even have that." "It's mobile phones everywhere. People passing my kiosk often ask: 'Oh, people are still selling these, even with everything online?' "That really upsets me. This is our livelihood. What are we supposed to do?"

## 'Need to innovate'

Microbus driver Tareq Mahmud, 44, stopping near the kiosk, said he hadn't bought a newspaper in 11 years "I stopped when I realised that the journalists I was reading in the paper every morning were the same ones I had watched on television" the previous evening, he told AFP. "And I think there are many like me who stopped around then."

According to official statistics, Mahmud is right: Egypt in 2019 published 67 titles—public, private or linked to politi-



CAIRO: A woman sits in a chair next to newspapers on display at a newsstand along Kasr Al-Aini street in the centre of Egypt's capital Cairo. Newspaper sellers were once a dime a dozen on Cairo's bustling streets, but now the vendors hawking hot-off-the-press editions have fallen almost silent. — AFP

cal parties—down from 142 in 2010. Circulation roughly halved from more than one million copies to 539,000 over the decade. Ahmad al-Taheri, editor-in-chief of the Rose al-Youssef weekly, a staple of Egyptian journalism for almost a century, said media need to innovate, including in their distribution. "We need to find new outlets," he told AFP, suggesting new pandemic-era sales points: "Why not pharmacies?"

This is hardly a solution for Umm Mohamed, who after 18 years in the business is planning for her retirement. In the

absence of a trade union or other support system, she, like other vendors, recently signed up to a modest pension scheme with state-run publisher the Ahram Foundation. But even this pension is not guaranteed. Abdul Sadiq el-Shorbagy, head of the National Press Authority, told parliament in January that the state press is indebted, owing over \$573 million in taxes and insurance payments. Press outlets are bleeding cash as going online has yet to turn a profit for them, with most content offered for free and advertising revenue proving insufficient. — AFP

## Climate crisis: Indigenous groups 'victims and saviors'

PARIS: Long portrayed as victims of climate change, indigenous peoples who have struggled for years to protect ancestral lands and ways of life from destruction are finally being recognized as playing an important role in defending precious environments. "In the face of climatic, economic and health catastrophes, reality forces the recognition of indigenous peoples' knowledge, and a new relationship of respect," said Gregorio Mirabal, head of the COICA indigenous organization.

"Now we are not victims, we are the solution!" That message was reinforced in a sweeping report by UN climate experts on the impacts and adaptation to global warming, released on Monday, that outlined in harrowing detail the challenges facing humanity and the planet they

depend upon for survival.

It highlights that many indigenous peoples are on the frontlines of global warming, such as those in the Arctic whose communities and traditions are threatened by melting sea ice and rising waters. But it also underscores what these communities and their intimate knowledge of nature—transmitted from generation to generation—can bring to the fight against climate change, in particular to limiting its impacts.

That is crucial since indigenous communities, who number less than half a billion people worldwide, steward land home to 80 percent of Earth's remaining biodiversity, notes the IPCC. From the Amazon to Siberia, these communities have been forced to develop methods of



MAROUA: Refugees are seen 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

copying with external challenges "for centuries and have developed strategies for resilience in changing environments that can enrich and strengthen other adaptation efforts", it said. A major cause of their vulnerability acknowledged for the first time by the IPCC in

this report is colonialism. "I think it's a huge advancement," said Sherilee Harper, of the University of Alberta, Canada, adding that this is a crucial context that helps not only understand the problems facing indigenous groups, but also to frame solutions. — AFP



## International

## Australia orders 200,000 to flee as deadly floods kill 13

## Authorities issue severe rain and wind warnings

**WINDSOR:** Australia's emergency services yesterday ordered 200,000 people to flee from the path of a wild storm that has killed 13 people in a week of record-setting east coast floods, but the city of Sydney escaped the worst of the deluge. Authorities issued severe rain and wind warnings for a 400-kilometre (250-mile) stretch of the coast as water levels rose rapidly—including in suburbs around Sydney, Australia's largest city and home to five million people.

The unpredictable storm front has crawled southwards along the east coast from Queensland to New South Wales, creating havoc as rivers and reservoirs broke their banks with water swamping homes up to their roofs. A low-pressure system sat off the coast hundreds of kilometers north of Sydney, dumping the heaviest rain in that area and sparing the city from a feared downpour, said meteorologist Ben Domensino of Weatherzone.

"Sydney escaped the heaviest falls today," he told AFP, predicting that the storm would weaken by Friday. The Warragamba Dam in southwestern Sydney, which supplies 80 percent of the city's water, has been spilling over since the early hours of Wednesday. The forecast of peak overflow at the dam was downgraded by nearly half yesterday because rainfall in the dam's catchment areas was less than had been predicted.

## 'Unpredictable'

Major floods are still under way in some areas west of Sydney along the Hawkesbury and Nepean rivers—which snakes across the city's suburbs—said a

spokeswoman for the New South Wales bureau of meteorology. "That's a system that is very big and it will take a while for it to ease off," she warned.

In the historic town of Windsor—where many of Australia's oldest surviving European buildings are—Paul Caleo joined other locals watching the Hawkesbury River rise above the local bridge, cutting off access to homes and farms. Across the submerged bridge, an almost 120-year-old home stood alone on high ground surrounded by floodwaters.

"The river by its very nature is unpredictable," Caleo said. Along Sydney's historic harbour, Taronga Zoo prepared for an influx of injured wildlife from torrential rainfall and flooding. The first fear was for young wildlife, small animals—including echidnas and bandicoots—and birds unable to escape surging floodwaters. Heavy downpours can make birds' feathers so waterlogged they are unable to fly, a spokeswoman told AFP.

As the floodwaters recede, concern will turn to the animals living in fresh water, including platypuses. New South Wales' emergency services said more than 70 evacuation orders were still in force across the state. "Many people are waking up today to see much of our state underwater," New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet said earlier in the day. "If you are subject to one of those evacuation orders, please get out," he told a news conference, explaining that the evacuation orders affected 200,000 people.

Scientists say climate change is making Australia's floods, bushfires, cyclones and droughts more fre-

## Rivers, reservoirs break their banks



SYDNEY: Rising floodwaters is seen along the Hawkesbury River in Windsor in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

quent and more intense. "Australia is at the forefront of severe climate change," said environmental expert Hilary Bambrick of the Queensland University of Technology. "Temperatures are rising faster in Australia than the global average, and higher temperatures mean the atmosphere holds more moisture, meaning rainfall events are becoming more extreme." Across New South Wales, flood levels have climbed to the highest level in decades during the flooding disaster.

In towns such as Lismore in the state's northeast,

which is now cleaning up as flood waters retreat, people had clambered onto their rooftops, sometimes waiting many hours to be rescued from rising waters. New South Wales said it was sending an extra 400 personnel to that region to help people on the "very, very long road" to cleaning up and recovering. "Many people today in the Northern Rivers and over the last 24 hours have returned home, and they have returned home to devastating scenes," state premier Perrottet said. "My message is we will be with you." — AFP

## Mozambicans haunted by insurgency's horrors

**MONTEPUEZ:** Her severed head was placed in front of their door. Her tongue had been cut out—punishment for daring to talk back to the insurgents terrorizing northern Mozambique. Two years after her sister-in-law's death, the scene still haunts Zara Alifa Assumane, 62. She fled her home in Mocimboa da Praia after the killing and now lives in a camp in Montepuez, 150 kilometers away.

"I'm still terrified, I can't stop thinking about it," she said, her hair wrapped with a red-chilli-patterned headscarf. When the Islamists showed up near her home, they ordered everyone outside. "My sister-in-law spoke back to them, so they decapitated her," Assumane recalled. "They placed her severed head in front of our house door and then they cut off her hands and placed them on her body." The mutilations took place in front of the eyes of her son, who was then abducted by the insurgents.

Life is quieter now. The camp for displaced Mozambicans has grown to house thousands of people. While aid agencies are providing food, sanitation and water, a local economy is springing up. Barbers and tailors have set up shop, and even accept mobile money payments. Children sell eggs laid by hens reared in the camp. A shack with a rooftop satel-

lite dish advertised the day's entertainment: the "Barcelonas vs Naples" football match. All around, roosters crow over the Mozambican rap blasting from speakers powered by solar panels.

The group known locally as Al-Shabab—though with no links to the Somali militants of a similar name—have raided towns and villages, uprooting some 800,000 people. More than 3,700 others, including 1,600 civilians have died. But attacks like the one on Assumane's village are less common now. Since July, thousands of troops from Rwanda and the SADC regional bloc have deployed to shore up the Mozambican military. The northern province of Cabo Delgado is the only part of Mozambique with a Muslim majority. The region has also turned out to have vast natural gas and mineral reserves.

Efforts to extract the natural gas have drawn the biggest-ever investments in Africa, including a \$20-billion project from TotalEnergies. Montepuez itself is rich in rubies, with foreign mining giants like Britain's Gemfields operating here. Part of the anger driving the insurgency is at the failure of the gas investments to lift living standards in one of the poorest regions of one of the poorest countries in the world. — AFP

## Taiwan warns against 'turning blind eye' to military aggression

**TAIPEI:** Democratic countries must not "turn a blind eye to military aggression", Taiwan's leader said Wednesday, warning her island faces threats similar to those confronted by Ukraine at a meeting with a delegation of former US security officials. The delegation, led by ex-chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and retired admiral Michael Mullen, arrived in Taiwan on Tuesday at a time of rising tensions between Washington and Beijing over the self-ruled island as well as the crisis sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Democratic Taiwan has watched the Ukraine situation closely, as it lives under constant threat of a Chinese invasion, with Beijing claiming sovereignty over the island and vowing to seize it one day-by force if necessary. "History teaches us that if we turn a blind eye to military aggression, we only worsen the threat to ourselves," Taiwanese leader Tsai Ing-wen told the delegation.

"The Ukrainian people's commitment to protect their freedom and democracy, and their fearless dedication to defending their

country have been met with deep empathy from the people of Taiwan, as we too stand on the frontlines of the battle for democracy." She warned of Beijing's rising military threat to Taiwan and the region, including "using cognitive warfare tactics and disinformation to divide Taiwanese society".

China has ramped up pressure on Taiwan since the 2016 election of Tsai, who rejects its stance that the island is part of Chinese territory. Its sabre-rattling has increased considerably over the past year, with warplanes breaching Taiwan's air defense zone on a near-daily basis. Last year, Taiwan recorded 969 such incursions, according to a database compiled by AFP—more than double the roughly 380 in 2020.

Just weeks before Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, China and Russia signed a joint statement agreeing to a host of foreign policy goals, including Taiwan being "an inalienable part" of the mainland. "Facing threats to the security of the Taiwan Strait and the region, we look forward to working even more closely with the US and other stakeholders in the region," Tsai said. The delegation's visit reflects bipartisan support for a strong US-Taiwan partnership, Mullen said, adding it is aimed at reassuring regional allies that "the United States stands firm behind its commitments".

"Maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is not just a US interest



TAIPEI: Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen (center) walks with former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo (left) during his visit to the Presidential Office in Taipei. — AFP

but also a global one," he said. The delegation does not include current US officials but it is "in coordination with the White House and the Biden administration," a senior official said. Last year, former senator Christopher Dodd and former deputy secretaries of state Richard Armitage and James Steinberg were asked by President Joe Biden to travel to Taipei—the first such delegation since he came to power. — AFP

## 'Forgotten' war leaves refugees in limbo

**OGOJA:** Three years ago, Akor Pelkings fled his home in western Cameroon, where a conflict raged between the security forces and rebels fighting for an independent state. Today, the 25-year-old is one of 70,000 Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria, wondering in despair when they can return. Yet they in turn are among a million people uprooted by a conflict which is now in its fifth year yet remains largely forgotten—even unknown—in the rest of the world. The violence erupted in 2017, when militants declared an independent state in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions, home to most of the anglophone minority in the majority French-speaking country.

Both the separatists and government forces have been accused of atrocities in the fighting, which according to the International Crisis Group (ICG) has killed more than 6,000 people. Pelkings crossed into Nigeria, finding shelter in one of the refugee camps that have sprung up near the border regions, although they often have less international aid than in other conflict areas. "Why no one cares? Our lives are destroyed, and no one cares. The conflict went to days, to months, now to years," he said. In dozens of interviews with AFP, Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria described their experience.

A common thread emerged—a process of darkening fear, which began as neighbors, relatives and supporters of the anglophone secessionist movement were whisked away in police vans and were rarely heard of again. Gerard Tiko'Or Akenji, who founded an agricultural cooperative at a camp operated by the UN refugee agency in Ogoja, eastern Nigeria, said the intimidation was unprovoked. "They arrest so many youths from my community," said



OGOJA: A Nigerian customer who bought chickens from Cameroonian refugees who fled to Nigeria due to Cameroon separatist war, transports his wares in Adagom 3 settlement, Ogoja, Cross Rivers State, eastern Nigeria. — AFP

Akenji, 45, who added that he had been picked up four times from the start of the conflict until he finally fled in March 2019.

"I left the country because of fear of death," said Akenji. "I always tied my sneakers, and lie on my bed with my legs down, and my door open, in case of any noise I have to run," he said. "The sound of gun and explosives have killed many of old people, because they are very afraid." Then the schools began to close as threats from separatists and the fear of violence kept students at home. "At the beginning of the conflict, I had to stop going to high school," said Pelkings, who dreamed of going to university but now raises chickens in this camp in Nigeria.

In September 2021, the start of the academic year, two-thirds of schools in the two English-speaking regions were closed, depriving 700,000 children and adolescents of education, according to the UN. Hundreds of schools have been attacked there, according to the campaign group Human Rights Watch (HRW). Almost all of those attacks were by armed separatist groups who refuse to allow French to be taught. Even so, said a humanitari-

an source, "no one (in the camps) will tell you" that the separatists are to blame, because most of the refugees support their cause.

Access to health care has also deteriorated dramatically in English-speaking Cameroon. Health centers have been attacked or occupied. Chu Bernice Chang will never forget the circumstances of her first birth when at age 21 she delivered her girl, at home, without any help. The clinic in her village was being used as a rear base for the Cameroonian army, she said. According to the ICG, 250 villages have been destroyed in the conflict—a punishment for being suspected of helping one side or the other.

Actions of this kind were cited by many refugees as to why they left, sometimes fleeing from one day to the next. "My village was attacked more than six times," said Odilia Ntong, a 50-year-old. "They destroyed the house, the shooting, I had nothing, so left." For five days she moved through the bush with nine other women, hungry and sleeping on the ground before she managed to cross the border into Nigeria. Ntong now lives alone in Takum, a small town in eastern Nigeria, in a tiny room that she rents for 1,500 naira (\$3.60, three euros) a month. — AFP

## Russian invasion upends relations

**WASHINGTON:** Russia's war against Ukraine is a week old, but its consequences are already reverberating across the globe: it has upended international relations, left Moscow isolated, united a previously divided West, and raised the specter of a nuclear standoff.

Moscow's offensive marks a turning point for the whole world. Above all, Russia's attack shattered "the hope that post-Cold War Europe would be spared a large-scale land war," said Ali Wyne, Senior Analyst with Eurasia Group, Europe, the United States and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres came together to denounce Russia's attack on its neighbor as a flagrant violation of the international rules-based order built after World War II.

Punishment was quick and painful. From crippling Russia's financial system, to slapping penalties on its oligarchs and President Vladimir Putin himself, to banning Russia from European airspace and major sports competitions, the West has unleashed an unprecedented cascade of sanctions on Moscow. "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.

In 2019, French President Emmanuel

Macron declared that NATO was experiencing "brain death," riven by disagreements between members and belittled by Donald Trump. When Joe Biden was elected, he sought to breathe new life into the alliance, hoping to rely on NATO in his standoff with China. That prompted more internal divisions, with some members saying that confronting Beijing was not part of NATO's mission.

Born at the start of the Cold War with the aim of protecting Europe from the Soviet threat under the US nuclear umbrella, the transatlantic military alliance is now rediscovering its purpose—and its key enemy—by stepping up against Moscow. "Russia's invasion has strengthened NATO, deepened transatlantic alignment, and, perhaps most notably, compelled Germany to reverse its longstanding stance on shipping lethal weapons to conflict zones," said Wyne. "Whether greater short-term Western cohesion yields a shared long-term approach to dealing with Moscow remains an open question."

French diplomat and economist Jean Monnet, who played a significant role in rebuilding Europe after World War II, famously said that Europe will be born out of crises as well as out of its solutions to those crises. — AFP



## Business

## Equities rise as Powell soothes rate fears

## Oil close to \$120 as Ukraine conflict continues to roil energy markets

**HONG KONG, China:** Stocks rose yesterday after Federal Reserve chief Jerome Powell said the bank would hike interest rates gradually to fight inflation, though oil marched towards \$120 as the Ukraine conflict continues to roil energy markets.

With the Russian invasion of its neighbour hammering all assets across the board as uncertainty reigns supreme, traders were given a much-needed shaft of light on Wednesday when the Fed boss eased concerns over its plans for tightening policy.

Powell told lawmakers he was in favour of a moderate pace of rate increases, with a 25-basis-point lift this month, as he tries to nurture the economic recovery while keeping a lid on prices, which are rising at their fastest pace in 40 years. He warned that the "near-term effects on the US economy of the invasion of Ukraine, the ongoing war, the sanctions, and of events to come, remain highly uncertain".

The comments soothed concerns that officials could announce an aggressive 50-basis-point lift. The issue of Fed tightening has cast a pall over markets for months, bringing a near two-year rally to an abrupt end, and that has now been compounded by the Ukraine crisis. Powell did, however, say the bank would remain "nimble" to events and would act more aggressively if needed down the line. Meanwhile, St. Louis Fed chief James Bullard said he was for a "rapid withdrawal of policy accommodation", as Chicago president Charles Evans added that policy was currently "wrong-footed" and should be tightened.

Still, Powell's comments were able to "appease risk-markets by ruling out a 50 basis-points hike in March, while simultaneously promising inflation vigilance at following meetings", said Citigroup strategists William



WASHINGTON: Federal Reserve Board Chair Jerome Powell testifies about 'monetary policy and the state of the economy' before the House Financial Services Committee in Washington, DC. — AFP

O'Donnell and Edward Acton. Wall Street ended sharply higher with all three main indexes more than one percent up.

And Asia followed suit with Tokyo, Hong Kong, Sydney, Seoul, Taipei and Singapore leading healthy gains, though Shanghai and Mumbai edged slightly lower. London and Paris rose at the open but Paris dipped. The gains were also helped by news that

soaring. "Germany must build its own LNG terminals with the necessary connections and infrastructure," the economy ministry concluded last week.

A number of projects, which had stalled because of a lack of political and financial backing, could also receive "public support", the ministry said. In the northern town of Stade, on the Elbe, the construction process for one project is about to get under way.

"The technical assessments are complete," Hanseatic Energy Hub, the company behind the project, told AFP. Meanwhile, in Wilmershaven, on the North Sea coast, the Belgian group TES is also planning to build a facility. The terminals could, however, take some time to come online. "The approval process takes minimum three years, and two for construction," Karen Pittel, energy expert at the Ifo institute think-tank, told AFP.

## Climate objectives

The narrow room for manoeuvre has cast doubt over Germany's ambitious timetable for its transition towards renewable energy. Germany's governing coalition of the Social Democrats, the Greens and the liberal FDP, in office since December, had promised an earlier exit from coal in 2030 and maintained Angela Merkel's decision to exit nuclear by the end of 2022.

Paradoxically, natural gas was to play a crucial bridging role in the planned green shift, providing a ready energy supply when the wind is still or the sun does not shine-at least until the technology to store the energy produced by renewables catches up. "There are no more taboos," Economy and Climate Minister Robert Habeck declared recently. "In the short term, we may need to hold coal power plants in reserve out of caution," he said.

The Green party minister likewise did not rule out pushing back the closure of the country's last three operational nuclear power plants. The government would, however, face significant challenges were it to pursue the nuclear option. "You cannot just extend a nuclear plant you have decided to close like that," energy expert Pittel said. There were "extremely high hurdles, on a technical and administrative level" to keep the plants going, the plant operator RWE told German daily Handelsblatt. — AFP

Ukraine and Russian officials will hold second round talks to end the war.

But analysts warned of further volatility for some time as fighting continues to rage in Ukraine. Widespread sanctions against Russia threaten to put its economy on its knees, while Moody's and Fitch have slashed its rating to junk.

Meanwhile, the country's equities are to be

## Top carmakers suspend operations at Russian plants

**FRANKFURT, Germany:** Toyota and Volkswagen, the world's two biggest auto manufacturers, said yesterday they would suspend operations at their production facilities in Russia, following the invasion of Ukraine. Toyota said it would halt work at its only factory in Russia and stop shipping vehicles to the country, citing "supply chain disruptions" linked to Moscow's assault on Ukraine and Western sanctions. The world's top-selling carmaker said its plant in Saint Petersburg produced around 80,000 vehicles last year, mainly for the Russian market-representing just a fraction of the 10.5 million vehicles made worldwide by the Japanese group.

Toyota's Saint Petersburg plant employs around 2,600 people, a spokeswoman told AFP, confirming the supply disruption was linked to the conflict. Toyota has no factories in Ukraine but said sales operations in the country had been suspended since February 24, when Moscow launched its assault. German group Volkswagen also said in a statement it was suspending production at its two plants in Russia "until further notice", as a result of the invasion. Volkswagen, which had already announced a stop to deliveries to Russia, employs around 4,000 people between its two plants in Kaluga and Nizhny Novgorod.

Fellow German car manufacturers Mercedes-Benz and BMW have also idled production in Russia, as well as halting vehicle exports to the country. Western governments, sporting organisations and big companies have cut Russia off or dealt it punishing sanctions over the internationally condemned attack.

Other Japanese firms also announced yesterday that they were halting or altering business as a result of the situation. Honda said it had suspended all exports to Russia "until further notice", though the firm only exports around 3,000 cars and motorcycles a year to the country. Mazda, which sold around 29,000 vehicles in Russia last year, said it had stopped reserving containers for shipments to the country and would continue operating its joint venture factory in Vladivostok until parts run out.

Others were more cautious, with Nissan and Mitsubishi Motors saying they were reviewing the situation. Japanese airlines are also being forced to adapt to tit-for-tat airspace closures, with Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways cancelling some routes and rerouting others to avoid Russia, adding hours to some flights.

Sales of cars in Germany were up again in February, official figures published yesterday showed, but the outlook for the industry was clouded by production disruptions due to the conflict in Ukraine. Around 200,000

## IEA outlines plan to cut Russia gas to EU by a third

**PARIS, France:** The Paris-based International Energy Agency released a 10-point plan yesterday which it said could reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas by a third over the coming year. The invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the European Union's reliance on Russian gas imports, which totalled some 140 billion cubic metres (bcm) by pipeline last year and another 15 bcm in liquefied natural gas (LNG) form.

That accounted for 45 percent of the bloc's gas imports and nearly 40 percent of its consumption. The IEA recommended not signing any new gas contracts with Russia, maximising supplies from other sources, accelerating the deployment of solar, wind and nuclear power, and improving energy efficiency in homes and businesses.

"Nobody is under any illusions anymore. Russia's use of its natural gas resources as an economic and political weapon show Europe needs to act quickly to be ready to face considerable uncertainty over Russian gas supplies next winter," said IEA executive director Fatih Birol in a statement.

Bringing Russian imports to zero is a major challenge for Europe, and Moscow is expected to keep gas

removed from closely followed indexes by MSCI and FTSE Russell, further isolating Moscow from the global economy. "It is clear the perpetual mega-bulls of the past two years are continuing to fight a rear-guard action, using their previously successful buy-the-dip playbook, refusing to accept that the central bank cookie jar is near empty and that Ukraine-Russia has changed everything," said OANDA's Jeffrey Halley.

While the war is making finance chiefs re-think their plans, central banks appear intent to keep on the tightening track for now, with the Bank of Canada on Wednesday announcing a rate rise. The major source of angst for policy-setters is the spike in oil prices, which has been a key driver of inflation this year owing to narrow supplies and soaring demand and is now being amplified by the conflict in Europe.

Yesterday Brent continued to storm higher, at one point hitting \$119.84 a barrel for the first time since early 2012. WTI touched \$116.57 for the first time since 2008. While world governments have not included Russian oil in their wide-ranging sanctions on Moscow owing to concerns about the impact on prices and consumers, trade has become increasingly tough as banks pull financing and shipping costs rise.

OPEC and other major producers, including Russia, refused Wednesday to lift output by more than their previously agreed amount, dealing a blow to hopes of an easing in supply pressures.

An agreement by the United States and 29 other countries to release 60 million barrels from their reserves has had little impact on the relentless rise in prices. Other commodities are also elevated with European natural gas benchmarks and aluminium at records. — AFP

new cars were registered in Germany in February, 3.2 percent more than in the same month last year, according to the federal transport agency KBA. The new figure continued the positive start to the year for the car market after a similar 8.5 percent rise in January, but the industry faces renewed challenges.



BERLIN: (COMBO) This combination of pictures created shows the logo of Toyota and Volkswagen. The two biggest auto manufacturers, said yesterday they would suspend operations at their production facilities in Russia, following the invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

The comparative increase was attributable to weak sales figures last year. Peter Fuss, a partner at EY said. "A quick market recovery in light of the recent geopolitical escalation has become even less likely," Fuss said, warning of delivery delays and price increases.

The conflict in Ukraine has caused disruptions for German car manufacturers at home and abroad. The three top car makers in Germany, Volkswagen, BMW and Mercedes-Benz, have all stopped production in and exports to Russia as a result of the invasion.

Suppliers based in Ukraine have also seen their production interrupted or been forced to close as the Russian army advances, with knock-on effects for plants in Germany. Volkswagen, the largest German car manufacturer, will close its main factory in Wolfsburg for a week in mid-March, and has adjusted production schedules at other factory locations in Germany and Poland. The prospect of more challenges ahead will come as a blow to the industry, which suffered a difficult 2021 as a result of coronavirus-related restrictions and bottlenecks. — AFP

flowing for the sake of its own financial stability. The EU has gas pipeline links to Norway, Algeria and Azerbaijan — but they have limited capacity to increase production. It can also import LNG by ship — notably from Qatar, Australia and the United States — but it is limited by the capacity of its ports and refineries to convert LNG into usable gas.

## 'Accelerate the fight'

The IEA said its measures were in line with its existing roadmap to reach "net-zero" emissions by 2050, which already envisioned the EU eliminating Russian gas imports by 2030. "What is at stake is both the need to accelerate the fight against climate change, and, as we can see now, the short-term energy security of the European continent," said Barbara Pompili, minister for ecological transition in France, which currently holds the EU presidency.

"The 10-Point Plan proposed by the IEA today will enrich our thinking," she said. The European Commission is set to outline plans for Europe to reduce its reliance on Russian gas next week. The IEA also outlined more drastic measures if Russian gas imports had to be curtailed more quickly, but admitted these would come at a heavy price for the EU's climate policies. They would involve switching from gas to coal-fired power plants, and using oil or other fuels in gas-powered stations. This would increase the reduction of Russian gas imports to 80 bcm, or more than half, the IEA said. "Reducing reliance on Russian gas will not be simple for the EU, requiring a concerted and sustained policy effort across multiple sectors," it said. — AFP

## Germany begins slow move away from Russian gas

**BERLIN:** The invasion of Ukraine has thrown Germany's problematic dependence on Russian gas into stark relief, forcing Europe's largest economy to urgently reshape its energy mix. In a previously unthinkable step for Chancellor Olaf Scholz's young government, the crisis even has politicians considering delaying Germany's planned exit from nuclear energy and coal to keep the lights on. "We will change course to overcome our import dependence," Scholz said Sunday at an extraordinary session of the Bundestag, or lower house of parliament, on the Ukraine crisis. The decision represents a massive and expensive reversal for the government which has banked on Russia to secure its energy needs over the past two decades.

With Russia increasingly isolated internationally as a result of economic sanctions over Ukraine, Berlin can no longer rely on Moscow to keep supplying over half of the country's gas. While energy supplies have largely been exempted from the West's response, policy-makers still needed to "prepare for a scenario" where Russia "stops gas deliveries", Finance Minister Christian Lindner said on Tuesday.

## Liquefied gas

Initially, Germany hopes to substitute Russian supplies with larger deliveries of liquefied natural gas (LNG), a super-chilled form of the fuel, which can be imported by sea from producers such as the United States or Qatar. The German government made a splash in the LNG market on Wednesday by announcing it was earmarking 1.5 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) for the fuel. But Germany lacks the infrastructure to absorb huge new supplies, with no LNG terminals along its coast where tankers can dock.

Their absence means it will have to import supplies through one of the European Union's 21 other terminals, a costly solution at a time when energy prices are



PORTOVAYA BAY: File photo shows a Russian construction worker speaking on a mobile phone in Portovaya Bay, during a ceremony marking the start of Nord Stream pipeline construction.

## Fitch, Moody's slash Russia's sovereign debt to junk

**PARIS, France:** Ratings agencies Fitch and Moody's slashed Russia's sovereign debt yesterday to "junk" status, or the category of countries at risk of not being able to repay their debt, a week after Moscow began its assault on Ukraine. Moody's downgraded the rating on Russian long-term debt from Baa3 to B3 subject to a further review over the West's sanctions against Russia, while Fitch lowered its rating from BBB to B, also with a negative outlook.

"The multi-notch downgrade of Russia's ratings and maintaining the review for further downgrade were triggered by the severe sanctions that Western countries have imposed on Russia", including on its central bank and some large financial institutions, Moody's said in a statement. The agency also noted a "heightened risk of disruption" to sovereign debt repayment in the face of "severe and coordinated sanctions". It said there were "significant concerns" over Russia's willingness to service its debt.

On Wednesday, the European Union cut seven Russian banks from the global SWIFT interbank messaging network, which allows for quick and secure transactions. The World Bank also announced it was halting all of its ongoing projects in Russia and Belarus in response to the invasion of Ukraine. Fitch, for its part, said in a statement that it expected a "further ratcheting up of sanctions on Russian banks". — AFP



## Business

# China's Congress to focus on boosting slowing economy

## Russian invasion has raised the prospect of spiking food and oil prices

BEIJING: A property downturn, slowing economy and war in Ukraine loom large over this week's annual convening of China's legislature, with policymakers expected to focus on shoring up faltering growth. The rubber-stamp parliament starting Saturday in Beijing gathers some 3,000 members of the National People's Congress (NPC) for highly choreographed meetings over bills, budgets and personnel changes.

The ruling Communist Party uses the opportunity to tout its achievements while also setting the country's economic blueprint and GDP target for the year ahead. Much of the NPC's agenda is unknown until during-or even after-the multi-day meeting, with many sessions taking place behind closed doors.

But this year, concerns are bound to centre on the country's sluggish economic growth, partly down to a crunch in the crucial property sector-which makes up as much as a quarter of national output. Stringent "zero-COVID" measures including harsh lockdowns and closed borders have also been a major blow to manufacturing hubs, tourist centres and port cities.

Meanwhile, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has raised the prospect of spiking food and oil prices, with fears over supplies of crucial commodities from the region being affected. Commerce Minister Wang Wentao admitted to journalists this week that China's economy faces "huge" pressure this year.

### GDP and stability

Beijing traditionally announces its new economic growth target at Premier Li Keqiang's annual "state of

the nation" speech at the NPC, followed by his rare-but heavily stage-managed-press conference. China's GDP growth slowed sharply in the final months of 2021 despite an earlier pandemic bounceback, as it grappled with tepid domestic demand and a property downturn.

The country's communist leaders have long based their legitimacy on the argument that their model of government represents economic growth and continuity for China's massive population. But as much of the rest of the world now reopens, China is increasingly out of step, as continued COVID-19 restrictions weigh on consumer confidence.

Maintaining stability will be crucial as the Communist Party gears up for a pivotal meeting this fall-the 20th party congress-that is expected to easily secure President Xi Jinping a third term. In 2020, there was no GDP target set at all, and last year Li announced a modest goal of "above six percent".

Amid the unpredictability, analysts expect Beijing to announce a similarly open and attainable target this year. "We expect the growth target to be set at 'above five percent'," UOB economist Ho Woei Chen said in a recent report, adding that pace would match the past two years' average of 5.1 percent.

Iris Pang, ING's chief economist for Greater China, expected the range could be higher after the country easily exceeded last year's target. And infrastructure would probably form a key part of the government's support for the economy, predicted ANZ Research senior China strategist Zhaopeng Xing.—AFP



ZHANGJIAKOU, China: File photo shows a worker using a torch to cut steel pipes near the coal-powered Datang International Zhangjiakou Power Station at Zhangjiakou, in China's northern Hebei province. — AFP

## Six-month suspended sentence for Ghosn aide in Nissan trial

TOKYO: Former Nissan executive Greg Kelly was handed a six-month suspended sentence yesterday by a Tokyo court over allegations he helped disgraced auto tycoon Carlos Ghosn attempt to conceal income. The 65-year-old American was detained at the same time as Ghosn in November 2018, but the former Nissan chief jumped bail and fled to Lebanon the following year, leaving Kelly alone to face charges.

Prosecutors had sought two years in prison for Kelly, accusing him of helping Ghosn under-report his income to the tune of 9.1 billion yen (\$79 million) between 2010 and 2018. But the court found him not

guilty on the charges for the financial years 2010 to 2016, and guilty for the financial year 2017, handing down a six-month prison sentence suspended for three years. The American has always denied the accusations, and the trial has been closely watched in Japan and abroad, with the US ambassador to Tokyo saying the case was a top priority.

After the hearing, Kelly said he was "extremely surprised and shocked" by the verdict which his lawyers said they would appeal. "I have consistently acted by prioritising the best interests of Nissan, and I absolutely did not take part in illegal activities," Kelly said in a Japanese-language written statement.

"While the court gave a not-guilty verdict on the greater part of the allegations, I do not understand why it found me guilty for that one year," he said. "I am innocent of all charges." Kelly's team had argued the proposed post-retirement payments were never agreed and there were merely exploratory discussions about a "legal way" to keep Ghosn in the fold after his tenure and prevent him from joining a competitor.

But judge Kenji Shimizu ruled that by fiscal year 2017 Kelly "was aware that there was an unpaid remuneration and the court recognises that there was a conspiracy (between Kelly) with Ghosn and (Nissan executive Toshiaki) Ohnuma."

### 'A long three years'

Some have viewed Kelly as little more than a scapegoat in a case that centred around Ghosn, whose audacious escape hidden in an audio-equipment box in December 2019 left Japanese prosecutors red-faced. "Kelly was arrested with the expectation that he could be 'turned' to testify against Ghosn," said Stephen Givens, a business lawyer in Tokyo who has followed the case. "When Ghosn escaped to Beirut, the prosecutors were left with a weak, free-standing case against Kelly," he told AFP. Nissan had pleaded guilty in a separate case, and was ordered Thursday to pay a fine of 200 million yen (\$1.7 million).

Kelly has been in Japan since his detention in 2018 and has been joined in Tokyo by his wife, who had to enrol in Japanese lessons to secure a visa to stay in the country. The verdict does mean he should now be able to leave Japan for the first time in three years, which was welcomed by US ambassador to Tokyo Rahm Emanuel.

"We are relieved that the legal process has concluded, and Mr and Mrs Kelly can return home," he said in a statement. "While this has been a long three years for the Kelly family, this chapter has come to an end," he added, offering no comment on the guilty verdict itself.

Japanese prosecutors have a close to 99 percent conviction rate in cases that go to trial, though experts said the outcome in Kelly's case was hard to predict because it was the first of its kind in the country. For his part, Ghosn, who faced several additional financial misconduct charges, has always insisted he and Kelly are innocent and that Japanese prosecutors worked to help Nissan push him out in a "palace coup".

"If he's guilty, many Japanese should also be in prison," he said from Beirut during an online press conference in December. There has been other fallout from the case, with two Americans who helped Ghosn flee the country extradited from the US to Japan and sentenced last year to between 20 months and two years in prison.—AFP

"The devastating war in Ukraine is a human tragedy, and our deepest empathy and concerns are with the millions of people impacted," the company said. "These decisions have a direct impact on 15,000 Ikea co-workers, and the company groups will secure employment and income stability and provide support to them and their families in the region," Ikea said.

While the stores operated by the Ingka group account for the bulk of the workforce affected, 12,000 people, Ikea also has nearly 2,500 employees working in manufacturing, with three factories in Russia.

According to the company, 47 suppliers in Russia and 10 in Belarus, would be affected by the decision, which also puts a stop to imports and exports between the two countries. Prior to this announcement, Ikea had initially announced that it would leave its shops in Russia open, which was met with criticism in Sweden.—AFP

They represent 20 percent of cases, compared to 10 percent a year ago, according to financial daily Dunya. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's unorthodox policies, as well as the weakening lira are contributing to inflation. Central banks normally raise rates to tame inflation but Erdogan vehemently opposes high interest rates, claiming they are the "mother and father of all evil" and cause high inflation. The Turkish lira lost 44 percent of its value against the dollar last year. AFP spoke to 12 tenants who described being forced to leave their apartments in the same way as Yilmaz, or who have suffered rent increases of over 100 percent, five times higher than the legal limit in Turkey.

Turkish law stipulates that, under a tenant's contract renewed in February, a landlord cannot increase the monthly rent above 22.6 percent, a figure calculated using base inflation. The law also restricts evictions, but tenants said they gave in to pushy or threatening landlords. In January, an Istanbul man in his 90s was filmed by a neighbour using an axe to break down his tenants' door after they refused to pay their rent, which suddenly rose from 1,200 to 4,000 liras. "The

## IMF urges S Lanka to raise taxes, devalue currency

COLOMBO: The International Monetary Fund warned crisis-hit Sri Lanka yesterday that its foreign debt was "unsustainable", and called for devaluation and higher taxes to revive the almost bankrupt economy. The pandemic pushed the South Asian island's tourism sector-a key foreign-exchange earner-off a cliff, and the government in March 2020 imposed a broad import ban to try to shore up foreign currency.

But more than two years on, Sri Lanka is grappling with food and fuel shortages, which this week saw its public transport crippled as buses ran out of diesel and the state imposed blackouts. Following its annual review of the cash-strapped country, the IMF said its fast-dwindling foreign reserves were inadequate to service the country's current foreign debt of \$51 billion. Official data shows Sri Lanka needs nearly \$7 billion to service its foreign debt this year, but the country's external reserves at the end of January were only \$2.07 billion-just enough to finance one month's imports.

The IMF stressed "the urgency of implementing a credible and coherent strategy to restore macro-economic stability and debt sustainability", recommending a return to a "market-determined and flexible exchange rate"-meaning a devaluation of the Sri Lankan rupee. While the central bank's set rate is 197 rupees to the dollar, a thriving black market offers 260 rupees for US currency notes. This disparity has led to a more than 50 percent decline in foreign remittances through official banking channels.

But the IMF noted the country's economic woes began pre-pandemic. Soon after taking office in November 2019, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa cut several taxes nearly in half, the IMF said, driving down government revenues and forcing it to borrow more.

Among recommendations to address the crisis was to raise income taxes and VAT, "complemented with revenue administration reform", the IMF said. The lack of dollars to import fuel has led to a serious energy crisis. Besides bringing public transport to a halt on Wednesday, the state's electricity company also imposed a daily seven-and-a-half-hour electricity blackout-the longest scheduled power rationing in over a quarter of a century.

Without dollars to finance essential imports, rice, milk powder, sugar and wheat flour are in short supply, while local industries are unable to bring in raw materials and machinery. The shortages pushed inflation to 16.8 percent in January-the fourth consecutive record rise-and the IMF said it expected it to remain in the double digits. International rating agencies have downgraded Sri Lanka over expectations it may not be able to service its foreign debt, though the government insists it can meet its obligations.—AFP

rise in rents is pushing property owners to seek the recovery of their homes to put them back on the market" at distinctly higher prices, according to lawyer Hanife Emine Kara, a specialist in real-estate law who has seen the number of cases rise.

### 'Illegal and opportunistic'

Property owners pushing for three-figure rent increases argue that official inflation data does not reflect the reality, a claim supported by some independent Turkish economists who say inflation reached over 110 percent in January. "We live in a period in which owning a home or renting cheap accommodation is a luxury," said Mehmet Bulent Deniz, head of the Turkish Consumers Union Federation. However, some landlords try to find a balance.

"We have agreed to 35-percent increases. There needs to be a happy medium," said Hakan Yildiz, who owns three properties in Istanbul. Some tenants, such as Emrullah Comran, refuse to accept, on a matter of principle. In January, Comran's landlord wanted to increase his rent by 58 percent.—AFP



TOKYO, Japan: Former Nissan executive Greg Kelly, who is charged with financial misconduct, enters the Tokyo district court to receive his verdict, in Tokyo. — AFP

## Ikea suspends Russia, Belarus operations

STOCKHOLM, Sweden: Swedish furniture giant Ikea said yesterday it would suspend its activities in Russia and Belarus, affecting nearly 15,000 employees, 17 stores and three production sites, in response to the war in Ukraine.

"The war has had a huge human impact already. It is also resulting in serious disruptions to supply chain and trading conditions. For all of these reasons, Ikea has decided to temporarily pause operations in Russia," the company said in a statement to AFP.



The suspension mainly concerns Russia, where the Swedish group has been present since 2000 and is one of the largest Western employers. Operations in Belarus would also be halted, though the country hosts only a few suppliers and has no shops, according to Ikea.

But salaries have not risen at the same pace, with most increasing by between 30 and 50 percent on average in January. "We shouldn't have had to leave," lamented Yilmaz, who works as a receptionist, upset at his former landlord who claimed he wanted the property back for his son.

"He harassed us. My family had no peace," he added. Yilmaz is even angrier because he said the landlord's son did not move into the apartment. "I saw an advert (for the flat) on the internet a week after we left," he said, showing a photo of the advert. The rent is now 2,600 Turkish liras (\$190, about 170 euros), compared with the 1,100 liras (\$80) paid by Yilmaz.

### Rising legal disputes

To add insult to injury, Yilmaz's new home will cost him 2,000 liras (\$146), half of his salary, and is located in "a remote corner, in an old building that is hard to heat and without a lift," he said. Yilmaz's dispute has not hit the courts but legal cases between tenants and property owners are now the biggest single issue processed by Turkish courts.

## Turkey inflation woes pit tenants against landlords

ISTANBUL: Kicked out in the middle of a harsh Turkish winter, 30-year-old Erdem Yilmaz calculated that he spent two and a half months' salary to urgently relocate to a new home in Istanbul. The father of a two-year-old is not the only Turk in this situation after last year's currency crisis.

Disputes between homeowners and tenants have risen sharply in recent months in Turkey after annual inflation reached 54.4 percent in February, the highest since April 2002. In the same period, rents have exploded by 85 percent in Istanbul and by 69 percent at the national level, according to analysis by Bahcesehir University.





A person takes images of a model of the Sagrada Familia Basilica using a smartphone by Chinese consumer electronics and mobile communications company Oppo in the MWC (Mobile World Congress) in Barcelona. — AFP photos



A Macco robot serves drinks at the MWC (Mobile World Congress) in Barcelona. The Mobile World Congress, where smartphone and telecoms companies show off their latest products and reveal their strategic visions, is expected to welcome more than 40,000 guests over its four-day run.

## FOLDABLE FUTURE: SMARTPHONES RETURN TO DESIGN CLASSIC

The "snap!" of a shutting phone is the nostalgic sound resonating from the giant stands of Samsung, Oppo and Huawei at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona this week. Star of the early 2000s, the flip-phone is making a comeback, with the big names of the industry hoping the high-tech new version of the foldable smartphone is on the verge of going mainstream. As production costs start to fall, analysts expect a tenfold increase in sales by 2026. Samsung has been the pioneer in the sector, presenting the first foldable smartphone at the Barcelona conference three years ago.

The South Korean firm accounted for 87 percent of foldable phone sales last year according to analysts DSCC. It vows that its latest models—the "Galaxy Fold" and "Galaxy Z Flip"—will give users the sort of experience normally reserved for tablets and laptops. "We are working with players like Disney+ and YouTube to best integrate their applications into this screen size and make maximum use of all the possibilities of the product," said Francois Hernandez of Samsung France.

But competition is rising, with companies like China's Oppo muscling in. Its "Find N", currently available only in Asia, has seen "really hot" sales in China, according to the company's head of products Arne Herkelmann. The foldable phone "is ready for the mass market," she told AFP. "We see that it is becoming more



A group of people take part in an immersive 360 holographic show in the MWC (Mobile World Congress) in Barcelona.



A dancer performs during an immersive 360 holographic show in the MWC (Mobile World Congress) in Barcelona.

and more mature as a technology and also reaching more approachable prices, so definitely in the future, you will see more foldable devices."

### Disruption

It has not just been the technical challenge of creating a bendable screen that has held back the market. It has also been hard to disrupt the fundamental image—seemingly set in stone with the first iPhone

in 2007 — of a smartphone as a large black rectangle with a single touch screen. They remain a niche segment with a market share of just 0.62 percent in 2021, according to Ritesh Bendre, analyst at Counterpoint Research.

But with Huawei (and its P50 Pocket), Xiaomi, Motorola, and even Google working on their own models, that share is expected to reach 3.5 percent by 2025, he said. A key turning point is expected when

Apple joins the fray, which analysts expect to see around 2025. "Apple is a hugely influential company," said Bendre, estimating that foldable sales would surpass 60 million when it gets involved.

"This will add further credibility and help open up the foldable market to iPhone customers. Volumes will depend on whether Apple is aiming for a more expensive or cheaper type of foldable," added DSCC's Ross Young. But in the upcoming

battle of the foldable, Samsung already has the jump on its competitors, especially in the technologies necessary for its production. "Samsung is taking advantage of Apple's lack of participation and Huawei's difficulties" linked to US sanctions, said Young. "It sees foldable screens as a way to improve its flagship position against Apple and other brands." — AFP



## Kim Kardashian, Kanye West finalize divorce

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian's marriage to Kanye West officially ended Wednesday when a Los Angeles judge finalized her divorce from the rapper now known as Ye. Kardashian appeared before the court virtually but Ye was represented only by his lawyer, who brought no objection to the end of the marriage.

Ye had publicly fought the separation, including with social media posts imploring Kardashian to reconcile. Kardashian filed for divorce last year after months of press reports about marital strife and as Ye battled with mental health issues. "I very much desire to be divorced," Kardashian wrote in a declaration filed to the court last week. "I have asked Kanye to keep our divorce private, but he has not done so," added the 41-year-old megastar.

### Lavish wedding

"I believe that the court terminating our marital status will help Kanye to accept that our marital relationship is over and to move forward on a better path which will assist us in peacefully co-parenting our children." The couple have four children: eight-year-old daughter North, son Saint, six, daughter Chicago, four, and two-year-old son Psalm. The pair, who began dating in 2012 and married in a lavish ceremony in Italy two years later, rapidly became one of the world's most instantly recognizable couples. But their union ran

into trouble with reports of bizarre outbursts from Ye, 44, who suffers from bipolar disorder.

In 2020, the mercurial entertainment mogul launched a bid for the US presidency with a rambling speech in which he revealed shocking personal details about his daughter, and broke down in tears. He also posted tweets that accused his wife and mother-in-law of trying to lock him up. Kardashian has previously called on the media and public to show "compassion and empathy" over her husband's erratic behavior. It is the first divorce for Ye and the third for Kardashian, who came to fame with the US reality TV series "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" which followed the lives of her family members in Los Angeles.

Chicago-raised Ye burst onto the rap scene via his production skills, before delivering a string of critically acclaimed and bestselling studio albums. He has made a public turn to Christian evangelism in recent years. Last August he filed to legally change his name to his longtime nickname "Ye," saying it was for "personal reasons." The pair began dating while Kardashian was going through divorce proceedings with second husband Kris Humphries. Kardashian is now in a relationship with 28-year-old comedian and actor Pete Davidson. — AFP

## Who killed Pasolini? Italy still questions century after birth

Provocative Italian filmmaker and poet Pier Paolo Pasolini had no shortage of enemies, but half a century after his brutal murder on a beach, his death remains a mystery. Italy marks the 100th anniversary on March 5 of the birth of one of its leading left-wing intellectuals, while a retrospective of his estimated two dozen movies is planned in Los Angeles.

But the most crucial questions that have gripped Italy since his mangled body was found on a beach of Ostia outside Rome on November 2, 1975 — who ordered his killing and why—remain unanswered. Pasolini was only 53 when he died, beaten with fists and sticks, then run over by an Alfa Romeo GT, either his own or someone else's.

A 17-year-old male prostitute, Giuseppe "Pino" Pelosi, was stopped while running away from the filmmaker's car and admitted killing him, saying Pasolini tried to rape him. Pelosi was jailed for nearly 10 years, but in 2005 he recanted on his confession, instead blaming three unnamed men with Sicilian accents. The investigation was reopened in 2010, based on DNA found on Pasolini's clothes, but only one sample could be identified—Pelosi's.

In the years since Pasolini died, theories have swirled about why the artist was killed, ranging from blackmail to a hit by the far-right or mafia. Pasolini lived his life unafraid of controversy as he took aim at bourgeois values, Catholic censorship and the threat of neo-fascism, while exposing the hardships of life through an often unbearably grim lens. He was "an uncomfortable person for those in power", his childhood friend, Silvio Parrello, told AFP at his Rome workshop that has become a shrine to the filmmaker.

### Right to scandalise

Through his essays, poems, plays and films, Pasolini highlighted the downsides of Italy's post-war "economic miracle", which brought modernity but also shanty towns and growing regional inequality. "All his life he sought out an archaic, pre-industrial, pre-globalised peasant world, which he saw as innocent," another friend, Italian writer Dacia Maraini, told AFP.

Pasolini was already known in Italy for his poetry when he began in film. His last movie, "Salo or the 120 Days of Sodom", was released after his death. The films range from gritty realism to loose adaptations full of symbolism—"Salo" was based on the work by the Marquis de Sade—while his novels reveal a fascination with small-time hoodlums from the Rome suburbs.

"To scandalize is a right. To be

### Political crime

For criminologist Simona Zecchi, author of two books on Pasolini, the writer was killed for his journalism at a time when Italy was in the throes of violence between far-left and far-right groups, known as the "Years of Lead". In 1974, Pasolini—who was close to Italy's Communist party—published an inflammatory article about the December 1969 Piazza Fontana attack in Milan, which left 17 people dead and more than 80 injured.

It was first blamed on anarchists, then members of a neo-fascist group. Pasolini claimed he knew who was responsible, but said he had no proof. No one was ever convicted. There is also speculation blackmail played a role in his death, as weeks before, reels of "Salo" had been stolen in Rome. But investigators later ruled out the theory.



Silvio Parrello, dubbed 'Er Pecetto', poses past Pasolini's pictures on the wall of his artist's workshop in Monteverde district in Rome. — AFP

scandalized is a pleasure," he said in his last television interview, in Paris, on October 31, 1975. But not everybody appreciated what he was trying to do. Shortly before his death, the filmmaker received threats over "Salo", a critique of Fascist Italy that caused outrage because of its graphic depiction of violence and sexual abuse. Some believe Pasolini's murder was linked to his investigations into the suspicious death of Enrico Mattei, the boss of energy giant Eni, in a 1962 plane crash likely caused by a bomb.

Zecchi believes there was never any will to find out what really happened. "Italy has a problem with the truth, because this truth has often passed through the dark side of our institutions," she said. Pasolini's French biographer, Rene de Ceccatty, said solving the murder is complicated by the "several layers" of individual actors likely involved. "From the moment you accept it was a political crime, it's not surprising that there is so much fog around it." — AFP



Sports

# Russian, Belarusian athletes banned from Winter Paralympics

## 83 athletes from Russia, Belarus will be heading home

BEIJING: Russian and Belarusian athletes were yesterday banned from the Beijing Winter Paralympics over the war in Ukraine, with organisers bowing to international pressure and threats of a boycott. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) had just a day earlier said athletes from the two countries would be allowed to compete as "neutrals" in the Games, which start today. It said that was the "harshest punishment" the IPC could dish out under its rules. But organisers reversed that decision less than 24 hours later, meaning 83 athletes from Russia and Belarus, which hosted troops for Moscow's attack, will now be packing their bags and heading home.

"In order to preserve the integrity of these Games and the safety of all participants, we have decided to refuse the athlete entries from RPC and NPC Belarus," the IPC said in a statement. "To the para-athletes from the impacted countries, we are very sorry that you are affected by the decisions your governments took last week in breaching the Olympic Truce," IPC President Andrew Parsons told reporters.

"You are victims of your governments' actions." The International Olympic Committee (IOC) earlier this week urged sporting federations across the world to exclude athletes from the two countries. Multiple Paralympics committees around the world, teams and athletes had threatened not to compete if the Russian and Belarusian athletes were present, which was "jeopardising the viability" of the Games, organisers said.

"Ensuring the safety and security of athletes is of paramount importance to us and the situation in the athlete villages is escalating and has now become untenable," the IPC said in a statement.

### 'Miracle'

Ukraine Paralympic Committee President Valeri Sushkevych said his team—who arrived in Beijing Wednesday—had been overwhelmed with solidarity. He said many team members had difficulties escaping bombings on their journey out of the country.

"This is a miracle that we managed to be here at the Paralympic Games," he told reporters in Beijing. "We came with a primary objective. We are here to defend



BEIJING, China: This handout photo taken and received from the OIS/IOC yesterday shows Valeri Sushkevych (L), president of the Ukrainian Paralympic Committee, shaking hands with IPC president Andrew Parsons (R) following a press conference ahead of the Beijing 2022 Winter Paralympic Games in Beijing. — AFP

our country with the whole sport community," he said.

IPC President Parsons said he expects Belarus and Russia to take legal action against the ban. "I hope and pray that we can get back to a situation when the talk and focus is fully on the power of sport to transform the lives of persons with disabilities, and the best of humanity," he added. The previous decision to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete had drawn a swift and international backlash on Wednesday.

Germany's top Paralympic official had criticised the decision as lacking courage and had told AFP it was "a dark day for the Paralympic movement".

### Emotional rollercoaster

Athletes from Ukraine arrived safely in Beijing as

the UN said the number of refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries had topped a million. Biathlon team members were preparing for competition-hitting the slopes for skiing and shooting training in Zhangjiakou yesterday.

The small Eastern European country has punched above its weight in previous Paralympic winter events, with frequent podium finishes in the biathlon and ski competitions. The delegation took home 22 medals in 2018 — including seven golds—gaining the sixth spot on the world tally. For some of the team, the emotional rollercoaster and disrupted focus will be a case of déjà vu. During Russia's hosting of the Winter Paralympics in 2014, Ukrainian athletes had to grapple with Moscow's takeover of the Crimea peninsula. — AFP

## Aussie women taking 'low key' tilt at seventh World Cup

WELLINGTON: Australia are downplaying their status as red-hot favourites at the Women's Cricket World Cup in New Zealand, with coach Matthew Mott saying they cannot expect to cruise to a seventh title. Mott said any complacency among the Aussies was dispelled by a nine-wicket defeat in a warm-up match against the host nation this week, describing it as the "perfect tonic" for his players.

"It was a little kick in the backside at the right time to just remind us that any team in this tournament on their day have got players that can stand up and hurt you," he said. Australia also suffered a blow on the eve of the tournament Thursday when star all-rounder Ashleigh Gardner tested positive for Covid-19, ruling her out of the team's first two matches.

While stung by the loss to New Zealand, who chased down an imposing target of 322, the Australians can justifiably regard it as a blip rather than a sign their campaign is in trouble. They still enter the 12th edition of the one-day international tournament as six-time champions on a run of form that includes only three losses since the last World Cup in 2017.

This includes a world-record 26-match winning streak which only ended in September last year and a recent series win in the Women's Ashes over reigning World Cup champions England. Mott said his players were well rested after completing 10 days of border isolation to enter New Zealand and they were keen to get into their tournament opener against England on Sunday. "We've deliberately gone in low key into this tournament—we had a big Ashes series, then quarantine and we gave the players a chance to freshen up," he said. "I think that's going to just get us cherry ripe for March 5 and be able to hold that throughout the tournament."

### 'Even footing'

Captain Meg Lanning attributed Australia's success to squad depth, pointing out how rising stars such as Tahlia McGrath and Darcie Brown contributed to the Ashes victory alongside veterans Ellyse Perry and Alyssa Healy. "The biggest thing for us over the last few years is that we haven't relied on one or two players, we've had some really good depth in our squad," she said. "You need a number of different players at times to step up and the depth we've got is something we're going to need at this World Cup."

Lanning predicted a high-scoring tournament, saying the Twenty20 format had encouraged big hitters. "Teams are willing to go a bit earlier and get to that 300 mark," she said, adding that the Australians were "confident" in their aggressive game style.

However, shocks can happen in the sudden-death environment of tournament knockouts, as Australia discovered to their cost when India beat them in the semi-finals of the 2017 World Cup. "Every team starts on zero wins, it's an even footing—what's happened in the previous couple of years is irrelevant," Lanning said. The Aussie skipper even made a cheeky bid to claim underdog status against England, who her team have not lost to since 2017. —AFP



LINCOLN, New Zealand: South Africa's Marizanne Kapp (R) plays a shot as England's Amy Jones (L) looks on during the warm-up match between England and South Africa at Bert Sutcliffe Oval in Lincoln. — AFP

## Juventus seize late control of cup semi

FLORENCE: Juventus took control of their Italian Cup semi-final on Wednesday after Lorenzo Venuti's late own goal gave the visitors a 1-0 first-leg win on Dusan Vlahovic's return to Florence. Venuti left the field in tears after he deflected Juan Cuadrado's cross into his own net in the first minute of stoppage time to hand Juve the win and a potentially crucial away goal.

Serbia forward Vlahovic was back at the Stadio Artemio Franchi for the first time since moving to Turin in January but had little joy for depleted Juve in a tense match which lacked quality. "It was a difficult match because we were missing so many players, but we managed to keep order and we're improving," said Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri to Mediaset.

"We're doing well physically and psychologically, now we need to put this match to once side and look to the weekend." The tie will be decided at the Allianz Stadium next month, with the winners taking on either AC Milan or Inter Milan—who drew 0-0 on Tuesday—in May's final in Rome. "I don't know what more I could have asked, we had 22 shots and hardly conceded anything at the back," said Fiorentina coach Vincenzo Italiano. "We've still got the second leg and we'll go to Turin to play our own game." Fiorentina fans had promised a fiery welcome for former hero Vlahovic, whose departure to fierce rivals Juve for an initial 70 million euros (\$80.2 million) brought an end to months of speculation around the 22-year-old's future.

He had enraged Viola fans by refusing to sign a contract extension which owner Rocco Comisso said would have made him the highest-paid player in the club's history. Home fans made an enormous racket with the 10,000 whistles handed out creating a blistering noise, and the teams came out in front of a huge display depicting Medieval Florentine poet Dante surrounded by flames. A banner directed at Vlahovic cited Canto 26 from 'Inferno', a passage from the eighth circle of Hell about the fate of enablers of fraud. However, the high-culture barracking of their former player was debased by a large group of Fiorentina fans who ignored the club's plea to not racially abuse Vlahovic, with chants of "you're a gypsy" clearly heard during the pre-match warm-up.—AFP

Sheikh Nasser Bin Hamad Bin Nasser Al Thani, Chief Business Officer, Ooredoo Qatar, said: "We are rightfully proud of our selection as Official Global Connectivity Services Provider for such a world-class event, and that FIFA and the SCDL have placed their trust in us. Our reputation for providing strong, reliable network services, and our strategic commitment

to innovation and technology, is firmly evidenced by the many other major sporting events at which we have proved our capabilities, such as IAAF World Athletics Championship Doha 2019, FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2021(tm) and F1 Ooredoo Qatar Grand Prix 2021. We look forward to once again showing the world what we, and our country, can do."

Mohammad Al Khater, Telecommunication and Broadcast Technology Manager, Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, said: "We are very happy to have chosen Ooredoo, the leading telecoms provider in Qatar and one of the fastest growing companies in the region and the world, to provide global connectivity services to all media rights licensees. We have previously worked with Ooredoo, who successfully delivered outstanding quality and results - as well as a great experience for fans - at several major sporting events. We are confident that the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 will witness unrivalled success with Ooredoo as a partner."

Ooredoo is committed to providing broadcasters a network that will enable millions of viewers across the globe to experience all the goals, actions and excitement of the tournament. With Ooredoo's nationwide fibre and ground-breaking 5G mobile network, broadcasters and service providers can choose Ooredoo to be one-stop shop for their connectivity requirements.



## Kuwait Jet Ski 2022 Championship

KUWAIT: The second round of Kuwait Jet Ski 2022 Championship was conducted on Wednesday, with UAE's Baker Al-Murri winning first place of the 'sitting'



professionals' category followed by Yousuf Al-Abdelrazaq second and Yousuf Al-Jerajsi third.

The 'beginners sitting' category was won by Fawaz Al-Mukaimi, ahead of Shaheen Ramadhan and Nasser Al-Rujaib. Member of Kuwait Sea Sport Club Board, Deputy Chairman of the Sea Committee Yousuf Al-Wattar said the round was for one day with 25 persons competing in three categories at Marina Mall beach. — KUNA

## Ooredoo to be global connectivity service provider for FIFA 2022

DOHA: Ooredoo has announced it is to be the Official Global Connectivity Services Provider for FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Ooredoo has been selected by FIFA and the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy to provide a global network connecting Doha to different points of presence in Europe - London and Frankfurt - and Singapore in Asia.

The telecoms leader will be providing global connectivity services to all media rights licensees in Qatar for this momentous event, with around 50 broadcasters across the globe connecting to its network and the international broadcasting centre in Qatar for transport of live video feeds and data.

As part of this initiative, Ooredoo is building a dedicated multi-100Gig international network offering broadcasters the quality and resiliency required for broadcast-grade video production and distribution. To



Sheikh Nasser Bin Hamad Bin Nasser Al Thani CCO Ooredoo Qatar and Mohammad Al Khater Telecommunication and Broadcast Technology Manager Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy.





MILWAUKEE: Grayson Allen #7 of the Milwaukee Bucks plays defense against Gabe Vincent #2 of the Miami Heat during the game at the Fiserv Forum Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP

## Bucks rally to cool off Heat

### Harden feels the love in Sixers home debut

LOS ANGELES: Milwaukee's Jrue Holiday drove for a layup with 1.9 seconds left as the NBA champion Bucks rallied from a 14-point deficit to beat Eastern Conference leaders Miami 120-119 on Wednesday. Milwaukee out-scored Miami 21-6 down the stretch to halt the Heat's winning streak at four games. Khris Middleton drilled a three-pointer with 13.5 seconds to play to pull Milwaukee within one, then superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo forced a jump ball and won it giving Holiday the chance for the game-winner.

"Just had to be aggressive and get something on the rim," Holiday said, adding that the key to the Bucks win was "persistence." "We know it's a game of runs," he said. "When they went on a run, we knew we had one in us. From there we locked in and got key stops and came back and got a win."

Miami had no timeouts left, and Tyler Herro's desperation three-pointer at the buzzer was off-target. Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Antetokounmpo finished with 28 points 17 rebounds and five assists

despite being in early foul trouble. Middleton added 26 points and Holiday scored 25 for Milwaukee.

Herro led the Heat with 30 points. Gabe Vincent scored 21 and Bam Adebayo added 18 points with 12 rebounds for Miami, who made 21 of their 44 three-point attempts. The Heat remained 1 1/2 games ahead of the Chicago Bulls atop the Eastern Conference. The Bucks are in fourth place, a game behind the third-placed Philadelphia 76ers.

James Harden thrilled Philadelphia fans in his 76ers home debut, scoring 26 points with nine assists and nine rebounds in a 123-108 come-from-behind victory over the New York Knicks. Joel Embiid scored 27 points and pulled down 12 rebounds and Tyrese Maxey scored 25 points for the 76ers, who improved to 3-0 with Harden, who arrived in a trade-deadline deal that sent Ben Simmons to the Brooklyn Nets.

For much of the night, it looked like the Knicks might spoil Harden's home Philly debut. The visitors, fueled by 16 points from eight Sixers turnovers, built a 16-point

lead in the second quarter. Philadelphia took the lead for the first time on Harden's free-throws in the third quarter, and his three-point play pushed the advantage to 13 points in the final minute of the period.

The Sixers didn't trail in the fourth, notching their fourth straight victory. Maxey scored 21 of his 25 points in the second half, adding four rebounds and three assists. "It was a movie," Harden said of his first game in front of Philadelphia fans, which started with a dramatic pre-game introduction.

"I felt the energy, I felt the love. I just wanted to come out there and show my love back," Harden said. He had played a key role in two 76ers road wins, but said his first game in Philadelphia since joining the Sixers was "everything I expected it to be."

"I think everyone in the world knows how great these fans are, how passionate they are about these Sixers," Harden said. "It felt great to be out here. I tried to get the jitters out early, but it was fun out here. I'm glad we came out with the win."

### Pacers out-last Magic

Elsewhere, Indiana's Malcolm Brogdon scored 31 points and grabbed 11 rebounds while handing out eight assists to help the Pacers overcome a 15-point fourth-quarter deficit in a 122-114 overtime win over the Magic in Orlando. Tyrese Haliburton starred in overtime, scoring 12 of his 21 points in the extra session.

Brogdon, still regaining his form after a right Achilles tendon injury, scored 14 points in the fourth quarter. He missed two shots in overtime, but Haliburton picked up the slack with five points in the extra session that included a three-pointer that gave the Pacers a three-point lead they wouldn't relinquish.

It went to overtime in Houston, too, where Donovan Mitchell scored 37 points and Mike Conley scored nine of his 15 in the extra session to power the Utah Jazz to a 132-127 victory over the Rockets. Rudy Gobert added 27 points with 17 rebounds for Utah, who notched a third straight victory and their ninth in 10 games. — AFP

## Chelsea survive FA Cup scare after Abramovich puts club up for sale

LONDON: Chelsea survived a major FA Cup scare to reach the quarter-finals with a 3-2 win at Luton just hours after Roman Abramovich put the club up for sale on Wednesday. Thomas Tuchel's side took to the Kenilworth Road pitch for the fifth round tie with their heads still spinning from Abramovich's bombshell announcement.

The Russian billionaire has decided to sell Chelsea amid fears he could be sanctioned by the British government amid his country's invasion of Ukraine. Abramovich, who is alleged to have close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin, will give the net proceeds from the sale to victims of the Ukraine war, with his asking price starting at a reported £3 billion (\$4 billion).

After his massive investment helped Chelsea win 19 major trophies in his 19-year reign, Abramovich admitted it had been "incredibly difficult" to give up the keys to Chelsea. Fittingly, it was Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku who completed Chelsea's escape act on the day the Abramovich era entered its final chapter.

Chelsea twice trailed against second-tier Luton before Lukaku bagged the winner in the closing stages to spare their blushes. Abramovich sanctioned the club record £97 million deal that brought Lukaku from Inter Milan last year in the final blockbuster transfer of his reign. Asked about the sale, Tuchel admitted it was impossible to imagine Chelsea without Abramovich. "I can only think about Chelsea with Roman Abramovich. So it's very hard for me. It hasn't sunk in yet that this is going to stop. It's a massive change of course," Tuchel said. "I don't know as much as maybe you think. I'm not a CEO or member of the board. So, I'm very sure the club will speak to us and the players. "I'm not so much worried because I still feel privileged and in a good place. I'm never afraid of change, and will focus on what I can influence, and this is staff and team."

It was a much-needed victory for Chelsea after their agonising penalty shoot-out defeat in the League Cup final against Liverpool at Wembley on Sunday. But it

was Abramovich's seismic decision to sell up that hogged the attention at tiny Kenilworth Road. Chelsea's travelling fans sang Abramovich's name when news of the impending sale filtered through before kick-off.

### Lukaku to the rescue

Chants of 'we've won it all' prompted an acerbic response from Luton supporters, who sang 'you bought it all' in response to the millions invested by Abramovich in star signings. Chelsea conceded a shock goal in the second minute as Reece Burke rose above Malang Sarr to glance his header past Kepa Arrizabalaga. Tuchel's side hit back in the 27th minute when Saul Niguez scored for the first time since his August loan move from Atletico Madrid.

Saul drilled a composed finish from the edge of the area after Timo Werner started an incisive counter-attack. Sarr was at fault again in the 40th minute when he tried in vain to play offside and Harry Cornick sprinted onto Carlos Mendes Gomes' pass to net Luton's second goal. Chelsea snatched an equaliser in the 68th

minute when Werner controlled Ruben Loftus-Cheek's superb high pass and slotted home for his first goal in eight games. Lukaku has yet to repay much of that mammoth fee but he bagged his 11th goal of the season as he stretched to tap in Werner's cross in the 78th minute.

Liverpool kept up their bid for an unprecedented quadruple as Takumi Minamino's double sealed a 2-1 win against Norwich at Anfield. Japan forward Minamino put Liverpool ahead in the 27th minute with a clinical finish from Divock Origi's pass. He netted again in the 38th minute, this time lashing home off the inside of the post, before Lukas Rupp got one back for Norwich in the 76th minute. Having lifted the League Cup last weekend, Liverpool are firmly in contention for the Premier League and Champions League, with no English side ever winning all four prizes in one season.

"If you make 10 changes you can't expect perfection. We are in four competitions, three left, because of the quality of the squad," Reds boss Jurgen Klopp said. Elsewhere, Southampton eased through with a 3-1 win against West Ham at St Mary's. — AFP

## Foreign players and coaches quit Russian clubs

PARIS: As the invasion of Ukraine continues, foreign players and coaches are fleeing Russian football, handball and basketball clubs. The most high-profile departures are in football. Daniel Farke has left Krasnodar without coaching a game. The German, who was appointed in January, took his assistants Edmund Riemer, Chris Domogalla and Christopher John with him. The former Norwich manager told German media: "we have now, with a heavy heart," asked Krasnodar "to terminate our contracts."

"The current political development and the pleas from our children, wives, families and friends to come home, as well as the disappearance of all sporting prospects, led to this well-considered decision," said Farke. "The gravity of life has now unfortunately caught up with us." Russian media reported that Polish international Grzegorz Krychowiak has also asked to leave Krasnodar. Another German coach, Markus Gisdol, has quit Lokomotiv Moscow. He told German daily Bild that he could not "exercise his vocation in a country whose leader is responsible for a war".

Andriy Voronin, a former Ukrainian international, has quit as assistant coach at Dynamo Moscow, second in the Russian league. "I can't live in a country that's at war with my country," he told Munich-based Sueddeutsche Zeitung. "Everything that's happening in my home country is a catastrophe, a big catastrophe, it depresses me a lot." Another Ukrainian, defender Yaroslav Rakitskiy, terminated his contract with Zenit St. Petersburg on Wednesday.

Brazilian defender Pablo has also left the club according to the Russian media. Krasnodar midfielder Remy Cabella, who is recuperating from an injury in France, made it known on social media that he would wait before returning to Russia.

The decisions by both the European handball and basketball federations to expel clubs from their top competitions has helped provoke an exodus. Belarusian club Meshkov Brest, bottom of their eight-team group in the handball Champions League, have lost Polish, Slovenian, and French players and Spanish and Portuguese coaches. All of them could return if the "situation stabilises," said the club. — AFP



LUTON: Chelsea's Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku celebrates scoring his team's third goal with teammates during the English FA Cup fifth round football match between Luton Town and Chelsea at Kenilworth Road stadium in Luton, central England. — AFP