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Putin: Any countries imposing no-fly zone party to conflict

Ukraine puts off evacuation of key port besieged by Russian forces



IRPIN, Ukraine: People cross a destroyed bridge as they evacuate this city northwest of Kyiv during heavy shelling and bombing yesterday. — AFP

KYIV: A strategic Ukrainian city put off a planned evacuation of residents yesterday blaming Russian forces for breaking their temporary ceasefire as the Russian leader warned the West of a wider war if a no-fly zone is set up. "Any movement in this direction will be considered by us as participation in an armed conflict by that country," President Vladimir Putin said.

With his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky criticizing NATO for ruling out a no-fly zone for fear of sparking nuclear conflict, Putin spoke of "colossal and catastrophic consequences not only for Europe but also the whole world", if such a zone was set up. For Zelensky, on day 10 of the invasion, under an escalating bombardment that has flattened more and more infrastructure and sent nearly 1.4 million civilians fleeing for their lives, the Western military alliance's "no" to a no-fly zone had essentially given "the green light for further bombing of

Ukrainian cities and villages".

Under siege Mariupol proudly resisted Moscow-backed rebels during a 2014 conflict, but the Azov sea port has for days been without electricity, food and water in the dead of winter and people began gathering for the evacuation. However city officials called a delay in the evacuation, saying: "The Russian side does not adhere to the ceasefire and has continued shelling both Mariupol itself and its environs, and for security reasons, the evacuation of the civilian population has been postponed."

Negotiations were underway "to establish a ceasefire and ensure a safe humanitarian corridor", Mariupol authorities added. An evacuation had been seen as a prelude to a final assault that, if successful, would see the Russian army push north from occupied Crimea and link up with their forces from the east and take control of Ukraine's coast on the Azov sea.

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News in brief



CAIRO: Egyptian female judge Radwa Helmi Ahmad sits on her first court hearing at the State Council yesterday. — AFP

First woman on Egypt top court

CAIRO: Radwa Helmi made history yesterday as the first woman judge to sit on the bench of Egypt's State Council, a top court in the Arab country. Helmi, making her appearance in a Cairo courthouse, was among 98 women appointed last year to join the council, one of Egypt's main judicial bodies, following a decision by President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. — AFP

UAE promises 'robust' response

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates has promised "robust actions" against money-laundering and terrorist financing after the Middle East financial hub was placed on a grey list of countries subject to heightened scrutiny by the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force on Friday. UAE officials said they would strive to meet a list of requirements laid down by the taskforce, including increasing prosecutions and identifying sanctions evasion. — AFP

US court rules against Muslims

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court dealt a blow Friday to three Muslim men who accused the FBI of having spied on them because of their religion after the attacks of Sept 11, 2001. While it did not shut the case down completely, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the government had the right to invoke state secrets privilege to refuse to provide information to the court responsible for studying the men's complaint. — AFP

Foul play not suspected in Warne's death

KOH SAMUI, Thailand: Thai police yesterday said foul play was not suspected in the shock death of Australian cricket superstar Shane Warne, who died of a suspected heart attack while on holiday on the paradise island of Koh Samui aged just 52. Police said late yesterday he would be flown from Koh Samui to nearby Surat Thani today for an autopsy, before being transported home to Australia.

The "King" of spin's death sparked a global outpouring of grief from prime ministers, rock stars and fellow players, an acknowledgement that the Melbourne native transcended his sport. Warne - one



MUMBAI: Australian bowling legend Shane Warne leaves the field after his last international match at Wankhede Stadium in this May 20, 2011 file photo. — AFP

of the greatest Test cricketers of all time - was found unresponsive in his luxury villa at the Samujana resort on Friday evening after failing to meet friends.

"Despite the best efforts of medical staff, he could not be revived," a statement from his management

Iran, UN watchdog agree approach to resolve nuke issues

TEHRAN: Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency said yesterday after talks in Tehran that they agreed on an approach to resolve issues crucial in efforts to revive the country's 2015 nuclear deal. The announcement came shortly before Russia said it would seek guarantees from

the United States before it backs the deal, potentially scuppering hopes the agreement could be wrapped up soon.

IAEA chief Rafael Grossi said the UN agency and Iran "did have a number of important matters that we needed... to resolve", but that they had now "decided to try a practical, pragmatic approach" to overcome them. Atomic Energy Organization of Iran president Mohammed Eslami said the two sides had come to the "conclusion that some documents which need to be exchanged between the IAEA and the Iranian organisation should be exchanged" by May 22.

Grossi's visit to Tehran comes after Britain, one

Haqqani group leader finally shows his face

KABUL: One of the Taliban's most secretive leaders, whose only picture on US "most wanted" lists is a grainy semi-covered profile, was photographed openly for the first time yesterday at a passing-out parade for new Afghan police recruits. Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, who also heads the feared Haqqani Network, has previously only been photographed clearly from behind - even since the hardline Islamists seized power last August.

"For your satisfaction and for building your trust... I am appearing in the media in a public meeting with you," he said in a speech at the parade. Before the Taliban's return, Haqqani was the most senior of three deputies to leader Hibatullah Akhundzada. Akhundzada himself hasn't been seen in public for years, and many Afghan analysts believe he may not even be alive.

Haqqani heads a powerful subset of the Taliban blamed for some of the worst violence of the past 20 years. The United States has offered a reward of up to \$10 million for information leading to his arrest, saying he was responsible for a string of terror attacks. Pictures of Haqqani were being widely shared on social media yesterday by Taliban officials who had previously only posted photographs

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company said. His body was brought to the Thai International Hospital Samui at about 6:00 pm (1100 GMT). "No foul play was suspected at the scene based on our investigation," Thai police told AFP.

At an evening press conference, local police chief Yuthana Sirisombat said relatives had "already coordinated with the Australian Embassy so that right after the autopsy's finished, they will take his body back to Australia". Warne had asthma and "had seen doctors regarding a heart condition prior to his death", he said, adding relatives said the player had previously suffered chest pain. Sirisombat also said "no drug substance was detected in Warne's body", without giving further details.

As Australia awoke to the news yesterday, fans laid flowers and other offerings - among them a meat pie and cigarettes - at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where there is a statue in Warne's honor. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison called

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of the parties to parallel talks on the deal in Vienna, indicated an agreement was close. The 2015 nuclear deal has been hanging by a thread since the United States' unilateral withdrawal in 2018 under then president Donald Trump. The landmark accord was aimed at guaranteeing Tehran could not develop a nuclear weapon - something it has always denied wanting to do.

Oil-rich Iran said this week that it was ready to raise its crude exports "to the pre-November 2018 level" - before punishing sanctions imposed by the Trump administration started to take effect. The next few days are widely seen as a decisive point

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KABUL: Taliban Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani speaks to new Afghan police recruits during a graduation ceremony at the police academy yesterday. — AFP

Local

Maltese President meets Kuwait's Assembly Speaker

Ghanem conveys Amir's greetings to President Vella

VALLETTA: President of Malta George Vella met Friday with the visiting Speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem. Ghanem conveyed to the Maltese President the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and their wishes of further progress and prosperity for Malta. On his part, President Vella asked the National Assembly Speaker to convey his greetings and appreciation to the political leadership of Kuwait for their ongoing efforts in bolstering bilateral relations between the two nations. Speaker Ghanem arrived in Malta two days ago to participate in the second peace forum, organized by Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation, and gave a speech in the inaugural session on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Ambassador to Malta Faisal Al-Mutairi said that now "is a high time for promoting the culture of peace throughout the world." There is a need at

the present time more than ever to promote the culture of peace, he said, stressing that understanding and cooperation among nations of diverse religions and cultures for sake of peace has become quite pressing. Ambassador Mutairi was speaking on the



High time for promoting peace: Kuwaiti envoy

sidelines of the Second International Forum for Just Peace Culture, organized by the Kuwaiti Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation in the Maltese capital.

Ambassador Mutairi lauded the foundation for organizing the event which would

pave the way for establishing an international platform for publicizing just peace. The State of Kuwait has always been ready to partake in regional and international efforts for boosting the culture of peace, activate dialogue among civilizations and spread values of tolerance and mutual respect among nations of the globe, he affirmed. Mutairi said the forum is a very crucial event because of the messages that serve the human race, also noting that it is part of Kuwait's soft might, employed for serving peace permanently.

Saud Al-Babtain, in a statement at the inaugural session on Thursday, affirmed that his foundation is pursuing an initiative for securing the culture of peace for the next generations, disclosing that he has obtained accreditation of the United Nations General Assembly Bureau's of the initiative. The forum bears two symbols, one is the venue as it is held in a cosmopolitan country and the other is unanimity among the conferees to attain just peace, he said. —KUNA



VALLETTA: President of Malta George Vella meets Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. —KUNA photos



NEW YORK: Kuwaiti MP Dr Obaid Al-Mutairi (right) with UNSC President Lana Nusseibeh (center) and Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Mansour Al-Otaibi. —KUNA

Kuwaiti lawmaker meets UN officials on delisting citizens from UN sanctions

NEW YORK: Visiting Kuwaiti MP Dr Obaid Al-Mutairi discussed yesterday with a number of UN officials, ways and efforts to delist names of a number of Kuwaiti citizens from UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions list. Mutairi said that the visiting Kuwaiti delegation met separately with UN Security Council Ombudsman Secretary Richard Malanjum, in his first meeting since he assumed his UN position. The meeting covered issues regarding requests to lift the names of Kuwaiti citizens from the UNSC sanctions list.

The MP added that the delegation held another meeting at the United Nations headquarters with

the head of the sanctions committee established under Resolution 1267, Ambassador Trine Heimerback from Norway, for the same purpose. He noted that the delegation held a third meeting, after the UNSC emergency session on Ukraine, with the President of the Council, Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh, as part of ongoing parliamentary and diplomatic efforts in this regard.

Mutairi stressed that the State of Kuwait has already fulfilled all relevant legal requirements and invited the UN Security Council Ombudsman to visit Kuwait and meet with its official officials to verify its compliance with related UNSC resolutions. —KUNA

Putin: Any countries imposing...

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After Russia's defense ministry declared the ceasefire - to open a humanitarian corridor out the war's fiercest battles - officials said the city's 450,000-strong population could begin to leave by bus and private cars. "This is not an easy decision, but... Mariupol is not its streets or houses. Mariupol is its population, it is you and me," said mayor Vadim Boychenko.

The siege came as more Russian forces inched closer to the capital Kyiv amid fierce fighting, particularly in the western suburbs and the northern town of Chernihiv. Dozens of civilians have been killed in shelling, missile attacks and air raids, and those remaining live among the town's ruins and in craters. "There were corpses all over the ground," Sergei told AFP, as air raid sirens wailed once more. "They were queuing here for the pharmacy that's just there, and they're all dead."

AFP reporters saw scenes of devastation - despite Moscow's insistence it is not targeting civilian areas. Fears are rising in Kyiv that the capital will suffer the

same fate once Russian missile artillery is deployed within range. Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov alleged Russia had changed tactics after encountering tough resistance. Ukraine, he said, had defeated plans to quickly storm major cities and overthrow Zelensky's government, forcing Moscow to resort to "cowardly" attacks on civilians.

Zelensky remains defiant, announcing yesterday that Ukrainian forces were counterattacking around Kharkiv, the country's second largest city, which has seen Russian incursions and fierce bombardments. "We inflict such losses on the invaders that they have not seen even in their worst dream," he said. Since Putin's army invaded on Feb 24, Russia has pummeled Ukrainian cities, with officials reporting hundreds of civilians killed. Europe's largest atomic power plant has even come under attack sparking fears of a catastrophic nuclear accident.

But Moscow has so far only seized two key cities in its 10-day-long invasion - Berdiansk and Kherson on Ukraine's southern Black Sea coast. Capturing Mariupol represents a bigger prize for Russian forces as it would deal a severe blow to Ukraine's maritime access and connect with troops coming from annexed Crimea and the Donbas. The Kremlin said it was waiting for a third round of talks with Ukraine in Belarus, and one of Kyiv's negotiators said it hoped to hold them this weekend. — AFP

eters. "The loss that we are all trying to wrap our heads around is huge," he said. Warne's inestimable impact was reflected by his inclusion in a list of the Wisden Cricketers of the 20th Century, alongside Don Bradman, Garfield Sobers, Jack Hobbs and Viv Richards. Bursting onto the scene as a brash young player with a shock of blond hair, Warne became almost as well known for his colorful life away from cricket as he was for his exploits on the field.

The first bowler to take 700 Test wickets with an assortment of leg-breaks, googlies, flippers and his own "zooters", Warne retired from Australia duty in 2007 following a 5-0 series win at home to arch-rivals England. He played 145 Tests in total over a 15-year career, taking 708 wickets, and was also a useful lower-order batsman, with a highest Test score of 99.

Following his international retirement, Warne continued to star on the Twenty20 franchise circuit, appearing for Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League and his hometown Melbourne Stars in Australia's Big Bash League. He subsequently became a highly regarded television commentator and pundit, renowned for his forthright opinions, and was involved with coaching, working individually with current-day leg-spinners. — AFP

Foul play not suspected in...

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Warne "one of our nation's greatest characters" and announced he would receive a full state funeral.

Current players - who have led emotional tributes - took to the field against Pakistan in Rawalpindi, with both sides observing a minute's silence and sporting black armbands. Speaking outside the police station on Koh Samui, Andrew Neophitou, a close friend of Warne, said: "We really just want to get Shane home, that's all it is."

Credited with reviving the art of leg-spin, Warne was part of a dominant Australian Test team in the 1990s and 2000s and helped his country win the 1999 limited-overs World Cup. A larger-than-life character, his tally of 708 Test wickets has been surpassed only by fellow spinner Muttiah Muralitharan. Australian captain Pat Cummins said he was "a hero" to the current generation of crick-

Kuwaiti team snatches gold, silver medals in Karate tournament

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Kyokushin-Kan karate team won late Friday gold and silver medals at an international full-contact Karate tournament held in Antalya, Turkey. Kuwait's Hamza Al-Bahbahani and Dhari Al-Shammari came in first and second respectively in the 85 and 75 kg kumite competitions held at the second Ashihara World Championship. Speaking to the press, head of the

delegation Sensei Hassan Al-Kandari said the tournament saw the participation of 141 karatekas representing 17 countries, including Kuwait. The Kuwaiti fighters had to go through tough competition before earning their places at the winners' podium, affirmed Kandari, adding that the adequate preparation prior to the competitions enabled the team to achieve its goal. On future tournaments, Kandari revealed that the Kuwait Kyokushin-Kan team was now preparing for Saida Fighting Championship (SFC) in Lebanon later this month. Both the Kyokushin and Ashihara styles belong to the full-contact and bareknuckle school of Karate where fighters must win by knockout, point advantage or judges' decision. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Head of the delegation Hassan Al-Kandari (center) with Hamza Al-Bahbahani (left) and Dhari Al-Shammari. —KUNA

Haqqani group leader finally...

Continued from Page 1

that didn't show his face, or if it had been digitally blurred. At the police parade yesterday, Haqqani was dressed like many of the senior Taleban officials - very heavily bearded and wearing a black turban and white shawl. He said he was showing his face so "you could know how much value we have with our leadership". Haqqani's appearance also suggests the Taleban have grown even more confident of their hold on the country since seizing power on August 15, two weeks before the last US-led foreign forces left.

Several diplomats were in the crowd - including Pakistan's ambassador - even though no country has officially recognized the new Taleban regime. The

Haqqani Network, founded in the 1970s by Jalaluddin Haqqani, was heavily supported by the CIA during the mujahideen war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is believed to be in his 40s, is his son, and succeeded him following his death in 2018.

The latter was blamed for the deadly 2008 attack on Kabul's Serena Hotel that killed six people, as well as at least one assassination attempt against former Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The FBI Rewards for Justice program says he maintains "close ties" to Al Qaeda, and "is a specially designated global terrorist".

He is reported to have been the target of several US drone strikes - in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and in the rugged terrain between them that is the heartland of the Haqqani Network. He was also credited as the author of a New York Times opinion piece in 2020 titled "What We, the Taliban, Want", sparking controversy that the newspaper had given "terrorists" a public platform. — AFP

Iran, UN watchdog agree approach to...

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for negotiations on reviving the accord formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA. "We are close. E3 negotiators leaving Vienna briefly to update ministers on state of play" and were "ready to return soon", said British delegation head Stephanie Al-Qaq, referring to negotiators from Britain, France and Germany.

But Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday that Moscow, itself slapped with sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine, would seek guarantees from Washington before backing the nuclear deal. Lavrov said Russia had requested that the US give it written guarantees that its sanctions "will not in any way harm our rights to free, fully-fledged trade and economic and investment cooperation, military-technical cooperation with Iran".

Russia is party to the ongoing talks in the Austrian capital to restore the agreement along with Britain, China, France and Germany. The United States involved indirectly. Grossi vowed this week that the IAEA would "never abandon" its attempts to get Iran to clarify the presence in the

past of nuclear material at several undeclared sites. Iran has said the closure of the probe is necessary to clinch a deal.

Behrouz Kamalvandi, deputy head of the Iranian atomic agency, told television he was hopeful Iran would reach an agreement with the IAEA during Grossi's visit. Grossi is expected to hold a news conference on his return to Vienna. The coming days are seen as pivotal for the West because of the rate Iran is making nuclear advances. Its stockpile of enriched uranium has now reached more than 15 times the limit set out in the 2015 accord, the IAEA said this week.

Several observers believe the West could leave the negotiating table and chalk the deal up to a failure if a compromise is not reached this weekend. The EU has been chairing nuclear deal negotiations and the bloc's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Friday he "hopes to have results this weekend" to "resurrect the agreement". He stressed there was "still work ongoing".

Iran's top diplomat, Amir-Abdollahian, said earlier he was prepared to travel to the Austrian capital if a deal was reached. "I am ready to go to Vienna when the Western sides accept our remaining red lines," he said in a phone call with Borrell. While Amir-Abdollahian did not define the "red lines", Iran has repeatedly demanded the right to verify the removal of sanctions and for guarantees the US will not repeat its withdrawal from the agreement. — AFP

Local

Kuwait voices concern over dangerous breaches against Palestinian people

Kuwait calls UNHRC to condemn Zionist entity's violations

The Russian and the Ukrainian Within Us

By Nejouad Al-Yagout

Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Some people say that this quote is attributed to Einstein, others claim he never said it. The point is: Here we are again. Another dictator. Another invasion. And another instance of people taking sides.



As a citizen of Kuwait, it is reminiscent of what happened to us in 1990. Saddam sent troops close to the border. Many across the globe, including Kuwaitis, did not think Saddam would dare enter the country with most nations against him. After all, he had just come out of a near-decade long war against Iran a couple of years prior. Would he dare to take such a risk while his country was already facing economic issues and post-war fatigue? Yes, he dared. What amazed Kuwaitis was that it was the first time, at least in modern history, that an Arab had invaded another Arab country. Some Kuwaitis even share their heritage with Iraqis. Sound eerily familiar? There are many parallels between then and the current crisis. And it makes one wonder: What are we doing wrong? How could we come back to such a sorry state?

We cannot sit comfortably while fellow human beings are leaving their homes, while fellow human beings have lost their livelihood, while fellow human beings are being killed, while a land is being invaded. The last thing the world needs is another humanitarian disaster. It is easy to blame Putin. But that whole insanity repeating itself? It makes one wonder what we are doing wrong. As such, we need to address the underlying issue. And the issue is this: We are all responsible for the madness in our world. And the dictator, a manifestation of our ego, is a siren—a loud, terrifying siren—that we need to get out of the mess we have created.

We hear that the world is safer than ever before. But how can we claim that when our world is in shambles? And this takes us to Carl Jung and his theory of collective unconsciousness. If we are brave enough to venture within ourselves, we will find the dictator within us, the little child who pouts when we don't get what we want, the little monster who wants a bigger house, a bigger garden, more clothes, more shoes, more, more, more. Sure, many of us would not invade land to get what we want, but the seed is the same. We don't think enough about the seed, do we? Instead, we attack the monsters out there, those greedy leaders who send in troops and take over territory that is not rightfully theirs, those politicians who wave the flag of nationalism and arrogance and prejudice. Yes, it's them. Not us. But who votes for these politicians? We do. They reflect us. Some are even related to us. Critics may argue that polls are rigged. But, even so, these politicians and dictators have countless supporters and followers. There are many who would die for them. Have we forgotten that many countries were founded on blood and tears? How did they manage if they weren't supported by many people and soldiers who carried out their mission for them? And what is the solution? Do we eradicate them all, one by one? This is the tendency of man. Kill or ostracize anyone who does us harm. But if we look closely enough, the dictator brings to life the dictator within us, that monster who seeks revenge, that judge who protests and condemns and mocks, the gossip who can't wait to vent at the dinner table. And then we enter full victim mentality mode. And what does the victim do? In many cases, the victim becomes more nationalistic, purging its country of anyone who is not like them. And, in extreme cases, the victim becomes the dictator, killing the so-called other, avenging what has been done to their community. The cycle perpetuates until there are more dictators in power, more bloodthirsty politicians who want to eradicate anyone who threatens their ego, their land, their resources.

It is easy to judge. It is easy to take sides. And the ego prides itself on being on the right side,

even as we are not on the right side when we ostracize our family members, fight ourselves daily, gossip about our colleagues, betray our friends and families, or obsess about ourselves. We take pride in being the good ones fighting evil, ignoring the evil within us. We ignore all the times we belittle others, the times when we bully others, throw tantrums, are cruel to those near and dear to us. We go to war with others every single day and, in turn, gasp when it is manifested. If we spent as much time looking into ourselves as we do on criticizing and condemning others, peace would finally rear its gorgeous, stunning, and beautiful head. Only then will we know the enemy was lurking within our very selves the entire time, telling us who to hate, who to condemn, who to attack, who to invade. That enemy might get the Putins in the world to kill, but it gets us to kill the love we have within us, to kill our relationships with others, to kill family ties, to kill sacred bonds with our spouses, to kill the self-esteem of our children, and to kill the concept of oneness at our workplace or, on a larger scale, in the world. We have lost our ability to love, forgetting that the enemy can dissolve as soon as we stop letting it control our lives.

Putin's time will run out. All we need to do is look at history. Violence never prevails. But another Putin will arise. Another Saddam will pop up. Another Stalin, another Hitler. Why? Because we haven't learned the lesson. As Eckhart Tolle so eloquently states: "You can see human unconsciousness in so many forms. You can see it very clearly in the terrorists. Sometimes it's easier to see the madness in others—but we also have to see it in ourselves."

And Lao Tzu had it right eons ago when he said: "If you want to eliminate the suffering in the world, then eliminate all that is dark and negative in yourself. Truly, the greatest gift you have to give is that of your own self-transformation." There is a voiceless voice inside each of us that knows the way, that knows that the only path is love, no matter how much we fight against it. We think we are fighting hate. No, we are fighting love. We are resisting love. And when we say humanity can never change, we keep ourselves deluded and we allow the enemy within to fool us and keep us in its stranglehold of deception. We can change. Each of us. One by one. There is already plenty of good on this planet. But when all we report is bad news, fearful news, that is how we see the world. And how we see the world changes the way we are with ourselves and others for the worse. There is enough news about people misbehaving. Yes, we need that to galvanize us to do better; but where are the stories of people helping others? Where are the headlines of all the heroes and heroines who practice love? Where are the accounts of so-called enemies working side by side for peace in the world? Where are the stories of enemy soldiers helping those on the other end? Why don't we post such stories? We don't because we are afraid our community will call us traitors or condemn us for choosing love over fear. That's why.

But love is the way. When we send love even to those we hate, the hate in the world dissolves. This does not mean accepting abuse from others or staying silent when invaded, but it means transforming our minds when tragedy strikes, so that another disaster doesn't come in its place. This means holding the Putin within us and asking it to remember love. This means asking the Ukrainian soldiers to let go of revenge when the crisis is over, so that future generations do not carry the hate within them, so that history does not repeat itself. A few years ago, when Kuwait wanted to invest in Iraq, many critics were shocked that we would invest in a country that once invaded us. But we refused to live in the past. The Iraqi government had changed after Saddam was toppled, so we chose to move on and restore our brotherly ties with Iraq. The way to go is by letting go when a tragedy is over. Even when the whole world prides itself on hating its enemies, even when critics tell us to continue to punish those who hurt us in the past, let us, one by one, choose love and forgiveness and compassion and understanding.

We have a lot to learn about love. But it's the only law. It's what will save this planet from war, destruction, climate change, and mistreatment of animals, creatures, and one another. And the love we seek is within us, ever trying to guide us to love better, to live better. We can do this. But each of us must take up the lofty challenge of doing better in our homes, first and foremost. And the home is in our heart. It is a mansion with sprawling gardens and flowing rivers. Some people call it heaven.

GENEVA: The State of Kuwait on Friday expressed deep concern at dangerous violations of the international humanitarian laws targeting the Palestinians and impunity for the Zionist entity's perpetrators. Kuwait's alarm in this respect was manifested by the country's Permanent Representative at the United Nations and International Organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghuneim. The perpetrators, namely the Zionist entity's occupation forces in the occupied Palestinian territories, must be held accountable for employment of excessive force against the Palestinians, said ambassador Ghuneim, addressing the 49th session of the Human Rights Council. He called upon the council to take an explicit stand and condemn recurring violations by the Zionist entity, the occupation-based force, against the Palestinian people. A large number of these practices are tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, the envoy noted.

This occupation-hinging force, the Zionist entity, continues to violate UN resolutions, practice a policy of racial discrimination, a policy of ethnic cleansing, ambassador Ghuneim said, affirming the Palestinians' right to self-determination, ending the occupation and establishing an independent state according to relevant international

resolutions. The State of Kuwait supports the call by the High Commission for Human Rights on the Zionist entity to comply fully with the international human rights laws, holding immediate investigations into all the abuses and breaches of these laws, the ambassador declared. He reaffirmed the State of Kuwait's full support for the just Palestinian cause that constitutes a foundation of its foreign policy, emphasizing that this backing would be maintained until end of the Zionist entity's occupation of the Arab territories and establishing the independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, as stipulated by the UN resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two states' principle.

The ambassador applauded the council's report with respect of accountability in the cases of international law's flagrant breaches by the occupation-hinging force against the unarmed Palestinian people. He drew attention of the international community to mounting occurrences of using live ammunition by the Zionist entity's security forces in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in addition to escalating violence by the Zionist entity's settlers. Impunity for employment of excessive forces has become prevalent however using firearms against civilians is considered a war crime, he pointed out. —KUNA



HEBRON: People help carry away an injured Palestinian protester amidst clashes with the Zionist entity's forces in the center of the city of Hebron in the occupied West Bank on Friday. —AFP

On the occasion of the



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IRPIN, Ukraine: A Ukrainian serviceman carries a child while assisting people to cross a destroyed bridge as they evacuate this city northwest of Kyiv during heavy shelling and bombing yesterday. — AFP

Local

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Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

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Editor-in-Chief
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EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 353/3561
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News in brief

Amir condoles with
UAE President

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Friday a cable of condolences to UAE's President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahayan on the death of Sheikh Aisha bint Mohammad bin Khalifa Al-Nahayan. In the cable, His Highness the Amir expressed his sincere sympathy over Sheikh Aisha's death, praying to Allah the Almighty to bestow mercy on her soul and bring solace to her family. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

Amir offers condolences
to Pakistan's President

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Friday a cable of sincere condolences to Pakistan's President Arif Alawi on the victims of the "terrorist blast" that targeted a mosque in Peshawar City, northwest of Pakistan. In the cable, His Highness the Amir expressed Kuwait's condemnation and denunciation of this gruesome "terrorist act" that targeted the innocents. He prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow mercy on the victims' souls and to bring solace to their relatives, wishing a rapid recovery to those injured. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent the Pakistani president two similar cables.

Kuwait deplors
terrorist bombing

KUWAIT: The Foreign Ministry expressed Friday Kuwait's condemnation and denunciation of the terrorist bombing attack at a mosque in the Pakistani city of Peshawar which left dozens of worshippers dead and scores others injured. The ministry also voiced Kuwait's solidarity with the friendly Islamic Republic of Pakistan and backing to all the measures it takes to maintain security and stability. The ministry extended sincere condolences to families of the victims and wished the injured speedy recovery.

Kuwait oil price
down to \$111.39 pb

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti oil price dropped by \$7.82 to \$111.39 per barrel (pb) on Friday, compared with Thursday's \$119.21 pb, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) announced yesterday. In the world market, the Brent crude went up by \$7.65 to \$118.11 pb, and the West Texas Intermediate rose by 8.01 cents to settle at \$115.68 pb.

Cairo victim
'not Kuwaiti'

KUWAIT: Egypt's security bodies have identified the man, who was found dead earlier Friday at Al-Haram Area in Giza, west of Cairo, as "Egyptian, not Kuwaiti", Kuwait's Embassy in Cairo said. In a statement, the embassy expressed sincere thanks to Egyptian authorities for their cooperation and for immediately informing it of the victim's identity. A Kuwaiti man was reported early Friday to have allegedly been killed near the Egyptian Pyramids in Giza Governorate.

Kuwait to hold
environment week

KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority (EPA) announced on Friday the organization of environmental week in Kuwait from March 6 to 12 of each year to educate people about protection of the environment and natural resources in the country. In a press statement, EPA Chairman and Director General Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad Al-Humoud Al-Sabah said that the environment week would feature a variety of activities including workshops, planting and awareness-raising events, etc. Sheikh Abdullah expressed his hope the participation of all segments of the society in the environment week activities to raise level of people's awareness about the environment. He added that today, the activities of the Environment Week would be launched with a visit to Al-Jahra Natural Reserve to plant several diverse seedlings in celebration of this occasion. He pointed out that the week would be themed "protecting it begins with you."

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A heavy sandstorm hit Kuwait on Friday, which drastically reduced down visibility in most areas around the country. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait International
Rally to take place
on March 17-19

KUWAIT: Head of Kuwait International Motorsport Club, Chairman of the organizing committee of Kuwait International Rally 2022 Emad Bukhamseen said the rally will be held under the patronage of Public Works Minister, State Minister for Youth Affairs Ali Al-Mousa during the period of March 17-19. He thanked Minister Mousa for his patronage as this comes out of his support of such championships and caring for the youth as they make up a large

part of the society.

Bukhamseen said the rally is the fifth round of the Middle East Championship and expressed confidence in the Kuwaiti youth to organize and host such events successfully. He said motorsport is highly popular among youth in Kuwait and the Gulf. "The state had a sense of that and built Kuwait City for Motorsports which is an outstanding structure with its racing tracks and buildings," he said. He also appreciated the role of the Amiri Diwan which supervises its administration.

The rally competitions are distributed over 10 speed rounds with a distance of 180.60 km while the total distance of the rally is 517.62 km. Kuwait Rally is on the agenda of the Middle East Championship since 1984 but the crises that went through and the two Gulf wars prevented it from happening between 1990-1994 and 1997-2007.



Ali Al-Mousa



Emad Bukhamseen

Qatar's Nasser Al-Atiya holds the largest number of wins as he made his seventh win in 2018, superseding UAE's Mohammad bin Sulayem who has four wins.

stc concludes its successful participation in 'The Avenues Sky'

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, concluded its successful participation in "The Avenues Sky" - season 2 during the month of February, a family-oriented event at the Avenues Mall with a range of activities for children and adults.



Danah Al-Jasem

In its statement, stc mentioned that its participation in the event was aimed at celebrating Kuwait's national holidays alongside the people of Kuwait, while simultaneously giving back to the community as part of the comprehensive CSR agenda that stc has launched in celebration of the National days. stc organized several interactive games, competitions, and experiences at the stc booth, with a range of prizes distributed to participants and winners.

The company also streamed its national holidays TVC, which received positive reviews, great feedback, and a high level of engagement from the public. In addition to its TVC, stc organized an Ashman movie night for children along with a raffle for two behind the scenes tickets for a memorable and exciting experience that was highly favored by the children, which made stc hold another movie night during the last week of the event.

In celebration of Kuwait's national holidays on February 25th and 26th, stc has been implementing its extensive month-long celebrations that were launched with the tagline "February is very 'wayed' different with stc". These initiatives are directed to the Kuwaiti community and fall in line with stc's corporate social responsibility agenda and the Company's eagerness to join the nation in celebrating these occasions.

Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "The event witnessed a great turnout, with remarkable interaction and engagement from visitors at the stc booth, especially from the youth and children. We are proud to participate in a community-based initiative that adds to the series of initiatives and activities in which stc has partaken during



the month of February. Our objective is to bring joy and happiness to everyone in Kuwait, whether through our socially driven events or by participating in engaging initiatives, which is why we look forward to participating in such engaging events."

Jasem added, "We find it critical through our role as market pioneers to collaborate with both government and private sectors in socially driven initiatives that bring

the community together during special occasions. In this regard, on behalf of stc, I would like to thank the organizers, participants, and visitors for making this event a successful and memorable one. stc aims to enrich people's lives across various aspects, whether it is through our wide range of solutions and offerings, or by taking part in various activities and initiatives that bring the community closer together."



Pakistan police try to identify bomber

Fury over Russian attack on Ukraine nuclear plant

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

North Korea fires ballistic missile

South condemns Pyongyang's 'unprecedented repeated firing of ballistic missiles'

SEOUL: North Korea fired a suspected ballistic missile yesterday, Seoul's military said, continuing this year's record-breaking blitz of weapons tests with a launch just days before South Korea's presidential election. From hypersonic to medium-range ballistic missiles, Pyongyang test-fired a string of weaponry in January and last week launched what it claimed was a component of a "reconnaissance satellite"—although Seoul described it as another ballistic missile.

Despite biting international sanctions over its nuclear weapons, Pyongyang has ignored US offers of talks since high-profile negotiations between leader Kim Jong Un and then-US president Donald Trump collapsed in 2019. Instead of diplomacy, Pyongyang has doubled-down on Kim's drive to modernise its military, warning in January that it could abandon a self-imposed moratorium on testing long-range missiles and nuclear weapons.

South Korea's military said yesterday it had detected a presumed "ballistic missile launched into the East Sea from the Sunan area around 08:48 am." South Korea's National Security Council condemned Pyongyang's "unprecedented repeated firing of ballistic missiles", which goes against peace on the Korean Peninsula and the international community, the presidential Blue House said in a statement.

Seoul will "even more thoroughly monitor North Korea's nuclear and missile-related facilities, such as Yongbyon and Punggye-ri", the statement added. Tokyo also confirmed the launch, saying the missile had flown "at a maximum altitude of approximately 550 kilometres (340 miles) and a distance of approximately 300 kilometres." Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi said. He said the "extremely high frequency" of Pyongyang's weapons tests this year were "a threat to the region" and were "absolutely unacceptable."

The North's sabre-rattling comes just four days before South Korea votes for a new president, with the tests seemingly a means of Pyongyang conveying its "discontent" with outgoing dovish president Moon Jae-in, who brokered Kim's first summit with Trump, analysts said.

"Looks like Kim is feeling that Moon did not do much after the Hanoi summit collapsed," said North Korean studies scholar Ahn Chan-il, referring to the final meeting between Kim and Trump.

Pyongyang has clearly "decided to prioritise their own military agenda regardless of what South Korea thinks," he added. Tensions with North Korea are no longer a major issue in South Korean elections, analysts say, with issues including domestic income inequality and youth unemployment top of voters' lists of concerns.

But if Moon's ruling Democratic Party loses on Wednesday, it could herald a shift in Seoul's North Korea policy. One of the two frontrunners, former prosecutor Yoon Suk-yeol of the opposition People Power Party, has threatened a pre-emptive strike on South Korea's nuclear-armed neighbour if needed.

Not Ukraine

Analysts had widely predicted Pyongyang would seek to capitalise on the United States' distraction over Russia's invasion of Ukraine with more tests. Ukraine, which emerged from the Cold War with sizeable Soviet-era nuclear weapons stocks of its own, gave up its arsenal in the 1990s.

"With these tests, North Korea seems to be saying North Korea is different from Ukraine, reminding the world that it has its own nuclear weaponry system," said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies. "It's yet another demand for Washington to abolish the so-called 'hostile' policies against Pyongyang," he told AFP.

North Korea last month accused the United States of being the "root cause of the Ukraine crisis" saying in a statement on its foreign ministry's website that Washington "meddled" in the internal affairs of other countries when it suited them but condemned legitimate "self-defensive measures".

Domestically, North Korea is preparing to celebrate the 110th anniversary of the birth of late founder Kim Il Sung in April, which experts say Pyongyang could use as an opportunity to carry out a major weapons test.

Recent satellite images analysed by specialist website 38 North suggest that the country may be preparing a military parade to showcase its weapons to mark the key anniversary. "Pyongyang is likely to focus on testing its reconnaissance satellites and ICBMs until April," said Cheong Seong-chang of the Center for North Korea Studies at the Sejong Institute. — AFP



Seoul to monitor North's nuke facilities

Blinken defends sanctions tactic

BRUSSELS, Belgium: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday that the suffering of Ukrainians will likely worsen but defended the West's focus on sanctions and limited military support as an effective way to stop Russia's invasion.

Amid rising pressure for US and European allies, and especially NATO, to help Kyiv more on the battlefield, Blinken said that their actions so far against Moscow were only just beginning to have a punishing impact. But he also said that more military support and more sanctions, as well as increased humanitarian aid for Ukrainians, were the focus of a day of talks at the NATO and European Union headquarters in Brussels.

"The terrible expectation is that the suffering we've already seen is likely to get worse before it gets better," Blinken told reporters. Earlier Friday NATO rejected mounting calls to implement a "no-fly zone" over Ukraine that could force Russia to stop its jet fighters, bombers and helicopters from attacking Ukraine.

And while the United States and Western European countries are actively supplying Ukraine's forces with anti-armour rockets and portable Stinger missiles that can take down helicopters and slower-moving aircraft, they are refusing to send Ukraine's air force more fighter jets to better counter-attack the Russians.

But Blinken, who has taken a lead role in organizing global retaliation against Russia, said a no-fly zone would be impossible to enforce without expanding the conflict. "The only way to actually implement something like a no-fly zone is to send NATO planes into Ukrainian airspace and to shoot down Russian planes. That could lead to a full-



RZESZOW, Poland: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (L) and Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau address a joint press conference in Rzeszow, Poland yesterday. —AFP

ledged war," he said.

But even as the Russian invading force pushes ahead and increasingly hits urban civilian targets, Blinken said coordinated Western actions are having an impact. With what he said was a continuing supply of weaponry, the Ukrainian military has been able to stall some of the Russia advance.

"We are going to tremendous lengths with allies and partners to provide Ukrainians with the means to effectively defend themselves," he said. "One of the things that we talked about at length today in our various meetings of NATO and the EU was, what more we can do and how to do it effectively," he said. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba attended those meetings virtually, he said, and gave his counterparts a list of what the country's army needs. "We're working on all of that, every every single day," Blinken said.

He also cited the impact economic of sanctions on the Russian economy, debasing the currency, forcing up interest rates, and cutting it off from crucial supplies and income. But he admitted that the impact can't provide immediate relief to millions of Ukrainians. — AFP

Afghan evacuees prefer life in Qatar to Taleban rule

DOHA: Surfing on wifi and enjoying free meals in comfortable town houses in Qatar, Afghans who fled their country have shrugged off the Taleban's claims they are living in miserable conditions. Despite an uncertain future, the Afghans of Doha's Park View Villas insist there is no way they will go back to their homeland under the Islamist hardliners, no matter what the new rulers say.

Since August, more than 75,000 Afghans have passed through the Gulf emirate that brokered a peace deal between the Taleban and the United States and remains a key intermediary in the Taleban's difficult links to the outside world. One hundred Afghans are now at Park View, a compound built to house officials for this year's football World Cup. Two hundred others were moved this week to a nearby US camp for processing to be relocated to the United States.

The villas opened following criticism of facilities at an emergency camp on a US military base after the tidal wave of evacuations started. The compound's streets resemble a quiet US neighbourhood. Its weekly dance party was buzzing after Taleban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid declared on Sunday that the Taleban believed thousands of Afghans were "living in very bad conditions" in Qatar and Turkey.

The residents beg to differ. "I can walk here. I feel safe," Thamina Heerawie, 22, told AFP during a break from volunteer work at the Park View nursery school, a rowdy focal point of compound life. "The situation here is much better than being at home and suffering over your dark future in Afghanistan." She said she would "definitely" go back to Afghanistan-if the



DOHA, Qatar: File photo shows Afghan refugees gather in a playground at Park View Villas, a compound built for this year's football World Cup, in the Qatari capital Doha. —AFP

Taleban were not ruling.

Dance parties

The Taleban regained power in August with a lightning offensive that capped a two-decade insurgency against a Western-backed government supported by a US-led international force. Mujahid indicated airlifts had been definitively halted, though he later backtracked on suggestions Afghans would be barred from leaving. The flights effectively ended on December 1 with little sign of a resumption despite international pressure.

Heerawie was one month away from graduating in accountancy when the Taleban took Kabul, depriving most girls of their education, though main universities reopened in February. She was among the 200 moved to the US camp this week and hopes to find a university in America. The Afghans can only leave Park View on guided day trips to parks, museums and sports events. But after at least four months, the wait for a permanent home has become stressful. Authorities have opened a mental health clinic to help them cope. Mia Kamal Ud Din, a carpet maker who fled with his family, said the uncertainty played on the minds of many. — AFP

International

Fury over Russian attack on Ukraine nuclear plant

US lawmakers urge Biden to take a tougher stance against Russia

KYIV: Ukraine and its allies expressed fury on Friday after Europe's largest atomic power plant was attacked and seized by invading Russian forces, which continued to shell major cities. The six reactors at Zaporizhzhia, which can power up to four million homes, appeared undamaged by the fighting and a fire that broke out in a training facility.

But Kyiv accused the Kremlin of "nuclear terror", and US envoy to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said the attack was "incredibly reckless and dangerous". Moscow's UN ambassador called accusations that Russian forces had shelled the plant part of "an unprecedented campaign of lies".

According to Ukraine, thousands of civilians have died since President Vladimir Putin's military invaded on February 24, claiming to be fighting a Western-leaning "Nazi" threat on its border. In a Kyiv hospital, wounded soldiers told AFP of their grim battle against the Russian advance on the capital, and vowed to return to the frontline.

"We were on reconnaissance and came across an enemy column that had made a breakthrough," said Motyka, 29, who was hit by shrapnel on his right side. "We fought them and killed their soldiers on foot, but they showered us with mortar fire."

On Friday, missile and bomb attacks on cities continued, the Ukrainian military said on Facebook, adding that the main focus of Russian troops was to encircle Kyiv. It added that Russian artillery and multiple launch rocket systems were pounding residential buildings and infrastructure.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said the attack at the nuclear plant "could have stopped the story, the history of Ukraine, the history of Europe." "Russian tank commanders knew what they were firing at," he said, adding: "The terrorist state now resorted to nuclear terror."

Zelensky will address the US Senate via Zoom at the request of Kyiv, a US legislative aide said. As the war intensifies, some US lawmakers are urging President Joe Biden to take a tougher stance against Russia, such as by suspending imports of its oil.

'Horrific, horrific consequences'

"We are faced together with what is President Putin's war of choice, unprovoked, unjustified, and a war that is having horrific, horrific consequences," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in Brussels. "We're committed to doing everything we can to make it stop."

With fears growing of nuclear conflict, the US and Russian armed forces have set up a new direct phone line to reduce the risks of "miscalculation," the Pentagon said Friday. But Putin has been unmoved as Russia has become an economic, sporting and cultural pariah. According to the Kremlin, Putin told his Belarusian counterpart that "the tasks set for the (Ukraine) operations are going according to plan and will be fulfilled in their entirety".

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called on Russians "to unite around our president", after thousands braved mass arrests at anti-war demonstrations this week. Authorities have imposed a news blackout



LONDON: A demonstrator holds a placard as she takes part in a rally in Trafalgar square in central London, yesterday, to show support for Ukraine and to protest against Russia's invasion of the country. —AFP



Fears growing of nuclear conflict

Ukraine: A nuclear-powered nation under fire

PARIS: The Russian shelling of Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine—the largest in Europe—has sparked international outrage and fears over the country's 15 operational reactors. The Zaporizhzhia reactors, apparently undamaged by the attack, were taken over by invading Russian forces that have also stationed themselves at Chernobyl, the site of the worst civilian nuclear disaster in history.

Experts have condemned the attack, while stressing that Ukraine's modern reactors are built to withstand most human-caused and natural impacts. Here's what we know about nuclear power in Ukraine:

Nuclear-powered nation

Ukraine is the seventh-largest producer of nuclear electricity in the world, according to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) figures for 2020. The country, which relies on nuclear energy for more than half of its power supply, has made significant improvements in nuclear safety over the years, experts say.

Zaporizhzhia has six of the country's 15 reactors and can create enough energy for four million homes. The plant is "relatively modern", said Mark Wenman of Imperial College London, noting its reactor components are housed inside a heavily reinforced containment building that can "withstand extreme external events, both natural and man-made, such as an aircraft crash or explosions".

"The design is a lot different to the Chernobyl reactor, which did not have a containment building, and hence there is no real risk, in my opinion, at the plant now [that] the reactors have been safely shut down," he told the Science Media Centre. The battle at the site caused a fire at an adjacent training facility, IAEA chief Rafael Grossi said early Friday.

He said only one of the six reactors was operating at about 60 percent, another had been undergoing maintenance, two were in "safety-controlled shutdown" and the last two "were already being held in reserve and are operating in low-power mode". Ukrainian monitors say there has been no spike in radiation.

Conflict fears

Earlier this week Greenpeace warned that the Russian invasion risks a "nightmare scenario" at one of the country's nuclear sites, potentially involving an explosion that caused cooling systems to fail and large amounts of radioactivity to be spread on the wind.

This, the charity said in an analysis focusing on Zaporizhzhia, could render large parts of Europe and Russia "uninhabitable for at least many decades". The main risk now is a loss of the power supply as the plant needs water and electricity to operate the safety systems and cool the reactor core, according to Karine Herviou, Deputy Director General of the French Institute for Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety. But the site has emergency generators, which normally have fuel to operate for seven to 10 days, as well as water reserves.

The other risk is direct aggression. Herviou said the containment buildings offer protection to a point "but it all depends on what we are talking about". An attack that hit another part of the plant could affect safety systems, she added. — AFP

In besieged Ukraine city, Africans see no way out

JOHANNESBURG: Cut off by Russian forces and surrounded by the sounds of battle, Adamu Rabiou sleeps in his clothes, shoes laced, ready to flee if he can. The young Nigerian is among hundreds of students, many of them Africans, stuck in the eastern Ukrainian city of Sumy and desperate to escape.

"We don't know how many days this situation will last," the 23-year-old medical student told AFP by telephone. "It's scary. There is no solution to get out. It is worse to stay." The Russian border is just a few dozen kilometres (miles) away, and Russian soldiers have surrounded the city.

Buses and trains have stopped running. A handful of taxis brave the streets, but charge a fortune. The students pool their money to pay the fare

when they go out for groceries. For the moment, Rabiou has found spaghetti, onions and tomato sauce to cook in his dormitory at the Sumy State University. He now worries what will happen when the food runs out.

"If the war takes a year, we will be waiting here for a year," he said. "I made up my mind. If there is a road, a bus, at taxi, a train—we are just going to move." At least in his situation there's an advantage to being black, he said, unlike at the borders where Africans have reported sharp racial tensions.

"Russian soldiers are not attacking other foreigners. We are all black, that helps," he said. There were 16,000 African students in Ukraine before the conflict according to Kyiv's ambassador in Pretoria, a legacy of the close ties between many countries on the continent and the nations of the former Soviet bloc. Moses Kanhema, 28, left his apartment in the city to stay in the dorms, which he thinks are safer.

"We are sitting ducks as we are talking," he said. Kuziva, a second-year engineering student who declined to give a surname, said they hoped to find a way to Poland. "In Sumy, every for-



SHEGYNI, Ukraine: Foreigners wait to go to Poland at the Shegyni Ukrainian border post. Hundreds of foreigners, mainly students from Africa, Asia and the Middle East who have been queuing for days in vain, hoping to go to Poland. —AFP

eigner is still stuck, and we are all trying to find a way to get out of here," the 23-year-old Zimbabwean said. "There has been a lot of fighting," he added. "We hope we can come out alive." Zimbabwe doesn't have an embassy in Ukraine, but Kuziva said his government had tried to help. "But,

like all the other nations they can't access their citizens here," he said. Kanhema was less forgiving. "The Zimbabwean authorities have taken our passport information," he said. "They call you, they keep saying 'Stay put, stay safe.' They have taken no real initiative. — AFP



NICOSIA, Cyprus: Protesters wave the Ukrainian flag as they protest against the Russian attack against Ukraine, in the old city of the capital Nicosia, yesterday. —AFP

Ukraine conflict spills into Cyprus school spats

NICOSIA: As the conflict between Russia and Ukraine rages, it risks spilling into an unlikely arena — classrooms and playgrounds in Cyprus, home to a sizable Russian population and a smaller Ukrainian community.

Trouble appeared to brew in schools in several cities, but especially Limassol, a seaside magnet on the holiday island and a financial hub that is sometimes dubbed "Moscow on the Med".

Veronika, a 17-year-old Ukrainian student at a private school, said verbal spats had broken out between fellow nationals and Russian peers.

"My Russian classmates are worried... because they know the Russian army is being injured by the

Ukrainian army," she said.

"There are some conflicts. They care about their people, and we care about ours."

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24, has been denounced by Kyiv and Western powers as unjustified aggression, while Moscow says it wants "the demilitarisation and denazification" of its neighbour after failing to receive security guarantees.

At another school in Limassol, staff sent an email appealing to parents to shield their children from their opinions on the conflict.

"As is human nature the children have been sharing the views of their parents with each other," wrote Costas Constantinides, general facilitator at Lighthouse school.

"This has led to conflict, blaming and shaming," he lamented in the email, which was also posted on Facebook. Speaking to AFP, Constantinides said "inevitably there's going to be some conflicts between students across the board, of all ages. "They pick up snippets from parents." — AFP

Sanctions, no-fly zone: West's complex calculus to stop Putin

WASHINGTON: Despite unprecedented sanctions and strong support for Ukraine, Western states have failed to stop the Russian onslaught and are even expecting things to get worse. But their options for intensifying pressure on President Vladimir Putin are likely to be limited.

More sanctions?

G7 countries promised Friday to impose "tough new sanctions" on Russia, and the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken pledged to "increase the extraordinary pressure we're already exerting." But there is not much room for maneuver. The US had promised before the invasion to "start at the top of the escalation ladder and stay there," and have kept their word.

Together with their European allies, they have decreed unprecedented sanctions against the Russian financial system and the oligarchs close to the Kremlin, banned exports of crucial technologies and imposed an air blockade. Russia has been banned from major sports competitions and dozens of companies have withdrawn from the country.

"Some people thought, and I would be included in this group" that the threat of these sanctions "would be enough to deter President Putin but then it wasn't," former US ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor told AFP. "And so it's not clear to me that additional sanctions would make him withdraw."

So far, Russia's energy sector has been relatively spared. Many US lawmakers are urging President Joe Biden to ban US imports of Russian oil, something that the president has not ruled out. Some hawks are also calling for the Russian financial system to be completely cut off from the rest of the world, while Westerners have taken care to target banks that are least linked to the hydrocarbon sector. Blinken warned against measures that would reduce global energy supply and automatically drive up the price at the pump for Americans and Europeans.

That, he warned, was not in the "strategic interest" of the West, seeming to be betting more on the effect of the current sanctions played out over time. — AFP

International

Pakistan police try to identify bomber as death toll rises to 62

Officials checking biometric data of people who crossed into Pakistan from Afghanistan

PESHAWAR: The death toll from a suicide attack at a Shiite mosque in northwest Pakistan rose to 62 overnight as police said yesterday they would try to identify the bomber from two severed feet found at the scene. Police also released CCTV footage of Friday's attack showing a man dressed in a traditional shalwar kameez tunic shoot two policemen as he entered the mosque in the Kocha Risaldar area of Peshawar, around 190 kilometres (120 miles) from the capital Islamabad.

He then detonated a suicide vest packed with ball bearings that ripped through the building, crowded with people just moments before Friday prayers were due to start. The Islamic State group have claimed responsibility for the attack. "There are seven bodies beyond recognition including two amputated feet which we believe are of the bomber," Peshawar police chief Muhammad Ijaz Khan told AFP.

"We are trying to ascertain identity of the bomber through DNA testing." He said the death toll had risen to 62 — including seven children aged below 10. It was the deadliest attack since July 2018, when a blast at an election rally killed 149 people — and was also claimed by the local chapter of the Islamic State group.

Ijaz said officials were checking the biometric data of people who had recently crossed into Pakistan from Afghanistan, where IS have previously planned attacks. Peshawar — just 50 kilometres from the porous border with Afghanistan — was a frequent target of militants in the early 2010s but security has greatly improved in recent years.

Sunni majority Pakistan has recently been battling a resurgence of its domestic chapter of the Taliban, Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan (TTP). A one-month truce last year failed to hold and there are fears the TTP, which has targeted Shiite Muslims in the past, has been emboldened by the success of the Afghan Taliban. Interior Minister Sheikh

Two severed feet found at the scene

Rashid Ahmad said in a video statement that police will "track them down in the next couple of days". Members of the local Shiite community, meanwhile, were sending bodies of victims to their home districts for burial.

The blast came on the first day of a cricket Test match in Rawalpindi between Pakistan and Australia, who have not toured the country in nearly a quarter of a century because of security concerns. — AFP



PESHAWAR, Pakistan: Relatives mourn the death of their relatives outside a hospital following a bomb blast at a mosque in Peshawar. — AFP



BEIJING, China: Delegates leave after the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

China says military spending to grow 7.1 percent in 2022

BEIJING: China's military budget—the second-largest in the world after the United States—is set to increase by 7.1 percent in 2022, Beijing announced yesterday. Some 1.45 trillion yuan (\$230 billion) has been set aside for national defence, according to a government budget report.

The increase is slightly higher than the 6.8 percent rise last year and broadly in line with the general pace of growth in recent years. It exceeds Beijing's annual GDP growth target of 5.5 percent announced separately by Premier Li Keqiang yesterday.

During a speech opening the annual session of China's rubber-stamp parliament, Li said Beijing would "enhance military training and combat readiness, stay firm and flexible in carrying out military struggle, and safeguard China's sovereignty, security and development interests".

Beijing has poured billions of dollars into defence modernisation in recent years as it aims to transform its huge military into a world-class force rivaling that of the

United States and other Western powers. Military tensions have dramatically increased over the past year between China and rivals including the US and India as Beijing has overseen an island-building spree in the South China Sea, clashes on the Himalayan border and sabre-rattles over Taiwan.

Li made no reference to those tensions other than a standard warning against any "separatist activities" in Taiwan and "foreign interference" in the self-ruled island's status. Beijing's military budget is still far lower than Washington's, which has over \$700 billion earmarked for defense spending for 2022.

But many overseas military analysts believe actual spending is significantly higher than the publicly announced budget. "The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party and the party leadership needs to secure the continued support from the military leadership," said James Char, an expert on the Chinese military at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University.

"One of the ways to do this is by demonstrating that the needs of the PLA are being prioritised," Chinese President Xi Jinping last month called on the military to conduct "combat-oriented tests" and increase the capacity for "intelligent, information-based warfare." Over the past year, China has conducted two flight tests of hypersonic ballistic missiles. — AFP

'Maladaptation': How not to cope with climate change

PARIS: A crescendo of deadly extreme weather is outpacing preparations for a climate-addled world, according to a landmark UN assessment of climate impacts released this week. Whether it is sustainable farming or bioengineered crops to boost food security; restoring mangrove forests or building sea dams to buffer rising oceans; urban green corridors or air conditioning to temper killer heatwaves — the search for ways to cope with the fallout of global heating has become urgent.

"At current rates of adaptation planning and implementation, the adaptation gap will continue to grow," the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns.

At the same time, however, the 3,650-page IPCC report raises red flags about how schemes to deal with climate impacts can go wrong.

There's even a word for it: "maladaptation". "We're finding that there are many cases in which adaptation projects don't work," said Clark University professor Ed Carr, lead author of a chapter in the IPCC report on climate resilient development. "Some have actually made things worse." Building a dam, for example, to prevent urban flooding may help protect a small area for a limited time period. "But if the measure you put in place has negative consequences along the rest of the river and makes things worse in the long run, that's maladaptation," said Imperial College London's Friederike Otto. Otto, a pioneer in quantifying the extent to which climate change makes extreme weather more likely or intense, said people often fail to recognise the role bad choices — building houses in a flood plain, for example — play in disasters.

Lack of data

"Just blaming climate change alone can lead to maladaptation," she told AFP. Sometimes coping measures have unintended consequences. Kwame Owusu-Daaku, an assistant professor at the University of West Florida, investigated the aftermath of sea barriers erected in front of a modest fishing village near the Volta River estuary in Ghana to prevent beach erosion due to storm surges and rising seas.

The sea walls worked. In fact they worked so well that a large real estate developer — hand in glove with the local government — took over the land to build luxury, beach-front chalets. "The people who lived there were kicked off the land," Owusu-Daaku said in an interview, calling the outcome an example of "maladaptation

opportunism". Not only was this unfair, it is probably unsustainable too, according to the IPCC report. Sea walls, dykes and flood-control gates "create long-term lock-in of vulnerability, exposure and risks that are difficult and costly to change," it said.

And while hard engineered structures may protect against hazards up to a certain point, they also create "an illusion of no risk". Another source of maladaptation is lack of data. "You can only adapt to what you know," said Mohamed Adow, founder and director of the Nairobi-based Africa Power Shift.

"In the case of Africa, we know very little. How do you create early warning systems for extreme weather without data?", he told AFP.

Not well thought-out

In a world where new infrastructure — roads, buildings, sewage systems — must serve both development and adaptation objectives, a lot of construction is probably not fit for a 1.5C world, much less one that could warm 2C or 3C above pre-industrial levels, experts say.

The Earth's average surface temperature has already risen 1.1C compared to that benchmark.

"Maladaptation happens when you try to solve one problem and wind up creating another," said Patrick Verkooijen from the Global Center on Adaptation. "There are so many examples of well-intentioned measures that are not thought through in a holistic way." A study of more than 300 initiatives for coping with climate change cited in the IPCC report found that one-third may have unintended and negative consequences.

A more detailed analysis of three projects in Cambodia — promoting irrigation, forest protection and tree planting — "found evidence that local communities' rights being violated and destruction of bio-diverse habitats."

The potential for maladaptation "had been ignored by international donors as well as national authorities," the report concluded. Other types of maladaptation are recurrent, especially in the global South.

Eighty percent of land used to grow food is rain-fed, and thus highly vulnerable to droughts made worse by rising temperatures. In parts of Africa, more frequent dry spells will likely double in length in a 2C world. The most common adaptation response to drought is irrigation, but this potentially vital solution can cause problems of its own.

Extracting groundwater for irrigation can deplete aquifers, which in turn can make water unsuitable for human consumption and aggravate drought conditions. For heatwaves, air conditioning can be a literal life-saver, especially in regions projected to see an increase in so-called deadly heat days. "But at the societal level, it is maladaptive because of its high demands on energy and associated heat emissions, especially in high-density cities," the report warns. — AFP

How satellites are shaping the Ukraine conflict

WASHINGTON: From a huge Russian military convoy snaking its way to Kyiv to missile strikes and refugee crossings, commercial satellite imagery of the Ukraine conflict is helping lift the fog of war, illuminating for the public what was previously the domain of spy agencies.

Technologies that can pierce cloud cover and work at night are also coming to the fore, as a growing army of open-source intelligence analysts offer near real time assessments of battleground developments.

"Governments are no longer the only place to go for high precision satellite data," Craig Nazareth, a former US intelligence officer turned scholar at the University of Arizona, told AFP. Thanks to the explosive growth of the private satellite industry, the volume of imagery is greater and turnaround time faster compared to prior conflicts, such as Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea.

While most Western governments have their own sophisticated satellite assets, their classified nature means the images can't be shared. And with public trust in the US and British governments shaken after the 2003 Iraq war, third-party imagery has helped plug credibility gaps.

"They're saying 'Look, it's not us, this is actually happening, we're not making this up,'" Nazareth said.



IVANKIV, Ukraine: File photo shows Maxar satellite image taken and released on February 28, 2022 shows a military convoy along a highway, north of Ivankiv, Ukraine. — AFP

Beyond helping shape narratives, the images are directly aiding Ukrainian forces in their war efforts.

"Capella Space is working directly with the US and Ukrainian governments as well as other commercial entities to provide timely data and assistance around the ongoing conflict," Payam Banazadeh, the company's CEO confirmed in a statement to AFP.

Radar imagery

It was images taken by the San Francisco startup that led a group of independent researchers to realize the invasion was underway, before Vladimir Putin announced his "special military operations" in the early morning of February 24.

Hours before that speech, Jeffrey Lewis of the

Middlebury Institute in California tweeted that Google Maps showed a "traffic jam" on the road from Belgorod, Russia to the Ukrainian border.

It was the precise spot Capella Space previously saw a convoy of military vehicles, and the congestion likely reflected Russian civilians getting stuck at roadblocks while military vehicles passed.

"Someone's on the move," he correctly hypothesized. While most satellite imaging requires daylight and clear skies to capture images, Capella Space works with synthetic aperture radar (SAR) — in which sensors shoot down energy, then record the amount that reflects back to them.

SAR "penetrates clouds and smoke, even in very large storm events or fires, so we can reliably capture clear and precise images of the Earth under almost any conditions," said Dan Getman, the company's vice president of product.

Another company whose pictures have been used heavily by news media is BlackSky, which released what it believes was among the first engagements of the war — an attack on the Luhansk Thermal Power Station a little after 4:00 pm local time on February 23.

"We have a constellation of small satellites that can see dawn to dusk, not just at certain times of the day" the company's CEO Brian O'Toole told AFP.

In traditional polar orbits, which fly north-south, a satellite could take only two snaps of a particular spot per day — but BlackSky flies its hardware counter-clockwise to the planet's rotation, allowing them to revisit areas more often. Clients receive the images within 90 minutes, and are helped in interpreting them by AI-enabled software. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 2022

Neutral Switzerland's economy shaken by sanctions on Russia

Bern slaps sanctions on assets of Russian firms, individuals

GENEVA: Switzerland's newly-adopted tough stance on Russia has forced the Swiss economy to readjust to sanctions, blowing a wind of panic through the raw materials market in particular.

Switzerland announced Monday it would follow the sanctions being imposed by the European Union, abandoning Bern's traditional reserve by ordering the immediate freezing of assets belonging to Russian companies and individuals appearing on the EU blacklist. And it went further on Friday, adopting even stricter EU sanctions applied in response to Moscow's February 24 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Exporting goods that could enhance Russia's military capabilities is prohibited, as is the exportation of certain goods and services in the oil sector, and aviation technology.

"The implementation of these sanctions is compatible with Switzerland's neutrality," the government insisted in a statement. The wealthy Alpine nation's businesses are complying with the sanctions but have also stressed that Russian money accounts for only a fraction of their turnover, in an attempt to reassure investors. The airline Swiss, a subsidiary of Germany's Lufthansa, has suspended its flights to Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

Global container shipping company MSC and freight logistics firm Kuehne + Nagel have stopped taking Russian orders for cargo, except for food, medical and humanitarian goods.

Business lobby Economiesuisse said the sanctions would have "limited" direct consequences on foreign trade. Russia is only Switzerland's 23rd-biggest trading partner. The Swiss mainly export medicines, medical products, watches and machinery to Russia, while the chief imports are gold, precious metals and aluminum.

In 2021, exports to Russia amounted to 3.2 billion Swiss francs (\$3.5 billion, 3.2 billion euros), with imports as low as 270 million francs, according to the customs authorities. However, the landlocked

state is an important player in raw materials trading, through companies such as Glencore, Trafigura, Vitol and Gunvor.

Gennady Gatilov, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, said Friday he was surprised by the sanctions, because Switzerland had always "tried to maintain a certain neutrality."

"We are disappointed with this, because we have very good relations with Switzerland... and the joining of Switzerland to these unlawful sanctions... will have (a) certain negative impact," he told reporters.

Crisis mode

According to figures circulating in the Swiss press, 80 percent of Russian oil is traded in Switzerland, though Florence Schurch, secretary general of the Swiss Trading and Shipping Association, could not confirm the figure. The exact amount is "being assessed", she told AFP, nonetheless confirming that the sector weighs heavily in the economy.

In employment terms, energy, grains, metals and minerals trading represents some 10,000 direct and 35,000 indirect jobs. "Since Monday, everyone has been in a bit of a crisis cell mode," Schurch explained. Some companies are already trying to "locate their cargoes" on the move, or "repatriate sailors stranded in the Black Sea".

"A lot of companies have censored themselves," she said, not least because payments are becoming "complicated" now that Russian banks are cut off from the SWIFT system and Swiss banks are reviewing their trade financing. The Swiss-based Nord Stream 2 company has gone under after Germany halted the gas pipeline following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The bankruptcy has caused panic in the sector. Trading giant Glencore has announced it is reviewing its business in Russia while Trafigura is revisiting its stake in Vostok Oil-Rosneft's



BERN: Switzerland announced Monday it would follow the sanctions being imposed by the European Union, abandoning Bern's traditional reserve by ordering the immediate freezing of assets belonging to Russian companies and individuals appearing on the EU blacklist.

major oil project in Siberia.

Banks, watches and tourism

Swiss banks are a popular place for wealthy Russians to stash their money. According to the Bank for International Settlements, Swiss banks' liabilities to Russian customers amounted to \$23 billion in the third quarter of 2021. The Swiss Bankers Association reacted to the sanctions by saying that Russia was "not a priority" market, and excluded the Swiss subsidiaries of Gazprombank and Sberbank from its ranks. On the stock market, the Richemont group and the Swiss watch giant Swatch were also shaken by investor fears for the luxury sector.

Russia represents only about "one percent of our exports", said Jean-Daniel Pasche, head of the Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry. But the fall of the ruble could affect watch sales and the conflict also threatens to delay the return of Russian customers who "have not come to Switzerland since the start of the pandemic", he added. In 2019, before the COVID-19 crisis, Russian tourists accounted for only 1.7 percent of hotel nights in Switzerland.

"However, it is a wealthy clientele" favoring five-star hotels, said Switzerland Tourism spokeswoman Veronique Kanel. Some large hotels with a loyal Russian client base could therefore be "more specifically impacted". —AFP

New US sanctions target Russia's pro-Putin oligarchs

WASHINGTON: The United States imposed sanctions on the ultra-wealthy Russian oligarchs at the heart of President Vladimir Putin's regime in the latest ratcheting up of pressure on the Kremlin to halt its invasion of Ukraine.

They and their family members "will be cut off from the US financial system, their assets in the United States will be frozen and their property will be blocked from use," the White House said in a statement. "The United States and governments all over the world will work to identify and freeze the assets Russian elites and their family members hold in our respective jurisdictions—their yachts, luxury apartments, money, and other ill-gotten gains."

The sanctions match earlier EU measures against Russia's wealthiest figures, but also include a ban on travel to the United States and preventing these targeted people from hiding their assets through transfer to family members. "We're adding dozens of names ... including one of Russia's wealthiest billionaires, and I'm banning travel to America by more than 50 Russian oligarchs, their families and their closest associates," US President Joe Biden told reporters.

Biden accused oligarchs of "lining their pockets with the Russian people's money while the Ukrainian people are hiding in subways from missiles" and he vowed to maintain "the strongest, unified economic impact campaign in all history" against Moscow.

Britain—a favorite destination for oligarchs—announced a similar full asset freeze and travel ban on billionaire businessman Alisher Usmanov and former deputy prime minister Igor Shuvalov. The pair, worth an estimated \$19 billion, have "close links to the Kremlin," the Foreign Office said.

That brings the number of oligarchs hit by British sanctions to 15. The oligarchs-government officials and business owners who have amassed vast wealth in an economy where only Putin loyalists can get ahead—are seen as vulnerable because much of their wealth is tied to Western interests.

They own prestigious property in New York, sports clubs across the West, enormous yachts in the Mediterranean and send their children to the most expensive US universities, while traveling in luxury around the world. Much of that lifestyle is now set to come to a halt.

"One of the big factors is of course the proximity to President Putin," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters, explaining how the ultimate goal of the sanctions. "We want him to feel the squeeze. We want the people around him to feel the squeeze. I don't believe this is going to be the last set of oligarchs. Making them a priority and a focus of our individual sanctions is something the president has been focused on." The White House singled out several, including Usmanov, whose "property will be blocked from use in the United States and by US persons—including his superyacht... and his private jet." —AFP

White House looking for ways to cut use of Russian oil

WASHINGTON: The White House is looking for ways to reduce US consumption of Russian oil while protecting American families from price hikes, an administration spokeswoman said Friday.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sent oil prices soaring to their highest levels since 2014. While Western allies' severe financial sanctions on Moscow have so far exempted oil transactions, pressure has been building for new sanctions targeting Russia's main source of cash-oil exports. "We are looking at ways to reduce the import of Russian oil while also making sure that we are maintaining the global supply needs out there," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters.

"We are very focused on minimizing the impact to families," she said. Amid reports buyers are already shunning oil from Russia, futures prices on Friday were above \$115 a barrel.

The US Commerce Department on Friday

announced additional restrictions on Russian industry, including barring exports of key refining equipment to "limit Russia's ability to raise revenue from the sale of its refined products, including gasoline, that it can use to support its military efforts."

White House chief economic adviser Brian Deese told financial channel CNBC on Friday that the administration is keeping close tabs on the global oil market. "We're tracking the energy market on an hour by hour basis in terms of overall supply chain fluidity," he said.

President Joe Biden on Tuesday announced the United States would release 30 million barrels from the strategic petroleum reserves to help stabilize the market. But prices continued to rise. "It's an incredibly fluid and fast moving situation," Deese said.

Jim Krane at the Baker Institute, a Rice University think tank in Houston, said he sees momentum in Congress for a US ban on Russian oil imports but said it would be a largely symbolic move since the quantity purchased by American clients is relatively small.

"There would be a small short-term impact and potentially a longer-term impact on the Russian economy," Krane told AFP. Deese said the administration is continuing its focus on ensuring smooth functioning of the supply chain, including finding enough workers and drivers to allow goods to "flow from ports to trucks to

for the ruling Communist Party, which has based its legitimacy on delivering steady economic expansion and improved standards of living. The party is deeply concerned over social instability in its huge population should economic growth dip too low.

Stability is 'top priority'

Economic stability must be a "top priority", Li added. The annual parliament session is a week of highly choreographed meetings laying out the party's political priorities, economic expectations, and foreign policy goals, and this edition comes in a year in which President Xi Jinping intends to further cement his grip on power.

Prior sessions have unveiled high-profile legislation such as the tough national security law imposed on Hong Kong and reversals to the country's one-child policy, but no flagship laws are expected this year. Chinese economic growth has slowed markedly in recent years from its past boom decades, when annual expansion sometimes exceeded 10 percent. China has been largely successful in controlling the virus and limiting its economic impact.

But the economy has been hit lately by a cascading property market slump, government regulatory

new German factory next to the group's historic home in Wolfsburg will begin "as early as spring 2023" for a production start in 2026, VW said in a statement.

The new site will be dedicated to the production of mass-market "Trinity" vehicles, the centre point of Volkswagen's new all-electric fleet. The decision was an "important milestone" for the company, the head of the VW brand Ralf Brandstaetter said in a statement, as it plans its move away from traditional combustion engines. The Volkswagen group—whose 12 brands include Audi, Porsche and Skoda—is pumping 35 billion euros into the shift to electric vehicles and aims to become the world's

China sets lowest GDP target in decades over 'grave' outlook

BEIJING: China set its lowest annual GDP target in decades yesterday, as Premier Li Keqiang warned of a "grave and uncertain" outlook against the backdrop of the coronavirus, a property slump and uncertainty over the war in Ukraine.

Li announced the unusually modest target of around 5.5 percent growth for 2022 — the lowest since 1991 — in his speech opening the annual session of China's rubber-stamp parliament. Addressing about 3,000 members of the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing's cavernous Great Hall of the People, Li said the world's second-largest economy "will encounter many more risks and challenges, and we must keep pushing to overcome them". The target was based on a need to maintain stable employment, basic living needs and "guard against risks", Li said in China's version of a state of the nation address. China's economy is a key driver of global growth and crucial domestically

Volkswagen plans €2bn electric car plant in Germany

BERLIN: German auto giant Volkswagen said on Friday it had approved a 2 billion euro investment in a new electric car plant, as it seeks to overhaul its business in the face of stiff competition from US rival Tesla. Construction on the



WASHINGTON, DC: US President Joe Biden waits to speak about the February jobs report during an event at the White House complex on Friday. —AFP

warehouses" and on to consumers, he said.

Firms worldwide have struggled to overcome supply chain snags and shortages as they emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. In the US economy, the situation has been exacerbated by a shortage of workers, which last year led to scenes of ships lined up at ports unable to offload their cargo, and lines of trucks waiting for goods to come off the ships. —AFP



BEIJING: A security personnel stands guard in Tiananmen area near the Great Hall of the People ahead of the opening ceremony of the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing yesterday. —AFP

crackdowns on the property, tech and financial sectors, and smothering containment measures to nip virus outbreaks but which have dampened consumer demand. China's economy last year handily exceeded the official target of at least six percent growth, expanding by 8.1 percent, but the pace slowed significantly in the second half. —AFP

largest electric carmaker by 2025. The announcement of the \$2.2 billion investment came on the same day as Volkswagen's rival, electric car pioneer Tesla got the green light from local officials to start production at a new plant near Berlin, Tesla's first "gigafactory" in Europe. With Tesla's ambitions parked on its front lawn, Volkswagen is hoping to match its US rival with the new purpose-built factory by producing new electric vehicles in the space of 10 hours. Currently, an electric Volkswagen takes around 30 hours to be built at the group's plant in Zwickau in eastern Germany, group CEO Herbert Diess told employees in November. —AFP

Business

Beijing wary of extending economic lifeline to Russia

Beijing forced to tread a fine line amid Western sanctions

BEIJING: An isolated Russia could be driven further into China's arms economically in the wake of sanctions imposed over the invasion of Ukraine, but Beijing appears wary of offering a warm embrace. Western countries have hit Russia's economy hard including by closing airspace, freezing assets and excluding seven banks from the SWIFT interbank messaging network.

The impact is expected to be wide-ranging and impede Moscow's ability to shore up the beleaguered ruble and purchase imports. China has avoided openly condemning Russia's attack and has the financial strength to soften the blow against its giant neighbor. But analysts say Beijing will likely tread carefully to avoid violating the most severe international restrictions.

'Financial muscle'

China is the only country with the "financial muscle to help Russia", said Paola Subacchi, professor of international economics at the University of London's Queen Mary Global Policy Institute. Beijing holds massive foreign exchange reserves and a swap agreement between the Chinese and Russian central banks has been in place for years, Subacchi noted.

"When the ruble fell as a result of the sanctions during the Crimea invasion (in 2014), the swap agreement was activated and helped to pay for Russian imports," she told AFP. "But it is not enough. It's negligible compared to what they (Russia) need in order to support their currency," she said.

Analysts also note that China is not a major importer of wheat—a key Russian export—and neither can it step in to provide all of the goods that Russia needs. This week, Russian gas giant Gazprom said it had signed a contract to design a pipeline to China,

taking a step towards a new supply agreement that could ease Russia's reliance on European buyers. Chinese firms could export more to Russia and buy more Russian energy, but the gains for Moscow would be minimal considering the overall impact of the war. Julian Evans-Pritchard said in a report for Capital Economics.

'Won't risk violations'

While China can in some cases provide yuan to Russia to help it buy what it needs from abroad, Beijing will likely "tiptoe" around anything more overt for now, said Leland Miller, CEO of data analytics firm China Beige Book. Beijing will not want to appear to openly flout sanctions especially while fighting still rages, and probably "won't risk violating the more severe restrictions on SWIFT, central bank transactions, and technology exports", he added.

Violations could bring secondary sanctions on key Chinese companies that sell products to Russia containing US intellectual property, Miller said, meaning China will need to tread a fine line.

Just a month ago Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian leader Vladimir Putin declared in Beijing that their bilateral friendship had "no limits"—a deepening embrace driven by their mutual desire to counter US influence. China cannot publicly oppose Putin without endangering that partnership, Chen Long, a partner at research firm Plenum, wrote in a report.

But Beijing also cannot support Russia too strongly without risking an international backlash, Chen said.

"It's just going to be business as usual," he added. Commerce Minister Wang Wentao told reporters this week that China hoped to maintain normal trade with both Russia and Ukraine. Beijing recently



People walk by a trading center also known as Russia Market in Beijing on March 1.

announced it was lifting restrictions on Russian wheat imports, but this merely marked the fulfillment of an earlier promise.

No SWIFT lifeline

There has been speculation over whether China's yuan-based Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) could help Russia. But experts say it will be difficult to circumvent SWIFT, which facilitates secure transactions between banks.

"CIPS can't provide a true lifeline to Russia

because international transactions still run atop the SWIFT system," said Miller. Chinese financial institutions appear to be steering clear of triggering potential US sanctions against their own operations for aiding Russian entities. Bloomberg News reported last week that two of China's biggest state-owned banks—Bank of China and ICBC—were restricting financing for purchases of Russian commodities. And the China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank said Thursday it would suspend business related to Russia and Belarus. —AFP



To fight its war, Russia closing digital doors

WASHINGTON: Russia's blocking of Facebook is a symptom of its broader effort to cut itself off from sources of information that could imperil its internationally condemned invasion of Ukraine, experts say. The often-criticized social network is part of a web of information sources that can challenge the Kremlin's preferred perspective that its assault on Ukraine is righteous and necessary.

Blocking of Facebook and restricting of Twitter on Friday came the same day Moscow backed the imposition of jail terms on media publishing "false information" about the military. Russia's motivation "is to suppress political challenges at a very fraught moment for (Vladimir) Putin, and the regime, when it comes to those asking very tough questions about why Russia is continuing to prosecute this war," said Steven Feldstein, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Russia thus joins the very small club of countries barring the largest social network in the world, along with China and North Korea. Moscow was expected to quickly overpower its neighbor but the campaign has already shown signs that it could go longer and could lead to the unleashing of its full military ferocity. "It's a censorship tool of last resort," Feldstein added. "They are pulling the plug on a platform rather than try to block pages or use all sorts of other mechanisms that they traditionally do."

Earlier this week independent monitoring group OVD-Info said that more than 7,000 people in Russia had been detained at demonstrations over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Web monitoring group NetBlocks said Russia's moves against the social media giants come amid a backdrop of protests "which are coordinated and mobilized through social media and messaging applications."

The war is meanwhile taking place during a period of unprecedented crackdown on the Russian opposition, with has included protest leaders being assassinated, jailed or forced out of the country.

'No access to truth'

Since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine last week, Russian authorities have stepped up pressure against independent media even though press freedoms in the country were already rapidly waning. In this context, Facebook plays a key information distribution role in Russia, even as it endures withering criticism in the West over matters ranging from political division to teenagers' mental health. Natalia Krapiva, tech legal counsel at rights group Access Now, said social media has been a place where independent, critical voices have been talking about the invasion.

"Facebook is one of the key platforms in Russia," she said, adding that its loss is "a devastating blow to access to independent information and for resistance to the war." Russia has been hit with unprecedented sanctions from the West over the invasion, but also rejections both symbolic and significant from sources ranging from sporting organizations to US tech companies.

Facebook's parent Meta and Twitter however have engaged on the very sensitive issue of information by blocking the spread of Russian state-linked news media. Russia's media regulator took aim at both, with Roskomnadzor accusing Facebook of discrimination toward state media. —AFP

Brazil exits recession, but faces tough year

SAO PAULO: Brazil exited recession in the fourth quarter, the government said Friday, though weak growth and high inflation still dog Latin America's biggest economy as President Jair Bolsonaro gears up to seek re-election in October. Gross domestic product (GDP) grew 0.5 percent for the period from October through December, reversing its 0.3-percent and 0.1-percent contractions in the previous two quarters, said the national statistics institute, IBGE.

That brought GDP growth for 2021 to 4.6 percent on the year, erasing the economy's painful contraction in pandemic-battered 2020, which was revised to 3.9 percent. But the economy remains a headache for far-right leader Bolsonaro, with growth still weak and inflation hitting Brazilian households hard. Uncertainty fueled by Bolsonaro's expected election showdown with leftist ex-president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and international turmoil around Russia's invasion of Ukraine will likely weigh heavily on the Brazilian economy this year, analysts say.

"2022 is a difficult year due to both internal and external factors," said economist Gilberto Braga of business school IBMEC in Rio de Janeiro. "Uncertainties around the country's political future are making things unpredictable and will delay strategic decisions on the economy... And external issues will weigh down global GDP, and Brazil's along with it," he told AFP. "The current scenario is 'stagflation.'"

'Weak momentum'

The rebound was driven by Brazil's key agricultural sector, which grew 5.8 percent quarter-on-quarter-

though it contracted 0.2 percent on the year, hit by the country's worst drought in nearly a century. The services sector grew 0.5 percent quarter-on-quarter and 4.7 percent year-on-year, while industry contracted 1.2 percent for the quarter but grew 4.5 percent for the year.

The return to growth "was mainly a result of turnaround in the agricultural sector, which is unlikely to be sustained," William Jackson, chief emerging markets economist at consulting firm Capital Economics, said in a note. "In the meantime, high-frequency indicators for the services and industrial sectors point to weak momentum in the first quarter of 2022."

His team maintained a forecast of GDP growth of 0.8 percent for 2022, "making Brazil the worst performer in the region this year." Economists polled by Brazil's central bank currently forecast GDP growth of 0.3 percent for 2022. "It isn't a very solid recovery," said Silvia Matos, an economist at the Getulio Vargas Foundation. "There's no escaping it, we're going to have more inflation" driven by the fallout of the Ukraine conflict, she said. "That's going to reduce Brazilian families' purchasing power and restrain our economic growth." Brazil's annual inflation rate came in at 10.06 percent last year, crashing through the central bank's target of 3.5 percent.

The central bank has responded with one of the most aggressive tightening cycles in the world, rapidly raising the benchmark interest rate to 10.75 percent from an all-time low of two percent in March 2021. The hawkish monetary policy is in turn weighing down growth, sapping the economy's recovery from COVID-19. Brazil has been among the countries hit hardest by the pandemic, with more than 650,000 deaths—second only to the United States.

Even with 72 percent of Brazil's 213 million people now fully vaccinated against COVID-19, the economic recovery has been tepid. With prices soaring and wages stagnant, the average Brazilian's purchasing power fell by seven percent last year. —AFP



SAO PAULO: In this file photo taken on December 30, 2021 people are seen in a commercial street in downtown Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AFP

Samsung suspends shipments to Russia

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics has suspended shipments to Russia over "geopolitical developments", the firm said yesterday, as major firms including Apple cut ties with the country over its invasion of Ukraine. The South Korean tech giant is the world's biggest memory chip maker and the leading smartphone seller in Russia.

"Due to current geopolitical developments, shipments to Russia have been suspended," Samsung said in a statement. "We continue to actively monitor this complex situation to determine our next steps."

The decision comes as Western governments,

sporting organizations and big companies cut Russia off and deal it punishing sanctions over the internationally condemned attack on its neighbor.

Samsung controls just above 30 percent of the smartphone market share in Russia, according to Bloomberg News—four percent of the tech giant's total global smartphone revenues. Sales of semiconductors in Russia, in turn, accounted for less than 0.1 percent of Samsung Electronics' profits, according to a report by Hana Financial Investment.

South Korea, a key US security ally, also this week announced it would block financial transactions with major Russian banks and their subsidiaries subject to US sanctions. Samsung is also donating \$6 million, including \$1 million in consumer electronics as well as voluntary donations from employees, to "actively support humanitarian efforts" and refugees in the region, the firm said. —AFP



LOS ANGELES: In this file photo taken on February 04, 2022, donut baker Larry Perlman displays a tray of donuts before placing them into the oven in Los Angeles. —AFP

US adds 678,000 jobs in Feb amid pandemic recovery

WASHINGTON: The US economy saw a hiring surge in February, pushing the jobless rate closer to its pre-pandemic level as hard hit sectors recover from the impact of COVID-19. American employers added 678,000 workers to their payrolls last month, driving the unemployment rate down to 3.8 percent, the Labor Department reported Friday. The report is good news for President Joe Biden, who has highlighted the strong economic recovery even as inflation has accelerated and undermined his approval rating. Due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, inflation could see further acceleration as oil and other prices surge.

"Today's report shows that my plan to build an economy from the bottom up and the middle out is working," Biden said of the report. Pointing to the success in combating the virus, Biden noted that "Since I took office, the economy has created 7.4 million jobs."

He repeated his pledge to "tackle head on the challenge" of rising prices but said the US economy "is uniquely well positioned" to deal with inflation. The surge in hiring last month far surpassed the consensus forecast, although some economists were calling for a big increase as the world's largest economy gets back on track. The Omicron variant wave in the United States has faded, leading many local authorities to lift mask restrictions.

Many Americans have also started traveling more and bars and restaurants are rebounding. "The February jobs report showed an economy moving powerfully past the pandemic," said Robert Frick, corporate economist at Navy Federal Credit Union.

He cited advances "in sectors beaten down by the pandemic... that show Americans getting back to normal spending patterns."

'Solid position'

Job gains were widespread, led by the 179,000 new jobs in the leisure and hospitality sector that was hard hit by COVID-19 shutdowns and restrictions.

Manufacturing and construction saw modest hiring gains, while professional services increased by 95,000, the report said. The government revised the results in the prior two months, for a combined increase of an additional 92,000 positions in December and January.

Frick said the upward revisions underscore "how well hiring fared even during the height of the Omicron wave." "With Omicron all but petered out, we should expect more strong jobs reports."

However, while the jobless rate fell from four percent in January, the share of people in the workforce barely changed. The data show some groups are taking longer to reap the benefits of the recovery, with unemployment among Black workers at 6.6 percent, twice the rate for white Americans.

Millions of people are still working part time because they cannot find full-time jobs, and 1.2 million said they weren't able to look for work due to the pandemic. Still the solid jobs recovery and concerns over rising inflation have prompted the Federal Reserve to prepare to raise lending rates later this month for the first time since the benchmark rate was cut to zero as the pandemic began. —AFP

Business

Californians resigned as gasoline prices spike

Russia's invasion of Ukraine sends world oil prices rocketing

MONTEREY PARK, US: Californians filling up their cars on Friday winced at the spiraling cost of gasoline, but largely shrugged as residents of the state that has long had the highest gas prices in the United States.

California drivers are paying an average of more than \$5 for a gallon (\$1.34 per liter), according to the American Automobile Association (AAA), up more than a third from a year ago, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine sends world oil prices rocketing. "It's going to affect the prices," Mike Hernandez told AFP.

"I'm not really into politics or anything like that, but now that this thing is going on between Russia and Ukraine, it's just that sad."

Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of neighboring Ukraine has sent financial markets into meltdown. Prices for crude oil—the raw material for gasoline—have been hit hard, and are up well above \$110 a barrel, with players fretting about the impact on Russian supplies, as sanctions choke Moscow off from the global economy.

While all countries have access to the same gasoline, subsidies or taxes imposed locally mean the ultimate cost to consumers varies wildly. For

example, in oil-producing Nigeria, which subsidizes fuel, the official price is 40 US cents per liter.

In Hong Kong, drivers were already paying \$2.50 per liter in 2021, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit. On average, Americans pay around \$1 per liter, according to the AAA, and even California's \$1.34 per liter is well below the prices paid by Europeans.

"It's expensive but it's always been more expensive here in California, so I guess we're used to it," said Harry Lee, as he fueled up on the way to work in Los Angeles on Friday. "I'll be happy when it goes down but so far it doesn't impact me too much," he added.

"My cousin, who drives for Uber here in LA, is complaining a lot though. I guess it can be hard on him if gas remains at this level for too long." California's relatively high gas prices are the result of state taxes, as well as stricter refining rules that require specific fuel formulae intended to reduce air pollution in the hot summer months. While many drivers have grumbled about seeing pump prices rise almost daily, some say they are prepared to put up with the extra cost because of the pictures of the war in Ukraine they are seeing on the news.

"I would rather have high gas prices here than an



MONTEREY PARK, US: Prices for gas and diesel fuel, over \$5 a gallon, are displayed at a petrol station in Monterey Park, California on Friday. —AFP

authoritarian regime in the Ukraine," said Los Angeles resident Jacqueline St-Anne. "If we have to suffer with a little bit of inflation and gas prices for a while to assure that such a wonderful country as Ukraine has an opportunity to develop its democra-

cy, we should do that."

For others, there is a simple solution to paying through the nose. "I just bought a Tesla," said Matthew Reynl. "That's my solution to the gas prices going up." —AFP

KFH achieves growth in local and foreign trade finance operations

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continued to achieve growth in the volume of L/Cs and L/Gs related to local and foreign trade finance. This comes as part of the bank's keenness to support trade activities and companies of all categories. KFH succeeded in providing customers with suitable finance channels and played a distinguished role as a mediator between the seller and the buyer, thus achieving remarkable success and growth in trade operations by providing letters of guarantee LG and letters of credit LC.

KFH is distinguished for having highly qualified national cadres and adopting the latest technology applications in the trade finance sector regarding the opening of L/Cs and L/Gs, thus contributing to the enhancement of customers' experience and giving them access to any place worldwide through a vast network of correspondent banks using Hi-Tech communication systems. KFH has come a long way in introducing innovative solutions and alternatives for foreign trade finance by using documentary credit and Sharia-compliant finance tools, thus overcoming several challenges which trade exchange process has faced.

KFH released recently "Swift Transfer Control" Service according to the highest levels of safety and quality. The service enables the bank to conduct a direct and real time tracking on financial transfers with the function to receive alerts and stop transfer payments.

In addition to continuing to offer and develop finance channels to fulfill customer's aspirations and providing well balanced trade relations, KFH introduces a set of products to enhance import and export activity including On Sight L/Cs which provide customers with the highest levels of security upon importing merchandise from abroad or even supplying them inside Kuwait, Acceptance L/C which is a deferred payment L/C according to which payment to the foreign supplier is deferred for a certain agreed period after dispatch of cargo or receipt of bill of lading, and refinanced L/C through Murabahah according to which the customer's merchandise is imported on his account. Once the mechanize arrives the customer can buy it from KFH for a known profit and settle its value on flexible instalments to suite each customer's cash flows. Also, KFH provides export credit product which contributes to the activation of the foreign export movement and support local products including oil and gas. The export credit is delivered or endorsed in favor of the exporter in Kuwait upon instructions from the importer and his bank outside Kuwait. Thereafter, the customer receives his money upon completion of the specifications of the exported merchandise.



LuLu Exchange opens its 28th and 29th branches in Kuwait

KUWAIT: In continuation of its ambitious growth plans, LuLu Exchange, one of the nation's most trusted payments provider, opened its 28th and 29th branches at Hawally and Riggae on 28th February.

The branches were inaugurated by Adeb Ahamed, Managing Director of LuLu Financial

Holdings, in the presence of senior company management. The new branches extend the network under the holding company to 245 global branches, spread across 11 countries.

Addressing the gathering on the sidelines of the opening, Adeb Ahamed, Managing Director of LuLu Financial Holdings, said, "Kuwait continues to see accelerated recovery in line with the improvement of the global economy. The nation's visionary leaders and people are to be credited for creating a favorable environment for business and life to thrive, and the opening of our new branches reaffirm our commitment to the nation's economy as a consumer-first financial services provider."

LuLu Financial Holdings has been in the news recently for its aggressive efforts aimed at digital transformation of its global branch network into consumer engagement centers. Talking about the same, Shaiju Mohandas, General Manager, LuLu Exchange Kuwait, added, "At a time when technology plays an important role in making people's lives better, we aim to become the most preferred brand among the people of Kuwait. As part of a global financial services provider, we are taking all efforts to align our physical and digital capabilities to create affordable, reliable and trustworthy payment solutions that blend modern services with a human approach."

Ooredoo awarded 'Fastest 5G Network in Kuwait' for 2021

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first telecom operator to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, named the "Fastest 5G Network in Kuwait" for 2021; at the Mobile World Congress Barcelona 2022, awarded by the Ookla, the company behind Speedtest, and the global leader in fixed broadband and mobile network testing applications, data and analysis. The award was received by Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain, Chief Executive Officer and Tapan Tripathi, Chief Commercial Officer- Ooredoo Kuwait.

Long-term network investment

Ooredoo Kuwait has taken major steps in the world of telecommunication over the past two years and during the pandemic, and continued to strengthen its networks up until this day while successfully continued to achieve key milestones in its network development journey. Moreover, the company has taken proactive steps in the Kuwaiti market and outperformed its competitors in providing the best and fastest coverage. The network infrastructure witnessed a significant upgrade over the past two years, with more than \$250 million invested heavily in developing the network in addi-

tion to enhancing and enriching customers' experience and providing the best 5G experience. Faster speeds and very low response rates (latency) in data transmission have been remarkably observed. Ooredoo Kuwait proudly earned this accomplishment based on the results of thousands of consumer-initiated tests taken using Speedtest.

Unremitting efforts have been made by Ooredoo Kuwait with great hard work by Technology and Networks teams that was supported directly by the senior management. This resulted in increasing the number of its 5G towers across the country to ensure a broader and more comprehensive coverage across all residential areas of Kuwait, chalets, farms and islands. Furthermore, Ooredoo Kuwait deployed 500 Long Term Evolution (LTE) expansions and upgrades to providing much faster data speeds, improved performance as well as lower operating costs.

AI and ML in 5G

As Ooredoo's 5G network continued to grow, and with the rapid transformation in enterprises and industries towards digitalization and



improved connectivity, Ooredoo has implemented Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) to enable intelligent networks, autonomous network operations, and enhanced efficiencies. This Zero-Touch network operations have given Ooredoo the edge in network performance and customer experience.

Data usage & traffic

Amidst the pandemic, digital technologies and solutions are at the fore; hence, the number of internet users has significantly increased, particularly during the pandemic lockdowns and curfews. Ooredoo Kuwait witnessed 50 percent increase and growth in data and internet usage compared to last year, hence, it efficiently responded to this growth and increasing demand, which made it

outperform its competitors, and provide superior experience on online gaming, e-learning, video streaming services and browsing Social Media channels and platforms.

FWA technology

Additionally, Ooredoo launched 5G Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) to provide internet access to customers in areas with low fiber penetration or expensive to install and maintain. The company has also taken major steps in improving productivity and performance for its business customers, by launching the Dedicated Internet Package (DIA), which provides a range of different speeds. It also ensures fast internet with a more secure internet connection than the broadband network services currently available for businesses.

GCC markets positive on multi-year high oil prices: Markaz

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" recently released its monthly market review report for the month of February 2022. In line with its GCC peers, Kuwait's all share index gained 3.9 percent, supported by a continued up-trend in oil prices. Oil prices, which acted as an important factor driving the GCC stock market performance, breached the \$100 per barrel mark in the month of February.

Among sectors, Boursa Kuwait's Telecom sector was the top gainer, rising 10.9 percent followed by Consumer Discretionary at 7.6 percent. Technology and Energy sector index declined, falling 8.7 percent and 5.0 percent respectively. Boursa Kuwait's banking sector index was up by 3.2 percent in February. Among Premier Market stocks, Gulf Cable &

Electrical Industries and National Investments Company were the top gainers during the month, rising 54.4 percent and 28.7 percent respectively.

The World Bank projects the Kuwait economy to grow by 5.3 percent in 2022, followed by 3 percent growth in 2023. The World Bank underscored the contribution of high oil prices to the national budget of the country, and the importance of developing the private sector and human capital for achieving sustainable economic growth. High inflation is seen as a potential risk to the oil price momentum. Inflation in Kuwait rose to 4.3 percent YoY driven by rising prices of food and housing services, which rose 7.26 percent and 2.44 percent YoY respectively in the month of January. Fitch Ratings, following the announcement of downgrade of Kuwait's sovereign rating to AA- in January, lowered the long-term Issuer Default Ratings (IDR) of 11 Kuwaiti banks. The outlook of the banks' IDRs remains stable, reflecting on the Kuwaiti sovereign rating. Total bank deposits were down by 1.5 percent YoY at the end of 2021, marking its first decline in 21 years.

Regionally, S&P GCC composite index rose by 3.2

percent for the month, driven by upward oil price momentum. All GCC markets gained for the month apart from Oman, which witnessed a loss of 1.5 percent. Bahrain's All Share Index recorded the highest gains among GCC countries, ending 8.5 percent higher for the month. After Bahrain, Abu Dhabi and Dubai equity indices were the biggest gainers among GCC, rising 7.1 percent and 4.7 percent respectively over the month. Qatar and Saudi Arabia equity indices also marked a gain of 3.6 percent and 2.6 percent respectively over the month. Among the GCC blue chip companies, the best performer was International Holdings Company, which gained 23.6 percent during the month, followed by Abu Dhabi Commercial bank, which gained 20.1 percent. According to a recent report by S&P Global, UAE banks are expected to benefit from the potential interest rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve as it anticipates the Central Bank of UAE to follow suit. Higher expected interest rates in the year ahead, coupled with rising oil prices and lower financing requirement for social spending, could lead to a fall in the GCC debt issuances in 2022.

Global equity markets witnessed volatility and

inflation fears, with major indices ending in negative territory with effects more pronounced in European equity markets. Geo-political tensions surrounding Russia and Ukraine, shot the CBOE VIX index to 37.5, near to its 52-week high. A steep rise in volatility had major equity indices end the month in red, with MSCI World and S&P 500 equity indices decreasing 2.7 percent and 3.1 percent respectively. The fear in the markets was more pronounced in Europe, as evidenced by the French CAC 40 equity index and the German DAX equity index which shed 4.9 percent and 6.5 percent over the month. Eurozone and peripheral eurozone bond yields dipped down as their prices shot up with high demand with investors taking flight to safety away from the equity markets to more defensive bond markets. US consumer prices rose 7.5 percent YoY in January, marking the steepest yearly increase since February of 1982, while UK inflation rose 5.5 percent YoY in January to a three-decade high. Geo-political tensions coupled with economic sanctions can make inflation worries more pronounced for the global investment market.

Lifestyle | Features



Weavers use handlooms to make traditional muslin garments at the Dhakai Muslin Project facility in Narayanganj. — AFP photos



Picture shows detail of a cotton plant at the Bangladesh Cotton Development Farm, where Phuti Carpus cotton is grown to produce Dhaka muslin, in Gazipur.



A weaver uses a handloom to make traditional muslin cloth at the Dhakai Muslin Project facility in Narayanganj.

'Woven air': Bangladesh revives elite forgotten fabric

With wooden spinning wheels and hand-drawn looms, Bangladesh is painstakingly resurrecting a fabric once worn by Marie Antoinette and Jane Austen but long thought forever lost to history. Dhaka muslin was stitched from threads so fine that popular folklore in European parlours held that a change in the light or a sudden rain shower would render its wearer apparently naked. The textile once brought magnificent riches to the lands where it was spun. But to revive it, botanists had to hunt halfway across the world and back for a plant believed gone from the face of the earth. "Nobody knew how it was made," said Ayub Ali, a senior government official helping shepherd the revival project.

"We lost the famous cotton plant, which provided the special fine yarn for Dhaka muslin," he told AFP. The muslin trade at one time helped turn the Ganges delta and what is now Bangladesh into one of the most prosperous parts of the world, historians say. Flowing dress garments weaved from the cloth were worn by generations of the Mughal dynasty then ruling India before the fabric enchanted European aristocrats and other notables at the end of the 18th century.

A muslin shawl belonging to Austen—supposedly hand-embroidered by the "Pride and Prejudice" author herself—is on display at her former home in Hampshire, while a 1783 portrait of Marie Antoinette depicts the French queen in a muslin dress. But the industry collapsed in the

years after the 18th century conquest of the Bengal delta by the East India Company, paving the way for British colonial rule. The mills and factories that sprung up in England after the industrial revolution produced much cheaper textiles, while European tariffs killed the foreign market for the delicate fabric.

'Rare and possibly extinct'

The quest to bring back Bangladeshi muslin began with a painstaking five-year search for the specific flower used to weave the fabric, which only grows near the capital Dhaka. "Muslin can't be woven without Phuti Carpus cotton. So to revive Dhaka Muslin, we needed to find this rare and possibly extinct cotton plant," said Monzur Hossain, the botanist who led the effort.

His team consulted a seminal book on plants by the 18th century Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus along with a later historical tome on Dhaka muslin to narrow down a candidate among 39 different wild species collected from around Bangladesh. With local museums lacking any specimen of Dhaka muslin clothing, Hossain and his colleagues went to India, Egypt and Britain for samples.

At the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, curators showed them hundreds of pieces imported from Mughal-era Dhaka by East India Company merchants. Genetic samples revealed that the missing plant was already in their hands, found by the botanists in the riverside town of

Kapasia north of the capital. "It was a 100 percent match, and some history books say Kapasia was one of the places where Phuti Carpus was grown," Hossain said. The plant is now being grown in experimental farms in an effort to raise yields and scale up production.

'Like doing prayers'

But the revival project immediately ran into another roadblock—finding weavers nimble enough to weave the plant's ultra-fine threads. In the two centuries since the muslin trade collapsed, Bangladesh has

again become a world textile hub, albeit with an industry no longer catering to royalty or other international elites. Instead Dhaka is now home to countless bustling factories of the global fast fashion trade, supplying huge brands such as H&M and Walmart, with its \$35 billion in yearly apparel exports second only to China.

The country has no shortage of garment workers, but the muslin project needed to source artisans from the small cottage industry of spinners and weavers working with fragile threads. They found candidates from villages around Dhaka

where small workshops make intricate saris from jamdari, a fine cotton produced in a similar way to muslin. "I don't know how I did it. But it needs supreme concentration," said Mohsina Akhter, one of the spinners brought into the project. "To do it you have to be in perfect mind. If you are angry or worried, you can't hand spin such a fine yarn."

It took months for the team to master the craft, working with threads four or more times finer than jamdari, with two people taking eight hours of non-stop labor to weave an inch or less of cloth. "It is like doing prayers. You need to have full concentration. Any lapse will tear up the yarn and set your work backwards," said Abu Taher, a weaver. "The more I work, the more I wonder how our ancestors wove such a fine clothing. It is almost impossible," he told AFP.

The intense labour needed means that any garments stitched from Dhaka muslin will always remain a boutique product, but the government has found some tentative interest from established industry players. "We want to make it a top global fashion item. It has a great history," said Parvez Ibrahim, whose family owns a factory supplying global fashion retailers. "But to bring down cost, we have to speed up the production process. Otherwise, reviving Dhaka muslin won't mean anything," he said. — AFP



Workers spin thread from cotton to make traditional muslin garments at the Dhakai Muslin Project facility in Narayanganj.

The Boulder and the Beautiful - road clearing operation

A massive boulder that crashed down onto a California road, blocking traffic for hours as it garnered a healthy internet following, was blasted to pieces Friday. The hulking great rock stopped traffic around Lake Tahoe after it tumbled onto the highway on Thursday evening. California's Department of Transport (Caltrans) swung into action, with crews dwarfed by the obstacle they had been sent to shift.

The department also launched #Boulderwatch on social media accounts, offering followers on Twitter regular-if slightly tongue-in-cheek-updates, photos

and videos of the operation to clear Highway 50 at Echo Summit in California's mountainous north. Workmen in high-viz kit drilled holes in the monster rock and then stuffed dynamite inside before retiring to a safe distance and watching the resulting explosion.

Footage shows the boulder fragmenting in a cloud of dust and smoke, before heavy earth-moving machines ultimately began carting the debris away. "@CalTransDist3 wants to ensure the public no roadrunners or coyotes were injured & Wile E. Coyote was not responsible for this boulder falling onto the highway. He is innocent this time," the department quipped on Twitter. The road, which runs through mountainous national forest and links ski fields, was expected to be opened later Friday afternoon, the agency said. — AFP



In this handout image courtesy, a big boulder blocks US route 50 as crews work in the area, at Echo Summit near Lake Tahoe, California. — AFP

Living rough in Morocco, migrants dream of Spanish enclave

When 2,500 migrants stormed Morocco's border with a Spanish enclave this week, Mahjoub Abdellah wasn't among the hundreds who made it across—but he is determined to try again. The 22-year-old from the war-devastated region of Darfur in western Sudan was nursing a foot injury on Friday at a makeshift camp in a Moroccan forest near Melilla, a tiny Spanish territory which he sees as his route to "a dignified life".

"If I get a chance, I'll try again," he said. Spanish authorities say Wednesday's incident was the biggest such crossing attempt on record, with almost 500 managing to cross into European Union territory. Melilla and Ceuta, Spain's other tiny North African enclave, have the European Union's only land borders with Africa.

That makes them a magnet for migrants desperate to escape poverty, violence and hunger both at home and during their journeys across Africa. "I'm tired. I spent three months living in this forest, under the rain," Abdellah said. "Even animals couldn't live in these conditions." He plans to leave the drab town of Nador, near Melilla, to try to earn some money elsewhere—and prepare another attempt.

Cat and mouse

Melilla, a welcoming city for sunseeking European tourists, sits a stone's throw across the border from the Gourougou Massif, a forested mountain that has long served as a grim hideout for migrants hoping to reach European territory. To do so, they have to brave successive layers of

razor wire, ditches and high fences—and at times violent game of cat-and-mouse with both Moroccan and Spanish security forces.

Spain says over 800 migrants managed to cross Melilla's heavily fortified 12-kilometre frontier this week, compared to 1,092 in the whole of last year. They said the migrants had thrown rocks and used "violence" against security forces. Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) said some 30 migrants were injured in Wednesday's rush, three or four of them seriously. On Friday, Moroccan police were deployed along the fence near the town of Beni Ansar as migrants walked in freezing gusts of wind along the rugged paths of Gourougou.

'No hope back home'

Ahmed Mohamed, another migrant from Sudan, also tried to reach Melilla on Wednesday. He is just 17 years old, but has lost count of how many times he has attempted the crossing since he arrived in Morocco eight months ago. After his failed

attempts, he is sent back each time to the Casablanca or Safi regions, hundreds of kilometers (miles) away. "One day, I'm going to achieve my dream," he told AFP. "Back home, there's no hope any more."

Like many of his companions, he said he entered Morocco via neighboring Algeria, but he prefers not to reveal the exact route. Another 17-year-old, a Chadian girl with a tattooed forehead, begged to be let into Europe. "Open the borders, help us! We're sick of being chased and harassed," she said.

She had not tried to cross this week but would stop at nothing to succeed. In mid-May 2021, Spain was caught off guard when more than 10,000 people swam or used small inflatable boats to enter Ceuta as Moroccan border forces looked the other way. The incident, at the height of a diplomatic spat between Rabat and Madrid, showed how heavily Spain relies on Moroccan cooperation to rein in clandestine migration. — AFP



Migrants climb a ledge along a mountain path after an attempted assault on the border fence separating Morocco from Spain's North African Melilla, near Nador. — AFP

Poverty, activism combine in Chad street theatre

Sheet-metal shacks line the dusty rubbish-strewn alleys, and the stench of burning plastic waste fills

the air. This hardly seems a good time or place for culture, but for Chadian artist Bonaventure Madjitoubangar, it's perfect. "Power doesn't give a damn about culture—that's why I use the public arena, to bring theatre to as many people as possible," he said. The dreadlocked 35-year-old performs dramatised readings in the slums of N'Djamena, the Chadian capital.

The backdrop to this week's performance is the Chagoua district near the Chari river. A score of adults and children look on, many drawn by the bewitching high notes of the balafon, a sort of xylo-

phone. The actor's issue of the day is "Exile," with work by Nimrod Bena Djangrang—a multiple award-winning Chadian writer who left the country when civil war raged in the 1980s. The notion of exile resonates with many Chadians. Poverty, deadly jihadist attacks and inter-community conflict are driving many to seek a safer or better life elsewhere.

"I chose this author to address the theme of exodus," said Madjitoubangar. "Many Chadians are tempted to leave the country because of poverty, with the risk of ending up drowned like many other

exiles in the Mediterranean." In the world's third-least developed country, 42 percent of the population of some 15 million live below the poverty line, according to the United Nations. Only 20 percent of Chadians are literate and there are no cinemas and theatres. "It's good, what he does for the district, for the children, with the various workshops he sets up," said Antoinette Nojidemgen, a shopkeeper.

"What I'm doing is a political act, bringing culture to the grassroots, but it takes time," said Madjitoubangar, who sometimes also performs in private courtyards.

Other performances have focused on women's rights, featuring "So Long A Letter" by Senegalese author Mariama Ba or the weight of tradition with "Sous l'Orage" ("Caught In The Storm") by Malian playwright Seydou Badian. "But I can also do pieces by Albert Camus," he said Madjitoubangar. "Culture knows no borders." — AFP



Visitors look at the Cyberdog robot on Xiaomi's stand on the opening day of the MWC (Mobile World Congress) in Barcelona.

CYBERDOG AND ROBO-BARMAN: SPOTTED AT SPAIN TECH CONGRESS

Phone makers and telecoms firms unveiled a series of gadgets and innovations at one of the industry's biggest get-togethers this week in Barcelona. Here is a selection of the most curious objects from the Mobile World Congress.

5G bartender

It shakes a mean cocktail, speaks a dozen languages and recognises its most loyal customers by their faces. The Kime robot is a "high added value" bartender developed by Spanish "food tech" group Macco Robotics. Joan Laporta, president of Barcelona football club, was among the robot's customers at the tech gathering this week. The 5G-enabled humanoid robot can "work 24 hours a day", according to its manufacturer. In these COVID-affected times, the robot has another advantage over its human competitors-it avoids "unnecessary contact" and reduces the risks of contamination, the company says.

Virtual disco

No queuing around the block to get in, no security guards at the entrance-

just a virtual reality headset and a booming soundtrack. On the stand of the South Korean operator SK Telecom, visitors had a lively taste of the metaverse, the immersive version of the internet touted as the centerpiece of the next online generation. With joysticks in hand, the virtual clubber is plunged into a giant disco ball to dance among other avatars. This is one of many applications in "ifland", the operator's very own metaverse, which is designed to "maximize the user experience across various virtual spaces and avatars".

Remote car racing

Ever wondered what it would be like to drive a car while sitting more than 1,000 kilometres from the steering wheel? French operator Orange is proposing it as one use of the next-generation 5G internet. Called "Vrombr", this mobile game created by the young start-up Polyptik allows you to drive real miniature cars via a smartphone. In the demonstration at the Mobile World Congress, the driver was in Barcelona while the vehicle raced around a track near Paris.



Visitors look at the Cyberdog robot on Xiaomi's stand on the opening day of the MWC (Mobile World Congress) in Barcelona. The world's biggest mobile fair was held from February 28 to March 3, 2022. — AFP photos

Quick-charging, green battery

Several manufacturers claimed to have developed the fastest smartphone chargers in the world. China's Realme

unveiled a 150-watt charging system for its forthcoming GT Neo 3, which will allow it to recharge its battery to 50 percent in five minutes. Its competitor Oppo

has promised a 100 percent charge in nine minutes thanks to its "Supervooc" 240-watt technology. Meanwhile, Japanese start-up PJP Eye has unveiled a prototype of an "organic" battery using carbon made from cotton instead of the metals usually used for this type of product. This technology "allows our batteries to have a long lifespan" and reduces their CO2 emissions, explains Inketsu Okina, the firm's director.

Cyberdog

Low on its legs, its body full of sensors and microphones, the cyberdog can trot close to its owner, bark, hold up its paw and even stand guard. The robot, shown for the first time outside of China by its creator Xiaomi, is controlled via a mobile phone. Even though its "brain" is still in an experimental phase utilizing open-source programming, Xiaomi has already put 1,000 of them on sale in China for a cool \$1,600 euros (\$1,800) each. — AFP



Artifacts are displayed during a ceremony marking the restitution of cultural property from the US to France at the ambassador's residence in Washington, DC. — AFP

United States returns pillaged skull, golden objects to France

The United States has returned a set of illegally obtained artifacts, including a skull from the Parisian catacombs and golden ingots from an Atlantic shipwreck, to their rightful owner—the French state. The prized objects, which also included an ancient Roman coin, were handed over on Wednesday during an official "restitution" ceremony at the French ambassador's residence in Washington.

Steve Francis, a high-ranking official in the US Department of Homeland Security, along with French Ambassador Philippe Etienne, unveiled the pieces and detailed how American authorities had worked with their French counterparts to get them back into French hands. "It is unacceptable that cultural property can be stolen and trafficked, and this is one of the mutual priorities between the United States and France," the ambassador told AFP.

Treasure hunt

The five golden ingots had originally been looted from the Prince de Conti, a ship that wrecked in December 1746 off the French island of Belle-Ile-en-Mer, near mainland France, according to a handout provided by the French

embassy. The vessel, which was on a return trip from China, had long been forgotten, until a teacher in 1975 came across archival documents mentioning its location. He received authorization to excavate the site, but it was quickly looted, with many of the ingots disappearing before arrests were made.

However, in December 2017, five ingots matching the description of the Prince de Conti gold appeared on a list of items up for auction in California. A French agency dedicated to underwater archeology notified American authorities, who stepped in to seize the objects.

"The evidence that was provided by the French government was overwhelming," said David Keller, a US agent who focuses on cultural property and antiquities. "These marks on them identify the people that actually made the ingots in the Qing dynasty," Keller told AFP. "So there's a lot of history just wrapped up in it." The golden coin is much older—dating back to the third century AD. It is part of a larger treasure trove of ancient Roman objects, known as the Treasure of Lava, which was found in 1985 on the French island of Corsica, and was sold without official permission.

According to the French Embassy, specialists in currency "consider it one of the most important monetary treasures in the world." The skull originated in the Parisian catacombs, extensive caverns created in the late 18th century to house relocated remains from local cemeteries. The site, known as an ossuary, is the largest in the world, containing the bones of more than six million Parisians. The skull was recovered from an antiquities dealer in Houston, Texas in 2015. — AFP

100 new species in Myanmar reveal its 'biological riches'

At least 100 new species—from monkeys to mussels—were found in Myanmar in a decade, according to conservationists who said discoveries during the country's fleeting period of openness revealed "astonishing biodiversity". Beginning in 2010 with the identification of the Myanmar snub-nosed monkey, a small black primate known as the "sneezing monkey", researchers have made an "incredible sequence of discoveries", said International Wildlife Group Fauna and Flora International.

Over ten years, during which Myanmar's generals eased their stranglehold on power, scientists from all over the world made a bee line to the country to explore rainforests, delve into cave systems, wade through rivers and pick their way across majestic karst rock formations. "Myanmar harbors biological riches that most countries can only dream of. Its remaining tracts of forest are home to some of the most spectacular wildlife in mainland Southeast Asia," FFI said in a statement.

But the organization raised fears over a "barrage of threats", including from illegal logging, hunting, agriculture, infrastructure development and quarrying. FFI had tallied up the list of 100 new species early last year. But before they could celebrate, the Myanmar army seized power in a February 2021 coup. With field operations already suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic, FFI's Acting Country Manager Ngwe Lwin said the team was focusing on existing conservation programs with Myanmar partner Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association.

Critically endangered

He said a decade of openness had afforded researchers a rare chance to travel into remote areas of the country, some of which had previously been heavily restricted and conflict-torn. But that does not mean the discoveries came easily. In 2010, Ngwe Lwin and colleagues travelled to the forests of northern Kachin state near the border with China, looking for a new monkey species. Local people had seen the monkeys and said they were easy to track, particularly in the rain because their upturned



This undated handout photograph shows a Popa langur, found in the vicinity of Mount Popa, Myanmar. — AFP photos

noses collect water causing them to sneeze. They told the conservation team to head through the dense forest to a spot near their village. "Actually that was about one day's walk," Ngwe Lwin told AFP. "They said it's very easy, but for us, it was really hard." After days of fruitless searching, they were presented with a single dead monkey that local hunters had accidentally captured in an iron trap meant for black bears.

"Unfortunately, the snub nosed monkey got trapped," Ngwe Lwin said, adding that a conservation area had now been set up there and local people were far less likely to use traps or target the critically endangered creatures. FFI said it was crucial to involve local communities

in preservation efforts, adding that many people in the country were dependent on natural resources for survival. The United Nations Development Program has estimated that nearly half of Myanmar's 55 million population will be living below the national poverty line this year.

'Remarkable'

Other species found in the last decade include a cave dwelling crab, a carnivorous snail and 17 species of freshwater mussels. Scientists also discovered 37 different species of gecko living in isolated pockets of karst limestone habitat in eastern Myanmar—in many cases restricted to a single cave or hilltop. In one instance, a two-week expedition yielded 15 new species, said conservation biologist Aung Lin: "One day, one new species." Lee Grismer, a professor of biology at La Sierra University, whose team found the majority of the geckos, has described his expeditions in Myanmar as "one of the most remarkable experiences ever".

He told AFP the chances of finding more new species were "extremely high", adding he was confident he would return to Myanmar to look. In the meantime, FFI has proposed one karst area be designated as a "key biodiversity site" that would be safe from the cement companies that are destroying other similar formations. But Grismer said that was not his main concern. "The people are being hurt, not the habitats," he said. — AFP



Photo shows a Myanmar snub-nosed monkey (Rhinopithecus strykeri) with infants in northern Myanmar.

Lifestyle | Features



Spectators hold placards as they stand to observe a minute silence and pay their respects to former Australian cricketer Shane Warne following his death.— AFP Photos



Cans of baked beans and drinks are placed at the base of a statue of former Australian cricket great Shane Warne at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), in Melbourne yesterday.

Flowers, drinks, ciggies and meat pie: Australian fans mark Warne's death

Beneath Shane Warne's fittingly one-and-a-half times larger than life bronze statue, stunned fans in his native Melbourne made votive offerings of flowers, drink, cigarettes and a meat pie yesterday, remembering an imperfect hero whose outsized skill and personality transcended cricket. When the "King of Spin" attended the unveiling of his likeness outside his beloved Melbourne Cricket Ground more than a decade ago, he quipped that the "wonderful" result made the "about four hours" the sculptor had spent measuring between his nose and ears worthwhile.

But joking aside, Warne said he relished the idea that the statue would be a future reference point—a place for ordinary Australians to come together. "It's a pretty amazing walk down to the MCG for whatever it is you're doing," he said. "So to have a place here where people can meet and say 'I'll meet you at the Shane Warne statue' will be nice."

Now, on one damp Saturday morning a decade later, fans arranged to meet "at the Shane Warne statue" to mark his untimely death aged 52 and join in their shared grief. "I'm not even a massive



A man places photos at the base of a statue of former Australian cricket great Shane Warne at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), in Melbourne yesterday. Australia cricket great Shane Warne—one of the best Test players of all time has died of a suspected heart attack aged 52.

cricket person," said John Haddad "but I've met him before and he's not much different in age. It hits home." For much of the last 30 years, Warne the man has been a reference point that brought Australians together.

From his 1992 Test debut against India to his incisive commentary—now as much a part of the Australian summer's sound-

scape as kids laughing on the beach or the click of bat on ball. In the time in between, he captured the imagination of countless backyard cricketers and set the sporting world on fire. "It was pretty devastating to lose a childhood hero," said Andy Smith, who came to the MCG to put down a bouquet and pay his respects.

"Everyone was here as a kid, and

watching the cricket shows, especially the lunch break shows, where he would come out and show his bowling technique. It was always amazing to watch." "He was a hero for a lot of kids I think," said Smith, who particularly recalled witnessing Warne's landmark 700th wicket and his retirement. Most Australians of a certain age particularly remember where they were for Warne's "Ball of the Century" against England's Mike Gatting—a delivery so special, so befuddling it has been the subject of a scientific paper.

"I was in China at the time and watching TV and when they showed that clip," said Chris Morrow. "Here I was in the middle of Qingdao going 'whoop, whoop, whoop' it was the greatest moment." With a friend he wanted to come to the MCG to pay his respects to cricket's rock star—as much as his prowess on it. They laid down a few items beloved by Warne—a "meat pie from a service station, and a packet of Winfield Blue (cigarettes), and half a dozen VBs." — AFP



In this file photograph, Australian cricketer Shane Warne delivers a ball during the fourth day of the second Test match between Bangladesh and Australia at The Chittagong Divisional Stadium.— AFP

Warne, a spin genius with soap-opera life

Shane Warne mixed legendary cricket deeds with lurid headlines away from the pitch in a career as bewitching as his famed wrong 'un. Warne, who died at the age of 52 from a suspected heart attack, was never one for half-measures throughout his extraordinary 15-year Test career. The greatest leg-spinner of them all carved out a flamboyant lifestyle cast outside the mould of a traditional cricketer icon, often putting himself at odds with the game's purists.

While his discipline, passion and sheer talent drove him to the 708 Test wickets in a 145-Test career that made him the scourge of batsmen worldwide, the tubby blonde kid who became a superstar did things his way. Along with flowers laid by his statue at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday, there was a can of beer, a packet of cigarettes and a meat pie—a nod to the unconventional sporting lifestyle that won him legions of fans on and off the field.

"Shane was one of our nation's greatest characters," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said. "His humor, his passion, his irreverence, his approachability ensured he was loved by all." Warne is entrenched in Australia's sporting pantheon in the eyes of many he is second only to cricket's immortal Don Bradman. He not only resurrected the waning art of leg-spin, but became the first bowler to take 700 Test wickets and delivered the most famous ball in the sport's history.

'Ball of the century'

Warne posted inauspicious figures of 1-150 in his 1992 Test debut but knuckled down under spin guru Terry Jenner. Eighteen months later, Warne riveted the cricketing world with the "ball of the century" against England. Warne's first leg-break delivery in an Ashes Test turned viciously to bamboozle England's Mike

Gatting at Old Trafford in 1993 that heralded the arrival of a cricketing superstar.

He was a master of mind games, targeting batsmen ahead of a series and warning he was working on a new mystery ball to bowl out his "bunnies" in the opposition line-up. He gave a man-of-the-match performance when Australia won the World Cup in 1999, and was known for a sharp and inventive cricketering brain which saw him long touted as Australian Test skipper. But even Warne himself once described his life as a soap opera, such was the litany of off-field controversies.

"Warnie", also nicknamed "Hollywood", survived several scandals and pursued an energetic love life which is widely thought to have cost him the Australian captaincy. In 1998 it emerged that Warne and Australian team-mate Mark Waugh had been fined three years earlier for supplying information to an Indian bookmaker, and he was stripped of the Australian team vice-captaincy in 2000. A series of infidelities culminated in a public break-up from his wife of 10 years, Simone, with whom he had three children. At one point he was engaged to British actress Liz Hurley.

Success despite scandals

And yet his performance in Australia's failed Ashes campaign in England in 2005 is regarded by some pundits as the pinnacle of his career, when he overcame his disintegrating marriage and a tabloid frenzy to take 40 wickets. He also missed the 2003 World Cup in South Africa after he tested positive on tournament-eve for a banned diuretic—a weight-loss pill sometimes used to mask steroids in a scandal which saw him banned for a year. Warne returned to Test cricket in March 2004 but never again played international one-day matches, instead preferring to concentrate on the longer form of the game.

He continued playing after ending his Test career in January 2007 and scripted a title triumph with a rag-tag Rajasthan Royals team in the Indian Premier League's first edition in 2008, highlighting his nous and motivational skills. But his final season in charge of Rajasthan in 2011 did not offer his hoped-for fairy-tale finale. —AFP

Sufi pilgrims gather in Dakar

Thousands of Sufi Muslim pilgrims gathered in Dakar on Friday for the first time since 2019 without restrictions related to COVID-19. The followers of the Layene Sufi Muslim brotherhood, dressed in long white cotton robes, met in the Camberene district in the northeast of the city, one of their strongholds. Men on one side, women on the other, they sang their traditional songs and chanted prayers.

Several Senegalese television stations aired the ceremony. The mass annual pilgrimage was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to the restrictions imposed to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. The Senegalese Muslim brotherhood of the Layene, founded by Seydina

Limamou Laye (1843-1909), advocates unity and equality. This, the pilgrims said, is why all of them were dressed the same way, and all are named Laye.

One of the pilgrims, Ousmane Laye, told AFP that "the founder of the brotherhood announced that he is the reincarnation of the Prophet Mohammed, which is why he is considered a messenger of God". In Senegal, which is nearly 95 percent Muslim, most followers of one of the four main Sufi brotherhoods; the Mouride, Tidiane, Layene and Khadre, all of which are very influential and play a major social role.— AFP



Layene pilgrims arrive at the start of their yearly pilgrimage at the Seydina Issa Rohou Laye Mausoleum in Camberene. Each year thousands of Layene Muslim community followers embark on a pilgrimage from the birth place of the Layene community in Camberene and finishing at the Sacred recollection Cave in Ngor. — AFP photos

Cultural iron curtain falls for Russian musicians

Even during the darkest days of the Cold War in the 20th century, Russian opera and ballet stars still came regularly to the West for performances. But this time, things are different: a cultural boycott far more stringent is falling into place. In barely a week, some of the world's leading dancers, opera singers and conductors have been stripped of their jobs in the West, their shows cancelled and careers curtailed, in the wake of Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

"Even at the height of the Cold War, cultural exchanges between Russian, American and European artists continued. There were of course always tensions, but it was possible," said Peter Gelb, director of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. "What's happening today is different, it goes beyond the Cold War, it's a real war," he told AFP.

Gelb, who had been in Moscow to discuss a joint production with the Bolshoi just days before the invasion, knows what he is talking about. As a young talent agent representing the legendary Russian-American pianist Vladimir Horowitz, Gelb organized his client's return to Soviet Russia as the country opened up in the 1980s. Gelb also filmed the concert of Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich during his return in the same period.

Soft power

Ballet was a particular source of "soft power" for the Soviet Union and tours to the West began in the 1950s—though always under tight surveillance by both their hosts and their KGB minders. Some of those trips have gone down in history: the Bolshoi's visit to London in 1956, or the first tour by the Kirov (later renamed the Mariinsky) to Paris in 1961, during which the legendary dancer Rudolph Nureyev defected.

The West sent its emissaries in the other direction: the American Ballet Theater performed for the first time in Moscow in 1960, followed two years later by the New York City Ballet, in the midst of the Cuban missile crisis. After the collapse of the USSR, exchanges intensified, with star Russian dancers invited everywhere and even becoming lead members of companies in the West, such as Svetlana Zakharova, the "tsarina" of dance, who had principal dancer roles at both the Bolshoi and Scala in Milan.

Once unimaginable, an American, David Hallberg, became a principal dancer of the Bolshoi in 2011. Suddenly, it has become unimaginable once again. "In the current context of brutality against innocent citizens, there is no possibility of making exchanges like those during the Cold War," said Gelb.

The Met has ceased its collaboration with the Bolshoi, and will boycott all pro-Putin artists, a decision also taken by the Paris Opera and many other venues around Europe. The Bolshoi's trip to London this summer has been cancelled. Russian choreographer Alexei Ratmansky, a former head of the Bolshoi who grew up in Kyiv, abandoned a new ballet he was putting together in Moscow and rushed back to his home in New York. Laurent Hilaire, the French head of the Moscow Stanislavski Ballet, quit his post of five years.

Stars cancelled

The wrath fell especially on two superstars seen as close to Putin. Conductor Valery Gergiev, considered among the greatest of his generation, was stripped of his role as head of the Munich Philharmonic, and declared persona non grata in many theatres and by his own agent. And the soprano Anna Netrebko, international queen of opera, is cancelling her performances at the Met. Laurent Bayle, former director general of the Philharmonie de Paris, said it leaves little for these artists to do outside Russia, especially since China remains almost entirely closed off due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "They will remain in their own country," he told AFP. "Three-quarters of their activity has been called into question."

If the current war ends in a long-term occupation of Ukraine, "it is certain that no one will risk inviting Russian artists," he added. Exceptions will clearly be made for those who have themselves been victims of Putin's regime or openly denounce it. —AFP

Sports

Haynes hits century: Australia down WCup holders England

South Africa make winning start with a comfortable 32-run victory

HAMILTON: Australia underscored their status as the team to beat in the Women's World Cup when a Rachael Haynes century set up a 12-run win over defending champions England in Hamilton yesterday. South Africa also made a winning start to the tournament with a comfortable 32-run victory over Bangladesh in Dunedin.

Haynes and Meg Lanning put on 196 for the second wicket as Australia reached an imposing 310 for three off their 50 overs. Nat Sciver, with an unbeaten 109 from only 85 deliveries, kept England in with a chance but a target of 36 off the final three overs proved too much. Haynes said it was difficult to score early in the innings and she was not expecting Australia to reach 300.

"Initially we were thinking 260-270 might be OK, but once we got going we thought let's just try and go as big as we can and to get over than 300 mark was quite important," she said. England captain Heather Knight took positives from the narrow loss, seeing it as a step up from the recent Ashes series. "For us as a batting unit that's a real confidence booster," she said. "It's not the end of the world. We lost the first game of the 2017 World Cup."

Knight won the toss and elected to bowl, removing Alyssa Healy in the ninth over to have Australia one for 35 when Haynes and Lanning came together. Haynes was the last wicket to fall with her 130 coming off 131 deliveries while Lanning's carefully paced

innings produced 86. After 25 overs Australia were 102 for one with the second half of the innings producing 208 runs. Tammy Beaumont and Heather Knight put on 91 for England's second wicket and after Knight's dismissal for 40 Nat Sciver dominated the crease.

Australian leg-spinner Alana King, who before the game tweeted her sadness at the death of Shane Warne, took three wickets including Beaumont for 74 before Jess Jonassen's miserly final over took two wickets and ended England's chance. In Dunedin, South Africa had a comfortable 32-run victory over Bangladesh guided by tight spell of seam bowling by Ayabonga Khaka, who took four for 32. While the margin was decisive, it was not a convincing performance for South Africa who were all out for 207 on the penultimate delivery.

After a solid 41 from Laura Wolvaardt, the batting faltered to be 119 for five when Marizanne Kapp (42) and Chloe Tryon (39) put on 71 at better than a run-a-ball to lift the total to 190 before the last five wickets fell for 17 runs. Sharmin Akhter and Shamima Sultana made a solid start for Bangladesh to reach 69 before Sultana went for 27 and Akhter, who was dropped twice early in her innings, was removed soon after for 34. Nigar Sultana (29) and Ritu Moni (27) put on 53 for the seventh wicket but the required run rate continued to grow and Bangladesh were all out for 175 in the final over. — AFP



HAMILTON: Australia's Rachael Haynes plays a shot as England wicketkeeper Amy Jones (left) looks on during the Round 1 Women's World Cup Cricket match between Australia and England yesterday. — AFP

Jadeja's 175 puts India on top in first Sri Lanka Test

MOHALI: All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja hit an unbeaten 175 and took a wicket to put India in command of the opening Test against Sri Lanka on day two yesterday. Jadeja pulverised the Sri Lankan bowling in Mohali to amass his Test-best total before India declared their innings on 574-8 in superstar cricketer Virat Kohli's 100th Test. In reply, Sri Lanka were in trouble at 108 for four at stumps-needing another 267 runs to avoid the follow-on. Pathum Nissanka, on 26, and Charith Asalanka, on one, were batting at close of play.

Ravichandran Ashwin took two wickets while fellow spinner Jadeja and fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah claimed one each. Both teams observed one minute's silence before the start of play in memory of Shane Warne and Rod Marsh—the Australian greats who both died Friday—and wore black armbands. India resumed the day on 357-6 and Jadeja put on a stand of 130 with overnight partner Ashwin, who made 61, to stretch India's dominance after they elected to bat first at the start of the two-match series.

He recorded his second Test century before lunch, surpassing his previous best of 100 not out, to ram home the advantage after Rishabh Pant's 96 on Friday. Jadeja, who began day two on 45, went past 150 with a six off Dhananjaya de Silva and put on an unbeaten partnership of 103 with number 10 Mohammed Shami, who made 20. Shami appeared to be struggling after being hit on the back by a fielding throw and skipper Rohit Sharma called his batsmen back to the pavilion, with tea taken early.

'Tired' Sri Lanka

"Today I just stayed calm and batted normally," Jadeja told reporters afterwards. "Ashwin and I have enjoyed batting with each other." On Friday's first day, he said, "I was just staying at the non-striker's end and enjoying watching Rishabh bat." He was approaching a double century when Rohit declared, but said he had signalled to the dressing room to end the Indian innings soon as the ball was turning and it was a good time to get a "tired" Sri Lanka in to bat. Shami returned to bowl the first over after the Indian team gave Kohli, who made 45 on day one, a guard of honour in the star batsman's landmark game.

Ashwin struck first with the wicket of Lahiru Thirimanne as he trapped the left-handed opener lbw for 17 with his off spin. Leg spinner Jadeja was introduced in the 25th over and on his second ball sent back skipper Dimuth Karunaratne trapped lbw for 28 with one that turned sharply from outside off to the left-handed opener. It would have been three down when Bumrah bowled Nissanka through the gate but the delivery turned out to be a no-ball.

Bumrah, the team's vice-captain, made amends with the wicket of Angelo Mathews for 22 and Ashwin got de Silva for one as Sri Lanka slipped to 103-4. Asalanka survived an anxious moment at the death when he was given out lbw to Jadeja but successfully reviewed the decision in his favor when the system showed the ball missing the stumps. "The wicket might turn more as the game progresses and the odd ball is also keeping low," Jadeja said. "We will try to bowl wicket to wicket" today. The match is new all-format captain Rohit's first as Test captain after Kohli quit the job in January. — AFP

Afghanistan punish sloppy Bangladesh to level series

DHAKA: Hazratullah Zazai struck an unbeaten half century to help Afghanistan thrash Bangladesh by eight wickets in the second Twenty20 international with the two-match series ending all square at 1-1 in Dhaka yesterday. Zazai hit 59 off 45 balls and Usman Ghani scored 47, guiding Afghanistan to 121-2 in 17.4 overs after Fazalhaq Farooqi and Azmatullah Omarzai claimed three wickets each to restrict Bangladesh to 115-9. A minute's silence was observed in memory of late Australian greats Shane Warne and Rodney Marsh before the start of the match.

Both Zazai and Ghani benefited from Bangladesh's sloppy fielding as the hosts failed to back up Thursday's convincing 61 run victory. Nasum Ahmed dropped Zazai on nought off the third ball of the innings before Afif Hossain and Mohammad Naim reprieved Ghani at 39 and 41 off the bowling of Mahedi Hasan. Mahedi struck early

to remove Rahmanullah Gurbaz for three but Zazai and Ghani took full advantage of Bangladesh's weak fielding to add 99 runs for the second wicket.

Mahmudullah Riyad dismissed Ghani to break the stand, with Afghanistan only 13 runs away from victory. It was left to Darwish Rasooli to end the game with a towering six off left-arm spinner Nasum. Afghanistan captain Mohammad Nabi hailed the team for their bowling efforts. "The boys played really well, especially in the first innings. Hazratullah and Ghani batted well for us," he said. The hosts earlier never managed to get going after electing to bat first, losing wickets at regular intervals.

"It was a good wicket to bat on. We didn't put together enough partnerships. (I am) very disappointed the way this game turned up," said Bangladesh captain Mahmudullah. "We need to improve our fielding. That's something we need to work on," he added. Mushfiqur Rahim top-scored with 30 off 25 balls, in his 100th Twenty20 international, while Mahmudullah chipped in with 21 off 13 balls. On 19, Mahmudullah became the first Bangladeshi to score 2000 runs in Twenty20 internationals before he was trapped plumb in front by leg-spinner Rashid Khan. Farooqi finished with 3-19 while Omarzai claimed 3-22. — AFP



DHAKA: Afghanistan's Hazratullah Zazai watches the ball after playing a shot during the second Twenty20 international cricket match between Bangladesh and Afghanistan yesterday. — AFP

Azhar and Haq put Pakistan in driving seat

RAWALPINDI: Veteran batsman Azhar Ali and opener Imam-ul-Haq scored big hundreds to help Pakistan dominate Australia yesterday on the second day of the opening Test in Rawalpindi. Azhar knocked 185 and Haq a career-best 157 to guide Pakistan to 476-4 against a hapless Australian attack on a placid and unresponsive Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium pitch. Skipper Babar Azam declared an hour before the close in the hope of an early wicket, but Australia ended the day on five without loss after bad light stopped play with 15 overs remaining. Left-handed opener Usman Khawaja scored five, while David Warner was yet to get off the mark.

Australia will need another 272 runs to avoid the follow-on against Pakistan's wily spinners, who are used to the pitch conditions. Azhar was delighted at scoring a hundred against the visitors. "I always enjoy scoring runs against Australia as they are one of the top teams and they challenge your abilities," he said. "It will be tough to bowl Australia out twice on this pitch, but I hope our bowlers do their best."

Australia, South Korea power into Davis Cup finals

SYDNEY: Australian Open doubles champion Thanasi Kokkinakis won a decisive singles rubber to power 28-time winners Australia through to the next stage of the Davis Cup yesterday, with South Korea toppling Austria to also make the grade. Lleyton Hewitt's Australians went into day two tied 1-1 with Hungary and were fighting an uphill battle after Fabian Marozsan and Mate Valkusz upset John Peers and Luke Saville to clinch the doubles 6-4, 6-4.

That left world number 30 Alex de Minaur needing to win against 35th-ranked Marton Fucsovics to keep the clash alive—and backed by a rowdy crowd at Sydney's Ken Rosewall Arena he battled through 7-6 (7/4), 6-4. Kokkinakis last played in the Davis

Australian Marnus Labuschagne, meanwhile, said his side had a tough fight ahead. "I think the only way you get yourself back into a game like this is by taking it day by day, over by over. "We know we can turn this game." The day began on a sombre note as players paid tribute to the legendary Australian spinner Shane Warne, who died of a suspected heart attack in Thailand Friday, with a minute's silence. Both teams wore black arm bands, while the handful of early-morning spectators in the stands also stood in respect.

Slow session

Pakistan added just 57 runs at snail's pace in the morning session. Haq was the slowest of the Pakistan pair, adding just six runs in the first hour and not hitting a boundary until the 90th minute. He was lucky to survive a caught-behind appeal on 143 off Lyon that the Australians didn't challenge, when replays showed it hit the bat. But Azhar put on a solid 208-run stand for the second wicket with Haq and then another 101 for the third wicket with Azam, who was run out for 36. Azhar was finally caught reverse sweeping Labuschagne after batting for just four minutes under nine hours.

Mohammad Rizwan (29) and Iftikhar Ahmed (13) remained not out. For Australia's pace-cum-spin attack it was a hard toil with Labuschagne (1-53), Cummins (1-62) and Nathan Lyon (1-



RAWALPINDI: Australia's Nathan Lyon (right) attempts to run out Pakistan's Azhar Ali during the second day of play of the first Test cricket match between Pakistan and Australia at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday. — AFP

161) among the wickets. Spearheads Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood went wicketless for 71 and 53 runs respectively. Pakistan lost only Imam-ul-Haq in the first two sessions as they added 149 runs after resuming the day on 245-1. Haq completed 150 before he was trapped leg-before by Cummins soon after lunch.

Haq, who unsuccessfully reviewed the decision, batted for nearly nine hours and hit 16 boundaries and two

determined location in September with 16 teams.

Croatia, Great Britain and Serbia are already through, with Davis Cup chiefs to decide next week who will replace defending champions Russia after they were axed over the invasion of Ukraine. Those 16 will be whittled down to eight for the quarter-finals in November. Six-time champions Spain will take a comfortable 2-0 lead over Romania into their tie at Marbella after teenager Carlos Alcaraz and veteran Roberto Bautista Agut eased to victories on day one. France also opened up a 2-0 lead over Ecuador in Pau, as did the Netherlands over Canada in The Hague.

The Taylor Fritz-led United States and Diego Schwartzman's Argentina enjoy the same advantage in their showdowns against Colombia and the Czech Republic respectively. But the other ties are finely poised at 1-1 with world number three German Alexander Zverev set for a crunch clash against Brazilian Thiago Monteiro in Rio. World number eight Casper Ruud similarly faces a crucial battle with Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik in Oslo as he attempts to help Norway progress. — AFP

Cup seven years ago, but was recalled after claiming a first ATP singles title in Adelaide this year, then winning the Australian Open doubles crown with Nick Kyrgios.

With the tie on the line, he repaid skipper Hewitt's faith with a gutsy 6-4, 6-4 win over young Hungarian number two Zsombor Piros. "Thank you Lleyton for trusting me, it's been a long time since I played and to play a fifth rubber at home has been incredible," he said. De Minaur added: "We've got immense pride, immense passion and one thing you can count on from the Aussie Davis Cup team is we're never going to give up."

In Seoul, 65th-ranked Kwon Soon-woo steered South Korea over the line with a hard-fought 7-5, 7-5 victory over Austria's 143-ranked Dennis Novak. They had also entered day two tied 1-1, with Nam Ji-sung partnering Song Min-kyu to outlast Alexander Erler and Lucas Miedler 6-4, 6-3 in the doubles to give Kwon the platform he needed to finish it off. Twelve Davis Cup ties will be decided yesterday, with the winners progressing to the finals, the first stage of which will be played at a yet-to-be-

Sports

Max pressure as Sixers, Harden down Cavaliers

Maxey scores 33 points as 76ers overturn a 21-point deficit

NEW YORK: Tyrese Maxey scored 33 points as the Philadelphia 76ers overturned a 21-point deficit to defeat the Cleveland Cavaliers 125-119 on Friday. Maxey found his scoring touch after the interval with 24 points in the second half as the Sixers extended their winning streak to five games. New recruit James Harden enjoyed another influential performance with 25 points, 11 assists and three turnovers to maintain his unbeaten start with the Sixers.

Joel Embiid added 22 points while Georges Niang had 17 off the bench and Tobias Harris added 15. Darius Garland led the Cavaliers scorers with 26 points while Isaac Okoro added 22. Jarrett Allen and Cedi Osman had 20 points apiece. The Cavs appeared ready to run away with the game after an explosive first quarter, erupting for 43 points to go 21 points clear before Philadelphia gradually clawed back the lead to trail 71-63 at the break.

Maxey then sparked the Sixers into life after halftime as Philadelphia outscored the visitors 62-48 to close out the win. Maxey said the Sixers' tighter defensive display after the break proved the difference. "It was all about stops," the 21-year-old said. "They had something like 40 points in the first quarter and that's way too many points. "Once we settled in and started getting stops we turned the game around."

Sixers coach Doc Rivers meanwhile praised the contribution of rising talent Maxey. "He's just playing great," Rivers said. "I'm on him a lot about being aggressive. Yelled at him about five times tonight.

The more he's aggressive, the better we are. "He's a fearless kid, he's playing great, and he's getting great shots. He's been great for us." The win lifted the Sixers to second in the Eastern Conference at 39-23 before Saturday's road trip against leaders Miami in Florida.

Elsewhere Friday, Giannis Antetokounmpo delivered a 34-point display as the Milwaukee Bucks outlasted the Chicago Bulls 118-112 in another heavyweight Eastern Conference duel. Antetokounmpo hauled in 16 rebounds and finished with five assists and two steals as the reigning champions showed their pedigree with a gutsy win on the road. Jrue Holiday added 26 points for Milwaukee while Khris Middleton finished with 22 as the Bucks moved into third place in the standings at 39-25, leapfrogging Chicago in fourth.

Zach LaVine (30 points) and DeMar DeRozan (29) led the Chicago scorers. The Bulls led by eight points early in the fourth quarter, but were unable to ram home the advantage in the closing stages as Milwaukee finished the stronger. In Phoenix, Cameron Johnson drained a buzzer-beating three-pointer to cap a career-high 38-point performance and give the Suns a 115-114 victory over the Knicks. Johnson's superb late effort completed a pulsating comeback for the Western Conference leaders, who improved to 51-12.

"That's what we do, we grind things out-we play together, we stick together," Johnson said afterwards. "We don't crumble. We've been through adversity over the years. We've got a group of guys



PHILADELPHIA: James Harden #1 of the Philadelphia 76ers shoots the ball against the Cleveland Cavaliers on March 4, 2022 at Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia. — AFP

who care about each other and cares about winning games." The Knicks had led by 14 early in the fourth quarter but were gradually reeled in by a Suns team missing the injured Chris Paul and Devin Booker

(health and safety protocols). Johnson's game-winning points total included nine-of-12 three-pointers, with Mikal Bridges adding 20 points and Cameron Payne 17. — AFP

Ukraine athletes dig deep on day one of Winter Paralympics

BEIJING: Ukrainian athletes showed resilience in the face of the turmoil engulfing their war-torn homeland yesterday, racing to the top of the medal table on day one of the Beijing Winter Paralympics with an impressive haul of seven. With more than 1.2 million of their fellow citizens now refugees and fears of a food crisis mounting, the Ukrainian Paralympians on the slopes in Zhangjiakou dug deep. The team claimed three golds, three silver and a bronze in the biathlon events, just days after an arrival in the capital their top official had dubbed a "miracle" following an arduous journey. Host country China, meanwhile, grabbed eight medals yesterday, including two gold.

Ukraine made a clean sweep in the men's vision-impaired biathlon race, with Vitalii Lukianenko, 43, adding a seventh Paralympic gold to his collection and 25-year-olds Oleksandr Kazik and Dmytro Suiarko claiming silver and bronze, respectively. "They are my brothers in sport and brothers in life. We are really close to each other," Lukianenko said after his win. He

urged his relatives in the besieged city of Kharkiv to remain strong. "I want to dedicate this medal to the guys who protect our cities," he said.

'For the people in Ukraine'

In the men's biathlon standing event, Grygorii Vovchynskyi, 33, also used his victory to pay tribute to the bravery of Ukraine's embattled citizens. "Ukraine is a big family," he said. "My gold medal in my first race is for peace in Ukraine, for the people in Ukraine." Oksana Shyshkova, 30, who is visually impaired, won the women's sprint title in her category, while in the women's standing race, Liudmyla Liashenko finished second. "Medals mean nothing compared to the lives of relatives and people who have suffered already through war," Oksana said.

A pre-race chat to his family helped spur Rad Taras to the silver in the men's sitting sprint biathlon-the team's first medal of the day. "They're safe right now," he told AFP. Rad said the chaotic lead-up to the event had taken a toll. "The last week, we spent in Italy, without any equipment. We



ZHANGJIAKOU: Ukraine's Natalia Tkachenko (right) grabs the pole of her guide Denys Nikulin as she competes in the women's sprint vision impaired biathlon event yesterday. — AFP

couldn't train, we just rested and went walking," he said. "The race was really tough." He hopes the performance will help lift spirits back home. "It's a big honor to wear yellow and blue colours and represent my country," he said.

Ukraine-born Oksana Masters, who competes for Team USA, claimed her sixth Paralympic gold since 2012 and dedicated her win in the women's sitting biathlon to her

country of birth. "I'm so proud to be Ukrainian... everything I have learned (as) an athlete... resilience, fighting and working hard, I learned from Ukraine," she said. The superstar all-rounder-cyclist, rower, biathlete and cross-country skier-won a cycling gold at the Tokyo Summer Paralympics six months ago and said the quick transition back to winter sports had been tough. — AFP

Tumouh Disabled Sports Club delegation returns

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Tumouh Disabled Sports Club delegation (Dubai Expo 2020) returned home Friday. Club Chairwoman and head of the delegation Rihab Buresli said they participated in sports, art and patriotic presentations and were successful in reflecting an excellent image. Buresli lauded the commitment of the athletes and related departments - praising their outstanding presence in sports, theatre and popular shows that coincides with Kuwait's celebration of the National days.

Buresli was happy with the visit of Information and Culture Minister Dr Hamad Rouhaldeen. She also thanked Information Ministry Undersecretary Muneera Al-Huwaidi and Assistant Undersecretary Faisal Al-Mutalaqqim for their support. She also thanked the Public Authority for Sport, athletes and parents who accompanied their children to the events.

She said this participation presented a realistic model of the participation principle - enabling and giving confidence to the mentally disabled in a way that meets the goals of sustainable development 2030 that was issued by the United Nations (UN). Information Ministry Undersecretary and general commissioner of Expo 2020 lauded the civilized image that was projected by Tumouh Club and appreciated their initiative. Al-Huwaidi recommended that Tumouh Club participate in the Osaka expo 2025 in Japan.



Championship, hosted by the Arabian Horse Center, Bait Al Arab. This sponsorship highlights the Bank's commitment under its community-focused social responsibility program to supporting the sports culture in Kuwait, particularly the activities that are deeply rooted in the local cultural identity and heritage.

The Kuwait International Arabian Horse Championship aims at encouraging local breeders to improve and raise the production, quality, and performance of homegrown horses. This year's tournament included the Ninth Kuwait International Arabian Horse Cup and the Kuwait-

Egyptian Arabian Horse Cup. Both championships featured the participation of a large number of breeders and owners of purebred Arabian horses and drew large crowds of Arabian horse lovers.

The Bank's support for this initiative is part of its dynamic full-fledged "ENGAGE-Together to Be The Change" community program, which focuses on promoting social welfare through educational, cultural, and health-driven initiatives. Through ENGAGE, Burgan Bank translates its values and vision for the role it plays as a driver of positive change in society's welfare and development.

News in brief

Quartararo struggles

DOHA: Reigning MotoGP champion Fabio Quartararo struggled in the third practice session for the season-opening Qatar Grand Prix and was forced into the first qualifying session. Quartararo was only 11th fastest on his Yamaha with just the top 10 automatically advancing to Q2 in the afternoon, which decides the first four rows of the grid. The two quickest riders in Q1 join that session. Alex Rins on one of the surprisingly quick Suzukis had the fastest practice time overall. His time of 1 min 53.432 sec was 0.035sec faster than six-time MotoGP champion Marc Marquez, and 0.147 better than his teammate Joan Mir. It was a welcome boost for Marquez, who is coming off two injury-ridden seasons, on his redesigned Honda. "I'm much better than last year when I was on the sofa," Marquez he told British broadcaster BT Sport. — AFP

Sevilla held by Alaves

MADRID: Sevilla gave Real Madrid the chance to move eight points clear at the top of La Liga after they were held to a goalless draw by relegation-battling Alaves on Friday. Madrid can extend their advantage when they host Real Sociedad at the Santiago Bernabeu after being gifted another opportunity to strengthen their already-commanding position in the Spanish title race. Sevilla were boosted by a 2-1 victory over third-placed Real Betis last weekend but failed to follow up that victory against a determined Alaves side, who edge up to 18th in the table. Five draws in seven La Liga games for Sevilla have even given their rivals hope of finishing second, with fourth-placed Barcelona 10 points behind but with two games in hand. Betis, in third, are nine points back, having played one game fewer. "We weren't at our level today," said Sevilla defender Nemanja Gudelj. — AFP

Martinez fires Inter top

MILAN: Lautaro Martinez scored a hat-trick as Inter Milan went top of Serie A on Friday with a 5-0 win over rock-bottom Salernitana. The result edges Inter a point clear of Napoli and AC Milan in a tight three-way title race with all three sides having played 27 matches. Inter were on a five-game winless run so Friday's romp is a boost ahead of their midweek return-leg Champions League last-16 clash with Liverpool, who lead 2-0 from their win in Milan last month. Argentine striker Martinez punched the ground in frustration after smacking a volley off the crossbar on 20 minutes. But two minutes later he was punching the air in triumph after beating the off-side trap and slotting the opener into the far corner. — AFP

Paris-Nice turns 80

PARIS: Cycling's Paris-Nice embarks today with all the difficulties of a Grand Tour packed into an eight-stage jaunt to the French Riviera beachfront finish-line that lends the event the nickname 'Race to the Sun'. Double defending champion Maximilian Schachmann of Bora Hansgrohe will be tested in cross-winds in the open plains, on a tricky individual time-trial and in both hilly and outright mountainous terrain in the Ardeche and the low Alps. He will be pushed all the way on this 80th edition of the event by Jumbo-Visma leader Primož Roglič, who will be chaperoned by newly-signed Australian all-rounder Rohan Dennis, who joined from Ineos and who is capable of a tilt at the title himself. English rider Adam Yates leads the Ineos roster shorn of its injured star Egan Bernal, but featuring 2018 Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas. — AFP

Burgan Bank sponsors Kuwait Arabian Horse Championship 2022

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank has sponsored the 2022 Kuwait International Arabian Horse

Chelsea boost top-four bid

Aston Villa thrash Southampton 4-0; Leeds beaten in Marsch's first game



BURNLEY: Chelsea's German midfielder Kai Havertz (2nd right) controls the ball during the English Premier League football match between Burnley and Chelsea at Turf Moor in Burnley yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: Chelsea ignored the drama over Roman Abramovich's decision to sell the club as Kai Havertz inspired a 4-0 rout of Premier League strugglers Burnley, while Leeds manager Jesse Marsch suffered a 1-0 defeat at Leicester in his first game yesterday. All Premier League captains were wearing armbands in Ukraine colours this weekend and clubs held a minute's applause in a show of solidarity with the country following Russia's invasion. The war has indirectly taken a major toll on Chelsea, with Russian oligarch Abramovich putting the club up for sale amid fears he may be sanctioned by the British government for his alleged links with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Abramovich's vast investment delivered 19 major trophies in his 19-year reign, including the Champions League and Club World Cup under current boss Thomas Tuchel. But Chelsea face an uncertain future in the post-Abramovich era, put-

ting pressure on Tuchel to keep the team on track during the transition to a new owner. Qualifying for the Champions League is essential to that ambition and third-placed Chelsea remain on course after brushing aside third-bottom Burnley at Turf Moor.

After Chelsea fans chanted Abramovich's name during the applause for Ukraine, Reece James put them ahead in the 47th minute with a fierce finish. Havertz doubled the lead with a header from Christian Pulisic's cross five minutes later. The German forward, again replacing club record signing Romelu Lukaku, made it three goals in nine minutes with a close-range strike from James' cross.

Pulisic tapped in Chelsea's fourth in the 69th minute from Saul Niguez's deflected cross. Chelsea's third successive league win moved them six points clear of fourth-placed Manchester United. Marsch has been hired to save Leeds from relegation after replacing Marcelo Bielsa. But he

was unable to spark an immediate improvement in their fortunes as Harvey Barnes bagged the winner in the 67th minute. After a series of fine saves from Leicester keeper Kasper Schmeichel, Barnes struck with a cool finish from inside the area.

Marsch is just the second American to take charge of a Premier League club after Bob Bradley's brief spell at Swansea in 2016. Dismissed by RB Leipzig in December after a disappointing five-month spell, Marsch has a massive job on his hands to change perceptions of American coaches while keeping Leeds afloat. Leeds have lost their last five games and sit just two points above the relegation zone. "After four days together and to have changed a lot of the tactics, I'm really proud of the group," Marsch said.

"We are getting to know each other. To play so well at a tough place, it doesn't feel right that we didn't get what we deserved but that's sport. A big

first step for us." Ivan Toney's hat-trick lifted Brentford to their first win in 10 league games as the Bees moved six points clear of the relegation zone with a 3-1 victory at bottom-of-the-table Norwich. Christian Eriksen provided the assist for Toney's opener in his first competitive start since suffering a cardiac arrest playing for Denmark at the last year's European Championship.

Newcastle extended their unbeaten run to eight league games with goals from Ryan Fraser and Fabian Schar clinching a 2-1 win against Brighton at St James' Park. In severe relegation trouble when Eddie Howe took over as manager, Newcastle are now seven points above the bottom three. Aston Villa thrashed Southampton 4-0 thanks to goals from Ollie Watkins, Douglas Luiz, Philippe Coutinho and Danny Ings. Jean-Philippe Mateta and Wilfried Zaha scored in Crystal Palace's 2-0 victory at Wolves. — AFP

Martin grabs Qatar pole with Marquez also on front row

DOHA: Qualifying specialist Jorge Martin grabbed pole position for the MotoGP season opener in Qatar as he posted the fastest time in the final session yesterday. The Spaniard, on a Pramac Ducati, was joined on the front row by Italian Enea Bastianini for Gresini, which has switched to Ducati bikes this season, and six-times world champion Marc Marquez of Honda.

Martin took four pole positions last year in his rookie MotoGP season. "I feel good always to be on pole position," he said. "But I am not 100 per cent happy because I lack a bit of race pace." Bastianini pushed his way onto the front row for the first time at this level with a lap that finished after the qualifying time had elapsed.

Marquez, who has a reputation for picking the right wheel to follow in qualifying, made a quick exit from the pits so he could tail Ducati's Francesco Bagnaia round the track for one last tilt at a fast time. As wind blew dust and sand across the track, the strategy worked. "With this wind it was important to take somebody as a reference and that's what I did," he said. "We start on the front row. It's Saturday. It's important. But tomorrow is the race."

Marquez missed the start of last season still rehabbing a badly broken right arm and sat out the end of the campaign with double vision. "If I'm here, I'm good," he said ahead of qualifying. "I'm much better than last year when I was on the sofa." Marquez he told British broadcaster BT. "I arrive at an acceptable level. We'll see at race distance," he said, adding he had not been able to do any long practice sessions in the close season.

Marquez realistic on season goals

Marquez seemed torn between declaring that he would challenge for another championship and managing expectations,



LUSAIL: (Left to right) Pramac Racing's Spanish rider Jorge Martin, Aprilia Racing Team Gresini's Spanish rider Maverick Vinales, Ducati Lenovo Team's Australian rider Jack Miller, and Ducati Lenovo Team's Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia drive during the fourth free practice session yesterday. — AFP

not least his own. "I want to fight for the title, I cannot lie," he said, but he added: "This Qatar race, I know I don't have the performance or I don't have the level or it's not the right time to win... but you never know, we'll see."

"There are 21 races. It's a long season. We'll see." Reigning champion Fabio Quartararo will start in 11th position today, one row behind his closest rival last season Italian Bagnaia, who is in ninth place. Quartararo only sneaked into final session after being forced into the first qualifying and finishing second fastest to grab the last place in the 12-rider shootout for pole position.

The champion was consistently fast until the dash for the finish along first part of the 1.068km main straight coming out of the final corner. Before qualifying, Quartararo again complained about the

Yamaha's lack of top speed. "My big request was to increase top speed. Unfortunately we couldn't do that. Let's see if we can make a small step," he said, adding that he was "happy" overall with the bike. The Suzukis, who had dominated practice, had a disappointing qualifying. Spaniard Joan Mir was eighth and his compatriot Alex Rins was only 10th out of 24.

In Moto2 and Moto3, the first poles of the season went to Italy's Celestino Vietti (Kalex) and Spain's Izan Guevara (GAS-GAS). Like many sports bodies since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, MotoGP is displaying the words "United for peace" during its television broadcasts. Several riders are also wearing a "Give peace a chance" sticker on their helmets. The GP is the first of a record 21-race season climaxing in Valencia, Spain, on November 6. — AFP

Bayern held by Leverkusen 1-1

BERLIN: Thomas Mueller scored a bizarre own goal as Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich were held to a 1-1 draw by Bayer Leverkusen yesterday, while Angelino salvaged RB Leipzig a crucial point against top-four rivals Freiburg. Julian Nagelsmann's Bayern missed a chance to move 11 points clear at the top of the table, with second-placed Borussia Dortmund's match at Mainz postponed due to a COVID-19 outbreak in the hosts' squad.

But the Bavarian giants are still in pole position for a 10th straight league title. Third-placed Leverkusen remain four points clear of fifth-placed Freiburg in the race for a top-four finish and Champions League qualification. It appeared as though it would be business as usual for Bayern when centre-back Niklas Suele gave them an 18th-minute lead with his first Bundesliga goal of the season.

Leverkusen were gifted an equalizer nine minutes before half-time, though, in

strange circumstances. Kerem Demirbay's free-kick from the right wing was sailing straight to Bayern goalkeeper Sven Ulreich but Mueller, under no pressure, stretched full length to volley the ball into his own net. The visitors twice almost grabbed a shock lead before the interval, as Amine Adli struck the post before Ulreich made an excellent save to deny Charles Aranguiz a goal.

Bayern dominated in the second half but struggled to create many clear-cut chances, with Robert Lewandowski passing up the best opportunity for a winner when he headed wide 10 minutes from time. Nagelsmann's men will now turn their attentions to Tuesday and the Champions League last-16 second leg against Red Bull Salzburg, with the tie level at 1-1.

Elsewhere yesterday, RB Leipzig clung on to fourth place thanks to Angelino's 90th-minute goal in a 1-1 draw against Freiburg at the Red Bull Arena. The visitors led for the majority of the match after Ermedin Demirovic's first-half goal. But former Manchester City left-back Angelino's intervention kept Leipzig in fourth, above their opponents on goal difference. — AFP



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's defender Niklas Suele (right) and Leverkusen's French striker Moussa Diaby vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match between Bayern Munich and Bayer Leverkusen yesterday. — AFP