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Amir tells MPs Kuwait not immune to crisis fallout

MPs urge govt to stock enough quantities of anti-radiation iodine pills

Amir mourns passing of Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib



KUWAIT: Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib (pictured inset) is laid to rest at Sulaibikhat cemetery yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolence to the family of the late Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib, who passed away aged 95 on Sunday. In the cable, HH the Amir expressed his sincere condolences

as well as his gratitude to Dr Khatib's contributions to best serve the country throughout his career, especially in parliamentary work, through his membership in the Constituent Assembly.

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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday urged lawmakers to avoid disputes amid the highly delicate international situation, saying Kuwait is not immune to the effects of the Russia-Ukraine military confrontation. In a message to lawmakers conveyed by National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem during yesterday's emergency session, HH the Amir urged lawmakers to place Kuwait's national interests ahead of everything else and called on them to pay greater attention to safeguard Kuwait's security and political interests.

He also called on MPs to help solidify the internal front and avoid the use of constitutional tools in an excessive way. Ghanem read HH the Amir's message at the end of a special Assembly session to discuss the possible impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Kuwait and the region. The session was held behind closed doors at the request of the government.

At the end of the session, MPs submitted a set of recommendations to the government calling to stock a sufficient quantity of anti-radiation iodine pills to be given



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah after a closed session of the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

to the population in case of need. The lawmakers also urged the government to speed up the process of establishing a national committee for emergencies, crises and natural catastrophes. They also called on the government to use funds controlled by the Kuwait Investment Authority to

invest in strategic food projects and develop national warehouses to stockpile food.

Ghanem said after the session that the prime minister and ministers explained the government's readiness for any emergency that may result from the war.

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News in brief

Kuwait names new coach

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Football Association (KFA) Sheikh Ahmad Al-Youssef announced Czech Vitezslav Lavicka has signed a contract to manage the 'Blue Jerseys'. Sheikh Ahmad voiced hope that Lavicka will play a leading role in the national team's progress. With 20 years of experience, Lavicka managed his nation's U-21 team on two separate occasions. — KUNA

Zionists kill Palestinian teen

JERUSALEM: Zionist soldiers killed a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank Sunday, following the earlier police shooting of a Palestinian teen. The Palestinian health ministry said 16-year-old Yamen Jafal was shot dead "by the occupation forces". Just before dawn on Sunday, Zionist police shot dead a Palestinian teen, identified as Karim Jamal Al-Qawasm. Nine other Palestinians have been killed since Feb 8 in the West Bank. — AFP

Queen meets Trudeau in person

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II met visiting Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau yesterday, in her first in-person engagement since falling ill with COVID-19. The 95-year-old monarch, who is also queen of Canada, chatted with Trudeau after he jetted in for talks on the conflict in Ukraine with UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte. — AFP

BJP predicted to win UP

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was set for a resounding victory but a reduced majority at elections in the country's most populous state Uttar Pradesh, exit polls forecast yesterday. Results are also due in four other states. Exit polls also projected a landmark win for the upstart Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab. In the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, a close fight was anticipated between the incumbent BJP and Congress. — AFP

Ukraine rejects Russian offer of corridors

KYIV: Ukraine dismissed Moscow's offer to create humanitarian corridors from several bombarded cities yesterday after it emerged that exit routes would lead refugees into Russia or Belarus. The Russian proposal of safe passage for people from Kharkiv, Kyiv, Mariupol and Sumy came after terrified Ukrainian civilians came under fire in previous failed ceasefire attempts.

Violence raged 12 days into the war, even as a third round of peace negotiations was starting yesterday

and the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers eyed talks in Turkey later this week. The Russian invasion has pushed more than 1.5 million people across Ukraine's borders in what the UN calls Europe's fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II, and sparked fears of a wider conflict.

International sanctions intended to punish Moscow have done little to slow the invasion, and Washington said it was now discussing a ban on Russian oil imports with Europe. Oil prices soared to near a 14-year high on the developments while stock markets plunged.

As international pressure mounted over horrifying scenes of civilians cut down while fleeing, Moscow's defense ministry announced plans for

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IRPIN, Ukraine: A man helps a woman evacuee cross a destroyed bridge as she and others flee this city northwest of Kyiv yesterday. — AFP

Ex-boss of India bourse arrested in mystic scam

MUMBAI: The former chief executive of India's National Stock Exchange has been arrested, officials said yesterday, in a bizarre corporate misgovernance scandal featuring a supposed Himalayan yogi. Chitra Ramkrishna - a high-flying execu-

tive once feted as the "queen of the bourse" - allegedly took business advice from a mystic throughout her 2013-2016 tenure at one of the world's largest derivatives exchanges.

She was detained by Central Bureau of Investigation, India's equivalent of the FBI, in Delhi late Sunday, a senior officer told AFP. Spiritual leaders and "godmen" have long enjoyed vast followings in India and the business world is no exception in the highly religious nation of 1.4 billion people. A 190-page report released by regulators last month revealed damning details of

how Ramkrishna, 59, shared sensitive information with a spiritual adviser she supposedly met by the River Ganges.

The former boss of India's largest stock exchange "had abdicated all her powers to the unknown person" and "was merely a puppet in his hands", regulators said in the report, without identifying the yogi. Last month, federal police arrested Ramkrishna's former protégé Anand Subramanian, whom she hired and later promoted on an astronomical salary - despite him having no relevant experience - allegedly on the advice of the yogi.

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Chitra Ramkrishna

'Nightmare' of underage marriage for Morocco girls

TAMARWOUTE, Morocco: Nadia was just 16 when she was married off to a violent husband old enough to be her father - an ordeal thousands of Moroccan girls face every year due to a legal loophole. "I went through hell. But the nightmare is behind me now," she said. Nadia, from a remote part of the North African kingdom's Anti-Atlas mountains, managed to win a divorce after a year of marriage.

Now aged 20 and living back with her parents in her village of Tamarwoute, she is learning to read and write. "My dream is to be independent, and I'm encouraging other girls in the village to do the same," she said shyly, her face half-covered with a scarf. Like the other women with similar stories quoted in this article, her name has been changed to protect her identity.

Morocco's 2004 family code puts the legal age of marriage at 18, but it includes a clause allowing judges to give families special dispensation to marry off children under that age. Rights groups have long called for the loophole to be closed. But according to official figures, judges approved some 13,000 waivers in 2020 alone - more than half of the total applications.

That figure does not include minors wedded in

customary marriages, not recognized in law but sealed with a simple reading of a verse from the Holy Quran alongside two witnesses. Najat Ikchich of the YTTTO rights group says "this tragedy is widespread in remote, landlocked and marginalized areas". For the last 10 years, the association she heads has been taking an annual convoy through Morocco's remote mountain communities, stopping to raise awareness of the dangers of underage marriage, organize debates and distribute aid.

Precarious livelihoods and long-held traditions make the group's mission particularly sensitive. "It's delicate work because it's a taboo subject, so it's vital that we earn the trust of the people we're meeting and most of all, listen to them," Ikchich said.

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Local

Kuwait bids farewell to Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib

Kuwaiti, regional political icon dies at 95

KUWAIT: Influential Kuwaiti political figure Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib was laid to rest yesterday at the Sulaibikhat cemetery. A large number of mourners attended the funeral, led by National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and several Kuwaiti political figures. Dr Khatib, who played a key role in the country's independence and transition to a democratic parliamentary system as well as regional politics, passed away at 95 on Sunday.

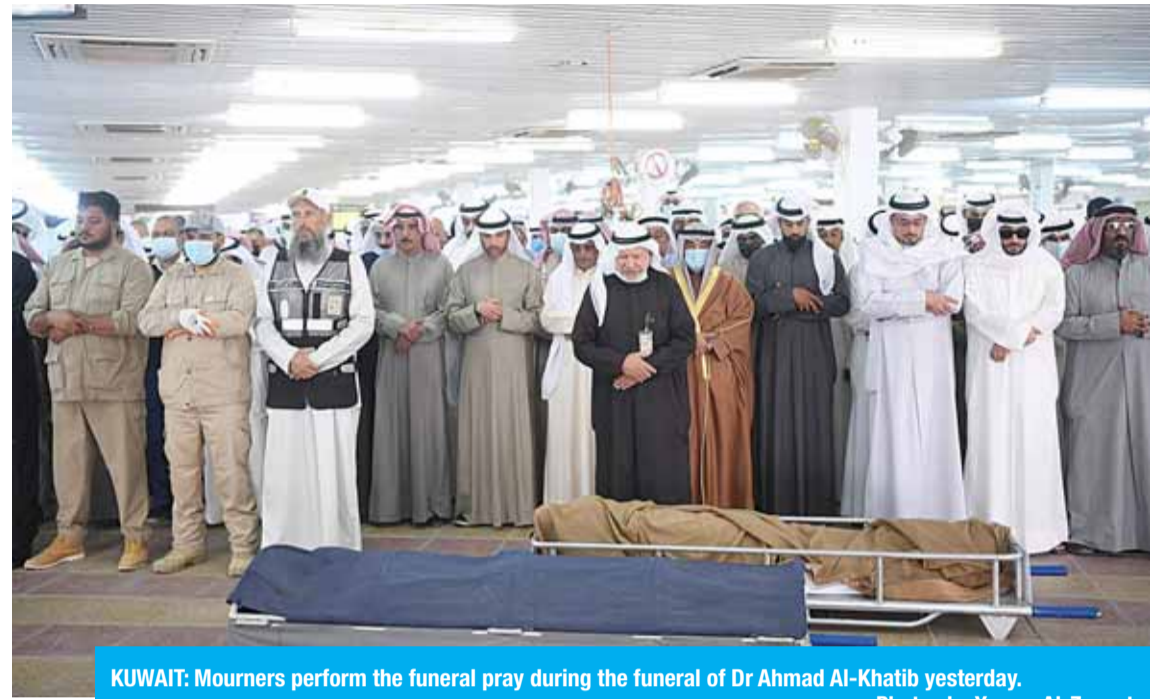
Born in Kuwait City in 1926, Dr Khatib began his academic life in three of the oldest schools in Kuwait - Al-Mubarakiyah, Al-Anjari and Al-Ahmadiyah - before making his mark in politics domestically and regionally. From Kuwaiti schools' early system of Al-Katatib, which focused on the teachings of the Quran, alongside basic writing and arithmetic, he moved to Lebanon, where he graduated from the American University in Beirut as the first surgeon in Kuwait's history in 1952. It is here he ventured into

political activism, establishing, along with several friends 'Al-Qawmeyeen Al-Arab' movement, translated as 'The Arab Nationalists' in 1951.

After Kuwait gained its independence in 1961, Dr Khatib, having had his own practice in the country after working for a number of years at the Amricani Hospital, became Vice President of the Constituent Assembly, which approved the Kuwaiti constitution in a decision made by the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, who sought to establish a democratic system and binding constitution emanating from the people. This developed into what we know today as the National Assembly, Kuwait's unicameral legislature. He was later elected a member of the first parliament in Kuwait in 1963, garnering the most votes in the country's first-ever legislative elections, and later attending as lawmaker numerous sessions between 1965 and 1992, eventually retiring from political life in 1996. —KUNA



First surgeon in Kuwait's history



KUWAIT: Mourners perform the funeral pray during the funeral of Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib yesterday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



The coffin of Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib is carried to his final resting place.



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem attends the funeral.



His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attends the funeral.



Former MP Saleh Al-Mulla (center) and other mourners attend the funeral.

Palestinian ambassador eulogizes 'Arab icon' Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub released a statement yesterday in which he expressed condolences on the passing of Kuwaiti political figure Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib. "In the name of the President of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization Executive Committee Mahmoud Abbas and on behalf of the Palestinian Community in Kuwait, I convey our sincere condolences on the passing of the late Dr Ahmad Al-Khatib to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Al-Jaber Al-

Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti people and the family of the late Dr Khatib," Tahboub said in the statement. "He was a patriotic symbol and one of the founders of the Arab nationalist movement. Palestine as well as Kuwait lost a great Arab icon who was among the strongest supporters of Palestine, its people and its cause. May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on Dr Khateeb."



Palestinian Ambassador Rami Tahboub

Kuwait Army launches drills at Fort Carson, Colorado



KUWAIT: The military exercises 'Eagle Resolve 2022' were launched at the 'Fort Carson' base in the US state of Colorado, under the guidance of Kuwait Army, with participation of GCC States, USA and friendly countries, and will continue for 14 days. In a statement, Kuwait Defense Ministry said yesterday that commanders and officers from various sectors of the Kuwaiti Army and the National Guard, a number of officers of the armed forces of the GCC countries, the US and some civil and security institutions from friendly countries are participating in the drill.

Meanwhile, Commander of the Joint Duty Force of the exercise 'Eagles Resolve 2022' Brigadier General Mubarak Al-Zoubi said that the exercise aims to strengthen the armed forces and exchange experiences in crises management and disasters, as well as confronting current and future challenges. It will unify field planning and implementation of participating units at all levels in the environment of non-military operations, he continued.

Brig Gen Zoubi highlighted the development of the coordination and cooperation level between ministries, institutions and government departments in crisis management. He explained how they are supporting the military and security operations, raising combat readiness to confront challenges and threats at the local and regional levels, and strengthening



defense cooperation between brotherly and friendly countries. He stated that the commanding and implementation of the exercise will be carried out through major command centers run by officers from the Kuwaiti army in cooperation with the participants from the Kuwaiti National Guard. He indicated that the exercise was prepared in the State of Kuwait and will be implemented in the United States of America in several stages, namely on how to operate planning procedures, and exercising of command centers and crisis management. The exercise 'Eagle Resolve 2022' is the 15th edition of the series of exercises which began in 1999 in the Kingdom of Bahrain. —KUNA

On the occasion of the



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Local

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.comLAPA organizes
events to
celebrate women

KUWAIT: Loyac Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA) announced presenting women in Kuwait with several workshops for free in March to celebrate them. The first workshop coincides with the International Women's Day today. The first program will be presented by LAPA CEO and creativity liberation trainer Fareah Al-Saqqaf. The program named "Bliss" is made of three parts and starts with the Chinese Tai Chi art which is known for improving the mood and raising energy levels, then a session of breathing and relaxation. The program concludes with a meditation and positive programming session. The program aims at enabling participants to achieve deep feeling of gratitude and comfort. This program will be followed by a drawing workshop on Thursday by Director of Formative Arts at LAPA Zainah Dabbous, as participants will come out with works of their own.

LAPA designated the following week for performance arts that starts with a physical expression workshop by Stan, then an acting workshop by actress Sarah Rashad on March 15th and 17th, respectively. The physical expression is a way to maintain physical fitness and harmony between body and awareness by all muscles and control movement. The acting workshop aims at motivating the imagination of participants and increasing their self-confidence and empty negative energy.

LAPA will conclude the woman's month activities with a rhythm workshop on March 22nd to celebrate Mother's Day. The workshop will be presented by Head of Music Department at LAPA Nisreen Nasser. Participants will learn several Arab and international rhythms and will play it on the Taar instrument. This workshop is a reminder for ladies on the importance of keeping rhythm in our lives despite all the noise around us as well as responsibilities.

All these workshops are within LAPA's campaign that was launched towards the end of December titled "art for all" out of its belief that arts are the right of all individuals and is a dire need following the pandemic and its psychological effect on everyone.



Fareah Al-Saqqaf



Zainah Dabbous



Nisreen Nasser

Kuwait releases rare pics of Britain's
Queen Elizabeth at seaside landmark

KUWAIT: A group photo taken following the inauguration of the exhibition yesterday. —KUNA photos

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti historian released yesterday never before seen pictures of Britain's Queen Elizabeth meandering around the ever-illuminous seaside landmark of Kuwait Towers. The photographs, displayed amid an exhibition marking Queen Elizabeth's 70th year on the British throne, depict the world's longest-reigning monarch, alongside her late husband Prince Philip, visiting Kuwait Towers mere days before the iconic site's official opening. —KUNA

Psychologist says seeking help for
mental health 'demonstrates maturity'

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Anger, irritation, frustration, anxiety and depression are just a few psychological issues many of us may have faced during the past two years of the pandemic. Anyone experiencing mental health challenges must visit the nearest psychological center in order to get the necessary help.

In an interview with Kuwait Times, Dr Zainab Khan Duryazai from Al-Razi Centre for Social and Psychological Counseling said people should consult their psychologists whenever any problem arises, especially if a person has undergone very traumatic experiences - from family-related issues to school bullying to even wars or pandemics. "Visiting a psychological center means you are acknowledging someone's help in order to manage mental difficulties, which normally occur when someone faces serious circumstances. The psychological center can help before it becomes a full-blown mental disorder - if it does, you need to see a psychiatrist," said Duryazai, who earned a US doctorate in psychology, holistic healing and hypnosis.

According to Duryazai, seeking help demonstrates maturity and acknowledging the wiser opinion of professional people. "If you want a balanced opinion of professional people who scientifically study mental health issues, better consult a psychologist first. If the patient is hallucinating and talking to themselves or imaginary people, then you need to visit a psychiatrist. We take responsibility for tracing the origin of mental disorders. If the issues can be corrected or rectified, we do that here in the center through a series of sessions," she said.

The common misconception of many is that psychologists and psychiatrists are the same. "Our jobs are not the same. People often confuse psychologists with psychiatrists (and vice versa). Yes, the titles may sound similar, we are trained to diagnose and treat individuals with psychological health conditions. However, psychologists and psychiatrists are not the same," Duryazai said.

"We are professionals in psychotherapy, hypnother-

apy and psychoanalysis. If the patients need medicines with mental health disorders, we refer them to a psychiatrist in a hospital. We will try to assess and evaluate before we send them to a psychiatrist," she underlined.

As a psychologist don't prescribe any kind of medicine but a psychiatrist can prescribe medicines. We can recommend the patient to a psychiatrist. "We are dealing with people who cannot cope with life because of traumatic experiences. Our mission is to help people recover and heal through counseling. For example, being locked down for almost a year had a psychological effect on different levels. Most of the time, people tend to fight back through anger, frustration or irritation. But there are some people who cannot cope, so small problems can lead to being unable to sleep at night, which could affect their mental capabilities. We can help at this stage through a series of counseling sessions," she added.

"Some people end up depressed and it affects their psychological wellbeing. The lockdown which we experienced last year challenged our state of mind and mental stability. During a pandemic, there are many anxieties and turmoil in life. Human minds need stability - if there is no stability and we are not sure what tomorrow brings, it can create lots of troubles in our minds," Duryazai said. "The coping mechanisms of some people are limited and there are some who cannot overcome the trauma. But there are many people who can overcome trauma in just a few weeks, every human is different with different capacities of coping."

According to Duryazai, children were also very vulnerable during the pandemic. "We are all triggered by the events unfolding around us and we are all affected. The impact is felt by children. For the past two years, our children had to do schooling from home without socialization and physical education. So most of them resist leaving the home. Parents are affected too - I call it a major disaster that will remain in our memories for a lifetime. Two years being forced to sit in front of computers at home is very distressing, but there is light at the end of the tunnel," she told Kuwait Times.

Kuwait celebrates
women's achievements
on Int'l Women's Day

KUWAIT: Kuwait is set to join the world in celebration of the International Women's Day today. The UN had been celebrating the day since 1975 to remember the women's social, political and economic achievements, as well as their struggle to gain their rights. In 1994, Kuwait signed the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), focusing on equality in accordance with the Kuwaiti constitution. The UN's 2030 development goals also include articles on women's rights. In the same context, Kuwait's late Amir His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah pledged Kuwait's commitment to enabling women, during his speech at the UN's sustainable development summit in 2015. Enabling women is also a part of Kuwait's 2035 vision. The Women's Research and Studies Center had been training women to occupy prominent leadership positions in the past four years, in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, the UN Development Programme and the UN organization for enabling women.

Kuwaiti women had been playing a great role in society since the pre-oil era, as she took care of her family on all levels as men went to dive for pearl for long months. After the discovery of oil, women joined educational institutes and occupied governmental jobs. During the Iraqi Invasion, Kuwaiti women in defending their country and fighting against Iraqi soldiers, where they were jailed, tortured and even killed for the sake of Kuwait. Women's sacrifices were recognized during the 1990 Jeddah conference, where Kuwait's men demanded to grant women their equal rights in all of the state's authorities. In 2005, women entered the ministerial formation for the first time ever. Kuwaiti women went on to occupy different top positions including minister, undersecretary, university dean, ambassador and chairperson of prominent economic companies. Since 2006 to 2021, women had been a part of every ministerial formation, even if by one or two ministers. In 2020, women became judges for the first time, while in 2021, the Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah issued the first of its kind order to allow women to join the army, to work in civil and medical jobs in the meantime. —KUNA

"When schools get back to normal, at least children can start the process of healing and can easily overcome the trauma and troubles of the pandemic. But adults are the decision makers; they work hard to find money for the family to put food on the table."

Mental health issues among expats are no different from locals. In 22 years of dealing with mental health issues in Kuwait, Duryazai has faced several issues related to mental disorders. "In Kuwait, I have dealt with several psychology disorders, from schizophrenia to bipolar disorder and conditions various types of phobias, sleeping disorders and OCD, among others," she said.

"Locals and expats have similar problems of broken marriages. These are difficult tasks to handle, but my first mission has always been to try to save marriages, and I will try to mediate for the sake of the children. When there's no solution for reconciliation, I try to talk to them to be civil with each other, at least for the sake of the kids. They are the most vulnerable and it affects their mental growth and abilities," Duryazai said.

Yoga or any kind of physical activities can help Duryazai replied in the affirmative. "I can talk about holistic approach because we are using these methods that can really help a lot of people. Other issues I normally deal with include behavioral and emotional disorders, clients experiencing difficulties related to depression, anxiety, stress, phobia, panic attacks, ageing and geriatric issues and obsessive-compulsive disorders, including grief counseling," she said.

Kuwait Times asked for advice for people facing issues with their jobs or relationships in Kuwait. "If you are facing troubles in coping with life I advise you to go back to rebuild your life with your family, relatives and friends even if it's required to go back to your home country do it. There is no replacement for the love of the family; be with them and create a happy life with them. This way you can have a diversion," Duryazai concluded.

Dr Zainab Khan
Duryazai



Virus chaos pushes more expats to join Hong Kong exodus

Abused refugee in Greece says 'no longer afraid to speak up'

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KYIV: Russian prisoners of war are presented to the press by Ukrainian Secret Services (SBU) at the Interfax press agency in Kyiv. —AFP

Ukraine parades captured Russian soldiers

Young Russians in green fatigues lined up before the press

KYIV: The Ukrainian military has paraded captured Russian soldiers before the media and made them recite repentances for their invasion, prompting the Red Cross to warn prisoners must not be mistreated. Eyes red, faces gaunt and in some cases scratched, 10 young Russians in green fatigues were lined up before the press and cameras at an event attended by AFP on March 4.

Some of them stared at their boots and avoided looking at the cameras, while others appeared more at ease. It was the second such act in a week organised by Ukraine's SBU intelligence service. Despite being widely recognised as the victim as Russia bombards its cities, Kyiv risks ceding moral ground over the February 24 Russian invasion to Moscow, which has accused it of torturing detainees.

"Prisoners of war and detained civilians must be treated with dignity," the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said in a statement. Prisoners "are absolutely protected against ill-treatment and exposure to public curiosity including images circulating publicly on social media," it said. The Ukrainian defence ministry and the SBU

did not respond to questions from AFP about their methods.

Presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovich called in an online video for "humane treatment of prisoners". He reminded viewers that Ukraine's western partners were watchful on the subject.

Speak to the camera

Blindfolded with tape, the soldiers were pushed along on single file, holding one another by the shoulders to keep from falling. They were then groomed and taken into a room where they were shown videos of Russian bombardments, while a Ukrainian officer named the cities being bombed.

"Look what your army is doing," the officer said. "They would tell your parents that you died on manoeuvres, not that you were here." Each soldier then faced the cameras and stated his name, his unit and how he had entered Ukraine.

Each said that he was voluntarily stepping up to condemn Russia's invasion—using the same phrases as the other soldiers. Each soldier said he was being well treated and ended by calling on Russians

not to believe their President Vladimir Putin's "lies".

Russia has not reacted specifically to these appearances, but more generally its defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov on February 27 said Russian prisoners of war were facing "torture". He compared them to victims of "the German Nazis and their henchmen".

Calling prisoners' mothers

The Ukrainian military has set up a website to arrange for the mothers of captured Russian soldiers to come to pick them up in Ukraine, via the Polish border. "Unlike Putin's fascists, we Ukrainians do not make war against mothers and their captured children," Ukraine's defence ministry said in a statement.

Ukraine's military command said 200 Russian prisoners of war have been captured since February 24. Russia's defence ministry in turn says it has captured 572 Ukrainians. The figures cannot be verified. The ICRC told AFP it could not exercise its right under the Geneva Convention to visit the prisoners because of the current fighting. —AFP

Poland opens doors as refugee count hits a million

MEDYKA, Poland: Faced with the influx of a million refugees fleeing Russian troops in Ukraine, Poles like Nicolas Kusiak, a 27-year-old manager, have rallied in an ever expanding humanitarian response. They have taken in refugees, offered food and transport and above all a little human kindness to the distraught and traumatised women and children who have had to leave their men folk behind to fight.

"It's beginning to get organised," Kusiak told AFP near the Medyka border post—a frequently clogged crossing point near the Ukrainian city of Lviv. Kusiak, a Pole born in France who speaks several languages, has been helping as a translator ever since he arrived at the border four days ago.

He also brought tents, generators, heaters and food with him from Warsaw and has tried to coordinate police, doctors, firefighters and the volunteers doing out hot soups—a daunting challenge. "Everyone is trying to do everything," he said. The government has set up reception centres and charities up and down the country have mobilised in a massive aid effort, helped by the estimated 1.5 million Ukrainians already living in Poland.

'We don't have enough places'

Polish border guards on Sunday said the number of people crossing since Russian troops advanced into Ukraine on February 24 had reached a million, saying this was "a million human tragedies". At the main train station in Krakow in southern Poland, a temporary reception centre has been set up and hundreds could be seen arriving.

The reception centre "is really full and we have lots of people here all the time.... We don't have enough places," said volunteer Anna Lech, 45. But Maja Mazur, another volunteer, said spaces were being offered in the city where refugees could have some food, a hot drink and "stay for a day or two".

Many are continuing their journeys on to western Europe. "I came from Kharkiv with my family, with my two sons and my parents," said Anna Gimpelson, an architect from the frontline city of Kharkiv. "Our city is going through really awful times. We have bombs everywhere and our neighbour's house doesn't exist any more," she said.

"For three days we were on the road and now are going to my friend's in Dusseldorf. Maybe we will spend some time there and think what to do next." The UN has said that a total of more than 1.5 million people have fled Ukraine and it expects the number could go up to four million.

"Our main challenge today is to prepare infrastructure to be ready to take in a wave of refugees whose size we cannot predict," said Michal Dworzyczyk, a top Polish government official. The Polish branch of Amnesty International meanwhile appealed on Facebook for Poland not to forget about migrants from the Middle East who are still stranded between Belarus and Poland. It called the unequal treatment of foreigners based on their nationality a "massive injustice"—AFP

Turkish women fight femicide

ISTANBUL: A group of female activists prepare banners ahead of a march in Istanbul: "Keep the feminist rebellion going", reads one, "We don't have to stick to your taboos", says another.

The mood is cheery, but the reason for the gathering is not. They were readying for a rally today — International Women's Day — to protest femicide and urge Turkey to rejoin a Europe-wide convention protecting women from violence.

"March 8 is an occasion for many women to make their voices heard," activist Kubra Karagoz, 31, told AFP. "The streets and squares belong to women, despite all the pressure to drive them away," she said, kneeling down to write on a purple canvas.

'Incompatible'

Turkey has seen a groundswell of feminist protests after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan abruptly pulled out of the Istanbul Convention last year. Turkey was the first country to sign the convention in 2011, which laid the way for a legal framework to tackle, prevent and prosecute violence against women. Ankara justified the withdrawal by saying the treaty had a hidden agenda to normalise homosexuality, in part because of its broad ban on discrimination, including based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

The LGBTQ movement is "incompatible" with Turkey's social and family values, government spokesman Fahrettin Altun said. The move is still

haunting women who complain of being deprived of legal guarantees in Turkey, where females won the right to vote in national elections in 1934 — well ahead of many European nations and 10 years before France. The pull-out has prompted huge demonstrations, some that have seen clashes with police spraying tear gas at protesters.

The majority of women in the country are familiar with the treaty, according to Canan Gullu, who heads the Federation of Women's Associations of Turkey. "For us, it's still in place," she says.

'Volunteer activists'

Turkey has seen an uptick in femicides in recent years. Last year, 416 women were killed, according to the We Will Stop Femicide Platform. So far this year, 72 have been killed. Many are murdered by partners and relatives, and some have sparked uproar. In February this year, Huseyin Can Gokcek murdered his 16-year-old fiancée Sila Senturk in the northern city of Giresun after her family allegedly forced her into the relationship. Well-known screenwriter Gani Mujde joined a chorus of condemnation, saying those who let her be killed should "drown in the blood of child brides".

"Let the light in this girl's eyes blind those who got the 16-year-old engaged and left her alone with her murderer," Mujde said. Gullu said women are now at the forefront of the battle for better protection. "The women's movement has achieved social awareness, which is our pride, the result of standing upright," she told AFP.

"We don't have a mercenary army. We are not putting anyone out on the street by giving out money. There are volunteer activists from all sides in this movement."

In the wake of the Istanbul Convention with-

More than 500 infections were reported across mainland China yesterday, the most since China's initial outbreak in the central city of Wuhan was brought under control in the middle of 2020. The spike comes as cases spiral out of control across the border in the southern Chinese territory of Hong Kong, where hospitals have been overflowing with patients and locals are panic-buying fearing a lockdown.

Questions have been raised about the sustainability of China's heavy-handed control strategy coupled with concerns about the efficacy of Chinese vaccines. COVID-19 was first detected in China in late 2019 and since then Beijing has responded to each local outbreak with harsh snap lockdowns and mass testing along with state-mandated tech to track people's movements.



ISTANBUL, TURKEY: Activists paint banners and placards as they prepare for a feminist march to mark International Women's Day in Beyoglu district in Istanbul. —AFP

drawal, Erdogan has promised a legal reform package of hefty sentences for violence against women.

The bill will come to full parliament floor "as soon as possible," he said at a women's event last week. But activists say it's not enough, and want the convention restored.

"There's no point in stiffening penalties. Our problem is that the laws are not being implemented," said Elif Ege, 35, who describes herself as an independent feminist. Human rights lawyer Nesibe Kiris said the withdrawal sends a clear message to perpetrators, offering "an escape from justice, and legitimacy to commit such crimes". But she added that women are more mobilised than ever to "influence society and politicians and thus impact judicial rulings". For Gullu, the battle may be uphill, but she insists that violence "is not destiny." "Women are the homeland of women. We will support each other. We'll remind women they are not helpless," she said. "We will stand side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder, and win this fight." —AFP

In Hong Kong there has been mixed messaging about whether officials will follow the mainland's lockdown policy and there have also been signs that Beijing is reconsidering zero-COVID. A top Chinese scientist said last week that the country should aim to co-exist with the virus and could move away from the zero-tolerance strategy "in the near future".

However, National People's Congress spokesman Zhang Yesui poured cold water on that idea Friday ahead of China's annual parliamentary meetings where policies are set for the coming year. "The path is correct and results are good," Zhang said. "Any prevention and control measures will have some costs, but compared to protecting people's lives and health, these costs are worth it." —AFP

China's zero-COVID policy under pressure as fresh cases rise

BEIJING: China yesterday reported its highest number of coronavirus cases in two years as clusters emerged in more than a dozen cities, posing a fresh challenge to Beijing's zero-COVID policy. The country's borders remain mostly closed as policymakers continue to pursue the zero-tolerance approach even as many parts of the world turn to living with the virus.

International

Abused refugee in Greece says 'no longer afraid to speak up'

'Our goal is to give them a sense of safety and strength'

ATHENS, Greece: For Congolese asylum-seeker Ruth, the fact her husband beat her was something she used to keep a tightly guarded secret. Like so many abused women, the 23-year-old mother-of-three's suffering remained shrouded in silence. "My husband was violent but I had been hiding it for a long time. Then one day, I couldn't lie, my face was scarred by the beatings," she said.

"A social worker helped me and found me a place in this centre", murmurs Ruth, who did not want to give her full name, still upset. "Being a woman has often been synonymous with hardship for me, but today I am no longer afraid to speak up."

The intervention of the social worker resulted in Ruth finding shelter and help in Athens. "The difficulties have not destroyed me. Today I am moving forward", the young mother of three sons aged five, three and nine months old tells AFP.

Holding her restless youngest child in one hand, she explains that she was "saved" two-and-a-half months ago after being transferred from the Elaionas migrant camp on the outskirts of Athens. Now, she is trying to recover thanks to the "A Step Forward" programme, set up by the NGO Doctors of the World in collaboration with fund operator Sol Crowe and Human Rights 360, with European funds.

The programme operates a reception centre for vulnerable women asylum-seekers and their children providing housing, counselling, healthcare and education while they apply for asylum. Since June 2021, it has welcomed more than 40 single women with children, mostly from the Democratic Republic of Congo, sub-Saharan Africa and Afghanistan.

"All the women who come here are victims of violence. Some have suffered rape, physical violence, others were

oppressed by their families who prevented them, for example, from studying," notes Evi Papayianni, the social worker in charge of the centre.

'A sense of safety'

"Our goal is to give them a sense of safety, strength and also to make them understand that they have rights. "If for Greek women, filing a complaint is difficult, for foreign women this is even more so!" Papayianni adds.

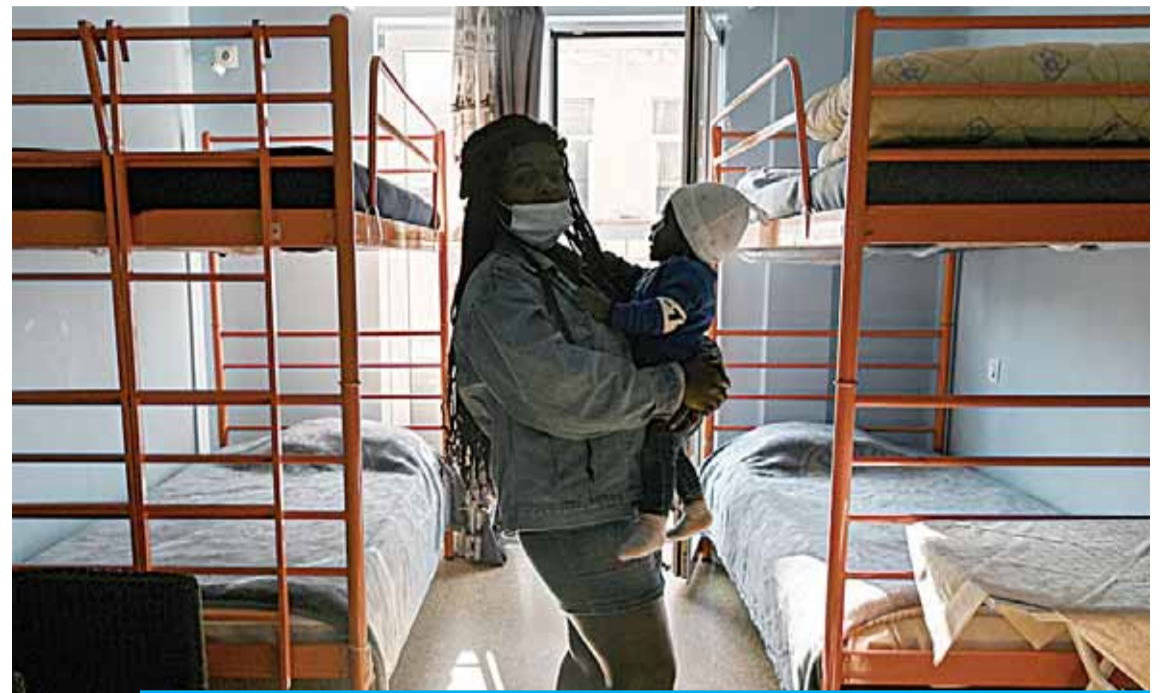
Psychological help, seminars on violence against women and their rights, language courses, yoga, drawing... asylum-seekers can take advantage of a wide range of services as they wait to obtain their documents. Then there is help to find a job or put them contact with other organisations which can help them.

In a just few months, Papayianni says, the women can see their lives transformed and regain their confidence. "When I first met Ruth, she was very withdrawn and her children were scared, they didn't speak. Now they are smiling, they are getting back their hunger for life," she says.

For Ruth, "the most important thing is to talk, to free yourself from your past". "I'm still disturbed, I had trouble concentrating but the psychologist and the sports sessions are helping me," she says. After losing her parents in Congo, the young woman explains she "no longer had any protection". "I lived on the street, I suffered sexual violence. Then I found my husband. He sold his house, we flew to Istanbul," she says, looking at her sons with a protective gaze.

Vulnerable but brave

From Turkey, the family then began the "dangerous journey". "I thought we were never going to get to Lesbos.



ATHENS, Greece: Ruth, a Congolese asylum-seeker, victim of domestic violence, holds the youngest of her three sons in a shelter for abused refugee women, run by the NGO Doctors of the World (Medecins du monde, MDM), in Athens. —AFP

The dinghy was overloaded, two people fell overboard during the journey," she recalls. On February 7, 2021, when they landed on the Greek island a few kilometres from the Turkish coast, the police were waiting for them and tried to get them to re-embark in order to send them back to Turkey, Ruth says.

Out of the 30 passengers, 18 managed to hide for 10 hours and get registered in the Mavrovouni camp, she adds. NGOs accuse Greek border officers of illegal push-

backs of migrants. But Athens vehemently denies the claims, insisting its coastguard saves lives at sea.

"All that belongs to the past. Now I'm thinking about my future. I would like to go back to school and become a midwife," Ruth says. And as Women's Day approaches, she wonders: "Are we more vulnerable? In a way yes, I've been through a lot because I'm a woman, but I've always had the courage to keep fighting." Then, she pauses and adds: "No, we women, we are strong!" —AFP



'Most important thing is to talk, to free yourself from your past'

Iran seeks 'details' of Russian demands on nuclear deal

TEHRAN: Iran said yesterday it was awaiting "details" on Russia's demands for US guarantees that could potentially delay reaching an agreement in talks aiming to restore Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Saturday that Moscow wants written guarantees from Washington that Western sanctions imposed on it over the Ukraine conflict will not affect its economic and military cooperation with Tehran, ahead of any conclusion of a revived Iran nuclear deal.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday dismissed these demands as "irrelevant". Sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine "have nothing to do with the Iran nuclear deal", he said on CBS talk show "Face the Nation."

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said Monday "we have also seen and heard Mr Lavrov's remarks in the media." "We are waiting to hear the details of that through diplomatic channels," he added, during his weekly news conference.

"Iran's peaceful nuclear cooperation should not be affected or restricted by any sanctions, including Iran's peaceful nuclear cooperation with Russia, China and other countries," he said. Russia, which was slapped with wide-ranging economic sanctions by the US and the EU following its invasion of Ukraine, is party to ongoing talks in Vienna aimed at reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, along with Britain, China, France and Germany. The United States is participating indirectly.

The 2015 agreement gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme, but the US unilaterally withdrew from it in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump who reimposed heavy economic sanctions on Tehran. That prompted Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments. The Vienna talks aim to return the US to the nuclear deal and lift sanctions on Iran, while Tehran would in turn return to full compliance with its commitments.

As with the original agreement, Moscow is expected to play a key role in the implementation of any fresh deal with Tehran, for example by receiving shipments of enriched uranium from Iran. "Russia's approach so far has been a constructive one in order to reach a collective agreement in Vienna," Khatibzadeh stressed. —AFP

Pro-Ukraine protests sweep Europe

BRUSSELS: Thousands of demonstrators on Sunday took to the streets in cities across Europe for the second weekend running to protest against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Moscow's assault on its pro-Western neighbour on February 24 has sparked global condemnation and an outpouring of solidarity with Kyiv as the West inflicts harsh sanctions, some directed against Russian President Vladimir Putin himself.

Rallies were again organised across the continent following demonstrations on Saturday to denounce Russia's actions and demand an end to the conflict. In Brussels, police said around 5,000 people took part in a rally marked by a sea of Ukrainian flags and chants of "Russians, go home!", "No to war" and "Europe, be brave, act now!".

Protesters in the French city of Toulouse—which is twinned with Ukraine's capital Kyiv—assembled behind a large yellow and blue banner, holding portraits showing a bloodstained Putin and

labelling him an assassin. Cries of "close the airspace" and "Let's protect Ukraine's sky" resounded through the city, a reference to Kyiv's demand that NATO establish a no-fly zone to prevent Russian aircraft contributing to Moscow's onslaught.

Around 5,000 people also gathered in the northern city of Caen by a memorial commemorating the 1944 D-Day landings, a key turning point in the battle against Nazi Germany in World War II. The Ukrainian flag was hoisted and many attendees sported the yellow and blue colours of the Ukrainian flag, an AFP correspondent saw. "People of Ukraine, we won't desert you! Democracy, freedom, peace," read one placard.

'Close the sky, not your eyes!'

In Spain, protests unfolded in the capital Madrid, Barcelona and other cities across the country. Authorities said about 800 people congregated in Barcelona's central square with banners saying "Close the sky, not your eyes", "NATO, protect Ukraine's sky" and "Stop Putin, stop the war". "They are attacking, destroying and killing civilians for no reason," Ukrainian Natalia Brodovska, who has lived in Spain for eight years, told AFP. "It's horrible, we can't sleep or eat. I think all Ukrainians feel that. But the situation of my people who are in Ukraine is a lot worse," the 45-

Germany looks to reform Nazi-era abortion laws

BERLIN: After years of controversy and criticism from gynaecologists, Germany is planning to scrap a Nazi-era law that limits information on abortion, while access to the procedure in the country remains beset by obstacles. The Social Democrats, Greens and the Free Democrats, ruling together as a government since December, promised in their coalition agreement to scratch from the statute books one of the most controversial sections of the penal code.

Paragraph 219a, adopted in 1933 shortly after Adolf Hitler had taken power, prohibits the "promotion" of abortion, a crime punishable by "up to two years of imprisonment or a fine". It is on this basis that courts have in recent years handed out penalties to medical professionals offering information on pregnancy terminations on the internet.

In some cases, the sites offered a simple statement that the gynaecologist carries out abortions, with no further details. But an end came a step closer after the Justice Minister Marco Buschmann put forward draft legislation at the start of the year to remove the paragraph, though it

has yet to be voted on in the Bundestag.

Strictly limited

Among the doctors prosecuted in recent years is Kristina Haenel, a general practitioner from Giessen in western Germany, who became the face of the campaign to ditch the law after being fined 6,000 euros (\$6,558). Her legal misadventures created a sensation in the media, reminding Germans that abortion remains severely restricted in law. The many pitfalls for practitioners dissuade doctors from offering the procedure in a country that was at the forefront of the women's rights movement in the 1970s. In June 2019, two gynaecologists in Berlin, Bettina Gaber and Verena Weyer, were each also handed two-thousand-euro fines for the same offence.

"I'm pleased that taking an informed decision will now be possible" for pregnant women, Haenel said when the plan to remove the law was announced. Anti-abortion militants, who organise themselves online, are behind most of the complaints made against medical professionals, while one activist was recently convicted for comparing abortion to the Holocaust.

Under pressure from campaigners, many medics have removed all relevant information from their websites and have declined to be included in family planning lists shared with women looking to end their pregnancies. The outcry that came in response to the



BELGRADE, Serbia: People wave Russian and Serbian flags during a rally organised by Serbian right-wing organisations in support of Russian invasion in Ukraine, in Belgrade. —AFP

year-old lawyer said.

Thousands of Russians defied the authorities and around 2,500 were detained on Sunday for protesting against the war. A police spokeswoman said 1,700 people were arrested in Moscow after around 2,500 took part in an "unsanctioned protest", while 750 were detained at a smaller rally of around 1,500 people in the second-largest city, Saint

Petersburg, Russian news agencies reported.

OVD-Info, which monitors detentions at opposition protests, put the figure of detainees in 49 towns and cities across Russia at 2,575 people and said police used electric shockers on protesters. The latest detentions brought the total number of demonstrators held to more than 10,000 since the invasion began. —AFP



BERLIN, Germany: File photo shows a protester holding up a sign reading "My Body my choice - the right to abortion" during a demonstration against violence against women called by women's right organisation "Terre des Femmes" in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. —AFP

prosecutions led Angela Merkel's government to relax legislation slightly, allowing gynaecologists and hospitals to indicate online that they offered abortions.

Specifying what methods were used was, however, still prohibited, a compromise solution that did not satisfy practitioners. Opposition from within Merkel's own Christian Democrats had prevented the paragraph from being struck from the penal

code completely. Removing the paragraph would mean no longer being able to tell "whether the advertisement came from a cosmetic clinic or an abortion clinic", said Merkel's party colleague Helge Braun, one of her closest aides and who is himself a doctor.

In Germany, a woman wishing to have an abortion in the first 12 weeks of her pregnancy must have an obligatory consultation at an approved centre. —AFP

300 Haitian migrants land in Florida

MIAMI: Some 300 Haitian migrants reached the United States Sunday after their wooden boat ran aground near a

Florida Keys private club, local authorities said. The packed boat beached around 1300 GMT near Ocean Reef, an upscale private club in North Key Largo, on the southern tip of Florida, said the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, cited by the Miami Herald.

"Initial reports show the (people) involved in this suspected smuggling venture are Haitian," said the US Coast Guard on Twitter. Chief Patrol Agent

Walter N. Slosar of the US Border Patrol said multiple agencies were responding to a "dangerous situation in the Florida Keys involving approximately 300 migrants... many in need of medical attention." He said 163 of those on the boat had swum to shore, sharing a photo on Twitter of the vessel crowded with people and listing sharply to one side. Another picture showed some 20 people wrapped in striped towels clustered on

the shore, piles of what appear to be wet clothes nearby.

US Customs and Border Protection in the state announced the opening of an investigation into what it called a "maritime smuggling event." The arrival was the third time US authorities had detained Haitian migrants trying to reach the United States in a week.

On Friday, the Coast Guard intercepted 123 people on board a small vessel off

Anguilla Cay, in the western Bahamas, and last Sunday, it detained more than 140 people off the coast of Andros, the largest island in the Bahamas.

Human smugglers are known to use the Bahamas—a group of islands near the Florida coast—as a jumping-off point for getting people, many from other Caribbean countries such as Haiti, into the United States, in what can often be a treacherous journey. —AFP

International

Virus chaos pushes more expats to join Hong Kong exodus

‘We want to get our children out of here above all’

HONG KONG: For the last eight years Mathilde and her family have called Hong Kong home, but as the coronavirus tears through the city they are joining an exodus of foreign workers looking for an escape route.

“We are leaving and we will come back to empty our house whenever that is possible,” she told AFP, declining to give her surname and nationality. “All our close friends are leaving.”



“All our close friends are leaving”

For Mathilde it was the risk of being separated from her three Hong Kong-born children that was the final straw after two years of tough “zero-Covid” restrictions. “We want to get our children out of here above all,” she said. Hong Kong used mainland China’s “zero-COVID” strategy to keep the virus at bay, until the highly infectious Omicron variant broke through at the start of the year.

But while other places that deployed similar tactics such as Australia, New Zealand and Singapore are learning to live with the virus, Hong Kong is doubling down — even as it records tens of thousands of new infections each day. The city has been ordered by China, the only major economy still pursuing zero-COVID, to curb the outbreak at all costs. All 7.4 million residents will be tested later this month and authorities are building a network of isolation camps to house the infected, deepening fears that families will be separated in the months ahead. As a result, departures have skyrocketed with a net outflow of 71,000 people — including 63,000 residents — in February, the highest since the pandemic began.



COLOMBO: File photo shows a string of blasts ripped through high-end hotels and churches holding Easter services in Sri Lanka on April 21, 2021 killing at least 150 people, including 35 foreigners.

Sri Lanka cardinal seeks UN probe into Easter massacre

GENEVA: The head of Sri Lanka’s Roman Catholic Church yesterday urged the United Nations to investigate the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings that killed 279 people, calling the massacre a “political plot”.

In an address to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith demanded a mechanism to probe the attacks, which have been blamed on local Islamic radicals. “The first impression of this massacre was that it was purely the work of a few Islamic extremists,” Ranjith said. “However, subsequent investigations indicate that this massacre was part of a grand political plot.” The Church has previously suggested that the attacks, which targeted three churches and three hotels in Colombo in April 2019, helped Gotabaya Rajapaksa win the presidential elections in November the same year. The government has not responded to the Church’s accusations.

Ranjith, who initially supported Rajapaksa’s election as president, said there were attempts by the government “to harass and intimidate those who clamour for justice”. Catholic priests have been summoned and questioned at length by the Criminal Investigations Department over statements critical of the slow progress in investigations.

“Nearly three years after the horrendous crime, we are still in the dark as to what really happened on that Easter Sunday,” the cardinal said. His address to the UN Council came a week after meeting with the pope. Sri Lanka is on the agenda of the UN’s top rights body at the moment for a separate reason. Last year it set up a mechanism to gather evidence linked to alleged war crimes during the final stages of the island’s Tamil separatist conflict, which ended in May 2009.

Allegations that Sri Lankan troops killed at least 40,000 Tamil civilians in the final months of the war go back to a period when Rajapaksa was the top defence official under his elder brother president Mahinda.

Both have denied allegations of war crimes. “We earnestly call upon the UNHRC and all its member countries to support the continuation of evidence gathering initiated by the Council last year and to devise a means to ensure an investigation to unravel the truth behind the Easter Sunday massacre,” the cardinal said. Last month, Sri Lanka’s High Court acquitted two top officials accused of “crime against humanity” for failing to prevent the Easter Sunday bombings. — AFP

‘No road map’

Travel restrictions have been hard on Hong Kong’s foreign workers, who make up nearly 10 percent of the population. Borders have been effectively sealed to visitors and residents who do return have faced two to three weeks in expensive hotel quarantines throughout most of the pandemic.

“If there was a road map and we knew that there’s some light at the end of the tunnel we might stay,” said Heiko, a German entrepreneur who works in artificial intelligence. “Since this is not the case... we’ve decided to leave.” Heiko’s youngest daughter recently celebrated her second birthday. “Her entire life has been a sequence of lockdowns, multiple stays in quarantine hotels, closed playgrounds and closed kindergartens. She’s met her grandparents only once,” he sighed. Lucy Porter Jordan, a sociologist at the University of Hong Kong, said that, before Omicron, Hong Kong “had the restrictions but you also had the safety”.

“If you take that out of the equation, you end up with this kind of perfect storm.” Most of those leaving, she added, were people with children and “people that have the means”. Over the last fortnight Hong Kong has looked more like New York or London at the start of the pandemic than a city which had two years of hard-won breathing room to get ready.

The government was caught flat-footed with few plans in place to deal with a mass Omicron-fuelled outbreak. Hospitals and morgues were quickly overwhelmed and the city’s current death rate is four times Singapore’s, mostly accounted for by unvaccinated elderly residents. Panic buying has stripped shelves bare, schools remain shuttered and summer holidays have been brought forward so classrooms can be used for mass testing.

Talent drain

Companies and industry groups have been increasingly public in their talent-drain warnings. The European Union’s local office estimates 10 percent of its nationals have left since the pandemic began.



HONG KONG: Expat families line up at the check-in counter as they prepare to depart Hong Kong’s Chek Lap Kok international airport as travel restrictions hit hard on Hong Kong’s white collar “expat” foreign workers, who make up roughly 10 percent of the population with borders effectively sealed to visitors and residents who do return have faced 2-3 weeks in expensive hotel quarantines throughout most of the pandemic. — AFP

Multiple airlines have reported a surge of bookings in recent weeks while shipping container prices have doubled in a year. International shipping company SendMyBag told AFP outbound shipments from Hong Kong have increased four-fold compared with 2021.

“Everybody is looking for tickets to go, people are fighting for the containers,” said Lin, a mother of two grown children who declined to give her nationality.

Lin is looking to move to Dubai after 12 years in Hong Kong and said many of her colleagues were doing the same. “A friend who’s leaving next week had a three-year-old BMW and she said ‘You know what,

I’m just giving it to charity because no one will buy it anyway.’” The current exodus adds to a wave of migration already under way of local Hong Kongers, which began after China cracked down against democracy protests.

Between June 2020 and June 2021 Hong Kong saw its biggest population decrease in 60 years, and there is little sign of that changing. “We are now only in the starting period of this wave,” said Chung Kim-wah, head of Hong Kong’s Public Opinion Research Institute. “Many more young people will choose to move away if they have a chance.” — AFP

Ukraine war a ‘moment of choice for China’: Scott

SYDNEY: Australia’s prime minister called Russia’s invasion of Ukraine “a moment of choice for China” Monday, urging Beijing to end its tacit political and economic support for the war. Scott Morrison pressed China to shape the actions of its Russian ally and prove that Beijing is committed to global peace and the principle of sovereignty. “No country would have a greater impact right now on Russia’s violent aggression towards Ukraine than China,” Morrison told the Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based foreign policy think tank. “The crisis that now grips Europe heralds a moment of choice for China,” he said.

Presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping met in Beijing days before the war in Ukraine began, pledging friendship with “no limits”. Since then, China has avoided direct criticism of the war, expressed sympathy for Russia’s jus-

tifications and refused to join Western sanctions. Morrison accused Beijing of throwing Russia “an economic lifeline” by relaxing trade restrictions on the import of Russian wheat. He also voiced concern that a Chinese firm may step in to replace Visa and Mastercard services that have been frozen in Russia.

“Today we even hear of UnionPay’s potential involvement out of China in supporting a payment system in Russia,” he said. Morrison has led a government increasingly at loggerheads with China’s leadership. The address delivered remotely as the prime minister isolated at home with COVID-19 — served as a preview of his election stump speech, with Australians set to go to the polls within the next three months. Morrison laid out a number of concerns about China’s actions closer to home, including “the militarisation of disputed features in the South China Sea” and growing tensions in the Taiwan Strait. He also promised that his government would build a new submarine base on Australia’s east coast in the wake of his country joining the AUKUS partnership alongside the United States and Britain. A key element of the partnership is the transfer of knowledge from the US and Britain about nuclear-powered submarine technology—a move that has garnered criticism from Beijing.—AFP

China open to mediating on Ukraine

BEIJING: China stressed yesterday that the friendship between Beijing and Moscow was still “rock solid”, despite international condemnation of Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine, as Beijing said it was open to helping mediate peace.

China has refused to condemn its close ally Moscow after only last month touting a “no limits” strategic partnership between the two countries. “The friendship between the two peoples is rock solid, and both sides’ future cooperation prospects are very vast,” said Foreign Minister Wang Yi at a press briefing during the Chinese leadership’s annual political congress in Beijing.

But he said China was “willing to work with the international community to carry out necessary mediation, when necessary”. The European Union’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said last week that China should mediate future peace talks between Russia and Ukraine as Western powers cannot fulfill the role, in an interview with Spanish daily El Mundo. Beijing has repeatedly said it would play a “constructive role in calling for negotiations” to resolve the crisis, but has not previously committed to joining or hosting any peace talks. Wang also said China would send humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

Economic ties

The foreign minister described the China-Russia relationship as “the world’s most crucial bilateral relationship”, which “is conducive to world peace, stability and development”. He referred to last month’s China-Russia partnership commitment as “clearly and unmistakably showing the world” that both countries “jointly oppose the revival of the Cold War mentality and stoking ideological confrontations”.

This month, 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. And Russian banks said Sunday they planned to issue cards using China’s UnionPay system after Visa and Mastercard moved to suspend operations amid unprecedented sanctions on Moscow.—AFP



SEOUL: This picture taken on March 1, 2022 shows South Korea’s presidential candidate Lee Baek-yoon (L on the vehicle) of the Labor Party speaking during an election campaign in Seoul ahead of the March 9 presidential election. — AFP

S Korea’s long-shot presidential candidates

SEOUL: From a wealthy businessman who wants to unify the Korean peninsula to a heavily indebted ex-automotive offering socialism to the masses, South Koreans have a plethora of choices in Wednesday’s presidential election. Of the 12 candidates in the running, only two — from the country’s main political parties — have a real chance of winning. Even so, minor-party candidates refuse to give up their dreams. The wealthy country, Asia’s fourth-largest economy, has been divided from its communist neighbour North Korea since the Korean War of the 1950s, and the idea of reunification has long since ceased to be a vote-winner.

Enter presidential candidate number 13, Lee Kyeung-hee of the fringe Korean Unification Party. For a decade, the businessman has poured billions of won into running for the country’s top job, on a platform of reuniting the peninsula. “Unification is the biggest issue,” he told AFP at a small rally featuring a student dance group, saying South Korea has hit the limits of economic growth as a divided nation.

The major parties differ in their approach to North Korea, with the incumbent Democratic party in favour of dialogue and the People Power party more hawkish, but neither proposes reunification. Under outgoing President Moon Jae-in, there was a volley of high-level diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang’s leader Kim Jong Un, including three inter-Korean summits, plus summits with then US president Donald Trump.

But talks collapsed and have remained stalled since, while North Korea ramps up weapons testing. Lee said that, should he become president, he would “hold an inter-Korean summit every Tuesday at 10 am”.

Socialism, at a price

Lee is independently wealthy and has funded his repeated runs for office with his own cash, but candidate number 7 Lee Baek-yoon of the Labor Party told AFP he had taken out bank loans to pay for his presidential dreams. From the “donation” each candidate must make to get on the ballot to the cost of campaign materials, running for office is expensive and, unless a candidate wins 15 percent of the vote, it is not covered by the state.

“I’m using only the minimum amount of money that I really need to spend, and I still owe a lot right now,” Lee Baek-yoon told AFP, adding that he had spent all his savings on his bid to become South Korea’s first socialist president.

While the People Power party runs on a small-government, fiscally conservative platform and the Democratic party is in favour of more government welfare spending, neither questions the right of South Korea’s powerful chaebol — family-run conglomerates such as Samsung — to exist.

“An exclusive society for the top 1 percent has been created over the past few decades because of a monopoly structure centred on the chaebol,” said Lee Baek-yoon, who used to work on the production line at a car factory. His platform is wildly unpopular in the status-obsessed country: while he was being interviewed by AFP he was repeatedly heckled by angry voters telling him to “Go to North Korea”. He expects to win, optimistically, five percent of votes. But he refuses to give up, saying his key goal is simply “to inform people a little more about the new world of socialism.”—AFP

Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 2022

Zain signs contract with KPTC to supply smart bus devices

Step explores opportunities of future collaboration in digital transformation areas



KUWAIT: Eaman Al-Roudhan and Waleed Al-Shurayan with Mansour Al-Saad and Hamad Al-Marzouq

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, signed a contract with the Kuwait Public Transport Company (KPTC) to supply smart bus devices. Through the contract, the two companies seek to explore opportunities of future collaboration to push forward KPTC's digital transformation goals in line with the nation's developmental and digitization plans.

The announcement was made during the contract signing ceremony held at KPTC's headquarters, which was attended by Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan, KPTC Chairman Waleed Al-Shurayan, KPTC CEO Mansour Al-Saad, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq, as well as Zain and KPTC executives.

Commenting on the partnership, Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan said: "Today, Zain takes a new step forward into solidifying its leadership position as one of the Kuwaiti private sector's top companies that empower full digital transformation in government institutions within all vital sectors. These efforts are well in line with the nation's developmental and digitization plans as part of the New Kuwait 2035 vision".

Al-Roudhan continued: "We cherish the trust of our colleagues at KPTC for selecting Zain to be their future partner in achieving their digital transformation plans. Zain was and will always be prepared to make all its tech capabilities available to empower many vital operational aspects of public sector institutions. This is especially true as Zain enjoys an ecosystem of strategic partnerships with many of the world's biggest tech leaders, which surely makes it the first destination for serving the tech needs of any government agency".

Al-Roudhan concluded: "We hope this agreement reflects our active role as an enabler of the most advanced tech solutions to the biggest national companies from both the public and private sectors. Zain is always keen on exerting efforts that further progress national economy and push the

Eaman Al-Roudhan: Zain always prepared to offer its tech capabilities to empower digital transformation in public sector.

Waleed Al-Shurayan: Digital transformation comes in line with a great development KPTC services will undergo soon

nation's plans and developmental goals. This is especially true as KPTC is considered one of the oldest government institutions that contributed to Kuwait's progress since its inception in the 1960s".

Future opportunities

Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq said: "This contract explores future opportunities of collaboration between Zain and KPTC in digital transformation areas. Through this partnership, Zain is set to offer a range of advanced services to upgrade KPTC's portfolio of services, as well as reinforce the company's digital channels, allowing it to replace traditional channels and offer an elevated customer experience of higher quality to its customer base in Kuwait".

Al-Marzouq added: "Today's collaboration is only a first step in a new journey we take towards achieving a main goal that we have put together along with our partners in the public sector: to contribute to developing the public transport sector in Kuwait and take it to new levels. We are eager to build a digital infrastructure for this sector and offer KPTC world-class solutions in order to elevate the quality of the nation's public transport ecosystem".

KPTC Chairman Waleed Al-Shurayan commented: "Digital transformation tools are vital to integrate the services we provide to the public. Kuwait has recently witnessed a huge leap in digitization and using technology across ministries and government agencies. This has led to more flexible work-

flows, saving time and effort, as well as reducing congestion in the services that assist the public".

Al-Shurayan continued: "It is very important for us to elevate the company's services, integrate them with modern tech tools, and utilize digital transformation to further develop our portfolio. This step comes in line with a great development that KPTC's many services will undergo soon, including public transport, maintenance, rental, Omrah, maritime transport, and other services".

New projects

Al-Shurayan added: "We are proud that Kuwait is one of the first GCC countries that established a public transportation system in 1961, sixty years ago. Great nations always seek to offer comfortable public transportation services to transport groups of people together and help reduce pollution. By transporting large amounts of people together in one vehicle, users would stop using their personal vehicles. We invite citizens to use the service after the new developments it will undergo soon. Additionally, a new service was added recently to transport families free of charge through special buses parked at selected areas next to parking slots such as Souq Sharq, Ministries Complex, and more to transport visitors to and from Mubarakiya Market. This is a joint initiative between KPTC, Asimah Governorate, and Kuwait Municipality to reduce traffic congestions in that vital area, which is most visited by citizens".

Al-Shurayan praised the efforts of KPTC staff, which contribute to serving the increasing number of public transport users. He stressed that the company is working towards elevating public transport methods from the ground up, in line with preserving the environment and protecting the climate through a number of projects that will be announced very soon.

KPTC CEO Mansour Al-Saad said: "There is a need for software that organizes, schedules, and tracks busses. This is also true for creating applications that facilitate the experience for users of KPTC services through their mobile phones, making it easy for them to transport, schedule their appointments, and reach payment and subscription tools. It is part of the company's direction to facilitate the experience for users and identify condensed locations in order to redistribute busses on the most demanded areas more efficiently.

Al-Saad stressed: "We take great care for the tasks and responsibilities taken by KPTC towards the public, and among our priorities is to make KPTC the favorite transport method for citizens and residents. We want to reinforce the culture of sustainability for a better future, as well as to gain the trust and loyalty of our customers and shareholders". Al-Saad added: "KPTC puts the needs of its customers at the forefront of its priorities by serving their transportation needs and assisting them to reach their destinations, as we understand their needs and appreciate their time. The company takes into consideration the internal regulatory factors as well as the external directives and factors, including government regulations when making strategic decisions".

Zain continues to achieve its strategy towards fully transforming into an integrated digital service provider, reflecting its commitment in further pushing the digital transformation wheel in Kuwait by contributing to advance the local business sector. The company considers itself an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait on all levels, especially within business areas.



KUWAIT: Eaman Al-Roudhan and Waleed Al-Shurayan sign the contract



KUWAIT: Zain and KPTC officials during the signing ceremony

Business

US, Europe mulling bans on Russian oil imports: Blinken

German ministers warn against boycotting Russian oil

WASHINGTON: The United States said it was in "active discussions" with European nations about banning Russian oil imports as further economic penalty against Moscow for invading Ukraine, but stopped short of announcing an outright boycott. However, Germany's finance and foreign ministers cautioned Sunday against banning Russian energy imports as the West searches for ways to tighten the screws on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine.

With his country fighting for its existence two weeks since the incursion, Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky has urged his Western allies to levy additional sanctions against Moscow, including boycotting its lucrative oil and gas sector.

With Western nations mulling the prospect of a boycott, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba waded into the debate to strongly call for a ban on such imports, saying Russian oil "smells of Ukrainian blood." Late last week the White House said it was looking for ways to reduce US consumption of Russian oil while protecting American families from price hikes, but pressure has mounted on Western nations to cut off Russian energy imports as a way to tighten the screws on the Kremlin.

"We are now in very active discussions with our European partners about banning the import of Russian oil to our countries, while of course at the same time maintaining a steady global supply of oil," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told NBC talk show "Meet the Press." "The actions we've taken to date have already had a devastating impact on the Russian economy," he added, referring to biting sanctions that have economically isolated Russia and its president, Vladimir Putin. Ukraine's Kuleba, however, stressed that choking off Russia's oil exports is crucial.

Asked Sunday on CNN about Shell's announcement that it continued to buy Russian oil and donate the profits to Ukrainian causes-Kuleba urged Shell and other



WASHINGTON: The United States said it was in 'active discussions' with European nations about banning Russian oil imports as further economic penalty against Moscow for invading Ukraine, but stopped short of announcing an outright boycott.

energy giants to cut off Moscow's biggest revenue source and "stop buying Russian oil."

"Russian oil and gas smells of Ukrainian blood," he said. European and British gas prices surged to record peaks last week on supply disruption fears. And oil prices continued to push higher, with Brent futures ending at \$118.11 a barrel, the highest level since 2008.

Like Blinken, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, who has spoken of ramping up sanctions on Russia, did not fully advocate an outright ban on Russian oil—at least not yet.

"The goal is to isolate Russia and to make it impossible for Putin to finance his wars," she told CNN on

Sunday. "For us, there is a strong strategy now to say we have to get rid of the dependency of fossil fuels from Russia." US lawmakers have directly sought an all-out boycott, with Republican and Democratic senators last week urging President Joe Biden to ban oil imports from Russia.

"I think... you can construct a plan to phase that in rapidly," Senator Marco Rubio told ABC. "We have more than enough ability in this country to produce enough oil to make up for the percentage we buy from Russia." Only eight percent of imports of crude oil and refined products to the United States come from Russia, according to Lipow Oil Associates in Houston, Texas

But in Germany, which currently holds the rotating presidency of the G7, foreign minister Annalena Baerbock said such a move would be pointless since it could not be sustained long term.

"It's no use if in three weeks we find out that we only have a few days of electricity left in Germany and therefore we have to go back on these sanctions," she told a German public broadcaster. In a separate interview, she added that Germany was prepared "to pay a very, very high economic price" but "if tomorrow in Germany or Europe the lights go out, it's not going to stop the tanks".

Germany is dependent on Russian fossil fuels, importing an estimated 55 percent of its gas and 42 percent of its oil and coal from Russia. German Finance Minister Christian Lindner was also skeptical of an oil ban. "We should not limit our ability to sustain ourselves," he told the newspaper Bild.

European and British gas prices surged to record peaks last week on supply disruption fears. And oil prices have continued to skyrocket, with Brent futures leaping to almost \$140 a barrel, the highest since 2008. Instead of boycotting Russian energy, the next round of G7 sanctions against should hit oligarchs who have gotten rich under President Vladimir Putin, the finance minister suggested. "Those who have profited from Putin and stolen the wealth of the Russian people, also through corruption, cannot enjoy their prosperity in our western democracies," Lindner told ARD television.

On Thursday, the United States and the United Kingdom added more Russian oligarchs to a blacklist of businessmen associated with the Kremlin already targeted by the European Union. The same day, France said it had seized a superyacht owned by Russia's oil czar Igor Sechin on the French Riviera. Russia is already dealing with a wave of sanctions designed to isolate it from the international financial system. Putin has likened the global blacklisting to a declaration of war. — AFP

China exports up 16.3% as trade with Russia surged

BEIJING: Chinese exports in January and February rose a combined 16.3 percent on surging global demand and a spike in trade with Russia in the run-up to the war in Ukraine, according to customs data released yesterday. The growth rate exceeded economists' expectations of a 15.7 percent gain from a year earlier. Shipments from the world's second-largest economy were valued at \$544.7 billion in the first two months, the data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Exports to Russia rose 41 percent compared to the same period in the previous year. Trade data for January and February is usually combined to even out the impact of the extended Chinese new year holiday, which usually begins in one of those two months. Imports rose 15.5 percent to \$428.75 billion in the first two months of the year, leaving a Chinese trade surplus of \$115.95 billion.

Exports remain a bright spot for a Chinese economy that has slowed sharply in recent months due to

virus outbreaks, a property market slump and regulatory crackdowns on key sectors. China's leaders Saturday set a target of 5.5 percent GDP growth this year—the lowest annual goal since 1991 — with Premier Li Keqiang warning of a "grave and uncertain" outlook as the war in Ukraine threatens to damage global supply chains. China's coal imports in the first two months doubled from a year earlier as Beijing scrambled to replenish supplies after a shortage late last year caused power cuts that paralyzed large swathes of the economy. Exports to Russia grew at the fastest rate among China's major trading partners in January and February, outpacing trade with the European Union and the United States.

Russia was also the second biggest source of imports for China, which buys energy products from its neighbor. Trade with China has served as a lifeline for Russia, which had already faced Western sanctions over its 2014 seizure of the Crimea region from Ukraine. Moscow's international isolation has deepened following its invasion of Ukraine that began late last month. China has been Russia's largest trading partner for more than a decade, according to commerce ministry data.

Beijing approved Russian wheat imports just hours before the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine. But analysts believe China will avoid dramatically increasing trade support to Russia to avoid running afoul of the global sanctions arrayed against Moscow. — AFP



BEIJING: Chinese exports in January and February rose a combined 16.3 percent on surging global demand and a spike in trade with Russia in the run-up to the war in Ukraine

German industrial orders rise but war clouds outlook

BERLIN: Incoming orders to German industry increased again in January, official figures published yesterday showed, as the government warned of economic disruption from the war in Ukraine. Orders rose 1.8 percent on the previous month, having climbed three percent in December, according to seasonally adjusted figures from the federal statistics agency Destatis. The indicator, which can give a foretaste of industrial production, was 7.3 percent higher in January than in the same month last year.

The war in Ukraine, however, heralded "extremely high uncertainties for the future development of demand", the German economy ministry said in a statement. Industrial bottlenecks, aggravated by the conflict, meant it was "uncertain" producers would be able to

make up the backlog of orders which built up over the course of 2021, the ministry said.

Shortages of raw materials and components, which grew as the year wore on, hampered production in Europe's largest economy last year. In January, domestic orders fell significantly by 8.3 percent, while demand from within the euro area fell by 2.6 percent. Order growth instead came from outside the eurozone, with the

Ukraine sets export quotas on key agri products

KYIV: Ukraine, one of the world's top wheat producers, has set export restrictions on the crop and other agricultural products amid Russia's military invasion, the Interfax Ukraine news agency reported.

According to a government decree published Sunday evening, a license issued by the authorities is now required in order to export wheat, poultry meat, eggs and sunflower oil. Quotas were also introduced for the export of cattle and beef, salt, sugar, oats, buckwheat, rye and millet. The conflict has pushed wheat prices higher as Russia is the world's top exporter of the cereal and Ukraine is the fourth according to estimates by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The United Nations' World Food Programme on Friday warned of a looming food crisis in Ukraine in conflict areas and said disruptions in production and exports could lead to food insecurity globally. The body noted that with Russia and Ukraine providing some 29 percent of the global wheat trade, serious disruptions in production and exports could send food prices—already at 10-year highs—even higher. — AFP



DES PLAINES, US: In this file photo taken on November 11, 2008, a sign showing the American Express logo is seen outside of a restaurant in Des Plaines, Illinois. — AFP

American Express suspending 'all operations' in Russia, Belarus

WASHINGTON: US credit card and payments giant American Express said Sunday it is suspending its operations in Russia and Belarus over Moscow's "unjustified" attack on Ukraine, the latest financial services blow to Russia over its invasion.

"In light of Russia's ongoing, unjustified attack on the people of Ukraine, American Express is suspending all operations in Russia," the company said in a statement, noting that American Express cards will no longer work at merchants or ATM money machines in Russia. "We are also terminating all business operations in Belarus," it added.

In addition to blocking usage of globally issued Amex cards in Russia, "cards issued locally in Russia by Russian banks will no longer work outside of the country or on the American Express global network," the company said. American Express noted its previous steps taken, including halting its relationships with banks in Russia that have been impacted by sanctions slapped on Russia by the United States and Western allies.

The move follows card payment titans Visa and Mastercard, which had announced Saturday they will suspend operations in Russia. "Noting the unprecedented nature of the current conflict and the uncertain economic environment," Mastercard said it had "decided to suspend our network services in Russia." Visa, for its part, said that "effective immediately" it would "work with its clients and partners within Russia to cease all Visa transactions over the coming days."

US President Joe Biden "welcomed the decision" during a phone call with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky in which the two discussed US, ally and private industry actions to deter Russia from further aggression, according to a White House readout.

Major corporations across a range of industries have halted business in Russia since its troops invaded Ukraine on February 24, including everything from US-based tech firms such as Intel and Airbnb to French luxury giants LVMH, Hermes and Chanel. As government and corporate sanctions have taken effect, the Russian ruble has crashed to a record low, forcing the central bank in Moscow to more than double its key interest rate to 20 percent. Russian President Vladimir Putin has banned residents from transferring money abroad. The impact of the invasion has rippled through the global economy, with a barrel of oil now selling for close to \$120, while prices for grains, some metals and other commodities exported by Russia and Ukraine are surging. — AFP

flydubai back in the black

DUBAI: The Emirati budget carrier flydubai yesterday announced it is back in the black, posting \$229 million in profits in 2021, after heavy losses suffered by the world's COVID-hit airline industry. Flydubai, which is owned by Dubai like the giant airline Emirates, carried 5.6 million passengers last year, a 76-percent leap from 2020 when it lost \$186 million at the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

Dubai, a tourism and trading hub, has since October been hosting the delayed Expo 2020 world fair, which ends on March 31. In July 2020 Dubai became one of the world's first locations to reopen to foreign travel. Dubai airport last year remained the world's busiest in terms of international passengers, numbering about 29.1 million in 2021. — AFP



Russia is the world's top exporter of the cereal and Ukraine is the fourth according to estimates by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Business

Unemployment, pay gap, instability pandemic legacy for Peru's women

24 million women in Latin America lost their jobs during pandemic

LIMA: When the pandemic struck Peru and forced the economy to shut down in an attempt to stop the spread of the coronavirus, women were some of the hardest hit. Silvia Munoz lost her job as a domestic worker, while Yolanda Chambi was forced to close her shop selling traditional Peruvian clothes. Both were among millions of Peruvian women to lose their income during the pandemic, which exacerbated gender inequality. There is a story seen throughout Latin America on the eve of International Women's Day, where four million women remain unemployed even after regional economies have reopened.

When COVID struck, many women were forced to give up work to look after sick family members and children as schools and creches were closed as part of government restrictions. And while most have since returned to work, many have had to accept lower salaries or even make do with working in the informal sector. Once the virus reached Peru in March 2020, "there was no work, there was nothing," said Munoz, 65, speaking from her home in the working class Lima neighborhood of Villa Maria del Triunfo. One thousand kilometers (620 miles) away in Puno on the shores of Lake Titicaca, Chambi tells a similar story. "We lost all our earnings," she said.

She used to sell clothes to locals for the Virgen de la Candelaria festival that takes place on February 2 and involves traditional Andean music and dancing.

It has been canceled for the last two years due to COVID. Unable to sell her wares, Chambi could no longer afford the rent on her home-cum-workshop. She was forced to move with her four children to the family home in the countryside, where they grow pota-



LIMA: Daisy Falcon Lopez, 34, sits next to her dog at her home in the Independencia district, on the eastern outskirts of Lima, Peru on February 26, 2022. — AFP

atoes, broad beans and other vegetables.

While many countries in the region paid out benefits to those that lost their jobs due to the pandemic, few people in Peru received such aid because 70 percent of the 33-million population works in the informal sector, and very few—especially the poor—have bank accounts.

Gone back 10 years

The International Labor Organization says women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The ILO says 24 million women in Latin America lost their jobs during the pandemic and as many men. But while only half a million men remain out of work, eight times as many women do, "which contributes to

amplifying the impact of the crisis on gender inequality at work."

Women's unemployment in the region is 12.4 percent, compared to just 8.3 percent for men. After years of steady progress, "the pandemic has taken us back more or less to the figures from 10 years ago," Italo Cardona, the ILO chief for Peru, told AFP. Sectors that traditionally employ a lot of women have been particularly hard-hit by the pandemic, such as hotels, restaurants, services and the informal sector. "The return of women to the labor market is much slower than for men," said Cardona.

Daisy Falcon, 34, lost her job as an administrative assistant at a manufacturing company in March 2021. She now sells prepared meals to acquaintances. She says her family members were "dying one after another from Covid," and she spent months caring for them.

'I feel powerless'

Many of those back in work have been forced to accept lower pay. A few months ago, Munoz, who supports her ill husband, started working again four days a week—but for 30 percent less pay than before. Having previously earned \$25 a day, she now receives \$17.50. "You have to accept it because behind me is someone who takes less," said Munoz.

"I feel powerless because you get older, you're not as strong as you used to be and when you're older still, there's no pension," Chambi, who sells breakfasts by the roadside, is likewise pessimistic about the future. "If the festival remains suspended, if our economy remains suspended, we will have no earnings," she said. — AFP

Lexus Design Award 2022 reveals six finalists

KUWAIT: Lexus has recently announced the six finalists for the tenth edition of the Lexus Design Award 2022, a global platform to support and nurture the next generation of up-and-coming creators from around the world. Each of the finalists will gain the extraordinary privilege of mentorship by international creative stars as they prototype their ideas with a budget of up to 3,000,000 yen (approximately \$25,000) per project. The finalists were selected by a distinguished jury from among 1,726 entries submitted by creators in 57 countries. The Lexus Design Award was established to support fresh design talent and showcase their innovations on a prominent and respected international platform. This year's six finalists were chosen for their original solutions that contribute to a better tomorrow, while articulating the Lexus brand's three core principles: Anticipate, Innovate, and Captivate, while seamlessly enhancing the happiness of all.

Lexus Design Award 2022 finalists:

Chitofoam by Charlotte Bohning & Mary Lempres (Dual USA - Germany and Dual USA - Norway / Based in USA)

A biodegradable packaging solution derived from the exoskeletons of mealworms that have digested polystyrene foam waste.

Hammock Wheelchair by Wondaleaf (Malaysia)

A combination wheelchair, forklift, and hammock for reducing the manual lifting of patients by caregivers.

Ina Vibe by Team Dunamis (Nigeria)

A sustainable cooking, charging, and lighting product.

Rewind by Poh Yun Ru (Singapore)

A platform that leverages multi-sensory stimulation to prompt meaningful recollection for seniors with dementia.



Judges

Sound Eclipse by Kristil & Shamina (Russia)
A noise-canceling device that reduces noise from outside when placed near an open window.

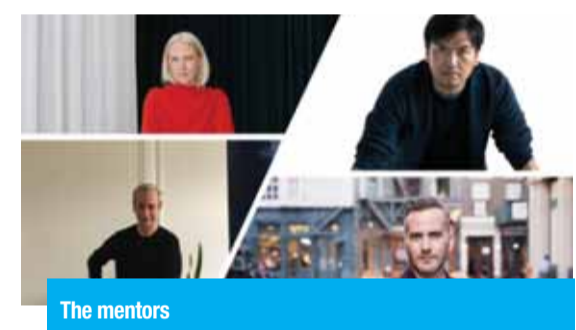
Tacomotive by Kou Mikuni (Japan)

A tangible driving simulator for children with visual and aural challenges.

Lexus Design Award 2022 judge Anupama Kundoo said, "I was impressed by the creators' sensitivity to real-life issues faced by individuals with disabilities and the challenges facing society, such as sustainable coexistence with nature. The mentoring process will optimize the impact of the finalists' designs. I greatly enjoyed working with such a diverse jury and finding so much alignment. Where there were different perspectives, those too were complementary and aligned in their core values."



Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East & Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, said: "We are excited to see that the Lexus Design Award, now in its tenth year, is increasingly becoming recognized amongst creatives from around the world. This year's submissions have been exceptional in terms of ideas, with the six finalists



The mentors

demonstrating unparalleled creativity, resourcefulness, and a great capacity for forward-thinking."

Fujita added: "This competitive platform has always brought some of the best and brightest creators together from around the world, inspiring and empowering them to elevate their ideas and bring them to the world to contribute to a better tomorrow. Supporting the next generation is an essential component of Lexus' drive to push the boundaries of what can be achieved through brave design. I would like to thank everyone involved in the Lexus Design Award's enduring success, along with our customers from all around the world for supporting us on our journey to create amazing experiences."

In mid-January, the six finalists participated in a five-day workshop with the four Lexus Design Award 2022 mentors: Sam Baron, Joe Doucet, Sabine Marcelis, and Yosuke Hayano. Interacting directly with these leading lights, the finalists received professional guidance to explore the potential of their ideas, and help bring them to life.

Finalists will continue working with mentors to further develop their prototypes throughout the approximately three months leading up to the Grand Prix selection. A judging panel featuring renowned design leaders Paola Antonelli, Anupama Kundoo, Bruce Mau, and Simon Humphries will select the Grand Prix winner in Spring 2022 based on their final prototypes and presentations. gn, exceptional craftsmanship, and exhilarating performance, Lexus has developed its lineup to meet the needs of the next generation of global luxury guests. It is currently available in over 90 countries worldwide.

Lexus associates/team members across the world are dedicated to crafting amazing experiences that are uniquely Lexus and that excite and change the world.



KUWAIT: Hisham Abdullah Jassim Al-Qallaf receives the Al-Jawhara monthly prize worth KD 125,000.

NBK announces winner of KD 125,000 in Al-Jawhara draw

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to reward its customers with an exquisite array of draws, prizes and offers all year round. In this context, the bank announced Hisham Abdullah Jassim Al-Qallaf as the winner of Al-Jawhara monthly prize worth KD 125,000 for February 2022. The draw was held live on NBK's Instagram page in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from NBK, noting that Al-Jawhara monthly and quarterly draws are conducted in the presence of a representative from Deloitte.

NBK recently released an advertising video for Al-Jawhara Account, which focused on the possibility of making dreams come true for all family members, since Al-Jawhara Account provides a great opportunity to save and win weekly, monthly or quarterly prizes.



Hisham Al-Nusif

Before conducting the monthly draw for February, NBK launched an engaging competition on its Instagram page, which was related to the advertising video with a question about how many times the jewel showed in the video, and 2 winners received KD 50 each."

On this occasion, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We congratulate the winner of the monthly draw, and promise our customers more engaging events all year round, and chances to win in the draws and get exceptional rewards and prizes." Al-Nusif affirmed that NBK is committed to provide customers with an integrated banking experience including exclusive rewards, top-notch banking products and services, and quick and easy banking.

"Al-Jawhara Account provides a saving vessel for customers with chances to win at the same time in Al Jawhara weekly, monthly and quarterly draws, through which we aim to reward our customers," he added. On the other hand, NBK announced the names of the winners of Al-Jawhara weekly draws for February worth KD 5,000 each including: Bibi Rajab Ramadan, Ebrahim Omar Al-Mawash and Mohammad Houmod Al-Enezi.

It is worth mentioning that Al-Jawhara Account gives customers the opportunity to enter draws and win prizes of KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly as well as the grand prize of KD 250,000 quarterly. Every KD 50 deposited into Al-Jawhara Account gives the customer a chance to be one of the next lucky winners, and if no withdrawal or transfers occur on the account during the holding period, customers will receive an additional chance for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win.

Since 2012, National Bank of Kuwait has rewarded loyal customers with a total worth of annual prizes amounting to KD 2,200,000 in Al-Jawhara weekly, monthly and quarterly draws. In addition to providing top-notch, cutting-edge and highly secure banking services, NBK is keen to give customers a variety of offers, rewards and prizes matching their interests all year round.



stc participates in MWC Barcelona 2022

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its participation in the 'MWC Barcelona 2022', the world's most influential event for the connectivity industry. The event was held in Barcelona, Spain from February 28th till March 3rd, with the theme 'Connectivity Unleashed' focusing on the exploration of ground-breaking technologies that will shape the industry.

As one of the key players in the regional and international telecom market, stc's presence at MWC 2022 was led by engineer Maziad Al-Harbi, CEO of stc, along with key management executives in the company. Eng Maziad Al-Harbi, CEO of stc, stated "stc's participation was an opportunity to engage in multiple brainstorming sessions and meet with many of the industry experts and strategic partners to exchange ideas and gather knowledge considering the vast networking opportunities provided by the platform. As part of stc's strategy to enable digital transformation and enrich the customer's journey experience, this will in return provide stc with the knowledge and capacity to implement pioneering digital solutions that will sustain stc's position as an industry leader."

Al-Harbi continued, "stc has been focusing on strengthening its network infrastructure and providing exceptional digital connectivity solutions that are capable of withstanding today's rapidly evolving digi-

tal world. Participating in a globally renowned event such as MWC Barcelona grants access to a large network of industry players and experts who possess valuable insights on developments and trends in the market that can shape the future of the telecom and digital solutions landscape. stc's participation at MWC 2022 aimed to share some of the success stories the Company has successfully achieved through its pioneering role in offering digital, cloud, internet of things (IoT), Data Center as well as advanced IT solutions within the integrated communications technology sector."

stc recently showcased its ability to adopt a new-to-market concept by launching its 5G Standalone technology, dubbed 'FULL 5G', elevating the 5G experience to a new level through better speeds, lower latency, and improved coverage. The Company was the first and only operator to launch this innovative solution in Kuwait and the MENA region, further building on its current strong 5G network and infrastructure. Recognized as the world's largest and most influential connectivity event, MWC Barcelona witnessed the participation of over 1,500 exhibitors and attendees from 165 countries. The event welcomed world-leading companies and trailblazers as they shared the latest through leadership about the progression and future of connectivity. Global mobile operators, device manufacturers, technology providers, vendors, and content owners each played a role in the successful event which exhibited ground-breaking products and technologies that can create a significant impact.

The event explored the key concepts of how 5G Connect, Advancing AI, CloudNet, Fintech, IoT and Tech Horizon will help unlock the full power of connectivity so that people, industry, and society thrive. Various topics within each key concept were covered by industry leaders and tech pioneers who showcased their perception of the evolution path that will ultimately transform the industry across different aspects.

Business

The quest to seize Western assets of Russian oligarchs

Putin's inner circle targeted over Ukraine invasion

PARIS: Western seizures of super-yachts owned by Russian oligarchs have made headlines as Vladimir Putin's inner circle is targeted over the invasion of Ukraine, but experts warn identifying and blocking further cash and assets will prove difficult. The European Union, UK and US have all trumpeted unprecedented sanctions against key figures in the Moscow elite.

Even countries long known for harboring assets with few questions asked, such as Switzerland and Monaco, have joined in with the measures. On the still-growing sanctions lists, hundreds of people including lawmakers, high-ranking military officers, prominent journalists, tycoons and finance chiefs have been targeted.

As well as asset freezes, the measures can sometimes include bans from sanctioning nations' territory.

High-profile individuals affected include Nikolay Tokarev, the president of oil and gas giant Transneft, Rostec defense firm chief Sergei Chemezov or VEB development bank head Igor Shuvalov. Washington would "find and seize their yachts, their luxury apartments, their private jets," US President Joe Biden warned in last week's State of the Union address.

"We're coming for your ill-begotten gains," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said that oligarchs' "partners, their children, their property holding companies" would be affected, "such that they won't be able to hide behind financial constructs".

Many wealthy individuals use complex ownership structures to minimize tax bills or obfuscate the true owner of an asset. Besides the very richest oligarchs close to Putin, "there's a sort of hinterland of maybe two to three thousand individuals... they are also very, very rich financially... and they are all related and supported by the Putin regime," said Robert Barrington, Professor of Anti-Corruption Practice at Britain's University of Sussex.

Hidden billions

The UK has been one of the Western nations most favored by Russians stashing away their wealth in financial assets or real estate, earning the capital the derogatory nickname "Londongrad". On top of high-end residential property, London also offers facilities like the vast legal and wealth management resources of the City and world-renowned boarding schools and universities for the scions of the rich.

Barrington said that around 1.5 billion pounds (\$1.9 billion, 1.8 billion euros) of London property ownership in desirable areas like Kensington, Chelsea and Hampstead had been traced to oligarchs, likely



HAMBURG: The yachts Luna and Dilbar, believed to be owned by Russian oligarchs, are docked in a shipyard of Blohm & Voss in the harbor of Hamburg. — AFP

only a fraction of the total. "Luxury property is a preferred means of laundering money stemming from corruption or embezzlement of public funds," said Sara Brimbeuf of Transparency International France. A short hop from Britain, France too "hosts these ill-gotten gains", piling up on the sun-soaked southern coast and in high-end districts of western Paris or Alpine resorts.

Properties in Mediterranean spots like Nice and St Tropez have been traced to oligarchs close to Putin and already targeted by sanctions. But none of the experts AFP spoke to was able to estimate the scale of the Russian elite's Western holdings.

Wealth industry

When it comes to managing their money, oligarchs "don't actually do the stuff themselves," said Jodi Vittori, a professor specializing in corruption at the University of Georgetown in the US.

"They have a team of enablers that does this for them. They're the lawyers, the accountants and art dealers," Transparency's Brimbeuf said that "not all of them do what they're supposed to" when it comes to reporting suspect assets or transactions to the authorities—"even though they're subject to anti-money laundering requirements" in the laws of many Western nations. Last month, a consortium of investigative journalists alleged that Swiss bank Credit Suisse had for decades held billions of euros of money in accounts of criminals, dictators and rights abusers and failed to meet its reporting obligations.

The bank itself rejected the claims. Identifying the real origin and ownership of assets can be arduous,

painstaking work picking through shell companies and complex structures.

"It would need a significant mobilization by intelligence services" to identify much of the hidden wealth, said Julien Martinet, a lawyer at French firm Swifflitigation. In France, only one major seizure has made headlines since sanctions were imposed—the super-yacht Amore Vero linked to Rosneft boss Igor Sechin, believed to be worth up to 120 million euros.

Meanwhile Italy on Saturday said it had seized yachts belonging to steel magnate Alexei Mordashov and Putin confidant Gennady Timchenko, worth 95 million and 50 million euros respectively.

But experts recall that it has only been days since the sanctions have been imposed, with wealth probes sometimes requiring years to complete.

Task force

US Attorney General Merrick Garland has already announced the creation of a task force to pursue oligarchs' assets dubbed "KleptoCapture", numbering 10 prosecutors as well as federal investigators and tax specialists. Similar operations have been mounted in other Western countries including France, while online amateurs are also pitching in.

US teenager Jack Sweeney has set up the Russian Oligarch Jets Twitter account to track the elite's private planes. Beyond identifying and freezing assets, seizing them outright presents even higher legal hurdles. For example, in France "infringing on property law requires a law, not just a regulation or a decree" from the government, lawyer Martinet said.

A senior official in France's own oligarch task force

said that they were able to seize the Amore Vero super-yacht only because its crew attempted to depart for Turkey, "placing themselves outside the law".

Scramble for safety

Many Russian billionaires have already moved their floating palaces to safer waters, with rumors coursing about upcoming moves away from the Cote d'Azur, according to a source familiar with the industry. The source mentioned Dubai as one possible destination, while the Maldives—which have no extradition treaty with the US—are also now hosting several yachts, including those belonging to aluminum magnate Oleg Deripaska and steel tycoon Alexander Abramov.

On land, there has been little sign of a sudden flight from property in southern France. But in London, billionaire Roman Abramovich has put his stake in Chelsea football club up for sale, promising to put the profits towards helping victims of the war in Ukraine. Abramovich, the co-founder of aluminum giant Rusal, grew rich in the 1990s as Russia privatized former Soviet state industries and his wealth is now estimated at over \$12 billion by Forbes. He is close to Putin but has yet to be targeted with sanctions.

Also in Britain, financier Mikhail Fridman withdrew from the LetterOne investment firm that he co-founded and from all the European firms where he holds a stake. Both he and his partner Petr Aven have been targeted by sanctions, but deny any "financial or political relationship" with Putin. In a letter to his LetterOne employees, Fridman told staff last week that "war can never be the answer" and called for the "bloodshed" to end. — AFP

Ooredoo Group in top 50 global telecom brands

DOHA: Ooredoo Group has once again ranked in the Top 50 Global Telecommunications brands, maintaining its position as one of the world's leading telecoms companies, according to the recently released Brand Finance Telecoms 150 2022 report.

Ooredoo Group's brand value increased 6 percent on its value in 2021, and the company appeared in the ranking list for the sixth consecutive year with a total brand value of \$3.412 billion. The Group maintained its Brand Strength Index at 79, and its brand rating of AA+ for the fourth consecutive year.

Industry valuation and strategy consultancy Brand Finance attributes the 6 percent growth in brand value in part to positive contributions coming from Indonesia, Algeria, Tunisia and Qatar, driven by positive business performance from these operating companies. Brand Finance produces the rankings list annually according to valuations of telecommunications companies across the globe. Brands are first evaluated to determine their strength - based on factors such as marketing investment, familiarity, loyalty, staff satisfaction and corporate reputation - and this strength is then used to quantify the brand's value, by calculating the proportion of a business's revenue that is contributed by the brand. Information from each process is used to create rankings of the world's most valuable telecoms brands.

Brand Finance has closely monitored Ooredoo

Group's brand value since its global brand roll-out in 2013, with the Group now having featured in the top 50 global telecommunications brands for six consecutive years. The Doha-based telecommunications provider has operating companies in 10 markets across the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia.

Ooredoo Group has made solid progress across key strategic areas, capitalizing on digital opportunities presented by changes in market trends and accelerating its digital transformation in line with its strategic plan to operate in an agile, adaptable way. Investment in networks, technology and people has enabled the company to deliver transformational digital experiences and position itself as a market leading connectivity provider across its global footprint.

Speaking of the confirmation of Ooredoo Group's position, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulla Al-Thani, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer at Ooredoo, said: "We are proud to once again be named one of the top 50 telecommunications brands, and delighted that we have maintained this prestigious status for a sixth consecutive year. This is testament to our considerable contribution to the telecommunications industry, a contribution which is a direct result of our commitment to investing in innovation, technology and people to ensure we can offer the best possible products and services across our markets." He continued: "We are consolidating our position as a pioneer of commercial 5G and making exciting progress in both our own digital transformation and as part of the digital revolution. We believe our competitive strategy, strong leadership and commitment to evolving into a smart telco will stand us in good stead to drive this momentum forward, enabling us to maintain and increase our brand value in the years to come."



The Bank of Russia building

"effectively supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine", without detailing what specific measures would be taken.

Samsung Electronics, the world's largest smartphone maker, also announced over the weekend it had suspended all shipments of products to Russia due to "geopolitical developments".

The world's 10th largest economy has also joined a multinational ban on transactions with several Russian banks using the SWIFT global payment system, which allows the transfer of capital across continents. The International Monetary Fund warned the already "serious" global economic impacts of the war in Ukraine would be "all the more devastating" should the conflict escalate. — AFP

IBS to host Prof Snook on March 20

KUWAIT: Prof Yaqoub SY Al-Refaei, Director General of the Institute of Banking Studies, stated that the Institute will host Prof Scott Snook, Senior Lecturer from Harvard Business School, on March 20th, 2022. This program is sponsored by the National Bank of Kuwait, Gulf Bank, Burgan Bank and Warab Bank.



Prof Scott Snook

Prof Scott Snook shares his wisdom about leadership and development based on his unique experience as both a leader and a scholar. He spent 22 years leading soldiers in the United States Army and retired as a Colonel. He has led soldiers in combat and taught leadership at the US Military Academy at West Point. He also has an MBA & PhD from Harvard University and for the past twenty years has taught courses on authentic leader development at the Harvard Business School and to executives around the world. Prof Al-Refaei also indicated that in this Program, Scott will introduce the counterintuitive role that vulnerability plays in leading, and will discuss the practice of personal reflective exercise, and also will explore what it takes to be world class.

The Institute of Banking Studies frequently invites renowned world speakers to present programs/seminars/workshops for executives across the private and public sectors in the State of Kuwait. Over the last 8 years, IBS has invited the following international experts and speakers to present professional programs, seminars and workshops: Robin Sharma, Dr John C. Maxwell, Tom Peters, John Baldoni, Mark Sanborn, Adrian Gostick, Michael Neill, Joel Garfinkle, Steve Farber, Dave Ulrich, Erik Qualman and Michael Wade. IBS also invited James Dowd, Senior Fellow, Managing Director, Executive Education; Linda A Hill, Professor of Business Administration, Faculty Chair, Leadership Initiative; and Francesca Gino from Harvard Business School, and Mohd Al-Qahtani, holder of the world championship in diction and rhetoric, 2015, and Latifa Al-Loughni from Kuwait.

Burgan Bank reveals Yawmi account winner of KD 125,000 cash prize

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced Fouz Adnan Khalaf as the new KD 125,000 cash prize winner in the Yawmi quarterly draw. The winner expressed her excitement for being the winner of the rewarding cash prize with Yawmi Account from Burgan Bank.

The Yawmi quarterly draw offers customers chances to win higher rewards, entitling one lucky

KFH offers best investment plan for children's future

KUWAIT: Considering its pioneering role in offering unique solutions and innovative products, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has continued its distinction in fulfilling customers' aspirations and providing the best investment plans and solutions according to the highest international standards.

KFH is keen to meet customers' desires to secure a better future of the family. As big steps require early planning, KFH offers the "Rafaa" plan, which is a long-term investment plan to cover the expenses of your children's marriage to be ready for the happiest moments.

Among the conditions of the investment plan is that the age of the son or daughter be less than 20 years, and the age of the customer must range between 21 and 61 years. The investment period ranges from 4 years to 25 years. The investment plan "Rafaa" advantages include the following: the investment amount or monthly payments may be amended at any time and the amounts shall be automatically transferred on monthly basis from the customer account to the flexible investment plan "Rafaa" account. Also, the customer can withdraw 60 percent of the balance in the first year and 60 percent every year after the first withdrawal. The customer can automatically increase the monthly investment amount once every two years. It is possible to deposit specific financial payments in addition to the monthly deductions without affecting the schedule of the investment plan. The saving amount and accrued profit during the investment period shall fall due upon expiration of the investment plan. The investment plan can be cancelled at any time and the invested amount and profits accrued on the date of closing shall be refunded to the customer.

Long term investment plans provided by "KFH" encourage and inspire customers to enhance future planning and saving culture, determine family spending priorities and enhance chances of increasing family income through innovative and flexible solutions with rewarding investment returns.

customer to win KD 125,000 cash prize every three months. To enter Burgan Bank's Yawmi Quarterly Draws, customers should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning.

Lifestyle | Features

Iraq's National Museum reopens after three-year closure

Iraq's National Museum reopened yesterday to visitors after a three-year closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic and political unrest. Treasures dating back 2,500 years to the neo-Assyrian empire alongside 9th century Islamic antiquities went back on display, including two winged bulls from the Nimrud site in the palace of Assurnasirpal II (883-859 BC). "We've waited a long time to come here," said Tijen Kayralci, 65, part of a tour group from Turkey. "It's beyond my expectations, these are priceless, very valuable pieces," she said. "It reflects the depth of Iraq's history."

Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi said Sunday at the official inauguration that the museum, founded in 1923 to display five millennia of history in Mesopotamia, or modern-day Iraq, has undergone extensive renovation. The Iraq Museum was closed three years ago "because of the demonstrations and for security reasons", said Laith Majid Hussein, the head of Iraq's antiquities authority, referring to anti-gov-

ernment protests which swept the country in 2019. "And then there was the coronavirus pandemic," he said.

The museum, which has stood at its present site since 1966, was ransacked amid the chaos that followed the US-led invasion of 2003 that toppled Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein. The authorities have recovered around a third of some 15,000 artefacts that were looted at the time. Islamic State group jihadists, who controlled swathes of Iraq between 2014 and 2017, carried out large-scale destruction of ancient sites, as well as trafficking in antiquities. Iraq has recovered more than 18,000 artefacts in the past year, the vast majority of them from the United States. In December, Iraqi authorities held a ceremony to celebrate the return of the prized Gilgamesh tablet, which is over 3,500 years old. — AFP



A handout picture released by the Iraqi Prime Minister's Media Office shows Premier Mustafa Al-Kadhemi (center) inaugurating the renovated National Museum as it reopens following a 3-year closure. — AFP

GYLLENHAAL'S 'LOST DAUGHTER' TRIUMPHS AT INDIE SPIRIT AWARDS

Maggie Gyllenhaal's "The Lost Daughter," a drama about the challenges and taboos surrounding motherhood, was named the year's best indie film at the Spirit Awards on Sunday. Gyllenhaal—until now primarily known as an actress in films such as "The Dark Knight" and "Secretary"—also won prizes for best screenplay and best director, for her debut effort in both fields.

The Film Independent Spirit Awards honor low- and mid-budget movies, and the glitzy gala held at Santa Monica beach near Los Angeles could provide a much-needed boost for smaller films like Gyllenhaal's ahead of this month's Oscars. "The Lost Daughter," based on Elena Ferrante's novel, is in the running for three Academy Awards including best actress for Olivia Colman, who plays a mother estranged from her children and harboring guilt for her failings in raising them.

"My film is in an unusual language—it's the language of the minds of women," said Gyllenhaal, before dedicating her final prize for best feature to "women in film." While only films made for less than \$22.5 million can compete for Spirit Awards, some of Hollywood's biggest stars turned out for the event, and streaming giant Netflix emerged as the day's big winner with six awards.

Beyond the honors for "The Lost Daughter," Netflix earned two prizes for 1920s race drama "Passing," including best supporting actress for Ruth Negga, and one for South Korean smash hit series "Squid Game." Stars Kristen Stewart and Javier Bardem were among several who used the event to speak out against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Tylour Paige won best actress for her portrayal of a stripper who becomes embroiled with a prostitution scam in "Zola," a black comedy



Best Ensemble Cast in a New Scripted Series "Reservation Dogs" Devery Jacobs (left), DiPharaoh Woon-A-Tai (center), Paulina Alexis (second right) and Zahn McClarnon (right) pose in the press room during the 37th Film Independent Spirit Awards.



Best feature "The Lost Daughter" director Maggie Gyllenhaal, Osnat Handelsman Keren, Talia Kleinhendler and Peter Sarsgaard pose in the press room during the 37th Film Independent Spirit Awards. — AFP photos



US actress Tylour Paige poses with the Best female lead award for "Zola".



Best director, Best screenplay and Best feature winner for "The Lost Daughter" Maggie Gyllenhaal poses in the press room.

based on a viral Twitter thread. Simon Rex—a former MTV host who began his career by appearing in adult films—won best actor for "Red Rocket," about a washed-up porn star.

Rex said his career had been "in the toilet" before director Sean Baker approached him to make the tiny film, which sees him running naked down the streets of a small Texas town while wearing a prosthetic penis. "Thank you so much for recognizing my fake penis," joked Rex. "This movie was made for \$1 million with a 10-person crew with no permits," he added. "We were hiding from police. We were hiding from neighbors. I was running down the street butt-naked."

"If this doesn't embody the spirit... of independent film, I don't know what does."



Winner of Best supporting male actor Troy Kotsur.

'Free this film'

The Spirit Awards are typically held the day before the Oscars, but this year were held three weeks prior, meaning voting for the season-concluding Academy Awards has not yet taken place. Deaf actor Troy Kotsur cemented his Oscar frontrunner status by earning another best supporting actor prize for his role in "CODA." The film follows high school teen Ruby as she juggles her musical ambitions with her deaf family's dependence on her to communicate with the "hearing" world.

"Summer of Soul (...Or, When The Revolution Could Not Be Televised)"—musician Questlove's first movie about the huge "Black Woodstock" festival that took place in 1969 Harlem—won best documentary. The film brings to light long-lost and never-before-seen footage of the star-studded concert, which was attended by 300,000 people and featured Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone and Mahalia Jackson. Questlove's real name Ahmir Thompson—said it "took a village of people to free this film from its 50-year sentence sitting inside of a basement."

Each year, the Spirit Awards gives the prestigious Robert Altman Award to a film's director, casting director and cast. "Mass," a harrowing drama in which a school mass shooting victim's parents sit down with the mother and father of the attacker in a bid to find closure, received the pre-announced honor. The Oscars take place in Hollywood on March 27. — AFP

In Mali, Tuareg filmmaker turns lens on women

Fati Walet Mohamed Issa, a young documentary filmmaker from Mali's volatile north, says her goal is to shine a light on the plight of women in the conflict-torn Sahel state. "Women are often either taken out of school to get married, or they are not allowed to go to school," the 24-year-old, wearing a tunic and a veil, tells AFP. Mali is a conservative Muslim-majority nation of 21 million people, where swathes of the country are in the hands of jihadists, and pressure for women to conform to traditional gender roles is strong. But Issa is uncowed.

She has recently finished shooting a 10-minute film in a Tuareg encampment in Timbuktu. It and other pieces made by women have now had a screening in the historic city—a rarity indeed for female filmmakers in the remote northern region. The documentary is entitled "Tamadjrezt"—

"Regret" in the Tamasheq language of Issa's Tuareg ethnic group. "I want to talk about them, about us," she says, referring to women. In 2012, Tuareg separatists launched a rebellion in Mali's desert north, which spiralled after it was commandeered by jihadists.

Islamist fighters have since spread to central Mali as well as neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. Thousands of soldiers and civilians have been killed and two million people have been displaced by the Sahel-wide conflict, of which Mali remains the epicentre. Issa explains that she shot her film alone, because "technical teams were afraid to come." Her documentary follows a 15-year-old girl named Fatma, whose fami-

ly fled to neighboring Mauritania because of the conflict but then returned home.

Fatma attended a school built of straw, which didn't survive the torrential downpours of Mali's rainy season. Despite her wishes, her father refused to allow to continue her schooling elsewhere. "For us, women and girls have to take care of the home," Fatma tells the camera.

'A lot to do'

Issa herself comes from the same traditional nomadic Tuareg background as Fatma, where education for girls is not deemed a priority. The filmmaker herself fled to Mauritania and returned to Mali, and also had to pause her schooling because



Fati Walet Mohamed Issa, a member of the Tamajeq ethnic group (part of the Tuareg people cluster), a film director screened in Timbuktu, poses at her home in Bamako. — AFP

of the conflict. But last year, Issa applied and was selected by an American NGO called Accountability Lab to make a short film about the status of women, which resulted in "Tamadjrezt".

She screened it in mid-December, alongside nine other films commissioned by the NGO, which dealt taboo topics such as prostitution or domestic violence. Zeina Mohamed Ali, a project manager at Accountability Lab, explained that the NGO wanted to give a voice to women, whom she said "are not listened to enough." At the film showing, dozens of people from the local community watched attentively. "It inspired me," Mariama Walet, a 28-year-old woman in the audience, said afterwards.

"It hurts me when I see how far behind we are in protecting women and girls". Issa, who has a young child, told AFP that her ambition is keep making films that speak to her community, and especially women and girls. Mali has a rich cinematic tradition, with several well-known female directors. Tuareg female directors are few, however. "People are too ruled by tradition here," Issa said, adding that she had come to the realization that films could teach people "something else." "There's a lot to do," she added. — AFP

Historic Ukrainian city scrambles to defend heritage

Statues wrapped in foam and fireproof material can be seen all around the historic city of Lviv, where the race is on to protect cultural treasures against possible Russian bombardment. In the western Ukrainian city's Market Square, only a trident can be seen sticking out from a statue of Neptune—the Roman god of the seas—that is entirely covered in a plastic sheeting. "I got some money, gathered a team and bought some material," said Andriy Salyuk, head of the Society for the Protection of Monuments, and one of the main drivers behind the protection effort.

Volunteers have joined up with city workers and builders in the movement to defend the rich heritage of Lviv, a city of 700,000 people whose centre is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Salyuk said he was moved to act when an art historian "told me that if there was a bombing, God help us, we could lose the stained glass windows".

'We can't do everything'

Speaking to AFP in an office decorated with Ukrainian flags and the colors of various battalions fighting in eastern Ukraine, he said he has received donations from wealthy benefactors. The effort has brought together an unlikely coalition, including construction companies which have advised on the best material to use to protect the stained glass windows of various churches. At the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, which dates back to the 14th century, Andriy Pochekva was overseeing the installation of one such panel.

"We cannot protect from a direct impact but we are trying as much as possible to protect from light damage, whether it's a fire or a shockwave or small fragments," he said, as a crane maneuvered the panel into position. On one side of the cathedral, a large sculpture of the Holy Sepulchre has already been covered up under the watchful eye of Liliya Onishchenko from the city's cultural heritage protection department.



"I have devoted my entire life to defending cultural heritage," the 66-year-old told AFP. "I do not want to see the results of our work destroyed by the war," she said. In another part of the city, she said a recently restored wooden altar from the 14th century in an Armenian church has been dismantled and placed under protection "like the First World War". Onishchenko said that museums in the city have also been storing away their exhibits for safekeeping. After protecting "the most fragile objects", Salyuk said he wanted to pass on to the next stage. "People ask what we are going to do with the works of art inside the churches. We would love to help them, to coordinate, but we can't do everything." — AFP



Revelers parade with lanterns during the traditional "Morgenstreich" procession starting the carnival of Basel. — AFP photos

LANTERNS LIGHT THE WAY AS BASEL CARNIVAL COMES BACK

Revelers in fancy costumes lit up the freezing streets of Basel yesterday as Switzerland's biggest carnival returned for the first time since 2019. The three-day event, which is one of the best-known carnivals in Europe, was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But tens of thou-

sands of people were out in the streets of Switzerland's third-biggest city before dawn to see the "Morgenstreich" lantern-lit procession get things back with a bang.

At 4:00am the city lights were turned off and the drum majors yelled "Morgestraich, vorwärts marsch!", giving the forward march order to set off, in the

local Basel dialect of German. The streets were transformed into a river of painted lanterns, colorful masks and creative costumes flowing through the northern city to the sound of pipes and drums.

The world's biggest Protestant carnival, which features on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list, started at 4:00am yesterday after Ash Wednesday, and lasts for 72 hours. The annual event is dubbed "the three most beautiful days" in the city, which borders Germany and France and straddles the River Rhine. The reasons why the carnival takes place a week later in Basel than in other cities in Switzerland and Germany have been lost over the centuries.

It is not known how far the Basel carnival dates back. A devastating earthquake in 1356 destroyed the city's archives, and the earliest document referring to the carnival dates from 1376. There were fewer large lanterns this year than would normally be seen, as the green light for the 2022 carnival came late, meaning that not all the parading groups had time to get ready. Some presented the lanterns



they had prepared for the cancelled 2020 edition.

Though Switzerland has lifted almost all of its COVID-19 restrictions, the virus has not gone away. The carnival's traditional big have nonetheless been cancelled this year. 2020 marked the first

time in around a century that the carnival had been called off the last time was due to the Spanish flu pandemic. — AFP



Sri Lanka's most sacred elephant dies aged 68

Sri Lanka's most sacred elephant passed away aged 68 yesterday, prompting an outpouring of grief and a presidential order for the huge cadaver to be stuffed and preserved for posterity. Nadungamuwa Raja was the most important among 100 elephants used in an annual pageant involving fire-eaters and drummers, tasked with carrying a golden casket of Buddhist relics on its back.

Yesterday a procession of mourners—including schoolchildren, priests in saffron robes and an elderly lady with a Zimmer frame—paid their respects to Raja, praying and touching its mighty tusks in reverence. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa decreed that the animal be declared a "national treasure" and ordered its remains be preserved "for future generations to witness," his office said. Raja was due to be handed over to taxidermists later yesterday for stuffing after Buddhist funeral rites have been performed, its owner said through a spokesperson.

Tourist draw

Decked out in lights, Raja carried the casket of relics at the annual Esala Perahera pageant, a major tourist draw in the central city of Kandy—performing the role most years from 2006 to 2021. The elephant even had an armed escort of elite commandos after a 2015 incident when a motorcyclist almost rammed it while on an outing to attend a temple ceremony.

One of Raja's predecessors, who was also known as Raja, carried the golden casket of 34 relics for exactly 34 years

between 1953 and 1986. When the older Raja died in 1988 aged 72 there was an enormous outpouring of grief and the government declared a national day of mourning. The older Raja was also preserved and has its own museum within Kandy's Temple of the Tooth compound, which contains a purported tooth of the Buddha.

Hunt for successor

Choosing a successor will be a lengthy process. The chosen elephant has to be from a particular caste with special physical characteristics to qualify. When the elephant stands, seven points—the four legs, its trunk, penis and tail—must all touch the ground. The animal must also have a flat back, the tusks must be formed in the shape of a traditional window and its height must be about 12 feet (3.6 meters).

An exception was made with Raja, who was only 10.5 feet tall, because it was the tallest in the country at the time. Raja was born in India and had been gifted to Sri Lanka by an Indian prince. Elephants are a protected species in Sri Lanka but many are kept as pets, because they are seen as status symbols. Laws have been tightened in recent years to ban the capture of wild elephants which is punishable with death. Animal rights campaigners say captive elephants are often maltreated, a charge denied by temples and owners of domesticated elephants. — AFP



The mahout Wilson Kodituwakku places a white sheet on the body of Sri Lanka's sacred tusker Nadungamuwa Raja, who carried a golden casket of relics at an annual Buddhist pageant.



Folk icon Leonard Cohen

British firm acquires entire catalog of folk icon Leonard Cohen

British song management firm Hipgnosis said Sunday it has acquired the entire catalog of famed Canadian singer-poet Leonard Cohen, in the latest big catalog purchase to hit the music world. The London-based company said it had acquired rights to "all 278 songs and derivatives" written by Cohen, including the haunting anthem "Hallelujah," which Hipgnosis said had been covered more than 300 times and "streamed more than five billion times." It did not reveal what it had paid the heirs of the Montreal songwriter, who died at age 82 in 2016.

Cohen's longtime manager Robert Kory represented the heirs in the negotiations. In all, 127 of the songs come from Cohen's "Stranger Music" catalog, for which Hipgnosis acquired "the songwriter's share" of royalties for songs written up through 2000. The company said it had also acquired full ownership of copyrights and royalties for the "Old Ideas" catalog, 67 songs written from 2001 to Cohen's death.

"To now be the custodians and managers of Leonard Cohen's incomparable songs is a wonderful yet very serious responsibility," said Hipgnosis founder and CEO Merck Mercuriadis. "Leonard wrote words and songs that have changed our lives," said the Canadian-born Mercuriadis, who has managed artists including Beyonce, Elton John and Mary J. Blige.

The acquisition was carried out by Hipgnosis Songs Capital, a partnership between Hipgnosis Song Management and Blackstone LLP. Hipgnosis previously purchased the catalogs of stars including American-Canadian Neil Young and alternative rockers Red Hot Chili Peppers. Several top artists have sold their catalogs for impressive sums. British singer Sting sold his entire catalog in February for an estimated \$250 million, American media reported. — AFP

Newest 'Batman' soars to huge opening in North American theaters

Warner Bros' dark new film "The Batman" has soared to the top in North American theaters to become the year's first film to exceed \$100 million in its opening weekend, industry analysts said Sunday. The latest in a growing collection of Batman films—this one a particularly gloomy version, starring English actor Robert Pattinson—took in an estimated \$128.5 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period, Exhibitor Relations reported. The movie cost an estimated \$200 million to produce.

Sony's "Spider-Man: No Way Home" is the only other pandemic-era film to surpass the \$100 million mark in its opening weekend, analysts said. It logged a resounding \$260 million in ticket sales when it opened in December. "The Batman" has the Caped Crusader tracking down a serial killer (Paul Dano) while battling crime, corruption and his own demons. It also stars Zoe Kravitz, John Turturro, Peter Sarsgaard, Andy Serkis and Colin Farrell.

Sony adventure film "Uncharted," starring Tom Holland as an Indiana Jones-style treasure hunter, slipped from chart-topper to a distant second, taking in \$11 million—even as its domestic total passed

\$100 million. Metro Goldwyn Mayer's buddy comedy "Dog" placed third, taking in \$6 million. Channing Tatum plays a war-wounded US Army Ranger who agrees to drive Lulu, a dog injured while working with the military in Afghanistan, to her former handler's funeral.



English actor Robert Pattinson arrives for "The Batman" world premiere at Josie Robertson Plaza. — AFP

In fourth was persistently popular "Spider-Man," with \$4.4 million in domestic ticket sales in its 12th week out. Its international earnings are now just north of \$1 billion. And in fifth, down one spot from last week, was 20th Century's murder mystery "Death on the Nile," at \$2.7 million. It stars Kenneth Branagh (who also directs) as the quirky Belgian detective Hercule Poirot in this latest take on the 1937 Agatha Christie novel.

Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Sing 2" (\$1.5 million)
- "Jackass Forever" (\$1.4 million)
- "Cyano" (\$683,000)
- "Scream" (\$570,000)
- "Marry Me" (\$530,000).

JK Rowling promises up to £1m for children in Ukraine

"Harry Potter" author JK Rowling yesterday promised to match donations up to £1 million (\$1.3 million, 1.2 million euros) to a charity she co-founded to help children in Ukraine. The writer set up Lumos in 2005 "to end the systematic institutionalization of children", including in the Zhytomyr region west of the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. The charity said the area, where more than 1,500 children were trapped in orphanages even before the invasion, was now under attack from Russian forces.

It wants an urgent end to military action to protect the estimated 100,000 children living in institutions in Ukraine and to prevent more family separations. In response to Lumos' appeal to fund urgent supplies and care for youngsters in orphanages, Rowling tweeted: "I will

personally match donations to this appeal, up to £1m." Donations will go towards providing emergency food, hygiene and medical kits, and funding support families and foster carers to look after displaced and traumatized youngsters. — AFP



JK Rowling

Sports

Hosts New Zealand cruise to a 9-wicket win over Bangladesh

Cold, wet conditions affected her players: Bangladesh captain

DUNEDIN: New Zealand cruised to a nine-wicket win over Bangladesh in a rain-affected match yesterday to put their Women's Cricket World Cup campaign back on track. The New Zealanders, who suffered a shock loss to the West Indies in their opening match, looked totally in control in a fixture where the innings were reduced to 27 overs due to heavy rain.

Set a target of 141, they finished on 144-1 with seven overs to spare as Suzie Bates smashed 79 off 69 balls and Amelia Kerr made 47 off 37. Captain Sophie Devine said New Zealand needed to "move on quickly" from the West Indies defeat but admitted she feared the match against Bangladesh would be washed out, in a potentially disastrous blow to their hopes of making the knockouts. "We know that this competition's going to be tight so we're certainly happy we managed to get a win," she said.

Bangladesh captain Nigar Sultana said the cold, wet conditions affected her players. "We've never played in these conditions because of the rain," she said. "Our bowlers couldn't grip the ball properly and we couldn't see the ball properly on the ground, so it was very tough." She said the Bangladesh batters struggled to form partnerships but hailed her team's fighting spirit. New Zealand won the toss and opted to bowl in the first ever ODI meeting between the teams.

Bangladesh's openers made a dynamic start to their 27-over innings, intent on improving the sluggish run rate that cost dearly in a 32-run loss to South Africa in their tournament opener. Shamima Sultana made 33 off 36 balls before departing, then Amy Satterthwaite put the brakes on Bangladesh's scoring with two wickets in her first over and finished with three for 25. Fargana



DUNEDIN: Bangladesh's Sobhana Mostary fields at the boundary line during the Round 2 Women's Cricket World Cup match between New Zealand and Bangladesh at University Oval in Dunedin yesterday.—AFP

Haque managed 52 off 63 balls but was run out by Frances Mackay, who performed spectacularly in the field. Devine was dismissed cheaply for 14 but Bates and Kerr combined for a decisive 108-run stand.—AFP

Bastianini wins Qatar MotoGP

DOHA: Enea Bastianini won the season-opening Qatar MotoGP on Sunday and dedicated his first victory in motorcycling's premier class to former team boss Fausto Gresini, who died last year after contracting COVID-19. The Italian, in his second season in the elite, took first place ahead of South African Brad Binder on a KTM with Spaniard Pol Espargaro of Honda third after leading for most of the race.

"I think now it's incredible," said Bastianini, the Moto2 champion in 2020 who rejoined Gresini Racing this season after beginning his career with the team in Moto3. "At the end Pol was really close to me. I understood that now I could try to win the race, and I overtook Pol on the first corner after he went out." Bastianini paid tribute to the late Gresini, the team's founder and a double 125cc world champion in the 1980s who passed away at the age of 60.

"I dedicate this victory to Fausto. He pushed me a lot from the skies, and it's fantastic for all the team. I think we've all been crying." Bastianini started second on his Ducati but took control of the race from Espargaro with four laps remaining, improving on a couple of third-place finishes from his debut season. Alex Espargaro on an Aprilia was fourth ahead of Honda's six-time MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez, whose past two seasons have been derailed by injuries.

Suzuki duo Joan Mir and Alex Rins failed to replicate their success from Saturday's practice, crossing the line in sixth and seventh respectively. Reigning champion Fabio Quartararo of France finished ninth after a challenging weekend on his Yamaha. Quartararo began in 11th after barely sneaking into the final qualifying session, and suffered with tyre-pressure problems and a lack of top speed. "What's frustrating is that I'm really giving my all. I'm definitely here to get a good result and I finish ninth on a track where I won last year," said Quartararo. "It hurts but you have to stay strong. The most important thing is to keep in mind that, whatever the position, you're giving your all and today, sincerely, I couldn't have done better.—AFP



LUSAIL: Gresini Racing MotoGP team's Italian rider Enea Bastianini (right) competes during the Moto GP Grand Prix of Qatar at the Lusail International Circuit on March 6, 2022.—AFP



ORLANDO: Scottie Scheffler of the United States poses with the trophy after winning the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard on March 06, 2022.—AFP

Scheffler wins Arnold Palmer Invitational

MIAMI: Scottie Scheffler was the last man standing at brutal Bay Hill on Sunday, firing an even par 72 to win the Arnold Palmer Invitational by one stroke. Scheffler's five-under-par total of 283 was enough to notch his second win in three starts, after claiming his first US PGA Tour title at the Phoenix Open in February.

He had three birdies and three bogeys at wind-whipped Bay Hill in Orlando, Florida, and held steady coming in as the tough conditions, compounded by glassy greens and deep rough, saw his pursuers falter. Former FedEx Cup champion Billy Horschel started the day tied for the lead and had a chance to force a playoff at 18. But he couldn't get his 29-foot birdie putt to drop and signed for a three-over par 75 that left him sharing second on 284.

Norway's Viktor Hovland was tied for the lead after a birdie at 16 but bogeyed the par-three 17th from a greenside bunker and closed with a two-over 74 for 284. England's Tyrrell Hatton was also in the group sharing second after an impressive three-under par 69. Scheffler's victory was a testament to perseverance, especially since he said his game was not that great. "I did not swing the club well at all today off the tee," Scheffler said. "I was hitting a lot of bad spots, but I just kept grinding. I made some key putts there towards the end and two great lag putts there to kind of finish off the round."

Two a-drift to start the round, Scheffler was one-over through nine holes after two birdies and three

bogeys. He rolled in a five-foot birdie putt at the 12th to get back to five-under. He drilled a 21-foot par-saving putt at the 15th, and a testing six-footer for par at 16. He two-putted from 46 feet at the par-three 17th and from 69 feet at the last to get into the clubhouse with the lead.

"I would say the pars on 17 and 18 were gut check time," Scheffler said. "The finishing stretch here is so brutal - 15, 17, and 18 are such hard holes." Horschel was the only one who could catch him then. He had appeared to be out of it after four bogeys and a double bogey with just one birdie in his first 10 holes. Birdies at the 12th and 15th had Horschel back in the hunt, but he couldn't find another birdie in the last three holes.

Patience test

Hovland, who started the day one back, opened with six straight pars before sticking his tee shot within two feet at the par-three seventh for birdie. Then followed back-to-back bogeys at eight and nine, a birdie at 11 and two more bogeys at 13 and 15 before a birdie at 16 saw him tied for the lead again.

He couldn't maintain the pressure, however, dropping a shot at 17 when he was unable to get up and down from a greenside bunker and he settled for par from the fringe at 18. "I hit the ball beautifully at the start, just couldn't make any putts to get the momentum going," Hovland said, adding that the unpredictable wins made for a "guessing game" on the already demanding course.

"It's just a patience test," he said. "You've got to ultimately make some putts and have things go your way to win out here." Gary Woodland, seeking his first victory since his 2019 US Open triumph, leapt into the lead with a 24-foot eagle putt at the 16th. But he needed two shots to get out of a greenside bunker on the way to a double-bogey at 17 and settled for a one-over 73 that left him tied with Chris Kirk (72) on 285.—AFP

Shane Warne 'died of natural causes'

KOH SAMUI: Cricket superstar Shane Warne died of natural causes, Thai police said yesterday, as his family lamented a "tragedy we will never come to terms with". The legendary Australian leg-spinner died on the Thai holiday island of Koh Samui on Friday after being found unresponsive at a luxury villa.

Initial reports suggested the 52-year-old suffered a heart attack and autopsy results yesterday confirmed he died of natural causes. "Investigators received an autopsy report today in which a forensic doctor concludes the death was due to natural causes," Krissana Pattanacharoen, deputy national police spokesman, said in a statement.

He said Warne's family had been informed of the result and accepted it. "Investigators will conclude the autopsy reports and send them to state prosecutor as soon as possible," Krissana added. Surachate Hakparn, assistant to the national police chief, said investigators had found no signs of violence at the villa where Warne was found. "His father said he (Warne) had been suffering chest pains and was planning to return home for a check-up after this trip," Surachate told reporters in Koh Samui.

Warne's unexpected death sparked an outpouring of grief from prime ministers, rock stars and fellow athletes. The player-one of the greatest Test cricketers of all time—was found after failing to meet friends. He was taken to the Thai International Hospital Samui but despite medical efforts he could not be revived. Officials said his body will now be transported to Bangkok to be handed over to diplomats for repatriation to Australia, where he is to be honored with a state funeral.

Family devastated

In their first public comments since the death on Friday, Warne's parents, brother, children and ex-wife expressed deep sorrow, paying tribute to one of the greatest Test cricketers of all time and the man they loved. "To find words to adequately express our sadness is an impossible task for us and looking to a future without Shane is inconceivable," parents Keith and Brigitte Warne said in a statement. "I miss you so much already," said daughter Summer Warne. "I wish I could've hugged you tighter in what I didn't know were my final moments with you." "I wish I could've told you that everything was going to be OK and hold your hand."

Son Jackson Warne reminisced about playing golf and poker, and watching Australian rules football while eating pizza with someone he saw as a brother and best friend, as well as a father. "I love you so much. I don't think anything is ever going to fill the void you have left in my heart," he said in a statement. "You were truly the best father and mate anyone could've asked for. I love you so much Dad, see you soon."

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison led tributes to one of the country's "greatest characters" and announced Warne would receive a full state funeral. Over the weekend fans paid homage to Warne at the Melbourne Cricket Ground—including offerings of cigarettes, beer and meat pies—to remember an extraordinary cricketing talent with a huge appetite for life. 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.—AFP

Neville woe as Austin thrash Inter Miami

LOS ANGELES: Austin FC scored five goals for a second straight game on Sunday, thrashing Inter Miami 5-1 to surge to the top of Major League Soccer's Western Conference. Argentinean striker Sebastian Driussi and substitute Ethan Finlay both scored twice as the Texans ran riot against the David Beckham-owned Miami. Driussi opened the scoring for Austin on 22 minutes before Julio Cascante doubled the hosts' lead four minutes later.

Driussi grabbed his second of the game on 51 minutes, volleying home from close range after Miami gave away possession cheaply. Ecuador international Leonardo Campana gave Miami the faintest of hopes in the 53rd minute, punishing slack defending in the Austin defence to drive in a low shot from inside the area. But Finlay snuffed out any hopes of a Miami fightback in the 64th minute, and then lashed home a thunderous effort on 90 minutes to complete a miserable afternoon for Miami manager Phil Neville.

"This league is really punishing, you get punished for your mistakes, lapses in concentration," the former England and Manchester United defender, said. "We know our team is going to take time to settle and there were signs we were getting back into the game—and then we'd concede again. We've just got to stop conceding goals." Austin, 5-0 winners over Cincinnati in their opening game last week, lead the Western Conference with six points from two games. Miami have one point from two games and are 11th in the Eastern Conference.—AFP



KUWAIT: Public Authority for Sport Deputy Director General for Competitive Sport Dr Saqer Al-Mulla received Kuwait Fencing delegation in the presence of Technical Director Abdelkareem Al-Shamlian and National Teams Manager Ibrahim Al-Busaili upon their return from the Asian championship where they won three bronze medals. Al-Mulla thanked them for their efforts.

Sports

Atletico Madrid and Barca return to La Liga top four

Joao Felix scores twice as Atletico beat Real Betis

MADRID: Barcelona and Atletico Madrid rejoined La Liga's top four on Sunday after Barca needed a late penalty to beat Elche 2-1 before Atletico defeated Real Betis 3-1. Joao Felix scoring twice at the Benito Villamarin. It is the first time Barcelona and Atletico have both been in La Liga's Champions League qualification spots since August.

Atletico have struggled for solidity and consistency since winning the title last season while Barca are still recovering from a financial crisis and the departure of Lionel Messi. Yet both teams will be growing in confidence that they can now achieve their minimum objective, which is to avoid missing out on the Champions League next season and the further financial damage that would cause.

Barca are now third, level on points with Atletico in fourth, but having played a game fewer. They might both fancy their chances of finishing second, with stuttering Sevilla only seven points in front. Atletico's win over Betis was particularly significant given Betis started the day in third and have looked the mostly likely candidates to upset the established top four.

Felix, who was again preferred to Luis Suarez, has four goals in his last four games. "Everyone needs time. We ask everything from Joao and he is doing it," Diego Simeone said. Barcelona, meanwhile, had to come from behind at the Martinez Valero after Fidel capitalized on a Pedri error, only for Barca to come storming back thanks to two substitutes. Ferran Torres diverted in from close range on the hour before Memphis Depay scored an 84th-minute penalty after the striker had drawn Elche's Antonio Barragan into a handball.

"It seemed we were going to lose a game we did not deserve to lose," said Barca coach Xavi

Hernandez. "We deserved to win by more than one goal." Victory continues an impressive run of form for Xavi's side, who have not lost in the league since December and came into this game on the back of scoring four times in three consecutive games for the first time since 2017. When Xavi was appointed in November, Barcelona sat ninth.

'On right path'

"We have four wins in a row, this has not happened for a long time, it's a good sign," said Xavi. "The players believe in what we are doing. We are on the right path." Barcelona had the better of the chances in the first half, the best of them falling to Frenkie de Jong, who darted in behind but failed to beat Edgar Badia. Then Ousmane Dembele sprinted clear and his lifted shot was parried out to De Jong, whose follow-up was cleared off the line by Diego Gonzalez.

Elche then landed a sucker-punch a minute before half-time as Barca failed to deal with a straight-forward goal-kick downfield and amid the confusion, Pedri poked the ball back, past his own defense and through to Fidel. Fidel took a touch and fired into the far corner. Barcelona equalized on the hour as Dembele drove to the line and hung up a cross. Jordi Alba was unable to catch the ball cleanly but Torres was perfectly placed to steer in.

Elche were tiring, Barca pushing for a winner and in the 82nd minute they got their chance as Depay wriggled around Barragan, the ball popped up and Barragan instinctively lifted his arm to meet it. Depay swept the penalty into the top corner. Atletico were ahead after 75 seconds in Seville as Jan Oblak's punt downfield was flicked onto Angel Correa, who took advantage of some lethargic



SEVILLE: Real Betis' Spanish midfielder Cristian Tello misses an attempt on goal during the Spanish league football match between Real Betis and Club Atletico de Madrid on March 6, 2022. —AFP

Betis defending to cross to Felix, the striker given an easy finish.

Betis levelled in the fifth minute of injury-time at the end of the first half after Hector Herrera was robbed of the ball under pressure from Youssouf Sabaly and Cristian Tello guided the loose ball bril-

liantly into the corner. Felix struck again on the hour when Marcos Llorente raced in behind and picked out the Portuguese with a cut-back before Thomas Lemar added a third with 10 minutes left, sidefooting in after an electric Antoine Griezmann run down the right to secure victory. —AFP

Dynamic Diaz offers Liverpool fresh dimension

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp is still laughing off the idea his side could win a historic quadruple of trophies, but he does concede he has the best squad during his tenure at Anfield. One of the reasons for that bold statement is the recent arrival of Colombian winger Luis Diaz, who has boosted the German's attacking options for the second half of the season.

The Reds ended a 10-year wait to win a domestic cup competition last week, beating Chelsea on penalties to win the League Cup. They are heavy favorites to reach the quarter-finals of the Champions League on Tuesday — 2-0 up against Inter Milan after the first leg of their last-16 tie while a heavily rotated team cruised into the FA Cup quarter-finals with ease. A seven-game winning streak in the Premier League has also rekindled the Premier League title race with Manchester City, which seemed lost at the turn of the year. January could have wrecked Liverpool's season, with Egypt's Mohamed Salah and Senegal's Sadio Mane heading off to the Africa Cup of Nations, where Senegal beat Egypt on penalties in the final. But Diaz arrived from Porto towards the end of the transfer window for a fee that could rise to £50 million (\$66 million), refreshing Klopp's attacking options as he mounts a four-pronged challenge.

Triumvirate

Much of the success of the Klopp era has been

dependent on attacking triumvirate of Salah, Mane and Brazil forward Roberto Firmino. But all three are out of contract at the end of next season, at which point they will all be beyond 30. "It was necessary, we cannot rely on these boys," said Klopp after Diaz starred in Saturday's 1-0 win over West Ham. "You need to bring in quality and fresh energy. That's what we tried and it looks like it worked out."

Klopp could afford the luxury of leaving 17-goal Diogo Jota on the bench at the weekend, while Salah was replaced with the game still in the balance to give him a rare rest before Inter's visit. In the San Siro three weeks ago, it was Diaz's introduction that helped turn the tide as Klopp made four changes before the hour mark. Inter were the better side for much of the first 75 minutes, but the financial gulf between the top of the Premier League and Serie A showed in the final stages.

The Italian champions, who were forced to sell Romelu Lukaku and Achraf Hakimi last year due to financial problems, faded in the final stages when Firmino and Salah scored to give the tie a one-sided look heading back to Merseyside. "The boys have now really proper quality in depth, but we cannot play all competitions and go far in the competitions if we don't have this depth—there is no chance," said Klopp. "You can do it for a year when you are lucky with injuries, but I think we had years where Bobby, Sadio and Mo played pretty much all the games."

Diaz, 25, has scored just once in eight appearances for Liverpool, but he has been on the winning side in all of them as his direct running with the ball and pressing off it have fitted seamlessly into Liverpool's style. Even players who have gone on to enjoy huge success at Anfield such as Andy Robertson and Fabinho have initially been given

show after the cup defeat in midweek," Martins said of a French Cup semi-final defeat to Nantes.

Rennes recorded a fourth win in five games earlier Sunday with a 2-0 victory over Angers to keep the pressure on the clubs above them in the race for Champions League football. Benjamin Bourigeaud and Gaetan Laborde scored at Roazhon Park as Bruno Genesio's team moved to within a point of third-placed Marseille. Strasbourg's push for a top-three finish has been stalled by three successive draws, the latest a 1-1 stalemate after Sweden's Jens-Lye Cajuste grabbed a late equaliser for Reims to cancel out a goal from Jean-Ricner Bellegarde.

Nantes followed up their midweek French Cup semi-final win over Monaco on penalties by beating Montpellier 2-0 through goals from Randal Kolo Muani and Willem Geubbels. Lille thumped Clermont 4-0 with Jonathan David among the scorers, while Saint-Etienne climbed out of the relegation places thanks to Denis Bouanga's strike in a 1-0 win over Metz. Bottom club Bordeaux lost 2-0 at home to Troyes to leave them three points from safety and without a win in five games. —AFP

but there was never any danger of Celtic relinquishing their lead. The win takes Celtic to 73 points, three clear of defending champions Rangers with eight matches to go. Ange Postecoglou's side's commanding performance stretched their unbeaten domestic run to 29 games. Celtic were awarded a 14th-minute penalty for handball when Maeda's shot hit the grounded Jack Fitzwater from close range.

With main penalty taker Josip Juranovic on the bench, McGregor stepped up but struck his effort against a post. The first goal came when Maeda reacted quickly to head the ball over the line after the ball came back off Livingston goalkeeper Max Stryjek. Celtic doubled their lead seconds after the restart—Maeda missed Anthony Ralston's cross but the ball flashed in



Liverpool's Colombian midfielder Luis Diaz

months to settle and meet Klopp's demands. "When we saw him play for Porto we thought that is exactly what we want him to do as well," said Klopp. "He looks like a Liverpool player." —AFP



MARSEILLE: Marseille's French defender Boubacar Kamara (right) fights for the ball with Monaco's French defender Axel Disasi during the French L1 football match between Olympique Marseille (OM) and AS Monaco on March 6, 2022. —AFP

off Devlin. Forrest made it 3-0 when he ran on to Jota's through-ball and fired a left-footed strike beyond the goalkeeper.

Livi responded immediately when Devlin's long throw was flicked on and Shinnie stabbed home at the near post but Celtic remained in control and could have added to their lead. "It's great to win but our performance was excellent," Postecoglou told the BBC. "We started the game really well and put them under a lot of pressure. They were always a threat from set pieces but even then we competed really strongly. We focus hard on being as good a pressing team as we can be. We want to be damaging when we have the ball but if we can limit the opportunities of the opposition, that really helps us." —AFP

Things we learned in the Premier League

LONDON: Manchester City outclassed Manchester United to leave their rivals' top-four chances hanging by a thread as Arsenal climbed into the Champions League qualification spots at United's expense. On an eventful weekend in the Premier League, Newcastle won again to pull seven points clear of the relegation zone while Chelsea hammered struggling Burnley 4-0 after a turbulent week. Elsewhere, Leeds lost their first match under new manager Jesse Marsch to remain in the mire and Christian Eriksen made his first start for new side Brentford in a 3-1 win at Norwich. AFP Sport picks out three talking points from the Premier League.

United face another rebuild

Manchester United began the season beating Manchester City to the signing of Cristiano Ronaldo as they set their sights on snatching the title from their local rivals. Sunday's 4-1 hammering at the Etihad instead leaves the Red Devils in the all-too-familiar position of facing a yawning gap to the league leaders.

The scoreline barely did justice to City's superiority as a disjointed and dispirited United were brushed aside, leaving their chances even of making the top four hanging by a thread. Arsenal now have a one-point lead and three games in hand in the race to join City, Liverpool and Chelsea in next season's Champions League. "They gave up," said former United captain Roy Keane. "Shame on them."

United interim manager Ralf Rangnick could point to key absentees, with Ronaldo and Edinson Cavani out injured, while Raphael Varane and Luke Shaw were sidelined by coronavirus. But the German has failed to have the desired impact since replacing Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, who was sacked in November. Rangnick is set to remain at Old Trafford for the next two years in an advisory role. And it is hard to imagine him recommending anything other than another expensive rebuild for a dysfunctional squad. Arsenal seize control of destiny.

Arsenal were bottom of the Premier League after their first three games of the season, without a single goal to their name. But now they are fourth in the table, strong favorites to return to the Champions League after a five-year absence from Europe's top club competition. The Gunners have shrugged off the recent departure of forward Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang to Barcelona, which left them light on experienced attackers, winning their past four games.

The scoreline of the 3-2 win at Watford on Sunday did not do justice to the Gunners' superiority, with Mike Arteta's team playing fluent football and scoring some dazzling goals. The Spaniard said he tries not to look at the Premier League table too much. "I cannot control results and I cannot predict which matches we are going to win, draw or lose," he said. "It's impossible. If I start to do that I think we're going to lose focus in what we want to do." But a glance now and it makes pretty good reading.

Chelsea have been a club in turmoil over the past week. First it was announced that Roman Abramovich was to hand over control of the club to trustees of its charitable foundation following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Then came the dramatic announcement that the Russian billionaire was to sell up after 19 years of almost uninterrupted success at Stamford Bridge.

Despite the upheaval of the pitch over the past week, Chelsea have gone toe to toe with Liverpool in the League Cup final before losing on penalties, beaten Championship side Luton in the FA Cup and seen off Burnley 4-0 in the Premier League. Tuchel criticized fans who chanted Abramovich's name during a minute's applause to show solidarity with Ukraine before kick-off at Turf Moor. But he praised his team for their efforts after a difficult few days. "It shows for a me a lot of character," he said. "It shows the guys have what it takes to play for Chelsea. It shows we have the environment to focus on football. We believe we are allowed to focus on football and we do it as good as possible." —AFP

Celtic pound Livingston, to restore 3-point lead

GLASGOW: Celtic restored their three-point lead at the top of the Scottish Premiership on Sunday with a 3-1 win at Livingston. Daizen Maeda put Celtic ahead in the 17th minute, soon after Callum McGregor missed a penalty, and Nicky Devlin's own goal doubled the visitors' lead in the opening moments of the second half.

Andrew Shinnie pulled a goal back within a minute of James Forrest's 55th-minute effort,



ZHANGJIAKOU: (Left to right) South Korea's Lee Jehyuk, USA's Garrett Geros, China's Sun Qi and USA's Zach Miller compete during the men's snowboard cross SB-LL2 quarter-final event yesterday at the Zhangjiakou Genting Snow Park, during the Beijing 2022 Winter Paralympic Games. —AFP

Golden day for Canada at Paralympics

Hosts extend their streak of success

BEIJING: A hat-trick of gold medals propelled Canada from sixth to third in the Beijing Winter Paralympics' medal table yesterday, as hosts China extended their streak of success. On the third day of action in the Chinese capital, Natalie Wilkie powered home in the standing long distance cross-country skiing event, while fellow Canadian Brian McKeever, 42, claimed victory in the visually impaired category.

It was McKeever's 14th Paralympic gold medal at his sixth games appearance. "I'm still hungry," he told reporters. Beijing will be his last Games but he still has sprint and the middle races to go—which means a chance to equal the 16-gold-medal haul of German former para-alpine skier Gerd Schöffelder, the most decorated men's

Paralympian. At the snowboard cross, first-time Paralympian and double-amputee Tyler Turner made his mark with gold for Canada in the LL1 category.

Four years ago, after a skydiving crash, he didn't think he would snowboard again. "I like to tell people it's not pretty, it's not sexy—it looks like I lost my legs yesterday and woke up tomorrow on the top of the podium, but that's not how it goes," the 33-year-old told AFP. Fellow Canadian boarder Lisa Dejong netted a silver in the women's event, which was won by 47-year-old Cecile Hernandez of France, with Brenna Huckaby taking bronze in a race that had plenty of thrills and spills.

The men's UL snowboard cross final was an all-China affair with Ji Lijia, 19, prevailing over Wang Pengyao and Zhu

Yonggang to win his country's seventh gold. "Four Chinese athletes in the big final. We were really happy. Our goal is to bring glory to our home country," Ji told reporters. Top-of-the-table China's medal haul is now up to 25, seven of them gold. It's an impressive feat considering their first Winter Paralympics medal—a gold in wheelchair curling—only arrived in 2018.

Ukraine win gold again

Cross-country skier Oksana Shyshkova added another gold medal to Ukraine's tally, bringing their total number of golds to four. The team, which netted seven biathlon medals including three gold on day one, faced an arduous journey last week to make it to Beijing after the Russian invasion of their homeland. The

United Nations estimates 1.5 million Ukrainians have fled the country as part of the fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II.

"With the situation in Ukraine, it is very difficult to focus on the race and to be emotionally stable, but we know that we have to do everything we can," Shyshkova told reporters. "Our battle is here and we should prove that Ukraine is a strong country." Australia's top medal hope Ben Tudhope, who has cerebral palsy, pocketed bronze in the snowboard cross LL2 category at his third Paralympics. "I still can't wrap my head around it. It doesn't feel real yet," the 22-year-old told reporters. "Flying Finn" Matti Suur-Hamari claimed gold, with the United States' Garrett Geros winning silver. —AFP



BOSTON: Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics drives to the basket past Nic Claxton #33 of the Brooklyn Nets during a game at TD Garden on March 6, 2022. —AFP

Tatum's 54 sparks Celtics over Nets

LOS ANGELES: Jayson Tatum erupted for 54 points as the Boston Celtics defeated the Brooklyn Nets 123-117 on Sunday. Tatum's virtuoso performance means the 24-year-old has now tied Celtics legend Larry Bird's franchise record of four career 50-point performances. The victory was the Celtics' 14th win in their last 16 outings, and leaves them in fifth place in the NBA Eastern Conference standings with 39 wins and 27 losses.

"This is what I dreamed about as a kid," Tatum said afterwards. "I worked my whole life to get here. Obviously I have a long way to go before I accomplish what I want to accomplish, but I'm staying in the moment and enjoying it, doing what I love every day." Tatum's display stymied a Brooklyn side who welcomed both Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving to the same starting line-up for only the fourth time this season. Durant finished with 37 points for the Nets while former Celtics player Irving added 19.

Irving was taunted mercilessly throughout by Boston's raucous home crowd, with chants of "Kyrie Sucks" echoing around the TD Garden arena. Boston's balanced offense, meanwhile, enjoyed a productive afternoon with all five starters posting double-digit points tallies. Jaylen Brown added 21 points while Marcus Smart finished with 14. Al Horford (13 points) and Robert Williams III (10) completed the bulk of the scoring for the hosts. Brooklyn got off to a fast start to lead by five points after the first quarter, and took a nine-point lead in the third.

But Boston hit their stride down the stretch and pulled clear thanks to an 18-point fourth quarter haul from Tatum to seal victory in a game that saw the lead change hands 28 times. "It's fun the way we're playing," Tatum said. "Obviously we've been on a good stretch. We're just having fun competing. It wasn't always pretty today but everyone contributed and we just figured it out. "And those are the best wins—when you just figure it out, find a way to win whatever it takes. And that's what we did." —AFP

Giroud sinks Napoli to fire AC Milan to the top

MILAN: Olivier Giroud struck a huge blow for AC Milan in the Serie A title race with the only goal in Sunday's 1-0 win at Napoli which fired his team top of the pile. Veteran forward Giroud diverted home a wayward shot three minutes after the break at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona to put Milan two points clear of local rivals Inter Milan.

Champions Inter, who have a game in hand, had claimed the summit on Friday with a 5-0 thumping of Salernitana but now sit second, a point ahead of Napoli. The Frenchman's eighth league goal of the season was his first away from the San Siro since signing from Chelsea in the summer and came on an eventful night for the 35-year-old.

"I always try to do my job when I'm in the area, to be in the right place at the right time," Giroud told DAZN. "I don't want to talk about the Scudetto right now but we're hoping to win something this year. We're ambitious and we'll fight to the end." It looked as though Giroud wouldn't finish the match midway through the first half when he was flattened by Kalidou Koulibaly and was down for over two minutes as medical staff tried to patch up a bleeding gash above his ankle.

Giroud then clattered into David Ospina seven minutes before half-time, leaving the Napoli goalkeeper worryingly prone on the grass before he eventually got up and carried on.

A recovered Ospina did well to tip aside Ismael Bennacer's low drive just before the hour mark, while Theo Hernandez and Alexis Saelemaekers could have extended the margin of victory late on in a hugely impressive display which underlines their title credentials.

It comes after two deeply disappointing draws with bottom side Salernitana and Udinese which had allowed Napoli to lead the league on goal difference heading into this week's matches. Luciano Spalletti's team were the league's form team in 2022 but failed to ignite despite having an almost full-strength line up and a big crowd backing them.

"Today was a big opportunity for us which we wasted, but we can't cry about it because there are lots of games to go," said a disappointed Napoli captain Lorenzo Insigne. "If we play again like we did tonight no-one here will remember us."

Juve apply pressure

Alvaro Morata scored for the first time since mid-January with 20 minutes on the clock at the Allianz Stadium in Turin to keep Juve in the race. Juve sit fourth, seven points behind Milan, and are applying pressure thanks to a run of 14 league matches without defeat stretching back to the end of November.

Coach Massimiliano Allegri has repeatedly insisted that Juve are not in the title race and Morata was



NAPLES: AC Milan's Swedish forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic (left) fights for the ball with Napoli's Senegalese defender Kalidou Koulibaly during the Italian Serie A football match between SSC Napoli and Milan AC on March 6, 2022. —AFP

equally evasive when asked about his team's ambitions for the season. "I'm of my own opinion which is to think about the next training session and the next match. We can't think about it too much," he told DAZN. Sunday's was a far from accomplished performance from a team missing a host of players including Paulo Dybala, Weston McKennie, Giorgio Chiellini, Leonardo Bonucci and Denis Zakaria.

Spezia were excellent in the second half and had two great chances to level, with Emmanuel Gyasi heading a huge opportunity straight at Wojciech Szczesny five minutes after the break and the Poland goalkeeper at his best to stop Kevin Agudelo with 10 minutes remaining.

Domenico Berardi continued his impressive season for 10th-placed Sassuolo with a brace of penalties in a 4-1 win at struggling Venezia, who sit three points from safety after being promoted last season.

Berardi has scored 12 times this league season and is also in double figures for assists in the best campaign of his career. With Federico Chiesa out for the season the 27-year-old will be in Italy boss Roberto Mancini's thoughts ahead of the Azzurri's crucial 2022 World Cup qualification playoffs later this month. Krzysztof Piatek scored his sixth Fiorentina goal since arriving as Dusan Vlahovic's replacement in January in a 1-1 home draw with Verona. —AFP