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New interior, defense ministers appointed

News in brief

Pig heart recipient dies



BALTIMORE: Surgeon Dr Bartley Griffith is seen with patient David Bennett, Sr, who received a pig heart implant in Jan 2022. — AFP

WASHINGTON: The first person to receive a pig heart transplant has died two months after the historic procedure, the hospital that carried out the surgery said yesterday. David Bennett, 57, who passed away March 8, had received his transplant on Jan 7. University of Maryland Medical System said in a statement. — AFP

Over 200 flights cancelled in Istanbul

ISTANBUL: More than 200 flights for today have been cancelled at Istanbul's two airports because of expected snowfall. Turkish Airlines said yesterday that it had cancelled 185 flights at Istanbul airport today, 114 of them domestic and 71 international. The airline cancelled another 20 domestic flights of AnadoluJet at the smaller Sabiha Gokcen airport. Pegasus said around 30 domestic flights at Sabiha Gokcen airport for today were now cancelled. Nearly 50 flights tomorrow were also cancelled. — AFP



NASIRIYAH: Iraqis demonstrate to denounce rising prices of basic food items in Al-Haboubi Square yesterday. — AFP

Iraqis protest rise in food prices

NASIRIYAH: Protests erupted yesterday in Iraq's impoverished south over a rise in food prices that officials attributed to the conflict in Ukraine. The price of cooking oils and flour have skyrocketed in local markets as government officials have sought to address growing anger with various statements and measures. — AFP

WHO: Pandemic 'far from over'

GENEVA: The pandemic is far from over, the WHO's leader insisted yesterday, two years after he first used the term to describe the world up to the emerging threat of COVID-19. Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus first described COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Two years on, he lamented how the virus was still evolving and surging in some parts of the world. — AFP

Court says army fund money used for national security

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: An Amiri decree was issued yesterday appointing Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah as interior and defense ministers respectively. They replace the former defense and interior ministers who resigned together last month in protest against the state of affairs in the country and their inability to carry out reforms under such circumstances.

Meanwhile, the special ministers' tribunal said yesterday that the money taken from the army fund by senior officials was in fact used for "classified national security matters", and that the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah "was aware and approved the spending", and thus the issue is

outside public supervision and accountability.

The court on Tuesday acquitted former prime minister HH Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, former interior minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and seven current and former senior officials of charges of stealing more than KD 150 million from the army fund.

Detailing its ruling yesterday, the court said it received a letter from the Amiri Diwan stating that the money was spent with the prior knowledge and approval of the late Amir. The court said the money was used for top national security affairs and such matters cannot be disclosed for risk of harm to national interests. The court ruling is not final as it will go to the court of cassation for a final verdict.



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (left) and First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah are sworn in before HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday. — KUNA photos

Zionist entity prez in Turkey to 'restart' ties

ANKARA: The president of the Zionist entity met with Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara yesterday, in the first visit by a Zionist head of state to Turkey since 2007, as the countries seek to mend fractured ties. President Isaac Herzog's trip to the Turkish capital and Istanbul was planned weeks before Russia invaded

Ukraine, but the conflict could feature at the talks, with both the Zionist entity and Turkey playing mediation roles in recent days.

But bilateral issues may dominate following more than a decade of diplomatic rupture between the Zionist entity and majority Muslim Turkey, a vocal supporter of the Palestinian cause. "We will not agree on everything, and the relationship between (the Zionist entity) and Turkey has certainly known ups and downs and not-so-simple moments in recent years," Herzog said before departing.

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ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan shakes hands with Zionist President Isaac Herzog during an official ceremony at the Presidential Complex yesterday. — AFP

Biden orders work to begin on digital dollar

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden yesterday ordered government agencies to begin work on creating a digital US dollar, weighing the risks and benefits of a move that could be a

game changer for the global financial system. Coming amid the explosive rise of private cryptocurrencies like bitcoin, the US effort will place "the highest urgency on research and development efforts into the potential design and deployment options of a United States" digital currency, according to an executive order signed by Biden.

"A United States CBDC may have the potential to support efficient and low-cost transactions, particularly for

cross-border funds transfers and payments, and to foster greater access to the financial system," the order said, adding it could also be less risky than private digital assets. The world's largest economy will join more than 100 countries that are exploring or have launched pilot programs with their own central bank digital currency (CBDC), including China's digital yuan.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said agencies will "evaluate the

potential financial stability risks of digital assets and assess whether appropriate safeguards are in place". And due to the global implications of using digital assets, Washington will work with other governments on the effort that "will also address risks related to illicit finance, protecting consumers and investors, and preventing threats to the financial system and broader economy," Yellen said in a statement.

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Air defenses take centerstage at Saudi arms show

RIYADH: Air defense systems have been front and center at Saudi Arabia's first defense show as drone and missile attacks increase in the energy-rich Gulf. Deadly strikes on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates claimed by Yemeni rebels have been the talk of shows held in the two countries in recent weeks. Six hundred companies from about 40 countries showed off the latest military technology at the World Defense Show in the Saudi capital Riyadh this week.

"There is very much high interest in the region for the capabilities to defeat drones and IEDs," said Bobby Strawbridge of US firm Allen-Vanguard, which makes equipment to block radio-controlled weaponry. Saudi Arabia has since 2015 led an international coalition supporting Yemen's government against Houthi Shiite rebels. It has regularly come



RIYADH: A military drone is displayed at Saudi Arabia's first World Defense Show on Tuesday. — AFP

under attack along its southern border with Yemen.

Visitors to the Riyadh show are zooming in on anti-drone and air defense systems, according to Tomas Kossowski, chief operating officer for Advanced Protection Systems. The Polish firm sold its infrastructure-defense products to Saudi Arabia's national telecoms operator in 2019 and has

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The Hill's horseshoe bat, not seen in 40 years, was found again in Rwanda's Nyungwe National Park.

Bat not seen in four decades found in Rwanda

KIGALI: A critically endangered species of bats not sighted in 40 years has been found in Rwanda, with the "incredible" discovery delighting conservationists who had feared it was

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Local

Amir urges new ministers to exert efforts to protect Kuwait's security

New interior, defense ministers swear in before Amir

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Dar Al-Yamama, in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah who presented retired Lieutenant General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as the newly-appointed First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, and Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, where they swore in before His Highness their

appointment to their new positions. His Highness the Amir affirmed the necessity of increasing efforts to protect Kuwait's security, reiterating the importance of working with the legislative authority to best serve Kuwait and its citizens, wishing them further success. Several senior officials attended the meeting. An Amiri decree was issued earlier yesterday appointing retired Lieutenant General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, and Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets the new interior minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and defense minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, in presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. —Amiri Diwan photo

Kuwait Crown Prince receives Bahraini parliament speaker

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and visiting Speaker of the Bahraini Council of Representatives Fawzia Zainal, Head of the accompanying mission of honor MP Mubarak Al-Ajmi, His Highness the Crown Prince's Office Director Retired General Jamal Mohammad Al-Dhiab and His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan Secretary of Foreign Affairs Mazin Al-Essa, were also in attendance.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received the visiting Saudi Telecom Company (stc) Chairman Prince Mohammad bin Khaled Al-Abdullah Al-Faisal Al-Saud, and Saudi and Kuwaiti telecommunication companies' boards of directors. During the meeting, they presented His Highness the



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Speaker of the Bahraini Council of Representatives Fawzia Zainal. —KUNA photos

Crown Prince with the lock and key of the holy Kaaba. The meeting was also attended by His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan Chief Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Chief Abdulaziz Dakheel



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives the lock and key of the holy Kaaba from Saudi Telecom Company Chairman Prince Mohammad bin Khaled Al-Abdullah Al-Faisal Al-Saud.

Al-Dakheel and His Highness the Crown Prince's Office Director Retired General Jamal Mohammad Al-Dhiab.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also welcomed the



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Saudi Telecom Company Chairman Prince Mohammad bin Khaled Al-Abdullah Al-Faisal Al-Saud.

visiting Saudi Telecom Company Chairman Prince Mohammad bin Khaled Al-Saud and his accompanying delegation at Bayan Palace. His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Chief Abdulaziz Dakheel Al-Dakheel was present at the meeting. — KUNA

Diplomatic Women's Committee marks Int'l Women's Day

KUWAIT: The Diplomatic Women's Committee and spouse of the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman, Kady Al-Khrousi, co-hosted an event at the Omani House to celebrate the International Women's Day on March 8th. The Honorary President of DWC, Sheikha Halah Bader Muhammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the Ambassador of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Ambassador of the Republic of Kenya were the chief guests. Among the attendees were the spouses of ambassadors and diplomats accredited to the state of Kuwait and the members and friends of DWC. Narges Al-Shatti, the advisor of the commit-



tee, prepared a cultural, social program and a show of traditional dresses from some countries. The program began with an introduction by Shatti, welcoming the guests and participants, and a history of International Women's Day showing how women were able through their merit and capabilities to lead the campaign for gender equality since the beginning of the 20th century, and how they



achieved success and made the international community stand behind them to achieve their goals. A review of the efforts and success stories of Gulf and Kuwaiti women was also presented achieving gender equality in all fields of professions and in all aspects of life. At the end of the ceremony, Kadi Al-Khrousi, spouse of the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman, was honored for her outstand-

ing efforts since the day she joined the committee, and the Ambassador of the Republic of Sierra Leone as well for her continued support for the committee. Maqdis, The Director of the Ethiopian Airline Office, was honored for her support to celebrate International Women's Day. The attendees enjoyed the celebration of the International Women's Day.

Zionist entity prez in Turkey...

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"But we shall try to restart our relations and build them in a measured and cautious manner," he added, before a boarding a plane with "Peace and cooperation" written in Turkish on its side.

After landing Herzog and Erdogan proceeded through an honor guard at the Mustafa Kemal Atatürk mausoleum, with Herzog writing an inscription that praised Turkey's first president as a "visionary leader" for choosing "the path of collaboration". Relations between the two countries were frozen after the death of 10 civilians following a Zionist raid on the Turkish Mavi Marmara ship, part of a flotilla trying to breach a blockade by carrying aid into the Gaza Strip in 2010.

A 2016 reconciliation agreement that saw the return of ambassadors all but collapsed in 2018 in the wake of Gaza border clashes that killed dozens of Palestinians. Turkey has maintained strong relations with Hamas Islamists who control Gaza. Condemning the Herzog trip yesterday, Hamas reiterated its policy of rejecting "any form of communication with our ene-

my". After the 2018 Gaza bloodshed, Turkey recalled its diplomats and ordered the Zionist envoy out of the country.

Asli Aydintasbas, a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, told AFP it was "quite likely" that the reappointment of ambassadors will be announced during the trip. The rapprochement began following Herzog's inauguration in July. The Zionist entity's presidency is a largely ceremonial role, but Herzog, a veteran of the leftwing Labor party, has taken on an out-sized diplomatic role and has spoken to Erdogan several times in recent months.

Zionist leaders were wary of Turkey's outreach. But Erdogan's move to secure the release of a Zionist couple arrested in Istanbul in November on espionage charges proved a "turning point", said Gallia Lindenstrauss of Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies. The matter "opened the opportunity for improved relations", said Lindenstrauss, a senior researcher and Turkey expert.

Following the 2010 crisis, the Zionist entity created a strategic alliance with Greece and Cyprus - two states with long-standing acrimony towards Erdogan's Turkey - holding regular meetings and joint military drills. The trio were part of the "East Mediterranean Gas Forum" established in 2019 with other states, including Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian territories - without Turkey. — AFP

attache, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Drones have become the big new threat facing the region because they are cheap, easy to build and difficult to intercept, making them attractive to radical groups, the diplomat added. The Zionist entity said last month that it had fired at a drone launched by Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, while in November Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi escaped an assassination attempt by a bomb-laden drone.

Arms companies are gearing up in response. One company at the Riyadh show was selling a portable system that can block the radio signal used to control drones. That offers the possibility of setting up a drone-free zone over a military base or a moving convoy. Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest arms importer between 2016 and 2020, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, on Monday announced an accord with US giant Lockheed Martin to build an air defense system in the kingdom.

The General Authority for Military Industries, which oversees the Saudi defense industry, has made 22 deals with national and international enterprises worth some two billion dollars. The deals range from the purchase of military systems to the construction of production lines and the transfer of knowledge and training. — AFP

Biden orders work to begin...

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Governments and investors around the world rely on the US greenback as a secure investment, and the dollar is central to commerce as well, including the global oil market. White House economic adviser Brian Deese said "maintaining US global leadership" is a central goal of the effort. However, the study also will look for "unintended consequences," he said on CNBC.

Officials rejected the notion that Washington is late to the effort to create a government-backed digital currency. "We've got to be very, very deliberate about that analysis because the implications of our moving in this direction are profound for the country that issues the world's primary reserve currency," an official said. Biden's executive order called on agencies including the Treasury Department to examine issues including consumer protection, financial inclusion and use of digital assets for illicit activities.

The reporting deadlines are staggered, ranging from 30 to 180 days, and will include consultations with the private sector. The United States "can move quickly, but we can also move in a way that's smart and that's inclusive," the official said. The officials downplayed competition from Beijing, saying the US dollar "has been and will continue to be crucial to the stability of the international monetary system as a whole"

and those issued by foreign central banks "do not threaten this dominance". In addition to China, Nigeria in October launched its own virtual money, while El Salvador has allowed bitcoin to serve as legal tender.

Digital assets, including cryptocurrencies, have seen explosive growth in recent years, surpassing a \$3 trillion market cap last November, from \$14 billion just five years prior. The White House said around 16 percent of adult Americans - approximately 40 million people - have invested in, traded or used cryptocurrencies. However, "without oversight, the explosive growth in cryptocurrency use would pose risks to Americans, to the stability of our businesses, our financial system and our national security," the official said.

Another official stressed the need to ensure all Americans benefit from advances, since "earlier forms of financial innovation have ended up hurting American families while making a small group of people very rich". The US Federal Reserve released a report in January noting that digital currencies could offer potential benefits to American consumers and businesses, but said it is not clear they would outweigh the potential risks.

These include concerns the currencies could be used to evade sanctions like those imposed on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, but the official said they have not been a "viable workaround" for the "financial sanctions we've imposed across the entire Russian economy". Under Biden's order, US government agencies will look into preventing money laundering as well as efforts to use digital currencies to evade financial sanctions, while the Fed "is encouraged" to study the potential uses of an American CBDC. — AFP

Air defenses take centerstage at...

Continued from Page 1

since been in negotiations with other potential customers. Kossowski said interest from the Gulf in "defending critical infrastructure" was growing every month. "There is a big threat here from the constant attacks from drones in the region," he told AFP. "The Yemen border is under constant threat and with our solutions we are able to prevent drone attacks." The Saudi-led coalition says Houthi rebels have fired more than 400 missiles and 850 armed drones into Saudi Arabia over the past seven years, killing 59 civilians.

According to the Yemen Data Project, the coalition staged 401 air raids into Yemen in January alone. The UAE, which is part of the coalition, was the target of an attack in January that killed three people. "Houthi attacks have become more frequent and dangerous, that is why more advanced solutions are needed to confront them," said a Western military

Bat not seen in four decades...

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already extinct. But the Hill's Horseshoe Bat was in fact still clinging to life in Rwanda's Nyungwe Forest - a dense rainforest that is home to endangered mountain gorilla - the consortium behind the discovery said.

There had been no information on the population of the mammals and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2021 listed them as critically endangered. Rediscovering the lost species "was incredible", Jon Flanders, director for Bat Conservation International (BCI), said in a statement late Tuesday. "It's astonishing to think that we're the first people to see this bat in so long."

The Texas-based non-profit had partnered with the Rwanda Development Board and Rwanda Wildlife

Conservation Association to conduct surveys in the jungle starting in 2013. In 2019, after a 10-day expedition scouring the caves in the forest, the scientists found the bat. "We knew immediately that the bat we had captured was unusual and remarkable," BCI's chief scientist Winifred Frick said. "The facial features were exaggerated to the point of comical."

But it took them another three years to verify its species. The creatures of the night have long been infamous as fanged monsters or vectors of disease, with the coronavirus pandemic doing little to improve that image after scientists said COVID-19 likely originated in the animals. From the tiny two-gram "bumblebee bat", to the giant Philippine flying fox with its 1.5-m wingspan, bats make up a fifth of all terrestrial mammals.

Some 40 percent of the 1,321 species assessed on the IUCN's Red List are now classified as endangered. Human actions - including deforestation and habitat loss - are to blame. For the researchers in Rwanda, the elusive discovery marks the beginning of a new race to save the once lost species from disappearing again. — AFP

Local

Kuwait pledges to bolster joint Arab action, affirms support for Palestinians

Kuwait backs diplomatic efforts to resolve Ukrainian crisis

CAIRO: The State of Kuwait pledged yesterday to pursue efforts for bolstering joint Arab action at various levels, reaffirmed support for the Palestinian people and international efforts to resolve the Ukrainian crisis with diplomacy. The Kuwaiti vow was declared by Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah during a session of the Arab League Ministerial Council, held in Cairo, Egypt. The foreign minister, in his address marking conclusion of the council 156th session and handover of the chairmanship to Lebanon for the freshly inaugurated 157th session, expressed gratitude to the Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul Gheit and the AL Secretariat staff for their efforts during the Kuwaiti chairmanship mandate.

Kuwait, during the 156th session, sought to attain Arab solidarity and unify views toward urgent Arab issues, he said, noting that on September 20, 2021, a meeting was held at the office of the permanent Kuwaiti mission at the UN for consultations among the Arab League member states on issues listed in agenda of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly. Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser noted that on October 21, 2021, in response to an invitation from Libya, the State of Kuwait took part in chairing a conference for supporting stability in Libya, held in Tripoli. And, in November 2021, it took part in an international conference for Libya in Paris.

Arab solidarity

The minister listed other instances where Kuwait took action for sake of maintaining Arabs' solidarity, noting that on January 22, 2022, the State of Kuwait during its chairmanship of the Arab Ministerial Council, relayed a "Kuwaiti-Gulf-Arab-international" message to Lebanon including ideas on rebuilding confidence between Beirut and Arab states. On January 23, 2022, Kuwait headed an emergency session of the Arab League Council at the level of permanent delegates for taking a unified stance against terrorist Houthi militias' attacks on civilian targets in the UAE. A resolution was declared condemning the flagrant terrorist offensives. On January 24, 2022, in response to an invitation from the European Union, a meeting was held with EU states' foreign ministers where the Arab

stances were expressed to them toward various regional and international issues.

Shedding further light on Kuwait's political action in this regard, minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser noted that on January 30, 2022, Kuwait hosted the annual consultative Arab ministerial meeting, during which the conferees decided to take tangible steps regarding Arab causes. Moreover, during the meeting, Kuwait presented an initiative themed "the Arab food security."

On February 21, 2022, Kuwait headed the 58th meeting of senior Arab officials concerned with nuclear arms and weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) for taking a unified stand on the issue. On February 28, 2022, Kuwait headed an emergency Arab meeting at the level of permanent delegates at the Arab League to discuss the



Arab ministers mull Kuwaiti proposal on food security

Ukrainian crisis, where the conferees declared support for efforts to resolve it with diplomacy.

Unwavering support

Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser renewed the unwavering support for the Palestinian people, holding the Zionist entity, the occupation-hinging force, responsible for crimes perpetrated against the Palestinians in violation of international laws and conventions. The international community should shoulder the responsibility to revive the Middle East peace process according to relevant UN resolutions and the



CAIRO: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah (center) chairs the 157th session of the Arab League Ministerial Council in Cairo, Egypt yesterday. —KUNA

Arab Peace Initiative, he said. He applauded the African Union decision to suspend a decision to grant the Zionist entity the observer status.

Turning to Ukraine, he underscored necessity for Pan-Arab coordination to cope with ramifications of the crisis, affirming in this context the State of Kuwait adherence to the international laws and the UN charter that reject employment of force or threats to resolve states' strife. The State of Kuwait supports efforts by the UN and other international parties to de-escalate the situation and resolve the Ukrainian crisis, he affirmed. He called for further coordination among the Arab states to deal with impact of various external challenges affecting Arab peoples.

Diplomatic solution

Meanwhile, Abul Gheit expressed his aspiration to see a diplomatic solution to the Ukraine issue and voiced concern at the looming cereals' shortage in the Arab world. Addressing the session, Abul Gheit called for dialogue among stakeholders of the Ukraine-Russia crisis to resolve the issue, adding

that this question should not overshadow Arab causes. He called on the Arab states to be ready for defending "our interests and take stances that serve our objectives" amid forecast pressures by quarrelling superpowers. Economic fallout from the Ukrainian crisis have become well known and our region will suffer, regrettably," he said, urging the Arab League member states to map out strategies to minimize forecast hardships, affirming that the Arab nations would suffer from cereals' shortage, in particular.

He indicated at a Kuwaiti proposal during a ministerial meeting, held on January 30, for examining food security in the Arab world and prospects of integration among the member countries of the Arab organization at the nutrition level. "Now emergency circumstances should prompt us to act seriously for addressing this file boldly," he stressed. Several Arab states receive at least 50 percent of their needs of grains, namely wheat and cooking oil, from Ukraine and Russia. Military operations in Ukraine have obstructed exports of vital agricultural products to the Arab world. —KUNA

EU in talks with Gulf on diversifying energy supply: Spokesperson

BRUSSELS: The European Union yesterday said talks with Gulf countries on diversifying energy sup-

ply have been taking place and will continue. "We have conversations with a number of countries in the (Gulf) region and those conversations continue and will continue," Tim McPhie, Spokesperson of the European Commission for Climate action and Energy, told a news conference in Brussels in reply to a question by the Kuwait news agency (KUNA). The talks are held on the level of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Executive Vice

President Frans Timmermans, EU energy Commissioner Kadri Simson and EU High Representative Josep Borrell, he noted. "We are looking to diversify our sources. That is something we are working for several months when last summer we noted that prices were increasing due to supply squeeze in the global market, and that situation has now been exacerbated by the situation in Ukraine and that's why we continue to pursue these talks,"

added the spokesperson. The European Commission Tuesday proposed a plan to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels starting with gas, in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The plan called 'REPowerEU' will seek to diversify gas supplies, speed up the roll-out of renewable gases and replace gas in heating and power generation. This can reduce EU demand for Russian gas by two thirds before the end of the year. —KUNA

AIU celebrates Kuwait's National, Liberation Days

KUWAIT: The national pride of the Kuwaiti youth is strong and vibrant, and no one can deny this, especially during February, when Kuwaitis across the nation celebrate the holidays of National and Liberation Days. The crisp early spring air and luminous rising sun make for an ideal atmosphere for jubilees across Kuwait. The American International University (AIU) campus is a superb venue to host a celebration and the opportunity was not missed this month as events leading up to the grand celebration on February 22, took place almost daily throughout February.

AIU strives to offer its students an authentic American higher education experience by offering rigorous courses as well as an engaging and organized campus life. By hosting a variety of academic and social events across campus, students are given the opportunity to engage with others by developing essential planning, time management, and networking



skills, making them attractive to employers after they graduate. Students have the opportunity to participate in the events and are encouraged to join university-supported clubs that help facilitate the events that take place on the AIU campus.

One such event was the National and Liberation Days festival which took place on February 22, 2022. The ceremony was opened by honored guest speaker, Ambassador Jamal Al-Nasafi, who addressed the AIU community and shared his appreciation for the State of Kuwait. Following welcome addresses from the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Director of Student Engagement, students were treated to a variety of cultural elements including local dance and music, a student-led bazaar that sold everything from sweets to handmade wares to traditional Arabic coffee and tea. It was evident from the electrifying buzz which illuminated the venue that everyone in attendance was having a wonderful time. It is important for students to remember who they are and where they come from and events like this are important for cementing a strong and healthy national identity.



On the occasion of the



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News in brief

Amir offers
condolence

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of condolence to Pakistani President Arif Alvi over the death of former Pakistani president Mohammad Rafiq Tarar. In the cable, His Highness the Amir prayed to Almighty Allah to bestow mercy upon the soul of the deceased and to grant his family more patience. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent the Pakistani president two cables of identical sentiments.

Fund's Europe
assets at 22%

KUWAIT: An estimated 22 percent of Kuwait's future generations fund's assets are in Europe, while the fund's assets in Russia and Ukraine account for less than 0.4 percent, sources told Kuwait Times. The government has placed a plan to exit small investments in Russia, the sources added.

Kuwait oil price
at \$125.49 pb

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti oil price dipped by \$2.22 to \$125.49 per barrel (pb) on Tuesday, compared with \$127.71 pb the day earlier, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. In the world market, the Brent crude went up by \$4.77 to \$127.98 pb, and the West Texas Intermediate rose by \$4.30 to settle at \$123.70 pb. OPEC's basket of crudes' price went up \$1.42 to reach \$127.93 per barrel (pb) on Tuesday, compared with \$126.51 on Monday. The annual rate for the basket's price for 2021 is \$69.89 pb, OPEC said on its bulletin yesterday. The OPEC+ alliance involving OPEC and non-OPEC members decided during a meeting on March 2 to maintain the current production plan targeting a phased-out output increase of 400,000 barrels a day in April. Half of the output increase will come from Russia and Saudi Arabia, the top two oil-producing countries in OPEC+. Both countries will each be able to increase their production by 105,000 barrel per day to 10,436 million barrels by next April.

Shamal Az-Zour
announces profit

KUWAIT: Shamal Az-Zour Al-Oula Power and Water Company announced yesterday net profits of KD 13.5 million (approx. \$44.55 million) for 2021, marking a 10.32 percent increase compared to KD 12.2 million (approx. \$40.26 million) for the previous year. In a disclosure published on Kuwait Boursa website, the company added that the 2021 earnings per share reached 12 Fils, a 9.09 percent increase in comparison with 2020's 11 fils. It also mentioned that the board of directors recommended distributing five fils of profits per share, adding that such positive results were achieved due to decreased interest cost. Shamal Az-Zour Al-Oula Power and Water Company was established in 2013 and listed in Kuwait Boursa in 2020 with a capital of KD 110 million (approx. \$330 million), and it is concerned with building, operating, running and maintaining Al-Zour powerplant (the first phase).

Gulf Health Council
lauds Kuwait

RIYADH: The Gulf Health Council (GHC) lauded on Tuesday the achievements of Kuwait's Health Ministry both on the national and international levels, saying that the ministry was an exemplary institute in the region. This GHC praise came to commemorate Kuwait's Abdulaziz Al-Rashed Allergy Center for gaining specialized recognition from the World Allergy Organization (WAO). A statement by the GHC indicated that the Kuwaiti center was not amongst the best in the Middle East and Africa regions. The Health Ministry of Kuwait announced on February 8, 2022, that the Abdulaziz Al-Rashed Allergy Center had gained the Center of Excellence status from WAO.

EU Diplomat addresses EU-Kuwait
relationship, women's empowerment

EU's Irina Gusacenko talks her own work - life balance in interview

By Staff Reporter

KUWAIT: Irina Gusacenko, a diplomat in the European Union Delegation in Kuwait, spoke in an interview about the strong relationship between the EU and Kuwait, issues related to women's empowerment and various other topics. The following are excerpts from the interview:

● **You are the first female diplomat working for the European Union Delegation in Kuwait. Could you tell us more about yourself?**

It's a pleasure to be here and to talk to you today. From a personal point of view, I would like to say that I am proud of the two hats I currently wear: one as a diplomat at the EU Delegation in Kuwait and another as a working mother with a young daughter at home.

From a professional perspective, I have been a Czech diplomat for 13 years and have more than 10 years of international experience. I am delighted to be among the first EU diplomats to be based in this very welcoming country, bearing in mind that the EU Delegation to Kuwait is relatively new.

Prior to joining the EU's diplomatic service, I served as Deputy Head of Mission at the Czech Embassy in Kuwait and spent five years as a diplomat at the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Moscow during a prior posting.

As for my educational background, I completed a PhD in European Studies at Charles University in Prague, one of the oldest universities in Europe, and I also hold a Master of Arts in EU External Relations and European Diplomacy from the College of Europe in Belgium, a postgraduate institute established by the founding fathers of the European Union.

● **How did you decide to become a diplomat?**

I am the first diplomat in our family. My personal background contributed a lot to my decision. I was born in the former Soviet Union and lived through turbulent changes in the 90s, before my family immigrated to the Czech Republic at the end of that decade. The cultural and political environment in my new home gave me a new perspective and made me realize the importance of communication, with, and between, countries and people. This made me even more eager to reach out to other countries, to see things from different perspectives, and to understand other people's viewpoints. This thirst for knowledge and adventure contributed to my decision to become a diplomat.

Furthermore, I have always been interested in international affairs and, in particular, European integration. One of the unique things about Europe Union is the ability to travel freely between its member states and to live and study anywhere in the EU. Europe also gave me the opportunity to really immerse myself in other cultures and made me feel like a truly global citizen. I experienced this firsthand as an "Erasmus" student (a famous EU mobility programme for students) in France with fellow students of 30 different nationalities, as well as in Belgium, with participants from more than 50 countries. My own seven-year-old daughter is growing up in a multi-cultural environment. She is already fluent in three languages and currently learning yet another one.

I truly believe that the European integration process is unique. It brings stability and prosperity. We tend to take the status quo for granted these days in Europe, but I saw the significant changes the former Soviet Union went through during the 90s, and this is why I believe it essential to preserve security and stability. In addition, I have first-hand experience of the direct positive impact on the lives of the people after the Czech Republic joined the European Union in 2004.

Last but not least: a big thank you goes to my family, my mum and my dad, for their constant support. I remember that my mum used to encourage me to choose my own path in life. She always told me that "nothing is impossible in life" and "knock on the door and it will open". My dad likes to add: "treat people with respect and open your heart irrespectively of who they are and where they come from." Those are the principles I follow in my life.

● **What does the European Union Delegation to Kuwait do and what issues do you work on?**

The European Union has 145 Delegations and Offices around the world, representing EU interests to the host countries and building closer relationships between people. The EU Delegation to the State of Kuwait was inaugurated in 2019, as proof of our strengthening bilateral ties.

We cover a large number of cooperation areas, ranging from political consultations, trade and investments, energy, research and innovation, to security and women's empowerment, as well as culture, education, development and humanitarian cooperation. Our Delegation also represents the EU to the State of Qatar.

The EU Delegation is different from other



Irina Gusacenko

diplomatic missions as it also plays an important coordinating role with the Embassies of the EU Member States, particularly the 17 that are present in Kuwait.

● **What does a normal day for an EU diplomat look like?**

I see the role of a diplomat as a bridge builder, one who works to advance relationships between countries and people. A typical day for me involves a lot of communication in various formats and meetings with various stakeholders in Kuwait, like government and non-governmental organisations, youth groups, academics and the media, whilst exploring ways to strengthen ties and promote stronger political and economic relations between the EU and Kuwait. Analysing domestic developments is another key part of my job.

I am also the focal point on women's empowerment and human rights issues, so I am privileged to work with many inspirational Kuwaiti women and leaders committed to ensuring full participation of women in all walks of life.

Given the fact that I am also a mother and a wife, I am constantly balancing my professional and private life. Unfortunately, the pandemic is not making our life easier these days, but it taught me to be grateful for what



**Women's
empowerment
essential for
societies to thrive**

we have in life.

And of course, I try to immerse myself in the local culture and enjoy all that Kuwait has to offer. I have become an expert in all children's-related activities in Kuwait. I am particularly grateful to my Kuwaiti friends who introduced me to life in Kuwait, including the local culture, which I really enjoy.

● **You mentioned women's empowerment. Why is gender equality such an important issue in the EU?**

Thank you for this question. As a female diplomat, women's empowerment is close to my heart. As for the EU, gender equality is a core value of the EU and a fundamental right. Equality between men and women is enshrined in our treaties since 1957. It is an important part of who we are and what we stand for as a group of nations.

Ever since its inception, the EU has continued to tackle gender-based discrimination and we are proud that the EU is a global leader in gender equality today and one of the safest and fairest places for women in the world. Women make up to 40.4% of the members of the European Parliament for the 2019-2024 legislature, and the average representation of women in the parliaments of the Member States is 32.7%. Furthermore, 14 of the top 20 countries on gender equality worldwide are EU Member States. All of the above is owed to robust legislation, efforts to mainstream gender priorities into different policy areas, and laws to address particular inequalities.

And yet there is still much work to be done. For instance, the majority of women in the EU still carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid care responsibilities within their families, which hinders their participation in the labour market. They continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions in politics and business and, on average, women still earn 14% less than men do across the EU.

● **How does the EU promote women's empowerment within the Union?**

The EU is a global front-runner in promoting gender equality both within our Union and beyond. The European Union is working to address two of the greatest challenges women face in the workforce - lower participation in the job market and the gender pay gap. Currently the employment rate for women in the EU is 67%, while that of men is 78%. To help close this gap, the EU adopted the Work-Life Balance Directive, which aims to improve families' access to family leave and flexible work arrangements. It seeks to better support a work-life balance for parents and care-givers, and to encourage a more equitable split of parental leave between men and women, who often carry the biggest burden of childcare. Building on this, the EU has set a new goal for Europe - aiming to cut the gender employment gap in half by the end of the decade.

To address pay inequalities, the EU is proposing a European Directive for Pay Transparency. It is built on two simple principles - equal pay for equal work and transparency to ensure employers treat women fairly. Finally, the European Union is also putting women at the heart of the recovery from the pandemic. Stronger engagement on gender equality is key to a sustainable global recovery and to building fairer, more inclusive, more prosperous societies. Indeed, estimates show that advancing gender equality could add about EUR 11 to 21 billion trillion to global GDP by 2025.

● **The EU is seen as a champion and protector of women's rights globally. How does the EU promote women's empowerment abroad?**

The EU promotes gender equality through development cooperation programmes throughout the world as well as in our EU trade policy. The EU is also a major player in international fora on gender equality. The EU recently launched its Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Relations 2020-2025 (GAP III), which is looking for greater and faster progress towards gender equality by promoting a transformative approach and mainstreaming gender perspectives in all policies. The EU is also encouraging change in social attitudes, by actively engaging men and boys and by putting a focus on young people as drivers of change.

● **What is the EU doing to support women empowerment in Kuwait?**

In spite of the fact that the EU Delegation was established only two years ago and despite COVID-19 related constraints, we have been actively working with our local partners on promoting women's empowerment. Just to provide a few examples - we set up the informal EU-Kuwait Human Rights dialogue, a platform which enables annual frank exchanges on topics of mutual interest in the field of human rights, including women's and girls' rights. Women's empowerment was identified as a priority topic and a possible area for EU-Kuwait cooperation during the first and the second round of informal Human Rights Dialogue that took place in February 2020 and then in July 2021.

In July 2020, ahead of the Kuwaiti parliamentary elections, the EU Delegation joined efforts with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, and the Women's Research and Studies Center at Kuwait University to jointly organize a Workshop on Strengthening Women's Political Participation in Kuwait.

In 2021, the EU Delegation co-organized a high-level event on Women Economic Empowerment on 29 November, in the context of the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence and in coordination with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, UN Women and the Women's Research and Studies Center at Kuwait University, among others. The title of the event was "Driving Women's Empowerment Forward: Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and the Role of Business to Accelerate Equality in the Workplace".

The event aimed to showcase Kuwait's developments in the area of women empowerment and SDG5 and to exchange best practices in Kuwait, the European Union and abroad in the area of women's economic empowerment, particularly as private sector companies develop their post-pandemic and recovery plans, which are increasingly more purpose-driven.

Women still face challenges on their way to assume leadership roles, including in political offices. I believe that best practices from the EU and EU Member States could perhaps serve as an additional inspiration for further strategic changes in Kuwait when it comes to women's empowerment.

Women's empowerment and gender equality are essential elements for societies to thrive and we look forward to working with our Kuwaiti partners to build on the progress which has already been achieved in this regard.



'Lithuania mania' sweeps Taiwan as China spat sizzles

In Calais, Ukrainian migrants more welcome than most



PRZEMYSL, Poland: Refugees from Ukraine arrive at the train station in Przemysl, eastern Poland, near the Ukrainian-Polish border, to be relocated to other destinations, yesterday. — AFP

Ukraine refugee influx sparks rare EU unity

Poland welcome 1.2 million refugees across its border with open arms

BRUSSELS: The flood of refugees escaping war in Ukraine for the European Union has sparked a rare show of unity from the bloc's 27 nations after years of disputes over the sensitive issue of migration. In the space of just a week the EU rushed through a unanimous decision to trigger its protection mechanism granting those fleeing Ukraine the right to stay and work in the bloc for an initial two years.

It was the first time the EU had activated the measure, drawn up in 2001 after the conflicts in former Yugoslavia. "It's a unique and historic moment and I think we should take pride in this moment," EU home affairs commissioner Ylva Johansson told the European Parliament Tuesday.

"The decision was a unanimous decision, all member states agreed." The EU's response to the unprecedented influx of over two million refugees in 12 days is a major shift from how it has handled previous crises. When the same number of refugees arrived throughout the whole of 2015 and 2016 fleeing conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan the bloc was deeply split over how to share the burden. Now some of those countries most opposed to accepting refugees from

the Middle East seven years ago are neighbouring Ukraine and on the front line of the current crisis.

Poland has so far welcomed 1.2 million refugees across its border with open arms and 170,000 people have crossed into Hungary. The raw shock of seeing Russia invade the EU's pro-Western neighbour and the scale of the influx—the fastest growing in Europe since World War II—has galvanised the bloc to act with record speed.

'Prejudice'

But there are also "security issues that go beyond just Ukraine and concern the entire European continent," said Marie De Somer, a migration specialist at the European Policy Centre think tank. "Any sort of disunity or panic on the part of the EU, will be exploited by President (Vladimir) Putin," said Catherine Woollard, director of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles.

Woollard's NGO campaigned unsuccessfully for the activation of the EU's protection mechanism for refugees in 2015. She says part of the difference is down to the speed and size of the current crisis,

which has outstripped arrivals in 2015 when one million people came in the the course of a year.

But she also says it is undeniable that the fact most refugees from Ukraine are white and Christian has helped shape the response this time round.

"We know that racial and religious factors are an issue, so I think it would be naive not to note that part of the difference is due to those considerations," she said. "What we would like to see is similar responses in other situations, so that everybody arriving who needs protection, can receive protection."

Both the EU's executive and France, which holds the bloc's rotating presidency, hope the current crisis will push forward stalled migration reforms.

The push to set in stone a system for distributing asylum seekers among the EU's 27 nations has failed to make progress since being introduced in 2020 in the face of wrangling and opposition.

"We have to be ready for the next crises," urged French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. But that is far from certain as the EU scrambles to get to grips with the vast flows coming from Ukraine that Brussels warns could reach five million. — AFP

US rejects Poland offer of jets for Ukraine

WASHINGTON: The United States on Tuesday rejected a Polish offer to send MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine via a US air base, saying the proposal raised "serious concerns" for the entire NATO alliance.

Warsaw caught US officials off guard with the offer to deliver the Soviet-era planes to the US base in Ramstein, Germany.

Under the proposed scheme, those jets could then be deployed to Ukraine, while the Polish air force would receive F-16 fighters as replacements.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said the prospect of the jets, placed at the disposal of the United States, flying from a US-NATO base "into airspace that is contested with Russia over Ukraine raises serious concerns for the entire NATO alliance."

"We will continue to consult with Poland and our other NATO allies about this issue and the difficult logistical challenges it presents, but we do not believe Poland's proposal is a tenable one," Kirby said in a statement.

"It is simply not clear to us that there is a substantive rationale for it," he added. Kirby also stressed that Washington's stance was that "the decision about whether to transfer Polish-owned planes to Ukraine is ultimately one for the Polish government."

Ukraine has stepped up calls for Western allies to supply it with military jets in the face of the Russian invasion, but providing Kyiv with war planes poses serious risks — with NATO members unwilling to be deemed co-combatants by Moscow.

Ukraine's air force fleet consists of aging Soviet-era MiG-29 and Sukhoi-27 jets, and heavier Sukhoi-25 jets — and these are the only planes Ukrainian pilots could fly immediately without additional training.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a visit to Moldova on Sunday that Washington was "actively" looking at a deal with Poland to provide Ukraine with the MiG-29s.

But after Poland announced its offer, US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland told US lawmakers that Washington had been caught off guard.

Asked by a senator whether US officials coordinated ahead of time with Warsaw, Nuland said: "Not to my knowledge." While several lawmakers pressed for the jets to be rushed to Ukraine, Nuland refused to commit Washington to supporting or facilitating the exchange.

"I will continue to convey the very strong bipartisan view of this committee that these planes need to get to Ukraine," she told the panel. "There are a number of factors to consider here and there are some mixed views among allies and even within the administration."

While a significant part of Ukraine's air force remains intact since the war began on February 24, both Ukraine and Russia have sustained significant losses and neither controls the airspace over the country. — AFP

Revolutionary Guards killed in Zionist strike in Syria

TEHRAN: A Zionist entity attack in Syria this week killed two officers from Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the Islamic republic's ideological army said on Tuesday, vowing revenge. "Guard colonels Ehsan Karbalaipour and Morteza Saidnejad were martyred — a crime committed by the Zionist regime during a rocket attack in the suburbs of Damascus, Syria, yesterday morning," said a statement issued on Sepah News, the Guards' website. Zionist entity, it said, "will pay for this crime".

Both Iran and Russia have provided financial and military support to President Bashar al-Assad's regime since Syria's conflict began in 2011. On Monday a war monitor, the

British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said Israeli strikes killed two pro-Iran militiamen and wounded six others.

The target of the strikes was "a weapons and ammunition depot operated by Iran-backed militias near Damascus international airport", it said. Syrian state media said the Israeli missiles killed two civilians, something the Observatory, which relies on an extensive network of sources inside Syria, said it could not confirm.

Tehran says it has deployed its forces in Syria at the invitation of Damascus and only as advisers. This is not the first time Iran has accused Zionist entity of killing members of its armed forces in Syria. In 2018, Tehran said four military "advisers" were killed by a Zionist "aggression" in central Syria. The Guards had also previously announced the death of some of their members "on a mission" in Syria.

Syria's official SANA news agency said Zionist entity carried out Monday's strikes at around 5:00 am (0300 GMT), hitting positions south of the capital. "Our air defence sys-



DAMASCUS: A handout picture released by the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) shows a damaged car following Zionist missile strikes before dawn near the capital Damascus. — AFP

tems intercepted the missiles, downing most of them," SANA said. According to the Observatory, Zionist entity has carried out raids in Syria at least seven times so far this year.

Last month, Zionist raids near the capital killed two Syrian soldiers and four Iran-backed militiamen, the

Observatory said. Since civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, Zionist entity has carried out hundreds of air strikes inside the country, targeting government positions as well as allied Iran-backed forces and fighters of Lebanon's Shiite militant movement Hezbollah. — AFP

Freedom's choice for Afghans

ZARANJ, Afghanistan: Amid a roar of engines and clouds of dust, Sattar Amiri clammers into a pickup truck with his wife and infant son in a remote Afghan frontier town, ready for a perilous drive through the desert. Like the thousands of desperate migrants around him, he has only one goal—to reach Iran.

"I have no choice," says 25-year-old Sattar. "There is no future in Afghanistan." In Zaranj, a border town in southwestern Afghanistan, people smugglers say the flow of would-be exiles now reaches 5,000 to 6,000 a day—four times more than before the Taliban's return to power in August. At night, the most daring try to scale the

imposing wall that separates this arid city from Iran, despite the risk of being shot by border guards.

But when the sun comes up, thousands of men, women and children pile into old four-wheel-drive vehicles on a longer journey through mountains and deserts via Pakistan. Afghanistan has been plunged into financial crisis following the Taliban takeover six months ago, worsening an already dire humanitarian situation after decades of war.

Many Afghans are scrambling to leave the country for Iran or beyond in search of work to send money back to their families. Others fear being targeted by the Taliban because of their association with the previous Western-backed regime or the US-led foreign forces who finally withdrew on August 31. Sattar lost his job as an army mechanic when Afghanistan's military collapsed six months ago and since then says he has "not even managed to earn 1,000 Afghanis"—about \$10.

In desperation, he sold his house in



NIMRUZ: In this picture taken on February 17, 2022, Afghan migrants ride in pickup trucks through a desert road toward the Afghanistan-Iran border in Nimruz. — AFP

Mazar-e-Sharif to finance his family's escape to Iran, where he plans to take any job he can get. Nearly a million Afghans left their homes between August and December last year in an

attempt to flee, according to a recent report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This exodus has transformed Zaranj into a people-smuggling den of misery. — AFP

International

Guatemala Congress ramps up prison sentence for abortion

‘Criminalizing and penalizing miscarriages is dangerous’

GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala: Guatemala's conservative-led Congress approved on Tuesday a law ramping up the prison sentence for women who choose to have an abortion, while banning both gay marriage and teaching on sexual diversity.

The so-called Life and Family Protection Law punishes women who “have induced their own abortion or given their consent to another person to carry it out” with 10 years behind bars — more than three times the current sentence of three years.

The bill, set to come into law once President Alejandro Giammattei signs it, was passed by Congress on International Women's Day.

It also punishes anyone who induces an abortion without a woman's consent with up to 50 years in prison. Abortion is only authorized in Guatemala when there is a threat to the mother's life.

“While other countries continue to approve pro-abortion laws as well as laws that lead to the deterioration of the original concept of the family, this initiative has now become an important law for Guatemalan society,” said right-wing Congressman Armando Castillo, a key defender of the law.

But others were more critical. “Losing a pregnancy is devastating, and this law automatically turns a woman into a suspect even as she mourns her loss. They are criminalizing and penalizing miscarriages and that is dangerous,” center-left congresswoman Lucrecia Hernandez said.

The bill introduces a reform to the Civil Code,

which will now “expressly prohibit same-sex marriages” in Guatemala. It would also ban public and private teaching initiatives on sexual diversity, which it describes as “promoting in children and teenagers policies or programs that tend to lead to diversion from their sexual identities at birth.”

Those who promoted the law have said that there are “minority groups of the Guatemalan society” that propose “models of conduct... different from the natural order of marriage and family, which represent a threat to the moral balance of our society.” Left-wing Congressman Walter Felix denounced the law as “absolutely discriminatory”, and said it “incites hate.” “The human rights of significant parts of the population are being violated,” Felix said.

Congresswoman Hernandez also described the law as “unconstitutional,” adding that it will stigmatize people and spark “intolerance” in society.

“This law should really be called a law to imprison and kill women. It is one of the most brazen things they are doing in this Legislature, and on top of it all, they are doing it on Women's Day,” said center-left Congressman Samuel Perez.

‘Silly ideas’

After the bill passed, Human Rights Ombudsman Jordan Rodas said that the law “violates” international conventions signed by Guatemala, and announced a battle to have it declared illegal by the Constitutional Court, the highest in the country.

“Don't let them give us silly ideas”



GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala: Police officers stand guard outside the Guatemalan Congress in Guatemala City yesterday. Guatemala's unicameral Congress, controlled by the ruling party and its allies, on Tuesday approved a law that toughens prison sentences for abortion. —AFP

“We are going to file an action of unconstitutionality so that this (law) has no effect”, said Rodas. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets worldwide on International Women's Day to demand more rights, among them the possibility of deciding whether to have an abortion.

In Guatemala, hundreds hit the streets of the capital calling for an end to violence and corruption,

and demanding justice as they marked five years since 41 girls died in a fire at a state-run shelter.

As a small group of women staged a protest outside Congress, right-wing Congresswoman Patricia Sandoval defended the law.

“Don't let them give us silly ideas. This law is constitutional, it is viable, and it is the blessing of God,” she said. —AFP

In Calais, Ukrainian migrants more welcome than most

CALAIS: In the French port of Calais, Ukrainian refugees get hotel rooms, roast chicken and visa support from British officials — a welcome most non-European migrants here can only dream of.

Local people have given nappies, toys and clothes and the town hall has provided food and beds for the hundreds of Ukrainians who have arrived since Russia invaded their country on February 24. Like thousands of others from around the world, they have come to Calais, the last stage on the migrant trail to Britain — a northern French town marked in recent years by tension over migration.

Among them is Ihor Krainyk, a builder in his 40s. After more than 24 hours of nonstop driving, he can finally breathe. He is based in London but travelled to the Slovakian border last week to rescue his wife and daughter who were fleeing the war in Ukraine. In Calais, far away from the war in Ukraine, he was given a room and a plate of roast chicken with chocolate mousse. “Everything is well organised here. Thank you France!” he said.

The family's difficulties are not over, however. At the port of Calais, British customs officers told Krainyk he could return to England but his wife and daughter could not come. “We found ourselves here, exhausted, without knowing where to go,” he said. “Fortunately, people are very welcoming and told us to sleep here”.

The town's mayor lodged the Krainyk family in a youth hostel. The number of Ukrainians sleeping there each night has reached about 120. “I was going to pay, but they told me - no, it's OK,” said Aleksandra, an energetic 50-year-old wearing a metallic grey jacket. “It is true we are welcome”.

‘We have war too’

While Ukrainians are received warmly in Calais, others are not. In 2016 police dismantled a giant migrant camp known as “the Jungle”, but that did not stop migrants from coming.

Migrants from Sudan, Afghanistan and Syria are still regularly chased by the police and expelled from tent sites in the area. In contrast, the town has opened its arms to refugees fleeing Ukraine since Russia invaded.

Overall more than two million people are estimated by the UN to have fled Ukraine. The mayor of Calais, Natacha Bouchart, personally welcomed the first Ukrainian arrivals, a family of nine adults, early last week.

The measures have led other migrants and activists to question why the Ukrainians are getting special treatment. Steps away from the hostel, a group of Sudanese men sit on a slab of concrete eating a cold meal. They are waiting for a truck to smuggle them to the UK.

“In our country, too, there is war, militias”, said Omar, 33, who arrived from the Sudanese region of Darfur several months ago. “All of us would like to go to England. But here we are suffering, every morning the police come and tell us to move our tents,” he said. “Maybe because we are black, Africans.”

Francois Guennoc of the Auberge des Migrants, a coalition of associations assisting migrants, said all of them should receive the help the Ukrainians are getting. “It is great to see all this being put in place. —AFP

Serbs back Russians amid global outcry

BELGRADE: Amid the thunder of pro-Russian slogans and anti-NATO chants in the streets of Serbia's capital Belgrade, Marko Vezmar was unrepentant in his support for President Vladimir Putin and the invasion of Ukraine. “This had to be done,” Vezmar told AFP, while wearing a shirt emblazoned with a portrait of Putin wearing aviators and armed with a rifle.

“Evil reached Russian borders and if it wasn't for [the invasion] there would have been a world war,” he added, as the crowd yelled “Serbs-Russians, brothers forever!”. Days later, a pro-Ukraine demonstration in the capital Belgrade attracted a much smaller number of participants.

“I feel ashamed that my country did not join the rest of the world that condemned the invasion,” said Dubravka Stojanovic, a 59-year-old historian. As hundreds of thousands have rallied across the globe in solidarity with Ukraine, Serbia has emerged as a rare outlier with many in the country openly supporting Putin and his decision to invade the

former Soviet republic.

For centuries, Serbia and Russia have been united by deep fraternal ties — from their Slavic and Orthodox heritage to their steadfast alliances during the World Wars of the 20th century. Moscow's influence in Serbia remains ubiquitous, with Russian oil and gas providing the backbone of the country's energy sector.

Russian vaccine tourists have poured into the country amid the pandemic, while T-shirts featuring Putin's face are widely available at kiosks around Belgrade. “In the past couple of weeks, these are by far the best selling shirts,” said the operator of one kiosk in the capital, who asked not to be named. And now with Russia again on the war footing, many Serbians see no reason to side against their long-time patron.

‘Rock star’

The outpouring of support for the Russian invasion has come just weeks ahead of a general election in Serbia, presenting the incumbent President Aleksandar Vucic with a vexing dilemma. For weeks, pro-government media outlets backed by Vucic have echoed the fierce messages coming from the Kremlin.

“Pro-government media... made Putin a rock star in Serbia,” Vuk Vuksanovic, a Belgrade-based analyst,



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

told AFP. But with Serbia an aspiring European Union member, Vucic has tried to walk back some of the more chest-beating rhetoric in recent days, while also trying not to upset his pro-Russian base of supporters.

Following the invasion, Serbia officially condemned Russia's actions at the United Nations but Vucic has vowed to refrain from sanctioning Moscow at home. “I have aged 10 years in the past three days,” said Vucic during a national broadcast. “Our country has a position and as

long as we can, we will preserve it.”

Turning his back on Russia now could have dire consequences for him at the ballot box in early April, having spent years touting the importance of Serbia's ideological partnership with Putin. “What [the government] fears the most is the internal chaos that would erupt if Serbia chose a side,” Vuksanovic told AFP. “They are scared of alienating not only pro-Russian parts of the constituency, but also the church, the army and intelligence.” —AFP

Tanzania opposition leader's release stirs cautious hope

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania: The release of Tanzanian opposition leader Freeman Mbowe last week raised hopes of an easing of political freedoms in the East African nation, but observers say much more is needed to turn the page on years of authoritarian rule. The surprise move on Friday by prosecutors to drop terrorism charges against Mbowe, who had spent seven months in prison, was followed by a meeting hours later between him and President Samia Suluhu Hassan, with the pair promising to defend democracy.

The meeting revived the optimism that had accompanied Hassan's appointment last March after the death of her autocratic predecessor John Magufuli, with the then new president reaching out to the opposi-

tion and reopening banned media outlets. But her presidency fell under a shadow when Mbowe was arrested in July, along with other officials belonging to his Chadema party, just hours before they were due to hold a public forum urging constitutional reforms.

On Friday, Chadema secretary general John Mnyika said he hoped Mbowe's release would “open a new chapter of truth and justice in our nation.” “I will be even more relieved when Tanzania gets a new constitution, an independent electoral body and to see people's rights respected as important aspects of democracy and development,” Mnyika said on Twitter.

Opposition parties have been pushing hard for political reforms ahead of the 2025 presidential elections, calling for a level playing field. “Observing the



DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania: File photo shows Tanzania's main opposition Chadema party chairman Freeman Mbowe (c, in red) who was arrested on July 21, 2021, leaves the High Court in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. —AFP

rule of law and possibly (making) some constitutional reforms will help to improve the political space going forward,” said Richard Mbunda, a political science lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam.

“The shift will mostly depend on the political will, especially by the president, to address the main issues around democracy and rule of law which have been raised by the opposition,” Mbunda told AFP. —AFP

How Russian ‘safe corridors’ worked in bitter Syria war

BEIRUT: Russia's offer of “humanitarian corridors” for civilians to flee the Ukrainian cities it has besieged is a well-trying approach Moscow adopted during Syria's devastating civil war. In those evacuations, Russia backed Syria's regime in pummeling rebel-held enclaves, before it brokered “safe corridors” and exit deals for civilians and fighters to leave, paving the way for a return to full regime control.

The Russian-led evacuations were regularly ham-

pered by violence, often deeply distrusted, and were carried out with minimal international oversight. “In Ukraine, we are seeing some of the same risks we saw in Syria,” said Emma Beals, a non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute.

“In some cases, routes are attacked during evacuations and civilians are injured or killed,” she told AFP. Russia entered Syria's war in 2015 on the side of President Bashar al-Assad's regime. It negotiated and then oversaw controversial evacuations of more than 200,000 people from around Damascus, as well as the city of Aleppo and Daraa province.

In Ukraine, Kyiv has branded the corridors a publicity stunt, as many of the exit routes lead into Russia or its ally Belarus. Both sides accuse each other of ceasefire violations. Here is a look at the key Syrian evacuations Russia carried out.

The regime had been battling rebels in Aleppo since 2012, but in September 2016 it launched a final campaign backed by Russian air power. Russian warplanes bludgeoned rebel-held parts of the northern city, which came under a blitz of barrel bombs, shells and rockets.

According to the UN, about 40,000 civilians as well as more than 1,500 fighters were cut off in the city's eastern districts. Russia had repeatedly announced several “humanitarian corridors” it said would allow safe passage out-but few took advantage, with opposition officials labelling them “death corridors”. UN demands it should take charge of the corridors were largely ignored. In December 2016, Russia and Iran clinched an agreement with rebel-backer Turkey to evacuate rebel fighters and their relatives. —AFP

International

'Lithuania mania' sweeps Taiwan as China spat sizzles

Lithuanians say they have been greeted with toasts, handshakes from strangers

TAIPEI: The tiny handful of Lithuanians living in Taiwan are suddenly in vogue among the island's residents after their small Baltic nation did something Taipei has long staked its identity on: stand up to China. In the months since Taiwan opened a de-facto embassy in Vilnius, Richard Sedinkinas says he has started to receive applause in restaurants once wait-staff realise where he is from.

public displays of affection include a drone show in February, when a massive yellow, green and red heart was formed in Kaohsiung city's night sky—the colours of Lithuania's flag.

And when asked which country she would most like to visit post-pandemic, President Tsai Ing-wen did not hesitate. "I think Lithuania is a very brave country," she said in November. "I would like very much to go there."

'Like a sister'

Despite the vast distance and cultural differences, illustrator Mangirdas Riesuta says Lithuania and Taiwan share the experience of living under the shadow of a communist superpower. Now a tiny member of the European Union, Lithuania was the first nation to declare its independence from the Soviet Union in 1990. "Since then we have Russia by our side, always bullying us," the 34-year-old told AFP. "Lithuania sees Taiwan as a sister," Riesuta said. "We are going to set an example that we can actually (fight back) against bullying." No stranger to pressure from Beijing, Taiwan has in recent years lost several allies to China—the latest being Nicaragua which in December switched allegiance.

On the other hand, several Western democracies have made moves to strengthen ties with the island democracy. In 2019, Prague threw out a sister-city agreement with Beijing and signed one with Taipei.

Then Slovenia announced plans in January to exchange representatives with Taipei. "They should support democracy and that's why they should stand up for Taiwan too," said Austra Andriuskaite, head of the Lithuanian Community in Taiwan Association.

'Stand united'

In a Lithuania-themed bar along Taipei's Tamsui River, drinkers clink glasses of Voruta blackcurrant



TAIPEI, Taiwan: File photo shows Austra Andriuskaite (R), chairwoman of the Lithuanian community in Taiwan, displaying the flags of Taiwan and Lithuania (R) at a dinner gathering to celebrate their country's Independence Day in Taipei. — AFP

wine as the country's national anthem blares out of the speakers. Bottles of Gira beer, Ozone vodka, and Propeller dark rum—none of which would appear out of place in a Vilnius pub—line the shelves.

Owner David Yeh says his Little-One bar—a homophone to Lithuania's Mandarin name "Litaowan"—started getting more attention last year after Vilnius became the first EU government to donate vaccines.

"A Lithuania mania has swept among Taiwanese people who want to know about the country," he says. The wave of goodwill also meant 20,000 bottles of

Lithuanian rum, snapped up by Taiwan's state-run liquor company when it was blocked by China, sold out quickly among the island's drinkers.

Irena Marazaitė-Lin, a German-Mandarin translator, says growing interest in her homeland means she is now getting interpreting jobs using her native language for the first time, both with a government agency and a local company mulling Lithuania food imports.

"It's easy for China to bully a small country like Lithuania but it won't be so easy if all democratic countries can stand united," she says. — AFP



Feels like we are now celebrities

It doesn't matter that the 41-year-old boxing instructor, as well as about two dozen other Lithuanians living in Taiwan, had nothing to do with their country's decision. "People like to show appreciation—they treasure that somebody supports Taiwan in the face of this giant country (next door)," Sedinkinas told AFP.

China regards self-ruled, democratic Taiwan as part of its territory, and it balks at any international support for the island's sovereignty. Lithuania took the bold step last year to allow Taipei to open a representative office under the name of Taiwan, a significant diplomatic departure that incurred Beijing's wrath—downgrading Vilnius' relations and blocking its exports.

Within Taiwan however, Lithuanians say they have been greeted with toasts, handshakes from strangers, and free taxi rides. "Feels like we are now celebrities," Sedinkinas said. "We receive so much love." Other



PESHAWAR, Pakistan: Shiite Muslims take part in a protest against the recent suicide bomb attack on a Shiite mosque in Peshawar. — AFP

IS suicide bomber of Pakistan mosque was Afghan: Police

PESHAWAR: An Islamic State (IS) suicide bomber who killed 64 people at a Shiite mosque in northwest Pakistan last week was an Afghan exile who returned home to train for the attack, police said yesterday. There have been warnings Afghanistan could become a recruiting ground and staging post for militants since the Taliban returned to power last year following the hasty withdrawal of US-led forces. The Taliban have pledged they will not allow Afghan soil to be used to plot attacks on other nations, but last month the UN Security Council said "terrorist groups enjoy greater freedom there than at any time in recent history".

Two senior Pakistan police officials told AFP that the suicide bomber responsible for Friday's Peshawar blast had prepared the attack in Afghanistan. It was claimed by IS, whose Islamic State-Khorasan affiliate has been

active for years in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The officials said the attacker was an Afghan national in his 30s who moved to Pakistan with his family decades ago. "The bomber went to Afghanistan, trained there and returned without informing his family," one of the senior police officials told AFP.

"Islamic State-Khorasan is becoming a strong threat for us, they are operating from Afghanistan but they have sleeping cells here," he added. Taliban officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Police said they had killed three "facilitators" of the attack in an overnight operation, and arrested 20 others suspected of involvement.

IS also claimed responsibility for what it said was a suicide blast on Tuesday that killed seven paramilitary troops near a site in southwestern Pakistan where the president had visited less than half an hour earlier.

Since the Taliban's return to power, Islamabad has acted as a key broker between the hardliners and the international community. Pakistan was one of just three nations to officially recognise their first regime from 1996 to 2001. Its own version of the Taliban, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, have also staged attacks from hideouts in Afghanistan, testing their current diplomatic relationship. — AFP

for Human Rights and Democracy tweeted that Fernandez "was unjustly detained"

'Two beautiful flags'

The US delegation that traveled to Caracas at the weekend discussed energy supplies with Maduro, as Washington looks for ways to replace Russian oil imports, which have now been banned over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. The meeting was seen as a possible turning point in relations, since the United States ended its Venezuelan embassy operations in 2019, after Maduro claimed victory in a 2018 election that many countries deemed illegitimate.

Along with more than 50 countries, the United States recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido as interim president and imposed a battery of sanctions seeking to displace the socialist ruler, including an embargo on oil imports. The US Justice Department has also accused Maduro of drug trafficking and has even offered a \$15 million reward for information leading to his capture. Nonetheless, according to Maduro, the delegation held a "respectful, cordial and diplomatic" meeting for almost two hours over the weekend.

"We did it in the presidential office," Maduro said on Monday in a television address. "There were the two beautiful flags, united as the flags of the United States and Venezuela should be." While Maduro did not say what topics were addressed, White House press secretary Jen Psaki confirmed that "energy security" was one of the issues raised. It is not yet clear whether Cardenas and Fernandez have been cleared of their charges or by what process they were released. Last month, Venezuela's Supreme Court confirmed sentences for the "Citgo 6," including one for Cardenas of eight years and 10 months. — AFP

Protesters rally as Australian PM tours flood disaster

SYDNEY: Scores of protesters in a flood-wrecked city in eastern Australia vented their fury yesterday as Prime Minister Scott Morrison visited the heart of the disaster zone. Demonstrators demanded more help and stronger climate action as Morrison toured Lismore, which endured some of the worst flooding in a near two-week deluge along the east coast that has killed at least 21 people.

"We need help!" protesters chanted as Morrison visited the city. Many held placards with messages blaming the climate crisis including: "Coal and gas did this" and "This is what climate change looks like."

After the second major floods in a year, chunks of rubble and discarded, water-damaged furniture were piled high along the city's streets. Many people had to clamber onto their corrugated metal roofs to escape the fast-rising water last week as floods peaked in the city in northern New South Wales.

Some waited for hours to be rescued by locally improvised boat patrols, emergency services vessels or army helicopters as the waters surged around them.

Floodwaters across much of the east coast retreated as rainfall eased Wednesday, but major flood warnings were still in force in some areas including at the Hawkesbury River west of Sydney.

'Hard to live in'

Evacuation orders affecting about 40,000 people in New South Wales were in force in the morning. More than 90,000 people had been allowed to return to their homes. The death toll from the east coast deluge rose to 21 as police discovered the body of a 50-year-old delivery truck driver in floodwaters in Sydney's west.

Facing pointed questions at a news conference in the city, Morrison defended his government's climate record by stressing its commitment to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. "We are dealing with a different climate to the one we were dealing with before. I think that's just an obvious fact," Morrison said. "And Australia is getting hard to live in because of these disasters."

Morrison, who faces an election by the end of May, has underscored his support for coal-fired power stations to provide cheap electricity throughout their lifespans. Even as the floodwaters retreat, the scars on the landscape are widespread. In Narrabeen, on Sydney's northern beaches, the rains caused landslides that cleaved chunks out of the hillside along residential streets. Cleaning crews tried to clear away the mud and fallen trees yesterday. — AFP



SYDNEY: Fire and rescue officials arrive at a residential area inundated with floodwaters from an overflowing Hawkesbury River in the Windsor suburb of Sydney yesterday. — AFP

Two Americans released from Venezuelan prison

CARACAS, Venezuela: Two Americans, including a former executive of oil giant Citgo, were released from prison in Venezuela Tuesday, just days after a high-level US delegation met with President Nicolas Maduro.

The Citgo executive, Gustavo Cardenas, is one of the so-called "Citgo 6"—five Venezuela-born American citizens and one with US permanent residency—who have been held in Venezuela since 2017, accused of corruption. All six executives were handed lengthy jail sentences, and Washington has repeatedly asked for their release, with State Department spokesman Ned Price saying last October that they were being held as "political pawns." Attorney Jesus Loreto said that "the other five are still detained."

Citgo is the US subsidiary of Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA. US President Joe Biden confirmed the release of Cardenas and the second American, Jorge Alberto Fernandez, saying they were "wrongfully detained in Venezuela."

"We also remember the names and the stories of every American who is being unjustly held against their will—in Venezuela, in Russia, in Afghanistan, Syria, China, Iran, and elsewhere around the world," Biden said in a statement. Fernandez, a Cuban-American, was arrested in 2021 in Tachira state, bordering Colombia, after being accused of terrorism. The NGO Coalition

Rights watchdogs say 13 demonstrators killed in Chad

LIBREVILLE, Gabon: Security forces in eastern Chad killed at least 13 demonstrators, including a 12-year-old boy, who were protesting peacefully at a time of ethnic friction in their region, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said yesterday.

People in the town of Abeche rallied against a plan to inaugurate an official who comes from the Arab community at a site reportedly reserved for the sultan of the native Ouaddaïen community. On January 24, thousands of protesters were violently dispersed by soldiers, who killed three people and injured at least 40 others, HRW said in a joint statement with the Chadian Convention for the Defence of Human Rights (CTDDH). The following day, at a funeral for those who had died, "soldiers indiscriminately shot live rounds again, killing an additional 10 people and injuring at least 40 others," they said. A total of 212 people were

arrested and held for up to five days before being released, sometimes enduring beatings and inhumane conditions, they said.

The account is based on interviews with witnesses, two doctors and representatives of civil society groups, as well as videos and photographs, the two groups said. Their toll compares with an account given by a government official to AFP on January 28, who said 14 people had been killed and 64 wounded.

Communications Minister Abderraman Koullallah, who was also appointed government spokesman by the military junta which took power 10 months ago, told AFP on Wednesday, "The army didn't fire on anyone." "The army tried to establish order in a violent demonstration in which civilians used weapons, people were killed and property destroyed. The army reacted proportionately," he said. He added, however, "an enquiry has been opened to establish responsibility. HRW would do well to wait for the outcome."

A vast landlocked country in north-central Africa, Chad has a history of sporadic ethnic friction. The Ouaddaï is a vast semi-desert region near the border with Sudan that was once the heartland of the Ouaddaï Sultanate, an empire that existed for nearly three centuries until it was conquered by France in the early 20th century. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, MARCH 10, 2022

Zain Group successfully participates in Mobile World Congress Barcelona

Participation under its 4Sight strategic theme of 'Creating a Sustainable Digital Future'



BARCELONA: Bader Al-Kharafi and CEO of Omantel Talal Al-Mamari with Zain Group board members in Barcelona

- Zain showcased 10 demonstration areas welcoming many industry figures and authorities
- Senior management from operations attend reinforcing presence after 4-year absence

BARCELONA/KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading mobile innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announced its successful participation at Mobile World Congress (MWC) that took place in Barcelona, Spain between 28 February to 3 March, after a four-year absence. The leading regional telco utilized its presence at the leading global telecom conference and exhibition under its 4Sight strategic theme of "Creating a Sustainable Digital Future" to showcase activities that are turning it into a digital lifestyle service provider; sign a series of memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and introduce several cutting-edge solutions.

Zain Group benefitted on multiple levels from MWC Barcelona, assembling senior management from across its operating companies led by Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi to discuss issues of strategic importance as well as exchange considerations on the telco's future roadmap, that also witnessed Zain operations entering multiple deals with world leading technology and solutions' providers.

Moreover, Zain executive teams met with and entered strategic and continuous agreements with multiple key industry partners and held meetings with regulatory figures from their respective countries. Agreements and MoUs with leading technology innovators included but were not limited to Huawei, Ericsson, Nokia, Cisco, Microsoft, AWS, Dell and VMware support Zain in advancing its technological lead and customer offerings across all its markets.

A total of 10 demonstration areas were on display on the Zain booth, welcoming hundreds of visitors and highlighting activities in areas that included its 4Sight corporate and sustainability strategy; ZainTech enterprise and government (B2B) solutions provider that also included showcasing its Smart Cities, Cloud, Data and Zain Drone services; as well as Zain Global Connect wholesale and connectivity activities.

In addition, Zain Ventures, the venture capital and investment arm, highlighted its recent investments in ZoodPay, 'Buy Now, Pay Later' as well as in PIPE and Swvl, and other investments in leading Venture



Zain's booth at MWC



Multiple strategic deals centered on Zain Fintech, Zain Ventures, API platform, ZainTechData and Cloud initiatives, Wholesale and Tower monetization, and 5G LAN launch in KSA

Capital funds such as MEVP, BECO Capital and Valor Capital. Moreover, Zain Fintech showcased its Tamam micro-lending platform in Saudi Arabia, and Zain Cash in Iraq and Jordan, and M-Gurush in South Sudan, platforms that collectively attracted 1.5 million customers recording over 25 million transactions with a value of \$2.3 billion in 2021.

Also, Zain announced the establishment of Dizlee, the company's recently rebranded API engagement program; and showcased its Zain Esports achieve-

ments and future activities, which also incorporated an entertaining gaming zone for visitors that attracted many gaming enthusiasts.

In particular, Zain Saudi Arabia announced the launch of a 5G local area network (5G LAN), becoming the first operator in the Middle East and North Africa to adopt such advanced technology. Zain Saudi Arabia intends to provide its subscribers, mainly enterprise users, with a virtual local 5G network fully reliant on the 5G Stand-

alone technology, supporting an unmatched modern, reliable, and secure experience regardless of the number of connected devices and the nature of network connections.

Over the last few years, the telecom industry globally has been extremely resilient, and this year's Congress was especially important from the perspective of allowing Zain to meet, exchange experiences, and chart an effective way forward.

Zain continues to evolve and transform itself into a multi-dimensional digital lifestyle services provider. The growing range and complexity of partnerships and ecosystems bear witness to this trend and the company was honored to be able to showcase its progress at Mobile World Congress. Zain is committed to continuing to maximize value for all stakeholders and working with a wide array of collaborators to achieve this goal.

During MWC, Zain Group, and other regional operators announced the opening of the first regional community lab in collaboration with Telecom Infra Project (TIP) and Intel, following the recent signing of the Open RAN MoU to enhance network experiences for end-users.

Keeping with the theme of regional cooperation, Zain Group and Omantel also signed an MoU with other operators to accelerate collaboration to protect the environment, tackle climate change challenges, as well as reduce the carbon footprint through their operations. The memorandum reflects the efforts of the GCC's major telcos in facing environmental challenges, focusing on climate change and advancing the regional sustainability agenda. Zain was recently upgraded to A- in latest 'CDP Score Report - Climate Change 2021', ranking it first in region and among leaders globally.

The Zain booth attracted thousands of visitors over the 4-day congress who were intrigued by the booth's vibrancy and the insightful demonstrations, that included a prominent sustainability focused area at the entrance of the stand. Zain's participation and meetings during MWC Barcelona proved to be very successful in supporting the company's sustainable strategic roadmap and digital transformation.



Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi with top Huawei executives at the company's MWC booth



BARCELONA: Bader Al-Kharafi with Zain Group operations and finance executives at MWC

Business

Volkswagen reimagine classic camper for the electric age

VW bus, symbol of the hippy movement, for today's climate-conscious generation

FRANKFURT: Seventy years after its first model rolled off the factory line, Volkswagen is reinventing the VW bus, symbol of the hippy movement, for today's climate-conscious generation—but some of its former aficionados remain to be convinced.

The German automaker unveiled the camper's latest iteration, known as the ID.Buzz, part of the flagship ID line with which Volkswagen is leading a multi-billion-euro charge into the electric car market.

Reviving the "icon" was a "priority", group CEO Herbert Diess said recently in a question-and-answer session on the online forum Reddit. The new model, with its curvy resemblance to the original VW campers that had their hey-day in the 60s and 70s, was a "turning point" for Volkswagen, according to German car market expert Ferdinand Dudenhoeffer.

Alongside the eye-catching passenger bus, Volkswagen will also present a "particularly important" cargo model with a potentially larger market, Dudenhoeffer says.

Flower power

The design classic was the inspiration of Dutch importer Ben Pon, whose eye was caught by an employee-built transport vehicle, when he visited the Volkswagen plant in Wolfsburg in 1947. Following his eureka moment, Pon drafted the first plans and convinced VW to start production in March 1950, christening its second model after the Beetle.

The chubby camper, a symbol of liberty and free-thinking, was particularly successful in the United States, where it was embraced by the Californian surfer community. The bus has become a pop culture mainstay, transporting Scooby-Doo through his adventures, as well as the cast of the cult independent film "Little Miss Sunshine". Volkswagen is hoping to build on the camper's positive image. The bus which "contributed to the history of the flower power movement" is now the car "for the Fridays for Future generation" and "hippies of the climate crisis", according to Dudenhoeffer.

Charging stations

Winning over classic van-owners to the new electric model however might prove to be a little harder. The ID.Buzz had "taken on the V-shape" on the bonnet of the original T1 camper, says Melanie Wolf, 33, member of a VW Bus-lovers club in Bavaria.

With her partner Tobias Toplak, 43, she regularly hits the open road in her 1973 camper van model, most recently taking it on a tour of Norway. "I am interested to see how Volkswagen pulls off the mash-up between the hipster world and the 'Bulli' mindset," says Tobias, using the camper's affectionate German nickname. The spirit of "liberty and independence" on four wheels was difficult to match with the limited autonomy offered by electric motors, which need to be recharged, he says.

While there are no official figures, the ID.Buzz's range



Volkswagen is reinventing the VW bus, symbol of the hippy movement, for today's climate-conscious generation

has been estimated at about 400 kilometers (250 miles) by the German motoring association ADAC. "In the most beautiful places, when you spend the night in the middle of nowhere, there won't be charging points even in another 20 years," says Roland Graebner, 52, who owns a quartet of old campers with which he has "crossed Europe".

The fossil fuel-powered models "are just so flexible", his partner Britta Kellermann, 53, says, even though she finds the electric model "fascinating". With the ID.Buzz "the adventures you can have will certainly be different", concludes Hans Toma, 62, proud owner of a T2 camper from the late-70s. —AFP



FUYANG, China: A customer shops for vegetables at a supermarket in Fuyang in China's eastern Anhui province yesterday. — AFP

China inflation slowed in Feb as food prices eased

BEIJING: China's factory-gate inflation eased to its slowest pace in eight months in February as consumer price growth also softened, data showed yesterday, after new coronavirus curbs and a drop in food prices. The producer price index (PPI), which measures the cost of goods at the factory gate, rose 8.8 percent on-year, the slowest rate since June last year, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), tracking a fall in coal prices. It was above the 8.6 percent forecast in a Bloomberg survey of economists, but below the 9.5 percent in January. The rise in producer prices last month had been "affected by increased commodity prices globally such as crude oil and non-ferrous metals," NBS senior statistician Dong Lijuan said in a statement.

CO2 emissions from energy sector rise by record 2bn tons in 2021: IEA

PARIS: Global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions rose by six percent in 2021 to a record 36.3 billion tons, their highest ever level, the International Energy Agency said Tuesday.

"The increase in global CO2 emissions of over 2 billion tons was the largest in history in absolute terms, more than offsetting the previous year's pandemic-induced decline," it said. It pointed to the widespread use of coal to power growth as the world economy rebounded from the COVID crisis. "The recovery of energy demand in 2021 was compounded by adverse weather and energy market conditions—notably the spikes in natural gas prices—which led to more coal being burned despite renewable power generation registering its largest ever growth," it said. The IEA said the rebound of global CO2 emissions above pre-pandemic levels was largely driven by China, where they increased by 750 million tons between 2019 and 2021. "China was the only major economy to experience economic growth in both 2020 and 2021," it said.

"The emissions increases in those two years in China more than offset the aggregate decline in the rest of the world over the same period." In 2021 alone, China's CO2 emissions rose above 11.9 billion tons, accounting for 33 percent of the global total.

German Economy Minister Robert Habeck on Tuesday issued an "urgent appeal" to OPEC oil producers to ramp up output following a spike in prices and supply fears due to the Ukraine crisis.

The consumer price index (CPI), a key gauge of retail inflation, rose 0.9 percent on-year in February, the same level as in January. A steady fall in food prices—especially a 42 percent drop in the price of the staple meat pork compared to the previous year—has helped ease inflation worries.

But disruptions to the global food supply due to Russia's military operation in Ukraine are expected to affect prices in China, which relies on barley, sunflower oil, and corn imports from Ukraine, said Julian Evans-Pritchard, an analyst at Capital Economics. 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.

Analysts said cooling inflation could prompt the People's Bank of China to provide more policy support to bolster the economy. Rising production costs and low consumer prices are squeezing profits, said Zhiwei Zhang, Chief Economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. "The challenge for Chinese firms will rise if high commodity prices... persist into the second quarter," he said. — AFP



Habeck called on top oil producing nations to "increase production in order to create relief on the market". "That would be a contribution" to easing the stress on firms and households, he said at a Berlin press conference, adding that it was "an urgent appeal" to OPEC. The plea came as the price of Brent crude, the international benchmark, soared by more than five percent ahead of an expected announcement by President Joe Biden of a US ban on Russian oil imports over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. The price of a barrel reached \$129.92.

At last week's OPEC+ meeting, the 13 members of the Saudi-led OPEC group and their 10 allies, including Russia, agreed to hold firm on plans to stick to existing output targets through April.

Europe is heavily reliant on Russian energy imports, and Western sanctions against Russia have so far not targeted oil and gas. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has called Russian energy supplies of "essential importance" for people's daily lives in Europe's biggest economy. The United States is set to move forward with an energy ban on Tuesday, with US media reports saying Biden will announce a stop for imports of Russian oil and liquefied natural gas. Russia accounts for less than 10 percent of US imports of oil and petroleum products, which means the impact on the world's largest economy would be easier to bear than for European economies. —AFP

Al-Bahar: The gender diversity of NBK's team is a source of strength

KUWAIT: Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy Group CEO of National Bank of Kuwait said: "NBK has a firm belief that diversity is a source of strength and a competitive advantage for any organization, as a diverse workforce understands customers better and is able to provide more creative and innovative solutions."

Al-Bahar's statements came in a discussion panel within the "Ring the Bell" event organized by Boursa Kuwait in collaboration with the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD), the Regional Office of UN Women and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Kuwait.

Al-Bahar added that NBK's commitment to gender diversity and inclusion extends to cover customers by launching products and services targeting female customers and entrepreneurs, while continuing to advance its strides in this area, in line with its commitment to promote financial inclusion.

"International Women's Day this year is an important occasion to highlight inspiring female role models and the key role played by women in continuing to support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic," she highlighted. Al-Bahar emphasized that the call for gender equality aims to ensure a sustainable future, as the promotion of gender equality is one of the major global challenges of the 21st century. The representation of

women at all levels of decision-making around the world needs more efforts to reach the desired level, noting that there are examples of women who led the way to change and contributed to building and progressing their communities, the fact that motivates new generations of women to strive to participate in achieving prosperity for their countries, she pointed out. Al-Bahar noted that NBK's employee composition ratios reflect its commitment to gender equality, as females constitute 45 percent of total employees, and



Shaikha Al-Bahar

women represent 30 percent of employees in leadership and supervisory positions. In addition, NBK is committed to promoting gender equality as a key element in managing talent development by taking various measures to ensure the participation of women in leadership positions, providing mentoring and appropriate opportunities for their career development, as well as promoting the culture of women empowerment across the entire group.

UN Women themed this year's event "Empowering Women Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow" in recognition of the various contributions of women around the world in building a more sustainable future for all. The event is part of Kuwait's strides to develop and empower Kuwaiti women, by providing them training and qualification to be an active player in achieving Kuwait's development goals, and the participation with men in decision-making, which comes in line with the principles of Kuwait National Development Plan (KNDP), and New Kuwait Vision 2035.

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It required only "a fraction" of what he would spend in hospital, said the 43-year old father of seven as he held a plastic bag stuffed with anti-malarial herbs.

Soaring sales

Herbalists say sales have soared and demand has increased from cash-strapped customers. "The number of customers has increased four-fold because every day we attend to people from varying social backgrounds," said Abubakar Khalid, a herbalist in Kano's Yakasai neighborhood.

Ibrahim Musa, a doctor at Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, Kano's largest medical facility, blamed the trend on inflation with food costs sucking up earnings. Nigerians usually pay for healthcare out of pocket despite the emergence in recent years of health insurance for those with regular income.

"A lot of people don't have enough money to buy medications," said Musa, a consultant haematologist.

Nigeria's healthcare system is one of the worst in the world, ranking 163 out of 191, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Public spending on healthcare stands at 3.89 percent of Nigeria's \$495 billion GDP, compared to 8.25 percent in South Africa with a population of 59 million, less than one-third of Nigeria's, according to World Bank figures.

According to the Nigeria Medical Association (MNA) Nigeria has only 40,000 doctors for its 210 million population, a ratio of two doctors for every 10,000 people. The WHO standard is one doctor for every 600.

Fakes and frauds

Nigeria imports 70 percent of its pharmaceutical needs. But a huge volume of fake and substandard drugs find their way into Nigeria's market.

"People continue to lose faith in orthodox medications," Musa said. "This makes them turn to herbal preparations which are much cheaper and readily available." But the business has been infiltrated by quacks who make unreasonable claims of cures for a quick profit, herbal vendors say. In 2017 Hajara Bashir's husband died from internal bleeding after drinking a herbal concoction he bought from an itinerant vendor outside his home in Katsina. "He stumbled into the house and lay on the floor vomiting blood. The bottle had no label, so we couldn't trace the vendor," she said.

Last December drug and food watchdog NAFDAC warned Nigerians against using herbal concoctions due to poor storage which exposes the medications to bacteria. —AFP

As inflation bites, Nigerians turn to herbal medicines

KATSINA, Nigeria: Despite his financial services job in the north Nigerian city of Kano, two years ago Usman Ahmad started buying cheaper herbal drugs to treat his family's ailments after surging inflation left modern medicines beyond his budget. Africa's most populous country is struggling with double-digit inflation, especially high food prices, and many Nigerians are looking for ways to save on basic expenses.

Traditional herbal remedies have become one way, even though the sector is unregulated by health authorities and medical experts often warn about the risk of fake, even dangerous, remedies. "My income can no longer accommodate increasingly high hospital costs," Ahmad told AFP outside a herbal kiosk selling an anti-malarial concoction in Kano.

An anti-malarial mix cost Ahmad 200 naira (2.09 cents) compared to the 2,500 naira (\$6) he would pay for treatment at the hospital. Nigeria's economy has been badly hit by falls in global oil prices and the pandemic, which slashed petroleum revenue, weakened the local naira and helped keep inflation at around 17 percent.

A fraction of the price

The economic squeeze of low oil prices plunged Nigeria into recession in 2016 and 2020, pushing an additional seven million into poverty in 2020 alone, according to the World Bank's global poverty index.

Even before that, millions of Nigerians were living in poverty on less than a dollar a day. Herbal remedies have a deep-rooted culture in Nigeria, especially in more traditional communities, but the drugs have become more popular in recent years even among Western-educated Nigerians like Ahmad.

Herbal shops and itinerant vendors promising a cure for all forms of illnesses, from common flu to diseases such as cancer and diabetes, are a common sight on the streets and markets. Herbal vendors advertise their concoctions from loudspeakers atop old cars, while others push herbal mixture-filled prams and carts through the streets. "I have turned to herbs to treat ailments in my family due to the economic situation," Abubakar Hamisu, told AFP outside a herbal shop in northern city of Katsina, two hours drive from Kano.

Business

Inflation hits women hardest in male-dominated Turkey

Rising cost of living hit most vulnerable sections of Turkish society

ISTANBUL: Battered by soaring food prices, inflation and a plunging currency, Sumeyye Alayumat is among millions of Turkish women battling poverty in addition to inequality and marginalization in a male-dominated society.

The 28-year-old shares a tiny studio apartment in an Istanbul suburb with her mother. Her sister Rahsan joined them with her seven-year-old son, Ruzgar after she got divorced. In the evening, the three women unfold mattresses on the floor and sleep huddled together to save money on heating bills.

"I feel like I'm only working to pay the rent and the bills," said Alayumat. "After that, I have nothing left." A worker in a textile workshop, she is paid the minimum wage of 4,253 lira (272 euros, \$300).

With official inflation reaching a new peak of 54.4 percent in February, the rising cost of living has badly hit the most vulnerable sections of Turkish society. The two sisters left primary school to work-a practice once common among poor families. Girls were often the first victims, their education not being considered a priority in conservative families.

'I wish I could dream'

The economic downturn has triggered school dropouts which had declined due to programs aimed at eradicating child labor, Hacer Foggo, founder of the Deep Poverty Network NGO, told AFP.

Yearning for a better life, Alayumat has resumed her studies remotely and hopes to finish high school this year. "I wish I could dream. Enjoy simple things,

like going on vacation, having social activities. Everything that I can't do today because I don't have money," she said.

But the current state of the economy leaves little room for dreams and makes women's lives even more difficult. Less educated than men, only 39 percent of women work outside their home, according to official data. Turkey ranks 133 out of 156 countries in the World Economic Forum's latest gender equality index. Finding an apartment for this family of three women was not easy.

"The landlords did not believe that two working women are capable of paying the rent. But women can also earn a living!" Alayumat said.

"With the economic crisis, women have taken on enormous responsibilities in managing the household," said Zela Yalcin, social policy coordinator at the Istanbul Development Agency, a municipal body. "They are often the ones who are in charge of the shopping, even if it means going around all the supermarkets in the neighborhood to find the cheapest products".

'I deprive myself'

Many women are struggling to make ends meet while sacrificing their own needs, said Yalcin. "Many housewives turn off the heating and electricity once the children go to school and their husbands are out. They stay out in the cold all day, wearing several layers of clothing," she said.

Rahsan Alayumat, Sumeyye's 35-year-old sister who sells masks to textile workshops where she once worked, echoed Yalcin. "I manage by depriv-



ISTANBUL: Millions of Turkish women are battling poverty in addition to inequality and marginalization in a male-dominated society.

ing myself. I tell myself that my son should eat properly. I don't mind if I can't." But these efforts are not always enough.

"I couldn't afford a drawing book that my son needed. I have to work 13-14 hours a day to make ends meet," Rahsan Alayumat said.

According to the Istanbul Development Agency, 62 percent of families living in Turkey's largest city

spend most of their money on basic necessities. During previous crises, solidarity within the family and between neighbors made it possible to support women, Yalcin said. "But this time, this solidarity has also taken a hit. Poverty is such that the visits, once so frequent between neighbors, are vanishing. Because they are ashamed of not being able to offer usual treats besides tea." —AFP

ABK announces winner of Alfouz prize of KD 10,000

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced Sheikh Ahmad Mubarak Faisal Al-Sabah as the winner of KD 10,000 in the Alfouz weekly draw. The draw was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Monday.

The Alfouz draw account offers ABK customers the chance to win life-changing rewards. With Alfouz, ABK customers will get a chance to win KD 10,000 in Kuwait's highest single weekly draw and the ultimate grand prize of KD 5,000 monthly additional income for 10 years. Both new and existing ABK customers can benefit from this opportunity, with a minimum account balance of KD100 only.

ABK encourages everyone to open Alfouz draw account and/or increase their balances to have more chances in winning in the upcoming draw which will happen on Monday, March 14th. The higher the deposits are, the higher the chances to win.

NBK wins 'Best Retail Bank in Kuwait' at Service Hero awards

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has received the award of Best Retail Bank in Customer Services in Kuwait for 2021, according to Service Hero Customer Satisfaction Index, for the 11th time.

NBK was named the winner of the award during the virtual ceremony held by Service Hero to announce the index's results. The award was presented in a ceremony attended by Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO of National Bank of Kuwait - Kuwait Mohammed Al-Othman GM - Consumer Banking Group, as well as a number of the executives of Consumer Banking Group.

Service Hero is a highly reputable customer satisfaction index that collects the voice of customers on service standards and creates a list of service providers ranked by category. The index partners with the American Customer Satisfaction Index, a member of ESOMAR and is backed by an independent Advisory Council to ensure all results are impartial, objective and accurately reflect the voice of the customer. The Advisory Council includes academics and business professionals representing leading companies and institutions in Kuwait and the UAE, including: American University of Kuwait (AUK), Australian College of Kuwait (ACK), Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST), Abu Dhabi University and Zayed University.

The award of "Best Retail Bank in Customer Services in Kuwait" is fully based on customers' assessment of banks in Kuwait. Service dimensions evaluated include reliability, speed, product quality, value, location, staff quality, call center and website. The Index also rates overall satisfaction, loyalty and comparison to an ideal.

On this occasion, Mohammed Al-Othman, GM-Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "We aim to reach the highest level of customer satisfaction by ensuring we provide unique and advanced banking products and services that meet the needs and expectations of our customers."

Al-Othman noted that before launching and



products or services, NBK conducts multiple studies and surveys using scientific methodology and data analysis to ensure that they satisfy the needs of its customers while implementing the most advanced standards available globally.

"Our strategy for digital transformation, specifically our excellence in digital services and solutions, has significantly contributed to increasing customer satisfaction with our service and enriching their banking experience," he added.

Al-Othman pointed out that during 2021, NBK introduced many new advanced banking services

and enhancements to its digital channels, especially NBK Mobile Banking, in addition to providing an exceptional rewards program featuring exclusive draws and valuable prizes.

During the year 2021, NBK launched a variety of high-quality banking products and services that gained the trust of customers, focusing on advanced payment solutions and digital services through the updates of NBK Mobile Banking App and NBK Online Banking, as customers showed an increasing reliance on these channels for their banking transactions over the past period.

Why nickel is smashing records after Ukraine war

LONDON: Nickel, which is used to make stainless steel and batteries for electric vehicles, took an unprecedented twist Tuesday, as London suspended trade after prices skyrocketed due to the Ukraine crisis. Moscow's invasion of neighboring Ukraine sent the market surging beyond \$100,000 per ton as Russian supply concerns sparked sharp volatility.

Russia's role

The Ukraine conflict rocked already-tight global supplies because Russia is a key producing nation. The market then went into orbit with traders fearful of possible Western sanctions on its mining sector.

"Russia is the third largest supplier of nickel accounting for nearly 13 percent of the total global nickel mining capacity in 2021," said Rystad analysts Marina Bozkurt and Susan Zou.

Russia accounts for 11.3 percent of the global nickel output. This week's nickel gains easily outpaced those of Russia's other key commodities, which include aluminum, gas and crude oil.

The market backdrop

Prior to the Ukraine war, nickel won strong support over the last two years as the coronavirus pandemic heavily disrupted the supply of commodities. Demand is now strengthening as the world economy recovers from the fallout. The metal is used in electric batteries to help in the transition away from fossil fuels and toward cleaner green energy.

Prices of nickel had already soared by 30 percent in 2019, by 20 percent in 2020 and by another 25 percent in 2021.

The price spiral

Prices were catapulted higher Tuesday by a so-called short squeeze, commentators say. This occurs when investors bet on falling prices but are then forced to close out their positions and purchase at a far higher price, sparking an exceptionally volatile spike. "Some market participants who had been betting on falling prices were clearly surprised and wrong-footed by the price upswing and momentum since Russia's invasion of Ukraine," said Commerzbank analyst Daniel Briesemann. —AFP

UAE's corporate tax to positively impact real estate: Markaz

KUWAIT: The UAE's newly announced federal corporate tax will be beneficial for the domestic real estate sector in the long run even though it could portend a marginal negative impact in the short term, according to a report issued today by Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz". Titled "Impact of UAE Corporate Tax on Real Estate", the report takes a deeper look at the various aspect of the new tax regime and analyses anticipated effects on the residential, office, retail and industrial segments of the property market and the country's economy.

On 31 January 2022, the UAE announced plans to introduce corporate tax at a rate of 9 per cent for taxable net income greater than AED 375,000 of companies. The regime will be effective for financial years starting on or after 1 June 2023. The proposed tax rate is competitive and is comparable to global low tax hubs. A different tax rate would be applicable for multinationals that meet the criteria of the global minimum effective tax rate under the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Base Erosion and Profit Shifting initiative.

Examining the impact of the proposed corporate tax on the UAE's real estate sector, the report highlights that although businesses including those operating in the real estate sector would be direct-

ly impacted as it entails payment of a share of income to the federal government, real estate investments of individuals will not be subject to tax. It would also not apply to investment returns earned by foreigners and income from real estate for individuals. However, because of lower post-tax profit, businesses could choose to mitigate the impact through several measures, or the impact could be absorbed across the value chain, with a portion of it passed on to end-users.

Delving deeper into the possible outcomes in the property sector, Markaz projects that demand in the residential segment is likely to remain stable, as investments by individuals are not subject to corporate tax. However, given the recent pick-up in demand in residential space, developers could choose to increase prices to partly mitigate the impact of corporate tax on their business.

In the office segment, the introduction of tax might influence demand as a result of business decisions on office spaces and rentals, among others, in the short term. In the longer run, however, the impact is anticipated to be the least as the low tax rate might not significantly alter the UAE's competitiveness as a business destination. In addition, factors such as the recent weekend switch would also aid in the demand for office spaces. On the other hand, the retail segment is projected to have a pronounced impact as corporate tax could affect rent payments and demand for retail real estate because it affects the liquidity and profitability of businesses. Though retail occupiers are slowly emerging from the impact of COVID-19, the market has reportedly seen requests for rent-free periods and revenue share options citing the

uncertain economic climate. Against this backdrop, owners of malls might find it hard to raise the rents. Similarly, the move might lower capital investments in the industrial segment as a result of which demand might be affected.

The report also predicts an increase in project costs owing to second-order effects whereby material prices, construction and labor costs could rise. With interest rates set to rise in 2022, funding could get tighter for new real estate projects. These, along with lower profitability and liquidity, could translate to a slower rate of project expansion. Property prices might witness a rise if developers choose to increase unit prices to mitigate the impact of corporate tax.

Meanwhile, the implementation of corporate tax, the report notes, could result in greater transparency of business operations. This would mean a significant positive move for banks as they could better assess the credit and eventually, it could lower the cost of capital for various business operations.

While the introduction of the tax would certainly boost state finances, with the revenue set to be generated estimated at 14-15% of the government's total non-oil revenue, it could affect the profitability of businesses and in turn lower investment plans. However, considering that the UAE's proposed tax rate is comparable to other low tax hubs in the GCC region, the move might not have a significant effect on its attractiveness as an investment destination. Also, stronger government finances could increase capital spending by the government, especially in infrastructure, which could aid in increasing domestic and foreign investments, boosting demand for real estate.

Business

Highway nightmare: DR Congo's export route for high-value metals

DR Congo, world's biggest producer of cobalt and Africa's biggest producer of copper

LUBUMBASHI, DR Congo: The 27 tons of copper slabs are securely lashed down on the back of Omar Rachidi's tractor-trailer. Now all he has to do is drive the cargo to its destination. But that's easier said than done. Two thousand kilometers (1,200 miles) of road lie between southeast DR Congo's mineral belt and the Tanzanian port of Dar es Salaam, from where the copper will be shipped to Asia.

And that highway is hard graft. "Sometimes it takes two weeks to do the trip," says Rachidi, a 57-year-old Tanzanian, at the Chemaf metal processing plant at Lubumbashi in Haut-Katanga province.

"There are lots of queues, lots of tolls, lots of waiting at the border." The Democratic Republic of Congo is the world's biggest producer of cobalt—the key ingredient in modern batteries—and Africa's biggest producer of copper. And the highway is the crucial but slender link in getting that wealth to market.

On Rachidi's truck, the copper plates, called cathodes, are loaded in bundles that weigh 2.3 tonnes a piece. Each one is chained down "to prevent theft", says Chemaf's copper manager Eric Tshinkobo.

With copper reaching around \$10,000 (9,200 euros) a ton on the London Metal Exchange, the vehicle is thus hauling a load worth more than a quarter of a million dollars. "Robbers attack us, especially on the road that goes around Lubumbashi," says Katema. Jacob Daoudi, 45, another Tanzanian trucker who is hauling 30 tons of cobalt hydroxide, says the 80 kilometers (50 miles) to the Zambian border is fraught

with risk. "Bandits attack us, they rip the tarps, they grab our money," he says.

Toll stations

Attacks have become so bad that more and more trucking companies use a system of advance payment to cover road tolls on the DR Congo part of the trip, rather than have truckers carry a large amount of cash. Six toll stations dot the 400 kilometers on National Highway 1 from Kolwezi in neighboring Lualaba province, to Kasumbalesa, on the border with Zambia.

The queues there are notorious. The tolls "impede traffic flow and profitability," said Lambert Tshisueka Mutondo, president of the federation of international freight companies in Haut-Katanga.

He wants more police patrols to dissuade robbers and for the number of toll stations to be halved.

Trucks pay about \$500 to cover the 400 kilometers, which makes the cost of a return trip to Dar es Salaam rise to \$1,000 in tolls alone. The money goes to a Chinese firm that under a contract with the state builds and maintains roads—an arrangement that routinely draws flak.

Congo 'hassles'

National Highway 1 is smooth and tarmacked, which makes it a relative pleasure to drive on compared with DR Congo's typically pot-holed roads. But it has only two lanes, each flowing in the opposite direction—the country still has no motorway.



Six toll stations dot the 400 kilometers on National Highway 1 from Kolwezi in neighboring Lualaba province, to Kasumbalesa, on the border with Zambia.

At Kanyaka, halfway between Lubumbashi and the Zambian border, more than 200 trucks are waiting to get through a toll booth. Truckers say driving in Zambia and Tanzania is far from perfect, but the tolls there are far lower than in DR Congo and queues and paperwork less onerous.

"There are hassles all the time in Congo," says

Maniasi Djuma Makweba, 50, heading for Dar with 35 tons of cobalt he loaded at Tenke Fungurume Mining SA, located in the heart of the mineral belt. Like other drivers, he complains about the thieves, but also about the security forces. "When you go to the police to declare a robbery, they start by wanting to shake you down" for a bribe. — AFP



McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Starbucks halting Russia operations

MOSCOW: McDonald's, Coca-Cola and Starbucks on Tuesday bowed to public pressure and suspended their operations in Russia, joining the international corporate chorus of outrage over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Several of these companies, symbols of American cultural influence in the world, have been the subject of boycott calls on social media as investors have also begun to ask questions about their presence.

"We cannot ignore the needless human suffering unfolding in Ukraine," the fast-food giant said, announcing the temporary closure all 850 restaurants in Russia, where it employs 62,000 people.

Starbucks, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo announced their own decisions to halt or restrict business in quick succession, noting the growing human cost of the invasion. PepsiCo said that despite halting sales in Russia of its flagship beverage, as well as 7Up and Mirinda, it would continue to offer products like milk and baby food. "By continuing to operate, we will also continue to support the livelihoods of our 20,000 Russian associates and the 40,000 Russian agricultural workers in our supply chain," PepsiCo CEO Ramon Laguarta said in a statement.

Starbucks, which has 130 Kuwaiti conglomerate-run coffee shops in Russia, said all operations, including product shipments, will be suspended. A team from Yale University that keeps a list of companies with a significant presence in Russia said about 290 have announced withdrawal from the country since it invaded neighboring Ukraine, reminiscent of "the large-scale corporate boycott of Apartheid South Africa in the 1980s." About 30 multinationals still remain on the list of companies with significant exposure to Russia.

Legitimate reasons?

Some companies, however, have noted the limits of their influence is halting business. Yum! Brands, whose 1,000 or so KFC restaurants and 50 Pizza Hut locations in Russia are almost all independently owned, announced Tuesday that it was halting operations at company-owned KFC locations.

It said it was "finalizing an agreement" to do the same with its Pizza Hut restaurants, adding that all profits from operations in Russia will be redirected to "humanitarian efforts." Some businesses may have legitimate reasons to stay, several experts in ethics and communications strategy told AFP.—AFP

Mounds of old batteries threaten Gaza health

GAZA CITY: At a landfill in southern Gaza, mounds of discarded batteries pile up, rusting cells that pose a growing health risk to Palestinians in the enclave.

Batteries are an essential power source in Gaza, where public electricity supply is sparse and infrastructure has decayed since an Israeli blockade of the enclave began in 2007, the year Hamas Islamists seized control. "The batteries have been piling up for

15 years," said Ibrahim Baraka, who works at the 2,000 square meter (half an acre) landfill in Khan Yunis, where residents of surrounding houses can peer in to see piles of lead and mercury waste accumulating daily. Gaza, home to 2.3 million Palestinians, has only one power plant that runs on diesel. Fuel deliveries are unreliable, largely due to the blockade. The plant was also bombed by Israeli fighter jets during a 2006 conflict with Hamas. Mohamed Masleh, director of resources at Gaza's Environment Ministry, estimated that there are 25,000 tons of used batteries in Gaza that need to be recycled. Most are at sites not suited for storing dangerous materials.

A dangerous 'farce'

Battery collection is also a source of income for the impoverished territory, where unemployment rates

hover around 50 percent. On a crisp morning, Zakaria Abu Sultan meandered his horse-drawn cart through the streets of Gaza City, shouting his mission through a loudspeaker.

"Anyone with damaged batteries to sell?" he called out. "I've been wandering since dawn to buy damaged batteries. I buy them at best for 50 shekels (\$15), and sell them to the scrap dealer for 70 shekels," he told AFP. Typically, damaged cells are taken to landfills, like the one in Khan Yunis where Baraka works, which dismantle them for materials like plastic that are then sold to factories. Ahmed Hillis, director of Gaza's National Institute for Environment and Development, said that while he understood there was profit in discarded batteries, the trade was extremely dangerous. "Tons of batteries are accumulating in dumps, some of which are more than 40 and 50 metres high," he said.—AFP

hit by series of sanctions

MOSCOW: From closed airspace to frozen assets and oil bans, Western countries have announced increasingly severe economic sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.

Here is an overview:

Energy

The United States and Britain took a major swing at Russia's economy on Tuesday as they targeted the country's vital energy sector. President Joe Biden announced a ban on US imports of Russian oil and gas while Britain said it would phase out crude imports from the country by the end of this year. Prior to the announcements, energy giant Shell said it would immediately stop Russian oil purchases. Russia is the world's largest producer of gas and second-largest producer of oil. The European Union has treaded more carefully, with Germany, the Netherlands and Bulgaria warning against an abrupt EU-wide ban on Russian energy.

The European Commission said Tuesday that it wants to cut gas imports from Russia by two thirds by the end of this year. In its plan, the EU said the bloc could become fully independent of Russian gas, oil and coal by 2030. Germany has already halted the certification process for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, a key conduit designed to increase deliveries of Russian gas to Germany.

Russian gas giant Gazprom has been blocked from raising funds on Western financial markets.

Financial sector

The West has targeted the financial sector to limit Russia's capacity to fund the war. In a major blow to the Russian financial system, the European Union has cut seven Russian banks from the SWIFT messaging system, which allows banks to communicate rapidly and securely about transactions.

Concerned by sanctions, Russia's largest lender Sberbank has said it was leaving the European market.

Transportation

The airline sector was one of the first to be affected by the economic fallout from the Ukrainian conflict. Russian carrier Aeroflot was banned from the airspace of the entire EU, the United Kingdom and Canada, forcing it to suspend flights to these destinations. In retaliation, Russia has banned airlines from those same countries from flying over its territory. The entire Russian aviation industry has been targeted. The EU and Canada have banned the export of aircraft, parts and equipment from the aviation and space industries to Russia.

Nor has maritime transport been spared. Britain has closed all its ports to ships flying the Russian flag and those chartered or owned by Russians. France intercepted a Russian cargo ship belonging to PSB bank, which was targeted by European sanctions. The three biggest container shipping groups in the world, Danish giant Maersk, Switzerland-based MSC and France's CMA CGM, and other smaller competitors suspended non-essential deliveries to Russia.

Japan imposed sanctions on the export of semiconductor and other items to "Russian military-related organizations". Japan, along with South Korea and Taiwan, is one of the main producers of these electronic components, which are essential for a wide range of industrial products.

The US has announced restrictions on Russia's use of its technologies in various fields, including processors and chips manufactured by top suppliers Nvidia, Intel and Qualcomm.—AFP



MOSCOW, Russia: A view of a Starbucks coffee shop in Moscow yesterday. McDonald's, Coca-Cola and Starbucks bowed to public pressure and suspended their operations in Russia, joining the international corporate chorus of outrage over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.—AFP

News in brief

Adidas profits jump in 2021

FRANKFURT: German sportswear giant Adidas reported an almost-fivefold leap in its net profit yesterday, with the group betting on double-digit growth in 2022 despite the impact of the war in Ukraine. Adidas booked a net profit of 2.1 billion euros (\$2.3 billion) on its continuing operations in 2021, up from 432 million euros the previous year, the company said in a statement. Excluding the Reebok brand after Adidas agreed its sale in August, the net profit on continuing operations came in at 1.5 billion euros, up from 461 million the previous year. Across the board, the outfitter saw revenues rise by 15.2 percent to 21.2 billion euros in 2021, despite strong headwinds. Coronavirus lockdowns, supply chain disruptions and "challenging conditions" in the key Chinese market shaved more than 1.5 billion euros off the sales figure.—AFP

Japan Q4 GDP revised down

TOKYO: Japan's fourth-quarter growth was weaker than initially thought, revised data showed yesterday, with household spending less robust than first estimated. The world's third largest economy grew 1.1 percent in the three months to December, less than the initially estimated 1.3 percent rebound, according to the Cabinet Office. The downward revision was due in part to weaker corporate investment and household spending. The recovery in the last quarter of 2021 comes after a 0.7 percent contraction in the July-September quarter. For all of 2021, the economy grew 1.6 percent, slightly less than the initial estimate of 1.7 percent.—AFP

US trade deficit hits new record

WASHINGTON: A jump in oil and auto imports in January combined with a sharp drop in exports caused the US trade gap to widen again in January, according to official data released Tuesday. The trade deficit in the world's largest economy increased by 9.4 percent compared to December to a record \$89.7 billion, the Commerce Department reported. Exports fell 1.7 percent to \$224.4 billion while imports rose to \$314.1 billion, the report said. US firms have been trying to replenish depleted inventories and bring in parts and materials that have proved hard to find due to the pandemic disruptions that have snarled global supply chains.—AFP

Eswatini drivers protest fuel prices

MBABANE, Eswatini: Bus drivers in Eswatini's two major cities went on strike yesterday, blocking highways leading to two major cities in protest at rising fuel costs, a union said. Drivers of buses and mini-buses blocked the roads leading into Mbabane and Manzini, demanding that government regulators increase fares and salaries. The official price of petrol jumped nearly six percent last month, to 16.25 lilangeni (\$1.06, €0.97) a liter—the third increase in six months. Drivers want government to nearly double the fares they can charge, while also raising their salaries from 1,500 to 4,000 lilangeni per month. Wonder Mkhonza, spokesman for the Amalgamated Trade Union of Swaziland, said drivers were struggling at a time when King Mswati had decided to purchase two new jets, "ignoring the plight of the poor." — AFP

Bob Dylan to release new book in November



Bob dylan

Nobel laureate and folk-rock legend Bob Dylan will release a new book on songwriting in November, his publisher Simon and Schuster said Tuesday. "The Philosophy of Modern Song"-slated for publication on November 8 — is the first book of new writing Dylan has put out in nearly two decades, since "Chronicles, Volume One" came out in 2004. The beloved American poet and music artist began writing his latest book in 2010, and it's comprised of more than

60 essays, musing on artists such as Hank Williams and Nina Simone, along with the craft of songwriting, his publisher said.

"The publication of Bob Dylan's kaleidoscopically brilliant work will be an international celebration of songs by one of the greatest artists of our time," said Jonathan Karp, head of Simon and Schuster, in a statement. "The Philosophy of Modern Song' could only have been written by Bob Dylan. His

voice is unique, and his work conveys his deep appreciation and understanding of songs, the people who bring those songs to life, and what songs mean to all of us."

Rumors of a "Chronicles, Volume Two" have swirled for years but fans will now have "Philosophy" to tide them over until or if that edition comes into public existence. Dylan, who burst onto the folk scene in New York in the early 1960s, has sold more than 125 million records around the world.

The 80-year-old has maintained a rigorous touring schedule, and is currently on a global jaunt set to continue into 2024. In 2020 he released his 39th studio album, "Rough and Rowdy Ways," to critical acclaim. He notably won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016 "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition."—AFP

Ooredoo Kuwait unmasks the truth of 'The Batman' in an exclusive premier night for its customers

Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, in association with VOX Cinemas, the fastest growing cinema business in the MENA region, treated its customers and employees who are fans of the DC Superhero, Batman with an exclusive premier night of the highly anticipated



Nazem Al-Ghabra

movie "The Batman". The company launched a series of interactive competitions on its social media pages, which witnessed a huge engagement from the followers. Winners won complimentary cinema tickets to watch "The Batman" at VOX Cinemas in the Avenues.

Further, all eyes were on Kuwait City's iconic Ooredoo Tower Tuesday night as fans of the most iconic fictional characters

in the world, Batman, witnessed the Bat-signal and captures from the movie lighting up the Ooredoo Tower building, in anticipation of "The Batman" coming soon to cinemas.

Nazem Yousef Al-Ghabra, Senior Manager- Public Relations, Internal Communications, Corporate Social Responsibility and Sponsorships at Ooredoo Kuwait said: "At Ooredoo Kuwait, we will continue to explore new ways to reward our customers, form a medium for continuous communication between us and them and build a trusted relationship with them for the long term. We look forward to delighting and rewarding more customers with such special awards in the coming months and throughout the year."

Owned and operated by Majid Al-Futtaim, VOX Cinemas is the cinema arm of Majid Al-Futtaim, the leading shopping mall, retail and leisure pioneer across the Middle East and North Africa. VOX Cinemas is the Middle East's most innovative and customer-focused exhibitor, and the fastest growing cinema business in the MENA region. With more than 50 locations the region, including screens in the UAE, Lebanon, Oman, Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, VOX Cinemas is the Middle East's largest and most rapidly growing exhibitor in the entire region.



Abbey's 'Hadret El Mawkef' Kuwaiti series to air on MBC

"Hadret El Mawkef" (Honorable Position), a series by Kuwaiti production start-up Abbey's Productions, will air during Ramadan on major Pan-Arab channels. The company was founded in 2021 by Sheikha Abrar Khaled Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and focuses on enhancing the caliber of Kuwaiti films and television content. The series will air on MBC, Shahid.net, Sharjah TV, and Dhafr TV. Another of Abbey's series, "Zawaj Ella Rob'a'a" (Three fourth marriage), was selected by Saudi channels for Ramadan entertainment.

"We are very proud that a Kuwaiti-produced series will be on the forefront of major channels in Saudi Arabia and UAE during the holy month of Ramadan, a key period in the region for TV drama. Our team worked very hard this season to produce high-quality series that would showcase Kuwait's evolving TV drama content and position Kuwaiti writers, directors, actors, and actresses on the regional scene," said Ahmed Al-Buraiki, Abbey's Productions Managing Director. He was speaking at MBC's annual press conference that announces its Ramadan selections.

In less than a year, Abbey's Productions rapidly assimilated into the regional TV-drama scene through its series 'Bi Tawqeeq Mecca' (In Mecca's Time). The series ranked as the #1 most viewed in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait on Shahid.net.

The production team of Abbey's uses the latest high-quality filming techniques, therefore the company's series have taken Kuwait's entertainment scene by storm. The team's signature on its produced content was noticed by major platforms and channels amid a highly competitive field where hundreds of productions are presented daily from multiple countries.

In an official statement, the company said that the main objective behind estab-



lishing Abbey's is to develop Kuwait's film and TV productions to an international standard that would align with major global and regional entities. "We managed to achieve our goal in less than a year," added Al-Buraiki; "Thank you to our team and higher management for their support and commitment towards positioning Kuwaiti drama and film-makers on the regional scene."

'Hadret El Mawkef' is a 30-episode series written by Kuwaiti writer, Abdullah El-Roumi, and directed by Khaled Jamal. It provided a platform for Hayfaa Adel, Mariam El-Saleh, and Zahraa Al-Kharji to

act together again and included a team of Arab and Kuwaiti actors such as Abdul Aziz Al-Haddad, Abdullah Al-Turkmani, Heba Al-Dari, Layali Dhrab, Nawaf Al-Ali, Kifah Al-Rajeeb, Mansour Al-Boloushi, Sarah Al-Qabandi and Muhammad Al-Dosari. The story of the series highlights various contemporary issues that challenge many people in today's Arab societies when making life changing decisions in critical daily situations.

Mosul's Old City rises from rubble in war-scarred Iraq

Beneath what remains of the 12th-century Al-Hadba minaret, builders work on a project to revive Mosul's Old City, reduced to rubble during Iraq's battle to retake the city from jihadists. Mosques, churches and century-old houses are being brought back to life in the northern metropolis, which the Islamic State group seized as its stronghold before being pushed out in mid-2017. "Al-Hadba is the icon of Mosul, the symbol of the city," said Omar Taqa, a supervising engineer with UNESCO, the United Nations heritage body which has launched several projects to restore the city's landmarks.

The minaret was featured on Iraqi 10,000-dinar banknotes before the jihadists flew their black flag from the top of its 45-metre (49 yards) spire. IS chief Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi made his only confirmed public appearance in July 2014 at the Al-Nuri mosque, where he declared the establishment of a "caliphate". Three years later Iraq's army

and a US-led international coalition had forced the jihadists out of Iraq's second city. The Al-Nuri mosque, and the adjacent leaning minaret-nicknamed Al-Hadba or the "hunchback"-were destroyed in June 2017 during the battle to take back the city.

Iraqi authorities had accused IS of planting explosives there before their withdrawal. "We found 11 mines there, ready to be activated," said Taqa. "Some were hidden inside walls." Only the central area of the mosque remains, its dome propped up on arches supported by wooden wedges. Atop the columns of grey marble, traces of blue enhance the adjoining capitals. As for Al-Hadba, only its base remains standing, protected by a sheet of tarpaulin. Having removed about 5,600 tons of rubble, the reconstruction of the minaret begins in mid-March-retaining its tilt-while work on the mosque is due to begin in the summer. By the end of 2023, the site should be ready.

'Revive the Spirit'

While awaiting reconstruction, the more fragile parts of the structures are kept in a warehouse. These include fragments of the Mihrab, a niche indicating the direction of Mecca for worshippers, as well as pieces of the Minbar, from where the sermon is delivered and Baghdadi made his declaration in 2014. Around 45,000 terracotta bricks from the original minaret-about a third of those that made up the structure-are lined up on shelves to be reused, Taqa explained.



A picture shows a view of renovations at the Church of the Immaculate Conception (Al-Tahira-I-Kubra) supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO, in the old town of Iraq's northern city of Mosul. — AFP photos

Discoveries are still being made at the site, where in January a 12th-century prayer room was found under the mosque. The UN agency raised \$110 million for its "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" initiative, largely financed by the United Arab Emirates and the European Union. Al-Tahira and Our Lady of the Hour churches also set to be revived, as well as about 120 houses and the local school in the Old City.

Local contractors are handling the construction which has created 3,100 jobs. About half of those are for young people who have been trained in heritage

and building restoration, UNESCO said. Azhar, 48, once sold fruit on a cart in the Old City, before joining the workforce to rebuild Al-Nuri. "The houses, the streets, were destroyed. The people were displaced to camps," the father of five said, declining to give his family name. "Everyone has suffered. There are those who lost relatives, those who lost their homes, their shops, their cars." Some wounds remain close to the surface. Azhar's wife died during the battle for Mosul, but he cannot bring himself to speak of her.

Elegant alabaster

In the city, normality has begun to return. There are signs of a fledgling cultural revival, with libraries and museums reopening. Even as buildings in the Old City lie half-collapsed, coffee shops, workshops and bakers have reopened their doors. At the bend in an alley, women buy their vegetables steps away from workers mixing concrete.

Rows of houses edge closer to complete restoration, some of them between 100 and 150 years old. In the maze of houses that make up the historic district, visitors gasp in awe at elegant alabaster walls with Ottoman-inspired motifs overlooking courtyards. "There are 44 houses that are practically finished. They will be turned over at the end of March," engineer Mostafa Nadhim told AFP. Another 75 are to be completed this year. The project will also see the rehabilitation of infrastructure including "electric cables, street lights, water pipes and pavements", Nadhim added.

Ikhlas Salim, who moved back into her home just a few months ago, heats up a lunchtime meal for her two sons. They work on nearby reconstruction sites. When she first returned to her home, it was in ruins, but she said its restoration has had a "therapeutic" effect. "It's my grandparents' house," the 55-year-old said. "At first, we had lost hope of coming back."—AFP



A picture shows a view of archaeological artifacts salvaged from the Church of the Immaculate Conception (Al-Tahira-I-Kubra) in the old town of Iraq's northern city of Mosul.



Iraqi architects with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO sit inside a renovated traditional house.



A picture shows a view of a traditional house during reconstruction work.



Handlers guide their camels during the first Qatar Camel Festival, at Lebsayyer area of al-Shahaniyyah, around 25 Km northwest of the Qatari capital.

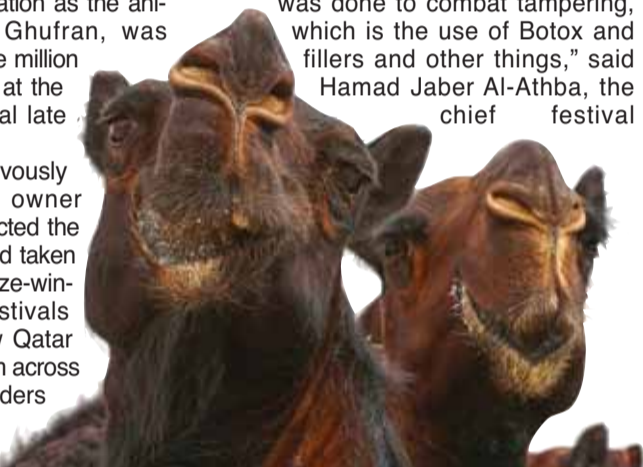


A cameleer pets a calf during the first Qatar Camel Festival. — AFP photos

COMELY CAMEL POUTS ITS WAY TO RECORD BEAUTY PRIZE IN QATAR

The lips pouted to perfection, the neck was long and poised, and the judges were sure that no Botox was involved as they awarded Qatar's largest cash prize for a camel beauty contest in front of an enthusiastic crowd. Hundreds of spectators, who poured into the isolated desert venue in Land Cruisers and Jeeps, threw up their scarves in celebration as the animal, named Mangiah Ghufraan, was declared winner of the one million riyal (\$275,000) top prize at the first Qatar Camel Festival late Tuesday.

The animal paced nervously in the paddock as his owner Fahed Farj Algufrani collected the cheque and told how it had taken "years" to prepare the prize-winning beast. Previous festivals were more local but now Qatar has allowed in camels from across the region, drawing breeders from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab



Emirates with millions of dollars in prizes at stake.

Organizers were on alert after a recent festival in Saudi Arabia, where 43 camels were disqualified after it was found they were given drug enhancements to make their lips droopier and their humps more shapely, according to official media. "Work was done to combat tampering, which is the use of Botox and fillers and other things," said Hamad Jaber Al-Athba, the chief festival

organizer. "We had a professional veterinary staff and advanced equipment and we worked to combat tampering and limit the spread of cosmetic materials," he told AFP. The camels are put through X-rays and other monitoring.

"Corruption was fought seriously at the Qatar Camel Festival." To pick the winners, the judges look at "the size and beauty" of the head, the length of the neck and the position of the camel's hump. "These are the most important points," said Al-Athba. For black camels the size of its head can be a deal-breaker, but for white camels, the consistency of the color counts.

Authorities in Qatar and its neighbors are seeking to give traditional practices a higher profile as they compete with mega events such as football's World Cup and Formula One grands prix. Al Athba said the festival had been a success, drawing Qatar's growing urban population as well as its desert-dwelling Bedouin. — AFP



A camel and its calf are paraded during the first Qatar Camel Festival.



A cameleer carries a calf during the first Qatar Camel Festival.



Camels are gathered to take part in a contest during the first Qatar Camel Festival.

Ukrainian former beauty queen calls for help in Russia onslaught

Former Miss Ukraine on Tuesday called for global support for her country in the face of Russian attacks, highlighting the plight of mothers and children as the world marked International Women's Day. Veronika Didusenko, who won the beauty queen title in 2018, told reporters in Los Angeles her country was suffering under the onslaught ordered by Russian President Vladimir Putin. "Right now, millions of Ukrainian chil-

dren and their mothers are trembling at every sound in the subway stations and bomb shelters," she said.

"Even more heartbreaking is that women are giving birth in such conditions in the shelters." Tens of thousands of Russian troops have swarmed into Ukraine since the invasion began on February 24, heading towards major cities, including the capital, Kyiv. More than two million people are known to have fled the country, the bulk of them seeking safety in Poland.

Didusenko said her countrymen would continue to defend their land, but pleaded for help from the outside world, including the imposition of a no-fly zone over Ukraine. "Ukrainians absolutely have the courage to defend their lands and homes, but in order to stop the endless attacks from the east and north, they are in desperate need of weapons and ammunition.

"Those remaining in Ukraine need this help the most; those who are under fire from the Russian fascist bombs are begging our allies to close the skies over Ukraine. "Unfortunately, their pleas are falling on deaf ears in Washington and Europe." Didusenko was accompanied by attorney Gloria Allred, who called on US President Joe Biden to allow Ukrainians fleeing the fighting to come to the United States.

"Many of these mothers and children... have no idea where they will be able to live with their children, and if they will be able to return to their former homes," she said. "As Americans, we must do everything possible to open our doors... to these refugees, and particularly mothers with children. "I urge President Biden to immediately announce that he will give Ukrainians the opportunity to come to the United States if they so choose." — AFP



Veronika Didusenko (right), who was crowned Miss Ukraine in 2018, speaks alongside women's rights attorney Gloria Allred (left) during a press conference about her experience fleeing the war in Ukraine in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Now a refugee, Eurovision's Jamala lifts Ukraine spirits from abroad

When her husband woke her up at 5:00 am saying Russia had invaded, Ukraine's Eurovision winner Jamala didn't know what to do first: pack, find their passports or take care of her two toddlers. The 38-year-old ethnic Tatar never thought that she would become a refugee like her grandmother. She was driven from her native Crimea by Soviet forces in 1944 — the title of the ballad about Soviet persecution that clinched her the Eurovision crown in 2016. "I never thought it would be a reality (today) because it was (in) the past," she told AFP. But there she was, covering in a building's second-floor parking lot in Kyiv. "I was really shocked," she said.

The family then decided to drive to Ternopil — 400 kilometers (250 miles) to the west, in search of safety. But after spending a night there, the sounds of explosions were too distressing and they moved again, this time to the Romanian border. Jamala crossed the border alone

with her sons aged one and three—Ukrainian adult men are not allowed to leave the country and her husband returned to Kyiv to help with the war effort. Her sister, who lives in Istanbul, picked her up. Now she constantly checks her phone, waiting for news from Kyiv. "It is really hard when you know that your husband is there. I can't sleep. Every minute I am thinking about how he is, how is everything."

'Dangerous'

Jamala, whose real name is Susana Jamaladinova, became a national heroine when she performed her winning song partly in the Tatar language in 2016, two years after Russia seized and annexed Crimea from Ukraine. Jamala's lyrics drew Russia's ire and boycott calls at the time. Crimean Tatars, a predominantly Muslim Turkish-speaking minority, were deported from their homes by then-Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, including Jamala's grandmother who fled to Uzbekistan in Central Asia.

"(The song) was about my granny, my family, all Crimean Tatars who were deported by the Soviet army," Jamala said. She draws parallels between her grandmother's experience and what Ukraine faces today at the hands of Russian President Vladimir Putin. "At this time, we see the same situation," she said. Members of her band remain in Kyiv, hiding in shelters. "My sound engineer wrote to me yesterday that he didn't have any water... he cannot go out, it's dangerous," she said.

For many observers, Jamala is a symbol of Ukraine's resistance against Russian aggression. She was invited to perform her winning song "1944" at the German Eurovision preliminary on Friday—an event marked by the war in Ukraine. "If I can do something, I will do it," she said. Even from Istanbul, she tries to boost Ukrainians' morale. — AFP



Eurovision song contest winner in 2016, Susana Jamaladinova, known as "Jamala" poses with an Ukrainian national flag during an AFP interview in Istanbul. — AFP photos



Ukrainian singer a composer Jamala, who won the 2016 Eurovision Song Contest for her song '1944' and fled the war in her country, performs her then winning song at the German preliminary round 'Germany 12 Points' of the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) in Berlin.

Sports

Not for the faint-hearted, Taleban embrace buzkashi in Afghanistan

KABUL: The announcer roared over the public address system as a lone rider separated from a melee of horses and galloped towards a chalk circle drawn in the middle of a muddy field in the Afghan capital. Despite being pursued by what appeared to be a cavalry charge, the rider dumped his "prize" in the circle and raised an arm in triumph.

Kandahar had taken the lead against Kunduz in Sunday's grand final of Afghanistan's national buzkashi championships. Banned as "immoral" when the Taleban first ruled from 1996 to 2001, the hard-line Islamists have embraced buzkashi since returning to power in August, and the winning team hails from their heartland despite it having no real tradition of the sport.

"Unfortunately, buzkashi was not allowed previously and was only played in provinces where the Taleban didn't rule," Qais Hassan, the owner of the winning Kandahar team, told AFP. "Today, luckily, buzkashi is not only being played all over Afghanistan, but the government, the Islamic Emirate, is organizing this competition."

The sport is both spectacular and violent - a lot like the country, many Afghans are quick to tell you - and steeped in history. Two teams with six horsemen a side fight for possession of, traditionally, a beheaded animal carcass-buzkashi means "dragging the goat" in Persian-with the aim of dropping it into the "circle of truth".

Injuries are common

It has been played for centuries in Central Asia, with slight variations from country to country.

These days a 30-kilogram (66-pound) stuffed leather bag resembling a carcass is used instead of the real thing, but the skills required to compete remain the same. Horses and riders can be substituted from 12 on each side - a necessity as injuries are common, although most riders shrug them off after brief treatment.

The mounts barge violently against each other, rearing and throwing their hooves into the mix. Riders lash the flanks of their steeds - and frequently their opponents too. Sometimes a horse and rider fall, and on Sunday a member of the Kunduz team broke his nose, but the powerfully built 50-year-old soon returned to the fray.

Kandahar and Kunduz were also finalists last year, but the game was called off in controversy after a security alert with just 40 minutes played. This time, the contest took place under tight Taleban security, six months after the fundamentalist Islamists returned to power. As spectators waited for the action to start, religious songs were broadcast over the public address system and white Taleban flags fluttered in the breeze.

The sport has become commercialized too. Large billboards were set up around the field, and riders wore different-colored numbered jackets - some even sporting advertising patches. Since returning to power the Taleban have promised a softer version of the harsh rule that characterized their first government, when they banned most sports - including football because it showed men's legs.

"The government has allowed the independence



KABUL: Horsemen from Kandahar team (in black) and Kunduz team compete during the final of Afghanistan's Buzkashi League on March 6, 2022. — AFP

of the Olympic administration and along with buzkashi, we have football, wrestling and other sports - all supported by the government," said Ahmadullah Wasiq, head of Afghanistan's national TV, which co-organized the tournament. For the record, Kandahar won 2-0, with the winning team

carrying off a handsome trophy presented by a senior Taleban official. The mud and rain made conditions treacherous, but Kandahar's Abdul Salam Aymaq - who took up the sport as a teenager - shrugged them off. "There was nothing difficult for us," the 32-year-old said. — AFP

News in brief



Best fan in Kuwait honored

KUWAIT: Deputy Director General of Public Authority for Sport honored the best football fan in Kuwait Yousuf Mirza aka Yoyo Arbawi, in the presence of his uncle Abdullah Ashkanani, former goalkeeper Ahmad Jassem and player Bandar Al-Salama.

Jadeja tops Test rankings

NEW DELHI: India's Ravindra Jadeja has returned as the world's number one-ranked all-rounder after his stand-out effort with bat and ball against Sri Lanka, the International Cricket Council said yesterday. Jadeja, a left-hand batsman and left-arm spinner, hit an unbeaten 175 and took a match tally of nine wickets as India hammered Sri Lanka inside three days on Sunday to lead the two-match series 1-0. — AFP

New York, Seattle on top

NEW YORK: New York City FC defeated Guatemalan side Comunicaciones and the Seattle Sounders downed Mexico's Leon as Major League Soccer teams dominated the opening quarterfinals of the CONCACAF Champions League on Tuesday. Goals from Valentin Castellanos, Maxi Moralez and Santiago Rodriguez gave MLS champions New York a 3-1 first-leg win over Comunicaciones at Rentschler Field in East Hartford, Connecticut. In Seattle, the Sounders' veteran Colombian striker Fredy Montero scored two first-half goals to set up his team's emphatic 3-0 victory over Leon. — AFP

Rafiq fears he's 'unemployable'

LONDON: Azeem Rafiq fears he may have become "unemployable" within cricket after speaking out about the racism he suffered during his two spells at Yorkshire. Former off-spinner Rafiq, 31, accused Yorkshire of failing to deal adequately with the abuse he suffered at the northern county, saying he had been driven to thoughts of suicide. "I feel like people are scared to be connected to me, because I will continue to fight for the truth," he told the PA news agency at the Include Summit in Birmingham. "I sit here as a 31-year-old, potentially unemployable, potentially (without) any hope of being around the game in the future, a game that I've loved for the majority of my life." — AFP

Imam-ul-Haq makes a name for himself, relatively speaking

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan opener Imam-ul-Haq has shed some of the burden of being the nephew of a legend with a century in each innings against Australia in the drawn first Test. The 26-year-old's uncle is former Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq, but Imam's exploits in the drawn Rawalpindi Test have now given him recognition in his own right. The pitch may have been a batting-friendly flat track, but Imam still had to show immense concentration and discipline for knocks of 157 and 111 not out.

In doing so he became the 10th Pakistan batsman to score a century in each innings of a Test, and only the fourth against Australia, behind former captains Younis Khan, Misbah-ul-Haq and Azhar Ali. His performance will not only cement his place in the Pakistan Test side, but will also silence a legion of critics who go after him after every failure.

The criticism usually circles back to suggestions he only has a place in the side through the family name. "I don't care what people say here and there and never lose heart," Imam said after scoring his

maiden Test century on Friday. "I want to take challenges and excel." Despite being cricket royalty Imam's journey hasn't been easy.

His uncle is Pakistan's third-highest Test run-scorer with 8,830 and most prolific in one-day internationals, 11,701. Despite obvious natural talent Imam was labelled "parchi" - an Urdu term used for someone given undue favoritism - and not helped by the fact that he was first picked in 2018 when his uncle was the chief selector.

Nepotism at play?

Imam had the game, most fans agreed, but was nepotism at play? The bespectacled Imam was Pakistan's highest run-getter in the 2014 Under-19 World Cup - where Pakistan lost in the final - finishing with 382 runs in six games. He also showed form in an A Series against Bangladesh, before scoring 848 in 11 matches in the 2016-17 domestic season.

Inzamam insisted he wasn't playing family favorites, saying his nephew was selected on the advice of coaches Mickey Arthur and Grant Flower. "Mickey and Grant came to me and stressed that they wanted him for the team, so only after that he was selected," he said at the time. The youngster made an instant impact, scoring a hundred on his ODI debut against Sri Lanka in Abu Dhabi in 2017.

His first Test, in 2018, was a match-winning 74 not out against Ireland when Pakistan were teeter-



RAWALPINDI: Pakistan's Imam-ul-Haq celebrates after scoring a century during the fifth day of the first Test cricket match between Pakistan and Australia at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Tuesday. — AFP

ing at 14-3, chasing 160. While Imam's ODI form only improved, his Test fortunes slumped and he was dropped after failing in Australia in 2019. But on the back of two hundreds in domestic cricket, Imam returned to the fold - and made the chance count in Rawalpindi. "Every time I failed they started trolling me but I have a resolve that I will answer them with my bat, with my runs," he said. "I want to make my own name." — AFP

Burgan Bank sponsors 6th round of KEF league

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank has sponsored the sixth round of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation (KEF) league for the 2021-2022 season, held at the Messilah Equestrian Club track. The bank's sponsorship of KEF's competition reflects its commitment to promote the sports culture in Kuwait and foster youth development through sports under the bank's comprehensive, community-focused social responsibility program.

On the first day of the league's 6th round, Friday, March 4, equestrian Rakan Alhasawi won first place, followed by Ali Alkhorafi in second, while Abdulrahman Alfuzae ranked third. While equestrian Ali Alkhorafi was able to take first place on the second day of the tour, Saturday March 5, Khaled Alkhubaizi and Ahmed Almadaha ranked in second and third places, respectively.

Commenting on the Bank's sponsorship of the league, Hessa Al-Najadah, Public Relations Manager at Burgan Bank, said "On behalf of Burgan Bank, I would like to congratulate all the winners of this round and emphasize our keenness to support all the efforts aiming at raising the levels of the sport and preparing Kuwaiti riders to excel at international events."

"Through the Bank's social responsibility program, we encourage talented athletes in various sporting activities under our sustained commitment to play a role in elevating the Kuwaiti sports sector by motivating younger generations to engage in various sports, particularly those that are highly embedded in our cultural identity and heritage," added Al-Najadah.

It is worth noting that Burgan Bank was the platinum sponsor of the first round of showjumping



Hessa Al-Najadah, Public Relations Manager at Burgan Bank, with the 6th round winning equestrians.



Khalid Al-Obaidi - Senior Officer, Social Media, at Burgan Bank, with the winners.

championship, organized by the Kuwaiti Equestrian Federation in Nov 2021. The bank will continue to support Kuwaiti sports and athletes in line with its commitment to play an effective role in encouraging sports and youth initiatives and driving excellence across the sector.

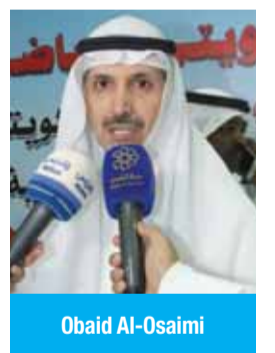
Preparations continue for shooting grand prix

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Higher Organizing Committee of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Annual International Grand Prix will hold a press conference on March 12, 2022 at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex to speak about the details regarding the championship and the preparations of Kuwait's national and other participating teams.

Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations and Director General of the Championship Obaid Munahi Al-Osaimi, which will be held from March 19-26 thanked HH the Amir on behalf of Kuwait Shooting Federation board of directors for his patronage of this championship in which the elite shooters of the world will compete.

He said the higher organizing committee and its subcommittees has been working for months to prepare for this event to maintain ranges and other related issues to ensure a smooth event. Osaimi lauded the cooperation of state departments and authorities, as this will contribute to make the championship benefit the name of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He also thanked the Public Authority for Sport and its Director Dr Humoud Fulaiteh and his deputies for their support.



Obaid Al-Osaimi

Windies stun England in World Cup thriller

DUNEDIN: Defending champions England slumped to a second loss at the Women's Cricket World Cup yesterday as underdogs the West Indies continued their sparkling start to the tournament. The West Indies, who stunned hosts New Zealand in the tournament opener, defeated England by seven runs in a thriller at Dunedin's University Oval.

England's tailenders made a valiant effort to reel in the West Indies' 226-run target but fell just short, leaving their title defense on the edge. "They batted outstandingly at us on a good wicket and played some brilliant shots," England captain Heather Knight said. "We felt like we were in a good position but I guess the last 10 overs cost us."

Four-time champions England, who lost to Australia in their opening match, face an uphill struggle to make the top four of the eight-team tournament and defend their 2017 title. The West Indies made a brisk start after winning the toss and opting to bat, racing to 81 without loss before throw-

ing away three wickets in a single over.

Spinner Sophie Ecclestone sparked the mini-collapse when she dismissed Hayley Matthews for 45, then Deandra Dottin was run out, before Ecclestone struck again with the next ball. Ecclestone subdued the West Indies' batters through the middle of the innings before Shemaine Campbelle and Chedean Nation staged a late charge.

Their 123-run partnership gave the West Indies a competitive total but England would have been dominant had they not dropped a slew of chances as the catching woes that marred the recent series against Australia returned. — AFP



DUNEDIN: West Indies' Shakera Selman runs after the ball during the Round 2 Women's Cricket World Cup match between England and West Indies at University Oval yesterday. — AFP

Sports

'Overconfident' Liverpool edge through despite defeat to Inter

LIVERPOOL: Mohamed Salah admitted Liverpool might have suffered from complacency as they crept into a fourth Champions League quarterfinal in five years despite a rare 1-0 defeat at Anfield to Inter Milan on Tuesday. The Italian champions were unable to scale the mountain they had to climb after losing the first leg 2-0 at home three weeks ago despite Lautaro Martinez's sensational strike into the top corner just after the hour mark.

Alexis Sanchez's red card shortly afterwards punctured any Inter momentum and Liverpool comfortably held out with the extra man despite slipping to just a third defeat in 44 games in all competitions this season. The Reds had been on a 12-game winning run to keep alive their hopes of a historic quadruple of trophies.

After lifting the League Cup last month, Jurgen Klopp's men are now into the last eight of both the Champions League and FA Cup and have a game in hand to cut Manchester City's six-point lead at the top of the Premier League. And Salah hopes they can learn from a rare off night in front of goal as they failed to score for just the fourth time this season.

"We lost the game and maybe that will give us a push," said the Egyptian, who hit the post twice in the second half with glorious chances. "Maybe in the back of our minds we were overconfident. It's a good game for us to learn from." Inter were left to rue conceding two late goals in Milan three weeks ago after they had enjoyed the better of the game for much of the first leg. "We've got to this stage for the first time in 10 years. We played against the strongest team in

Europe in this time & were their equals," said Inter boss Simone Inzaghi. "Sometimes it just takes a single episode to change the course of a game."

The Italian champions again controlled the first half, but Liverpool had the better chances as Joel Matip crashed a header off the bar before, from the resulting corner, Virgil Van Dijk's goalbound effort was deflected wide. After a subdued first 45 minutes, Liverpool were fired up by Klopp at the break and should have taken the lead on the night minutes after the restart when Salah turned a loose ball inside the box onto the post.

At the other end, Martinez looked to have wasted the chance to get Inter back in the tie when he dragged a shot wide from the edge of the area. But the Argentine made amends in spectacular fashion when he arrowed an effort into the top corner from outside the box on 62 minutes. Inter's joy lasted barely a minute before they were reduced to 10 men by Sanchez's ill-discipline.

The Chilean had been lucky to escape with just a yellow card for a dangerous lunge on Thiago Alcantara just before half-time and stupidly dived in on Fabinho to earn a second yellow. Salah hit the post again 15 minutes from time and only an incredible block from Arturo Vidal denied Luis Diaz in stoppage time as Liverpool failed to make their numerical advantage count. "I think over the two legs it is completely fine they won one, we won one, and we are through," said Klopp. "We could have done better against an opponent who makes life really uncomfortable." — AFP



LIVERPOOL: Inter Milan's Croatian midfielder Ivan Perisic vies with Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg match at Anfield on Tuesday. — AFP

Bayern into quarters as Lewandowski hat-trick sinks Salzburg

MUNICH: Robert Lewandowski scored a record-breaking 11-minute hat-trick to send Bayern Munich sailing into the Champions League quarterfinals with a 7-1 win at home to Red Bull Salzburg on Tuesday. The Polish striker had three goals to his name by the 23rd minute - the earliest anyone has ever completed a hat-trick in a Champions League game - as Bayern shook off their early nerves to crush Salzburg.

"This was definitely a statement from us, and it gives us hope that there is more like this to come," Bayern captain Manuel Neuer told Amazon Prime after his side reached the last eight for a record 20th time. Austrian champions Salzburg had held Bayern to a 1-1 draw in the first leg, but their hopes of an upset in Munich were left in tatters when Lewandowski scored a tap-in and two penalties to send Bayern on their way to a famous victory.

With just ten minutes and 27 seconds between Lewandowski's first and third goals, it was the fastest of the six

hat-tricks the Pole has now scored in the Champions League. "We knew we had to attack the box early today and get Lewy into the game, because he is so hard to defend against," said Thomas Mueller. "We all knew how important this game was today. If we had been knocked out, it would have been a very sad next three months for us," he added.

Lewandowski from the spot

Bayern started with an attack-heavy 3-5-2, but they looked nervy at the back and there were chances at both ends in the opening minutes. Lewandowski forced a sharp save from Philipp Koehn with the first attack of the game, while Nicolas Capaldo was denied at the other end by a brilliant block from Kingsley Coman. Lewandowski gratefully tucked away a penalty to give Bayern the lead on 12 minutes after he was brought down by Maximilian Woeber in the box.

Initially, the lead didn't seem to calm Bayern's nerves, and Salzburg almost



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski controls the ball during the UEFA Champions League last-16, second-leg match against Salzburg on Tuesday. — AFP

equalized as Nicolas Seiwald fizzed a fierce shot over the bar at the other end. But Lewandowski was in a predatory mood, and he soon added two more to complete his hat-trick and put the tie beyond the Austrian side. Having smashed a second penalty into the bottom corner to double the lead, he added a third on the counter-attack, chasing a loose ball over the line after a one-on-one with Koehn.

Bayern were now purring, and Serge Gnabry drilled home a crushingly inevitable fourth after an elegant passing

move on the half-hour mark. Mueller curled a brilliant shot into the bottom corner to make it 5-0 shortly after half time, before Bayern switched on cruise control. The guests grabbed a consolation goal with a clinical counterattack 20 minutes from time, 18-year-old Dane Maurits Kjaergaard smashing a Geoff-Hurst-like finish into the top corner past Manuel Neuer. But the hosts had the last word as Mueller stroked home his second and Lewandowski set up Sane for Bayern's seventh a few minutes from time. — AFP

Barca, Aubameyang in Europa League trophy hunt

PARIS: Barcelona and a rejuvenated Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Europa League specialists Sevilla will spearhead Spain's challenge in the last 16 of the competition today. Sevilla host English side West Ham in the first leg while Barcelona take on Turkish club Galatasaray at the Camp Nou, in two of the most attractive ties of the round.

Five-time European champions Barcelona are still adjusting to the unfamiliar surroundings of the continent's secondary competition after crashing out of the Champions League in the group stage for the first time in 18 years. They face Galatasaray at Camp Nou on the back of their best run of the season after four victories in a row, including an impressive 4-2 win away at Napoli in the previous round.

They sit third in La Liga and have not lost in the league since December, boosted by a busy January transfer window in which they signed Aubameyang from Arsenal as well as Ferran Torres and Adama Traore. Aubameyang and Torres have scored seven goals between them in Barca's last five games. "We have four wins in a row and this hasn't happened for a long time," said coach Xavi Hernandez on Sunday. "The players believe in what we are doing. We are on the right path."

The Europa League is still Barcelona's only realistic hope of winning a trophy this season and there remains a defensive fragility that will offer opponents encouragement. But Barca will be heavy favorites against a Galatasaray side that have struggled recently, winning only twice in their last 15 matches.

Europa League kings

Sevilla, who have won the Europa League four times in the last eight seasons, will face a West Ham side who are battling for a trophy. The Hammers' chances of finishing in the top four of the Premier League are slipping away, with Arsenal now firm favorites to secure the final Champions League spot and Tottenham and United still battling too. West Ham captain Mark Noble said his team's fighting performance in the 1-0 defeat to Liverpool last Saturday would restore belief after a rocky patch in which they were also knocked out of the FA Cup. "That performance will give us a lot of belief and hopefully we can take that into the Europa League now," Noble said on the club's website. "It's exciting and hopefully we can perform like that because Sevilla are a top team and we are going to need to perform well." — AFP

5-goal Fulham too strong for Swansea

LONDON: Championship leaders Fulham took another stride towards promotion to the Premier League with a 5-1 win away to Swansea on Tuesday. Victory left the Cottagers, relegated from the lucrative English top flight last season, 14 points clear of second-placed Bournemouth, albeit the Cherries have two games in hand. Only the top two clubs at the end of the regular season are guaranteed

promotion to the Premier League.

London club Fulham, fresh from a 2-0 win over promotion rivals Blackburn Rovers last weekend, found themselves with a man advantage in south Wales when Swansea defender Ryan Manning received a straight red card for a foul on Harry Wilson shortly before half-time. Wilson then helped Fulham go ahead early in the second half when his cross allowed Aleksandar Mitrovic to score his 35th league goal of the season.

An own-goal from Swansea's Ben Cabango saw Fulham double their lead before Bobby Decordova-Reid headed in to make it 3-0 with 17 minutes left. Joel Piroe pulled a goal back for Swansea, only for Fulham to seal

an emphatic win thanks to two goals late on from on-loan Liverpool defender Neco Williams. Bournemouth endured a frustrating evening after being held to a 1-1 draw by bottom-of-the-table Peterborough.

They fell behind to a goal from Jack Marriott on the half hour and although the Cherries were level early in the second period through Ryan Christie but could not press on. Sheffield United overwhelmed play-off rivals Middlesbrough 4-1 as former Blades manager Chris Wilder suffered a thumping defeat on his return to Bramall Lane. Sander Berge gave Sheffield United a 23rd-minute lead before Blades captain Billy Sharp soon made it 2-0 with his 15th goal of the

campaign.

Jack Robinson volleyed in a third on the hour before Boro substitute Folarin Balogun reduced the deficit in the 62nd minute with his first goal since a loan move from Arsenal. Morgan Gibbs-White, however, put the result beyond doubt 11 minutes from time as Sheffield United moved up to fifth and Boro dropped out of the top six. Luton continued their play-off push with a 1-0 win at Coventry while Blackburn held in-form Millwall to a goalless draw at Ewood Park that ended the Lions' five-match winning streak. Relegation-threatened Barnsley's hopes of a valuable win were dashed by a stoppage-time equalizer in a 1-1 draw at home to Stoke. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9
Clinics	
Kaizen center	25716707

Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
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CHANGE OF NAME

I, TASNEEM DAWOOD CURRENTLY HOLDER OF INDIAN PASSPORT N0093609, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM TASNEEM DAWOOD TO TASNEEM BADRI & NOW I WOULD BE KNOWN AS TASNEEM BADRI, ADDRESS BOHRA COLONY GALIYAKOT, DUNGARPUR, PIN 314026, RAJASTHAN, INDIA. (C# 1425)

I, SYED AHAMED BASHA (Old Name), S/o Shaik Khader Basha, D.No. 29/10-C, Alimabad Street, Rayachoty, Kadapa Dist, A.P. Hereby declare that I have changed my name as SHAIK AHAMED BASHA (New Name). (C# 1426) 10-3-2022



ZHANGJIAKOU, China: Austria's Carina Edlinger (C-#131) and Ukraine's Oksana Shyshkova (second right #132) compete in the women's sprint free vision impaired cross country final yesterday at the Zhangjiakou National Biathlon Centre during the Beijing 2022 Winter Paralympic Games. —AFP

Winter Paralympics feels the heat

ZHANGJIAKOU, China: Cross-country skiers ploughed through slushy snow wearing T-shirts on day five of the Beijing Winter Paralympics yesterday as spring-like weather pushed temperatures well above freezing. The warm spell caught some athletes off guard on the largely man-made snow at the Zhangjiakou cross-country event where six gold medals were up for grabs.

Competitors in the Olympics last month had battled blizzard conditions and a brutal wind chill, with some events postponed because of the weather. This time it was the opposite problem. Cross-country skier Birgit Skarstein, who competes in the women's sitting category, likened the weather to July back home in Norway as temperatures in nearby Zhangjiakou nudged a balmy 17 degrees Celsius.

Up on the slopes temperatures were about 10 degrees cooler, but still well above freezing as the artificial snow

began to melt. "It was really sucky conditions out there, you could feel the skis being drawn into the ground," she told AFP. "You pull and you feel like you're stuck in glue," said Skarstein, who raced in short sleeves. "It was really slushy," she said, adding at times she felt like her exhausted arms would fall off. "These kinds of conditions draw your energy out of the body."

For Canadian visually impaired cross-country skier Brian McKeever, 43, who won his 15th Paralympic gold medal, the conditions proved advantageous. "Honestly, I think for us it's probably an advantage (because my guide Russell Kennedy and I) don't have as much pure speed and power as some of the younger guys," he told AFP. "This is more about finesse."

Fellow Canadian Natalie Wilkie won the women's standing category - helping her country climb to second spot on the medals table with seven gold and 16 podium finishes, to overtake Ukraine.

French gold medalist Benjamin Daviet, who won the men's standing event, said the conditions also worked in his favor. "It was really warm weather, but the snow was better for me," he told AFP.

Paralympians recalled that they had endured similar warm weather at Pyeongchang 2018 and Sochi 2014. With more unseasonable weather ahead in the coming days in the Chinese capital, organizers will tweak the schedule including bringing Saturday's snowboarding forward a day because of a "high risk of rainfall and snow melting".

Organizers told AFP that, along with strong winds, "the temperature is projected to be higher than that in the same period of previous years". "We have formulated corresponding emergency plans for these weather challenges," they said in a statement, such as increasing the amount of artificial snow on slopes where there is sun and warmer temperatures.

'Grind fest'

American Aaron Pike, who competed in a T-shirt, said the cross-country track was lightning fast for the qualifying round but was getting slower and slower. It was becoming a "grind fest", he said. "I was honestly hoping it would still be winter out here," Pike told AFP. "It's slowing everyone down. For people with less function, they're not using their abs, they're not using their back, they're not throwing their body into all the pull strokes, they are just using their arms. "When it's slow like this they're going to suffer a little bit more for sure."

At the wheelchair curling there were dramatic scenes during Canada's win against Britain when one player fell from his wheelchair and had to be taken off the ice on a stretcher. "David Melrose has been taken to hospital for a medical assessment," a Paralympics GB spokesman said in a statement, adding that Melrose was conscious. He received initial first aid from the team's nurse and physio. —AFP

Dupont gets nod for Wales game as France hit by COVID

PARIS: Antoine Dupont will skipper France against Wales in the Six Nations in Cardiff tomorrow as a Covid-19 outbreak in the squad has left coach Fabien Galthie preparing for the worst. Star winger Damian Penaud misses out after a positive test, his place taken by the free-scoring Gabin Villiere, who sat out the Scotland win through injury.

Lock Romain Taofifenua will also skip the trip to Cardiff after testing positive for coronavirus. "Damian Penaud and Romain Taofifenua will not travel following positive tests this morning," France team manager Raphael Ibanez said after Galthie named the team yesterday. "We'd largely been spared that until now, but that's the way it is. We have the resources to front up against Wales. "Yesterday evening we explained to them that everything can happen very quickly. And that was the case."

Galthie did not rule out other players testing positive before Friday's match at the Principality Stadium, with a kick-off of 2000 GMT. "We are preparing for it: we are waiting for information from the Six Nations Committee to find out if and when we will be retested," he said. Penaud and Taofifenua, Galthie added, had discovered they had tested positive "this morning when they were packing". "Psychologically, it's brutal. But we've got to keep going and the guys coming in are ready."

Dupont takes his place in the starting XV after overcoming a stinger sustained in training on Tuesday. The 26-year-old scrum-half was forced to leave the session early after coming off worse in contact with a fellow squad member, his left arm bandaged and iced. The world player of the year, who had his elbow and biceps treated on the sidelines, has been crucial to France's current successful run: the team has notched up three wins from three matches and are bidding for their first Grand Slam since 2010, the last time they won the title.

"He's doing fine, very well," a reassuring Galthie said of his talismanic captain. France coach Fabien Galthie named Villiere, scorer of a hat-trick of tries in the 37-10 opening win over Italy and star of the 30-24 victory over Ireland, in place of Penaud, with Yoram Moefana retaining the other wing spot. Moefana had stepped in after Villiere missed the 36-17 rout of Scotland with a facial injury. Villiere is the sole change from that run-out in Murrayfield.

Dupont is joined at half-back by Toulouse teammate Romain Ntamack, with Gael Fickou and Jonathan Danty in midfield, Moefana on the other wing and Melvyn Jaminet at fullback. The pack is unaltered, New Zealand-born Uini Atonio and Cyril Baille propping up hooker Julien Marchand while Cameron Woki and South African-born Paul Willemse are named in the second row. Anthony Jelonch, Gregory Alldritt and Francois Cros form an ultra-competitive backrow. —AFP

Irving scores 50 as Nets sting Hornets

LOS ANGELES: Kyrie Irving erupted for 50 points as the Brooklyn Nets snapped a four-game losing streak with a 132-121 road victory over the Charlotte Hornets on Tuesday. The fifth 50-point game of Irving's career came courtesy of a superb shooting performance, with the seven-time All-Star shooting 15 of 19 attempts from the field including nine from outside the arc. The Nets improved to 33-33 with the victory, which keeps them firmly on track for a place in the postseason play-in tournament.

Brooklyn are eighth in the Eastern Conference standings, just ahead of the Hornets in ninth. Irving was backed by Andre Drummond, who scored 20 points and hauled in 14 rebounds, while Kevin Durant and Bruce Brown both had 14 points apiece. "It was special all the way around," Irving said afterwards.

"We started off the game with a great resolve, a great game plan and we just played aggressive the whole game. That's what feels good - you really want to put your stamp on the game early and that's what we did tonight. We needed it. We need everybody. It's a total team effort. It's not about one individual. Great performance but it's about the team and us getting collectively better."

Nets coach Steve Nash took

encouragement from the performance. "We showed the level we can play at when we play extremely hard and play connected," said Nash, who reserved praise for Irving's 50-point masterclass.

'A special player'

"He's incredible. It's a career highlight reel every night. We obviously have a special player on our hands and tonight he was unbelievably efficient and difficult to defend," Nash said. The Nets now face a showdown with the Philadelphia 76ers on Thursday, marking a reunion with James Harden - traded away from the Nets in January. "It will be a different feeling to play against him this soon after the trade, but it will be an exciting night for everyone to be part of," Nash said.

Elsewhere on Tuesday, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 39 points as the Milwaukee Bucks thumped the hapless Oklahoma City Thunder 142-115 to notch a fifth straight win. Khris Middleton added 25 points while Bobby Portis finished with 18 points and 14 rebounds in a romp for the Bucks, who remain third in the Eastern Conference.

In Indianapolis, Cleveland maintained their playoff drive with a 127-124 win over the Pacers courtesy of a career-high 41-point display from



CHARLOTTE, North Carolina: Kyrie Irving #11 of the Brooklyn Nets shoots the ball while guarded by Terry Rozier #3 of the Charlotte Hornets during their game at Spectrum Center on Tuesday. —AFP

Darius Garland. Garland also contributed 13 assists and five rebounds as all five members of the Cavs starting line-up cracked double figures. The Cavaliers are sixth in the Eastern Conference table on 38-27, with a comfortable four-win advantage over the seventh-placed Toronto Raptors, who are just outside the playoffs spots in seventh.

Tyrese Haliburton led the Pacers scoring with 25 points. In Orlando meanwhile, the Phoenix Suns bounced back from Sunday's loss to the Milwaukee Bucks with a 102-99 defeat of the Magic. With the Suns still without the injured Chris Paul

and Devin Booker (health protocols), it was left to Deandre Ayton to step up for Phoenix. Ayton finished with 21 points and 19 rebounds while Landry Shamet also posted 21.

In San Francisco, the Golden State Warriors finally snapped their five-game losing streak with a 112-97 defeat of the Los Angeles Clippers. Klay Thompson scored 20 points and Stephen Curry added 15 while Jonathan Kuminga delivered 20 off the bench for the Warriors, who improved to 44-22 with the victory. The Warriors are third in the Western Conference, while the Clippers remain in eighth place. —AFP