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Death toll mounts as bombing of Ukraine hospital sparks outrage

News in brief

Newborn daughter shot

LAHORE: A Pakistani father accused of killing his week-old daughter by shooting her five times because he wanted his firstborn to be a boy has been arrested, police said yesterday. In the deeply patriarchal country, a son is often believed to offer better financial security to parents than daughters, and girls and women face widespread violence. Newborn Jannat Fatima was killed on Sunday in the city of Mianwali, in central Punjab province, sparking a manhunt for her father Shahzeb Khan, who was arrested on Wednesday night following a series of raids, according to Punjab police. "The police were told by the complainants that the killer had been complaining for three or four days that he had wanted a son and he had been very angry," Zarrar Khan, spokesman for Mianwali police said. "His wife also confirmed that he was angry about having a daughter and wanted a son." — AFP



CAIRO: A woman sits in a chair next to newspapers on display at a newsstand along Kasr Al-Aini street in the centre of Egypt's capital Cairo. — AFP

Egypt inflation hits 10%

CAIRO: Egypt's inflation rate hit 10 percent in February, official figures showed yesterday, as the country heavily reliant on wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine braces for the full impact of their war. "The annual headline inflation rate recorded 10 percent for February 2022, compared to 4.9 percent for the same month last year," the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) said in a statement. In May 2019, Egypt's inflation rate hovered at 11 percent before easing in the following months. CAPMAS attributed the latest hike to a surge in prices of food especially vegetables, bread and grain. Last week, the global food price index reached an all-time high, soaring 24.1 percent above its level the year before, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). — AFP



Roman Abramovich

UK targets Chelsea owner

LONDON: Chelsea Football Club owner Roman Abramovich was yesterday hit with a UK assets freeze and travel ban, throwing his plans to sell the European and world club champions into disarray. The billionaire owner of the English Premier League side was one of seven Russian oligarchs slapped with restrictions, including his former business partner Oleg Deripaska. Others sanctioned were Rosneft chief executive Igor Sechin, whom the British government described as Vladimir Putin's "right-hand man", and the head of Gazprom Alexei Miller. Also on the list were VTB bank chairman Andrey Kostin, Transneft president Nikolai Tokarev and Bank Rossiya chairman Dmitri Lebedev. — AFP

No breakthrough in Russia-Ukraine top-level talks

KYIV: Russia and Ukraine failed to make a breakthrough yesterday in their first top-level talks since Moscow's invasion two weeks ago, amid international outrage over the bombing of a children's hospital that Kyiv said killed three people, including a young girl. Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said there was "no progress" even on a 24-hour ceasefire, after talks with Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Turkey, although the latter said Moscow would keep talking.

Russian forces yesterday rolled their armoured vehicles up to the northeastern edge of Kyiv, an AFP team saw, edging closer in their attempts to encircle the Ukrainian capital. Mayor Vitali Klitschko said half the population had fled, adding: "Kyiv has been transformed into a fortress. Every street, every building, every checkpoint has been fortified."

The UN estimates more than 2.3 million refugees have left Ukraine since Russia's invasion on February 24, which prompted unprecedented Western sanctions against Moscow along with a cultural and sporting boycott. At least 35,000 civilians were evacuated from the cities of Sumy, Enerhodar and areas around Kyiv on Wednesday. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, with three more routes set to open up, including out of the southern port city of Mariupol.

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IRPIN: Photo shows a car riddled with bullets in Irpin, north of Kyiv. Russian forces yesterday rolled their armoured vehicles up to the northeastern edge of Kyiv, edging closer in their attempts to encircle the Ukrainian capital. — AFP

Can Arab Gulf oil producers tame prices?

DUBAI: Oil prices have soared since Russia invaded Ukraine, but experts say oil-producing Arab Gulf states are neither able nor willing to ramp up output to help stem the spike. Germany's Economy Minister Robert Habeck on Tuesday issued an "urgent appeal" to the Saudi-led OPEC oil producers group, urging it to "increase production in order to create relief on the market" amid supply fears.

President Joe Biden on Tuesday 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. Russia is the world's largest producer of gas and second-largest oil producer behind Saudi Arabia. US media outlets have raised the possibility of an official visit to Riyadh, which is close to both Washington and Moscow, to convince it to pump more crude.

Not to cover the drop entirely. Analyst Amena Baker from Energy Intelligence said the group "now estimates that Russia's combined exports of crude oil and refined products have fallen by about three million barrels per day, and could shrink by another 2 million bpd over the next week or so". The only OPEC members that could supply more oil are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and to a lesser extent Kuwait and Iraq. But with an estimated combined reserve capacity of just 2.5 million to

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HANOI: A gas station employee pumps gasoline into the petrol tank of a customer's motorcycle in Hanoi yesterday. — AFP

New Facebook tools targeting misinformation

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook has begun letting groups automatically reject posts identified as containing false information, taking aim at a part of the massive network that has drawn particular concern from misinformation watchdogs. More than 1.8 billion people per month use Facebook Groups, which allow members to gather around topics ranging from parenting to politics.

Yet critics have said the groups are ripe targets

for the spread of misleading or false information by having sometimes large audiences of like-minded users organized on a particular topic. Administrators of "groups" at the leading social network can opt to have software automatically reject incoming posts showcasing information found to be false by third-party fact-checkers, Facebook App communities vice president Maria Smith said.

Groups were once touted by chief executive Mark Zuckerberg as a way to build more intimate communities at the world-spanning social network by providing online spaces for users to connect based on hobbies, endeavors, or other interests. "Our research shows, those same features - privacy and community - are often exploited by bad actors, foreign and domestic, to spread false information

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NEW YORK: A smart phone screen displays the logo of Facebook in Arlington, Virginia. — AFP

Struggling Libyan potters showcase wares online

GHARYAN: The Libyan city of Gharyan sculpted a reputation for ceramics generations ago, but fragile demand is forcing potters to seek new markets on Instagram and Facebook. Muayyad Al-Shabani didn't even start out in the craft. He earned a physics degree but struggled to find a job in a country whose economy has been battered by a decade of war and

instability since the fall of dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

Then Shabani started, almost by chance four years ago, to sell ceramics online from Gharyan, high in the Nafousa mountains south of Tripoli. Operating out of a Gharyan workshop, his firm with around 10 employees takes orders directly through

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GHARYAN: Locally made ceramics are displayed in front of a shop in the town of Gharyan, about 100 km southwest of the capital Tripoli. — AFP

Local

Society still male dominant despite women's achievements: Official

Symposium focuses on women's achievements in research, higher education



KUWAIT: The speakers are seen at the end of the symposium. — Photos by Ben Garcia

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The British Council in collaboration with the Kuwait College of Science and Technology (KCST) organized on Wednesday a conference entitled 'Women in Research and Higher Education'. The event was organized coinciding with the celebration of International Women's Day and was held at the KCST auditorium. It was attended by Sunny Ahmed, the Deputy Head of Mission at the British Embassy Kuwait and Michael Gordon, British Council Director. Among the speakers were women in academic circles and other respected guests.

In his opening remarks, Michael Gordon said that despite the advances, progress, and achievements in careers in many areas, "the fact is we are still a male dominated society." "There are still biases. There are many barriers," he said. "But in discussions like this, we can help understand the pattern and when we exchange experiences and inspirations today, there are opportunities to hear from these women who spectacularly made advances and achieved on their careers."

Dr Randa Diab Bahman, Student Life Alumni and the organizer of the event, said the function focused

on women in research. "This event is not just about women's needs, rights or all other conventional themes about women: we want to talk about those issues normally. Those issues are overlooked, although they are of concern for many of us in the



Event
co-organized
by British
Council, KCST

academy. We cannot totally ignore those issues just because nobody talks about it," she said.

"We are here to support, to network and to learn. We are not here to change anything; we are not here to bring you statistics on the table," Bahman explained. "We are simply here to make a difference. Our message in this seminar is to show



A general view of the audience.

how we did it despite many struggles in research in general; we are here to show you our tools that we used to overcome hurdles."

Bahman mentioned as an example the difficulties women face to have mentorship, which is a very important part in gaining academic experience. "It's very difficult for women to be part of any collaborative research," she went on. "It's difficult to collect any data because nobody wants to participate or cooperate. We cannot easily knock on doors of institutions or homes for a surveys we need."

She however conceded on the best part COVID-19 brought to the women in research. "I came to this realization during the last two years of the pandemic: I was working in the academic field for many years, and I'd never achieved the high level of success I was able to achieve during pandemic. When I sat at home, I did a lot of phone calls. I was on my laptop researching and talking to people via social media. Within a span of two years, I published 14 papers, plus two books, that is only because of my research actions at home. For many people, the pandemic was no doubt a challenge, but for us women in research, it was a ton of opportunity to do things. It helped drastically especially those who

have families and who have kids. It gave us the opportunity at doing our research at our own time. In fact I don't know how to go back to the pre-pandemic normal anymore, but I also want to stress that I believe that pre-pandemic will no longer be possible; it will not exist anymore, so we have to adapt. In fact, the pandemic time has taught us so many lessons in life, that we can get everything done, productively, efficiently and effectively without the normal procedures or protocols which we followed during pre-pandemic time," she mentioned.

Professor Khaled Al-Begain, KCST President, said the seminar brings out the best of everyone. "We, as an academic institution believed in scientific and the world of research. These are very important parts in our institution. We are proud of our research team; they are our source pride. We represent a strong culture of research in the college and as per statistics, we are number one in Kuwait in the number of publications per faculty. This is way above average. Also, because we are celebrating International Women's Day, we are also proud to mention that KCST female students' population stood at 60 percent. We also have great proportions of women in our faculties," said Begain.

Zain official sponsor of February Kuwait Festival

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its official sponsorship of the February Kuwait Festival 2022 titled "The Return". The event, organized by Rotana throughout March, made a return after a year-long halt due to the pandemic, and is held at the Arena Kuwait, 360 Mall in celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation days.

Zain's continuous support to this national festival since its inception comes as part of its commitment to being actively present in the various efforts that celebrate Kuwait's national holidays in February and March of every year.

The company is keen on sharing the



KUWAIT: Zain's team awarding Fahad Al-Kabaisi.

joys of this cherished time of the year with the Kuwaiti public by supporting such events that reflect the love of Kuwaitis to their nation. This is especially true as this year marks the 61st anniversary of Kuwait's independence and 31st anniversary of its liberation.

This year, the concerts of February

Kuwait Festival 2022 "The Return" hosted many distinguished Arab stars throughout March, including Mohammed Abdu and Aseel Abu Bakr on 3 March, as well as Nawal Al-Kuwaitiya, Fahad Al-Kabaisi, and Fahad Al-Salem on 4 March.

The festival also featured Nabeel Shuaib, Angham, and Ibrahim Dashti on 10 March,



From one of the concerts.

Abdullah Al Ruwaidh, Nawal Al-Zughbi, and Bader Al Noori on 11 March, Majed Al-Muhandis, Asalah, and Musaed Al-Bloushi on 17 March. The festival is set to host more stars who all visit Kuwait to take part in the celebrations.

Zain has long considered itself a key partner of the Kuwaiti community, espe-

cially in such times of national celebrations. The company's official support to this festival comes to show its commitment in sharing the joys of Kuwait as a leading national company in the Kuwaiti private sector. Zain will spare no efforts in being an integral part of the many occasions that are of interest to the local community.

Death toll mounts as bombing of...

Continued from Page 1

The children's and maternity hospital in Mariupol was attacked on Wednesday in what Zelensky described as a Russian "war crime", and which sparked global outrage. Local officials said yesterday that at least three people were killed in the attack, including a young girl. Overall, at least 71 children have been killed in Ukraine since the start of the war, and more than 100 have been wounded, said Lyudmyla Denisova, the Ukraine parliament's point person on human rights.

Ten days of constant attacks on Mariupol have already left more than 1,200 civilians dead, according to the mayor, and created what aid agencies call an "apocalyptic" situation, with no water, power or heat. Zelensky shared footage on Wednesday of massive destruction at the hospital, saying the "direct strike by Russian troops" had left children under the wreckage.

Officials had previously said 17 people were injured, including doctors. Video shared from the site by rescue workers showed a scene of complete devastation, with the wounded being evacuated, some on stretchers, past charred and burning carcasses of cars and a massive crater by the building.

The White House slammed the "barbaric" use of force against civilians, while EU foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell echoed Zelensky in calling it a "heinous war crime". "Strikes of residential areas from the air and blocks of access of aid convoys by the Russian forces must immediately stop," Borrell said. Russia's foreign ministry did not deny the attack but accused Ukrainian "nationalist battalions" of using the hospital to set up firing positions after moving out staff and patients.

Lavrov reiterated the claim yesterday, saying it was a military base for members of the radical Azov Battalion. Asked by a Turkish reporter if Russia was planning to attack other nations, Lavrov replied "we don't plan to attack other countries" and claimed "we did not attack Ukraine". He insisted that Russian President Vladimir Putin launched the operation as the situation in Ukraine "posed a direct threat to the Russian Federation". — AFP

expressed fears of "market panic" if all reserve capacity were used up.

Gulf countries have an interest in acting in coordination—both within the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, and with Russia-led allies in the OPEC+ group—to avoid a price war and keep control over the market. Robin Mills, CEO of Dubai-based Qamar Energy, said that it was "difficult to agree within OPEC+ for higher production levels, where most members are already producing at maximum levels, and Russia itself is a member". — AFP

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have so far avoided taking a position against Russia, and "it would appear they are disappointed with US support over various political/security issues", Mills added. The two countries, both part of a military coalition supporting Yemen's government against Iran-backed Houthi rebels, accuse the US of not taking a strong enough stance against the insurgents. — AFP

Struggling Libyan potters showcase...

Continued from Page 1

dedicated Facebook and Instagram pages, packaged each item and dispatches them around the world. "First we tried to get ceramics delivered to Libyans living overseas, in the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, and it was a great success," he said.

"Then we started tackling the problems linked to transport, like a lack of decent packaging. So we invested in packaging machines." The 35-year-old said he wants to stake out a corner on a market with no borders, and compete with products made in China, Turkey and Libya's neighbors. But he knows potters in Gharyan face a competitive disadvantage against rivals from more politically stable countries.

Potteries in Gharyan, a city of 160,000 people, essentially stopped developing in the 1980s and are struggling to keep pace with modernization, he said. Businesses across Libya face daunting logistical challenges and an archaic banking system—a challenge Shabani overcomes by receiving payment through an account in Europe. The money is then withdrawn in cash and delivered to merchants by hand.

New Facebook tools targeting...

Continued from Page 1

and conspiracies," disinformation researchers Nina Jankowicz and Cindy Otis wrote in a Wired opinion piece in 2020.

Facebook has long been under heavy pressure to prevent its platform from being used to spread misinformation on topics from Russia's invasion of

Ukraine to the COVID-19 pandemic and elections. The platform on Wednesday also updated a "suspend" tool that administrators can use to temporarily stop selected members from posting, commenting or otherwise taking part in a group.

For groups seeking to incorporate new members, Facebook added the ability to promote them using email or QR codes, Smith said. AFP currently works with Facebook's fact checking program in more than 80 countries and 24 languages. Under the program, which started in December 2016, Facebook pays to use fact checks from around 80 organizations, including media outlets and specialized fact checkers, on its platform, WhatsApp and on Instagram. — AFP

At a neighboring studio, Ali Al-Zarqani would like to move online but is not yet equipped to do so and struggles to reach his markets. Every morning he heads to the family's workshop in the centre of town. The road is lined with shops selling a range of pottery creations—dishes, jugs, pitchers, tajines and flower pots, enameled and hand-decorated with traditional designs. Some display hundreds of earthenware jugs, used for storing olive oil or cool drinking water in the baking Libyan summers.

Zarqani, 47, learned the craft from his father a quarter of a century ago. He starts by crushing and sieving clay-rich earth then kneading it to make it easier to sculpt, before efficiently crafting each piece on his wheel then leaving it to dry for up to 12 hours. Once decorated with natural pigments, the piece is then baked at more than 1,000 degrees Celsius in an electric kiln. "There's a lack of basic materials, which we have to import at high prices, and there are also few workers because of a lack of craft schools," said Zarqani.

"And moreover, demand isn't stable." Still, he hopes "the new generation will take over" to safeguard this "link to our land." Shabani, with his online business, is part of that new era and has found ways around the challenges which have left Gharyan's once-prosperous potteries struggling. He plans to keep expanding. "Ceramics are part of our identity," Zarqani said. "We're attached to it because it represents the identity of Libya." — AFP

Can Arab Gulf oil producers...

Continued from Page 1

three million barrels per day, it wouldn't be enough to make up for the drop in Russian exports.

But using reserve capacity would limit oil-producing countries' room for manoeuvre in case of further supply disruptions, and pricing would take that into account. "Prices may not fall much, and the markets will be vulnerable to any supply disruption shocks that no supplier will be able to handle," said Yousef Alshammari, head of market research firm CMarkits. He said prices would remain in the triple digits, reflecting the geopolitical risks. Baker also

Local

String of thefts around Kuwait raises alarm

People advised to keep valuables at minimum at home

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: A family flat in Salmiya was burgled a few days ago, with valuables including jewelry and cash stolen. The incident was posted on Facebook and garnered the attention of netizens. Kuwait Times found the flat where the robbery took place in block 12 in Salmiya and spoke to Bint Asadullah, the victim of the robbery.

"It took place on Friday evening between 8:00 pm and 10:40 pm - that was the time I went out with my husband to buy something. When we returned, the flat was dark and the door was ajar. I instinctively realized we were robbed, so I immediately went to our room and found all my jewelry was stolen along with some of our hard-earned money," Asadullah said.

"We went to Salmiya police station and reported the theft. Police immediately came to our place to check and lift fingerprints from the door and the place where I had hidden my valuables. I am very sad because the jewelry that was stolen was gifted to us during our wedding. Now there is nothing left in my jewelry box," she rued.

On the same day, according to Asadullah, police told them another flat nearby was also burgled. "I think the gang of thieves came to our flat after they robbed that flat. I hope the police will be able to arrest the thieves soon. This is scary - I had heard many things like this happening in block 10 in Salmiya, but not in block 12," said Asadullah.

The burglars knock on the door, and if no one replies, they break the door and enter the house. "They easily broke the lock of our flat and entered it. They removed everything from the cupboard and ransacked all the drawers and shelves. They took what they thought was valuable and left," Asadullah told Kuwait Times.

"Maybe the robber is not acting alone, and there are more than one. I hope with this story, you will be able to help many expats, to serve as a warning to be careful and keep your belongings secure. Better ask the building to install CCTV cameras, because in our building there are none. We got CCTV footage from a nearby salon, which hardly revealed the faces of the thieves," she said.

The building haris also isn't aware of who visits the building. "That is also a problem, as we only have one haris. He is a kind person and not very



KUWAIT: The damaged lock of a door of one of the targeted flats.

strict about the people going in and out of the building," Asadullah said, adding she doesn't know whether the building owner will now consider installing cameras after the robbery.

Asadullah advised keeping a minimum amount of cash and gold at home. "If you are planning to keep valuable things, buy a safe. Also, store the valuables on a high shelf at the back or in places that are inaccessible, because thieves do not spend a lot of time in the house. Ask your haris and neighbors to be vigilant at all times. Also, look for a building with CCTV cameras on all floors so that robbers think twice before they break into houses," she said. A few months ago, a string of thefts in Salmiya saw clothes left to dry on racks being stolen, along with shoes and plants from the front doors of flats.

Kuwait dispatches planeload of relief supplies for Ukrainians

KUWAIT: A plane loaded with 33.5 tons of medical and food supplies destined for the Ukrainians flew from the Kuwaiti Abdullah Al-Mubarak Air Base on Thursday. Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced that the plane was flying toward Warsaw Airport in Poland, where some procedures would be taken to secure delivery of the supplies to the Ukrainian refugees. KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-

Sayer said in a statement to the press that in line with instructions by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the aid cargo was sent from the Kuwaiti Government to the Ukrainian people, in coordination with the Kuwaiti ministries of defense and foreign affairs. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have fled their country due to the ongoing Russian "special operation." — KUNA



Education Ministry announces last day, final exams' dates

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education announced the dates for final exams and last day of school at public and Arabic private schools for the current academic year as follows:

- Kindergarten and elementary grades: Last day of school is June 6.

- Grades from 5 to 9: The finals run from May 29 to June 6.
- Grades from 10 to 11: The finals run from May 29 to June 9.
- Grades 12: The finals run from June 12 to June 23.

Start dates
Meanwhile, the education ministry also announced the start dates for the 2022/2023 academic year at public and Arabic private schools as follows:

- Kindergarten: September 18.
- First grade: September 19.
- Grades from 2 to 9: September 20.
- Grades from 10 to 12: September 25.



ANTALYA: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah speaks during the forum. — KUNA

Kuwait foreign minister partakes in Antalya diplomacy forum

ANTALYA: Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday took part in the inaugural session of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, held in the Mediterranean Turkish city of Antalya.

The foreign minister took part in the session that was also attended by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, Palestinian Foreign Minister Dr Riad Al-Malki and Secretary General of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe Helga Maria. Conferees during the event, themed "shedding light on mediation under changeable peace and improvised mediation," debated significance of the "pre-emptive diplomacy," emerging techniques for handling international affairs and establishing peace globally. — KUNA

GCC, US underline importance of long-term defense partnership

RIYADH: Members of the action groups between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the US specialized in integrated aerial defense and missile systems, and maritime security have reiterated importance of their long-term defense partnership. The groups reaffirmed commitment to regional

security as part of partnership between the six-member GCC and the US, the GCC Secretariat said in a statement yesterday. The two sides, who met at the Secretariat yesterday, discussed a series of air and maritime threats facing the region. They condemned anew malign behavior of Iran and its proxies, firing ballistic and cruise missiles as well as drones against civilian population and facilities. The GCC and the US underlined need of boosting the GCC countries' collective capabilities to confronting these aerial and maritime attacks, said the statement, adding the two sides agreed to develop integrated defense systems. — KUNA

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News in brief

Two girls arrested for mother's alleged murder

KUWAIT: Kuwait police arrested two sisters on charges of killing their mother. The suspects allegedly stabbed their mother to death and beheaded her inside their home in Doha, according to initial reports. The two are being held by police pending investigations in the case, according to sources familiar with the probe.

Kuwait oil price jumps to \$130.31 pb

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti oil price surged by \$4.82 to \$130.31 per barrel (pb) on Wednesday, compared with \$125.49 pb the day earlier, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. In the world market, the Brent crude plummeted by \$16.84 to \$111.14 pb, and the West Texas Intermediate also went down by \$15.44 to settle at \$108.70 pb.

Sheikhs set for key posts

KUWAIT: Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah is rumored to have been nominated for the Vice President of Kuwait National Guard's post, and Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad for the Capital Governor's post.

Ministry warns against prices gouging

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry yesterday warned that firm legal action would be taken against any commodities' dealer who would raise prices drastically. The ministry said in a statement to the press that law would be applied on offenders. They would be referred to the concerned authorities and their businesses would be shut instantly after discovering the unjustified hike of the necessities' prices. The ministry inspection teams have been spread across the local markets to monitor the pricing.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Birds fly over a beach in Kuwait. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Kuwait parliament speaker hosts visiting Bahraini chief legislator



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets Bahraini Council of Representatives Speaker Fawzia bint Abdullah Zainal. —KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Bahraini Council of Representatives Speaker Fawzia bint Abdullah Zainal.

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem yesterday received the visiting Bahraini Council of Representatives Speaker Fawzia bint Abdullah Zainal and her accompanying delegation. The two sides examined the brotherly relations, means of enhancing cooperation between the two countries, in addition to address-

ing a host of issues of common concern. They also touched on topics to be addressed at the forthcoming Inter-Parliamentary Union conference, due in Indonesia.

Also yesterday, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace the visiting Bahraini

Council of Representatives Speaker and her accompanying delegation. His Highness the PM's Diwan Chief Abdulaziz Al-Dakheel, His Highness the PM's Diwan Counselor Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah, and Chief of the accompanying Mission of Honor MP Mubarak Al-Ajmi were also in attendance. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The fifth liquefied gas line at Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery. — KUNA

KNPC inaugurates fifth liquefied gas line at Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) announced yesterday launching fifth liquefied gas line at Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery, the company's second largest project after the clean fuel project. The company's CEO Waleed Al-Bader stated that the pipeline reinforces the company's production of liquefied gas, adding to it around 805 million square feet of gas and 106,000 barrels of condensates, marking a 30 percent increase in production. Bader explained that the fifth line reflects the company's objectives of expanding profitable derivatives that correspond to global markets, indicating that gas derivatives are considered the company's best products in terms of being eco-friendly and very profitable, adding that the project provides work opportunities for national cadres.

Chairman of Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery Shujaa Al-Ajmi elucidated that the project works on treating natural gas extracted from oil wells, as well as



KNPC CEO Waleed Al-Bader

producing gases of methane, ethane, propane, butane, and natural gasoline. Ajmi added that the project includes a secondary unit that produces clean fuel gas, bolstering safety levels. Furthermore, Ajmi spoke of the challenges the coronavirus pandemic proposed saying

that the project was operated successfully despite delays in equipment importing and difficulties in providing specialized technicians.

Meanwhile, acting chairman Ghanim Al-Otaibi commented that this large-scale project required, at one point, 6,900 workers on site, and working hours from the beginning of the project to the end reached 57 million working hours, affirming that there were no dangerous accidents as safety measures were observed. Otaibi also affirmed the keenness of the company on incorporating local businesses in the project, as the private sector's share comprised 20 percent of the project's cost, adding that local companies also participated in importing equipment and constructions. — KUNA

Ooredoo sponsors Kuwait's Liberation Tower Expo

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, sponsored Kuwait's Liberation Tower expo in association with the Ministry of Communication (MoC) during the month of February and in celebration of the country's national days.

The exhibition was an opportunity to take the visitors on a tour into the past and present of the State of Kuwait, in which it displayed different vintage telecommunications equipment including telephones, printer, and faxes. Ooredoo Kuwait also had a distinguished presence during the exhibition in which it announced its exclusive national day's offers, along with treating visitors with unique gifts.

The exhibition was held under the patronage and attendance of the Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Communications, Kholoud Al-Shehab, and included a wide range of activities for handicrafts, and showcased a set of classic cars and kites

through the participation of many large companies in the country in support of this exceptional event. The exhibition organized by the Ministry of Communication at the 150th floor of Liberation Tower during the month of February when the Liberation Tower was open to the general public after a long gap.

On this occasion, Essa Al-Moosa, Executive Director of Business and Consumer Sales, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Our sponsorship of Kuwait's Liberation Tower Expo came as part of our corporate social responsibility strategy; in fact, it was an opportunity to remember our beloved Kuwait with an eye overlooking the present and an eye overlooking the past. It was also an opportunity to reward our valued customers with unique offers and competitive prices on the latest devices and packages."



Essa Al-Moosa



KUWAIT: (From left) Nawaf Al-Nabhan, Abdullah Al-Khattaf, Mane Al-Ajmi and Huda Al-Dlaimi.



Modi's party projected to retain power

Biden repairs image through Ukraine crisis leadership



SEOUL: South Korea's new president-elect Yoon Suk Yeol (C) of the main opposition People Power Party gestures to his supporters as he is congratulated outside the party headquarters in Seoul yesterday. —AFP

Yoon wins S Korean presidential race

Vows to maintain 'close coordination' on North Korea

SEOUL: Conservative Yoon Suk-yeol won South Korea's presidential election yesterday, with the political novice and avowed anti-feminist immediately promising a more hawkish policy on the nuclear-armed North.

After a bitter, hard-fought election campaign Yoon, formerly a top prosecutor who has never held elected office, was declared winner as rival Lee Jae-myung from the incumbent Democratic party conceded defeat. His victory of his People Power party looks set to usher in a more muscular foreign policy for the world's tenth largest economy after the dovish approach pursued by outgoing President Moon Jae-in during his five years in office.

Yoon will immediately have to confront an assertive Pyongyang, which has embarked on a record-breaking blitz of weapons tests this year, including a launch just days before the election. He vowed yesterday to "sternly deal" with the threat posed by Kim Jong Un's regime.

"But the door to dialogue is always open," he told supporters after visiting the national cemetery in Seoul. Yoon has also called for a more robust relationship with ally Washington, and spoke to US President Joe Biden early yesterday, vowing to maintain "close coordination" on North Korea.

His victory margin was razor-thin: Yoon had 48.56 percent of the vote against Lee's 47.83 percent, according to South Korea's National Election Commission.

Despite a campaign dominated by mud-slinging, voter turnout was 77.1 percent, including record early voting, with interest strong and the stakes high in the country of some 52 million.

"After a divided electorate has produced a divided government, Seoul may struggle to pursue policies of reform rather than politics of retribution," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

Moon's Democratic Party has a super-majority in the country's parliament, which could frustrate Yoon, who has no legislative experience, from pursuing his starkly different agenda.

"His lack of experience on any real policy making is a serious concern," Karl Friedhoff of the Chicago

corruption after leaving office.

On the campaign trail, Yoon threatened to investigate outgoing President Moon Jae-in, citing unspecified "irregularities". But in his victory speech, he struck a more conciliatory tone, telling the country: "The competition is over now, and everyone must make joint efforts to become one."

The frontrunners, who were both so unpopular that local media branded it the "election of the unfavourables", were neck and neck in the polls for months. Yoon clinched victory because voters wanted a "change of power" not because they strongly supported him or his agenda, analyst Park Sang-byoung told AFP.

"Moon enjoys high approval ratings but it couldn't measure up the people's demand for change," he said. With such razor-thin support, it will be risky for Yoon to pursue the outgoing administration legally after he assumes office, Park added.

Young swing voters were a decisive factor in the race, analysts said, with top concerns being skyrocketing house prices, social inequality and youth unemployment. He also specifically courted disgruntled young male voters, with a promise to abolish the gender equality ministry, on the basis that South Korean women do not suffer from "systemic gender discrimination", despite evidence to the contrary.

"My heart is very heavy and desperate," said Kim Ju-hee, a women's rights activist. Yoon's win has "set a precedent where a president-elect can openly ridicule women," she added. Exit polls showed Yoon getting 58.7 percent support from men in their 20s, compared to Lee at 36.3 percent. —AFP



Door to dialogue is always open

Council on Global Affairs told AFP.

Political revenge?

Yoon's election is a dramatic redemption for South Korea's conservatives, who were left in disarray in 2017 after their president Park Geun-hye was impeached. It could restart the "cycle of revenge" in South Korea's famously adversarial politics, analysts say, where presidents serve just a single term of five years and every living former leader has been jailed for

alleged Russian atrocities posted by the Ukrainian defenders and civilians.

Recent conflicts like the Syrian civil war have thrown out an increasing volume of online data to be pored over by a growing community of so-called "open-source intelligence" (OSINT) analysts, as well as government spies. But the flow of unclassified data from Ukraine is on a different scale.

"Western and Ukrainian intelligence agencies' targets are much more visible and accessible," said Damien van Puyvelde, a University of Glasgow intelligence researcher. They will be using "intelligence from images, electromagnetic, and doubtless partly also intelligence stemming from human sources", he added.

Historic first

Ahead of the invasion, the Biden administration in the US took the rare step of publishing intelligence information they said justified their fears of a Russian attack. "These sorts of information operations run the risk of compromising sensitive intelligence sources and methods," said Nathan Sales, a former American ambassador who now works for the Soufan Group think-tank.

"Policymakers evidently calculated that it was worth it to expose the Kremlin's lies." One European diplomat said the US move "would enter

from the two eastern European nations. Saied announced that he was launching a "relentless war on speculators and criminals", accusing them of seeking to "strike at social peace and security", in statement from the presidency.

Saied had previously announced he was working on legislation introducing prison sentences as a penalty for food speculation and profiteering. Tunisia has seen a sharp shortage in staples such as rice, semolina, sugar and flour over the past weeks, with the authorities frequently announcing the seizure of illegally stored quantities of these foods.

Tunisia remains embroiled in an economic and political crisis eight months after Saied seized extraordinary powers, having dissolved parliament



MEDYKA, Poland: People wait to board buses after crossing the Ukrainian border into Poland, at Medyka borders crossing yesterday. The UN says at least 2.2 million people have fled Ukraine, with more than half now in Poland. It has called the exodus Europe's fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II.—AFP

the history books". "It's the first time that anyone's done this. The US machine took a political and strategic decision" to publish intelligence almost in real time, the diplomat added. Such unprecedented openness from Washington did not convince Russian President Vladimir Putin to pull back from the brink. But while his plans were clear for all to see, Western officials believe he underestimated the willingness among spies in the opposing camp to cooperate across national boundaries. —AFP

and suspended the government.

The head of the powerful UGTT trade union, Noureddine Taboubi, in a telephone call Wednesday with Saied, warned of "the increasing deterioration of the social situation and purchasing power" of Tunisians", the union's Eshaab news service reported.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine poses a threat to food supplies to Tunisia, which imports about half its wheat from Ukraine and is dependent on foreign countries for much of its food supplies. The North African country began talks in February with the International Monetary Fund over a potential multi-billion-dollar bailout for the country's crisis-hit economy. —AFP

Iran says US has 'complicated' nuclear talks

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday accused the United States of working to "complicate" efforts to restore a 2015 nuclear deal, after new Russian demands linked to its invasion of Ukraine raised concerns of further delays.

It came on the day Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say in major state policies, stressed that his country will not give up on elements of "national strength", such as nuclear progress and regional influence.

Tehran is locked in negotiations with world powers to revive the nuclear deal that offered it sanctions relief in return for curbs on its atomic programme. Its arch foe the United States, under former president Donald Trump, unilaterally withdrew in 2018 from the accord known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Moscow said Saturday that, before backing a revived deal, it wants written assurances from Washington that sanctions imposed on it over the Ukraine war will not affect its economic and military cooperation with Tehran.

"Vienna negotiations are becoming more complicated every hour without a political decision by the United States," Iran's top security official Ali Shamkhani tweeted yesterday. "US approach to Iran's principled demands, coupled with its unreasonable offers and unjustified pressure to hastily reach an agreement, show that US isn't interested in a strong deal that would satisfy both parties," he added.

The negotiations to revive the deal involve Iran as well as France, Germany, Britain, Russia and China directly, and the United States indirectly. Washington's unilateral withdrawal from the accord and its reimposition of biting economic sanctions prompted Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

Negotiators have signalled that talks had progressed into a "final phase", but pending issues were still unresolved. The United States has described Russia's new demands "irrelevant", while France warned they could dash hopes for a revived nuclear accord.

"Some people are trying to blame us for protracting the talks. I must tell you that the talks have not yet been finalised, even the text of final agreement is not yet finalised," Russian chief negotiator Mikhail Ulyanov said on Wednesday.

"Like any other participant we have the right to ask for something... It's normal business, those who don't understand it are not professionals," he added. "We have the right to protect our interest both in the nuclear field, as well as in the wider context," he said, adding that he believes "all our trade and economic relations with Iran should be exempt from current and future EU or US sanctions".

"National strength"

The July 2015 deal gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear activities to guarantee it could not develop a weapons capability—an ambition it has staunchly denied. Western countries have also voiced concern over other Iranian capabilities, including its ballistic missiles program and regional influence and ties to armed groups from Lebanon to Yemen. Iran's supreme leader said Thursday that matters of "national strength" were not up for negotiation. "Regional presence gives us strategic depth and more national strength. Why should we give it up?" Khamenei said, in a statement on his official website. —AFP

Ukraine war offers intel bonanza for Russia watchers

PARIS: Russia's massive assault on Ukraine is providing Western intelligence agencies and analysts with a rare live opportunity to verify their assessments of the Russian army's strengths and weaknesses in the field. The scale of the deployment means Moscow's military equipment, methods, doctrine and especially its weak points are on full show—including via vast quantities of open-source data, images and video.

"What people are realising is that what they imagined (about the threat from this country) does not correspond to the reality of this deployment," said Alexandre Papaemmanuel, a professor at Paris' Institute for Political Studies (IEP).

The Ukraine mission was exposing "logistics that aren't up to date and ineffective coordination" on Russia's part, he told AFP. Information publicly available to spies, analysts and experts on the war in Ukraine ranges from high-quality day and night satellite photos from private firms in almost real time to images of fighting, captured equipment and

Tunisia's Saied declares 'war' on food profiteering

TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied declared war Wednesday on food speculators amid a shortage of products such as wheat and semolina-key staples in a country already mired in a political-economic crisis. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has threatened supplies of basic foodstuffs, particularly wheat, which many Arab countries chiefly import

International

Biden repairs image through Ukraine crisis leadership

President's job approval now sits at 42.7%

WASHINGTON: A congressional round of applause and a bump in the polls: US President Joe Biden has newfound political momentum from his handling of the war in Ukraine, but experts warn it might not last. Last week, the 79-year-old president got a lengthy standing ovation from both Democrats and Republicans in Congress when he underlined America's steadfast support for Ukraine during his State of the Union speech.

The moment of strong bipartisanship was remarkable for a country where political divisions run deep, especially ahead of hotly contested midterm elections later this year. With low polling numbers and his reform projects stalled in Congress, can the US president translate this moment more broadly and benefit from a "rally 'round the flag effect?"

The concept, put forth by political scientist John Mueller in 1970, suggests that during international crises, Americans tend to hold more favorable views of their commander-in-chief. Apparent gains on the COVID-19 front certainly also play a role, even if they are overshadowed by the war in Ukraine.

"We're seeing right now... pretty solid support among the public and even among Republicans for the actions that he's taken," said Emory University political scientist Alan Abramowitz.

Those actions, including broad sanctions on Russia and financial and military support for Ukraine have even "had a modest spillover effect in terms of his overall approval rating," Abramowitz added.

Presidential 'reset'

Biden's job approval now sits at 42.7 percent, according to polling aggregator FiveThirtyEight-

still low, but notably higher than the 40 percent he had on February 27.

As America's oldest president—he was 78 when he took office—Biden is often attacked by Republicans for having low energy and lacking authority. The Ukraine crisis can therefore help Biden "change his image as a leader with the public in general," as well as "gain back some of the grounds that he gave up with the withdrawal from Afghanistan that was... perceived as pretty disastrous," Abramowitz said.

The researcher attributes Biden's bump in popularity largely to improved views within his own party, even though former president Donald Trump embarrassed some fellow Republicans with comments lauding Russian President Vladimir Putin's intelligence. For Capri Cafaro, a former Democratic lawmaker in Ohio's state Senate and current professor at American University, Biden is attempting to "reset" his presidency. She points out that during his State of the Union speech, Biden spent a significant portion on Ukraine, but he also highlighted key issues

Experts warn momentum may not last

for people across the political spectrum: immigration and police support for conservatives, and abortion rights and welfare for progressives.

Out with big transformational plans, in with concrete projects: lower drug prices, rebuild bridges, open factories. Cafaro thinks that the shift by Biden is an attempt to "reframe" himself as "someone who was more pragmatic or moderate," after months of being framed as a "kind of a puppet of this progressive coalition that... got him elected."

'No-win situation'

But Cafaro also says Biden is "in a no-win situation, no matter what." "You always run a risk if



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden meets with business leaders to discuss the Bipartisan Innovation Act, in the South Court Auditorium of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, near the White House, in Washington, DC, on Wednesday. —AFP

you're trying to, you know, please everyone. No one really believes that you have a conviction," she said. The White House will also have to manage the Russia sanctions' collateral damage on the American economy which has already seen record levels of inflation in recent months.

Before Biden unveiled an embargo on Russian oil Tuesday, 71 percent of Americans said they would support actions against Russia even if it raised gas prices, according to a Quinnipiac University survey.

The crisis has also given the president a clear culprit to blame for rising gas prices, which

had steadily increased before the Russian invasion.

On Tuesday, Biden told a journalist who asked what he could do to lower prices: "Can't do much right now... Russia is responsible." Nonetheless, Republicans still intend to make high prices a key point in their election campaigns.

"Today, it is 'Russia's fault.' Before that, it was OPEC's fault. Before that, it was 'because of the virus,'" tweeted Kevin McCarthy, the lead Republican in the House of Representatives. "Serious question: How bad will gas prices have to be before he accepts some responsibility?" —AFP

Parliament elects Hungary's first-ever woman president

BUDAPEST: The Hungarian parliament yesterday elected Katalin Novak, a close ally of Prime Minister Viktor Orban, as the EU member's first ever woman president.

Novak, who most recently served as a minister for family policy, portrayed her election as a victory for women. She was elected to the mostly ceremonial role by 137 votes to 51 in the parliament dominated by Orban's right-wing Fidesz party ahead of opposition challenger Peter Rona, an economist.

"We women rear children, care for the ill, cook, do the work of two people if needs be, earn money, teach, win Nobel prizes, clean windows," Novak said in a speech before the vote.

"We know the power of words but can keep quiet and listen if we have to, and defend our families with a courage beyond that of men's if danger threatens," said the 44-year-old, Hungary's youngest ever head of state. "It is thanks to being a

woman and not despite it that I want to be a good president of Hungary," she said.

Earlier she posted a photo of her, her husband and her three children on social media, saying it "means a lot to me that my family is here with me".

LGBTQ controversy

Novak has been the face of government policies including generous tax breaks and handouts designed to encourage young families to have more children. Yesterday's vote comes weeks ahead of a crunch parliamentary election on April 3, where Orban faces a stiff battle to win a fourth straight term in power since 2010.

Peter Marki-Zay, who leads a six-party opposition hoping to unseat Orban next month, accused Novak of being "unfit" for the presidential position job due to her partisan background. Critics of the socially conservative Novak have also blasted her championing of anti-LGBTQ policies ahead of a referendum about gender-change also to be held on April 3.

A law banning the "display or promotion" of homosexuality or gender change to minors took effect last year, sparking a widespread outcry and threats of sanctions from Brussels. The government, including Novak, has argued the law is needed to protect children, but critics say the law discrimi-

Turkmenistan gears for father-son power succession during polls

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan: Authoritarian Turkmenistan is quietly preparing for a father-son power transition during a presidential election tomorrow as the world reels and markets jangle over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Nine candidates are contesting the ballot, but few doubt that strongman Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov's 40-year-old son Serdar—who has pledged to continue his father's course—will take over the hermit country's top job.

Berdymukhamedov senior, who is Turkmenistan's president, chair of the cabinet and senate chief, has been the regime's top decision-maker for the last 15 years.

The 64-year-old leader announced last month that he would step down to allow "young leaders" to govern. He has said however that he will remain in politics as head of the senate, a position that is second to the presidency. Berdimukhamedov senior took power in 2006, after the death of Saparmurat Niyazov, the so-called "Father of the Turkmen", whose rule created the blueprint for repression and leadership cults in the country of six million people.

Both men are feted with golden statues in Ashgabat,

Children of exile bring fresh vision to Chile cabinet

SANTIAGO, Chile: Six people exiled as children under Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship will now play a vital role in Chile's future as part of new president Gabriel Boric's cabinet.

"I believe that our own history is important for what we want for

the future," Maya Fernandez, the incoming defense minister, told AFP. The 50-year-old biologist is the granddaughter of socialist former president Salvador Allende, who was deposed by Pinochet's coup.

Fernandez lived in exile with her family in her father's homeland Cuba from the day of Pinochet's coup—September 11, 1973 — until 1992 when she was 21. She has been involved in politics ever since.

"I imagine that each of the ministers has had their own experiences

and learning abroad, and I think that is important," she said. "I think the exiles getting to know another life, other cultures, is always important," said Fernandez. "It affects you."

Boric, who will become Chile's youngest ever president at 36, has named a majority-women cabinet with an average age of just 42. And six of Boric's 24 ministers — 14 of whom are women—either were born, lived or studied in exile. They were among more than half a million Chileans who left the country under the 1973-90 dictatorship for political

reasons, many as victims of torture, detention, repression and poverty.

Marcela Rios, the future minister of justice and human rights, told AFP that those who have studied abroad and "have multicultural and different professional training, are a contribution to the state vision." They bring "a different view of the problems, incorporating learnings from other countries," she said.

Rios was just 13 when her family fled to Canada's Saskatchewan province as refugees, with the help of some nuns. —AFP



AJACCIO, France: Protesters throw stones and flares at French gendarmes in Ajaccio, on the French Mediterranean island of Corsica, during a demonstration in support of Yvan Colonna who was assaulted by a fellow inmate at the Arles prison on Wednesday. —AFP

Riots shake Corsica over assault of jailed nationalist figure

AJACCIO, France: Violent clashes broke out between protesters and police overnight Wednesday to Thursday on France's Mediterranean island of Corsica where local anger is growing over the assault in prison of a nationalist figure. Yvan Colonna, who is serving a life sentence for the assassination in 1998 of Corsica's top regional official Claude Erignac, is in a coma after being beaten on March 2 in jail by a fellow detainee, according to investigators.

The detainee is Cameroon national Franck Elong Abe, who is serving time for terror offences after being arrested in Afghanistan. Investigators said Abe attacked Colonna while he was working out in the prison gym, pulled a bag over his head and tried to strangle him.

Some media initially reported Colonna dead from a shortage of oxygen to the brain, but doctors managed to keep him alive. French prosecutors have charged Colonna's alleged jail assailant with attempted murder in association with a terror group.

According to France's top anti-terror prosecutor Jean-Francois Ricard, he confessed to the attack, saying he had been angered by "blasphemous statements" made by Colonna while behind bars.

The incident has stoked anger on the island where some still see Colonna—who was arrested only in 2003 after a five-year manhunt that eventually found him living as a shepherd in the Corsican mountains—as a hero in a fight for independence. Hundreds demonstrated in the main Corsican cities of Ajaccio, Calvi and Bastia with the protests rapidly degenerating into clashes with security forces, AFP correspondents said. Corsica, one of the Mediterranean's largest islands, has been French since the 18th Century. It is known as "Island of Beauty" because of its unspoiled coastlines, spectacular beaches and mild climate, which have made it popular with tourists who are the island's main source of income.

But there have also been constant tensions between independence-seeking nationalists and the central government, involving assassinations of officials sent by Paris, as well as frequent murders between the island's rival political factions. —AFP



BUDAPEST: Newly-elected Hungarian President Katalin Novak is pictured after she took her oath as representatives of the Hungarian parliament approved her appointment as the new president at the parliament building in Budapest yesterday. —AFP

nates against the LGBTQ community and conflates paedophilia with homosexuality. Novak—a former vice-president of the ruling Fidesz—will succeed party co-founder Janos Ader, who has held the job since 2012. She will take office after Ader's term expires May 10. —AFP



Serdar Berdimukhamedov

are low-ranking government employees.

"People who worked with him know more about him than us simple folk," Nepesova told AFP. "He will have his father close by."

In recent years he has tried out roles including deputy foreign minister and a regional governor.

Last year came his biggest promotion of all as he rose to deputy chair of the cabinet and a member of the security council, effectively becoming second-in-command.

Ruslan Myatiev, editor of the Europe-based independent Turkmen.news website, told AFP that as yet unspecified changes to the constitution promised by the outgoing president may see greater powers given to the legislature "in case something goes wrong with Serdar".

The election is not expected to affect the country's neutral foreign policy, which was honed under Niyazov and maintained by Berdimukhamedov. Turkmenistan traditionally "keeps silence in international crises", including over the war in Ukraine, said Myatiev, who noted that 270 Turkmen students were returning to Turkmenistan on an evacuation flight from Bucharest on Wednesday after fleeing Ukraine. —AFP

International

Refugees pray for Ukraine at Bosnian pilgrimage site

Arrival of refugees in Bosnia marks a stark reversal

MEDJUGORJE, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Far from home, Mariana Sova could only pray for Ukraine and an end to the war from a Catholic pilgrimage site in southern Bosnia where she had found safe haven from the fighting. "I pray for my country because Russia is killing people there," said Sova, whose husband had stayed behind in Ukraine to help with the war effort. "I want this to stop."



"I pray for my country"

Sova fled her home in western Ukraine's Ivano-Frankivsk after Russian missiles targeted a nearby airport. Thousands of Ukrainian pilgrims visit the small Bosnian town of Medjugorje every year. This time, however, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine last month, Sova and around 150 other Ukrainian women and children will be staying at the holy site in Bosnia for the foreseeable future.

The arrival of refugees in Bosnia marks a stark reversal for the once war-torn country, where a brutal conflict in the 1990s during the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia forced around two million from their homes. In the decades since the war's end, hundreds of thou-

sands more have left Bosnia to escape economic stagnation and political dysfunction in the Balkan state.

But with conflict again erupting across Europe, Bosnians are preparing to open their doors to Ukraine's refugees. "Several of us managed to accommodate a total of 150 people so far," said Davor Ljubic, who heads Medjugorje's hotelier association. Ljubic said they were expecting the arrival of three or four more buses with some 200 people in the coming days.

Refugee crisis

"We went through something similar some 30 years ago and we understand how these people feel," said the owner of one home where 12 Ukrainians were staying. Ukrainians are being welcomed "with a big heart and they can stay as long as they want," the man added, who requested anonymity. "As long as I have bread, they will have bread too."

Medjugorje, once a poor town near the border with Croatia, has prospered thanks to a constant stream of pilgrims to the area after the Virgin Mary was said to have appeared before six teenagers in 1981. More than two million people have fled Ukraine since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of the former Soviet republic, the United Nations reported this week. They have described it as the fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II.

"Behind the monolithic statistics are two million stories of separation, anguish, and loss," said Filippo Grandi, the chief of the UN's refugee agency. The Bosnian government said they were making preparations to welcome more refugees at two separate loca-

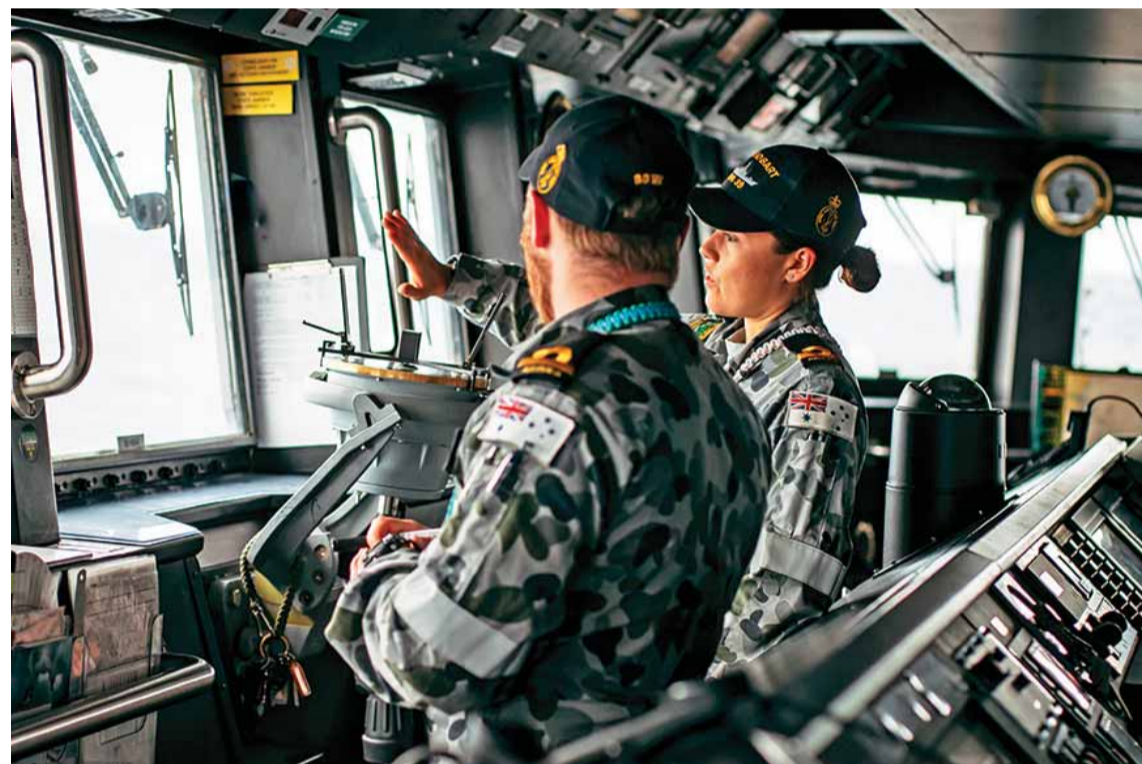


MEDJUGORJE: Pilgrims stand near St. Jacob church, in Southern-Bosnian town of Medjugorje. Although never recognized by Rome, after alleged St. Mary apparition in the hills close to the town, 41 years ago, Medjugorje became one of world's popular Marian pilgrimages. — AFP

tions in the country that would be able to accommodate around 500 people.

But even as tens of thousands flee Ukraine every day, others are planning to return to help evacuate more people. Vitali-a driver for a Ukrainian travel agency that offered regular trips to Medjugorje-said he

would return there soon. His family there is sheltering over a dozen people who fled shelling in the eastern city of Kharkiv. But for others, their old homes will remain far away until the war ends. "We dream of returning home and resuming our lives and work," said Sova. — AFP



AT SEA, Australia: A handout photo taken on February 22, 2022 and released by the Australian Defence Force yesterday shows Royal Australian Navy officer Sub Lieutenant Annabelle Wall (R) conducts duties as assistant officer of the watch on the bridge of HMAS Hobart during the 2022 fleet certification period. — AFP

Australia to boost defence force by nearly a third

SYDNEY: Australia will boost its defence forces by some 30 percent by 2040, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said yesterday, describing it as the country's largest military build-up in peacetime. The force would grow by 18,500 personnel to 80,000 over the 18-year period, at a cost of some Aus\$38 billion (US\$27 billion), the prime minister said at an army barracks in Brisbane.

Morrison, who is expected to call a general election in May, told a news conference it was the "biggest increase in the size of our defence forces in peacetime in Australian history". He said the military build-up was a recognition by his government of the "threats and the environment that we face as a country, as a liberal democracy in the Indo-Pacific".

The Australian leader said some of the new troops would support a future nuclear-powered submarine fleet, promised under a new Australia-Britain-US defence alliance, AUKUS. Australia says it plans to arm the submarines with conventional weapons but has yet to decide on the details of the programme, including whether to opt for a fleet based on US or British nuclear-powered attack submarines.

Forged at a time of growing Chinese influence in the Pacific region, the AUKUS alliance would make Australia the only non-nuclear weapons power with

nuclear-powered submarines, capable of travelling long distances without surfacing. Defence Minister Peter Dutton said the build-up of forces, to be focused on uniformed troops, would provide a credible deterrent from expansionist military threats.

'Lessons of history'

Beyond submarines, the new forces would be deployed in areas including space, cyber operations, naval assets, and land and sea-based autonomous vehicles, Dutton said. "It is absolutely necessary," he said, invoking Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent invasion of Ukraine.

"People who believe that President Putin's only ambition is for the Ukraine don't understand the history that our military leaders understand." The defence minister reiterated warnings about the strategic threat to Australia in the Asia-Pacific region, where China is flexing its increased power. "If people think that the ambitions within the Indo-Pacific are restricted just to Taiwan and there won't be knock-on impacts if we don't provide a deterrent effect and work closely with our colleagues and with our allies, then they don't understand the lessons of history," Dutton said.

Australia's conservative coalition government has been brandishing its defence credentials in the run-up to the election, with a string of polls showing the opposition Labor party ahead. But the government has been criticised for being too slow to deploy troops to help people hit by a near two-week flooding disaster across eastern Australia that has killed 21 people.

Morrison said yesterday that the deployment of navy, army and air force personnel across the flood-damaged east coast would grow to 5,748 by the end of the day. — AFP

"Due to the avalanches of hot clouds and ash, 253 people took shelter," Abdul Muhari said in a statement.

Residents have been told to steer clear of an area spanning a seven-kilometre radius surrounding Merapi's crater over warnings of lava and airborne volcanic material, Muhari added.

Hot clouds and smoke from the eruption blotted out the sky in parts of the densely-populated Java Island, near Indonesia's cultural capital Yogyakarta.

Mount Merapi is on its second-highest alert level since November 2020 after showing renewed activity. Its last major eruption in 2010 killed more than 300 people and forced the evacuation of around 280,000 residents from surrounding areas.

That was its most powerful explosion since 1930, which killed around 1,300 people. An eruption in 1994 left about 60 people dead. The Southeast Asian archipelago nation is home to nearly 130 active volcanoes. — AFP

Indonesians flee their homes as volcano erupts

JAKARTA: Indonesia's Mount Merapi unleashed a torrent of hot clouds, turning the sky a fiery red, as molten lava flowed down its slopes yesterday with the eruption forcing over 250 people to flee their homes, authorities said.

The volcano — one of the most active in the world — erupted multiple times overnight, spewing gas, volcanic ash and rocks that flowed over five kilometres down its slopes, the head of Indonesia's National Disaster Management and Mitigation Agency said.

Modi's party projected to retain power

LUCKNOW: A firebrand monk and poster boy of Hindu nationalism was set yesterday to retain power in India's most populous state, local media reported, in a triumph for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party.

Projections by media based on early vote counting showed the Bharatiya Janata Party on the cusp of a comfortable if reduced majority following elections in Uttar Pradesh, home to more than 200 million people. Victory in the state with more people than Brazil would strengthen local BJP chief Yogi Adityanath's chances of succeeding Modi as prime minister of the world's largest democracy.

Uttar Pradesh is the biggest prize among five regions to have held polls in recent weeks. It sends the most MPs to the national parliament and has been the power base of most Indian prime ministers. Adityanath's divisive sectarian rhetoric — coupled with exaggerated claims of his economic performance in one of India's poorest states — has proved a vote

winner, experts said.

The win is a "big endorsement of the kind of aggressive and hardnosed politics that he has been pursuing", journalist and Modi biographer Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay told AFP. Saffron-robed Adityanath, 49, rose from humble beginnings to become head priest of an important Hindu temple and founded a vigilante youth group.

Its volunteers regularly rough up Muslims and low-caste Dalits accused of slaughtering cows — sacred to Hindus — or of seeking to seduce girls from India's majority religion. His administration brought in a law to ban "love jihad" — Muslims marrying Hindus to convert them — and has targeted journalists and others with spurious "sedition" charges, critics say.

Media reports say more than 100 alleged criminals — most of them Muslims or Dalits — have been the victims of extra-judicial police killings, a charge Adityanath denies. His economic record has also been poor and his government is widely seen as having bungled the response to COVID-19, including by concealing the real death toll.

The BJP is also projected to retain power in Uttarakhnd, Manipur and the small coastal state of Goa, although the race there was tight. The opposition Congress appeared to have lost Punjab in the north to the upstart left-wing Aam Aadmi Party — which also rules the capital New Delhi — in a major blow to the Gandhi dynasty's once-mighty party. — AFP



AMRITSAR, India: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate for Punjab state assembly elections, Jeevanjot Kaur (C) along with party supporters gestures on the day of counting of the Punjab state assembly election votes in Amritsar yesterday. — AFP

Mali probes Mauritanian 'murders'

BAMAKO, Mali: Mali has announced a murder inquiry after an outcry in neighbouring Mauritania over the death of Mauritanian civilians in a border area, but contested allegations its troops were to blame. On Tuesday, Mauritania accused Mali's army of "recurring criminal acts" after a number of its citizens went missing near the border.

It gave no further details but a Mauritanian MP said at least 15 people had died in a zone south of Adel Bagrou in eastern Mauritania. Audio recordings on social media, attributed to eyewitnesses who have not been authenticated, say 30 people have disappeared and blame Malian soldiers.

In a statement late on Wednesday, Malian government spokesman Colonel Abdoulaye Maiga confirmed that "murders" had occurred. Junta leader Colonel Assimi Goita has spoken with Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, he said.

Goita has ordered an inquiry and "decided to send a high-level mission to Nouakchott as soon as possible". Maiga said. The government "vigorously condemns these criminal acts, which seek to damage the excellent quality of relations between our two countries", he added.

"No effort will be spared" to find those guilty but "at this point no evidence implicates the Malian armed forces, which respect human rights and always behave professionally", Maiga said. Questions about the Malian army were raised after a previous incident in January, when seven Mauritanians were killed in the same area. The Malian authorities said at the time they would open an inquiry and insisted nothing implicated the country's armed forces. The status of the probe has not been made public. Mali and Mauritania are key countries in the poor and troubled Sahel region of West Africa.

Mali is in the grip of a decade-old security crisis, with its poorly-equipped armed forces struggling with jihadist insurgents, ethnic violence and criminal gangs. The junta is in the hands of a military junta that seized power in August 2020, toppling elected president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita after a wave of public protests. The junta is seeking closer ties with Mauritania to help ease the impact of an embargo by Mali's neighbours over failures to meet a promise to stage elections. — AFP

Business

FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 2022

UAE reaffirms commitment to OPEC+ alliance agreement

Brent oil price rebounds 5% from slump to \$116.80 per barrel

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates yesterday reaffirmed its commitment to OPEC+ alliance agreements, a day after an envoy said it would urge the oil cartel to boost output.

"The UAE is committed to the OPEC+ agreement and its existing monthly production adjustment mechanism," Energy Minister Suhail Al-Mazrouei wrote on Twitter. "The UAE believes in the value OPEC+ brings to the oil market," he added. 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.

A surge in prices and supply fears following Russia's invasion of Ukraine have led to calls for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to increase output.

The OPEC+ group plans to boost production by just 400,000 barrels a day in April, the same pace as in recent months. The UAE ambassador to

Washington, Yousef al-Otaiba, had said on Wednesday that his country favored "production increases and will be encouraging OPEC to consider higher production levels". German Economy Minister Robert Habeck on Tuesday issued an "urgent appeal" to OPEC oil producers to ramp up output "to create relief on the market".

Oil producing countries have an interest in acting in coordination—both within Saudi-led OPEC and the Russia-led extended alliance—to avoid a price war and keep control over the market. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Iraq have an estimated combined reserve capacity of 2.5 million to three million barrels per day.

Brent oil rebounded yesterday, after tanking the previous day on hopes that the huge amounts of sanctions-hit Russian oil could be largely replaced by sourcing from elsewhere. European benchmark Brent North Sea crude climbed 5.1 percent to \$116.80 per barrel in morning deals.

New York's WTI contract advanced 3.5 percent to \$112.58. Both contracts had collapsed by more than 12 percent in value on Wednesday, as traders also seized on a glimmer of hope for peace talks between key producer Russia and Ukraine. Brent tumbled as low as \$105.60, having hit a peak of \$139 just two days before, as the Ukraine crisis continues to send shockwaves through markets.

The United Arab Emirates said Wednesday it would urge fellow states in the OPEC oil producers' cartel to boost output, while US talks with massive producer Venezuela appeared to be making progress.

"Crude prices rebounded this morning after being whipsawed on various Russia headlines," said Markets.com analyst Neil Wilson. "Brent and WTI plunged yesterday in a brutal reversal as the UAE indicated it could start pumping more oil and call on friends at OPEC to do more.

"Comments from Russian and



Ukrainian officials also pointed towards a path to peace, but the situation on the ground is no different."

At the same time, Iraq has said it could lift output and nuclear talks with Iran were also showing signs of bearing fruit. However, with the Ukraine war still raging and crude oil supplies still tight,

expectations are for the commodity to maintain its price strength.

"Traders are still very much in a cautionary mode as it is not clear to them that the current change in momentum or shift in the direction of the oil trend will last," said AvaTrade analyst Naeem Aslam. —AFP

Russian inflation strikes 6-year high

MOSCOW: Consumer price inflation in Russia, which has been accelerating for months, hit a six-year high in February, Russia's national statistics agency said Wednesday. The 9.15 percent annual inflation rate recorded last month by Rosstat was also the first time it has exceeded nine percent since January 2016.

Food prices were up nearly 11.5 percent on an annual basis. The inflation rate is more than double the four percent target of the Russian central bank and the data does not yet include the effect of Western sanctions imposed on Russia over Ukraine. High inflation has already hit the purchasing power of Russians, who have little savings, and proved a headache for the authorities in recent months.

Western sanctions are likely to drive up prices for many goods even higher, especially as the Russian ruble has lost around 40 percent of its value since the start of the year, making any goods that Russia manages to import even more expensive for consumers. Capital Economics noted the weekly consumer price information released by Rosstat for the week to March 4, showed that the collapse of the ruble led to a sharp 2.2 percent jump in prices week-on-week.

It said this rate was more than double the rate seen during the collapses of the ruble during the previous crises in 2008-2009 and in 2014-2015. "The collapse in the ruble... and imposition of sanctions on Russia will push up inflation significantly in the coming months," said Capital Economics.

The Russian central bank more than doubled its main policy rate to 20 percent last week as it sought to stop the hemorrhaging of the ruble, but to no avail. With many Russians still remembering the devastating hyperinflation of the 1990s, supermarkets have



MOSCOW: The ruble has weakened almost 40 percent against the US dollar this year, but experts say inflation has also been driven Russia's August ban on food imports from the US and EU.

announced measures to limit the rise in prices on basic foodstuffs.

Meanwhile, Russia announced yesterday an export ban on more than 200 types of foreign-made products and equipment until the end of the year, part of Moscow's response to sanctions imposed over the Ukraine conflict. The measure concerns goods and equipment that were previously imported into Russia from abroad.

"The list includes technological, communication and medical equipment, vehicles, agricultural machinery and electrical equipment—more than 200 types of goods in total," said an order signed by Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin.

"This measure is necessary to provide stability on the Russian market," the order said. The measure will

affect all foreign countries, but exceptions can be made for members of the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union and Georgia's breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Separately, the government also banned the export of "some types of timber" to countries that "committed unfriendly actions" towards Russia.

The list includes 48 countries, including EU states and the United States. Russia is home to one-fifth of the world's forest and further exploiting this resource could help the country cut down its economic reliance on oil and gas. President Vladimir Putin's "special military operation" in Ukraine that began on February 24 has triggered unprecedented Western sanctions and sparked an exodus of international corporations from Russia. —AFP

Germany in a quandary over Russian energy

BERLIN: Germany has rejected a complete ban on Russian gas and oil imports over Russia invading Ukraine, but voices are growing louder for Berlin to ditch its economic imperative to take a moral stand. After the United States and Britain imposed a ban on Russian oil, pressure has mounted on German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government and other G7 members to follow suit.

A group of climate activists, academics, authors and scientists published an open letter to the German government on Wednesday demanding a complete ban on Russian energy, reasoning that "we are all financing this war". In a newspaper opinion piece this week, conservative lawmaker and foreign policy expert Norbert Roettgen also said the only correct course of action was to "stop Russia's oil and gas business now".

"Nearly a billion euros (\$1.1 billion) are being poured into (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's war chests every day, thwarting our sanctions against the Russian central bank" and "for many Ukrainians, it will be too late

if we hesitate now," he wrote.

So far, Scholz's government has remained unmoved, reasoning that sanctions should not risk destabilizing the countries imposing them. Since Germany imports more than half its gas and coal and about a third of its oil from Russia, experts say a transition period would be needed to avoid the lights going out. "If we end up in a situation where nurses and teachers are not coming to work, where we have no electricity for several days... Putin will have won part of the battle, because he will have plunged other countries into chaos," Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock warned on Tuesday.

Underlining the precariousness of Germany's situation, Baerbock also admitted in a separate interview that Economy Minister Robert Habeck, also of the ecologist Green party, was "urgently trying to buy hard coal worldwide". Experts say a complete embargo would be painful, but not impossible.

'Whatever it takes'

In a study published this week, nine economists argued that oil and coal from Russia could easily be replaced by imports from other countries, though this could be a little trickier for gas. If Russian gas cannot be fully compensated for by other suppliers, households and businesses "would have to accept a 30 percent drop in supply",



ESSEN: A man standing at a Jet petrol station, in Essen, western Germany. —AFP

and Germany's total energy consumption would dip by around eight percent, the study said.

According to the economists, GDP could fall by 0.2 to 3 percent and the sanctions could cost each German between 80 and 1,000 euros a year, depending on how much Russian gas can be replaced. The Leopoldina National Academy of Sciences has also said that temporarily stopping Russian gas supplies would be tough but manageable for the German economy, "even if energy bottlenecks could occur in the coming winter". But, to protect consumers against price hikes and to encourage the transition to renewable energy, significant govern-

ment support would likely be needed.

For the Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper, a war in Europe is an "emergency" that justifies continuing with the "whatever it takes" mentality spawned by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Germany can borrow money for this," it said, arguing that a "rich" country like Germany "can and must afford" to step away from Russian energy. Observers have also noted that Germany has the option of delaying its nuclear exit—planned for the end of the year. Conservative Christoph Heusgen, a former adviser to Angela Merkel, told the ARD broadcaster that Germans are ready to turn down the heating to help. —AFP

Joe Biden's perilous oil diplomacy

WASHINGTON: How far should Joe Biden go to limit soaring US gas prices? The US president has launched an oil diplomacy gambit to compensate for banning Russian petroleum, but he risks accusations of propping up authoritarian leaders and undermining his own battle for democracy.

Amid the war unleashed by Russia in Ukraine, a recent American mission to energy-rich Caracas was intended to be discreet. And for good reason: US government emissaries met with Venezuela's controversial leader Nicolas Maduro, a sworn enemy of Washington which disputes his legitimacy as president. But news of the meeting leaked and the Biden administration was left scrambling to explain why it was engaging with an authoritarian regime.



Joe Biden

Biden could certainly boast of a success, as Caracas on Tuesday released two Americans detained in Venezuela. But the trip clearly had other motives. With the rise in crude prices brought on by the Ukraine war and Washington's decision to block all imports of Russian oil and gas, there is an urgent need to find other supply sources. "What we are doing is going all around the world, working with partners and organizations and entities, to try to increase the amount of oil on the market" and stabilize prices, the State Department's number three diplomat, Victoria Nuland, said Tuesday.

There are just a handful of countries which produce the "heavy fuel" that Russia was exporting, "so frankly we've got to look everywhere that we can," she said, without ruling out that Washington could buy Venezuelan crude. The new posture is quite an about face for Washington, considering that since 2019 the US has imposed an oil embargo on the Latin American nation, which remains a close ally to Russia's Vladimir Putin. In the short term, there is no assurance the visit changes the game.

The embargo remains in place and has caused "structural damage" to Venezuela's oil industry, former US diplomat Aaron David Miller told AFP. Maduro, for his part, "is exploring the idea" of reciprocal concessions, but that "does not mean he is abandoning Putin," said Mariano de Alba, a Latin America advisor with the International Crisis Group. Any mutual Washington-Caracas thaw would be a "long," uncertain and "very risky" process, he added. —AFP

Business

Invasion of Ukraine threatens to scramble ECB's recovery plans

Spiraling energy prices upend eurozone's economic outlook

FRANKFURT: Russia's invasion of Ukraine and spiraling energy prices have upended the economic outlook and left European Central Bank policymakers with the task of navigating the eurozone through a fresh crisis at their meeting yesterday.

The bank had been poised to take another step towards the "normalization" of its monetary policy—by ending its crisis-era asset-purchasing program and gradually bringing interest rates out of negative territory. Instead the outbreak of war at the gates of the euro area has given inflation a new push upwards and threatened a cautious economic recovery from the impact of the coronavirus.

Inflation climbed higher again in February, hitting a new all-time high of 5.8 percent for the currency club, well above the ECB's two-percent target.



Europeans remain wary of energy sanctions on Russia

The fast pace of price rises—consistently above the bank's previous expectations—has raised the prospects that new ECB projections yesterday could see a significant upwards revision for the coming years. Record inflation and the impact of the war are to be included in the latest forecasts, but a high degree of uncertainty remains.

"No one would currently want to quantify the economic implications for the eurozone," said Carsten Brzeski, head of macro at the bank ING. Tightening too soon to fight inflation risks pulling the rug out from under the economy, just when it is bracing against the impact of the conflict.

'Whatever necessary'

In her first response to the invasion, ECB President Christine Lagarde said the central bank would "take whatever action is necessary" to stabilize the euro region's economy. Observers will be listening closely to the former French finance minister's remarks in a press conference at 1330 GMT for any details of what this might mean in practice.

The ECB is likely to stick to what it has already announced "while at the same time keeping maximum flexibility", Brzeski said. At its last meeting in February, the Frankfurt-based institution confirmed its plan for "step-by-step" reduction in its massive bond-buying program, its main crisis-fighting tool, aimed at keeping borrowing costs low and stoking economic growth. After the end of net purchases, with the plan already laid out till October, hiking interest rates becomes a possibility under the ECB's guidance.

Currently, rates sit at historic lows, including a negative deposit rate which effectively charges banks to park their cash at the ECB overnight.

New crisis

High inflation and fears of more to come have increased the calls for the ECB to move faster towards rate hikes in the image of its peers in the United States and Britain.

The head of the typically hawkish Bundesbank Joachim Nagel has urged his colleagues on the governing council to keep their "sights trained on the normalization of our monetary policy".

The inflation spike has been driven in no small

part by soaring prices for energy due to the conflict with Russia, a major supplier to European countries. While the United States and Britain will stop importing Russian oil, European sanctions have so far exempted energy to avoid heaping pressure on domestic economies. EU countries including Germany and Italy are highly reliant on Russia for their energy needs, and gas prices hit all-time highs at the beginning of the week on fears of conflict-related cuts to supply. But the conflict is also set to aggravate supply chain issues which weighed on production in 2021, with factory closures in Ukraine already leading to work stoppages at auto plants in Germany.

Far from accelerating the end of their asset purchases, the impact of the war on the economy has led some to speculate that new ECB support programs will be needed in future. The ECB could begin to think about "war-PEPP", suggested Erik Nielsen, chief economic adviser at UniCredit bank, borrowing the title of the bank's pandemic-era emergency bond-purchasing program. The tool could be aimed at backing up government spending measures in response to the war to avoid borrowing costs from spiraling, Nielsen said. — AFP

Britain urges G7 members to ban Russia oil imports

LONDON: British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss on Wednesday called on the entire G7 to ban Russia oil imports, saying the world's leading economies should "go further and faster" in punishing Moscow for invading Ukraine. Standing alongside US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Truss also hailed transatlantic unity against Russian aggression, saying the strength of the alliance has "surprised" President Vladimir Putin and that more must be done to assure his invasion fails.

"We must double down on our sanctions. That includes... the G7 ending its use of Russian oil and gas" and implementing a full ban on Russian banks using the SWIFT bank messaging system, Truss said in a joint press conference with Blinken at the State Department in Washington.

"Now is not the time to let up. Putin must fail," she added. The United States on Tuesday led a Western assault on Russia's economic lifeline by banning imports of oil and gas, a move soon followed by Canada and a pledge from London to end the imports within the year.

Other Group of Seven members France, Germany, Italy and Japan have yet to make such a move, however, with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz cautioning Monday that a broad ban on Russian oil could put Europe's energy security at risk. But Truss insisted the West's alliance against Russia's autocratic leader, its economy and associated oligarchs was nevertheless working.

"We have surprised Putin with our unity and the toughness of our sanctions," she said. Blinken joined Truss in highlighting the comprehensive anti-Moscow cooperation, saying: "economically, the measures that we've taken have erased 30 years of progress integrating Russia into the world." — AFP



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KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 10 MARCH 2022

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1110	1134	1159	1093	66	31,549,252	31	2.81%	13.74%	1118	1152	24.5	2.37	2.6%	1.26
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	318	312	318	311	7	10,341,884	-5	-1.58%	11.83%	310	315	25.1	1.45	2.2%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	237	238	239	232	7	23,551,635	3	1.28%	9.17%	233	239	NM	1.04	1.7%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	273	277	278	270	8	13,521,355	5	1.84%	10.36%	275	278	21.0	1.26	1.8%	1.04
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	998	1000	1010	986	24	44,039,490	6	0.60%	20.19%	986	1005	39.2	4.38	1.2%	1.40
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	832	934	989	825	164	9,715,442	102	12.26%	18.23%	930	970	69.0	5.39	0.5%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	373	354	376	354	22	14,355,275	-16	-4.32%	61.64%	343	377	11.2	1.50	2.8%	1.26
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	198	209	213	183	30	104,641,264	12	6.09%	47.18%	200	212	47.6	2.59	1.8%	0.60
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	135	138	138	135	3	29,186,619	3	2.22%	16.95%	137	142	NM	0.84	6.2%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	167	165	171	160	11	34,118,599	-1	-0.60%	-7.82%	160	166	25.4	1.20	0.0%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	886	903	909	874	35	5,369,744	17	1.92%	13.87%	877	909	20.0	2.06	1.6%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	298	304	307	298	9	18,299,099	7	2.36%	7.42%	301	312	6.0	1.09	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1474	1385	1480	1380	100	1,603,433	-92	-6.23%	59.01%	1350	1390	48.9	1.40	3.6%	0.94
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	953	993	1035	950	85	6,684,719	40	4.20%	16.55%	970	995	28.2	2.33	5.4%	0.74
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	395	395	400	390	10	6,037,563	0	0.00%	13.83%	393	400	NM	1.07	3.8%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	1,033	1026	1,033	1023	10	11,026,420	-5	-0.48%	8.57%	1020	1035	2.3	1.11	0.8%	1.47
605	Zain	Telecommunications	638	633	638	624	14	15,178,840	-5	-0.78%	6.39%	631	638	14.5	2.30	3.6%	1.34
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,685	3,570	3,685	3,551	134	1,271,651	-100	-2.72%	10.73%	3560	3704	7.8	3.90	11.2%	0.50
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	224	217	225	214	11	13,937,139	-8	-3.56%	-0.46%	217	224	NM	0.69	0.0%	0.88
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,715	1,580	1,715	1,510	205	2,968,029	-120	-7.06%	22.48%	1571	1680	NM	15.06	2.0%	0.73
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	310	308	313	305	8	106,961,942	-1	-0.32%	10.79%	308	312	21.1	2.38	3.9%	1.15
821	Warba Bank	Banking	278	286	287	278	9	22,654,318	8	2.88%	4.38%	278	286	21.8	2.83	0.0%	1.00
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	598	591	600	589	11	3,530,831	-7	-1.17%	0.34%	590	596	18.4	1.67	2.9%	0.43
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	384	394	401	380	21	3,837,765	10	2.60%	2.30%	388	398	NM	1.65	0.0%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	226	225	228	223	5	8,756,031	0	0.00%	-1.32%	224	227	19.1	3.99	4.0%	0.61
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,479	2,780	2,842	2,411	431	2,079,329	320	13.01%	37.62%	2680	2820	35.6	9.89	2.3%	0.68

* As of end of week closing

Roncal was 'pushed' into being a celebrity makeup artist

Mally Roncal was "pushed" into being a celebrity makeup artist. The 50-year-old beauty entrepreneur - whose client list boasts stars such as Beyonce, Jennifer Lopez and Rihanna as well as Hollywood actresses Angelina Jolie and Maggie Gyllenhaal - admitted that she only decided to work with celebrities after her agent spotted potential. She said: "I didn't start out wanting to be a celebrity makeup artist, but it just kind of happened because my agent kind of pushed me that way. He was like, 'You're like a cup of coffee in the morning. Celebrities need that. They need that lift, that push, that cheerleader. You're like a mom, yet you're [like] a drag queen.'" The Mally Beauty founder has also appeared as a beauty expert on 'The Oprah Winfrey Show' and 'The Wendy Williams Show' explained that - unlike other makeup artists - she has never been afraid to share her secrets with others. She told Allure: "I've always been the one to want to put out my secrets or my tips or how to do things. I used to do a lot of photoshoots, and we would do those, like, Vanity Fair covers, and 10 celebrities would come up to shoot. Some makeup artists were very secretive, and they would put up the screen so no one could see what they were doing. I was always that makeup artist that was like, 'Come on, let's party.' And I would do my client in front of everybody. Then I'd grab the photo assistant and be like, 'Here, I'll show you how to do it on you.' I've always been that person."



Paris Hilton has launched a sunglasses line

The 41-year-old socialite is so "obsessed" with sunglasses and wears them at any time of day or night so felt inspired to launch a 12-piece collection of Y2K-inspired styles inspired by her reality TV heyday in the 2000s. She told ELLE US: "Well, as everyone knows, I'm obsessed with sunglasses. I wear them all the time, even at night. Sometimes, when I'm walking out of a club and there are cameras or flashes, or if I'm taking a million selfies, it's just better to have sunglasses on. When you wear sunglasses, you always look perfect." The former 'Simple Life' star - who has collaborated with Quay Sunglasses as well as non-profit organisation Project Glimmer to create the collection - went on to explain that working with a female-driven brand has helped her reach her goal of "empow-

ering women." She said: "Collaborating with a brand that is both led by women, and has such a strong emphasis on empowering women, all while being able to give back with them to a charity like Project Glimmer is exactly what I aim to do. These frames give you that extra confidence to 'sliv' your best life and go after your wildest dreams. The entire collection...loves it!" The sunglasses range comes in a variety of styles, including a 'Wanna Party' collection design with light-weight metal arms and adjustable notepads while the Y2K range So Serious comes in three variations as 'Check Print/Brown', 'Yellow/Smoke' and 'Black/Smoke.'



'It feels like you never left': Bob Saget's widow marks two months since his passing

Bob Saget's widow has marked two months since the passing of the actor. The 'Full House' star was found dead in his Orlando hotel room in January, aged 65, and Kelly Rizzo has admitted she's finding it hard navigating the "very weird new universe" without her late spouse in it. Alongside a snap of the pair, she wrote on Instagram: "Two whole months. I've experienced that now time means nothing and everything at the same time. "You count the weeks, and the months, they're strange and surreal milestones. "How can it be 2 months without you?? "But also it feels like yesterday you were here - and it still also feels like you never left?" She concluded: "I like to say it's all a very weird new universe. Learning how to navigate it is quite the journey." Kelly previously admitted she feels "robbed of time" following Bob's death. The Eat Travel Rock blogger - who met the late star in 2015 and married him three years later - wrote on Instagram: "My sweet husband. After much reflection this week, I'm trying, really trying, to not think I was robbed of time. But instead to think: How lucky was I that I got to be the

one to be married to THE MOST INCREDIBLE MAN ON EARTH. "I was the one who got to go on this crazy ride with him and be in his life these last 6 years. We had that time to make each other the happiest we'd ever been and change each other's lives forever. "I got to be the one to love him and cherish him. He deserves all the love. Every ounce of it. Because that's how amazing Bob was. He was love. If you were in his life you KNEW he loved you. He never missed an opportunity to tell you. (sic) Kelly has "no regrets" about their relationship and is grateful she and Bob - who has three adult daughters from his marriage to Sherri Kramer - were always open about their feelings for each other. She added: "Most importantly. I have no regrets. We loved each other so damn much and told each other 500 times every day. Constantly. I know how much he loved me until the very last moment and he knew the same. I'm so grateful for that. Not everyone gets that."

Marianne Faithfull has moved into a care home

The 75-year-old singer - who previously dated Sir Mick Jagger - is living at Denville Hall, north west London, where several other stars including 'Fawlty Towers' actor Andrew Sachs and filmmaker Lord Attenborough have previously resided. A friend of Marianne's told the Daily Mail newspaper's Eden Confidential column: "She's adding a touch of glamour to the home." A spokesman for the 'As Tears Go By' hit-maker confirmed: "Marianne is staying at Denville Hall while she recovers from the ongoing effects of COVID." Marianne was hospitalized for three weeks with the virus in April 2020, and in January 2021 she told how she may never sing again after battling COVID. She said: "I may not be

able to sing ever again. Maybe that's over. "I would be incredibly upset if that was the case, but, on the other hand, I am 74." "I don't feel cursed and I don't feel invincible. I just feel human. "But what I do believe in, which gives me hope, I do believe in miracles. You know, the doctor, this really nice National Health doctor, she came to see me and she told me that she didn't think my lungs would ever recover. "And where I finally ended up is: OK, maybe they won't, but maybe, by a miracle, they will. I don't know why I believe in miracles. I just do. Maybe I have to, the journey I've been on, the things that I've put myself through, that I've got through so far and I'm OK. Does that sound really corny?" And two months later, the star -

who was previously in a long-term relationship with Mick, but slept with his Rolling Stones bandmate Keith Richards - admitted she was struggling financially due to the pandemic. Marianne admitted things were "really quite desperate" in her life after a potential biopic about her - in which she'd be played by 'Bohemian Rhapsody' actress Lucy Boynton - was placed on hold due to the global health crisis. She said at the time: "I really need the money. The pandemic made me sick up. I got so ill, I nearly died. I've got what they call long-term COVID. "I was in hospital and all I remember about it is that I was in a very, very dark place and I presume that was being very close to death. "I've been working on my singing, practicing singing with a friend of mine who plays guitar, because I am really frightened that I wouldn't be able to sing anymore "Three things: the memory, fatigue and my lungs are still not OK - I have to have oxygen and all that stuff. The side-effects are so strange. Some people come back from it but they can't walk or speak. Awful... "It's wild, the things I forget. Short-term. I remember the distant past very well. It's recent things I can't remember. And that's ghastly. Awful. You wouldn't believe how awful it is."



Jasmine Fares 'struggled' to find casual clothes that would fit her religious needs

The 26-year-old social media star - who follows the Muslim religion and has almost one million followers on TikTok with husband Dawoud Harb as well as half a million on her own fashion-based Instagram - believes that there is a "lack of modest fashion" for her style on the British high-street and decided to launch her FARES! brand to "solve the problem." She said: "I think what we lack in the modest fashion industry is the typical H&M and Zara type of designs but catered to a Muslim dresser, a modest dresser. I struggled to find pieces that were just casual wear that also fit my modest needs. I wanted to create a brand that solved the problem I faced for so long. I wanted to create a brand that was your go-to brand for your essential basics, for your minimal design clothing, things that are timeless in your wardrobe." Jasmine then went on to reveal that her most "special" design from her FARES! collection is that of a blazer, which she ini-

tially designed back in school. She told Fashion Magazine: "The most special item to me would probably be the asymmetric blazer that I actually designed in high school. I knew that one day if I ever had a brand, that would be a piece that I wanted to release. When I was able to bring that original design to life, it was one of the coolest things ever because it's something that I've always imagined in my head. It was a really full-circle moment." The influencer also revealed that there is a lot to come for her new brand, including a collection to celebrate the Muslim festival of Ramadan later this year. She said: "We have a Ramadan collection, a summer collection, and with long Canadian winters, we always have multiple drops then too. We have a lot planned for FARES! Within the first year of growing this business, it's a lot of trial and error."



Jennifer Lopez has landed a new role at Virgin Voyages

The entertainer has announced she is now serving as Sir Richard Branson's adult-only cruise line's chief entertainment and lifestyle officer and an investor. The company brought the actress, singer and businesswoman on board to help them "shape the future of travel on the high seas." As well as bringing new ideas to the table to ensure passengers have "the most epic vacation ever", the 52-year-old superstar will focus on wellness and her cosmetics brand JLo Beauty will be available on board. In a statement, the 'On The Floor' hitmaker said: "My artistic and social mission is to empower, inspire and entertain. "Any attributes into a partnership and collaboration is exciting for me. "I admire Sir Richard and all he has built. I am inspired by Virgin Voyages' dedication to creating irresistible experiences and focus on well-being, which all fits perfectly with my own lifestyle and brand ethos." The announcement was made on social media with Jennifer joining Branson on FaceTime to

discuss her title. In the hilarious clip, the 71-year-old billionaire jokingly suggests JLo could be made their "Supreme Goddess of Mermaids" or "Mermaid in Manhattan". A press release states: "The Virgin experience is redefining the nautical tradition of appointing a godmother from a ceremonial role to a truly modern, change-making partnership with undoubtedly one of the most powerful artists in the world." Virgin Voyages launched in 2020 and now has three ships in its fleet: Scarlet Lady, Valiant Lady and Resilient Lady. Virgin Group founder Branson said: "We knew immediately that we wanted Jennifer to be a partner and to help Virgin Voyages shape the future of travel on the high seas. She is one of the most talented and hardest-working people out there. I admire her as an artist, as an entrepreneur and as a person." Chief executive Tom McAlpin commented: "From the moment we launched this brand, we knew we wanted to make waves and bring changes for sailors [passengers] to have the most epic vacation ever. "After the last two years, vacations have never been more needed, so we searched for someone very special to join us on this voyage. Jennifer is a trailblazer and embodies the spirit that lives inside of Virgin Voyages and our people. "As an investor and advisor, she turns the godmother tradition on its head and makes it powerful and limitless. We couldn't be more excited for what is ahead."



Lifestyle | Features

World clamors to air Ukrainian president's hit TV series

First one, then two, then 20: a small Stockholm agency has in recent days been deluged with bids for the rights to air the hit comedy series starring Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, a former actor turned wartime hero. "It's been very, very busy. All around the world, people have asked for the rights because they want to broadcast it," explains Echo Rights co-founder Nicola Soderlund in the agency's elegant offices in the Swedish capital.

Since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, broadcasters such as Britain's Channel 4, Greece's ANT1 and Romania's PRO TV have rushed to join those who have already snapped up the rights to "Servant of the People", which first aired in Ukraine in 2015. "I think last week we made maybe 15 deals and we are in negotiations with another 20 countries," says Soderlund, a poster advertising the series hanging above his desk. "The latest we heard of is Latin America, we're discussing with the US, Netflix, we're discussing with many."

In Italy alone, three or four broadcasters are currently vying for the rights, while



Fredrik af Malmberg (right), Managing Director and Nicola Soderlund Managing Partner at Echo Rights, a global rights management company, are pictured at the company's office, in Stockholm. — AFP

in Greece, the show is airing nightly on primetime. "In a way, it's an act of solidarity with the Ukrainians, and at the same time, of curiosity—you want to see who he is," Soderlund says of Zelensky. The president's stature has soared on the

international stage since the start of the invasion, impressing the world with his fearless determination in the face of the Russian onslaught.

Soderlund first met Zelensky 10 years ago, when the Ukrainian was developing

a game show called "Crack Them Up" in which ordinary people try to make comedians laugh, a concept later sold to Vietnam, China and Finland. "I went to lunch with him in Kyiv," recalls Soderlund. "He had all these crazy and funny ideas". Pulling out his phone, he shows selfies of himself posing with Zelensky at the Cannes film market in 2016 — held alongside the famed film festival—where producers, distributors and buyers do business.

'Needed a hero like him'

At the time, it was unimaginable that this "very funny comedian, very popular and loved by audiences" would go on to become Vladimir Putin's main target and "this world leader who embodies and speaks for the whole nation". "We needed a hero like him, after Trump and all that," Echo Rights managing director Fredrik af Malmberg interjects. With "Servant of the People", life imitated art. In the series, which ran for three seasons, Zelensky played a high school teacher propelled to the presidency after a student's video of him ranting about

corruption in Ukraine went viral.

The show's success propelled Zelensky to the presidency in real life. "He always said, 'In the US they've had actors becoming president for a long time'", af Malmberg recalls. While the company hasn't had any contact with Zelensky himself recently, Echo has been in contact with some of his representatives. "One has fled to Turkey and the other is in Rotterdam, but they are in contact with 'Vova', as they still call him", af Malmberg says.

The details of the rights contracts being negotiated are confidential, but the rights cost "around a million euros". Echo Rights also has another series produced by Zelensky in its catalogue, "Svaty" ("In-Laws"). The company, which employs around 40 people in Stockholm, London and Istanbul, has donated 50,000 euros to the Ukrainian Red Cross and plans to donate more as more contracts are signed. — AFP

In rare pandemic upside, NY Phil expedites \$550 million revamp

As the pandemic reduced the performing arts to streamed concerts and quarantine albums, New York's Philharmonic found a glimmer of hope in their darkened hall, accelerating plans to gut, renovate and upgrade it with a whole new sound. When concerts shut down at David Geffen Hall in March 2020, the company in partnership with Lincoln Center's famed arts complex on Manhattan's Upper West Side-jumped at the chance to speed up the overhaul by two years, now anticipating to open in October 2022.

at any given time, six days a week with multiple shifts and overtime, to revamp the building into a state-of-the-art space with improved acoustics and more accessible design.

"This was a unique and one-of-a-kind situation," Philharmonic head Deborah Borda told AFP, explaining that talks of the hall's reconstruction date back to 1995. "We will make something positive from this disaster." "It's taking something that has every negative aspect to it and reshaping it to make it a positive."

The new hall will feature a lobby doubled in size, a sidewalk studio for performances visible from the street, and improved acoustics made possible by wall resurfacing and an elevated stage ceiling. The renovation reduces capacity from 2,738 to 2,200, but visibility will be improved for nearly every seat in the house. Some audience members will be positioned behind the orchestra, offering a unique glimpse into its inner workings. The stage will feature a hydraulic system that allows raised sections and different configurations of performance.

'Out of the ashes'

The major renovation meant that when the Phil, one of America's oldest musical institutions, reopened its subscription season this fall it had to find temporary shelter in Lincoln Center's other venues. Henry Timms, the president and CEO of the complex, told AFP that when the pandemic began they realized "there was a world in which we could thread a needle, and that rather than it take four years it could take two years." "And it would be a powerful symbol of our confidence in the city."

Representatives at Lincoln Center and the Phil both emphasized that 42 percent of construction contracts for the project are with minority- and women-owned business enterprises, with 51 percent of its workforce coming from underrepresented communities. "This project has been built by New York, for New York," Timms said.

This summer the orchestra will be able to return to the hall after last playing there in the winter of 2020, to "tune the space" and get the acoustics just right. "I hope it will be a point of pride," Borda said. "That out of the ashes will come a very beautiful place that is redesigned for people." — AFP



Construction workers build the stage during a press tour of the newly revitalized David Geffen Hall in New York City.

The massive project-for which fundraising has raised \$550 million including from its namesake, the star music magnate David Geffen-has seen the dated hall that first opened in 1962 turned into an unrecognizable skeleton of itself. More than 600 construction workers are putting in hours



This undated architectural rendering released by the New York Philharmonic courtesy of Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects, shows the newly renovated David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center in New York.



This undated architectural rendering released by the New York Philharmonic courtesy of Diamond Schmitt Architects, shows the stage of the newly renovated David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center in New York. — AFP photos



This handout picture taken in Antarctica's Weddell sea and released by the Falklands Maritime Heritage Trust shows photo, video and laser pictures of the Ernest Shackleton's Endurance displayed in the control room of the AUV on board of SA Agulhas II during the Endurance22 expedition. — AFP photos



This handout picture shows (From left) John Shears, Endurance22 Expedition Leader, Mensun Bound, Director of Exploration, Nico Vincent, Expedition Sub-Sea Manager, JC Caillens, Off-Shore Manager with the first scan of the wreck and photos of Frank Hurley.

Shackleton's lost shipwreck discovered off Antarctica

Explorers have found one of the most famous shipwrecks in history, Ernest Shackleton's Endurance, deep in the icy sea off Antarctica more than a century after it sank, they announced Wednesday. Endurance was discovered at a depth of 3,008 meters (9,869 feet) in the Weddell Sea, about six kilometers (four miles) from where it was slowly crushed by pack ice in 1915. Shackleton went down in expeditionary legend through the epic escape he and his 27 companions then made, on foot and in boats. "We are overwhelmed by our good fortune in having located and captured images of Endurance," said Mensun Bound, the expedition's director of exploration.

"This is by far the finest wooden shipwreck I have ever seen. It is upright, well proud of the seabed, intact, and in a brilliant state of preservation. You can even see 'Endurance' arched across the stern," he said in a statement. The expedition, organized by the Falklands Maritime Heritage Trust, left Cape Town on February 5 with a South African icebreaker, hoping to find the Endurance before the end of the Southern Hemisphere summer. As part of Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition between 1914 and 1917, Endurance's crew was meant to make the first land crossing of Antarctica. But their three-masted sailship fell victim to the tumultuous Weddell Sea. Just east of the Larsen ice shelves on the Antarctic peninsula, the timber vessel became ensnared in pack ice in January 1915. It was progressively crushed and then sank 10 months later.

'Worst sea in world'

The crew first camped on the sea ice, drifting northwards until the ice cracked open, and then took to lifeboats. They sailed first to Elephant Island, a bleak and treeless place where most of the

men were dropped off and set up a camp. Using just a sextant for navigation, Shackleton then took five others in the strongest and most seaworthy boat on a 1,300-kilometre (800-mile) voyage to South Georgia, a British colony where there was a whaling station. Defying mountainous seas and freezing temperatures, the 17-day trek aboard the 6.9-

'Like the Titanic'

The underwater drones produced stunningly clear images of the 44-metre (144-foot)-long ship. Amazingly, the helm has remained intact after more than a century underwater, with gear piled against the taffrail as if Shackleton's crew had only just left it. The ship's timbers, though damaged



This handout picture shows the recovery of the Endurance22 expedition's AUV on the SA Agulhas II after a dive in the Weddell Sea, in search for Sir Ernest Shackleton's ship the Endurance.

metre (22.4-foot) open boat is often considered one of the most remarkable achievements in maritime history.

All 28 expedition members survived. The current-day explorers used underwater drones to find and film the shipwreck in the merciless Weddell Sea. Its swirling current sustains a mass of thick sea ice that can challenge even modern ice breakers. Shackleton himself described the site of the sinking as "the worst portion of the worst sea in the world". The region remains one of the most difficult parts of the ocean to navigate. "This has been the most complex subsea project ever undertaken," said Nico Vincent, the mission's subsea project manager.

from the crush of ice that sank in, still hold together. A mast had snapped into two across the deck, and portholes hinted at what secrets may still lurk inside. Sea anemones, sponges and other small ocean life forms made their homes on the wreckage, but did not appear to have damaged it. "It's quite remarkable just to see the pictures of that ship on the sea floor, equivalent to the discovery of the Titanic," said Adrian Glover, a deep-sea biologist at Britain's Natural History Museum. "It's not a forgiving place, as Shackleton and others found out," he told AFP. — AFP

Gorillas in our midst: Baby apes boost Congo wildlife haven

Two baby gorillas have been born in the Virunga National Park, the world-renowned wildlife haven in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the park said yesterday. "We're excited to announce that Virunga's Rangers have identified two new baby gorillas at #VirungaNationalPark," it said on Twitter. "Bazirushaka from the Lulengo family has given birth to her second child, a female. Rubiga, from the Kabirizi family,



has also welcomed her seventh child." The births are likely to have taken place in January and February in the Mikeno area of the park, where patrols and monitoring of the gorillas were suspended at the time because of rebel attacks, the park said.

The oldest national park in Africa, Virunga is home to spectacular species

of wildlife. They include over one-third of the world's mountain gorillas, an endangered species of which only about 1,000 remain. The 97-year-old haven extends across nearly 8,000 square kilometers (3,000 square miles), including border areas with Rwanda and Uganda that are troubled by armed groups.

Activities in the Mikeno sector of the park had been put on hold after a ranger was killed in November by suspected members of the M23, a former Congolese Tutsi rebel group. Dozens of soldiers and civilians have died since then in attacks blamed on the M23. Military operations are underway in the region, which last May was placed under a so-called state of siege aimed at facilitating a crackdown on rebels. Under it, senior civilian officials have been replaced by army or police officers. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Fans of K-pop group BTS take pictures as they arrive for a BTS live concert at Jamsil Olympic Stadium in Seoul. — AFP photos



Fans of K-pop group BTS arrive for a BTS live concert at Jamsil Olympic Stadium.

K-POP'S BTS ON STAGE FOR FIRST SEOUL GIG SINCE PANDEMIC

South Korean supergroup BTS yesterday returned to the stage in Seoul for the first time since 2019, with an adoring home-grown crowd offering only applause as Covid rules barred all screaming, chanting or singing. The show is the first of three concerts for the chart-topping septet titled "Permission to Dance on Stage - Seoul" at the capital's

rhythmic clapping filling the 60,000-capacity stadium, which was only a quarter full due to social distancing measures. Band leader RM, whose real name is Kim Nam-joon, said they were thrilled to be performing in front of a live audience again. "The fact that you are all seated in the stands shows a lot has changed," he said, referring to a livestream-only concert they per-

forming requirements for the BTS fans, known as ARMY.

Chanting, singing, screaming or even standing up were all banned, as South Korea battles an Omicron spike, with more than 300,000 cases reported yesterday. But fans including Heo Min-hee, a 25-year-old office worker, said being at the concert was a "dream" despite the

'Necessary change'

Ahead of the gig, the BTS members expressed concern over the rules but asked for fans' understanding. "There is a certain energy that can be felt from a person's voice, and I wonder if clapping can be enough," said J-Hope, whose real name is Jung Ho-seok. Fans were disappointed about the rules but acknowl-

media posts showed some fans were trying to sell their hard-won tickets after testing positive for the virus. Many concertgoers said they had taken extra precautions, some even placing themselves in self-quarantine after securing a ticket so as not to test positive and risk missing the big event. "I didn't go outside so I wouldn't catch Covid," said Choi Jung-yoon, 16, who stayed home for around a week. Her friend Jung Da-yeon added: "I wore double masks when I had to go to crowded places."

Livestreams

The floppy-haired musicians, all in their 20s and often sporting earrings and lipstick, appeal to a generation comfortable with gender fluidity. They are credited with generating billions for the South Korean economy, and their label enjoyed a surge in profits despite holding fewer concerts during the pandemic. In 2020, BTS were forced to call off what was supposed to be their largest international tour, with almost 40 gigs, though they held some concerts online.

The group's first in-person show since the pandemic began was at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles in November, with the four-night run grossing \$33.3 million, according to Billboard. The first and last shows of "Permission to Dance" will be streamed live online, while Saturday's concert can be watched in real-time at movie theatres around the world. —AFP



Fans of K-pop group BTS pose for pictures as they arrive for a BTS live concert at Jamsil Olympic Stadium in Seoul.



Fans of K-pop group BTS take pictures as they arrive for a BTS live concert.

Olympic Stadium. Since BTS' last performance for domestic fans in 2019, the band have gone from strength to strength despite the pandemic, with three Billboard-topping singles and two Grammy nominations.

Fans waved purple LED wands—the official colour of BTS fandom—in sync with the band appeared on stage, with

formed to empty seats a few months ago.

"When would we get a concert where we get this much clapping? This is a concert to be remembered in history." Bandmate Kim Tae-hyung, stage name V, added: "I'm so touched and thrilled that our ARMY are here." Tickets for the three concerts — 45,000 in all—sold out within minutes, despite stringent social-distanc-

restrictions. "I still can't believe that this is my seat whenever I look at my ticket," Heo told AFP before the concert. Han Aeng-hee, a 53-year-old fan from Gyeonggi province, added: "I prayed every morning to secure a ticket and miraculously, I got tickets to the first and last concerts." "I'm very grateful," she said.

edged the changes were inevitable. "Even though it's hard, I think it's a necessary change under the current circumstances," said Lee Chae-rim, a 28-year-old student.

"At least we can see them," added Darina, a 24-year-old student from Russia who lives in South Korea. "We can sing in our hearts." A handful of social

Moo-ve over: Loose cow stops cars on California freeway

An escaped cow that went for a stroll along a California highway brought traffic to a halt Wednesday, as drivers joined police in trying to capture the creature. Live footage broadcast by one local TV station showed cars attempting to corral the brown bovine as it sauntered up an exit on the freeway northwest of Pasadena.

Motorists appeared at one point to have the fugitive penned, but when one of them got out of the car, the cow doubled back, and trotted onto the interstate. Other footage from rival broadcasters showed the animal hoofing its way through a nearby strip mall after leaving the freeway, climbing a flight of stairs and even avoiding a waiting lasso.

Los Angeles' CBS affiliate reported that a police officer on a motorcycle then accompanied the cow for a short distance until it wandered to a local farm. There, farmworkers—presumably with more cow experience than city drivers and motorcycle cops—managed to recapture the animal, the station said on its website. — AFP



This file picture taken on July 21, 1969, shows US astronaut Edwin Aldrin standing on the moon beside the deployed flag of the United States during the Apollo 11 mission. — AFP

Buzz Aldrin's famous 1969 moon walk picture sells at auction

More than 70 original NASA photographs including a celebrated image of Buzz Aldrin's moon walk taken by Neil Armstrong were sold at auction in Copenhagen on Wednesday for more than 155,000 euros (\$172,000). The Aldrin image, which fetched 5,373 euros, shows the astronaut on the surface of the moon in July 1969 during the first manned lunar landing. It was famously used on the cover of LIFE magazine. Armstrong, the first man to step onto the Moon, can be seen in the reflection of Aldrin's visor.

A total of 74 NASA photographs were put up for sale including 26 taken on the Moon during the Apollo missions in the 1960s and 1970s. "We sold 73 of the 74 photos," the Bruun Rasmussen auction house told AFP. Put up for sale by a foreign collector who has asked to remain anonymous, the auction house had estimated the collection at almost 190,000 euros.

The most valuable item, the first shot of an "Earthrise" photographed by US astronaut William Anders while orbiting the Moon in December 1968 on Apollo 8, sold for 11,800 euros. The last time man set foot on the Moon was in 1972 during the Apollo 17 mission, but NASA is planning to send astronauts again in 2025-2026. — AFP

Cold shoulder for Russian artists sparks debate over cultural boycotts

As Moscow's invasion of Ukraine enters its third week, a pall has fallen over Russian artists, long crown jewels of a country whose fine arts are an eminent source of soft power. Superstar operatic soprano Anna Netrebko and renowned conductor Valery Gergiev are among the luminaries axed from performing on the global stages they have long graced—but do cultural boycotts work? The freezing out of artists who have espoused pro-Kremlin views—or who receive funding from the Russian state—recalls similar measures taken over apartheid-era South Africa or against Israeli institutions in solidarity with Palestinians as part of the BDS movement.

Jane Duncan of the University of Johannesburg, who has studied the power of such boycotts as political change agents, said isolation campaigns based on culture as well as sports can be "highly effective, because they can have a huge psychological impact." "Russia over a number of centuries now has prided itself on its intellectual, artistic and sporting achievements. It's become part and parcel of its identity and its projection of soft power globally," the academic told AFP. "I think we've already seen that there's a lot of dissent within Russia about the invasion of Ukraine, and a cultural boycott

may well intensify that."

Duncan cautioned, however, that a "blanket cultural boycott" could hurt anti-regime artists: in early 1980s South Africa, for example, she said, a form of "double censorship" emerged, where both the apartheid state and "artists who came from the liberation movements" were subject to shunning. "That led to a situation where you couldn't actually hear the voices of the oppressed and the exploited expressed through art, through music, through drama, because they weren't allowed outside of the country."

Emilia Kabakov, a multidisciplinary Ukrainian artist who has lived and worked with her husband Ilya in New York for decades, warned against punishing creatives—and anyone—simply on the basis of nationality. "I know that Russian artists right now have problems," the 76-year-old born in the Soviet city of Dnipropetrovsk, now known as Dnipro in Ukraine, told AFP. But she suggested those Russians who live and work abroad may have a reason, saying: "Did anybody think, why are they here? Because they can't live there... they want a normal life, unrestricted." "You don't have to work with collaborationists, but you have to work with Russians, and Ukrainians, and everybody else."

Where is the line?

The stance Kabakov evoked is the approach Duncan deemed appropriate—"steer clear" of boycotts based purely on nationality that "could lead to a very dark and difficult place." The scholar pointed to the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement as having a "much more sophisticated position on the cultural boycott" than was the original case in South Africa, promoting a selective rather than blanket ban.

Queried by AFP, the cultural and academic boycott arm of the BDS movement said in a statement the measures they advocate for are "strictly institutional" and do "not target individuals." Leaders of major cultural institutions including New York's Metropolitan Opera, Paris' Philharmonic, and other European venues in recent weeks have said the scope of their boycott is focused on artists who back Russian President Vladimir Putin, not everyone with a Russian passport.

"If somebody is a tool of the state, they probably won't be working with the New York Philharmonic," the orchestra's CEO Deborah Borda told AFP. "There is a line that is very clear," said French Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot. —AFP



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



In this file photo taken on February 21, 2020 Russian opera soprano singer Anna Netrebko performs during the 27th annual Victoires de la musique classique (Classical music award) ceremony at the l'Arsenal de Metz, in Metz, northeastern France. — AFP photos

Sports

New Zealand overpower India to showcase World Cup credentials

India's first defeat in the Women's Cricket World Cup

HAMILTON: Hosts New Zealand inflicted India's first defeat of the Women's Cricket World Cup yesterday, racing to a 62-run win in Hamilton. India's bowlers did well to limit New Zealand to 260-9 but were let down by a limp batting display that left them well short of the target.

The result leaves India, who scored a 107-run win over Pakistan in their tournament opener, fifth in the eight-team leaderboard after two matches. New Zealand, who have played one more match, are second. "Losing wickets back to back put a lot of pressure on us because we didn't have a batter who dared to take the team through," Indian captain Mithali Raj said.

Raj made 31 but Harmanpreet Kaur was the only Indian batter to offer any real resistance with 71 from 63 balls. Amy Satterthwaite set the tone for New Zealand with 75 off 84 balls, while fast-bowling allrounder Pooja Vastrakar was India's star performer, taking 4-34.

Raj's decision to bowl first after winning

the toss paid early dividends when Suzie Bates was run out for five.

Bates, who scored a match-winning 79 not out against Bangladesh, took off for a quick single but was left stranded by a superb throw from Vastrakar. Vastrakar's four-wicket haul played a vital role in containing New Zealand's batters when they threatened to post a huge total. New Zealand captain Sophie Devine edged her to the keeper for 35 but Amelia Kerr kept up the host nation's run rate with a half century.

The New Zealand top order all made good starts, with Satterthwaite's 75 the highlight, and an imposing score looked likely as they entered the last 10 overs at 211-4. But Vastrakar spearheaded an effective fightback by the Indian attack to restrict New Zealand to just 35 off the last five overs, despite aggressive batting from Katey Martin, who finished on 41. New Zealand bowler Lea Tahuhu took 3-17 to restrict India's run chase, with Kerr contributing 3-56. —AFP



HAMILTON: India's Harmanpreet Kaur plays a shot during the 2022 Women's Cricket World Cup match between New Zealand and India at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. —AFP

India cricket greats welcome 'Mankad' run out law change

NEW DELHI: India greats such as Sachin Tendulkar yesterday welcomed cricket's governing body changing the law on controversial "Mankad" run outs, which will no longer be classed as "unfair play". The rare mode of dismissal—where a bowler runs out the non-striker in their delivery stride if the batter is out of his crease—was named after Indian all-rounder Vinoo Mankad, who 75 years ago ran out Bill Brown twice in that fashion on a tour of Australia in 1947.

The nickname for that type of dismissal has stuck ever since, much to the annoyance of Mankad, who died in 1978, and other Indian cricketers. The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), the custodians of the sport's laws, have always held such dismissals as legitimate and batters should not seek to gain an advantage by backing up out of their ground.

But confusingly, the dismissal was listed under Law 41: "Unfair Play". But in one of several changes announced by the MCC this week that will come into effect from October 1, it will now be covered under Law 38: "Run Out". "I was always uncomfortable with that particular dismissal being called Mankaded," Tendulkar said in a video message. "I am really happy that it's been changed to run out. It always should have been run out according to me. So this is one good news for all of us."

Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin ran out England's Jos Buttler at the non-striker's end in an Indian Premier League game in 2019 and was widely criticised for acting against the spirit of cricket. England pace great Stuart Broad on Wednesday said, despite the law change, he would not run someone out with a Mankad. "I think it is unfair & wouldn't consider it, as in my opinion, dismissing a batter is about skill & the Mankad requires zero skill," Broad wrote on Twitter.

Saliva ban

Former India batsman WV Raman responded: "It is not about skill, but getting punished for a crime. Of course, on a cricket field, it is about disregarding the laws of the game. "A traffic cop doesn't display skill when he books someone for jumping a traffic signal! "The most important thing about the modification in the rule is that it won't be called Mankading. "At long last common sense prevails and an all-rounder of great skills will not be tarnished any more."

Indian batting great Sunil Gavaskar strongly objected to the term Mankading and called for it to be dropped, saying it sullied the name. If anything, he said, it should be "Browned not Mankaded".

There are several other changes to the laws. The use of saliva on the ball will be banned, which also removes any grey area of fielders sucking sweets or mints to help keep the shine.

The law around judging a wide has also been amended, with bowlers given more leeway because batters now move more in their crease before a ball is bowled. The incoming batter will now be on strike for the next ball after a catch, regardless of whether the batters cross while the ball is in the air—a change designed to reward the bowler for taking a wicket. The only time a new batter will not face the next delivery is if the wicket falls with the last ball of an over. —AFP

Medvedev feels pressure, motivation as Number 1

LOS ANGELES: Daniil Medvedev, who will contest his first tournament as world number one at the Indian Wells ATP Masters, says he's matured since his loss to Rafael Nadal in the Australian Open final. In the wake of his crushing loss to the Spanish star in Melbourne—where Nadal rallied from two sets down to win a record 21st Grand Slam title—Medvedev complained about "disrespectful" fans.

But he said Wednesday at Indian Wells that those comments—which came after he was fined US\$12,000 for an outburst at the chair umpire in his semi-final win over Stefanos Tsitsipas—were made in the heat of the disappointing moment. "It made me mature, the Australian Open," the 26-year-old said. "I understood I had a lot to work on myself."

Medvedev officially ascended to world number one on February 28—days after his rise was assured when Novak Djokovic fell in the quarter-finals at Dubai. Playing in the Mexico Open at Acapulco at the time, Medvedev was unable to celebrate the achievement with a title, stopped once again by Nadal in the championship match. The two could meet again in the semi-finals at Indian Wells, where Djokovic is absent due to US government COVID-19 travel regulations.

Djokovic, who is not vaccinated, didn't formally withdraw from the tournament until Wednesday, when women's first-round action was underway and the men's draw had already been made. The five-time Indian Wells champion was replaced in the draw by lucky loser Grigor Dimitrov. Medvedev acknowledged that there was "a lot of pressure" in playing as the world's top-ranked player "but at the same time a lot of

motivation," he said.

While he'll have No 1 beside his name, he won't have the Russian flag, after tennis authorities ruled that Russian and Belarusian players can't compete under the names or flags of their countries in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "I want to play tennis, play in different countries—I want to promote my sport," Medvedev said. Right now the situation is that's the only way I can play, so that's what I'm going to do."

He also reiterated his desire for peace as fighting raged for a 15th day in Ukraine. "My message is always the same - I want peace in all of the world," Medvedev said. "I think every tennis player is going to say the same." The conflict is certain to cast its shadow over Indian Wells, where a dozen players from Russia and four from Belarus are entered along with four from Ukraine.

Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska, who made it to the final in Lyon on Sunday a week after escaping Russian bomb attacks in her home city of Odessa, took the court Wednesday for a first-round match against France's Caroline Garcia draped in a Ukrainian flag. But she fell at the first hurdle, saving two match points in the second set tiebreaker before succumbing 6-4, 6-7 (8/10), 7-5. Garcia advanced to a second-round meeting with 11th-seeded US Open champion Emma Raducanu.

Osaka-Stephens blockbuster

Raducanu will be playing her first match since a hip injury forced her to retire from her first round match at Guadalajara last month. The 32 seeded players in both the men's and women's draws enjoy first-round byes, but the women's first round has still thrown up a blockbuster between four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka and former major winner Sloane Stephens. Both are unseeded, Osaka having dropped out of the top 80 in the world after falling in the third round of her Australian Open title defense.

She's now ranked 78th in the world while Stephens,



INDIAN WELLS: Daniil Medvedev of Russia takes a break during a practice session on Day 3 of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. —AFP

who ended a four-year title drought with a win at Guadalajara, is ranked 38th. Among other first-round matches on Wednesday, Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina beat France's Clara Burel 6-3, 6-2, Japan's Misaki Doi rallied to beat Anastasia Potapova 0-6, 6-4, 6-3, Australian Ajla Tomljanovic beat American Hailey Baptiste 6-2, 2-6, 6-2 and China's Zheng Qinwen beat 2009 champion Vera Zvonareva 6-3, 6-2. —AFP

Bonner and Holder keep West Indies in touch with England

ANTIGUA: An unbroken fifth-wicket partnership of 75 between Nkrumah Bonner and Jason Holder helped West Indies reach the close at 202 for four in reply to England's first innings total of 311 on the second day of the first Test at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua on Wednesday. Stumbling at 127 for four at tea following a bright opening stand of 83, the tourists' effort in pressing home the advantage was thwarted in the final session as the pair of contrasting right-handers defied all the challenges presented to them on a placid surface.

On a day of frequent brief interruptions for rain, it was another swift shower which ended the day's play with the phlegmatic Bonner on 34 off 103 balls with three fours and Holder showing a bit more purposeful intent on 43 off

104 balls, his innings embellished by six fours and a six, that lone heave over the boundary bringing up the 50-partnership. Captain Kraigg Brathwaite stroked 55 off 70 balls with seven fours and one six in an uncharacteristically aggressive effort to dominate the opening stand. John Campbell, playing his first Test for almost a year, was content to play the supporting role.

But when he fell for 35 in mid-afternoon, gloving an attempted pull off Craig Overton for wicketkeeper Ben Foakes to complete the leg-side catch, England sensed the chance for more success with the raw pace of Mark Wood proving particularly unsettling. Brathwaite chased a wide delivery from the fast bowler and Overton took a tumbling catch at backward point before a leaden-footed prod by Shamrah Brooks at Ben Stokes resulted in a simple catch to England captain Joe Root at first slip.

Jemaine Blackwood was lucky to escape before he had scored as Foakes could not hold on to a sharp chance when the vice-captain drove loosely at Wood. However there was no reprieve a few minutes later when an appeal for a catch at gully off Chris Woakes was upheld on review as television replays revealed an inside-edge onto

the thigh pad before the ball nestled in Overton's safe hands on the stroke of the tea interval.

"We will need to get early wickets on the third morning because Holder and Bonner played really well today in nullifying the reverse swing that we were starting to get," said Wood in putting the day's play into perspective. "We were definitely operating to a plan of bowling straighter lines and trying as often as we could to bring the stumps into play, but every time we veered offline we were punished. It's about trying to be consistent and stick to our plans as best as we can." Earlier, first day batting star Jonny Bairstow was last out for 140, contributing 31 of the 43 added by England from the overnight position of 268 for six.

Jayden Seales struck twice in three balls to finish with the best innings figures of four for 81 for the home side while fellow fast bowler Alzarri Joseph finally enjoyed some success with the last two wickets of the England first innings. Bairstow's controlled effort eventually ended via a well-judged catch by Holder running back from slip to short third-man as the right-hander sliced an attempted heave to the on-side half an hour before lunch. —AFP

Women's Basketball League

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Women's Basketball League will launch its second season tomorrow with two matches in the first round between Salwa Al-Sabah Sports Club with Qurain Club at Saad Abdallah Sports Halls complex. The second match will be between Fatayat Al-Oyoun and Gulf University at the same place. The Women's Basketball League is of two parts as the top four teams will qualify for the semifinals.

Head of the women basketball committee Hanan Al-Zayed said the League started late due to several reasons including the corona pandemic. Al-Zayed thanked member of the board of the Basketball Federation Fadhel Al-Dawoud for providing the necessary support and his keenness on keeping the Women's League going. She said the Gulf University's participation is the first of its kind and hoped for more private entities' participation next season.



KUWAIT: Public Authority for Sports Deputy Director General for Competitive Sport Dr Saqer Al-Mulla received Kuwait Motor Sport Club athlete Ali Makhseed who took the second place in the three rounds of the Middle East Category of Oman International Draft Championship. Al-Mulla thanked Makhseed for his efforts and wished him luck in future events. Meanwhile Al-Mulla met the Financial Support Coordinator for The Asian and Pacific Deaf Sports Association Nizar Jassem Al-Qamar who thanked the Authority for its support.

Sports

Abramovich: Chelsea's tycoon scrambling to save his empire

Empire teetering on collapse after Russia's invasion of Ukraine

LONDON: Roman Abramovich rose from a penniless background in Russia's frozen north to become a multi-billionaire and a celebrity football tycoon, but his empire is teetering on collapse after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The UK government's decision to freeze his assets cripples the activities of Chelsea Football Club, the jewel in Abramovich's crown, and delivers another crushing blow to his business realm.

As speculation swirled that he was about to be targeted over his alleged Kremlin links, Abramovich announced he was selling the Premier League side "in the best interest of the club, the fans, the employees, as well as the club's sponsors and partners". The asking price was believed to be about £3 billion (\$3.9 billion, 3.6 billion euros), but those plans are now in chaos.

Abramovich, 55, was one of the businessmen working in the shadows following the collapse of the Soviet Union, seizing control of lucrative state assets at bargain prices. In Abramovich's case, a controlling investment in the oil company Sibneft provided the vehicle for his rise. He had made money early on with a firm making rubber toys, after growing up an orphan from a Jewish family in the harsh far north. He is now worth \$12.4 billion, according to Forbes magazine, and as well as turning Chelsea into a European powerhouse has stakes in steel giant Evraz and Norilsk Nickel.

His property holdings include a 15-bedroom mansion in London's exclusive Kensington area, and he also owns one of the world's largest yachts, the 533-

foot (162-metre) Eclipse. A newer vessel in Abramovich's luxury fleet, the Solaris, is a little smaller. Both yachts reportedly come equipped with their own anti-missile defenses. In September 2005, he received a gargantuan cash boost with the \$13 billion sale of Sibneft to state-owned gas behemoth Gazprom, enabling Russian President Vladimir Putin to regain control of strategic assets.

'Key enabler'

Unlike other oligarchs who tried to take on Putin's Kremlin, such as his old business partner Boris Berezovsky, Abramovich has kept a low political profile. His loyalty to Putin was rewarded with the governorship of the vast, far-eastern Chukotka region, analysts say. After Berezovsky fell out of favour with the Putin regime, Abramovich took over his stake in the country's largest television network in 2001. Berezovsky died in unexplained circumstances near London in 2013.

Last year, Abramovich accepted an apology and rewrites after suing the British author and publisher of a book about the rise of Putin's inner circle. The libel action against Catherine Belton and HarperCollins prompted rights groups including Reporters Without Borders to criticise the use of lawsuits in Britain to silence critical reporting. The bestselling book "Putin's People" included claims by former Putin associate Sergei Pugachev that Abramovich had bought Chelsea in 2003 on the president's orders, in a bid to increase Russian influence.

Unswayed by the litigation, British Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran used parliamentary privilege to name Abramovich as one of 35 "key enablers" to Putin who should be sanctioned personally by the UK. His daughter Sofia has distanced herself from Russia's actions, writing on Instagram that "the biggest and most successful lie of Kremlin's propaganda is that most Russians stand with Putin". She shared a meme containing the sentence "Russia wants a war with Ukraine", with "Russia" crossed out and replaced with "Putin".

'One last time'

Abramovich himself also sought to put clear water between himself and the Kremlin, and announced that profits from the sale of Chelsea will go to "victims of the war in Ukraine". The tycoon's British investor visa expired in 2018, in the fraught aftermath of a nerve agent attack in the city of Salisbury that was blamed on Russian agents.

He obtained an Israeli passport, allowing him to travel freely to Britain, although his visits to watch Chelsea games in London have dwindled in recent years. "I hope that I will be able to visit Stamford Bridge one last time to say goodbye... in person," he said last week. In a rare media interview, with The Observer newspaper in December 2006, Abramovich disagreed that money could buy happiness, saying instead it could buy "some independence". He mused: "There is a Russian proverb: you never say that you'll never be in jail or never be poor." —AFP



Chelsea's Russian owner Roman Abramovich

Warne's body returns home to Australia

MELBOURNE: A private jet flew the body of Australian cricket superstar Shane Warne home to his native Melbourne yesterday, six days after his death at the age of 52 provoked shock and grief around the world. Carrying the cricketer's coffin wrapped in an Australian flag, a chartered Dassault Falcon 7X jet landed in the evening at Melbourne's Essendon North airport after an eight-hour flight from Bangkok.

His family is reportedly organizing a private memorial. Warne, adored by fans as the "king of spin" who bamboozled opposing batters, will be honored with a state memorial at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on March 30, with tickets open to the public. The sporting legend's body was found on March 4 at a luxury resort villa on the Thai island of Koh Samui. He was rushed to the Thai International Hospital Samui but despite medical efforts could not be revived.

An autopsy confirmed he had died of natural causes following a suspected heart attack. Thai police reported

that Warne's father said the player had been suffering "chest pains" and had planned to return home for a check-up after the trip. Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews announced the state memorial as a tribute to a larger-than-life man who has been a reference point in his home country for the past 30 years. "There's nowhere in the world more appropriate to farewell Warne than the 'G'," Andrews said.

Warne has been a big part of Australian life from his 1992 Test debut against India to his incisive commentary, now as much a part of the summer's soundscape as kids laughing on the beach or the click of bat on ball. In the time in between, he captured the imagination of countless backyard cricketers and set the sporting world on fire. Credited with reviving the art of leg-spin, Warne was part of a dominant Australian Test team in the 1990s and 2000s and helped his country win the 1999 limited-overs World Cup.

'Inconceivable'

Warne "didn't just inspire a cricketing generation—he defined it", said a statement by the Victoria government. Warne's family have released messages expressing their love and grief. "To find words to adequately express our sadness is an impossible task for us and looking to a future without Shane is inconceivable,"



BANGKOK: A private jet, carrying the coffin of Australian cricket player Shane Warne, departs from Don Mueang Airport in Bangkok yesterday on its way back to Australia after the cricketer died on the Thai holiday island of Koh Samui on March 4. —AFP

parents Keith and Brigitte Warne said in a statement this week.

"I miss you so much already," said daughter Summer Warne. "I wish I could've hugged you tighter in what I didn't know were my final moments with you." "I wish I could've told you that everything was going to be OK and hold your hand." Son Jackson Warne reminisced about playing golf and poker, and watching Australian rules football while eating pizza with someone he saw as a brother and best friend, as well as a father. "I love you so much. I don't think

anything is ever going to fill the void you have left in my heart," he said in a statement. "You were truly the best father and mate anyone could've asked for. I love you so much Dad, see you soon." Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison led tributes to one of the country's "greatest characters" Over the weekend fans paid homage to Warne at his statue outside the Melbourne Cricket Ground—including offerings of cigarettes, beer and meat pies—to remember an extraordinary cricketer talent with a huge appetite for life. —AFP

Tiger recalls parents and racism fight in Hall of Fame entry

MIAMI: A tearful Tiger Woods recalled fighting racism as a youth and the support of his parents on Wednesday in an emotional induction ceremony to the World Golf Hall of Fame. Woods was hailed for a transcendent career that has seen him capture 15 major titles, second only to the career-record 18 of Jack Nicklaus, and win 82 US PGA Tour titles, level with

Sam Snead for the all-time record.

He thanked instructors, caddies, friends and family—many of them in attendance—for the support that helped him turn childhood dreams into a historic sport career. "I didn't get here alone," Woods said. "I had unbelievable parents, mentors and friends who supported me in the darkest of times and celebrated the highest of times. "It's actually a team award. All of you allowed me to get here and I just want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart."

The 46-year-old American was among four enshrined in a ceremony at US PGA Tour headquarters in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, joined by former PGA Tour commissioner Tim Finchem, the late pioneer golf course developer Marion Hollins and four-time

women's major winner Susie Maxwell Berning. Woods was emotional before he began reflecting on his life, opening his remarks by saying, "I just lost a bet to (PGA veteran Steve) Stricker I wouldn't cry."

Woods recalled having to search for lost golf balls to practice with as a child and his inspirational late father Earl telling him to stop putting for quarters, so "I come home a week later, I had a pocket full of dollars." "One of the things that drove me was his passion to play the game of golf," Woods said of his dad. Woods was stung by racism when denied access to clubhouses, so he changed shoes in the parking lot. "You had to be twice as good to get half a chance (so) I made practice so hard, hurt so much, because I want to make sure I was ready come game time. —AFP

What do Abramovich sanctions mean for Chelsea?

LONDON: The future of European champions Chelsea has been plunged into doubt after Russian owner Roman Abramovich was hit with UK government sanctions in response to the invasion of Ukraine. Abramovich has bankrolled the most successful era in the Blues' history since taking charge in 2003 - the club have won five Premier League titles and two Champions Leagues among 19 major trophies.

The billionaire—described by the UK government as part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle—had already signaled his intent to sell Chelsea due to the looming threat of sanctions. UK Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries said the priority was to "hold those who have enabled the Putin regime to account".

"Today's sanctions obviously have a direct impact on Chelsea and its fans," she tweeted. "We have been working hard to ensure the club & the national game are not unnecessarily harmed by these important sanctions." Chelsea, who are in Premier League action against Norwich later on Thursday, have been given a special licence to continue to operate. But even that licence imposes some tough restrictions on a club still in the running for the Champions League and FA Cup this season and sitting third in the Premier League. AFP Sport looks at what Abramovich's sanctions mean for the club:

Sale on hold

The freezing of Abramovich's assets means any sale of the club appears on hold for now. "Chelsea Football Club is now also subject to an asset freeze under UK financial sanctions," said the government's Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation. A number of interested bidders have signaled their interest, although many believed Abramovich's reported £3 billion (\$4 billion) asking price was unrealistic. In a statement, the Chelsea Supporters' Trust (CST) said: "The CST notes with concern the government's statement regarding the owner. Supporters MUST be involved in any conversation regarding ongoing impacts on the club and its global fan base." —AFP

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MADRID: Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian defender Marquinhos (center) heads the ball between Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior (left) and Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second league football match between Real Madrid CF and Paris Saint-Germain on March 9, 2022. — AFP

Benzema's hat-trick lifts Real

PSG knocked out of Champions League

MADRID: Real Madrid pulled off one of the great Champions League comebacks on Wednesday as Karim Benzema scored a breathtaking hat-trick to upstage Kylian Mbappe and dump Paris Saint-Germain out in the last 16. Madrid were set to be the latest victims of another Mbappe masterclass as the Santiago Bernabeu after the 23-year-old ran them ragged for the best part of an hour and fired in to put PSG 1-0 up on the night, 2-0 ahead on aggregate.

But Madrid came storming back as Benzema capitalized on a mistake by PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma and then scored an incredible double in two minutes, the third coming within 11 seconds after PSG had kicked off. When the full-time whistle confirmed their 3-2 aggregate victory, many of Madrid's players dropped to their

knees and looked up to the sky, as much perhaps in disbelief as joy.

"Every game is a final now for us in the Champions League and La Liga but today we showed that Real Madrid is alive," said Benzema. For PSG, it was another epic collapse to add to their growing list of Champions League disappointments, with Mauricio Pochettino's future as coach immediately cast into doubt.

Even with Mbappe, Lionel Messi and Neymar, the Qatari-owned club's wait for a Champions League crown goes on. "We didn't manage our emotions well. We left ourselves exposed," said Pochettino. "We leave with great pain and disappointment because we didn't score the goals to reflect our superiority over the two games." Pochettino also fumed at referee Danny Makkelie

for not whistling for a foul as Benzema challenged Donnarumma before Madrid's first goal.

"Explaining what happened is easy, there was a foul on Donnarumma during the first goal, and that changed everything," he said. All eyes were on Mbappe, who was the only player to be cheered by Madrid's fans before the game as they were gifted an up-close preview of the player they hope will be theirs this summer. Mbappe delivered, scoring a superb goal, not to mention a spellbinding second that was disallowed for offside when he bamboozled Thibaut Courtois with a magical dummy.

But what looked set to become an exhibition of the world's deadliest player instead became another remarkable European night for Real Madrid and another nightmare for PSG. "We suffered a lot but we endured," said Real boss Carlo Ancelotti.

"Karim gave us the chance to score the first goal and then the magic came. From then on, there was only one team was on the field." Madrid clearly wanted to hit PSG hard from the start and for a while, it worked, Vinicius Junior tearing down the left and Fede Valverde bulldozing through Mbappe.

But the surge was brief, PSG killing Madrid's momentum, pushing them back and taking complete control. Mbappe sped clear for the first time in the eighth minute, Neymar curling a ball into the space on the left. The stadium held its breath, Mbappe made room but this time hit Courtois. PSG were comfortable, dictating the play and sensing the trepidation. Madrid had openings, Benzema curling just wide, but all over the pitch they looked slower, heavier, more cumbersome. — AFP

Suns beat Heat to seal the NBA playoff berth

WASHINGTON: Devin Booker returned from a four-game absence to power Phoenix over Miami 111-90 on Wednesday in a matchup of conference leaders, clinching an NBA playoff berth for the Suns. Booker, back after being sidelined by Covid-19 protocols, scored a game-high 23 points, passed off nine assists, pulled down eight rebounds, made two steals and blocked two shots for the visitors, who improved to a league-best 53-13. "I'm just trying to find my rhythm," Booker said. "I had a week off. I felt good. I was ready to get back at it."

The triumph was important to the Suns, who lost 123-100 to Miami at Phoenix on January 8. "They came to our home court and kicked our ass so we wanted to make a statement here," Booker said. "We knew it was going to be a hard game but I like how we played." Mikal Bridges added 21 points for Phoenix while Bahamas big man Deandre Ayton contributed 19 points and 10 rebounds. Duncan Robinson led Miami with 22 points. The Heat were without star Jimmy Butler, out with sinus congestion.

The Suns stretched their lead in the Western Conference to 8.5 games over Memphis by dispatching the top club in the Eastern Conference, the Heat falling to 44-23. Phoenix, which lost last year's NBA Finals to Milwaukee, improved to 22-0 this season when keeping an opponent under 100 points and became the first team to secure a post-season berth. "The playoffs are upon us," Booker said. "We're looking forward to it. We don't want to fall short again."

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 43 points and pulled down 12 rebounds to spark the reigning NBA champion Milwaukee Bucks over visiting Atlanta 124-115. It was the sixth victory in a row for the Bucks, who pulled within two games of the Heat for the conference lead at 42-25. Trae Young led the Hawks with 27 points and 11 assists. Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic of Serbia struck for 38 points and 18 rebounds to power the Denver Nuggets over host Sacramento 106-100 despite 32 points from the Kings' De'Aaron Fox.

LeBron triple double

Houston rookie Jalen Green scored a season-high 32 points to power the Western Conference

doormat Rockets to a 109-100 overtime home victory over the Los Angeles Lakers despite a triple double from LeBron James. "When we make a mistake or break down defensively or don't get a good look at the basket, teams are making us pay for it every time," James said after his club's ninth consecutive road loss.

"It's that simple. We have a small margin for error and they are making us pay." Turkish rookie Alperen Sengun scored 21 points and grabbed 14 rebounds for the Rockets, who had seven players in double figures. James delivered 23 points, 14 rebounds and 12 assists for the Lakers while Russell Westbrook scored 30 points to lead Los Angeles, which fell to 28-37 at ninth in the Western Conference.

Jayson Tatum scored 44 points to lead Boston to a 115-101 triumph at Charlotte while Chicago's DeMar DeRozan scored a game-high 36 points and grabbed a game-high eight rebounds in a 114-108 Bulls victory at Detroit. Fred VanVleet scored 26 points while Cameroonian playmaker Pascal Siakam and Scottie Barnes each added 20 points to power the Toronto Raptors over host San Antonio 119-104. —AFP



MIAMI: Deandre Ayton #22 of the Phoenix Suns drives to the basket during the game against the Miami Heat on March 9, 2022. — AFP



MANCHESTER: Sporting Lisbon's Brazilian striker Bruno Tabata (left) vies with Manchester City's Brazilian striker Gabriel Jesus during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match between Manchester City and Sporting Lisbon on March 9, 2022. —AFP

Man City cruise into Champions League quarters

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola said Manchester City's routine stroll into the Champions League quarter-finals is cause for celebration despite a subdued 0-0 draw against Sporting Lisbon on Wednesday. All the hard work for the English champions was done with a 5-0 win in the Portuguese capital three weeks ago as City reached the last eight for the fifth consecutive season. "It's a good sign," said Guardiola. "The last decade, step-by-step the club grew up. Every season playing this competition, qualifying for last 16 and now in the best eight teams in Europe."

City are on course for a fourth Premier League title in five seasons, but the Champions League has so far remained out of reach despite the billions invested by the club's Abu Dhabi owners. Guardiola knows his legacy in Manchester will be judged on whether he can finally make City champions of Europe. However, he believes the achievement of just becoming a regular contender should not be overlooked.

"Every year when we qualify for the Champions League I celebrate it that night because I know how difficult it is," he added. "When you qualify for last 16, I celebrate it. Now it's time to congratulate everyone, focus on the Premier League and see who we get in the draw." A much tougher test will lie ahead in

the last eight as Sporting set out at the Etihad just to avoid another embarrassing scoreline like the one they suffered on home soil.

"After the result of the first game the tie became practically impossible," said Sporting goalkeeper Antonio Adan. "The team was better defensively, and they didn't play with the same clarity either. We leave satisfied." Guardiola handed a European debut to teenage right-back CJ Egan-Riley with a number of defenders out through injury, illness or suspension. Rodri, Kevin De Bruyne and Riyad Mahrez were also rested from the start, but City should still have won the game comfortably.

Raheem Sterling wasted the best of the home side's chances as the England international failed to lift the ball over Adan from Phil Foden's sensational through ball. After an uneventful first half, City thought they had claimed the lead through Gabriel Jesus early in the second period. Mahrez, introduced at the break, ran into the box and slid the ball into the Brazilian on the left. Jesus smashed in from a tight angle but the goal was disallowed for offside following a VAR review.

The state of the tie was summed up when Guardiola took the chance to give 36-year-old goalkeeper Scott Carson his first Champions League appearance since 2005, replacing Ederson 17 minutes from time. Carson was called into action to bravely block from Pedro Porro with Sporting's best chance moments later. Mahrez, John Stones and Sterling all missed chances late on to break the deadlock, but Sporting salvaged some pride by holding out for a clean sheet. — AFP