



3 Kuwait has sufficient stock of wheat, prices remain stable



9 Shaken by Ukraine war, Germany to buy dozens of US stealth jets



12 'The Power of the Dog' triumphant with best film, director at BAFTAs



15 Tom Brady un-retires, says he will return to NFL's Bucs



Russia, Ukraine hold fresh talks amid deadly strikes

UN chief warns of food system 'meltdown' • IMF: Ukraine economy could collapse

News in brief

Basel Al-Haroun named CBK gov

KUWAIT: The Cabinet yesterday approved a draft decree appointing Basel Al-Haroun as Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait. He will replace Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel, who declined reappointment and decided to leave his post at the end of his tenure.



Basel Al-Haroun

MoH allows iftar gatherings

KUWAIT: The health ministry announced the return of all kinds of activities in Ramadan this year, including iftar gatherings and meal campaigns. Health Ministry Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health Dr Buthaina Al-Mudhaf said "the latest wave of the coronavirus is past us and the epidemiological situation in the country is improving".



Dr Buthaina

Workers can cash out holidays

KUWAIT: The Cabinet is allowing employees across state bodies to exchange unused vacation days for cash, government spokesman Tareq Al-Merzem said yesterday, citing a draft law on the matter. The draft law comes with certain provisos, whereby only those who have completed at least five years of service, in addition to a month of unused vacation days, are entitled to the payout. — KUNA



Tareq Al-Merzem

Chechen strongman in Ukraine

MOSCOW: Ramzan Kadyrov, the strongman leader of Chechnya, said yesterday that he was in Ukraine alongside Russian forces who are leading an offensive in the country. Kadyrov posted a video on Telegram of himself in military uniform studying plans around a table with soldiers in a room. He said in a message that the video had been shot at Hostomel, an airfield near Kyiv. — AFP



Ramzan Kadyrov

Paytm shares nosedive

MUMBAI: Paytm shares nosedived almost 13 percent yesterday after Indian regulators banned the beleaguered payments platform from enrolling new customers and reports emerged that its founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma was briefly arrested last month after crashing into a senior police officer's car in New Delhi and fleeing the scene. India's central bank also ordered an audit of Paytm's IT systems. Sharma, named India's youngest billionaire in 2017, launched Paytm in 2010 and quickly made the platform synonymous with digital payments. — AFP



Vijay Sharma

KYIV: Russia and Ukraine conducted fresh talks yesterday in an effort to end Moscow's devastating war, despite deadly strikes on a Ukrainian television tower, the capital and a pro-Moscow separatist region. On the 19th day of the invasion, the fourth round of talks made no breakthrough other than a planned resumption today, as Russian-backed separatists said fragments from a shot-down Ukrainian Tochka-U missile ripped the center of Donetsk, killing 23 people.

Moscow called it a "war crime" and rebels published photos of bloody corpses strewn in the street, even as the Ukrainian army denied having fired a missile at Donetsk. The United Nations estimates almost 2.8 million people have fled Ukraine since Russian President Vladimir Putin launched the full-scale land and air assault on Feb 24, most of them to Poland, struggling to provide for the arrivals.

UN chief Antonio Guterres warned yesterday that the world must act to prevent a "hurricane of hunger and a meltdown of the global food system" following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The secretary-general told reporters in New York that the war risks sparking far-reaching consequences for the global food supply that will have a devastating impact on the poorest.

Continued on Page 2



KYIV: A crane removes a wrecked car from in front of a destroyed apartment building after it was shelled in the northwestern Obolon district of the Ukrainian capital yesterday. — AFP

MPs call to discuss army fund, abolish ministers' tribunal

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MPs yesterday submitted a motion calling to convene a special session next Sunday to discuss the "violations in the army fund", less than a week after a special tribunal acquitted a former premier, a former defense minister and other top officials of embezzling tens of millions of dinars.

The 13 lawmakers who signed the petition called on National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem to invite the Audit Bureau to discuss its report on the graft case that involved the embezzlement of more than KD 150 million from the fund. They also called on the speaker to invite Sheikh Hamad Sabah Al-Ahmad, the son of the late Amir, Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak, the minister of Amiri Diwan, and Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, the former minister of the Amiri Diwan to hear their testimonies on the case.

But MP Obaid Al-Wasmi, head of the Assembly's legal and legislative committee, said the law does not permit the Assembly to invite these personalities to the special session, adding he will submit another motion to rectify the mistake. There has been no comment so far from the other lawmakers who sub-

mitted the motion on the so-called mistake.

The special ministers' tribunal last week acquitted former prime minister HH Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, former defense minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and seven former and current defense ministry officials involved in the high-profile embezzlement case. The court based its verdict on a letter from the Amiri Diwan which said late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah was aware of the money taken from the fund, which was used to serve Kuwait's national interests.

Meanwhile, MP Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf yesterday called for abolishing the special ministers' tribunal which tries ministers on the grounds that all people are equal and should be tried in the same court, adding there is no need for the special tribunal.

Chinese cities, factories in lockdown

BEIJING: All 17 million people in the Chinese tech hub of Shenzhen began their first full day under lockdown yesterday, as restrictions spread across Shanghai and other major cities to combat an outbreak challenging the nation's zero-tolerance COVID strategy. The southern city of Shenzhen imposed the measure on Sunday to counter an Omicron flare-up in facto-

ries and neighborhoods linked to nearby Hong Kong, which is recording scores of daily deaths as the virus runs rampant.

Major Apple supplier Foxconn suspended its operations in Shenzhen, the company said yesterday, as the lockdown bit hard into economic activity across the factory hub. Shenzhen is one of ten cities nationwide to have locked down all residents, though the measure was taken yesterday in some parts of other major hubs including Dalian, Nanjing and Tianjin, which neighbors the capital.

Health officials have warned tighter restrictions could be on their way, as

Continued on Page 2



SHANGHAI: Workers in protective clothes are seen next to some locked down areas after the detection of new cases of COVID-19 yesterday. — AFP

Digital art in spotlight at Dubai fair

DUBAI: Art Dubai, the Middle East's largest annual contemporary art fair, has featured for the first time digital works, as the wealthy Gulf emirate seeks to position itself as a crypto-assets hub. This year, in its 15th edition, the three-day fair hosted more than 100 local and foreign art dealers, with

an entire wing of 17 galleries and platforms dedicated to showcasing and selling NFTs, or non-fungible tokens.

NFT sales platforms use the blockchain technology behind cryptocurrencies, and transform anything from illustrations to memes into virtual collectors' items that cannot be duplicated. Benedetta Ghione, Art Dubai's executive director, said NFTs, which burst into the mainstream last year and are now traded at major auction houses, have drawn a lot of attention in the United Arab Emirates, already a leisure and business hub. — AFP (See Page 13)



DUBAI: Visitors stand in front of a painting by British artist Marc Quinn (Himalayan Spring) on display during the 15th edition of Art Dubai at Madinat Jumeirah on March 10, 2022. — AFP

Local

Fire Force holds graduation ceremony for cadet officers

52 Kuwaiti cadet officers graduate



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) yesterday held a graduation ceremony for 52 cadet officers after concluding their courses successfully. Sponsor of the ceremony, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior (Ret General) Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who attended the event, con-

veyed congratulations from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to the graduates.

KFF Commander Lieutenant General Khaled Al-Mekrad said, in his address at the ceremony that, with sponsorship of the Interior Ministry, the 26th batch of the cadet officers graduated. The batch included university-degree graduates of diverse specializations. Moreover, undersec-

retaries were promoted to the lieutenant rank, he added. For his part, KFF deputy chief for human resources, Major General Mohammad Al-Shatti, said the graduates had been trained on state-of-art equipment and various relief operations. —KUNA



Ziad Al-Omar (centre) poses for a group photo with GUST officials.



Ziad Al-Omar honored



Graduates at KFH booth

GUST honors KFH for 'investment in talents'

KUWAIT: Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) honored Kuwait Finance House (KFH), represented by its Group Human Resources Chief Officer, Zeyad Abdullah Al-Omar, for participating in the job fair held at the university campus. This recognition affirms the bank's leading position in investing in young national talents and recruitment of top graduates.

KFH pavilion comprised a highly specialized human resources team to offer job vacancies, conduct interviews and answer all queries and questions of the students and graduates looking for jobs

at KFH and enlighten them about the nature of work at the bank and the private sector in general.

KFH team has succeeded in completing all interviews with all students wishing to join KFH on part time basis. This procedure is usually conducted by global institutions in collaboration with universities to enhance students to work, give them training in an actual work environment and help them make the best use of their free time to make a better future.

KFH pavilion witnessed remarkable attendance by students wishing to know more about the job opportunities available for them in the future to join the banking industry. Al-Omar indicated that KFH is keen on participating in Job Fairs organized by GUST and various universities and academic institutions. This process reflects KFH's commitment to provide job opportunities for the Kuwaiti youth, thus referring to the strong partnership between KFH and GUST in various fields.

He added that the fair is an opportunity that

enables institutions to identify university graduates seeking jobs in the business market. He emphasized that students should focus on high demand majors e.g., information technology, cyber security, artificial intelligence, business analysis, digital marketing, and other basic majors in the business market. The high competition among institutions demands highly specialized talents with highly innovative mindset to execute transformation to a smart environment and continue moving forward in offering services and facilitate business procedures, thus enhancing customers' experience and satisfaction levels.

In this context, Al-Omar referred to "Forsa" program which is designed by KFH to attract top Kuwaiti graduates from technology majors in local and international universities. The program comprises comprehensive training programs on the latest IT applications in the banking fields and digitalization strategies. Al-Omar added that KFH is distinguished for providing an ideal work environment,

thus focusing on supporting innovation.

He reiterated that KFH has succeeded in employing highly advanced digital platforms and IT tools for conducting personal interviews, tests, evaluation, recruitment, and training. KFH has adopted highly advanced systems to determine the candidates' level, including education, skills and personality levels and prepare supportive reports and analysis to measure the candidate's efficiency, determine his pros and development aspects.

Al-Omar concluded his statement saying "We are proud to be the leading institution in recruiting Kuwaiti employees at the Kuwaiti banks and private sector levels. The recruitment ratio of Kuwaitis in the new recruitments process reached 100% while the nationalization ratio reached 76% in 2021. KFH enjoys a long record in the field of training, internship, scholarships, and talent development based on partnerships with global universities and reputable digital training platforms".

Russia, Ukraine hold fresh...

Continued from Page 1

Even before the war, he said, developing countries - with record inflation, rising interest rates and looming debt burdens - "Now their breadbasket is being bombed," Guterres said, noting that Ukraine provides more than half of the World Food Program's wheat supply.

The International Monetary Fund said yesterday Ukraine's government continues to function, the banking system is stable and debt payments are viable in the short term, but the Russian invasion could plunge Ukraine into a devastating recession.

And it warned that the war could have broader repercussions, including threatening global food security due to rising prices and the inability to plant crops, especially wheat. At a minimum the country would see "output falling 10 percent this year assuming a prompt resolution of the war," the IMF said in an analysis of the economy in the wake of the Russian invasion.

Outside the western Ukrainian city of Rivne, nine people died and another nine were injured yesterday when Russian forces hit a television tower, local authorities said. Rescuers were working to free survivors trapped under the rubble in the village of Antopil, the head of the regional administration, Vitaliy Koval, said on messaging app Telegram.

As Moscow's military advanced steadily towards several major urban hubs, Russian air strikes killed

at least two in Kyiv, now hemmed in on two sides and drained of more than half of its three million residents. "They say that he is too severely burned, that I won't recognize him," sobbed Lidiya Tikhovska, 83, staring at the spot where a paramedic said the remains of her son Vitaliy lay. "I wish Russia the same grief I feel now," she said, tears rolling down her cheeks as she clung to her grandson's elbow for support.

During its meeting with Russian representatives, Ukraine said it was demanding "peace, an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian troops". The videoconference talks paused without a breakthrough ahead of a planned resumption today. "Only after this can we talk about regional relations and about political differences," Kyiv's lead negotiator Mikhaïlo Podolyak said in a video statement posted to Twitter.

Russian troops not only edged closer to Kyiv but kept up their siege of the southern port city of Mariupol, where officials said nearly 2,200 people have been killed. At Ukraine's Chernobyl nuclear power plant, the site of the world's worst nuclear disaster in 1986, energy operator Ukrenergo said "occupying forces" had once again damaged its electricity supply. Russia's forces had earlier focused on eastern and southern areas of Ukraine - home to more ethnic Russians - but in recent days have moved to the country's center.

In Kyiv, only the roads to the south remain open, according to the Ukrainian presidency. City authorities have set up checkpoints, and people are stockpiling food and medicine. The north-western suburb of Bucha is held by Russian forces, along with parts of Irpin, Ukrainian soldiers told AFP. Some blocks in the once well-to-do suburb have been reduced to rubble. — AFP

Chinese cities, factories in...

Continued from Page 1

concerns mount over the resilience of China's "zero-COVID" approach in the face of the highly-transmissible Omicron variant. Authorities reported 2,300 new virus cases nationwide yesterday and almost 3,400 a day earlier, the highest daily figure in two years. "There have been many small-scale clusters in urban villages and factories," Shenzhen city official Huang Qiang said at a briefing yesterday. "This suggests a high risk of community spread, and further precautions are still needed."

Photos shared with AFP by a Shenzhen resident showed housing compound entrances blocked by large plastic barriers, as residents swapped jokes on social media about their rush to grab laptops from offices before the lockdown. Tech stocks plummeted on the Hong Kong exchange yesterday, as concerns over the impact of the virus spread in Shenzhen - home to hubs for Foxconn, as well as Huawei and Tencent - spooked investors.

In Shanghai, residential areas and offices in some neighborhoods remained sealed yesterday as city authorities try to avoid a full lockdown. Police tape, metal gates and rows of community workers in hazmat suits surrounded shuttered shops and homes in closed-off parts of the city. Streets were noticeably quieter across the megacity, which reported around 170 new virus cases yesterday - enough to seed anxiety among businesses over the economic pain ahead.

A restaurateur with four outlets in different parts of Shanghai said he has to wade through a

morass of hyper-local restrictions, giving an indication of how ordinary life in China is still spun on its head by a pandemic that the rest of the world has learned to cope with. "Different districts adopt different policies," he told AFP, requesting anonymity. "I want to close one and keep the rest open, and see how it goes later. What else can I do except tough it out?"

Other outbreak epicenters have been less lucky. Jilin province in the country's northeast recorded over 1,000 new cases for the second day in a row, and authorities banned residents leaving their cities without police permission. At least five cities in the province have been locked down since the beginning of March, including the major industrial base of Changchun, whose nine million residents were confined at home Friday.

Health official Lei Zhenglong told state broadcaster CCTV that more than 10,000 domestic infections had been recorded in March so far across dozens of provinces, and warned the situation in many areas was "still developing". While the caseload is low in global terms, it is deeply alarming in China where authorities have been unrelenting in squashing clusters since early 2020. At least 26 officials in three provinces have been dismissed due to their handling of local outbreaks, state media reported.

China has so far managed to control sporadic domestic outbreaks through a combination of snap lockdowns, mass testing and travel restrictions, but the latest outbreak is testing the limits of its playbook. Top medical expert Zhang Wenhong said yesterday that China cannot relax its zero-COVID policy just yet despite the low fatality rate of Omicron. "It is very important for China to continue to adopt the strategy of community COVID-zero in the near future," Zhang wrote on social media. — AFP

Local

Kuwait 'not yet' affected by Ukraine war, wheat imported from Australia

KFMB assures strategic stocks for six months

By Nawara Fattahowa

KUWAIT: The Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused a food crisis in Iraq, Egypt and many other nations in the Middle East and North Africa dependent on wheat imports from these countries. The shortage of wheat supplies has led to a hike in prices, with people in many countries in the region facing shortages of bread.

Fortunately, Kuwait is not yet affected by this crisis, as wheat is imported from Australia. The Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company (KFMB), the sole importer of wheat, assured Kuwait has strategic stocks for six months. According to a PR officer at KFMB, Kuwait imports the best quality of wheat from Australia. "KFMB supplies flour to local bakeries. We import the wheat and grind it in our mills, that were

founded in 1961, into flour. The flour used for Arabic pita bread is different from that used to make bread in the West. We use top-quality wheat," she told Kuwait Times.

"Presently, there is no change in the prices of any of our products. But we don't know how the situation is going to develop in the future. We are a public company subjected to inspections and controlled by the ministry of commerce. We can't raise prices unless the country of origin increases their prices, for which we must also show proof," she added.

Kuwait also imports barley for animal feed. "KFMB also produces animal feed from barley at our factory. We are governed by global prices - fodder prices had risen a few months back, but now there is no expected increase. But again, the situation may change in the

future. We also have a strategic stock of barley for the next six months," she explained, adding she cannot reveal all the countries they import barley from, as this information is not public.

According to TradeArabia.com, Kuwait ranked first among Arab countries and 33rd globally with 70.7 points in the Global Food Security Index (GFSI 2020) developed by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). On the other hand, Kuwait imports at least 90 percent of its food needs from abroad, which makes it vulnerable to the risks, especially with regards to protectionist policies imposed by countries during crises or when obstacles hit global supplies.

The index highlights the importance of addressing core causes of food shortage through effective policies and establishing a stronger, resilient and sustainable global food security system.



The 113 countries included in the GFSI cover five regions - Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa and North America.



Kuwait PM receives Egyptian Speaker

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday received at Seif Palace the Egyptian Speaker of the House of Representatives Dr Hanafi Jabali and his accompanying delegation. His Highness the

Prime Minister's Diwan Chief Abdulaziz Al-Dakheel, His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Counselor Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah, and MP Dr Khaled Ayed Al-Enezi also attended the meeting. —KUNA

ALESCO selects Dr Suad Al-Sabah as Arab personality

KUWAIT: The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO) selected Poet Dr Suad Al-Sabah as the Arab personality for the International poetry day. The International poetry day is celebrated on March 21 every year as approved by UNESCO during its 30th conference that was held in Paris 1999 in order to support the linguistic variety. It is aimed

at giving languages that are threatened with extinction more opportunities to use it in expression.

The international day is an opportunity to recognize poets and revive the verbal tradition for poetry reciting nights. Ministers responsible for cultural affairs in the Arab world approved during their 19th meeting in Riyadh in 2015 that 21st March of each year will be the Arab poetry day.



Dr Suad Al-Sabah

Kuwait, GCC denounce missile attack on Irbil

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry has expressed terse condemnation of the missile attack that targeted the city of Irbil in Iraq's Kurdistan Region, inflicting "material and humanitarian losses." The ministry, in a statement, expressed solidarity of Kuwait with the brotherly Republic of Iraq, supporting measures it may take to safeguard its security and stability.

Meanwhile, GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf also condemned the "terrorist missile attack on Irbil". In a statement on Sunday, Al-Hajraf affirmed the GCC's support for Iraq in fighting terrorism and protect-

ing its peace and stability. Earlier, Kurdistan's Region Interior Ministry announced that Irbil was attacked with missiles, adding that there were some damage without casualties. Also, United Nations Assistant Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) vehemently denounced the missile attack targeting Iraqi governorate of Irbil, as the Iraqi Foreign Ministry considered it a breach of sovereignty. UNAMI, via a tweet, described the attack as heinous and urged Iraqis to stand together and face acts that violate Iraq's sovereignty, territorial integrity and aims to undermine its stability, and also demanded that perpetrators of this attack be held to account.

The Iraqi Foreign Ministry condemned the attack and called it a blatant breach of sovereignty and an act that terrorized civilians and destabilized the region in such a critical time, and called on Iraqi citizens to stand together in solidarity. The Iraqi security media cell announced that a number of missiles targeted Irbil governorate without identifying the source of such attacks. —KUNA



IRBIL: A handout picture released by the Iraqi Prime Minister's Media Office shows Premier Mustafa Al-Kadhemi (2nd right) and Prime Minister of the Regional Government of Iraqi Kurdistan Masrour Barzani (3rd right) visiting the site of a missile attack a day earlier in Irbil yesterday. Iran claimed responsibility for a missile strike on March 13, 2022 on the northern Iraqi city of Irbil, saying it targeted a Zionist 'strategic centre' and warning of more attacks. —AFP

GCC chief stresses support for humanitarian efforts

RIYADH: Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf stressed yesterday the GCC's firm position in supporting humanitarian and relief efforts.

This came during a meeting that grouped Dr Al-Hajraf with the Special Envoy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for Syria and Afghanistan, Emile de Bont, in Riyadh, said the GCC General Secretariat in a statement.

During the meeting, both sides discussed issues of mutual concern and ways to enhance the international cooperation in the humanitarian and relief sectors. The GCC, established in the early 80s of the past century, groups Saudi Arabia, Kuwait,



Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf seen with the Special Envoy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for Syria and Afghanistan. —KUNA

the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman. The regional bloc seeks closer cooperation among the member states at various levels. —KUNA

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Cabinet names Sheikh Nawaf Saud KPC Deputy Chairman

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet yesterday approved a bill appointing Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah as Deputy Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation. Dr Mohammad Al-Fares, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy said in a statement to KUNA that the bill also stipulated appointment of the KPC board members. Al-Fares, also the KPC Chairman, said in his statement after the Cabinet weekly session that the newly assigned board members are Assad Al-Saad, Munaf Al-Hajeri, Yousef Al-Gabandi and Fadhel Safar. —KUNA



Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah

NBK the Platinum Sponsor of GUST Career Fair



Emad Al-Ablani



Gadeer Al-Kooheji

KUWAIT: In line with its commitment to supporting young national talent and qualifying them to labor market, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) participated as the Platinum Sponsor of the career fair of private sector job opportunities for the Kuwaiti youth, organized by Gulf University of Science and Technology (GUST). The Fair, which was held with physical attendance for the first time since the outbreak of the pandemic, over two days (March 13 and 14), aims to open direct communication channels between private sector companies and job seekers, to provide suitable job opportunities for students and fresh graduates.

NBK Group Human Resources staff were present at the bank's booths to provide counsel to students about choosing the right future career for each of them, as well as to familiarize them with the nature of the banking business and guide them to the process of joining NBK. On this occasion, Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "NBK's vision and mission has always been to invest in local talent, which makes us the employer of choice for Kuwaiti talent."

"NBK enjoys a strong work environment culture and provides large support to its employees, as well as continuous unique opportunities for career

Ooredoo participates in GUST Career Fair

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, participated with a Diamond sponsorship in the two-day Gulf University for Science and Technology Career Fair in its 23rd year. The career fair was attended by a large number of private sector companies, in addition to representatives from the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program.

Ooredoo Kuwait was represented by Omar Al-Bassam, Chief Human Resources and Administration Services Officer, Eisa Al-Beshaier, Senior Director of Human Resources and Administration Services, Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director- Corporate Communications, Mishari Al-Abduljalil, Director High Value Community Segment, Nazem Yousef Al-Ghabra, Senior Manager-Public Relations, Internal Communications, Corporate Social Responsibility and Sponsorships and Abdullah Al-Khattaf, Public Relations and Internal Communications Specialist. Omar Al-Bassam was recognized by the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Nawaf Arhamah.

Ooredoo's Human Resources Department participated in the career fair by providing students with information about job descriptions and roles in the company's different departments and sectors, answering queries about job opportunities, job descriptions, career paths, in addition to introducing

Sabah Hospital successfully performs rare operation

'Hernias can be life threatening; symptoms must not be ignored'



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: General Surgery and Obesity Consultant at Sabah Hospital Dr Mohammad Al-Sulaimi said a operation on the diaphragm was conducted using advanced technology. He said the procedure was 100 percent successful, adding it was a rare case of Morgagni hernia, which is not widespread and affects only one percent of cases. He said the pro-

cedure involved a 52-year-old Kuwaiti who complained of weight loss, difficulty breathing and loss of appetite.

Dr Sulaimi said following an examination and CT scan, a hernia was detected in the diaphragm that required surgical intervention. He said the surgery took 90 minutes. The patient returned to hospital two weeks later and is in excellent condition. He said hernia in the diaphragm occurs when the



upper part of the stomach opens through the large muscle that separates the abdomen from the diaphragm, which has a small opening from which the esophagus goes through before reaching the stomach.

Dr Sulaimi warned that hernias can be life threatening if not treated and symptoms must not be ignored, adding they may cause other complications.



development. This includes training programs and practical experience, which aim to enable them develop their skills and expertise to be qualified leaders of the development of the banking sector in the future," he added.

Investing in local talent comes as part of the efforts to achieve NBK's goals related to the Kuwaitization policy, he noted. Al-Ablani stressed that NBK prides itself as a source of professional talent in the local market, thanks to its various training programs like NBK Academy and "Tamakan" career readiness program, which mainly target fresh graduates demonstrating special skills.

On her part, Gadeer Al-Kooheji, Recruitment Manager, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said: "The strategy of Group Human Resources Recruitment Team is to attract the best talent, serve the goals of the New Kuwait Vision 2035, and strive to increase the national labor ratio in the banking sector and support the national economy by attracting local talent."

Al-Kooheji emphasized that NBK's employment

policies are based on equal opportunities and gender diversity. In 2021, NBK continued to attract high-caliber talent, by recruiting 376 new employees, up by 3.09% compared to 2020, including 335 Kuwaitis, as national labor ratio stood at 74.6% as of end of 2021.

"GUST Career Fair is one of the key events that provide an opportunity for NBK to spread its work culture among students and fresh graduates, and encourage them to work in the private sector in general, particularly in the banking sector, by providing them with training programs qualifying them to navigate their way into the labor market," she pointed out.

NBK's efforts in soliciting national talents go in line with its development and training plans aimed to invest in national cadres and prepare a promising banking generation. The Bank also offers a number of training courses and professional academic programs, being one of the leading banking institutions in Kuwait in organizing training programs for the youth.

Kuwait assumes the G77+China chairmanship

ROME: Kuwait yesterday assumed chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China with the United Nations Organizations in Rome for the 2022 session—the second time Kuwait takes over leadership of the largest international entity. Yousef Al-Juhail, the permanent representative with the FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization, officially received the group chairmanship from the outgoing head of the body Carlos Chemiak of Argentina.

The chairmanship handover was conducted at a ceremony held at the Argentinean mission headquarters, with participation of chairpersons of FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Program and representatives of the group member states.

The outgoing chairman expressed gratitude to the Kuwaiti representative for his unlimited support during his service as deputy chairperson, where he shed light on problems of the developing nations in the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic that led to aggravating issues at the economic, social, health and nutritious levels. He underlined the group role for "improving livelihood of the peoples in the face of the development gaps among our countries that have widened due to the pandemic," also deepening issues such as poverty, hunger, water shortage and inequality.

For his part, Al-Juhail expressed pride for his election to the post where Kuwait will take charge of the group on behalf of the Near East and North Africa. He expressed confidence that "our group will enrich" the forthcoming conferences on climatic change, COP27 due in Egypt and COP28 that would be held in the UAE.

The newly-elected group chairman, Al-Juhail, called for re-examining strategies to pave way for "aiding our countries attain more effective and sustainable agricultural systems." Kuwait, during its mandate as chair of the group, will focus on pending issues namely the current geopolitical developments in Europe and their future impact on the regional food security and following up on recommendations by the UN on food, assessing successful projects and role of the private sector, he said. —KUNA



Eisa Al-Beshaier, Omar Al-Bassam, Mijbil Alayoub, Mishari Al-Abduljalil and Nazem Al-Ghabra pose for a group photo.

them to the different training and internship opportunities Ooredoo provides annually in collaboration with different entities.

Omar Al-Bassam, Chief Human Resources and Administration Services Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait reiterated the company's belief in the major role that the youth play in the future of our country. "We are proud to participate in the GUST Career Fair, which attracts a number of Kuwait's most talented fresh graduates and alumni who received extensive academic

education in a variety of fields. Our support for youth is deep-rooted within our strategy across the organization in Ooredoo.

Our aim is to help them discover their potential, open new horizons for the ambitious youth by giving them opportunities to apply their educational knowledge to the professional world." Al-Bassam added, "Ooredoo Kuwait has taken upon itself the responsibility of attracting, maintaining and encouraging national talents and developing their skills in light of the acceler-



Nawaf Arhamah honors Omar Al-Bassam

ating pace of digital transformation and technological change that the world is witnessing - especially in the telecommunications sector".

Ooredoo boasts a dynamic and fresh corporate culture where new ideas are nurtured, and everyone is given a fair chance to grow and maximize their potential. Ooredoo employees are always given opportunities to develop their skills and enhance their knowledge through extensive year-round training programs along with new challenges to develop their interests.



Shelling fails to shift last civilians from Kyiv's ghost suburb

Diplomats come under pressure from Taleban regime

Page 7

Page 6



BASTIA, France: Protesters throw projectiles during clashes with police following a rally in support to Corsican nationalist figure Yvan Colonna a week after he was attacked in prison, in Bastia, Corsica, on Sunday. — AFP

Riots in Corsica over jailed nationalist

France calls for calm; police among 67 wounded in clashes

BASTIA, France: The French government called for calm yesterday after fierce clashes left dozens of demonstrators and police injured on the island of Corsica, where anger over the assault in prison of a nationalist figure has reached boiling point. Police reported 67 people injured during protests on Sunday, including 44 police, following scenes that onlookers described as akin to urban guerrilla war.

"The overnight scenes were extremely violent," the chief prosecutor in the north Corsican town of Bastia, Arnaud Viornery, told AFP. Police had to deal with a "quasi-insurreccional" situation, according to a statement by their union, SG Police. Yvan Colonna is serving a life sentence for the assassination in 1998 of the top state official in Corsica, Claude Erignac. He has been in a coma since being beaten on March 2 in jail by a fellow detainee, a convicted jihadist.

The incident stoked anger on the island, where some see Colonna as a hero in a fight for independence from France. He was arrested in 2003 after a five-year manhunt that eventually found him living as a shepherd in the Corsican mountains.

Demonstrations and riots have been ongoing since

the prison attack, which protesters blame on the French government. "French government murderers", read placards at Sunday's demonstrations. An estimated crowd of between 7,000 and 12,000 people took to the streets.



'It looks like an urban guerrilla war'

Colonna was jailed in the south of France. He is classed as a special status detainee which prevents him from being transferred to a Corsican jail. In response to the unrest, Prime Minister Jean Castex has removed this status for Colonna and two other

convicts, but this has failed to placate their supporters. Hundreds of masked demonstrators hurled Molotov cocktails and rocks against police, who fired teargas and water cannon. Clashes broke out in the afternoon and lasted late into the evening.

Prosecutor Viornery said protesters were using homemade explosive devices filled with gunpowder, lead or nails. Police ordered people to stay indoors in Bastia where protesters set the tax office on fire with incendiary devices and damaged the inside of the main post office. On Monday, Bastia was calm, with no visible damage done to shops, according to AFP reporters.

Anger and indignation

Corsica, the birthplace of Napoleon Bonaparte and one of the Mediterranean's largest islands, has been French since the 18th Century. It is known as the "Island of Beauty" for its unspoiled coastlines, spectacular beaches and mild climate, which have made tourism its main source of income.

But there have also been constant tensions between independence-seeking nationalists and the

central government as well as murders between the island's political factions.

"There is an expression of anger and indignation," Gilles Simeoni, Colonna's former lawyer and a pro-independence politician, said on Sunday. "The entire Corsican people has been mobilized to protest against injustice and in favor of truth and a real political solution." One demonstrator at Sunday's protest, Antoine Negretti, said, "Any violence will be the fault of the French government."

Seven years of negotiations had yielded no result, the 29-year-old said. "But things have changed thanks to seven days of violence. Violence is necessary." French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said on Monday he will travel to Corsica on Wednesday for a two-day visit, seeking to "open a cycle of discussions" with all political forces on the island. He condemned the recent violence and called "for an immediate return to calm". An Ifop poll published Sunday in the local Corse-Matin newspaper found that 53 percent of those questioned favored a degree of autonomy for Corsica, with 35 percent favoring the island's outright independence from France. —AFP

Strong quakes rattle Indonesia, Philippines

MANILA: Strong and shallow earthquakes shook western Indonesia and the Philippines' main island early yesterday, rattling buildings and sending panicked residents fleeing, but causing no casualties or damage. In Indonesia, a 6.7-magnitude earthquake hit off the west coast of Sumatra island and in the Philippines, a 6.4-magnitude tremor struck 110 kilometers (68 miles) off Luzon island, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) said. Officials in both countries said there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage, and there was no tsunami threat from either quake.

The one off Indonesia hit at 4:06 am (2109 GMT) at a depth of 21 kilometers (13 miles), with its epicenter 167 kilometers west of Sumatra's Pariaman city. "The earthquake was strongly felt for one minute. Residents got panicked due to the geologi-

cal activity," said Indonesia's National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) in a statement. It was felt most strongly on North Sumatra's Nias and Hibala islands, which are not densely populated and where people often live in wooden houses.

Zagoto, a 50-year-old resident of South Nias who like most Indonesians goes by one name, said he rushed outside with his family when the earthquake hit the coastal area. "I was in deep sleep but the earthquake made me wide awake, it was so strong," Zagoto told AFP.

The Indonesian Meteorology and Geophysics Agency (BKMIG) said the initial tremor was followed by a series of strong aftershocks. In the Philippines, the offshore quake hit at 5:05 am (2105 GMT), with residents in the capital Manila woken by their buildings shaking. But the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said damage was not expected. "It's strong and it's shaking as if it's dancing sideways," said Lieutenant Aristotle Calayag, acting police chief of the Philippine town of Lubang in Occidental Mindoro, an island off Luzon. Indonesia and the Philippines sit on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", causing them to experience frequent earthquakes. —AFP

Indonesia quake



Source: USGS



Iran's FM to hold talks on nuclear deal in Moscow

TEHRAN: Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian will head to Moscow today, the ministry said, days after negotiations on an Iran nuclear deal stalled amid new Russian demands.

"Russia has made its official demands loud and clear, and this needs to be discussed among all parties to the 2015 agreement, like all the demands that have been presented by other parties," foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told reporters yesterday. "The foreign ministers of the parties (to the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal) are in constant contact", and Amir-Abdollahian "will go to Moscow on Tuesday to continue the discussions", Khatibzadeh added.

More than 10 months of talks in Vienna have brought major powers close to renewing the landmark 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on regulating Iran's nuclear program. But the negotiations were halted after Russia on March 5

demanding guarantees that Western sanctions imposed following its invasion of Ukraine would not damage its trade with Iran.

On March 11, the European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell tweeted that the pause was "due to external factors," despite the fact that "a final text is essentially ready and on the table".

Iran waiting on Washington

The United States then put the ball in Iran and Russia's courts after the EU announcement. "We are confident that we can achieve mutual return to compliance... (if) those decisions are made in places like Tehran and Moscow," State Department spokesman Ned Price said. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has dismissed as "irrelevant" the Russian demands for guarantees, saying that they "just are not in any way linked together".

But on Monday, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman repeated Tehran's position that the move had to come from the US. "The remaining issues and points between us and the United States need political decisions in Washington", Khatibzadeh said.

"If they (the US) announce that they have made a decision, then all the delegations can return to Vienna" to finalize an agreement, he said. "We are not



TEHRAN: Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh addresses a press conference in Tehran, yesterday. —AFP

at the point of announcing the agreement," he added. Russia and Iran have seen relations improve in recent years, and Moscow plays a central role in enforcing the 2015 pact, in particular by receiving excess enriched uranium from Tehran.

The JCPOA aimed to ensure Iran would not be able to develop a nuclear weapon, which it has always denied seeking. On Saturday, Britain, France and Germany warned against moves to "exploit" the JCPOA, seen as a tacit warning to Russia. —AFP

Musk challenges Putin to fight, with Ukraine as the prize

WASHINGTON: Put up your dukes, Vlad. Elon Musk, the world's richest man, yesterday challenged Russian President Vladimir Putin to a fight, with nothing less than the fate of Ukraine, scene of Moscow's brutal invasion, at stake. The eccentric billionaire and founder of aerospace company SpaceX took to Twitter, where his messages are notoriously erratic, to see whether the Russian leader would test his mettle in person rather than through his country's forces fighting across the border. "I hereby challenge Vladimir Putin to single combat. Stakes are Ukraine," said Musk.

"Do you accept this fight?" he added in Russian, directly addressing the official English-language Twitter account of the 69-year-old president. When one of Musk's 77 million followers wrote that the Tesla founder might not have thought his challenge through, Musk said he was "absolutely serious." "If Putin could so easily humiliate the west, then he would accept the challenge. But he will not," he added. There was no immediate reaction from the Kremlin.

The South African-born Musk, 50, had already offered his support for Kyiv, tweeting "Hold strong Ukraine" this month while also offering "my sympathies to the great people of Russia, who do not want this" war. He also responded to a Kyiv plea by activating the Starlink internet service in Ukraine and sending equipment to help bring connectivity to areas hit by Russian military attacks. Musk often raises eyebrows on Twitter. In February he accused the US stock market regulator, which had imposed fines and restrictions on Musk and Tesla, of trying to muzzle his free speech. —AFP



Elon Musk

International

Shelling fails to shift last civilians from Kyiv's ghost suburb of Irpin

'I won't go anywhere, what happens, happens, I'm too old'

IRPIN, Ukraine: Most of the citizens of Irpin, a once well-to-do commuter suburb of the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, have fled the Russian army's bombardment. The streets are dotted with rubble where Grad missiles have burst open high-rise apartment blocks and modest wood and brick bungalows.

Sometimes the empty streets are so silent that a woodpecker's tapping in a tall tree sounds more insistent than the distant guns. But sometimes there is the roar of racks of Grad missiles and volleys of mortar shells being launched nearby. It's more than Mykola Pustovit, 69, can take. He bursts into tears as he and his wife start the long walk to find relative safety in Kyiv.

They had hoped the frontline would move away from Irpin, "but now, after such bombing, it's unbearable". In fact, the frontline has not shifted for days. By the reckoning of Ukrainian soldiers manning checkpoints in the town, maybe 20-30 percent of the district is in Russian hands.

The next suburb, Bucha, a few hundred meters further north, is already in the hands of the invading Russian army and violence is never far away. As AFP reporters crossed a makeshift wooden bridge into Irpin early on Sunday, Ukrainian forces were shipping the corpses of three of their comrades back out.

Later in the day, a car carrying American jour-

nalists came under fire near a Ukrainian checkpoint, killing film-maker Brent Renaud and wounding photographer Juan Arredondo. After the incident, Irpin's mayor Oleksandr Markushyn banned reporters from the town, but before the restriction came into place AFP found some civilians not ready to leave.

'This one bites'

Iryna Morozova is clearly frightened, she raises her hands in surrender when AFP journalists approach, as if being held at gunpoint. Her house is badly damaged, lying next to another that was all but demolished by an apparent missile hit. But the 54-year-old can't leave; who would feed her dogs?

She has the keys to a neighbor's house where three excitable puppies, a placid Golden Retriever and a nervous German Shepherd, confined and circling in a kennel, have a

home. "This one bites, we closed him up in the cage. We found him, he was scared and was shaking," she says of the distressed dog. The others have the run of a garden, and play happily with visitors.

"They sleep there in the kitchen. They play during the day. How can you leave them?" Morozova asks. The few remaining neighbors look out for one another and take food to the elderly, but Morozova is more worried about the pets. "There's nothing left here," welling up in grief in front of a ruined home.



KYIV: An elderly woman leans on her walker as she stands outside a destroyed apartment building following shelling in the northwestern Obolon district of Kyiv yesterday. — AFP

"Now we collect stray animals and feed them, because people left them behind and moved away."

Another neighbor, 76-year-old Vera Tyskanova, retired to the once pleasant suburban street after a career as a train driver in the Tajik capital Dushanbe.

She has been without power since an air strike early in the war, late last month, and is also consoling herself by feeding neighborhood strays. "There's water, but no electricity. There's a fireplace in the

part of the house which is not ruined ... I'm surviving," she laughs.

She may be putting a brave face on things, but just around the corner 84-year-old Mykola Karpovych—who once drove a tractor in farmland near the then friendly Belarus border—is bewildered.

"Where would I go? My legs and my hands hurt," he tells AFP. "To leave? Where would I go? Shall we go to Kyiv? I won't go anywhere. What happens, happens. I'm too old." —AFP



Residents do not want to leave their pets and go



ISTANBUL: This handout photo taken and released Sunday by the Turkish presidential press service shows Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left) with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis (right) in Istanbul. — AFP

Greek, Turkish leaders seek common ground over Ukraine war

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis held talks in Istanbul on Sunday, seeking a rapprochement against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "The meeting focused on the benefits of increased cooperation between the two countries" in view of "the evolution of the European security architecture", the Turkish presidency said in a statement after two hours of talks.

"Despite the disagreements between Turkey and Greece, it was agreed... to keep the channels of communication open and to improve bilateral relations," the statement added, saying the two leaders discussed the conflict in Ukraine and their differences in the eastern Mediterranean.

"We are facing so many challenges at the moment... that the most important thing is to concentrate on what unites us rather than on what divides us," the Greek prime minister told journalists after the meeting. "We stressed the need to forge a positive agenda," Mitsotakis said.

The meeting between the leaders of the neighboring NATO members came as Ankara seeks to shore up its credentials as a regional power player by mediating in the conflict. Last Thursday, the Turkish resort city of Antalya hosted the first talks between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba since the start of Russia's invasion.

They failed to broker a ceasefire. The Turkish and Greek leaders met on Sunday mindful that the burgeoning conflict in Ukraine looms larger than the long-standing tensions between Athens and Ankara.

'The world is changing'

"From the standpoint of both countries, having a potentially new crisis between them would certainly be very unwanted at this particular point in time," Sinan Ulgen, president of the Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies in Istanbul, told AFP. The Aegean Sea neighbors and NATO allies entered a dangerous stand-off in 2020 over hydrocarbon resources and naval influence in the waters off their coasts. Mitsotakis then unveiled Greece's most ambitious arms purchase program in decades and signed a defense agreement with France, to Turkey's consternation.

Senior Turkish officials continue to question Greek sovereignty over parts of the Aegean Sea, but last year Ankara resumed bilateral talks with Athens. "Obviously, Turkey is pursuing a very clear wave of normalization with regional rivals, after several years of having pursued a sort of very assertive foreign policy and being regionally isolated," said Asli Aydintasbas, a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. "I think that both Turkish and Greek leaders understand that the world is changing and the European security order is challenged in ways they have not imagined three months ago," she added. — AFP

Report: Europe new 'hotspot' for arms imports

BRUSSELS: Europe saw the world's biggest rise in arms imports in the past five years, a trend set to accelerate following recent rearmament commitments amid the threat posed by Russia, researchers said yesterday. While arms exports declined globally by 4.6 percent in 2017-2021 compared to the preceding five years, Europe posted a 19-percent increase, according to a study published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

"Europe is the new hotspot", Siemon Wezeman, co-author of the annual report for over three decades, told AFP. "We are going to increase our military spending not just by a little bit but by a lot. We need new weapons and a lot of that will come from imports", the senior researcher said, adding that the majority was likely to come from other European countries and the US.

Germany in particular has already announced plans to up its military spending, as have Denmark and Sweden. European countries spooked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine are expected to beef up their militaries with fighter jets, such as the American

F-35, missiles, artillery and other heavy weapons.

"Most of these things take a bit of time. You have to go through the process, you have to decide, you have to order, you have to produce. This generally takes a couple of years at least", Wezeman said.

He said the upward trend actually started after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, with the effects visible now. Europe's share of the global arms trade has already risen from 10 to 13 percent in the past five years, and this share will increase "substantially", according to Wezeman.

The opaque nature of many contracts and donations of weapons without payment make it difficult to provide an exact figure for the world arms trade but experts estimate turnover at close to \$100 billion (91 billion euros) annually. According to SIPRI, Asia and Oceania remained the main importing region over the last five years, home to 43 percent of arms transfers and six of the world's largest importers: India, Australia, China, South Korea, Pakistan and Japan.

While arms imports to the world's most populous region declined by



ISTANBUL: This file photo shows a woman looking at an armed military vehicle during the opening day of the 13th International Defense Industry Fair (IDF) in Istanbul. — AFP

around five percent over the past five years, East Asia and Oceania specifically saw strong growth, with 20 and 59 percent respectively. "Tensions between China and many states in Asia and Oceania are the main driver of arms imports in the region," the report's authors said in a statement.

Russian isolation

In the Middle East, the second-largest market, accounting for 32 percent of global arms imports, the increase was three percent, driven mainly by investments in Qatar amid tensions with its Gulf neighbors. "The current oil prices mean they're going

to have a lot of income and that usually translates into large orders for arms", Wezeman noted.

The Americas and Africa, meanwhile, have seen their imports decline sharply, by 36 and 34 percent respectively, accounting for about six percent of global arms imports each.

In terms of individual countries, India and Saudi Arabia share the top spot as the largest importers, each accounting for 11 percent, ahead of Egypt (5.7 percent), Australia (5.4 percent) and China (4.8 percent). When it comes to exporting countries, the US leads the pack with 39 percent. — AFP

Chinese media echoes Russia on Ukraine war

BEIJING: As Western sanctions on Moscow mount following its invasion of Ukraine, Chinese media tells a story to domestic readers that avoids blaming Russia and portrays sympathy for President Vladimir Putin's perspective. Beijing has refused to support nor condemn its close ally Moscow, while blaming the United States and NATO's "eastward expansion" for worsening tensions.

It is a view that reverberates across state newspapers and television—as well as social media—in China's tightly controlled news environment. When Putin announced an assault on Ukraine on February 24, China's official Xinhua news agency maintained it was a "military operation" and Moscow had "no intent" of occupying Ukrainian territory.

Days later, state broadcaster CCTV echoed a false Russian claim that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had left Kyiv—a story quickly repeated by other domestic outlets.

Some Chinese reports also state that there has been a surge of "neo-Nazi" ideology among the Ukrainian army and people, a claim supported by Putin.

A directive to a state-affiliated outlet, circulating online last month, appeared to instruct that posts unfavorable to Russia or containing pro-Western content should not be published.

State media reports on Ukraine avoid terms like "invasion", instead describing the situation as a "conflict" or "fighting". "This is not a struggle to find the right message," Justyna Szczudlik, China analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs, told AFP. "China purposely uses very vague language," she added, noting that this was to reduce diplomatic risks in its relations with Western countries. Officials, too, have rebuffed the term "invasion" when questioned by foreign journalists—accusing them of biased reporting—while giving the contradictory statements that China respects every country's sovereignty but won't take sides.

Censorship and nationalism

A fierce condemnation of war at the opening of the Winter Paralympic Games in Beijing was not translated on Chinese TV. And rights holders of the



KYIV: A woman reacts as she stands outside destroyed apartment blocks following shelling in the northwestern Obolon district of Kyiv yesterday. — AFP

English Premier League did not air matches a weekend earlier in March, knowing players were expected to show solidarity with Ukraine.

Under the barrage of China's support, netizens have been showing sympathy for Russia.

Pro-Putin hashtags have been allowed to proliferate on China's Twitter-like Weibo, along with admiring comments about how daring he is and

calls for Ukrainians to surrender.

In contrast, articles about state media embracing Russian propaganda were removed as "false information". "As with every country, China... considers its own security interests above all else," said Richard Ghiassy, an expert at the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

"In that security calculation, stable and predictable ties with Russia are absolutely pivotal," he added. — AFP

UK airlifts 21 Ukrainian kids for cancer care

LONDON: More than 20 Ukrainian children with cancer have been airlifted to the UK, the government said yesterday, as an appeal began for Britons to take in refugees in their homes.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid said the 21 children had been receiving treatment in Ukraine but were

forced to leave their homes because of Russia's invasion. They are now being given "life-saving" care by the state-run National Health Service (NHS) and have been accompanied by their carers, he told Sky News television. The government in London has been criticized for insisting that those fleeing the conflict and wanting to join family in the UK have to apply for visas to be able to travel.

Its insistence on security checks and visas has earned it unfavorable comparisons with the European Union, which has allowed Ukrainians visa-free stays for up to three years.

As of Saturday, "just over 3,000" visas had been granted under a UK scheme for family members,

Javid told Times Radio. Yesterday the government launches its "Homes for Ukraine" programme, which aims to allow "tens of thousands" of Ukrainians without family ties to stay in the UK.

Hosts will be given 350 pounds (\$457, 418 euros) a month and have to commit to housing refugees for a minimum of six months, senior minister Michael Gove said on Sunday. But additional overheads could prove problematic: Britons are grappling with the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation, as energy bills and inflation soar. Javid said the sick children, who arrived in the UK from Poland on Sunday evening, were initially given six-month visas but will be allowed to stay "as long as necessary". — AFP

International

Diplomats come under growing pressure from Taliban regime

Afghanistan's foreign embassies struggling to stay afloat

ISLAMABAD: Afghan embassies around the world that have refused to recognize the new Taliban regime are struggling to stay afloat and facing increasing pressure from Kabul to accept loyalist replacements. None of the country's 60 or so ambassadors, consuls or heads of diplomatic missions who were appointed by Western-backed former president Ashraf Ghani have agreed to serve the hardline Islamist group since it seized power in August last year. The Taliban government has yet to be formally recognized by any nation, and the international community is grappling with how to deal with the country's new rulers while also helping Afghans face an economic and humanitarian crisis.



Afghans endure humanitarian, economic crisis

"We are in a very unfortunate ... situation, but we still have to continue to operate in these difficult circumstances," said Yousuf Ghafoorzai, the ambassador to Norway. "The embassies still have a very important role to play in terms of trying to increase whatever humanitarian support is possible. But also (to help) discussions on the political track... to stabilize the situation."

Aid and cash reserves, frozen by the United States and the international community after the Taliban seized control, are trickling back into the country, which has long depended almost entirely on donors.

But Ghafoorzai and his colleagues have had no contact with the new regime, and staff have not been paid for months. The Afghan embassy and its consulates in the United States are being shut in the coming week.

"The Afghan Embassy and consulates are under severe financial pressure. Their bank accounts are not available to them," a US State Department official told AFP.

The embassy and Washington have made arrangements for an "orderly shutdown of operations in a way that would protect and preserve all diplomatic mission property in the United States until operations are able to resume," the official said. Across the world, Afghan ambassadors have been forced to dramatically scale down their activities, reduce energy bills and food costs, and even move into smaller premises. They have also increased consular fees to generate revenue. "The embassy is not receiving any funding or financial assistance from Kabul," Farid Mamundzay, the ambassador in New Delhi, told AFP.

"In the absence of the required financial support and depletion of resources, we have not been able to pay the staff salaries for months and had to downsize the strength and reduce the expenditure of the mission to the lowest." It is not clear how long visas, certificates and other documents issued by the holdout embassies will be recognized—either by the Taliban or the international community.

New passports issued in Kabul still refer to the country as the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, instead of the Taliban's preferred "Emirate", but officials have warned foreign journalists arriving with visas issued independently by the Dubai embassy that they may not be honored in future.

Squeezed out

In a handful of countries near Afghanistan, some ambassadors have left their posts or been pushed out by the Taliban, who have inserted their own representatives—but even the replacements face hardship. In Pakistan, salaries have not been paid since September. Employees live on income from visa and passport renewal fees and marriage certificates, said a source at the consulate in Peshawar, near the Afghan border.

The new consul general appointed by the Taliban



NEW DELHI: In this file photo taken on August 17, 2021, security personnel stand guard outside the Afghan embassy in New Delhi. — AFP

receives just 50,000 rupees (\$280) a month compared with the nearly \$5,000 his predecessor made, the source added. The Taliban made Pakistan, long accused of aiding their cause, the first country to which they sent a new representative. In Beijing, the ambassador resigned when a senior diplomat loyal to the Taliban was appointed to the embassy, which he is now unofficially leading. The Taliban have also managed to impose their men in Uzbekistan and Iran. Russia, meanwhile, said it was ready to accept "two or three" new diplomats, but that they would not take the place of the current ambassador.

'Threats and intimidation'

The Taliban did not respond to AFP's requests for comment, but they have previously claimed to largely have control over Afghan embassies. However, they

have failed to have one of their top spokesmen, Suhail Shaheen, accredited as ambassador to the United Nations, with the General Assembly indefinitely postponing a vote on the matter.

In Rome, Italian police had to intervene after a scuffle between the Afghan ambassador and a recently dismissed pro-Taliban diplomat who claimed he had been given the top job. "There have been threats, intimidation and violence in some of our missions by disgruntled ex-employees that are ideologically pro-Taliban," said Khaled Zekriya, the ambassador in Rome. "The Taliban administration tried to persuade our embassy to work on their behalf, but I said no. My answer will stay the same until an inclusive representative government will be established in Afghanistan, where the Taliban will be a part, not the only part, of this government." —AFP

Yangon residents queue for water as blackouts bite

YANGON: Clutching pails, tubs and buckets, residents of Myanmar's bustling commercial capital Yangon queued for water yesterday, as rolling power outages aggravate the economic misery sparked by last year's military coup. Last week the junta announced the country's already patchy power supply would be further reduced for seven days, blaming rising gas prices and attacks by anti-coup fighters on infrastructure.

The increasing outages see homes and businesses in Yangon, home to some seven million people, plunge regularly into darkness and leaving many unable to draw water to their homes. "We can use charcoal for cooking but we can't live without water," said Ko Aung as he queued with around 30 others next to a water bowser visiting his northeastern neighborhood in the city.

"Even if there is electricity, without water from the system, we can't cook anything," said the 40-year-old. Power outages are common in Myanmar thanks to a creaky and outdated electricity grid, with demand regularly outstripping supply during the sweltering summer months. —AFP



YANGON: People line up to fill containers with water in Yangon yesterday as thousands of people faced water shortages due to power outages in the city. — AFP

Mali bans civilians from border area in Mauritania tensions

BAMAKO: Mali says it has banned civilians from a border area where the disappearance of citizens from Mauritania-blamed by social media on Malian troops—has stoked tensions between the two neighbors. In a statement late Sunday issued after Mali dispatched envoys to Mauritania, government spokesman Colonel Abdoulaye Maiga announced, "The military authorities have decided to strictly forbid any movement by civilians in the Wagadou forest and Gringale forest zones."

Social media in Mauritania have accused the Malian army of killing civilians in a border area south of Adel Bagrou, a town in the southeast of the country. Mauritania's government has accused the army of "recurring criminal acts", but not given further details. A high-level Malian delegation was in Nouakchott, the Mauritanian capital, on Friday and Saturday in a bid to ease friction. The two sides agreed to set up a joint investigation into the disappearances and set up joint patrols in the border area.

Maiga, in his statement, said the Wagadou and Gringale zones lay in an area where the Malian military



TAOYUAN, Taiwan: Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (center) checks a rifle while inspecting reservists training at a military base in Taoyuan on Sunday. — AFP

Taiwan military reservists train under cloud of war

TAIPEI: Hundreds of Taiwanese military reservists carried out training exercises yesterday after the island's president called for "unity" as the Ukraine war rattles nerves over the threat of invasion from China. Taiwan last year stepped up its training regime for reservists as tensions rise with Beijing, which sees the self-ruled island as part of its territory to be seized one day, by force if necessary.

About 400 personnel took part in target practice yesterday in a program designed to boost their combat readiness. Their training kicked off earlier this month and simulates defending a beach near the capital Taipei. It comes as Taipei keeps a close watch on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with President Tsai Ing-wen appearing in front of the reservists on Saturday stressing the need for

had been conducting anti-jihadist operations since December. But, reiterating Mali's previous positions, Maiga said that the army had had nothing to do with the disappearances. "On the basis of technological evidence, it emerges that no FAMA (Malian armed forces) patrol was present in the zone at the dates given," he said. "At present no evidence supports incriminating our courageous FAMA."

Two separate incidents

Separately, the prosecutor to the military court in Bamako, the Malian capital, announced that an investigation into the disappearances would be carried out by gendarmes. The statement did not give further details—two series of disappearances have been reported, in January and early March.

The authorities had previously promised to investigate the disappearances in January, but any outcome from that probe has not been made public. A Mauritanian MP says at least 15 people had been killed, while unverified voice recordings on social media quote witnesses as blaming the Malian army for the disappearance of as many as 30. Mali and Mauritania are key countries in the poor and troubled Sahel region of West Africa. The military junta in Bamako seized power in August 2020, toppling elected president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita after a wave of public protests over his handling of a jihad insurgency. The country's poorly equipped armed forces are struggling with jihadist insurgents, ethnic violence and criminal gangs. Allegations of abuse by troops are common. —AFP

unity in defending the island. "The recent situation in Ukraine once again proves that the protection of the country, in addition to international solidarity and assistance, depends on the unity of the people," she said in a speech while dressed in military fatigues and body armor. Major General Chen Chung-chi, director of Taiwan's 6th Army Command, stressed the importance of reservists in addition to full-time troops.

"The security of the whole country does not just depend on the soldiers," he told AFP yesterday. "In Ukraine, we see soldiers in the battlefield, and some men... who go to battle after sending their wives and children to safety." "Military power is limited but the power of the people is unlimited." Reservist Shi Hui-bin said the immersion training kept him prepared and up to date with current military tactics.

"When the time comes, I will know what to do," he told reporters after a round of shooting practice.

China's saber-rattling against Taiwan has ramped up since Tsai took office in 2016 as she rejects Beijing's view that Taiwan is part of "one China". Chinese warplanes have increasingly breached Taiwan's air defense zone and Moscow sides with Beijing that Taiwan is "an inalienable part" of China. —AFP

Mother Teresa's former secretary to lead saint's Indian order

KOLKATA: Mother Teresa's former secretary has been named the new head of the Indian charity founded by the Catholic saint, officials said yesterday, months after the organization's funding came under government scrutiny.

Sister Joseph Michael is the third person to helm the Missionaries of Charity since the 1997 death of the revered nun and Nobel Peace Prize laureate who dedicated her life to helping the poor in Kolkata.

Members of the religious order from 110 countries gathered in the megacity to elect their new leader during a weekend prayer retreat, spokeswoman Sunita Kumar told AFP. The new superior general of the charity "has been with the organization for a long time and was Mother Teresa's secretary for years," Kumar said. Her predecessor, Sister Prema, had served in the role since 2009 and had recently asked to stand down on account of poor health. Sister Prema's departure comes after the Indian government threatened to cut off foreign funding to the charity on Christmas Day last year, before backpedaling two weeks later. —AFP

News in brief

Kenya arrests alleged ringleader

NAIROBI: Kenyan police said yesterday they had arrested the suspected ringleader behind an assault on a female diplomat that sparked outrage and protests in the East African country. The young woman was attacked in daylight by a gang of motorcycle taxi riders—commonly known as boda-boda—after a traffic accident in the capital Nairobi earlier this month, police said. Sixteen riders were rounded up last week after a viral video showed men grabbing at the woman's clothing and groping her as she screamed for help from inside the car, whose door had been forced open. —AFP

13 gendarmes killed in Burkina Faso

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso: Gunmen killed at least 13 gendarmes in an ambush Sunday at Taparko, a mining town in Burkina Faso, the latest in a series of attacks in the north of the country. "A team from the gendarmerie at Dori fell into an ambush set by armed individuals this afternoon near Taparko," a security source told AFP. As well as the 13 confirmed dead, a number of other gendarmes were missing, the source added. Another security source said reinforcements had been called in and were searching the sector for eight missing gendarmes. —AFP

Greek PM tests COVID positive

ATHENS: Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis yesterday said he had tested positive for Covid-19 after returning from a trip to Turkey. "The daily rapid test at the office gave a positive result to Covid-19," Mitsotakis said in an Instagram post. "I will isolate at home and work from there... I am certain all will be well and that I'll be back at the office very soon," the 54-year-old said. Mitsotakis, who is double vaccinated and has had a booster against COVID, on Sunday visited Turkey and was invited to lunch by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at his mansion on the banks of the Bosphorus. —AFP

Tongan PM tests COVID positive

SYDNEY: Tongan prime minister Siaosi Sovaleni has tested positive for COVID-19, his office said yesterday, as his Pacific island nation continues its recovery from a devastating volcanic eruption and tsunami. While Tonga was able to remain COVID-free for much of the pandemic, cases began to rise soon after international aid ships from Australia and New Zealand arrived in the wake of a powerful January 15 tsunami, which claimed at least three lives. There have since been 1,032 COVID-19 cases in Tonga with no deaths recorded as yet, according to the World Health Organization. —AFP

NY police seek gunman

NEW YORK: Police in New York have appealed to the public to help identify a man who shot at least two homeless people Saturday, killing one of them as he slept on the street. "The cases are clear and horrific," said Mayor Eric Adams, a former police officer, as he urged any witnesses to come forward. A shooter first fired on a 38-year-old man in Lower Manhattan early Saturday, wounding but not killing him, investigators said. Then, shortly before 5:00 pm (2200 GMT), police in the same neighborhood found the lifeless body of another man in a sleeping bag. He had been shot in the head and neck. —AFP

Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2022

KIPCO announces intent to merge with Qurain Petrochemical Industries

Combined entity would create greater value for shareholders: Group CEO

KUWAIT: Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) has announced reaching a preliminary agreement to merge by amalgamation with Qurain Petrochemical Industries Company (QPIC). The two companies signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) whereby they agreed to assess the merger proposition. As per the MoU agreement, KIPCO shall be the merging entity and QPIC shall be the merged entity.

The merger is subject to a detailed process as per Kuwaiti laws and regulations. This includes due diligence, valuation of both entities and fairness opinion by licensed independent advisors, in addition to regulatory approvals and the approval of stakeholders including the Extraordinary

General Assembly of both parties. The merger proposition combines the two companies to form a larger investment holding that would rank among the largest in the MENA region.

Furthermore, the combined entity would benefit from a balanced and diversified portfolio of assets that includes petrochemical and oil services, banking, foodstuff, insurance and others. This creates a more stable income stream. Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, KIPCO's Group Chief Executive Officer, said: "Looking ahead, we see an opportunity to create a stronger investment holding company that would capitalize on operational synergies between KIPCO and QPIC. The combined entity would have the ability

to pursue opportunities in new sectors and continue to support the growth of its existing portfolio, thereby creating greater value for all of the shareholders."

Sadoun Ali, QPIC's Vice Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, said: "At QPIC, we always look for opportunities to create better value for our shareholders. This has proven true through our policy of revenue diversification, which has reflected positively on our growth in past years. This may also be the case in this potential opportunity, once the independent investment advisor's report is completed, as per the requirements of the Capital Markets Authority and related authorities in Kuwait."



Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah



Sadoun Ali

Russia says West trying to push it into default

MOSCOW: Russia accused the West yesterday of seeking to push it into an "artificial default" through unprecedented sanctions over Ukraine, but vowed to meet its debt payments. Russia is due to make an interest payment on its external debt later this week and Moscow warned it will be doing so in rubles if sanctions prevent it from using the currency of issue.

"The freezing of foreign currency accounts of the Bank of Russia and of the Russian government can be regarded as the desire of a number of foreign countries to organise an artificial default that has no real economic grounds," Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said in a statement.

Ratings agency Fitch last week downgraded Russia's sovereign debt rating deeper into junk territory, warning that the decision reflects the view that a default is "imminent". But Siluanov denied that Russia "cannot fulfil the obligations" of its government debt.

Ready to pay

He said Russia "is ready to make payments in rubles" according to the exchange rate of Russia's central bank on the day of the payment. While Russia's foreign currency government bonds issued since 2018 do contain provisions for repayment in rubles, that is not the case for the combined \$117 million in interest payments on two dollar-denominated bonds tomorrow. Russia tumbled into default in 1998 when, thanks to a drop in the prices of oil and other commodities, it faced a financial squeeze that meant it could no longer prop up the ruble and pay off its debts which had swelled due to the first war in Chechnya.

The plunge in the value of the ruble, a spike in inflation and bank collapses caused widespread misery and were seen as helping President Vladimir Putin's rise to power. Putin had worked on improving Russia's finances by keeping debt low and using windfall oil export revenue to amass \$600 billion foreign currency reserves. But sanctions on Moscow over its "special military operation" in Ukraine, targeted \$300 billion of Russia's foreign currency reserves held abroad. Without access to these funds to make payments, Russia could find itself forced to default.

Another ratings agency, Moody's, warned last week that investors could face losses of 35 to 65 percent in case of a default but "the unpredictability of government actions to date increases the risk of higher losses". "Russia's ability and willingness to honor debt obligations has steadily deteriorated since the start of the military conflict," it said.

Unique situation

"It is a unique situation where the sanctioning party will be the deciding factor on Russia's 2022 default," said Elina Ribakova, deputy chief economist at the Washington-based Institute of International Finance. She noted that the US Treasury could unlock part of Russia's foreign currency reserves to enable payment of the bondholders, who are mostly from countries which have imposed sanctions. If Russia fails to make the bond payment, an automatic 30-day grace period kicks in and after its expiry it would be considered in default. International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva said Sunday that the while Russia has money to pay its debt, it "cannot access it". "I can say that no longer we think of Russian default as an improbable event," Georgieva told the CBS show Face the Nation.

The Western sanctions on Moscow over Ukraine have delivered an unprecedented blow to Russia's banking and financial system and will likely lead major disruptions in trade and inflation. To stave off a default Russia has boosted efforts to prevent money from leaving its borders and to support the ruble, which has already seen a precipitous drop in value against the dollar.

This includes a measure allowing Russian firms to make payments on debts sanctioning countries in rubles. Amid piling sanctions, a flurry of Western companies—from H&M to Ikea—have suspended their business operations in Russia. There are growing fears Russian authorities may try to "nationalize" or seize the assets of the local subsidiaries. —AFP

First war of TikTok era sees tragedy, humor and deceit

KYIV: Heart-rending videos of artillery strikes are being served up alongside funny snippets such as bomb-shelter cooking tips and invasion misinformation as the war in Ukraine plays out on TikTok.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine, millions of people have tuned into the hugely popular social networking service for news and views of what is happening on the battleground. That was not lost on US officials who hosted a video call to brief popular TikTok "influencers" on details about the war, according to posts at the social network.

"Lots of people have been turning to digital creators to learn about the invasion of Ukraine," read a tweet Friday by Gen-Z for Change, a nonprofit focused on using social media to promote civil discourse.

"Yesterday, we joined the @WhiteHouse and @WHNSC for a briefing on the United States' strategic goals in Ukraine so we're better able to debunk misinformation," it added, referring to the White House National Security Council. After Russia invaded Ukraine, music-themed video clips at Marta Vasyuta's account gave way to images of soldiers and the ravages of war.

Stuck in London, the 20-year-old Ukrainian exchange student uses TikTok to share glimpses of the tragedy inflicted on people still in her home country.

"My mission is to spread information; to not stop talking about that, because it really matters," said the economics student from Lviv whose videos have logged millions of views.

Valeria Shashenok stayed in the city of Chernigiv northeast of Kyiv and switched to English to broaden the reach of her sometimes surreal wartime TikTok posts. In one, she shows how to cook borscht in a bomb shelter. In another, she walks through rubble to a Rihanna music remix. The 20-year-old photographer is among those who have not given up on the playful nature of videos considered a trademark of TikTok, which boasts more than a billion users.

"I try to keep the humor, because it is my nature," said 23-year-old TikTok creator Rimma, who asked for her second name to be withheld. "I'm living through this trauma: my life is ruined, and there is nothing left for me but irony." Her TikToks include a clip of her in a basement in Odessa, quipping that Ukrainians' idea of going for a walk is now a jaunt to the nearest shelter.

She said the line between what is funny and what is hurtful is no longer clear, given the suffering and fear afflicting so many. But the appetite for wartime content at TikTok appears strong, with Vasyuta and Shashenok seeing subscriber ranks multiply at their accounts.

Youthful sass

While breaking news events such as conflicts have been featured on social media for years, TikTok tends to feature spontaneity and a bit of sass that has proven particularly popular with younger audiences. In the United States—where members of "Gen Z," born in the late 1990s, shun traditional television—online platforms like TikTok are prime sources of news.



TARANTO: A view shows the refinery of Italian multinational oil and gas company ENI on March 9, 2022 in Taranto, southern Italy. —AFP

IMF in Sri Lanka to discuss worsening economic crisis

COLOMBO: An IMF delegation was in Sri Lanka yesterday for talks on the island's worsening economic crisis, with the public suffering through months of food, fuel and medicine shortages. A lack of foreign currency has left traders unable to pay for vital imports in what authorities concede is the South Asian nation's worst financial crisis since independence from Britain in 1948.

Long queues outside gas stations and rolling blackouts have become the norm, while record inflation has caused serious hardship among the island's 22 million people by repeatedly pushing up the cost of groceries, transport and pharmaceuticals. A senior staffer from the International Monetary Fund "will hold talks" with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother, finance minister Basil Rajapaksa, a spokesman for the leader told AFP. Sri Lanka's government is divided on seeking a bailout, but the international lender said it was "ready to discuss options if requested" in a Monday statement.

The IMF warned earlier this month that the country's \$51 billion foreign debt was "unsustainable", and called for a currency devaluation and higher taxes to revive its almost bankrupt economy.

Sri Lanka last week allowed the rupee to float, a move that saw the currency nosedive 25 percent against the dollar and triggered a fresh wave of price increases.

Fuel costs have risen by nearly 80 percent since early February while food prices rose by a quarter according to January figures. The coronavirus pandemic hammered the South Asian island's tourism sector—a key foreign exchange earner. Sri Lanka needs nearly \$7 billion to service its foreign debt this year, but the country's external reserves at the end of January were just over \$2 billion—enough to finance one month of imports. International ratings agencies have downgraded Sri Lanka over expectations it may not be able to repay its borrowings, though the government insists it will. —AFP



"I hope that the kids who watch this war unfold on TikTok become opposed to war (and) realize the horrors and dangers of it," said US high school history teacher Chris Dier, who is also a TikTok creator.

"What I don't want is for it to desensitize them and normalize war."

Young TikTok users are also "bombarded" with propaganda that they likely need help navigating, said Dier. TikTok told AFP that it has ramped up resources to detect and counter "emerging threats" and "harmful disinformation" on the platform.

On March 6, the subsidiary of China-based ByteDance suspended the uploading of videos in Russia in reaction to a new law making it a crime to "discredit" the Russian military.

The flow of pro-Russian messages has noticeably declined at TikTok, with the most popular account being state-backed news agency RIA Novosti, which is known for false or discredited claims, such as the alleged existence of secret bioweapons labs in Ukraine. —AFP

Blast hits Nigeria Eni oil pipeline, cuts exports

YENAGOA, Nigeria: A blast has hit an oil pipeline run by Italian producer Eni in southern Nigeria, cutting some exports and causing a crude spill, its local operating company said yesterday. Eni, the parent of Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC), said the explosion hit its facility in Nembe in Bayelsa State and cut exports from its Brass terminal by 25,000 barrels per day (bpd).

Eni did not give more details on the blast, but vandalism, sabotage and theft from Nigeria's southern oilfields and pipelines are very common. The oil company said it was the second in a few days after an earlier incident on February 28 at its Obama flow station led to a production shortfall of 5,000 bpd.

NAOC declared force majeure on expected oil output at the terminal, gas feeds to Bonny NLNG plant and Okpai Power Plant. "An incident occurred on the Ogoda/Brass 24" oil line, at Okparatubo in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

"The event was caused by a blast, consequently causing a spill."

It said wells connected to the pipeline were immediately shut-in whilst river

booms and containment barges were mobilized to reduce the impact of the spill. National Oil Spills Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) confirmed inspections of the two incidents, but said details were still not available.

NOSDRA director Idris Musa said the two incidents were traced to vandalism, with 20 barrels leaked in the Feb 28 incident while nearly 1,250 barrels—the equivalent of 166 tonnes—were discharged in the second incident. Residents at fishing settlements who operate in the creeks and near the Atlantic shoreline at Nembe and Brass in Bayelsa criticized the impact of frequent spills in the area.

Noel Ikonikumo, Chairman of the local United Fishing Union listed several recent oil spills that have polluted waters, including the November 5 well blowout in Nembe, and a gas leakage at Sangana in Brass area. "Whenever there is a spill, our nets and other fishing gears get soaked in crude and get condemned because you can no longer use them as the smell of crude scares fish away," he said.

"We have written to the companies concerned to see reason with us and assist us but have not got any response." —AFP



COLOMBO: People queue to buy Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinders following shortages of essentials, in Colombo yesterday. —AFP

Business

Germany to buy dozens of US fighter jets in spending spree

Modernization of armed forces in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine

BERLIN: Germany plans to buy up to 35 US-made F-35 fighter jets and 15 Eurofighter jets, a parliamentary source said yesterday, as part of a major push to modernize the armed forces in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The F-35 jets made by Lockheed Martin would replace Germany's decades-old Tornado fleet, according to media reports confirmed by the source.

Tornados are the only Luftwaffe planes capable of carrying US nuclear bombs stationed in Germany that are a key part of NATO deterrence. Lockheed's F-35 stealth jets are considered the most modern combat aircraft in the world, and their unique shape and coating make them harder to detect by enemy radar. The additional Eurofighter jets Germany plans to purchase, made by a consortium that includes Airbus, would reportedly be used for other operations, including escort missions and electronic warfare like jamming enemy air defense systems. In a landmark speech late last month, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz pledged to invest an extra 100 billion euros (\$112 billion) in the nation's chronically underfunded Bundeswehr armed forces.

The spending boost marks a major reversal for Europe's top economy, upending its policy of keeping a low military profile in part out of guilt over World War II. After years of criticism that the country wasn't shouldering enough of the financial burden in the NATO military alliance, Scholz also vowed to spend "more than two percent" of Germany's gross domestic product annually on defense, surpassing NATO's own two-percent target. The shift was prompted by the return of war to the European continent following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, shaking Germany's sense of security and shining a harsh spotlight on the state of its

armed forces. A draft budget for 2022 unveiled on Monday confirmed Germany's spending ambitions.

If approved by parliament, the budget will see Berlin spending more than 50 billion euros this year on defense, a government source said, calling it a "record high". The amount comes on top of Scholz's promised "special fund" of 100 billion euros to upgrade the armed forces over the coming years.

Setback

The F-35 purchase however raises questions about the future of a common European fighter jet being developed with Spain and France. Known as the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), the plane is slated to replace French-made Rafale jets and German and Spanish Eurofighter planes by 2040. Scholz sought to allay fears that the project might become unnecessary in February's speech, by saying the joint European project was an "absolute priority". But the Bundeswehr has to replace its 40-year-old Tornado fleet in the short term because it has become "obsolete", Scholz added. Germany's planned jet deal is also bad news for US aviation giant Boeing, whose F-18 fighters were considered a frontrunner to replace the Tornados. While cheaper than F-35s, the F-18 would have had to have been recertified to be able to transport atomic warheads. There was no immediate indication of the price tag on Germany's new combat jet plans. But Finland ordered 64 F-35A jets in December, in a deal worth 8.4 billion euros.

International demand

Germany's Scholz-led government, which replaced Angela Merkel's cabinet in December, re-committed to



BERLIN: Germany said its plans to buy up to 35 US-made F-35 fighter jets and 15 Eurofighter jets, a parliamentary source said yesterday. — AFP

finding a successor to the Tornado in its coalition pact. The coalition is made up of Scholz's Social Democrats, the Greens and the pro-business FDP. Days after Russia launched its first attack on Ukraine, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, who chairs the parliament's defense committee, said the Tornado issue needed to be resolved urgently. The war in Ukraine has shown "that attacks are being carried out from the air and must be responded to accordingly", the FDP lawmaker was quoted as saying by German media.

The F-35 program has in the past been plagued by cost overruns and technical issues, but the multi-role supersonic jets have since become increasingly sought after by US allies. As well as supplying the US armed forces, Lockheed has contracts with 14 countries including Britain, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Poland. On its website, Lockheed describes the "long-range, highly manoeuvrable" F-35 as "the most lethal" fighter aircraft ever built. — AFP



PARANAGUA, Brazil: In this file photo, maize grains are loaded on a ship to be exported, at the port of Paranaguá, Paraná, southern Brazil. Brazil, one of the largest crop producers in the world, expects to increase its maize exports after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but fears that the conflict could make it difficult for it to import fertilizers. — AFP

Agriculture giant Brazil nervously eyes Ukraine war

BRAZILIA: Agricultural powerhouse Brazil is nervously watching the impact of Russia's war on Ukraine, uncertain whether the upside-an expected boost to Brazil's corn exports-will outweigh the hit to its crucial fertilizer imports. Brazil, a top exporter of agricultural products including beef, chicken, soy and corn, stands to gain a windfall from surging commodities prices, driven higher worldwide by the war. But the country also depends heavily on imported fertilizer, and is facing a collapse in stock from top supplier Russia, whose exports have been hit hard by Western sanctions. Corn has been particularly affected by the war.

Ukraine's invasion by Russia on February 24 has cast doubt on whether either country-the world's fourth- and fifth-biggest corn exporters, respectively, in 2019-20 — will be able to make expected deliveries this year. That is causing prices to soar, and could be a boon for Brazil, the number-three exporter.

Its corn crop was hit hard last year by bad weather, including the worst drought in nearly a century. But the harvest stands to increase by 29 percent in 2021-22, according to the latest forecast from the National Supply Company (Conab). "The corn price has hit one of the highest levels ever seen, making it attractive for Brazilian producers, a factor driving an increase in planting area" for the second harvest, the biggest of the year, said Joao Pedro Lopes of commodity-market analysis firm StoneX.

Strong global demand and a favorable exchange rate "should allow an increase of 67 percent in exports" of Brazilian corn in 2022, Conab said. The US Agriculture Department meanwhile has predicted that if Brazil's harvest is as big as expected, the country could pass neighboring Argentina to become the world's number two corn exporter this year, trailing only the United States. "International demand has suddenly appeared for immediate shipment of Brazilian corn, which is unusual for the first half of the year. And demand for the second half has accelerated, too," said analyst Paulo Roberto Molinari of agribusiness consultancy Safra e Mercado.

Fertilizer problem

But there is a big downside. "There's no guarantee on the key question of shipping merchandise," with the maritime transport sector upended by the war, said Cesario Ramalho, head of the Brazilian Association of Corn Producers (Abramilho). "And fertilizer supplies are uncertain too," he told AFP. Brazil imports around 80 percent of its fertilizers — 20 percent of that from Russia, its leading supplier.

Belarus, another key supplier and which has supported Russia in the Ukraine crisis, has also been hit

hard by Western sanctions. Agriculture Minister Tereza Cristina said earlier this month that Brazil had enough fertilizer stocks to last until October. She has been negotiating with other major exporters to source more. Farmers are already feeling the pinch: the price of a ton of imported fertilizer skyrocketed in Brazil by 129 percent from February 2021 to February 2022.

Mining indigenous lands

The fertilizer issue got swept up in a politically loaded debate last week when President Jair Bolsonaro called the Russia-Ukraine war an "opportunity" to pass a controversial bill to legalize mining on indigenous reservations. Backers argue the bill would allow Brazil to fully exploit its mineral wealth, including reserves of potassium, a key fertilizer ingredient.

Opponents warn mining would be disastrous for protected indigenous lands, including in the Amazon rainforest, where they say there is little potassium anyway. Bolsonaro said Friday the proposed legislation would help "integrate our indigenous brothers into society," adding: "They're almost like us." His administration launched a plan the same day seeking to nearly halve Brazil's dependence on foreign fertilizer by 2050 with tax incentives, loans and other measures to spur domestic production. Meanwhile, the market turmoil is also sending shock waves through other sectors of the agriculture industry.—AFP

Half of UK children hit as inflation soars: Study

KYIV: Millions of UK households, including almost half of the country's children, will go without basic items including food and clothes from next month as energy bills soar, a survey showed yesterday.

An estimated 23.4 million people will be unable to afford a socially acceptable standard of living, with the cash shortfall from the so-called "minimum income standard" averaging some £8,600 (\$11,200, 10,200 euros), according to research from the New Economics Foundation think-tank.

"Nearly half of all children will be living in families that have to make sacrifices on essentials this spring, like putting food on the table or replacing clothes and shoes," it said. Britons, already hit hard by the highest inflation in decades, face added strain from April when the government increases a workers' tax. That same month, a cap on domestic gas and electricity bills will also be increased, following soaring wholesale costs for companies.—AFP

European, US stocks rise on Ukraine hope as oil slumps

LONDON: European and US equities largely rebounded yesterday as investors seized on hopes of progress in peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, sending oil tanking alongside news of key crude consumer China's COVID lockdown of tech hub Shenzhen. Europe shrugged off tech-fuelled Asian losses after Moscow said it made headway in peace talks with Kyiv ahead of Monday's latest round.

Frankfurt shares rallied 2.2 percent and Paris won 1.8 percent in afternoon deals, while London gained 0.3 percent. US equities showed a meek improvement, as traders reckoned with the prospect of the Federal Reserve raising interest rates at its meeting this week.

The S&P 500 rose by 0.2 percent and the Dow Jones Industrial Average by 0.6 percent in early deals, while the Nasdaq lost 0.2 percent.

The prospect of easing supply tensions and growing demand fears also sent oil prices sliding six percent. "Moscow claims substantial progress in peace talks

while escalating conflict ... but that is enough for traders grabbing onto any good headline," said Markets.com analyst Neil Wilson. The latest talks come more than two weeks after Russia's President Vladimir Putin ordered his army to invade its pro-Western neighbor. Back in Asia, traders fretted that China's spreading coronavirus lockdowns could slam the Asian superpower's demand for crude.

Asian equities mostly fell Monday with Hong Kong taking a pounding as the Shenzhen lockdown fuelled a tech-sector rout. "The rapid spread of COVID across China is now unsettling investors, with expectations that mass lockdowns will once again blight the economy," said Hargreaves Lansdown analyst Susannah Streeter.

She added that oil "demand (is) expected to take a hit if Chinese economic output falls". Crude has continued to drop from last week's near 14-year peak close to \$140 per barrel. However, the commodity — which oils the wheels of the global economy — remains elevated, keeping major upward pressure on inflation.

The Fed's latest monetary policy gathering is expected to end tomorrow with the bank announcing a quarter-point interest rate hike to tackle decades-high inflation in the US. The US central bank is trying to walk a fine line between trying to rein in runaway inflation while also trying to support the world's biggest economy in the face of the war in Ukraine, which many fear could lead to another recession. — AFP

Germany charges Wirecard's ex-CEO Braun over fraud

BERLIN: German prosecutors said yesterday they have charged Wirecard's former chief executive Markus Braun and two other high-ranking managers for the colossal commercial fraud that led to the collapse of the payment company. The trio are accused of market manipulation, embezzlement and gang fraud on a commercial scale, said prosecutors in Munich, noting that the indictment itself runs to 474 pages.

The German fintech company, once touted as a shining star of innovative start-ups, crashed in June 2020 after admitting that a missing 1.9 billion euros (\$2.1 billion) from its balance sheets likely didn't exist. The time it took for prosecutors to file formal charges underlined the intricate and complex web of fraudulent transactions implicating Wirecard subsidiaries and third-party companies that took investigators across the world to unravel.

Among victims of the fraud were banks that had provided credit of 1.7 billion euros to Wirecard. Bonds worth 1.4 billion euros had also been issued and are unlikely to be repaid.

"All the accused group members were acting in an industrial fashion in these six cases of fraud, because that is how they secured their own salaries, including partially profit-related portions," prosecutors said in a statement. Braun for instance, received at least 5.5 million euros in dividends, they said.

Years in prison?

The other two accused are chief accountant Stephan von Erffa and director of Wirecard's Dubai subsidiary Oliver Bellenhaus. Prosecutors said they risk "several years" in prison if found guilty.

The trio had presented "incorrect" accounts for the financial years 2015-2018 by allegedly including revenues from so-called third party acquirer (TPA) businesses — companies that do not have their own licences to operate payment services or because they are involved in high-risk activities such as pornography or gambling. However, the proceeds reported as arising from the TPAs — three companies in Dubai, the Philippines and Singapore — actually "did not actually exist," said prosecutors.

The funds held allegedly in the Singapore TPA which were accounted as reaching almost a billion euros, "never existed at any time". Balance sheet confirmations were falsified by the alleged third-party trustee or by Bellenhaus on the orders of von Erffa, said prosecutors.



ASCHHEIM, Germany: This file photo taken shows Markus Braun, then CEO of the technology and financial services company Wirecard, posing at the company's headquarters in Aschheim near Munich, southern Germany. — AFP

"Unparalleled"

Founded in 1999, the Bavarian start-up Wirecard rose from a company piping cash to porn and gambling sites to a respectable electronic payments provider that edged traditional lender Commerzbank out of the DAX 30 index. Hailed as a champion of the burgeoning financial technology scene, it boasted a market valuation of more than 23 billion euros at one point — outweighing even giant Deutsche Bank. Wirecard's troubles began in January 2019 with a series of articles in the Financial Times alleging accounting irregularities in its Asian division, headed by chief operating officer Jan Marsalek.

But the company was able, at that time, to repeatedly fend off the claims and the FT's journalists themselves came under investigation over the reports. The huge scam unraveled in June 2020 when auditors EY said they were unable to find 1.9 billion euros of cash in the company's accounts. The sum, which made up a quarter of the balance sheet, was supposedly held to cover risks in trading carried out by third parties on Wirecard's behalf and was meant to be sitting in trustee accounts at two Filipino banks.

But the Philippines' central bank has said the cash never entered its monetary system and both Asian banks, BDO and BPI, denied having a relationship with Wirecard.

While key figures in the company have since been detained, including Braun, the company's former COO Marsalek, who is wanted by German prosecutors, remains at large.

Prosecutors said efforts to hunt down Marsalek are "ongoing". The scandal, described by then finance minister Olaf Scholz as "unparalleled" in Germany, sparked an overhaul of market oversight by regulator Bafin. — AFP

Business

Kuwait inflation hits decade high as food prices soar: Marmore report

Rents and maintenance costs rise as travel restrictions ease

KUWAIT: Marmore MENA Intelligence, a subsidiary of Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz", recently released a new report, titled 'Kuwait's inflation hits decade high', identifying the inflationary trends in Kuwait and analyzing the reason behind rising inflation.

Kuwait's inflation has climbed quickly overtime and has now become one of the highest inflation rates among GCC countries. Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 4.3 percent year-on-year (y/y) in December 2021 - highest since October 2011, a sharp increase from the 0.1 percent (y/y) registered in December 2018. The high inflation is mainly driven by a rise in food and beverage prices. The core inflation excluding food and beverage rose 3.7 percent (y/y) in December 2021, with most components recording a rise in prices. Housing Services, which has the highest weightage of 33.21 percent, rose to 2.35 percent (y/y) in December 2021 from being flat since the beginning of 2019.

What drives Inflation?

The housing services component turned positive from being flat due to a rise in rents and maintenance costs. Even though the price rise is lower for housing services than other components, the weight of this component makes it a significant factor. Rents and maintenance costs rose because of increased demand following travel relaxations from COVID-19 restrictions.

Food & Beverage prices shot up to a peak value of 11.5 percent (y/y) in June 2021 and continue to grow at 7.2 percent (y/y) as of December 2021. The prices of meat, fish, and fruits have continuously raised significantly since May 2020. Kuwait's food & beverage imports from 17 percent of total

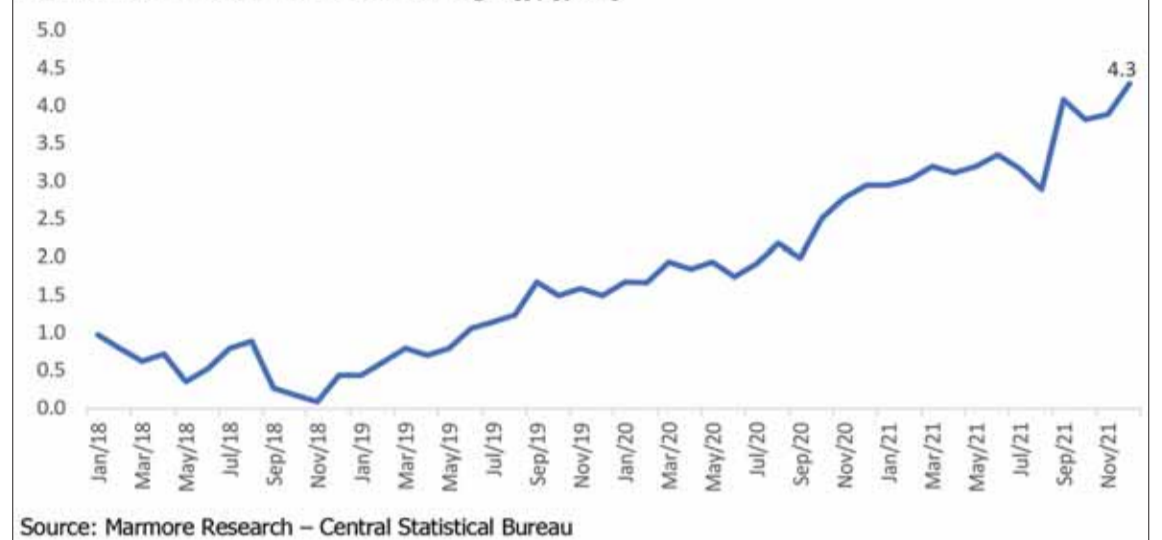
imports as of Q2 2021. The rise in the prices of food and beverage is due to the surge in international food prices on the back of strong demand and disruptions in the supply chain. This will further be aggravated by the ongoing geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which has pushed up all commodity prices even higher.

The Transportation component reached a high of 5.5 percent (y/y) in June 2021 and continues to grow at 4.3 percent (y/y) as of December 2021. Major sub-components that moved inflation were increases in the price of automobile spare parts and air travel. Clothing and Footwear rose to 6.2 percent (y/y) at the end of 2020 and remains flat since then. The price increase is attributable to several global issues that have an impact on the supply chain, including weak global production and supply, high land and sea transportation costs. The Education component of CPI was flat until August 2021 and rose 18 percent (y/y) in September 2021, the highest of all the components. The rise in education fees of pre-primary, primary, and high school education is the reason for this surge as the schools switched from online to offline education.

At present, food price is the major factor that is driving inflation. Food prices have increased due to several reasons including labor shortage, supply chain issues, and heightened consumer demand. It is worth noting that the outlook for food prices remains unfavorable.

Among the GCC countries, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia experienced inflation in food prices from the start of 2020 on the back of a rise in international food prices. However, the remaining GCC countries mostly experienced flat food prices. Prices of food products in Kuwait and its other GCC peers depend

Kuwait Consumer Price Index Change (y/y, %)



Source: Marmore Research - Central Statistical Bureau

on international markets' prices and the costs of importing (trading efficiencies). Nevertheless, GCC nations are trying to reduce their food dependency by investing in agricultural land and technology in their own country and foreign countries. In line with Saudi Arabia's food security plan, Saudi Agricultural and Livestock Investment Co. also known as SALIC, imported 355,000 tons of wheat from Ukraine, Canada, and Australia in 2021, which accounted for 10 percent of the country's demands. Likewise, Hassad Food, Qatari sovereign wealth fund's agricultural arm, has purchased land in Sudan and Australia, as well as plans to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in agricultural projects

in Kenya, Brazil, Argentina, Turkey, and Ukraine. Meanwhile, Kuwait Investment Authority is prioritizing developing food security and diversifying its food supply chain and is planning to invest in agricultural lands abroad. Housing Services prices that largely remained near zero have risen by 2.4 percent (y/y) in the latest reading. Residential rents are on the rise with demand from expatriates surging amid a relaxation of travel restrictions and subsidizing COVID-19 wave. Considering the above and the geopolitical factors, the inflationary pressures could persist in the short-term and the IMF inflation estimate of 3 percent for 2022 in Kuwait offers no solace.

Gulf Bank announces 10 winners of Al-Danah draw

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its monthly Al-Danah draw on 6 March 2022, to announce the winners for February. The 10 lucky winners received cash prizes of KD 1,000 each. The winners are:

Khalaf Oudah Ghanem Mutair
Hanea Ali Mohammad Sharaf Aldeen
Sahar Saleh Daasan Al-Fadhli
Nour Hani Mohammad Ghloum - minor
Thabet Fadel Thabet Saleeb
Fatimah Jassim Eissa Al-Wazzan
Hanan Ibrahim Essa Al-Wazzan
Latefa Soud Abdulaziz Al-Monayia
Abdulaziz Sulaiman Hasan Al-Awadhi
Saud Mejbel Ali Fajhan Aljibairi

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

Numerous benefits

The Al-Danah account is the only account that rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank. Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2021 (from January 1 to December 31, 2021) have been transferred to the 2022 draws. It is also worth noting that all account draws are attended by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with the quarterly and annual draws also reviewed by Ernst & Young.

To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either keep their account with a minimum deposit amount of KD 200 or increase their Al-Danah savings - the more deposits into an account, the more chances accumulated over time. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account holders also have the opportunity to enter and win cash prizes all year long through monthly, quarterly and annual draws.

Opening Al-Danah Account

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open Al-Danah account today with only KD 200. To open Al-Danah account, existing Gulf Bank customers can apply through Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services or book an appointment at their nearest branch by using the new "Visit Gulf Bank" app for a faster and more convenient branch visit. New customers can also open Al-Danah account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app.

Deposit more for more chances to win!

With Gulf Bank, depositing into Al-Danah account is easier and more secure than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts through the following channels: Online/Mobile Banking App which includes the ePay service, ATMs and ITMs, the Customer Contact Center at 1805805 which is available 24/7, in addition to the free-standing order service from other Gulf Bank accounts.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter Gulf Bank's Al-Danah draws throughout the year, for cash prizes totaling up to more than KD 2 million.

Huawei partners with Manga Productions

KUWAIT: Huawei Mobile Services (HMS) announced a strategic collaboration with Manga Productions, a subsidiary company of the Mohammed bin Salman MiSK Foundation, to provide users in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Russia, Spain, Germany, Italy, Indonesia, and India, with an immersive digital experience. The partnership allows users to discover Manga Productions' video content like Futures' Folktales using HUAWEI Video, with more exciting integrated customer experiences to follow soon.

Manga Productions is considered one of the leading production companies in the MENA region; their outputs range from animations, videogames and manga comics. Inspired by the rich heritage and culture from the Arabian Peninsula, Manga Productions focuses on creative and positive content, reaching all

different local and international groups of society to inspire tomorrow's heroes.

The anime industry is rapidly growing and estimated to reach \$43 billion by 2027, granting companies access to new revenue streams. Through the initiative, Huawei aims to open new avenues for Saudi subscribers to enjoy manga and anime, as well as empower partners in the Middle East and North Africa to scale by accessing advanced capabilities and enabling technologies. By recognizing the importance of enhancing users' experience through localized content, the tech giant aims to foster and catalyze the region's tech innovation ecosystem by making rich expertise easily accessible and available.

Lu Geng, Vice President of the Middle East and Africa, Huawei Global Partnerships & Eco-Development said, "This key partnership with Manga Productions further cements our commitment to foster home-grown partners around the region. Offering Huawei Mobile Services (HMS) users with Manga Productions' exclusive diverse and inclusive local content is a transformative experience for our subscribers." "We are thrilled to collaborate with



Huawei Mobile Services (HMS) in the region to expand further and provide our fans more accessibility to enjoy Manga Productions IPs," said Dr Essam Bukhary, Chief Executive Officer of Manga Productions. "The region's creative industry is growing, and with this landmark partnership, we can reach additional viewers that will inspire heroes of tomorrow."

Abdulaziz Alnaghmoosh, Director of Business Development, Marketing and Distribution at Manga Productions said "The collaboration will not only open up new experiences for users but will also create training opportunities to Saudi talents to work side by side with Huawei's team of experts to further enhance their skillset in the relative fields."



Moscow threatens Western companies with arrests, seizures

MOSCOW: Russian authorities, facing potential economic calamity as Western sanctions take hold, have threatened foreign companies hoping to withdraw from the country with arrests and asset seizures, the Wall Street Journal reported Sunday. Russian prosecutors have issued warnings to several foreign entities-via calls, letters and in-person visits-including to Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Procter & Gamble, IBM and Yum Brands, the parent company of KFC and Pizza Hut, according to the business daily, citing sources familiar with the matter.

They have threatened to arrest officials who have criticized the government or to seize assets, including intellectual property. "The warnings have prompted at least one of the targeted companies to limit communications between its Russian business and the rest of the company, out of concern that emails or text messages among colleagues may be intercepted, some of the people (familiar with the matter) said," according to the Wall Street Journal.

The Russian embassy in the United States on Sunday dismissed the report as "fake".

"We urge local media to abandon the vicious practice of spreading fake news. The Wall Street Journal opus is pure fiction," it said on Facebook. It added that the decision to continue business activities in Russia "is entirely up to the Americans."

Russia has faced unprecedented sanctions imposed by Western governments after the invasion of Ukraine, with a growing list of companies announcing their withdrawals from the country or their plans to suspend activities there.

Russian authorities have boosted efforts to prevent money from leaving its borders and to support the ruble, which has already seen a precipitous drop in value against the dollar.

Without using the word "nationalization," Russian President Vladimir Putin has said he is in favor of appointing "external" administrators to head such foreign companies in Russia "in order to transfer them to those who want to make them work." The prosecutor's office on Friday meanwhile ordered "strict control" of companies that had announced a suspension of their activities in Russia, warning especially of increased monitoring of labor legislation compliance, under penalty of prosecution. Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Procter & Gamble and Yum Brands did not respond to requests for comments by AFP Sunday. —AFP

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 290 million for three months with a rate of return at 1.125 percent.

UN launches biodiversity talks on deal to protect nature

GENEVA: UN biodiversity negotiations began in Geneva yesterday to hammer out a global deal to better protect nature that is due for approval later this year. Almost 200 countries are due to adopt a global framework this year to safeguard nature by mid-century from the destruction wrought by humanity, with a key milestone of 30 percent protected by 2030.

"The world is clearly eager for urgent action to protect nature," said Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, in a press release.

"And we have no time to spare. Together we must ultimately deliver a truly historic agreement that puts us firmly on the path to living in harmony with nature." Talks, which run from March 14 to 29, will set the stage for a crucial United Nations COP 15 biodiversity summit, initially due to be held in Kunming, China in 2020 and postponed several times because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Geneva meeting will announce new dates for COP 15, which is currently slated for April to May but is expected to be delayed again. According to several sources, the new dates envisaged are from the end of August to the beginning of September.

The CBD said the Geneva talks will play a crucial role in finalizing an "ambitious transformative post-2020 framework" to be approved at COP15. A draft of the document outlines some 20 targets for 2030, including the high-profile ambition to protect at least 30 percent of the Earth's land and water habitats.

It also includes objectives on reducing the amount of fertilizers and pesticides discharged into the environment and cutting at least \$500 billion per year of harmful subsidies. In 2019, a report by UN biodiversity experts said one million species could disappear in the coming decades, raising fears the world is entering a sixth era of mass extinction in the last half-billion years. Countries have failed to meet almost all the biodiversity targets set in 2010. —AFP



Ukrainian model Bogdana Didenko Nevodnik presents a creation during the Dolce & Gabbana catwalk show for the Fall/Winter 2022/2023 during the Milan Fashion Week in Milan. —AFP photos



28-years-old Ukrainian former model Ivan Sokolovsky (left) and 22-years-old Ukrainian model Bogdana Didenko Nevodnik help pack supplies to be sent to war-torn Ukraine.



22-years-old Ukrainian model Bogdana Didenko Nevodnik (left) and 20-years-old Ukrainian model Valya Fedotova pose at the Ukrainian consulate in Milan, where they help pack supplies to be sent to war-torn Ukraine.

UKRAINIAN MODELS WHO SWAPPED MILAN CATWALKS FOR WAR AID

Ukrainian model Bogdana Didenko Nevodnik was in Milan for fashion week when Russia invaded. Unable to return home afterwards, she now sorts aid parcels in the Italian city for her war-torn country. "I felt it was a bit stupid, unreal, to be on the catwalk when people are dying. I was ashamed and had the feeling that the spectators didn't really care," the 22-year-old told AFP.

Every time air raid sirens sound at night in the river port city of Kamianske, her home, Didenko Nevodnik is woken by a smartphone app set up to warn her. She lives the war minute by minute, from a distance. At first, her instinct was to "return by the first train or bus" to her home, just upstream of the central city of Dnipro.

But she was dissuaded by her husband, a young surgeon in Ukraine, and her family. Now, her long, dark hair tied at the nape of her neck, she works long hours alongside some 20 other volunteers, sorting through aid packages left in the small courtyard of the Ukrainian consulate in Milan.

Colorful children's drawings saying "No to war!" bedeck the entrance, above bouquets of flowers. Cars and lorries load and unload parcels of food, medicine, batteries and toys destined for the war zone.

'Killing machines'
"I would risk my life for Ukraine," says Didenko Nevodnik, who is dressed from head to toe in black and models for major brands around the world. "If necessary, I

would join the army". She took boxing classes as a teenager and says, "I always had a fighting spirit". She was also "a good shooter" with a gun because "we practiced on targets in our spare time".

"The Russian military who invaded my country are terrorizing our people. They want to destroy us. They show to the whole world that they are just animals. They have no humanity inside. They are just killing machines," she said. "They are destroying maternity hospitals with pregnant women. What kind of strategic objective is that?"

Another Ukrainian model, Valya Fedotova, who is also volunteering, says she was on the verge of tears during her Milan show-which also happened to be her fashion week debut. "But you can't cry

on the catwalk. I get paid for it and I can send the money to my family in Ukraine."

'Still in shock'
The 20-year-old shares a flat with six other Ukrainian models, all stuck in Milan. "I couldn't sleep. I'm still in shock," says Fedotova, describing the night the Russians started bombing her home town of Malyn, some 100 kilometers (62 miles) from Kyiv. She had begged her family to flee even before the town came under attack. But while her mother and two sisters took refuge with relatives near the border with Poland, her father stayed behind with the cat.

Didenko Nevodnik longs for the "stupid war" to end. "I just want to live a normal life, go home and see my family." Former

model Ivan Sokolovskyy, 28, asked his boss in Milan for time off at the start of the Russian invasion so he could do his part loading parcels onto trucks and acting as an interpreter. "I couldn't stay home alone and watch the news. I wanted to help my people," said Sokolovskyy, who hails from Ternopil in western Ukraine.

His biggest fear is that the Chernobyl plant, site in 1986 of the worst nuclear accident in history and occupied by the Russians since February 24, will be weaponised. "I think they will do something again in Chernobyl. That really scares me. They are that insane that they can do it," he said. —AFP



These photos show models wearing traditional Chinese dress Qipao rehearsing for a Shanghai fashion show. —AFP photos

Shanghai tailors keep qipao dress tradition alive

Zhou Zhuguang surveys his Shanghai workshop and rows of workers meticulously stitching high-collared Chinese dresses known as qipao, some of which sell for nearly \$5,000. "It's a highly skilled craft," said Zhou, co-founder of Hanart, one of China's most well-known qipao makers. "Some of our tailors spend a lifetime learning to make qipao." The price tag also reflects enduring demand for the qipao, known as a cheongsam in Hong Kong and overseas Chinese communities.

Drawing on traditional design elements, the dress was popularized in 1920s Shanghai, its form-fitting cut capturing the glamour of that free-wheeling pre-communist era and the desire of Chinese women to liberate themselves from traditionally subservient roles. The qipao disappeared after the Communist Party-which considered it decadent and bourgeois-took power in 1949. The dress's comeback is due in part to producers like Zhou. A mass-produced qipao, sometimes seen at weddings or other formal occasions, can be bought today for as little as 100 yuan (\$16).

But Zhou, 59, has found a market for higher-end designs among well-heeled Chinese fashionistas. Zhou previously dealt in lower-priced qipao before founding Hanart in 1998 in partnership with Chu Hongsheng, a legendary qipao designer who fitted Chinese film actresses and the wives and daughters of Shanghai mafia bosses. Chu died in 2017 at the age of 99.

Cultural value
"(Low price) isn't the true essence of the qipao," said Zhou, who feels that such an iconic Chinese fashion staple requires more luxurious materials, bolder designs



This photo shows a customer (right) trying on a piece of fabric for her custom-made Qipao with a tailor at a Qipao studio in Shanghai.

and hand-crafted precision, which inevitably push prices up. Zhou displayed these at a Shanghai show late last year which featured "modern, altered qipao" designs combining the classic Mandarin collar and body-hugging fit with less traditional elements such as lace, fringes, velvet, sequins and rich embroidery. "We want more young people to wear qipao," Zhou said of his design re-boot.

To Yang Zhenzhen, who owns a Shanghai qipao shop and is an online influencer of the dress style, cracking the

youth market is essential to keeping the tradition alive. Her shop targets buyers aged 25-45 with qipao starting at around \$600. "Young people bring new life and energy" to the qipao, said Yang, 28, who has been smitten with the dress since childhood and began collecting them five years ago.

"If young people don't wear them, then by the time they grow old there won't be anyone wearing them," she said. Yang admitted that youth acceptance suffers from a stereotype that qipao are for elderly women, or the belief that pop culture uses the dress to objectify Chinese women. "These are deep misconceptions... so I want to popularize it as best I can and let people know the real meaning of qipao," she said.

That includes the dress's role in breaking down gender norms for women during the 1920s. The sense of freedom associated with that will never go out of style, she adds. For Zhou, selling qipao is about perpetuating an element of China's intangible cultural heritage. "We are small, but we are carrying on a piece of culture," he said. "That's where our biggest value is." — AFP



A model wearing traditional Chinese dress Qipao rehearsing for a Shanghai fashion show.

'Batman' again tops N America box office in a slow month

"The Batman" held fast to its leading position in North American theaters this weekend, with a strong take estimated at \$66 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. With few new wide releases coming in what promises to be a quiet March, "Batman will carry the month," said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research, who predicts a "thin" release schedule through May.

Warner Bros.'s long and noirish take on the Caped Crusader-Robert Pattinson stars in the title role, with Paul Dano as the Riddler, Colin Farrell as the Penguin and Zoe Kravitz as Catwoman-has now surpassed \$238 million domestically and \$224 million internationally, more than justifying its \$200 million production budget. Sony adventure film "Uncharted," starring Tom Holland as an Indiana Jones-style treasure hunter, held in second place in its fourth week out, taking in an estimated \$9.3 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period.



In this file photo English actor Robert Pattinson and US actress Zoe Kravitz arrive for "The Batman" world premiere at Josie Robertson Plaza in New York City. —AFP

In third was a surprising entry. "BTS Permission to Dance on Stage: Seoul," from Trafalgar Releasing, earned \$6.8 million to become the top-grossing live cinema event of all time, according to Hollywood Reporter. Live-event cinema-which started mostly with opera performances-has been gaining popularity.

That knocked Metro Goldwyn Mayer's road-trip comedy "Dog" down one spot to fourth; it took in \$5.3 million. Channing Tatum plays an army veteran who drives Lulu, a dog injured while working with the military in Afghanistan, to her former handler's funeral. And in fifth was Sony blockbuster "Spider-Man: No Way Home," with \$4.1 million in ticket sales in its 13th week out. With Tom Holland playing the popular web-slinger, the film's international earnings are nearing \$1.1 billion.

Rounding out the top 10 were:
"Death on the Nile" (\$2.5 million)
"Sing 2" (\$1.6 million)
"Jackass Forever" (\$1.1 million)
"Scream" (\$445,000)
"Cyrano" (\$391,000) — AFP



This photo shows Zhou Zhuguang, the co-founder and designer of a traditional Chinese Qipao brand, showing his design at a Qipao studio in Shanghai.



This photo shows a tailor making a traditional Chinese dress Qipao at a Qipao studio in Shanghai.

Lifestyle | Awards



British producer Iain Canning, British producer Tanya Seghatchian and Australian producer Emile Sherman pose with their awards for Best Film for 'The Power of the Dog' shared with New Zealand director Jane Campion and Canadian director Roger Frappier (not pictured) at the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards at the Royal Albert Hall in London.



British actress Joanna Scanlan poses with the award for a Leading Actress for work on the film 'After Love'.



Will Smith accepts the Best Actor award for 'King Richard' onstage.

'The Power of the Dog' triumphant with best film, director at BAFTAs

Jane Campion's dark Western "The Power of the Dog" won BAFTAs for best director and best film on Sunday, beating Denis Villeneuve to the top prize although his sci-fi epic "Dune" won five other awards at the star-studded London ceremony. Will Smith scooped the best actor prize for his portrayal of the Williams sisters' father and tennis coach in "King Richard", while Britain's Joanna Scanlan won best actress for her widow's role in drama "After Love".



US actress Ariana DeBose poses with the award for a Supporting Actress for her work on the film 'West Side Story'.

The star of "The Power of the Dog", Benedict Cumberbatch, accepted the best director award on behalf of Campion, the day after she won the Directors Guild of America's top prize for her film. The film is a front runner for the Oscars to be held in Los Angeles in two weeks' time. Opening the ceremony amid Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, BAFTA chair Krishnendu Majumdar said the invasion had "shocked the world with images and stories detailing a truly horrific and



Jude Hill accepts the Best Young Actor/Actress award for "Belfast" onstage during the 27th Annual Critics Choice Awards at Fairmont Century Plaza. — AFP photos

heartbreaking situation".

He said that film academies across Europe stood in solidarity with Ukraine and "we share the hope for the return to peace". Despite the world's sombre mood over Moscow's ongoing onslaught, Sunday's awards were a celebration of freedom of a different kind as they were held in person for the first time since Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns.

The evening's host, Australian actress Rebel Wilson, presented a singing performance by Britain's Emilia Jones, who played a child of deaf adults in "CODA" and was vying for the best actress prize. Her performance was simultaneously signed on stage in British and US sign language. "Luckily though, in all sign languages, this is the gesture for (Russian President Vladimir) Putin," Wilson said, raising her middle finger. Presenting the prize for Best director, Andy Serkis took a swipe at Britain's Home Secretary Priti Patel and her handling of the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

Serkis said Patel's latest movie "all refugees are welcome, but some are more welcome than others, is a complete nightmare". Despite not winning the top prizes, Villeneuve's "Dune" won for special effects, cinematography, sound, score and production design. Accepting

the best actress prize for her role as Mary Hussain, a widow who discovers her late husband has a secret family, Scanlan said the film took "extreme love, blood, sweat and tears". She paid homage to her real husband, "living proof that there's no such thing as 'after love'."

US actress and singer Ariana Debose won the award for best supporting actress for her role in Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" remake, confessing to the audience that "I speak dance better than I speak English". Troy Kotsur won the best supporting actor prize for his role as the deaf Massachusetts fisherman father of Jones's singing high school student in "Coda", accepting his prize in sign language.

He joked about the event's celebration of the James Bond franchise's 60th anniversary, asking in sign language "have you maybe considered a deaf Bond, 008?" "Coda" director Sian Heder won the award for best adapted screenplay, paying homage to the US fishermen who helped her understand their job and the deaf community who "shared their stories with me and trusted me". France's Lea Seydoux presented the award for best film not in the English language, saying that "now more than ever we need to reach out across language divides and remember what we all have in common". Japan's Ryusuke Hamaguchi won the award for "Drive My Car", saying "well that got rid of my jet lag" as he accepted the prize.

"That's the power of film, they go beyond language, they go beyond borders. That really is the power of film," Hamaguchi said. Kenneth Branagh won the award for outstanding British film for his semi-autobiographical "Belfast", paying tribute to cinema going audiences in the age of Netflix. "All hail the streaming revolution but all hail the big screen too, it's alive! And long may they live together." "If you build it, they will come." Lady Gaga, who was nominated for best

actress for her starring role in "The House of Gucci", introduced the EE Rising Star Award, the only one voted for by the public. The award was given to Lashana Lynch for her role as an MI6 spy in James Bond's latest outing "No Time To Die". — AFP



US actor Troy Kotsur poses with the award for a Supporting Actor for his work on the film 'CODA'.



New Zealand director Jane Campion poses in the press room with the award for Best Director for "The Power of the Dog."



US actress and singer Lady Gaga poses on the red carpet upon arrival at the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards at the Royal Albert Hall, in London.



US Film editors Tom Cross and Elliot Graham pose with the award for Editing for their work on the film 'No Time To Die' with English actress Lashana Lynch posing with the Rising Star Award at the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards.



(From left) US producers Clark Spencer and Yvett Merino and US screenwriter, producer and director Jared Bush pose with their awards for an Animated Film for 'Encanto' shared with US animator Byron Howard (not pictured).



(From left) Jeremy Strong, J Smith-Cameron, Scott Ferguson, Brian Cox, Nicholas Braun, and Kieran Culkin, winners of the Best Drama Series award for 'Succession,' pose in the press room during the 27th Annual Critics Choice Awards at Fairmont Century Plaza in Los Angeles, California.

BAFTA winners

Best Film
'The Power of the Dog'

Outstanding British Film
'Belfast'
Outstanding Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer
'The Harder They Fall,' Jeymes Samuel (Writer/Director) [also written by Boaz Yakin]'
Film Not in the English Language
'Drive My Car'

Documentary
'Summer of Soul (Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised)'

Leading Actress
Joanna Scanlan, 'After Love'
Leading Actor
Will Smith, 'King Richard'

Supporting Actress
Ariana DeBose, 'West Side Story'

Supporting Actor
Troy Kotsur, 'CODA'

Animated Film
'Encanto'
Director
'The Power of the Dog,' Jane Campion
Original Score
'Dune, Hans Zimmer'

Casting
'West Side Story,' Cindy Tolan

Original Screenplay
'Licorice Pizza,' Paul Thomas Anderson

Adapted Screenplay
'CODA,' Si,n Heder

Cinematography
'Dune,' Greig Fraser

Editing
'No Time to Die,' Tom Cross, Elliot Graham

Production Design
'Dune,' Patrice Vermette, Zsuzsanna Sipos
Costume Design
'Cruella,' Jenny Beavan

Makeup & Hair
'The Eyes of Tammy Faye,' Linda Dowds, Stephanie Ingram, Justin Raleigh'

Sound
'Dune,' Mac Ruth, Mark Mangini, Doug Hemphill, Theo Green, Ron Bartlett

Special Visual Effects
'Dune,' Brian Connor, Paul Lambert, Tristan Myles, Gerd Nefzer

British Short Animation
'Do Not Feed the Pigeons,' Jordi Morera

British Short Film
'The Black Cop,' Cherish Oleka

EE Rising Star Award
Lashana Lynch

Lifestyle | Features



Visitors stand in front of a painting by artist Prabhakar Pachpute (*Bodies in Protest*) on display during the 15th edition of Art Dubai at Madinat Jumeirah in the Gulf emirate of Dubai. — AFP photos



People visit the 15th edition of Art Dubai at Madinat Jumeirah in the Gulf emirate of Dubai.

Digital art in spotlight as Dubai makes crypto hub bid

Art Dubai, the Middle East's largest annual contemporary art fair, has featured for the first time digital works, as the wealthy Gulf emirate seeks to position itself as a crypto-assets hub. This year, in its 15th edition, the three-day fair hosted more than 100 local and foreign art dealers, with an entire wing of 17 galleries and platforms dedicated to showcasing and selling NFTs, or non-fungible tokens.

NFT sales platforms use the blockchain technology behind cryptocurrencies, and transform anything from illustrations to memes into virtual collectors' items that cannot be duplicated. Benedetta Ghione, Art Dubai's executive director, said NFTs, which burst into the mainstream last year and are now traded at major auction houses, have drawn a lot of attention in the United Arab Emirates, already a leisure and business hub.

The increased interest, along with Dubai's "unique position" as "a growing crypto hub", prompted fair organizers to dedicate a new digital section, she told AFP at the launch on Friday. "We thought this was the perfect time and the perfect

place," she said. After signing an agreement in December with Binance, the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange by trading volume, Dubai—one of the seven emirates that make up the UAE—introduced last week a new virtual assets law and a regulatory authority to oversee the sector.

'Growing exponentially'

Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum tweeted that such a step "establishes the UAE's position in this sector" and aims "to ensure maximum transparency and security for investors". Local NFT platforms have welcomed the move as good for business, with crypto holders increasingly interested in digital art as a form of investment.

"The crypto community is growing exponentially," said Jennifer Stelco, of NFT curatorial platform Morrow Collective, which exhibited about 20 digital artworks at the show, nearly all of them by UAE-based artists. Among them is a piece by Vesa, a renowned Finnish mixed media artist based in Dubai, whose artwork combining painting and digitally-retouched images went on offer for 50 etherium (cryptocur-



A visitor stands in front of a painting by artist Angeles Agrela (*Yusto Giner Gallery*) on display during the 15th edition of Art Dubai.

rency), or about \$127,000 at Sunday's prices.

Stelco said that one piece, by Lebanese artist Magda Malkoun whose main work depicted her hometown Beirut, was sold for three etherium. The global NFT boom,

with US artist Beeple selling an artwork at a record-breaking \$69 million last year, has encouraged the Middle East's first online platform, Emergeast, to turn to digital art.

Established in 2014 and dedicated to emerging artists from the region, Emergeast sees NFTs as an opportunity for artists to "really expand" their audiences, reaching both collectors and non-collectors, co-founder Nikki Meftah told AFP. "The benefit also is that all the artists get royalties for every sale," she added. Faced with the NFT hype, Emirati sculptor and painter Aisha Juma started reworking some sketches on a tablet a few months ago, although she stresses the importance of the art's message over its medium.

"There is complexity because now people are interested in the medium... in the technology," she said. "The technology is extremely valuable. It gives me a platform to express more and to use more tools, I am not denying that, but I would also love people to look at the art, at what I am saying." — AFP



Visitors stand in front of works by Bybit on display during the 15th edition of Art Dubai.



Visitors stand in front of works by Refik Anadol (*PILEVNELI*) on display during the 15th edition of Art Dubai.



Visitors stand in front of installations by NFTation on display during the 15th edition of Art Dubai at Madinat Jumeirah in the Gulf emirate of Dubai.

Amid NFT boom, artists worry about climate costs

Digital art is nothing new to vonMash, who describes his blend of painting, video and sound as "afro-delic"—a psychedelic twist on Afrofuturism. But when the South African started thinking about selling his work as crypto-art on a blockchain, he hesitated. "I'm not fully for it because of the energy consumption that it takes," he explained.

Selling art as non-fungible tokens, or NFTs, uses the same technology as cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin. The buyer receives a verified digital token, which proves the artwork is an original. The boon for artists is that if their work goes up in value and is resold, they receive a portion of every future sale. "If another person buys my NFT, I automatically get a share of that," vonMash said. With traditional art, if a buyer pays 100 dollars, and then "sells it for 100,000, I would not get a cent of that."

Warehouse of computers

What worries vonMash and other artists is how those digital tokens get verified. Ownership of the artwork is authenti-

cated through complex mathematical puzzles—so complex that the calculations require warehouses of computers. Companies who solve the puzzles get rewarded with new tokens, and their solutions add a "block" to the chain of the authentication.

The number-crunching requires vast amounts of energy, often produced by coal-power electricity plants. Most NFTs are currently traded on a platform on a called Ethereum. Tech watchdog Digiconomist estimates that Ethereum uses as much electricity as all of the Netherlands, with a carbon footprint comparable to Singapore's. "The energy it takes for the proof of authentication for the artwork, it's so much," vonMash said. He has reason to worry.

Climate concerns have sparked a backlash against NFTs. K-pop fans in South Korea last year staged a brutal campaign against plans for popular groups include BTS and A.C.E. to sell crypto-art. "Essentially NFTs are a giant environment-destroying pyramid scheme," read a widely retweeted comment from @ChoicewithACE typical of comments that prompted the group to cancel their offering.

BTS's music label Hybe decided to postpone their launch, looking for greener alternatives. In South Africa, environmentalism is an unquestioned article of faith among many artists.

One collective called The Tree created a platform for artists to sell NFTs, and then collaborate with a Cape Town charity

called Greenpop to plant trees to offset the carbon emitted from the crypto-art sales.

Evolving world

Fhatuwani Mukheli said that system made him feel confident about the two NFT sales he's already made. "The world is constantly evolving," he said. "If I just hold on to what I know, then the bus is going to miss me." For vonMash, the solution was not to sell on Ethereum, but to place his art on a platform called Cardano, which uses a different authentication system.

Rather than have companies solve ever-harder puzzles, Cardano uses a mechanism called "proof of stake". Instead of earning new tokens by solving puzzles—and gobbling up electricity—users can simply pony up tokens they already have. Essentially, they're using their money in the form of crypto-currency to vouch for the authenticity of a digital artwork. If someone tries to game the system, or simply makes a mistake, they could lose their financial stake in the network.

The underlying technology can be confusing, but social impact consultant Candida Haynes said "the short story is that there are less environmentally hazardous options for NFTs." "Ultimately, blockchain developers have to also engage with sustainability and help keep less technical folks, including artists, informed about the state of environmental sustainability in blockchains," she said. — AFP



Visual artist vonMash poses for a portrait in his studio in Springs, South Africa, as he covers his face with an art piece commissioned by the world-renowned DJ Black Coffee. — AFP photos



Visual artist vonMash poses for a portrait in his studio as he covers his face with a painter's palette.



Visual artist vonMash checks a fine art print from his last exhibition at his studio.



Visual artist vonMash sits in his studio in Springs as he works to create a Non-Fungible Token (NFT) for the online digital art market.

US actor William Hurt dies aged 71

American actor William Hurt, known for much-loved films such as "The Big Chill" and "A History of Violence," has died at age 71, US media reported Sunday. Multiple outlets cited Hurt's son, Will, who said in a statement: "It is with great sadness that the Hurt family mourns the passing of William Hurt, beloved father and Oscar winning actor, on March 13, 2022, one week before his 72nd birthday. He died peacefully, among family, of natural causes."

The actor had been diagnosed with terminal prostate cancer in May 2018, but his son's statement did not specify whether the disease contributed to Hurt's passing. Hurt built his reputation on his willingness to play quirky and unusual characters such as a Russian police officer in "Gorky Park" (1983), a wealthy and aloof husband in Woody Allen's "Alice" (1990) and a man seeking to build a machine that would benefit blind people in "Until the End of the World" (1991).

His first film role was as an obsessed scientist in Ken Russell's 1980 film "Altered States." Appearing opposite Kathleen Turner in "Body Heat" in 1981 turned him into a sex symbol, and he won the best actor Oscar in 1985 for playing a gay prisoner in "Kiss of the Spider Woman." Hurt was also nominated for Oscars as a teacher of deaf students in "Children of a Lesser God" (1986) and as a slow-witted television anchorman in "Broadcast News" (1987).

For his second Academy Award, Hurt played a Philadelphia mobster in David Cronenberg's "A History of Violence." He appears in the film for only about 10 minutes, but he made a huge impact with critics, who praised his "creepy" and "funny" character. In recent years, Hurt made himself known to younger moviegoers through his turn in the Marvel Cinematic Universe as Thaddeus Ross, a blustering general who was present on the day Bruce Banner became the Hulk. In addition to "The Incredible Hulk," Hurt's character appeared in four Marvel films including "Captain America: Civil War," "Avengers: Infinity War," "Avengers: Endgame" and "Black Widow."

Uneasy with stardom

Hurt was born March 20, 1950 in Washington, DC, but as his father was a US diplomat, he traveled widely as a child. After his parents divorced, his mother married Henry Luce III, the heir to the Time-Life empire, and moved to New York. Hurt stayed close by, studying theology at Tufts University before enrolling at the renowned Juilliard arts school in New York.



In this file photo actor William Hurt arrives at the 69th Annual Golden Globe Awards held at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP

Despite his spreading fame, Hurt did not settle in Hollywood but set up his home in Oregon. In interviews, he had shown he was uneasy with stardom. "I'm not comfortable with all this. I'm not comfortable with walking the red carpet in a tuxedo and seeing all the women with their boobs pushed up and all the men dressed as penguins," he told one interviewer.

His private life, however, read like something straight out of Hollywood. Hurt married aspiring actress Mary Beth Supinger after finishing his studies at Tufts and followed her to London to study drama. They divorced on their return to New York. In the late 1980s, he was sued by a former live-in love, ballet dancer Sandra Jennings, who is the mother of one of his sons. He had two other sons from another marriage and a daughter, Jeanne, from a relationship with French actress Sandrine Bonnaire. Hurt spoke fluent French and was also an avid private pilot. — AFP

Sports

Torres scores twice as Barca thrash Osasuna

Sevilla slip again; Pique plays his 600th match for Barcelona

MADRID: Barcelona continued their La Liga resurgence on Sunday by blowing away Osasuna, with Ferran Torres and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang on target again in a 4-0 win at Camp Nou. Three goals in 14 minutes in the first half all but ended the match as a contest as Torres scored twice, the first a penalty, before Aubameyang prodded in a third. Riqui Puig rounded off the victory with 15 minutes left.

Focus now turns to two crunch games this week, against Galatasaray in the Europa League and then next weekend's Clasico against Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu. "If we play with this intensity, we can compete with anyone," said Xavi Hernandez.

A fourth consecutive league victory lifts Barca back up to third in the table, now only five points behind Sevilla and with a game in hand over Julen Lopetegui's side, whose title challenge looks to be over after they were held to a 1-1 draw by Rayo Vallecano. Sevilla have drawn six of their last eight games in La Liga and their latest stumble at Vallecas means Real Madrid will move 10 points clear at the top if they win at Mallorca.

Barca have been closing the gap to Sevilla in recent weeks and can have genuine aspirations now of finishing second. Sevilla could even get pulled into the battle for the top four if their current slump continues. While Sevilla have been hampered by absentees in recent weeks, Barcelona have been revitalised by reinforcements, their January business continuing to pay dividends in the form of Torres and Aubameyang.

The pair have five goals each now since joining in the transfer window and Barca have scored four goals in four of their last six games. "Ferran has scored goals wherever he's been," said Xavi. "And

Auba is a gift from heaven." Xavi, who was appointed in November with Barcelona lying ninth, also has to take credit, with this Barcelona team now playing the kind of slick, quick, high-intensity football that looked impossible under Ronald Koeman.

Xavi has also successfully reintegrated Ousmane Dembele, despite the jeers of disgruntled fans in response to the Frenchman refusing to sign a new contract. The whistles though have gone quiet now as Dembele registered two more assists against Osasuna and has been a key part of Barcelona's recent surge. "If you play well, people are happy," said Xavi. "He is giving everything for Barca and you can't fake that."

Barca seize control

Barcelona opened the scoring in the 14th minute when a nice move through midfield ended with Sergio Busquets popping a ball over the top for Torres, who was brought down by Nacho Vidal and slid the penalty into the corner. Dembele was the instigator for the second, driving infield from the right and piercing the Osasuna defence with a superb pass through for Torres, who finished. The third was more straightforward, Dembele crossing to the near post, where Aubameyang did well to steer in on the stretch.

Gerard Pique, playing his 600th match for Barcelona, had a goal ruled out for offside before Puig, on as a substitute, followed up his own shot to make it four. Sevilla could do with some of Barca's forcefulness in attack after they were held by Rayo Vallecano.

Lopetegui's side have struggled for goals in recent weeks and missed chances again, even if they were unfortunate to have a penalty cancelled fol-



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Gavi (left) vies with Osasuna's Spanish defender Nacho Vidal during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and CA Osasuna on March 13, 2022. — AFP

lowing a VAR review in the second half. Rayo will hope a draw against the second-placed team in the league can be a turning point for them after six consecutive league defeats. A brilliant start to the season had newly-promoted Rayo dreaming of Europe but a dreadful recent run has seen them drop to 13th, with nervousness growing about relegation.

Bebe gave the home side the lead early in the

second half, catching Bono by surprise with an early strike that flew inside the near post. Sevilla equalized in the 63rd minute when Thomas Delaney crept behind Rayo's Fran Garcia at the back post and then Rafa Mir was brought down by Alejandro Catena, the referee pointing to the spot. The decision, though, was reversed before Rayo had to survive more nervous moments in injury-time. — AFP



KFH signs deal with 'Full Match' football academy and application

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) signed a strategic partnership with "Full Match" football academy and application, as part of its keenness to constantly strive to provide the best benefits that meet the needs of youth. The interest in this segment is considered one of the main pillars of KFH's strategy.

The "Full Match" application is considered the largest football archive and the first of its kind. KFH is the first bank at the local and regional levels to put this application at the usage of users of smart devices, which are being used highly by customers. The application provides the results and schedules of upcoming matches for the different leagues. It is also possible to view the old matches that have been updated with a better quality, to provide the best experience for viewers through the application.

The application also provides the latest news of players, local and international tournaments, in addition to the players' history and personal achievements, all in one application to facilitate the user's ability to search and facilitate viewing of the largest archive of football, considering that football is one of the most popular sports locally and globally.



MARCHE: Overall leader Team UAE Emirates' Tadej Pogacar of Slovenia rides during the 7th and last stage of the Tirreno Adriatico cycling race. — AFP

Dominant Pogacar wins Tirreno Adriatico again

SAN BENEDETTO DEL TRONTO: Tadej Pogacar won the Tirreno-Adriatico seven-day cycling race on Sunday to notch up another triumph in a dominant start to the Slovenian's season. The final stage itself was won by Bahrain Victorious rider Phil Bauhaus, who edged stage seven's final bunch sprint. UAE team leader Pogacar effectively retained the "Race of the Two Seas" run between the Mediterranean and the Adriatic when he romped away from his rivals during stage six on Saturday. He eventually finished 1min 52sec ahead of Jumbo's Danish climber Jonas Vingegaard, with Ineos veteran Richie Porte taking third at 2min 44sec.

Pogacar, the 23-year-old two-time Tour de France champion, rolled across the line at San Benedetto del Tronto on Italy's Adriatic coast with the main peloton on Sunday to seal what is already a third win of the campaign, after the UAE Tour and the Strade Bianche

one-day classic two weeks ago. "I enjoyed this stage but I was focused until the end because you never know what happens... It's not finished until you cross the line," said Pogacar. "I'm super happy, any race we can win we're happy. So far so good, we'll see in the next races."

Bauhaus took the sprint at the end of a 159-kilometre race after the peloton absorbed a three-man breakaway of Manuele Boaro, Alessandro Tonelli and Jorge Arcas. Tonelli was reeled in just before the race hit the final of five flat, 14.5km laps at the seaside finale while Boaro and Arcas finally gave up their effort heading into the last 8km. That set up a thrilling finish as a huge group of riders tried to squeeze through a tight stretch of road.

Bauhaus slid up on the right to just edge Italian Giacomo Nizzolo of Israel Premier Tech after Interimarche's Norwegian Alexander Kristoff attacked too early. "I feel amazing, we always believe I can win. I knew I'm in good shape and the team did really good today," said the 27-year-old Bauhaus after a rare big win. "We knew it's a head wind, so the plan was to come late... I saw the gap on the right side and I just went for it. It's a super big race, I said this morning to the guys that it would be really nice on my Palmares to have a win like this." — AFP

Barcelona hammer Real, clinch Women League title again

MADRID: Barcelona's women's team won the Primera Division in the best way possible on Sunday by thrashing Real Madrid 5-0 to be crowned champions for a third season in a row. Barca's victory sent them 22 points clear at the top of the table with six games left to play. The dominant Catalans have won all 24 of their games played so far, with an astonishing 136 goals scored and only six conceded. Last season, Barcelona clinched an historic treble by winning the league, Champions League and Copa de la Reina.

After already winning the Spanish Super Cup as well this term, they could yet go one better and do the quadruple. Barca are in the quarter-finals of the Champions League, in which they will play Real Madrid again, this time over two legs, and the quarter-finals of the cup, with a game against Real Sociedad to come next week. The home leg against Real Madrid in the Champions League will be held at the 99,000-capacity Camp Nou.

Real Madrid only officially launched their women's team in 2020 and while they are quickly improving, they have work to do to close the gap to Barcelona. Madrid are fifth in the table, 29 points behind the newly-crowned champions, Alexia Putellas, the Spaniard who won the women's Ballon d'Or in November, scored twice two minutes towards the end of the first half at the Johan Cruyff Stadium. Patri Guijarro and Jenni Hermoso were then both on the scoresheet in the second half, either side of a Babet Peter own-goal as Barcelona clinched the title in style. — AFP

Zverev crashes out at Indian Wells; Rublev and Swiatek advance

INDIAN WELLS: World number three Alexander Zverev crashed out of the ATP Indian Wells Masters on Sunday, stunned in his opening match 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (7/2) by 39th-ranked American Tommy Paul. After dropping a first set in which Paul mercilessly punished his second serve, Germany's Zverev leveled the match with the only break of the second set in the 10th game. After holding his serve to love three times and breaking Paul in the sixth game of the third Zverev appeared to be heading for victory.

But the German immediately served four double faults to hand the break back and Paul dominated the tiebreak with the same aggression he showed in the opening set. "I played a really high level today," said Paul, who notched the biggest win of his career. "I knew how I wanted to play him, so I came out and executed it well. It got kind of crazy there in the second set, and I got lucky a little bit in the end, but I played well when it came down to the breaker, so I'm pretty happy with my performance."

Zverev was playing his first tournament since he was disqualified from the

Mexico Open in Acapulco after losing his temper and repeatedly smashing his racket into the umpire's chair. The 24-year-old Tokyo Olympic gold medallist was fined \$40,000 for verbal abuse and unsportsmanlike conduct. A further \$25,000 fine and an eight-week ban were suspended provided he does not incur a further code violation for 12 months.

In other men's second-round action, seventh-seeded Andrey Rublev pushed his ATP winning streak to 10 matches, shaking off a slow start to beat Dominik Koepfer 7-5, 6-4. Rublev, on the rise after titles in Marseille and Dubai this year, was 4-2 down before breaking 51st-ranked Koepfer twice to pocket the first set. He finished with 32 winners against the German and won 11 of 15 points at the net to put the match away.

Sixth-seeded Italian Matteo Berrettini also advanced, holding on for a 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 victory over Danish qualifier Holger Rune. But ninth-seeded Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime bowed out, falling 7-6 (7/4), 6-7 (4/7), 6-3 to Botich van de Zandschulp of the Netherlands. Alexander Bublik, the 31st seed, sent former world

number one Andy Murray packing with a 7-6 (11/9), 6-3 win over the three-time Grand Slam champion. Bublik, coming off his first career ATP title at Montpellier in February, beat Murray for the first time in three career meetings.

Raducanu ousted

There was more disappointment for Murray's British compatriot Emma Raducanu, who was beaten in the third round by Croatian Petra Martic 6-7 (3/7), 6-4, 7-5. The 19-year-old Briton, who stormed to an unlikely US Open title as a qualifier last year, served for the match at 5-4 in the third. But the 13th seed couldn't muster a match point and lost the next three games, a string of forehand errors spelling the end of her challenge in a final loss of serve. It was the latest setback for Raducanu, who was ousted in the second round of the Australian Open in January and suffered a hip injury at Guadalajara last month.

Martic, ranked 79th in the world, notched her first win over a top-20 player in more than two years. "I really wanted it so bad," Martic said. "I'm just happy I stayed calm when I was not playing so good. Because I think it was up and down for both sides." Third-seeded Iga Swiatek of Poland, the highest-ranked player left in the women's



INDIAN WELLS: Dominik Koepfer of Germany serves in his match against Andrey Rublev of Russia during the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on March 13, 2022. — AFP

field, struggled early but dominated late in a 6-7 (3/7), 6-2, 6-1 victory over Denmark's Clara Tauson.

Former world number one Simona Halep crashed Coco Gauff's 18th birthday celebrations, beating the US youngster 6-3, 6-4. Halep, the 2015 Indian Wells WTA champion, coped beautifully with blustery

winds, her 11 winners almost matching her 12 unforced errors while the aggressive Gauff's unforced errors soared to 33. Halep said she was pleased with her performance in the tricky conditions. "I think I played a smart tennis," said the Romanian, who saved all four break points she faced. — AFP

Sports

Inter gift AC Milan the upper hand after a draw at Torino

Napoli win 2-1 at Verona; Roma held by Udinese

MILAN: Inter Milan handed local rivals AC Milan the advantage in the Serie A title race on Sunday despite snatching a last-gasp 1-1 draw at Torino, as Napoli leapfrogged them into second place with a 2-1 win at Verona. Alexis Sanchez hit the leveler in the third minute of stoppage time of an entertaining encounter in Turin which left Inter in third, four points behind Milan. Simone Inzaghi's side have a game in hand, but they are now looking over their shoulders at Juventus, who are only three points behind their old rivals in fourth after stringing together a 14-match unbeaten run.

That would have been unthinkable at the turn of the year when Inter were four points clear at the top and 12 ahead of Juve but Inter are ragged after looking imperious before Christmas. "We know that we need to do more, have a different approach to these games, if we want to retain the title," Inzaghi admitted to DAZN. Sanchez's equalizer was laid on by Edin Dzeko, who was Inter's worst culprit in front of goal after heading just

wide on the hour and then nodding over from point-blank range moments before his Chilean teammate did the honors.

However Inter could easily have lost in a deeply disappointing display. After Brazilian defender Bremer gave the hosts the lead with 11 minutes gone, Samir Handanovic brilliantly tipped wide Armando Izzo's free header in the 64th minute. Seconds before Robin Gosens had saved his goalkeeper with a desperate lunge to stop Josip Brekalo from scoring what would have been a superb individual goal after the Croatian international weaved his way into the box.

They were also saved by the officials when Andrea Ranocchia was somehow ruled to have fouled Andrea Belotti in the area nine minutes before the break, a decision which left Torino baffled. "I went to (referee Marco) Guida and told him that it was a stonewall penalty, and he said to me 'VAR didn't call me so I must have made the right decision,'" said Torino's sporting director Davide

Vagnati. "You can talk about our brilliant performance and Inter's determination but if there's a penalty then they have to give it to us."

Picture perfect Osimhen

Victor Osimhen struck the first of his brace for Napoli, which kept them three points behind Milan, in the 14th minute at the Stadio Bentegodi by thumping home a perfect header from Matteo Politano's cross. In an eventful match for both Osimhen as the rest of his team, at one point it looked as though Napoli would have to do without their star forward for over half an hour when the 23-year-old was out of action for four minutes with a shoulder problem following a clash with Koray Gunter. He carried on however and lashed in his crucial ninth league goal of the season in the 71st minute before snatching a camera and taking a snap of the Napoli fans.

"(Khalidou) Koulibaly gave me the camera to take a picture of the fans who have been amazing

from the blast of the whistle to the very end. I think they deserved to get a shot," he told DAZN. Verona, whose hardcore fans caused outrage in the run up to the match with a banner which indicated the coordinates of Naples as a bombing target for Russia, had their hopes of continental football next season dented despite Davide Faraoni pulling a goal back shortly after Osimhen's second.

They are seven points behind both Roma and Atalanta who occupy sixth and fifth after their respective draws with Udinese and Genoa. Atalanta look to have forfeited their fight for the Champions League after a goalless stalemate with struggling Genoa, who have now drawn all seven matches under coach Alexander Blessin. Gian Piero Gasperini's Atalanta are eight points behind fourth-placed Juventus, albeit with a game in hand. Both Atalanta and Roma can be overtaken by Lazio, who are two points behind the pair before their match with Venezia in Rome on Monday night. — AFP

Jones defiant as England bid to derail France

TWICKENHAM: Eddie Jones has insisted England know what they have to do in order to deny France a Grand Slam and finish the Six Nations with a flourish. France have been the form team in this season's Championship but had to endure some nervous moments during a 13-9 victory over Wales in Cardiff that kept them on course for an unbeaten campaign.

England, by contrast, will head to Paris following a record 32-15 loss at home to Ireland, a match where they had to play most of the game a man down after lock Charlie Ewels was sent off just 82 seconds into the action at Twickenham. Nevertheless, England coach Jones said: "We've beaten France in our last two games, so we've got a pretty good idea of how to play against them, but certainly Wales did really well on Friday night."

"Wales lost the kicking in the first 20 and to beat France you have to out-kick them. That's the first thing. "Then you have to out-fight them around the ruck, which Wales did." "Wales are a really hard, tough team and we have to replicate them at the ruck and keep (scrum-half) Antoine Dupont quiet," added Jones.

France are now just 80 minutes away from their first Grand Slam since 2010 and Jones, who guided England to their most recent clean sweep in the tournament with a 31-21 victory in Paris six years ago, hopes the pressure surrounding Saturday's match

tells on Les Bleus. "For them to be playing for the Grand Slam, I remember going there in 2016 going for the Grand Slam and because it's such a huge thing in European rugby, it does become something in their head," the Australian said.

"And the only way we can make that live in their head a bit more is to play with such an intensity, and such ferociousness that we put them on the back foot. I think we've seen it in a few games. "Look, France are a good team, don't get me wrong. But like any team - even the great All Black teams winning at 90 percent, on your day if you can get stuck into them physically, take away their strengths, you can cause them problems."

'Massive steps forward'

England started this Six Nations with a defeat by Scotland and a reverse in Paris would mean they had won two matches and lost three for the second successive Championship. But Jones, just over a year out from the 2023 World Cup in France, was adamant England were making progress. "I think we've taken massive steps forward in this Six Nations. We dominated the game against Scotland but got beaten," he said of a narrow 20-17 defeat at Murrayfield.

"We've dominated this game with 14 men, at times, and got beaten. And then we've had two good wins against Wales and Italy and we'll have a good win against France." Jones, who took England to the 2019 World Cup final in Japan where they were beaten by South Africa, added: "Obviously our aim was to win the Championship. "We're disappointed we haven't won the Championship but sometimes circumstances mean that maybe the results don't mimic the performance. But that certainly catches up-the results will catch up."—AFP



Special Olympics

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait and UAE Special Olympics participated in a sports workshop in Abu Dhabi to learn the basics and skills of basketball to Special Olympics players within the implementation of the joint cooperation memorandum. The workshop was held with the participation of the World Social Responsibility Program of the US National Basketball Association (NBA). It included warm-up sessions and pauses to improve the game skills besides trial matches.

Chairwoman of Tumooh Sports Club and National Director of Special Olympics Rihab Buresli said this workshop comes within the joint sports projects and programs between Kuwait and UAE special Olympics in an implementation of the MoU between the two sides. Buresli thanked her UAE counterpart Talal Al-Hashimi and Strategy Director Fatima Al-Musallami for their hospitality. She also thanked Public Authority for Sport for its continued care and support. Meanwhile, Assistant sports activity director at the club Hanan Al-Zayed said the coming period will see more cooperation between the two sides based on the development of annual agenda of sports activities and activate the largest number of games that are included in the Special Olympics.

Women's sports day

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: With the participation of more than 700 female athletes of various ages, and various sports, social and entertainment activities, the first women's sports day concluded at the temporary premise of Kuwait Olympic Committee in Jaber Al-Ahmad Sports City. The closing ceremony included displays of Karate, Taekwondo, fencing and Gymnastics.

The ceremony was attended by Honorary President of Kuwait Disabled sports Club Sheikha Sheikha Al-Abdallah, Deputy Chairman of Kuwait Olympic committee Mohammad Jaffar, Deputy Director General of Sports Authority secretary general Ali Al-Merri, Chairwoman of women's sports committee at KOC Fatima Hayat, Canadian Ambassador, British Ambassador, Indonesian Ambassador and other officials.

Sheikha Sheikha Al-Abdallah lauded the organization of the first woman sports day saying "we happily saw a complete sports day for Kuwaiti women in various games, and this promises a bright future for women's sports, and we hope officials pay more attention to women's sport." KOC's Mohammad Jaafar said the committee is ready to present all types of support for women's sport, adding "we are proud with this sport and social activity, as well as the large presence of athletes of various ages, and we will seek to hold such a day every year in the future."

Dr. Saqer Al-Mulla thanked Chairman and members of the Board of KOC for organizing the women's day. He said the large number of participants and the technical levels we saw proves that women's sport is going in the right direction and we enjoyed a good sports day. Meanwhile Chairperson of the women's sports committee at KOC Fatima Hayat said holding the women's sports day was one



of the main goals of the committee, and is in the strategic plan for the next four years.

Meanwhile, Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait said "it was a beautiful day and an excellent idea to encourage women to participate in various sports." She added that sports help us go past the side

effects of the Corona pandemic and return to normal life. Indonesian Ambassador said she was happy to participate in the women's sport day adding that "it is an ideal sports experience, that brought out the sports abilities Kuwaiti women enjoy, and I was happy to participate in various activities."

Brady un-retires, to return to NFL's Buccaneers

MIAMI: Seven-time Super Bowl champion Tom Brady said Sunday he has changed his mind about retirement and will return to the NFL next season with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Brady won six titles in 20 seasons with the New England Patriots then moved the Bucs in 2020 and led them to a championship. But Tampa Bay lost to the eventual champion Los Angeles Rams in January in the playoffs and Brady announced his retirement last month. Now superstar quarterback Brady, who turns 45 in August, says he wants at least one more chance at a championship.

"These past two months I have realized my place is still on the field and not in the stands," Brady said in a social media posting. "That time will come. But it's not now. "I love my teammates and I love my supportive family. Without them, none of this is possible. I'm coming back for my 23rd season in Tampa. "We have unfinished business." Buccaneers coach Bruce Arians was thrilled to welcome back Brady. "Tom Brady loves to play football as much as anyone I've ever been around," Arians said.

"He's still playing at a championship level and was as productive as anyone in the league last season. We are ecstatic that he decided to continue playing and working toward winning another championship." The Buccaneers simply posted a video of Brady on Twitter with the message: "He's baaackkkk." The move comes in time for the Buccaneers to adjust their free agency and NFL Draft plans to allow for the legendary signal caller to be back in uniform in the upcoming season and not a major vacancy to fill.

"We're thrilled that Tom has decided to come back this season," Buccaneers general manager Jason Licht said. "We said we would leave all options open for him should he reconsider his retirement and today's announcement is something we have been preparing for in recent days. "Bruce and I have had plenty of conversations with Tom recently that led us to believe there was a realistic chance he'd want to come back.

"Tom is the greatest quarterback of all time who is still playing at an elite level. With this decision now made, we will continue to move forward with our off-season plans to reload this roster for another championship run." The retirement lasted 40 days after taking days to become confirmed in the first place. After speculation and reports that Brady was going to hang up his cleats for the last time, the husband of model Gisele Bundchen confirmed his retirement plans on February 1, saying then he no longer felt he could commit to American football. —AFP





NEW YORK: Evan Fournier #13 of the New York Knicks passes as Goran Dragic #9 of the Brooklyn Nets defends during the second half at Barclays Center on March 13, 2022. —AFP

Nets edge Knicks 110-107

Durant hits 53; James reaches a milestone

WASHINGTON: Kevin Durant erupted for 53 points to lead the Brooklyn Nets to a 110-107 victory over the New York Knicks on Sunday while teammate Kyrie Irving couldn't play but attended as a spectator. New York City's private sector COVID-19 vaccine mandates mean unvaccinated Irving still can't play NBA games in New York, at either the Nets' Barclays Center or the Knicks' Madison Square Garden.

But relaxed rules meant he could attend the game as a fan, an anomaly that frustrated NBA rival LeBron James. "It literally makes ABSOLUTELY ZERO SENSE!!!" James tweeted. "They say if common sense was common then we'd all have it. Ain't that the truth." Durant agreed.

"It's ridiculous," Durant said after the game. "I don't understand it at all. There's a few people in our arena that's unvaxxed, right? They lifted all of that in our arena, right? "It just didn't make any sense. We got a guy who can come in the building. Are they fearing our safety? I don't get it. We're all con-

sumed. Pretty much everybody in the world is confused at this point. Early on in the season people didn't understand what was going on, but now it just looks stupid."

Without Irving, limited to playing away games, and with new acquisition Ben Simmons yet to make his Nets debut, it was again up to Durant to carry Brooklyn. Durant was one shy of his career-high scoring night with six rebounds and nine assists. Durant's 3-pointer with 56.3 seconds remaining put the Nets ahead to stay at 106-103. "Kevin was unbelievable," Nets coach Steve Nash said. "Carried us. Made a lot of big plays. Rebounds, assists, the whole deal. He was Kevin Durant on full display."

Durant posted the eighth 50-plus point game of his career and his second this season. Only two other players, Irving and James, have reached the half-century mark in at least two games this season. The Nets hope changes in regulations will allow Irving to play home games once the playoffs start on April

16. New York City Mayor Eric Adams removed the public sector vaccine and mask mandates in February so the unvaccinated were allowed in bars and venues like the Barclays Center.

But a private sector mandate requiring employees of New York-based businesses to be vaccinated remains in place, and no exception will be made for Irving, Adams saying it would "send the wrong message." "Everybody out here is looking for attention and that's what I feel like the mayor wants right now," Durant said. "But he'll figure it out soon—he better. "Eric, you got to figure something out man, because it's looking crazy...he can come to the game, but not play? Come on, man."

LeBron reaches 30-10-10

James reached a milestone in the Los Angeles Lakers' 140-111 loss at Phoenix. James became the first NBA player with 30,000 career points, 10,000 career rebounds and 10,000 career assists with his second assist of the game, a pass to Carmelo Anthony.

Luka Doncic had 26 points, eight assists and eight rebounds and Spencer Dinwiddie hit the decisive 3-pointer with 11 seconds remaining to lift Dallas over host Boston 95-92.

It was the Mavericks' sixth triumph in seven games and snapped Boston's five-game win streak. The Celtics retired the No 5 jersey of Kevin Garnett after the game. The 45-year-old Hall of Fame big man was NBA Defensive Player of the Year in 2008 when he led Boston to the NBA title.

Joel Embiid scored 35 points and grabbed 16 rebounds while James Harden and Tobias Harris each scored 26 points as Philadelphia edged Orlando 116-114 in overtime. Trae Young scored 47 points to lead Atlanta over Indiana 131-128 while Marcus Morris scored 31 points to lead the Los Angeles Clippers over host Detroit 106-102. Ja Morant had 17 points and 10 assists for Memphis in a 125-118 triumph at Oklahoma City while Jonas Valanciunas had 32 points in New Orleans' 130-105 victory over Houston. —AFP

India thrash Lanka in pink ball Test to sweep series 2-0

BANGALORE: A bowling attack led by Jasprit Bumrah helped India thrash Sri Lanka by 238 runs inside three days at Bangalore's pink ball Test to sweep the series 2-0 yesterday. Chasing 447 for victory, Sri Lanka were bowled out for 208 in the second session after skipper Dimuth Karunaratne's valiant 107, on a pitch that turned from day one. Fast bowler Bumrah ended Karunaratne's spell and got one more to take his match tally to eight wickets while spinner Ravichandran Ashwin took four over the day.

Shreyas Iyer and Rishabh Pant scored 67 and 50 in India's 303-9 declared on day two to play key roles in an emphatic victory that left the hosts unbeaten in all three of their home day-night Tests. India also won the opening Test in three days and this win gives new all-format captain Rohit Sharma a winning start to his Test leadership.

Left-handed Karunaratne made a second wicket stand of 97 before Ashwin broke through for the stumping of the captain's overnight partner Kusal Mendis, who recorded his 12th Test half-century. Karunaratne though went on to wage a lone battle and raised his century—the sole hundred for a Sri Lankan batsman in this Test series after a boundary off Bumrah. India, who gained crucial Test championship points in the whitewash, remained dominant from day one after Iyer hit 92 and lifted the team from a precarious 86-4 to 252 all out.

Bumrah then returned figures of 5-24 for his maiden five-wicket haul at home to dismiss Sri Lanka for 109. The series will be remembered as marking Virat Kohli's 100th Test in the opening game in Mohali, though the star batsman scored just 45, 23 and 13 in the three Indian innings. The former captain twice fell lbw in this Test to take his average down to below 50 for the first time since 2017, but the crowd at M Chinnaswamy Stadium gave him a rousing reception.

Sri Lankan quick Suranga Lakmal took one wicket in his last Test and finished his career with 171 scalps in 70 five-day matches since his 2010 debut. Lakmal scored one before being bowled by Bumrah, who joined India's team in a rush to farewell the 35-year-old veteran. The tourists, who lost the opening Test by an innings and 222 runs, suffered a total whitewash after they lost the preceding Twenty20 series 3-0. Players from India and across the world will now assemble for the Indian Premier League, which begins March 26. —AFP



BANGALORE: India's captain Rohit Sharma (right) holds the trophy as his teammates Rishabh Pant (center) and Shubman Gill watch after winning the series at the end of the second Test cricket match between India and Sri Lanka yesterday. —AFP

Tuchel to stay with troubled Chelsea

LONDON: Thomas Tuchel insisted he will stay at Chelsea "until the end of the season", but the Blues boss wouldn't commit his future to the troubled club beyond that point. Tuchel's side lifted the gloom around Stamford Bridge following the sanctioning of Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich as Kai Havertz's 89th-minute goal clinched a 1-0 win against Newcastle on Sunday.

Abramovich has been sanctioned following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with the billionaire said by the British government to be part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle. Chelsea have been plunged into turmoil by the sanctions, which have left them unable to sign players, renew contracts or sell match tickets, with their revenue streams severely restricted as a result.

Amid fears that Chelsea could struggle to survive unless a new owner is found soon, there have been reports that Tuchel would be tempted to leave. The German, who has led Chelsea to Champions League and Club World Cup glory in his reign, has been linked with a move to Manchester United. Asked about his future after the Newcastle game, Tuchel offered a guarantee over his short-term future, but the reply left some room for manoeuvre.

"There's no doubt I stay until the end of the season. We just have to wait day by day because everything can change," he said. "The club is for sale but hopefully it goes through. So day-by-day, which is a good way to live your life." Tuchel's wild celebration of Havertz's winner suggested he remains committed to the Chelsea cause. But with United set to appoint a permanent successor to interim boss Ralf Rangnick in the summer, it would be no surprise if the Blues boss is mentioned again as a candidate for the Old Trafford job.



Chelsea's German head coach Thomas Tuchel

'People are worried'

Admitting he is determined to focus only on keeping Chelsea competitive amid such a turbulent period, Tuchel said: "There are circumstances we can't influence but that gives us the freedom to focus on the things we can influence. "The focus is on the first team, our players and me. But Chelsea is much more than just the first team."

"It is a massive club with huge tradition and there are hundreds of staff, it's not just the players, and it's important we show the spirit and give them the distraction." Chelsea have been restricted in the amount of money they can spend on away travel due to the sanctions, but Tuchel said they were still set to fly to Lille for the Champions League last-16 second leg on Wednesday.

"My last information is we have a plane. If not we go by train, if not by bus, if not I will drive a seven-seater!" he said. Aware of the strain of Chelsea's suddenly precarious financial position on the less well-paid staff members, Tuchel said he wants to provide positivity by ensuring the

team keep winning.

"There are a lot of people I see on a daily basis who are worried. They've worked here for decades but are not famous and they are worried about the future," he said after their fourth successive victory. "So we see what it means to these people, even if it is for 90 minutes. Like during Covid, we play to give people joy, anger, entertainment." Newcastle also had controversial owners after being bought by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund last year in a deal that raised issues about that country's dubious human rights record.

But Tuchel refused to be drawn into criticizing the government for targeting Chelsea and not Newcastle. "That's a big question. Unfortunately, the situation is like this for the owners of Newcastle," he said. "What can I say? I don't want to point the finger because comparing yourself and blaming others doesn't change our situation. "Our statement that we condemn war and what happens in Ukraine doesn't change. There is no doubt." —AFP