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with message for Ukraine



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spreads in Latin America



# 'Servant' term replaced with 'domestic worker' in laws

## Court scraps recent decision allowing 60+ expats' iqama renewal

### Al-Arabi lift Crown Prince Cup



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah presents the Crown Prince Cup to Al-Arabi SC players yesterday as National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and other officials applaud. Al-Arabi beat Kuwait SC 5-4 on penalties in the match at Jaber Stadium. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly yesterday approved an amendment to a law governing domestic workers, changing the word "servant" to "domestic worker" in all Kuwaiti laws to ensure they are in sync with international laws, especially those related to human rights.

According to an explanatory note, the amendment was attributed to avoid reservations by international human rights organizations and agencies concerned with labor affairs regarding the use of the term "maidservant" in laws regulating the domestic labor sector or in other laws. The amendment also replaced the term "private maid" with "private domestic worker", wherever it is mentioned in any law. The second and final round of voting on the amendment will take place after two weeks.

Meanwhile, the court of appeals yesterday overturned a decision allowing expats aged over 60 without university degrees to renew or transfer their work permits within the private sector for one year by paying a fee of KD 250 and KD 500 in comprehensive private health insurance.

The Assembly yesterday also rejected the resig-

nation of MP Yousef Al-Fadhlah, which he submitted around 11 months ago. Only 19 MPs voted to accept the resignation, while the government abstained. Opposition MPs criticized the government for abstaining and charged that the resignation is being rejected due to political motives.

The Assembly agreed to assign the parliamentary public funds protection committee to probe reports about accounts held by the former head of the pension agency in Swiss banks. The former official is currently living abroad and has been convicted of stealing tens of millions of dinars of the agency's funds. Law enforcement authorities in the country have been trying to repatriate the former head of the pension agency without success.

The National Assembly also discussed a report on resolving the housing problem in the country, in which the housing authority is demanding that its projects be exempted from the prior supervision of the Audit Bureau to accelerate their implementation. The debate on the issue will continue today. The Assembly also decided to delay the debate of a grilling against HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah for two weeks at the premier's request.

### News in brief

#### Fake heiress Sorokin still in US

NEW YORK: Fake heiress Anna "Delvey" Sorokin remains in custody in the United States, US immigration authorities said yesterday, despite reports she was about to be deported to Germany. Sorokin, who was jailed in 2019 for scamming hundreds of thousands of dollars from hotels, banks and friends and who inspired a hit series on Netflix, "remains in ICE custody pending removal", the agency said. — AFP

#### Binance gets license in Bahrain

DUBAI: Cryptocurrency exchange platform Binance, one of the world's largest, said yesterday it had been granted an operating license in Bahrain, its first in the Gulf. Another major cryptocurrency exchange platform, FTX, also announced yesterday the launch of its operations and the opening of a regional headquarters in Dubai. — AFP

#### TV protester fined \$280

MOSCOW: A Russian editor who protested against Moscow's military action in Ukraine during a primetime news broadcast on state TV was released with a fine yesterday after a court hearing. A judge at Moscow's Ostankino district court ordered Marina Ovsyannikova to pay a fine of 30,000 rubles (\$280) after she barged onto the set of Russia's most-watched evening news broadcast holding a poster reading "No War". Ovsyannikova pleaded not guilty in court. — AFP

#### US 3-year-old kills mother

WASHINGTON: A three-year-old American child accidentally shot and killed his mother while playing with a gun in the suburbs of Chicago. The boy was sitting in the child-seat in the back of a car, with his parents in the front, and managed to get his hands on his father's pistol. He began playing with it and at some point pulled the trigger. His mother, Daejah Bennett, 22, was shot in the back of the neck. The father was taken into custody. — AFP

## Russian forces press in on Kyiv as talks resume

KYIV: Russian forces pressed in on Kyiv yesterday with a series of strikes on residential buildings that killed four people in the Ukrainian capital, despite a fresh round of talks aimed at halting the war. In the highest-level EU delegation to go to Kyiv since the war began, the leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia travelled to the besieged capital in a sign of support for Ukraine.

But tensions were mounting, with

Kyiv's mayor announcing a 35-hour curfew to deal with what he called a "dangerous moment", while Russia broadened its assault across Ukraine with a huge strike on an airport. Nearly three weeks into Russia's invasion of its pro-Western neighbor, more than three million forced to flee to neighboring countries and 97 Ukrainian children have died, the country's president told Canadian lawmakers in a virtual address.

In a response to crushing Western sanctions on Russia, Moscow announced that US President Joe Biden and a dozen other top officials had been banned from entering the country, criticizing "the extremely Russophobic policy pursued by the current US administration".

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## Court upholds school hijab ban in Indian state

BANGALORE: An Indian court upheld a local ban on the hijab in classrooms yesterday, weeks after the edict stoked violent protests and renewed fears of discrimination against the country's Muslim minority. Southern Karnataka state was on edge for several weeks after a small group of girls in their late teens were prevented from wearing the garment on school

grounds at the end of last year.

Demonstrations snowballed across the state and police used tear gas to disperse angry crowds as more schools imposed their own bans and radical Hindu groups staged boisterous counter-demonstrations. After weeks of deliberations, Karnataka's high court ruled that the wearing of the hijab "does not form a part of essential religious practice in Islamic faith".

Its judgement said schools had reasonable grounds to impose dress codes that forbade the headdress in the interests of preventing divisions on religion and other grounds. "The aim of the regulation is to create a 'safe

Continued on Page 2

## Iran foils Zionist 'sabotage' plot at nuclear plant

TEHRAN: Iran has arrested several suspected members of a spy network linked to the Zionist entity, foiling its attempt to sabotage a key underground nuclear facility, state media reported. The announce-

ment comes as Iran is engaged in talks with major powers on reviving a landmark nuclear deal abandoned by the United States in 2018.

Iran has accused the Zionist entity of repeatedly targeting its nuclear facilities and scientists, most recently in an attempt to undermine efforts to restore the 2015 agreement, which was bitterly opposed by the Zionist entity. The suspects "planned on sabotaging the Fordo facility and were arrested by the intelligence services of the Revolutionary Guards", the official IRNA news agency reported late Monday.

Fordo is an underground uranium enrichment facil-

ity located outside the central city of Qom, around 180 km south of Tehran. IRNA did not specify the identity of the suspects or say how many were arrested. But it said that Zionist intelligence agents tried "to approach" an employee at Fordo after "recruiting" one of his neighbors, in order to gain information about advanced centrifuges at the facility.

The suspects had received payments "in the form of cash and digital currency so that no trace of it remains", IRNA added. A Zionist "spy officer, in the guise of a Hong Kong company and with the help

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KYIV: A woman is evacuated from a burning apartment building yesterday as Russian troops intensified their attacks on the Ukrainian capital. — AFP



BANGALORE: A girl wearing a hijab walks past police guarding a school yesterday after a court upheld a local ban on the hijab in classrooms. — AFP

## Local

# Kuwait environment body, UNEP ink cooperation deal

## Fresh deals boost Kuwait's capabilities



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Environment Public Authority (EPA) and UN Environment Program (UNEP) Regional Office for West Asia yesterday ink cooperation memo. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Environment Public Authority (EPA) and the UN Environment Program (UNEP) Regional Office for West Asia yesterday inked a memo for bilateral cooperation in environment protection in Kuwait. Speaking to reporters following the signing of the memo, EPA Board Chairman and Director-General Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad Al-Humoud Al-Sabah said it is the second memo to be clinched by both sides, saying it will largely help in attaining environment preservation goals.

Apart from the memo, four cooperative agreements were hammered out by the authority and the UN program with a view to protecting environment, boosting Kuwait's capabilities for addressing climate change and fighting pollution, he said. The fresh deals reflect Kuwait's commitment to exerting efforts and harnessing energies for environmental reform, he said, elaborating that the memo has a duration of four years, while the new deals have a period of two years.

On the basis of this cooperation, the UN program will throw much weight behind Kuwait's endeavor to revamp its capabilities in various environmental domains and to launch fresh joint ventures, he pointed out. All these efforts and agreements would unquestionably have positive impacts on Kuwait's development vision globally, expected the Kuwaiti official.

On his part, UNEP Representative - Regional Director for West Asia Sami Dimass said in a press

statement that this cooperation mainly aims at stepping up Kuwait's environment endeavors, and reflecting common priorities for the UN body and Kuwaiti authority. Pointing out a 2019 MoU, he said this renewed cooperation shows fervent environment efforts and agreement on new and fruitful projects. The UN program will help Kuwait work out a national chemical safety blueprint and ensure safe management and usage of chemical substances, he underlined. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Drugs Control Department officials yesterday arrested an Asian with 2 kg of marijuana. The suspect confessed to trading illicit substances and was referred to concerned authorities. Meanwhile Ahmadi police arrested a foreigner who was selling bottles, suspected to contain liquor - 511 imported bottles were found in his possession.



## Iran foils Zionist 'sabotage' plot...

Continued from Page 1

of an intermediary", communicated with the Fordo employee, it said. Iran has accused US or Zionist agents of carrying out an array of surveillance and sabotage operations targeting its nuclear program over the past decade.

In Aug 2012, saboteurs blew up power lines supplying the Fordo plant. Two years later, Iran said it had arrested several "spies" in Bushehr province, where its sole nuclear power plant is located. In 2020, Tehran accused the Zionist entity of masterminding the assassination of top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in an attack near Tehran. The following year it claimed the Zionist entity was behind a "small explosion" that hit its Natanz uranium enrichment plant. It was the second alleged sabotage attempt against the facility in less than year, after a reported attack in July 2020.

The sabotage attempt at Fordo was foiled by the

Guards' "nuclear command, in cooperation with its intelligence services command", state media reported. "This is the first time that the existence of the nuclear command has been officially revealed and confirmed," IRNA said. State media had quoted the head of the country's passive defense organization, Gholamreza Jalali, as saying that a new "defense security command unit" had been formed in May-June last year "after several acts of sabotage in the country's nuclear facilities". — AFP

Monday's allegations came on the eve of a visit to Moscow by Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian for discussions on the nuclear talks with major powers. The negotiations in Vienna had been making progress but were halted after Russia earlier this month demanded guarantees that Western sanctions imposed over its invasion of Ukraine would not damage its trade with Iran.

The 2015 deal gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. But then US president Donald Trump reimposed tough economic sanctions after pulling out of the nuclear deal in 2018 and Iran hit back by gradually rolling back its own commitments under the deal. Among other measures, it resumed enrichment at Fordo, which it had agreed to mothball. — AFP

emboldened hardline groups who see India as a Hindu nation and are seeking to undermine its secular foundations at the expense of its 200 million-strong Muslim community. Asaduddin Owaisi, one of the country's most prominent Muslim politicians, said yesterday's verdict had "suspended fundamental rights to freedom of religion" and urged a Supreme Court appeal. "I hope this judgement will not be used to legitimize harassment of hijab wearing women," he wrote on Twitter.

The state high court initially ordered a temporary ban on the wearing of all religious symbols - including Hindu and Christian ones - in schools. Schools later reopened under heavy security with a ban on gatherings of more than four people. In several instances authorities made teachers and pupils take off their hijab publicly at the school gate.

A number of Muslim pupils told local media they would rather go home than be made to choose between their faith and education. Aaliyah Siddiqui, one of the teenagers who petitioned the Karnataka court to appeal the ban, said the fight against the restrictions would continue. "All I want to say is I will not give up," she said in a video message. "I will fight for my hijab because hijab is my identity and my pride." — AFP

## Court upholds school hijab ban...

Continued from Page 1

space'... and the ideals of egalitarianism should be readily apparent to all students." Hundreds of extra police officers were deployed around Karnataka on Monday ahead of the ruling, though there was no sign of fresh protests by mid-afternoon. As tensions came to a head in February, several violent confrontations in cities across the state were broken up by police and schools were shut.

The hijab is an important article of faith in Islam and many in Karnataka say that Muslim girls have worn it in schools for decades, just as Hindus, Sikhs and Christians have done with symbols of their respective religions. Critics accuse authorities in Karnataka, which is ruled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party, of seeking to drive a wedge between religious communities that have coexisted peacefully for generations.

Rights groups say Modi's election in 2014 has

## Russian forces press in on Kyiv...

Continued from Page 1

According to the United Nations, nearly 1.4 million children have fled Ukraine since the conflict began on Feb 24 - nearly one child per second. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has reported 1,834 civilian casualties. Addressing a key Russian concern used to justify the invasion, Zelensky said Ukraine should accept that it would not become a member of NATO's military alliance.

"We have heard for years that the doors were open, but we also heard that we could not join. It's a truth and it must be recognized," he told a video conference with military officials. Ukraine's capital has been transformed into a war zone, with apartment blocks badly damaged from Russian bombardments and half of the city's 3.5 million people now gone. The 35-hour curfew will come into effect from 8:00 pm, the city's mayor Vitali Klitschko announced, saying that four died in the capital yesterday. "This is why I ask all Kyivites to get prepared to stay at home for two days, or if the sirens go off, in the shelters," he added.

Four large blasts were heard from the center of the capital early Tuesday, sending columns of smoke high into the sky. A fire raged in a 16-storey housing block and smoke billowed from the charred husk of the building, as emergency services and stunned residents navigated an obstacle course of glass, metal and other debris littering the road.

Another residential building in the Podilsk area also came under attack. "At 4:20 am everything was very thunderous, crackling. I got up, my daughter ran to me with a question: 'Are you alive?'," Lyubov Gura, 73, told AFP. The district was once "a place to get coffee and enjoy life. Not anymore," Ukrainian MP Lesia Vasylenko said.

A Fox News cameraman, Pierre Zakrzewski, was killed and his colleague Benjamin Hall wounded when their vehicle was struck by incoming fire in Horenka, outside of Kyiv, on Monday, the US network announced. Earlier yesterday, Ukrainian parliament's human rights chief said three other journalists had been killed since the invasion began, including a US reporter shot dead Sunday in Irpin, also on the outskirts of the capital.

Russian troops surround the city to the north and east, and authorities have set up checkpoints, while residents are stockpiling food and medicine. Overnight Russian shelling also caused massive damage at the airport in the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro, regional authorities said. "Two strikes. The runway was destroyed. The terminal is damaged. Massive destruction," said regional governor Valentin Reznichenko.

An AFP team saw large plumes of black smoke spewing out of the airport site but could not get closer as it was cordoned off by soldiers, who said the airport could be bombed again anytime. In the besieged south-eastern city of Mariupol around 2,000 civilian cars managed to escape along a humanitarian evacuation route, local authorities said, following another 160 cars the previous day.

Outwardly, at least, the two sides are still far apart in negotiations, with Moscow demanding Ukraine turn away from the West and recognize Moscow-backed breakaway regions. Ukraine is pushing for a ceasefire and Russian troop withdrawal. On Tuesday, Zelensky sounded a note of cautious optimism about ongoing peace talks and claimed Russia was realizing victory would not come on the battlefield.

"They have already begun to understand that they will not achieve anything by war," Zelensky said. He said Monday's talks were "pretty good... but let's see." In an unprecedented show of solidarity with the embattled president, the Polish, Czech and Slovenian prime ministers took a train to Kyiv to meet Zelensky yesterday. "In such crucial times for the world, it is our duty to be in the place where history is being made," Poland's Mateusz Morawiecki said in a Facebook post.

Russia's military progress has been slow and costly, with Moscow apparently underestimating the strength of Ukrainian resistance. Western defense experts believe Russia's military now needs time to regroup and resupply its troops, paving the way for a possible pause or slowdown in fighting.

NATO worries that Russia is gearing up to carry out a chemical attack in Ukraine, secretary general Jens Stoltenberg said, citing "absurd claims" that Ukraine possesses biological weapons labs and warning that Russia would pay "a high price" if it did so.

Yesterday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said China does not want to be impacted by Western sanctions on Russia, as US pressure grows on Beijing to withdraw support from Moscow. "China is not a party to the crisis, still less wants to be affected by the sanctions," Wang said.

Reports this week said Moscow had turned to Beijing for military and economic help - prompting what one US official called "very candid" talks between high-ranking US and Chinese officials. A Britain-based war monitor said Moscow had drawn up lists of 40,000 fighters from Syrian army and allied militias to be put on standby for deployment in Ukraine.

In the face of the assault, Kyiv's allies have piled economic pressure on Putin's regime, as Britain added 350 more Russians to its sanctions list, hiked tariffs on a swathe of imports from vodka to steel and banned exports of luxury goods. The Kremlin also faces domestic pressure despite widespread censorship of the war. — AFP

Local

# Kuwait's new interior and defense ministers take oath

## National Assembly rejects MP Al-Fadhlah's resignation request

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah took constitutional oath before the parliament session yesterday in line with Article 91 of the constitution. Article 91 of the constitution states that before taking up his functions at the Assembly or at its committees, a member of the National Assembly shall, at a public meeting of the Assembly, take the constitutional oath.

Yesterday, an Amiri decree was issued appointing retired General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, and Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah hosted at Dar Al-Yamama yesterday the newly-formed Ministers, where they swore oath with the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

In another development, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem announced yesterday that the parliament did not approve resignation request by MP Yusef Al-Fadhlah. Al-Ghanem added that the resignation request was approved by 19 members out of total of 60 attendees, whereas the government refrained from voting. MP Yusef Al-Fadhlah filed his resignation on April 7 of last year, and it was listed first on the Assembly's agenda. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attends a parliamentary session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Defense Minister Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attends a parliamentary session at the National Assembly yesterday.

## Germany, Kuwait ink Memorandum of Understanding

BERLIN: Kuwait and Germany have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to set an official and legitimate framework of charitable and donation acts in Germany, and to boost bilateral cooperation in this regard. The MoU was signed by Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Thufairi and German minister of state Tobias Lindner.

Speaking to KUNA, Al-Thufairi said the MoU provides the legal and official framework necessary for charitable act in Germany and transparency of transferring financial remittances in this regard. He added that the memo was signed out of

confidence and transparency between the two sides, stressing that Kuwait's charitable culture is highly appreciated by the German government.

He pointed out that he discussed boosting bilateral ties and regional issues with the German side. Kuwait is determined to enhance ties with Germany to reach the strategic level in all domains in a way that serves stability either in the Gulf area, Europe or the world, Al-Thufairi emphasized.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Philipp Ackermann, Director General for Near and Middle East, Africa and Latin America at the German Foreign Ministry said that the memo will allow the German government in the future to cooperate closely with the Kuwaiti government regarding private donations to religious facilities in Germany. He stressed the importance of the memo for the two sides, adding that it is the first one in its kind. He went to say that the two sides shared views, during talks, on mechanisms of bolstering bilateral relations. — KUNA

## ESCWA launches Arab forum for sustainable development in Beirut

BEIRUT: The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) yesterday launched the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development titled (Recovery and Resilience 2022) in the Lebanese Capital Beirut. During the opening session, Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul Geit said that the Arab Region has witnessed a significant increase in poverty levels during 2020 with 14 million people, raising the total number to 115 million people.

This number represents a quarter of the population of the Arab world, some Arab countries suffer from high rates of severe poverty, such as Somalia and Yemen, he noted. He added that the General Secretariat of the League has signed a cooperation memorandum with food banks that include 19 Arab states in membership, in order to strengthen efforts to eradicate hunger in the Arab region.

In this regard, Abul Geit referred to a resolution that was reached by the Council of the Arab League on the ministerial level, suggested by Kuwait, to prepare a comprehensive and integrative strategic study on the issue of Arab food security for submitting it to the next Arab summit in Algeria. The study might be presented also during the Fifth Economic and Social Development Summit that Mauritania will host early next year, he noted.

On her part, Deputy UN Secretary General Amina Mohammad said that war in Ukraine is destabilizing the global economy which is still suffering from the Corona pandemic, leading to a significant rise in the prices of food, fuel and other basic commodities. The Arab region has made great progress in addressing the Corona pandemic, as the vaccination rate in some countries has reached 90 percent, but there is inequality within the two region, as less than two percent of the people in Yemen are vaccinated, which increases the risks of new changes that do not threaten the region only, but the world, she noted.

She called for building stronger health systems

through investing in the primary health care, health surveillance systems, local production of vaccines, diagnostics and treatment. She stressed that the UN will continue to work with national governments to develop long-term financing strategies to support the "2030 Agenda" through the use of integrated national financing frameworks.

In turn, Jordanian Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Nasser Al-Shraideh said, "the economic growth rates are still low as a result of the decline in the performance of the main sectors, especially the sectors of industry, tourism and transport." Rates of poverty and unemployment are still at critical rates, especially in the youth and women categories, in addition to the high public debt in relation to the national product in most of the Arab countries, he added.

He considered that the forum is a real and unique opportunity for countries and institutions concerned with sustainable development to identify priorities for action and ways to implement them to come up with recommendations that will be a reliable roadmap for sustainable development in the Arab countries.

For her part, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Rola Dashti (Kuwaiti) said, "There are an additional 16 million poor people due to the Corona pandemic. Unemployment among young people is the highest in the world, and the disparity in wealth is stark, as the richest 10 percent in the region own more than 80 percent of its wealth." She added that 5.66 million people need humanitarian assistance in Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Libya and Yemen.

She noted that the public debt has reached historical levels estimated at \$4.1 trillion, in an area that needs an additional \$462 billion to recover from the Corona pandemic. The work of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development will continue in Beirut today. — KUNA



KUWAIT: On the occasion of the 9th anniversary of the election of Pope Francis, Archbishop Eugene M Nugent, Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See, held a reception on March 13, 2022 at Crowne Plaza Hotel. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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# Gulf seeks to host Yemen govt, rebels for rare talks

## US urged to redesignate Houthis as terrorist organization

**RIYADH:** Gulf Arab countries are seeking to host rare talks between Yemen's warring parties, including the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, in Riyadh at the end of the month, officials said yesterday. Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, has been wracked by a devastating war since 2014, pitting the Houthis against the internationally recognized government.

Repeated diplomatic efforts to get the two sides to agree a peace deal have failed over the years. The Saudi-based Gulf Cooperation Council "is considering holding talks between Yemen's warring parties to put an end to the conflict", an official from the six-nation bloc, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said yesterday. An official from the Saudi-backed Yemeni government, which has been embroiled in a seven-year conflict with the Houthis, said the conference would take place between March 29 and April 7.

"We don't have a problem if the Houthis attend the talks to try to find a solution to security, military and political issues," the official said. But he added it was unlikely the insurgents would accept

the invitation to go to Riyadh, which has been leading a military coalition to back the government against the rebels since 2015. Another official in Riyadh confirmed efforts for talks were underway, saying: "Saudi Arabia will not be party to negotiations."

Efforts would be led by Oman, which hosts Houthi officials and has regularly played the role of mediator in regional conflicts. A Houthi spokesman told AFP the rebels had yet to receive an invitation. "Saudi Arabia wants to present itself as a neutral country... but this call (for talks) is for media attention, nothing serious," he said, without confirming whether or not they would take part. The talks are scheduled to take place as the Saudi-led coalition marks seven years since its intervention in the Yemen war on March 26, 2015 - shortly after the rebels seized the capital Sanaa.

### Famine conditions

Riyadh has repeatedly called on the US administration to redesignate the Houthis as a terrorist organization. The grinding war has cost hundreds

of thousands of lives, directly or indirectly, and displaced millions, in what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Around 80 percent of Yemen's population of nearly 30 million depend on some form of aid for survival. On Monday, UN agencies warned the number of people in the country starving in famine conditions is projected to increase five-fold this year to 161,000 amid fears of a dire shortfall of life-saving aid. Over 30,000 people are already struggling in famine conditions, they said, calling the sharp rise "extremely worrying".

Efforts to convene Yemen's warring parties in Riyadh comes on the heels of a high-level conference to raise aid for Yemen, as fears mount that Russia's invasion of Ukraine threatens global food supplies. Yemen depends almost entirely on food imports, with nearly a third of wheat supplies coming from Ukraine, the UN said. The UN has repeatedly warned that aid agencies are running out of funds, forcing them to slash "life-saving" programs. Last year the UN pleaded for \$3.85 billion for aid, but raised just \$1.7 billion. —AFP

### News in brief

#### IFOC in its third edition

**RIYADH:** The third edition of The International Fire Operations Conference and Exhibition (IFOC) includes latest technologies in the field of firefighting and rescue. A number of international companies participating in the exhibition that will last until March 17, to introduce the latest mechanisms, means of fire protection for firefighters, equipment, firefighting networks, alarms and specialized automated vehicles. The Kuwaiti delegation participating in (IFOC) is headed by the Chief of the Kuwait Fire Force Lieutenant-General Khaled Al-Mekrad, who will participate in the conference's sessions. About 70 participants will discuss practical challenges, solutions of fire and safety operations, and enhancing during the sessions. — KUNA

#### Kuwait oil price down

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 65 cents to \$112.43 per barrel on Monday as opposed to \$113.08 pb last Friday, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The Brent crude dropped by \$5.77 to settle at \$106.90 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which slipped by \$6.32 to \$103.01 per barrel. Also, the price for OPEC's daily basket of crude dropped by \$3.94 to \$113.29 per barrel (pb) on Monday, compared with \$117.23 pb four days earlier, the cartel said. The monthly average for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' basket of crude last month was \$85.41 last month, it said in a statement. OPEC and its allies, a group known as OPEC+, agreed last month to proceed with a production hike of 400,000 barrels per day (bpd), keeping their current policy of slight monthly increases in output. — KUNA

#### OIC supports Palestinian rights

**ALGIERS:** The Executive Committee of the Parliamentary Union of the Members States of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) adopted a final communique at the conclusion of its 47th meeting on Monday. The conferees reaffirmed support to the struggle of the Palestinian people for regaining their legitimate and unalienable rights, foremost among which is the right to establish an independent and fully sovereign state with Holy Jerusalem as its capital. They urged the international community to double efforts to halt the Zionist aggressions on the Palestinian people, according to the communique. On the combat against terrorism, the conferees condemned all forms and manifestations of violence, reaffirming resolve to dry out the sources of funding for terrorism across the Muslim world, particularly the Sahel and East Africa regions. — KUNA

#### Army chief meets UK officials

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah received yesterday Air Marshal Martin Sampson, the UK Defense Senior Advisor to the Middle East and North Africa. They discussed issues of common concern. The Army Chief said in a statement that the Chief of Staff received Air Marshal Sampson, the UK Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis and the accompanying delegation. Discussions between the two sides dealt with topics of common interest. Commander of the Kuwait Army Land Force, Major General Mohammad Al-Dhafiri, and a number of senior military officers attended the meeting. — KUNA

## Inspectors raid shops

**KUWAIT:** Ministry of Commerce and Industry inspectors raided a tobacco retail company in Hawally for malpractices. The company is accused of selling expired products. Inspectors found large quantity of containers ready for distribution. Legal action will be taken against violators. Commerce Ministry and Industry inspectors issued 10 citations to several supermarkets for non-compliance with the Ministry laws.



**KUWAIT:** Jeeb Al-Shuyoukh, Ardiya, Mishref, Madina and backup firemen battle the fire in a popular market in Jeeb area. The fire was limited to the basement that contained clothes, food material and houseware items. No injuries were reported.



**KUWAIT:** Salmiya and Bidaa firemen put out a fire in a Salmiya building in a record time and no injuries were reported.



Dr Rana Al-Fares

## Kuwait to enhance its digital economy

**KUWAIT:** State Minister for Municipality Affairs and State Minister for Communications and Information Technology Dr Rana Al-Fares said that the network development project will commence so as to increase the net speed to 1 GB as well as expanding the digital economy - making way for new job opportunities.

In her opening speech at the Smart Cities Conference, organized by the Information Technology Society through the Zoom application, she mentioned that CITRA has set out to speed up the development of the fixed network in Kuwait in order to achieve the main idea of the Smart Cities. The Smart Cities aims to connect roads, utilities, and public places using the latest advanced technologies to direct the digital economy to further develop and create more jobs. Al-Fares also support new ideas and innovations to aid the project as the rest of the World is adapting to the same adding that the priority of these technologies must be in service of the citizens and its communities. The 2-day conference will identify the challenges the government and private sectors are facing in merging with the Smart Cities to achieve the main goals of mobility, digitization and coexistence. —KUNA



Russia rallies militias ahead of Ukraine urban assaults

## Turkmenistan strongman's son wins presidential vote



SHANGHAI: Officials and workers, wearing protective gear, work in an area where barriers are being placed to close off streets around a locked down neighborhood after the detection of new cases of COVID-19 in Shanghai yesterday. —AFP

# Millions under lockdown in China

## China reports 5,280 new COVID cases as Omicron variant surges

BEIJING: Tens of millions of people were under lockdown across China yesterday, as surging virus cases prompted the return of mass tests and hazmat-suited health officials to streets on a scale not seen since the start of the pandemic. China reported 5,280 new COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, more than double the previous day's tally, as the highly transmissible Omicron variant spread across a country that has stuck tightly to a zero-COVID strategy.

That approach, which pivots on hard localized lockdowns and has left China virtually cut off from the outside world for two years, appears stretched to the limit as Omicron finds its way into communities.

At least 13 cities nationwide were fully locked down as of yesterday, and several others had partial lockdowns, with some 15,000 infections reported nationwide in March. Health officials urged people over 60 to get vaccinated-including the third booster jab-as soon as possible.

Around 80 percent of people in that age group are double-vaccinated, according to official data-but Beijing is anxiously watching the situation in Hong Kong, which now has the world's highest virus death rates due to low inoculation among its oldest residents. Official Jiao Yahui said at a press briefing Tuesday that "the risk of severe illness is very high" for people in that age group.

### 'I panicked'

The northeastern province of Jilin has been worst hit by Omicron with over 3,000 new cases yesterday, according to the National Health Commission. Residents of several cities there including provincial capital Changchun-home to nine million people-are

under stay-at-home orders.

Health officials said over 8,200 Jilin residents have been hospitalized, with the vast majority showing mild or no symptoms. Shenzhen-the southern tech hub of 17.5 million people-is three days into a lockdown with many factories closed and supermarket shelves emptying, while China's largest city Shanghai is under a lattice of restrictions. City officials said at a press conference yesterday that "it is not necessary to lock down Shanghai at present", instead opting for more "precise" measures.



**Zero-COVID strategy appears stretched to the limit**

Scenes of closed neighborhoods, panic buying and police cordons cast back to the early phase of the pandemic, which first emerged in China in late 2019. Although cases from the chaotic initial outbreak in early 2020 are widely believed to have been under-reported, life since then had largely returned to normal in China under its strict zero-COVID approach.

But as lockdowns edge closer to Beijing, public venues have tightened their scrutiny of ubiquitous health QR codes. From a 21-day home quarantine with

her mother and three-year-old child, project manager Mary Yue said she was forced to isolate after cases were linked to a playground they had visited.

"I panicked when the health officials called... I was afraid they'd take us to a quarantine hotel," the 34-year-old told AFP. "But this time they are letting people isolate at home. That's a huge relief."

Others expressed exasperation as the pandemic grinds on in China, while much of the world tries to return to normal. "The control measures were doing pretty well before," Beijinger Yan told AFP, giving one name. "And now it starts again, when will it ever end?"

### Economic clouds gather

Experts forecast a dent to economic growth as the virus billows out. "Renewed restrictions, notably the lockdown in Shenzhen, will weigh on consumption and cause supply disruptions in the near term," Tommy Wu of Oxford Economics said in a briefing note. He added that it will be "challenging" for China to meet its GDP growth target for the year of around 5.5 percent.

Dozens of domestic flights were cancelled Tuesday, and aviation authorities said more than 100 international flights bound for Shanghai would be diverted to other Chinese cities between next week and May 1. Fears over shutdowns extended a tech-fueled rout in Hong Kong, where stocks plunged more than six per cent.

As the financial hub grapples with its own deadly COVID-19 wave, a former top government adviser condemned leader Carrie Lam Tuesday and called for her to "resign in shame". Hong Kong's 4,300 deaths in under three months-mostly in care homes-has seen Lam's administration criticized for low vaccination rates and unclear messaging. —AFP



NABLUS, Palestinian Territories: Relatives mourn during the funeral of 16-year-old Palestinian Nader Rayan who was killed by Zionist forces, at the Balata camp near the northern city of Nablus yesterday. —AFP

## Zionist troops kill two Palestinians in West Bank

NABLUS, Palestinian Territories: Zionist troops killed two Palestinians in separate shootings in the occupied West Bank yesterday, the latest in a flurry of deadly clashes as a US envoy tours the region seeking to ease tensions. A 16-year-old died in an exchange of fire with troops carrying out an arrest raid outside the northern city of Nablus, the Palestinian health ministry and Zionist forces said. Separately, a Palestinian in his 20s was killed in Qalandia outside Jerusalem, the health ministry said.

Teenager Nader Haitham Rayan died in Balata camp near Nablus after being hit by bullets to the head, chest and hand, the ministry said. It did not give further details on the circumstances of his death. A spokesman for Zionist border police said a Palestinian had been killed. Rayan's body was wrapped in a Palestinian flag ahead of his burial yesterday, during which gunmen fired into the air. The Palestinian health ministry said another nine people were wounded in the exchanges, one of them seriously. The second death occurred in Qalandia, a town on Jerusalem's northern outskirts that hosts the main checkpoint between annexed east Jerusalem and the northern West Bank. Alaa Shaham, in his 20s, was killed by a "live round to the head", the ministry said.

Commenting on the violence in Qalandia, the border police said riots erupted when forces entered the area to arrest "two people involved in terrorist activities". "Hundreds of rioters threw heavy objects from the roofs of houses endangering Zionist forces" who fired in response, a statement said, without mentioning the reported fatality. Hundreds gathered for Shaham's funeral, including gunmen from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, the armed wing of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah faction.

Palestinian authorities said the two deaths brought to 20 the number of Palestinians killed by Zionist forces this year. With violence flaring in the West Bank, US deputy assistant secretary of state Hady Amr was in the region for a tour aimed in part at trying to "reduce tensions", a US embassy spokesperson said. Hadr is also seeking "to implement specific economic steps that will improve lives", the spokesperson added. —AFP

## Syria enclave marks uprising with message for Ukraine

IDLIB: Thousands of protesters in war-torn Syria's rebel enclave of Idlib yesterday marked 11 years since the start of an anti-government uprising, buoyed by the global outcry over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Gathered on the main square in the northwestern city of Idlib, more than 5,000 people took part in one of the largest rallies the beleaguered region has seen in months.

Many of the demonstrators hoped the war launched by the Syrian government's main backer Russia in Ukraine would rekindle some interest in their cause. "What is happening in Ukraine today is similar to the situation here; the enemy is the same and the goal is the same," protester Radwan Atrash said. Thousands of demonstrators marked the date in other cities across rebel-held northern Syria.

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's grip on

power held by a thread after a nationwide uprising that erupted on March 15, 2011 escalated into a fully-fledged civil war. A decision by Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to throw his military might behind the Syrian government changed the course of the conflict and saved Assad's hold on power.

The main killers in a war that has left half a million people dead is by some margin the government and its allies, who include Russian and Iranian forces, as well as a myriad of militia groups. Around four million people, at least half of them displaced, now live in a region of northwestern Syria that is the last enclave fighting Assad's rule despite years of deadly Russian-backed offensives.

A few Ukrainian flags were visible at the Idlib protest, as were banners expressing solidarity with the Ukrainian people and demanding action against Putin. A medic among the protesters at the city's main roundabout had some advice for his counterparts in Ukraine.

"Fortify your hospitals with cement blocks; the enemy Putin does not distinguish between civilians, wounded people and fighters," said Ali Hamoush, who works at an Idlib hospital.

Russia has repeatedly targeted medical facilities

law enforcement in a tweet early yesterday. Authorities have offered large cash rewards for information that leads to the killer's arrest with police releasing images of a shaven-headed and bearded male suspect dressed all in black. The first shooting took place in the early hours of March 3 in northeast Washington. The victim was taken to hospital with non-life-threatening injuries, according to officials.

A second homeless man was shot and wounded five days later, also in northeast Washington, police said. He also suffered non-life-threatening wounds. The next day, a homeless man was found dead in northeast Washington with stab and gunshot wounds, police said. His tent, where he had been living, had caught fire. On Saturday, a 38-year-old man was shot in the arm in Lower Manhattan during the night, police said. —AFP



IDLIB, Syria: A Syrian boy takes part in a rally marking 11 years since the start of an anti-regime uprising in Syria's rebel enclave of Idlib yesterday. —AFP

in Syria, according to witnesses, medics and human rights groups. A pediatric hospital was hit by an apparent Russian strike in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol last week, causing an uproar and fuelling accusations of war crimes against Putin. As the conflict drags on, rights groups have pleaded for the international community not to forget Syria. —AFP



WASHINGTON: This handout screen grab released Monday by the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, DC, shows the suspect they believe targeted homeless men. —AFP

## Suspect in shootings of homeless men arrested

WASHINGTON: Washington police arrested a suspect yesterday over the shooting of five homeless men in the US capital and in New York, officials said.

Two men were killed and three wounded in the shootings that took place over the past 10 days, with Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser and her New York counterpart Eric Adams calling the perpetrator a "cold-blooded killer." Police said the suspect in the shootings was being interviewed by

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## International

# Russia rallies militias ahead of Ukraine urban assaults

## Kremlin plans to take major cities with urban warfare tactics

**PARIS:** A Russian call for fighters from Syria and Chechnya to join its war in Ukraine is motivated by plans to take major cities with urban warfare tactics which will require overwhelmingly superior attacking numbers, Western observers say.

After three weeks of fighting, all of the 150,000 Russian soldiers initially deployed at the Ukrainian border are now inside the country, experts say. "The Russians have no more reserves in the zone," a source at the French military chiefs of staff told AFP.

But if President Vladimir Putin wants to capture major cities such as Kyiv and the Black Sea port of Odessa, he will have to bolster troops on the ground after an initial campaign phase that has been slower than the Kremlin expected. This could equate to a numerical superiority of roughly 10 attackers for every Ukrainian soldier defending the urban centers, according to a military source, who asked not to be named. Local knowledge, mobility and early occupation of vantage points typically favor defending forces in urban combat, adding the source.

The Kremlin said Friday that volunteers including from Syria were welcome to fight alongside Russia's military in Ukraine. Yesterday, a war monitor said Russia had drawn up lists of 40,000 fighters from Syrian army and allied militia ranks to be put on standby for deployment in Ukraine.

### 'Massive reinforcements needed'

In a country where soldiers earn between \$15 and \$35 per month, Russia has promised them a salary of \$1,100 to fight in Ukraine, the Observatory reported.

"Putin needs more troops than he thought he

would. And he needs irregular troops because this war is becoming insurrectional," a Western security source said. After failing to conquer Ukraine quickly, "Russia now needs massive reinforcements in terms of equipment and troops" to continue the war, said Mathieu Boulegue, a research fellow specializing in Russia at Chatham House, a think tank.

Moscow's recourse to Syrian soldiers follows on from Russia's intervention in 2015 in the war-torn country on behalf of the government, helping President Bashar al-Assad clock up decisive victories in the decade-long conflict. Russia's airforce notably helped Syrian forces during their siege of rebel-held Aleppo. Syrian fighters have been deployed in foreign theatres before, by both Russia and Turkey in Libya, and by Turkey in Nagorno-Karabakh to help Ankara's ally Azerbaijan.

Putin has ordered his forces "to hold back on any immediate assault on large cities," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday. But, he added, the defense ministry "does not rule out" the possibility of putting large cities "under its full control".

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky slammed the Russian recruitment in Syria, saying Russia was hiring "murderers".

### 'Guess how close we are'

Fighters from Russia's overwhelmingly Muslim southern region of Chechnya are also loyal to the Kremlin and battle-hardened from reported past deployments in Syria and eastern Ukraine.

Numerous videos posted on social media have suggested that they are already present inside Ukraine.

**40,000 fighters from Syrian army being enlisted**



**LVIV, Ukraine:** People and servicemen attend funerals of Oleh Yashchyshyn, Sergiy Melnyk and Rostyslav Romanchuk, Ukrainian servicemen killed during Russia's invasion of Ukraine, at Lychakiv cemetery in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv yesterday. —AFP

Ramzan Kadyrov, the strongman leader of Chechnya, claimed on his Telegram channel Monday that he had been in Ukraine just outside Kyiv alongside the forces. "You don't have much time left," he wrote in a taunting message to the Ukrainian leadership. "Better to surrender and join us," he said, adding in a gloating aside: "guess how close we are" to Kyiv.

Kadyrov, a devout Muslim who rules the Russian region in the northern Caucasus with an iron fist, is a former rebel turned Kremlin ally with a paramilitary force at his command.

At the start of the Russian offensive, images circulated on social networks showing a square in the Chechen capital Grozny filled with soldiers claiming to be on their way to Ukraine. Kadyrov's forces are accused by rights activists of numerous abuses in Chechnya, including killings and enforced disappearances.

Yesterday, Kadyrov indicated he was back in Chechnya, welcoming to the region the secretary of Russia's national security council Nikolai Patrushev, a key member of Putin's inner circle. —AFP

## China wary of being impacted by Russia sanctions

**BEIJING:** China does not want to be impacted by Western economic sanctions on Russia, the foreign ministry said yesterday, as pressure grows on Beijing to withdraw support from an isolated Moscow.

Beijing has refused to condemn its close ally Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, while blaming the United States and NATO's "eastward expansion" for worsening tensions. Moscow and Beijing have grown closer in recent times, in what Washington sees as an increasingly hostile alliance of the authoritarian nuclear powers. "China is not a party to the crisis, still less wants to be affected by the sanctions," Foreign Minister Wang Yi said, according to a readout of a phone call with his Spanish counterpart Jose Manuel Albares published yesterday. China has "always opposed using sanctions to solve problems, let alone unilateral sanctions that have no basis in international law," Wang said, according to the readout.

Around three weeks after Russian troops marched into Ukraine, Moscow's forces have bombarded and besieged several towns and cities. Wang's comments were published after a seven-hour meeting between high-ranking US and Chinese officials in Rome, at which Washington said the US had expressed concern about "alignment" between Russia and China.

US media has reported that Russia has asked China for military and economic assistance, as its troops struggle to make ground and its economy faces devastation from Western sanctions. The New York Times, citing unnamed US officials, said there was no indication whether China had responded. But Beijing has so far sent mixed signals on Russia's bloody invasion and US officials say the jury is still out on how China will act.

Foreign ministry spokesman yesterday told reporters that Beijing "strongly urges the US not to harm China's legitimate rights and interests when handling relations with Russia". Asked about articles saying Moscow had asked Beijing for help, Zhao accused the US of "spreading disinformation" against China. "Our aim is very clear, that is, to promote de-escalation of the situation... and end the conflict," he added.

In the Rome meeting on Monday with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, China's senior diplomat Yang Jiechi reiterated the country's stance that Beijing is "committed to promoting peace talks", the official Xinhua news agency reported yesterday. China called on all parties to exercise "maximum restraint" and "protect civilians" in the Ukraine crisis at the meeting. —AFP

## Swiss neutrality under fire over Ukraine war

**BERN:** Russia's invasion of Ukraine has pushed Switzerland to shed taboos, with calls for rearmament and unprecedented sanctions putting its deeply engrained neutrality to the test of a war in Europe.

Critics in Switzerland have warned that government moves could "torpedo" one of the wealthy Alpine nation's key principles, dictating no involvement in conflicts between other states. After Russian troops entered Ukraine on February 24, Bern cited that neutrality when it initially refrained from jumping onboard with biting sanctions imposed by the European Union.

But four days later, the government buckled to international pressure and imposed all the EU sanctions, prompting criticism it was throwing neutrality to the wind. The move, which the government insisted was "compatible" with its neutrality, was widely welcomed on the international stage.

## Ukraine memes proliferate despite grim realities of war

**PARIS:** A giant Adolf Hitler bends down and pats a docile Vladimir Putin on the cheek, master to pupil, in a picture posted on Ukraine's official Twitter account on February 24 — the day the invasion began.

The message that follows reads: "This is not a 'meme', but our and your reality right now."

Almost two million people have liked the tweet and many thousands have shared it, making it one of the defining viral takes of the war so far. Yet the country's official messaging is only a tiny part of the story of memes in the Ukraine war. For two weeks after the invasion, Ukraine's official account pivoted away from humor, allowing the internet to fill the void. Dozens of dedicated accounts sprang up and social media platforms have been flooded with content from cats in cardboard tanks on TikTok to endless jokes about World War III and reworked scenes from Star Wars movies. But beyond a few seconds of mirth, do memes have a wider role?

"I don't think memes are going to end the war," says

war," he tweeted. "Thank you to everyone across the country who has stepped up to offer their help so far," he said, less than 24 hours after the launch of the "Homes for Ukraine" program.

The scheme enables individuals, charities, community groups and businesses to volunteer accommodation for refugees for a minimum of six months. It is open to Ukrainian nationals and their immediate family members and will allow them to live and work in the UK for up to three years and access healthcare, benefits and education.

Hosts, who will be given £350 (\$457, 418 euros) a month, must submit the names of those they wish to sponsor, with NGOs and charities working to identify those most in need. The UK has faced criti-

It even earned a mention in US President Joe Biden's State of the Union address, when he hailed that "even Switzerland" was with those striving to hold Moscow accountable for its aggression. But at home, it sparked outrage from the far right, which demands total neutrality, both on military and political.

The largest party, the populist right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP), has threatened to push the issue to a referendum, as part of the country's direct democracy system. The SVP has also lashed out at Bern's efforts to gain a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, warning this would "torpedo" the country's neutrality. The government has argued that if it is granted the seat in June elections, it can simply abstain on issues that cast doubt on its neutrality.

### 'Schizophrenia'

The Swiss candidacy has meanwhile received backing from most lawmakers, and all other parties have voiced support for the sanctions. "This marks a move towards a more active political neutrality," Swiss-American political



**GENEVA:** Critics in Switzerland have warned that government moves could "torpedo" one of the wealthy Alpine nation's key principles.

scientist Daniel Warner told AFP.

Former president Micheline Calmy-Rey has chimed in, insisting that while militarily neutral, Switzerland is "free to defend its interests by adapting its foreign policy, and is free to impose sanctions".

Switzerland distinguishes between the law of neutrality—which was codi-

fied in The Hague Conventions of 1907 and which imposes non-participation in international armed conflict—and the policy of neutrality. The latter is not governed by law, and its implementation "is determined according to the international context of the moment", the government explains on its website. —AFP

Charlie Gere, a sociology professor from Lancaster University in the UK. He describes memes in general as "nihilistic japing" likely to have minimal impact outside their own cultural sphere. The war has given rise to one meme that has crossed from internet curiosity to real-world product. The Saint Javelin meme—depicting a Madonna figure in the style of a religious icon clutching a rocket launcher—now features on T-shirts and various other merchandise sold by Canada-based marketer Christian Borys.

He says all his profit goes to the Ukrainian war effort and told the BBC he had raised more than \$1 million (910,000 euros). Memes are more commonly regarded as an effective way of spreading a message and engaging audiences. Christian Dumais, a writer and comedian whose Twitter alter ego "Drunk Hulk" has been behind plenty of viral content over the years, says Ukraine has been incredibly clear in its use of memes.

"A meme's ability to re-contextualize what we're seeing in the world in order to subvert, inspire, provoke, and educate is redefining how we can reach people," he says.

Vincent Miller of Kent university in the UK, author of "Understanding Digital Culture", sees memes as a kind of conversation that can enable political debate to flourish. "Given their anonymous nature and origins, memes allow people to avoid a lot of the friction and social divisiveness often involved with making

### Unequal treatment

The government has previously come under fire for its response to the evacuation of Kabul after the Taliban takeover in August last year. Some 15,000 people were taken out of the Afghan capital but the rushed nature of the evacuation meant thousands of Afghans who had worked with the UK there were left behind. The UK has meanwhile been under



**LVIV, Ukraine:** Daughter of Rostyslav Romanchuk stands near the portrait of her father during funerals of Oleh Yashchyshyn, Sergiy Melnyk and Rostyslav Romanchuk, Ukrainian servicemen killed during Russia's invasion of Ukraine, at Lychakiv cemetery in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv yesterday. —AFP

political statements online," he told AFP.

Whether impactful or not, memes will continue to proliferate around the war. Ukraine's official Twitter, after a two-week hiatus, returned to memes on the weekend, posting an image ridiculing Russian tanks and another highlighting the collapsing Russian economy. —AFP

domestic pressure to do more to prevent migrants crossing the Channel on small boats, putting themselves at risk in the busy shipping lane.

Johnson made "taking back control" of the UK's borders a key issue in the successful campaign to take the country out of the European Union. But putting that into practice has proved more problematic. Record numbers—more than 28,000—crossed last year and, unlike for Ukraine's refugees, finding suitable accommodation has been a problem. Campaigners have said that because of an over-stretched and under-funded system, many asylum seekers spend months stuck in taxpayer-funded hotels while their applications are processed. —AFP

## 100,000 Britons willing to host Ukraine refugees

**LONDON:** Over 100,000 Britons have expressed interest in hosting Ukrainian refugees, as part of a government program for households to take in those fleeing Russia's invasion, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said yesterday. "It's fantastic that over 100,000 people and organizations have recorded their interest in supporting Ukrainians fleeing the

## International

# Turkmenistan strongman's son wins presidential vote

## Election win paves the way for hereditary succession

ASHGABAT: The son of Turkmenistan's autocrat leader, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, decisively won the presidential election, officials said yesterday, paving the way for hereditary succession in one of the world's most tightly controlled countries. Serdar Berdimukhamedov, 40, won the ballot held last Saturday with 73 percent of the vote, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) said in a statement on its website.

Nine candidates stood in the poll in the isolated country of six million people, but few doubted that Berdimukhamedov's only son Serdar—who has pledged to pursue his father's course—would take over the country's top job. Berdimukhamedov senior, who is now Turkmenistan's outgoing president, chair of the cabinet and senate chief, has been the regime's top decision-maker for the last 15 years.

The strongman known as the gas-rich country's "protector" has dominated public life since the country's founding president, Saparmurat Niyazov, died in 2006 and he tolerates no dissent.

Last month Berdimukhamedov said he would step aside and allow "young leaders" to govern, triggering a snap vote. In the end Berdimukhamedov junior obtained a victory margin far lower than the 98-

97-percent routs posted by his 64-year-old father in the hermit state's previous two elections.



**Serdar garners 73% vote in election**

### No change to neutrality

Observers say his father will still be holding the reins, after the family patriarch pledged to remain in politics as head of the senate. One thing that is unlikely to change is the republic's neutral status in international affairs. Serdar Berdimukhamedov told journalists last Saturday that status would remain if he won because it "allows Turkmenistan to develop fully-fledged relations with all states".

The country that honors its leaders with ostentatious gold statues remains strongly dependent on

China, which dominates purchases of its natural gas. Smaller volumes purchased by Russia's Gazprom, meanwhile, could be threatened by the impact of sanctions targeting Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine—a conflict that Turkmen state media has all but ignored.

The country has also not admitted any coronavirus cases since the outbreak of the pandemic.

The now-confirmed father-son leadership transition will be the first of its kind in Central Asia, a former communist region that also includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. CEC officials in Turkmenistan had taken their time to announce the results of one of the world's most predictable elections, which saw Berdimukhamedov face off against relatively unknown civil servants and provincial officials. On Sunday, CEC's chairman Gulmyrat Myradov told journalists who had attended a press conference in expectation of hearing the results that the latter were being delayed due to "the need for a thorough count".

Across the Caspian Sea in the Caucasus region, Azerbaijan became the first former Soviet country to establish a dynasty, when President Ilham Aliyev took the helm upon father Heydar Aliyev's death in 2003. Tajikistan, the ex-Soviet bloc's poorest successor state, is expected to follow a similar path. Upper house head



Serdar Berdimukhamedov

Rustam Emomali, 34, is in pole position to succeed veteran leader Emomali Rakhmon, 69, should Rakhmon retire or prove unable to fulfill his duties.

The younger Berdimukhamedov's inauguration is scheduled for next Saturday. — AFP

## Indonesian president takes camping trip to site of new capital

JAKARTA: Indonesian President Joko Widodo took a camping trip to the country's future capital, he said on social media yesterday, posing for photographs in a forest at the site of the new city.

The country is preparing to move its capital from overcrowded Jakarta to Nusantara, in a megaproject that has come under criticism from environmentalists who warn it could damage ecosystems in the region. "Morning, how does it feel to stay overnight at the location of Nusantara? The air was cool and the weather was clear last night," Widodo posted on Instagram, captioning a picture of the president sitting in front of his tent.

On Monday, Widodo and governors from across the country inaugurated the site with a ceremony in which they brought soil and water from their respective regions and mixed them together to symbolise the country's unity. The new capital will cover about 56,180 hectares (216 square miles) of the eastern part of Borneo island, which the country shares with Malaysia and Brunei.

But the project has faced hurdles—with fears over its environmental impact compounded by the loss this week of investor SoftBank Group, which withdrew from the project without explanation.

Widodo announced plans to move the capital in 2019, citing rising sea levels and severe congestion on the densely populated Java island. The move is set to begin in 2024, but Widodo has cautioned the project could take over a decade to finish. Indonesia is not the first country in Southeast Asia to relocate an overpopulated capital, with both Malaysia and Myanmar moving their administrative centers in the 2000s. — AFP



PENAJAM, Indonesia: Indonesia's President Joko Widodo sits next to a tent as he and his entourage camp at a ground in Penajam Paser Utara, where the government plans to move its capital from Jakarta to East Kalimantan. — AFP

## Ex-HK adviser slams city leader over deadly COVID storm

HONG KONG: A former top government adviser condemned Hong Kong's leader yesterday, calling for her to "resign in shame" over a deadly COVID-19 wave that has clogged the city's healthcare system and sent elderly deaths soaring. Former government adviser Wong Chack-ke joins a chorus of pro-Beijing loyalists in criticizing Chief Executive Carrie Lam at a politically sensitive juncture for the city with a new leader to be selected by July 1.

Key Chinese officials—including President Xi Jinping—are also expected to be in town by that date for the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's handover from Britain to China. But Hong Kong's 740,000 plus cases and 4,300 deaths in under three months—mostly inside the city's care homes—have seen Lam's administration rebuked for its low vaccination rates and unclear messaging around potential lockdown and testing measures. "If a leader is of any virtue, he or she should resign in shame after seeing so many elderly people die of policy faults," Wong wrote in an opinion piece published Tuesday in the Ming Pao newspaper, calling the crisis a "man-made calamity".

"After the situation got out of hand, all the officials knew was to shirk the responsibilities by repeatedly emphasizing that the outbreak had overwhelmed the government's capacity," the former top adviser to Lam's predecessor Leung Chun-ying said.



SHENYANG, China: This photo taken on Monday shows a resident undergoing a nucleic acid test for the COVID-19 coronavirus in Shenyang, in China's northeastern Liaoning province. — AFP

## Hazmat suits and panic buying: Pandemic images return to China

SHANGHAI: A Shanghai pedestrian swarmed by hazmat-clad health officials, police tape wrapped around entire blocks, and panic buying at a Shenzhen shopping centre: China is returning to virus controls many hoped it had long left behind. The country is facing its worst COVID-19 outbreak since the first wave of the pandemic emerged in Wuhan in late 2019.

While the daily caseload is comparatively small, around 5,300 were recorded yesterday, the Omicron variant is shaking Beijing's "zero-COVID" strategy—and that means the return of mass testing and tough restrictions on movement. Shanghai's famous waterfront, usually buzzing with tourists and locals, fell quiet this week as authorities moved to stamp out a rise in COVID cases in China's biggest city. Just a handful of masked pedestrians snapped pictures of the skyline as workers were told to stay home, students turned to online classes, and restaurant dining was banned in some districts. Instead of an all-out lockdown-imposed in other cities across China during a recent virus resurgence—Shanghai restrictions were targeted at squashing clusters in specific zones.

But that has left residents picking through a web of local edicts. "We were informed last night to suspend (dine-in service) and we'll obey, otherwise we would have to shut down if they found out," one restaurant

owner in central Shanghai told AFP. In a neighboring district, another restaurant owner said the measures were already putting people off eating out. "We don't have many customers these days," he said, adding that anxiety was running high. On Douyin—China's version of TikTok—one would-be restaurateur complained that the dine-in ban was announced just as she had rented new premises. "I'm literally going to cry."

### Hazmat guard

In Shenzhen, the southern city of 17.5 million where a harsher lockdown has been imposed, social media videos showed panic buying at supermarkets where shelves were fast emptying. Large red plastic barricades blocked access to many compounds and lines metastasized in the gaps between high rise buildings as mass PCR testing rolled out. China's harsh Covid controls have generally enjoyed support from citizens: the official death toll has remained low and, after the chaotic first outbreak in Wuhan in 2020, life has largely returned to normal. "Now I'm used to (control measures), it's been a long time," Beijing resident Yan Zhiping told AFP. "As long as we protect ourselves well, there won't be problems."

But the frequency of COVID restrictions has started to grate on some as debate rises over whether Beijing should adjust its unrelenting zero-COVID policy, especially in the face of the highly transmissible yet less-severe Omicron variant. In Shanghai, one resident complained online that the city had done "a bad job", accusing the government of blocking people from posting negative comments. "Preventing and controlling the virus accurately in Shanghai is just a joke, an extremely irresponsible joke," fumed another. — AFP

## UN denounces mass killings in Myanmar

GENEVA: The United Nations yesterday denounced mass killings in Myanmar and accused the military of possible war crimes and crimes against humanity since last year's coup d'etat. The UN human rights office urged the international community to take immediate steps to halt the spiral of violence in Myanmar.

Myanmar's military seized power on February 1 last year, ousting the civilian government and arresting its de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. The junta has since waged a bloody crackdown on dissent.

In a report covering the period since the takeover, UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet's office said Myanmar's military and security forces had shown a flagrant disregard for human life. It described how the military had bombed populated areas with air strikes and heavy weapons and deliberately targeted civilians, many of whom were shot in the head, burned to death, arbitrarily arrested, tortured or used as human shields.

"We have really been able to identify a pattern over the past year, which indicates that this is planned, coordinated, systemic attacks: that there are clear indications that they would amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity," UN human rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva. "This is the clearest yet indication of the commission of these crimes." — AFP



HONG KONG: A Chinese soldier wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) stands guard at a People's Liberation Army (PLA) garrison in Hong Kong yesterday amid the city's worst-ever coronavirus outbreak. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Russia seeks jail for Navalny

MOSCOW: Russian prosecutors yesterday called for jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny to serve 13 years in prison on new fraud charges. Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most vocal domestic critic, was jailed last year after surviving a poison attack he blames on the Kremlin. "I request that Navalny be sentenced to a term of 13 years and a subsequent two years of probation," prosecutor Nadezhda Tikhonova was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies. The prosecutor also requested "two years of restricted freedom" for Navalny and that he pay a fine of 1.2 million rubles (\$10,600 or 9,700 euros). — AFP

#### NZ offers visas to Ukrainians

WELLINGTON: New Zealand will offer 4,000 special visas to refugees fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine if they have family in the southern hemisphere nation, its government said yesterday. Immigration Minister Kris Faafoi said it was New Zealand's largest special visa category in decades in support of an international aid effort. Over 2.8 million people have fled Ukraine since Russia invaded on February 24, according to UN estimates. "It's a two-year visa to help people escape the current conflict and to shelter here in the hope they can return home when the war ends," Faafoi said. — AFP

#### Dhaka on rape case probe

DHAKA: Bangladesh will ban questions probing the "immoral character" of rape victims in criminal cases, authorities said yesterday, after a long campaign by rights groups against humiliating interrogations of traumatized survivors. Experts say the country's Evidence Act, a 19th-century relic of the British colonial era, has been routinely used to discredit the testimony of victims during court cross-examinations and police investigations. Women activists have spent more than a decade demanding the law be amended and last year a coalition of rights groups petitioned Bangladesh's top court for its repeal. — AFP

#### Cruise ship runs aground

SANTO DOMINGO: Officials in the Dominican Republic confirmed Monday that a large cruise ship had run aground off the Caribbean island nation's north coast after leaving the port of Puerto Plata. According to local media, the ship is the Norwegian Escape, which carries 3,000 tourists and 1,600 crew members. "For the moment, there is no risk for passengers or crew members," said Vice Admiral Ramon Gustavo Betances Hernandez, who added that the ship had run aground due to "strong 30 knot winds." "The tide in this area rises about 1 meter (3 feet) at four in the morning (0800 GMT). — AFP

#### Fujimori returns to prison

LIMA: Disgraced former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori returned to prison after an 11-day hospitalization with heart problems, his daughter announced Monday. The 83-year-old, currently serving a 25-year sentence for crimes against humanity committed during his presidency, had heart surgery in October. "My father was discharged today from the Centenario Clinic to continue his treatment at Barbadillo prison," tweeted Keiko Fujimori, the ex-president's daughter and current leader of the opposition party Fuerza Popular. — AFP

#### Call for release of French journalist

DAKAR: Press rights groups have called for the release of French journalist Olivier Dubois, who was taken hostage by a jihadist group in Mali almost a year ago. A short video circulating on social media since Sunday appears to show Dubois, but has not been authenticated and its origin is unknown, as is the date it was filmed. The man, who seems to be in good health in the video, addresses his parents and his partner, from whom he says he receives messages. He also urges the French government to "continue to do its best" to obtain his release. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16, 2022

# Business

## China under pressure from US and allies to pull its lifeline from Russia

### Washington has driven Russia to the cusp of default

**BEIJING:** China is under intense diplomatic pressure from the US and its European allies to pull its lifeline from an isolated Russia but, three weeks after the invasion of Ukraine, Beijing has shown few signs of abandoning its friends in the Kremlin. Washington has driven Russia to the cusp of default since Vladimir Putin's invasion of neighboring Ukraine, strangling its economy with sanctions and pulling the country from the global payments system. Isolated, bleeding money and with its currency in freefall, Russia has grasped for the friendship of its giant southwestern ally-China.

And China appears to have reciprocated, despite the risks to its both reputation and its economic interests as the US-led sanctions unwind. A senior US official on Monday voiced "deep concerns about China's alignment with Russia" following talks in Rome between US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Yang Jiechi, the Chinese Communist Party's chief diplomat.

The discussions aimed to test the depth of China's commitment to Russia as it struggles to vanquish Ukraine, with images of bomb-scarred buildings and refugees fleeing in their hundreds of thousands horrifying the world. Since the war erupted, China has refused to condemn Putin's actions - or even describe the invasion as a "war".

Instead, as recently as last week Beijing called the partnership between the two "rock-solid". Moscow has dangled the prospect of cheap oil and gas to its energy-hungry neighbor, while the west vows to unhook itself from Russian hydrocarbons. Analysts say President Xi Jinping's challenge is to pick a pathway through the sudden chaos unleashed on the international order by Putin's actions-and ensure China comes out ahead of its rival, the US. "China is in it for self-interest, period. A weaker Russia is probably a Russia where you

can do more that serves your interests, since you have more leverage," said Alexander Gabuev, senior fellow at the Carnegie Center Moscow.

#### Picking a winner

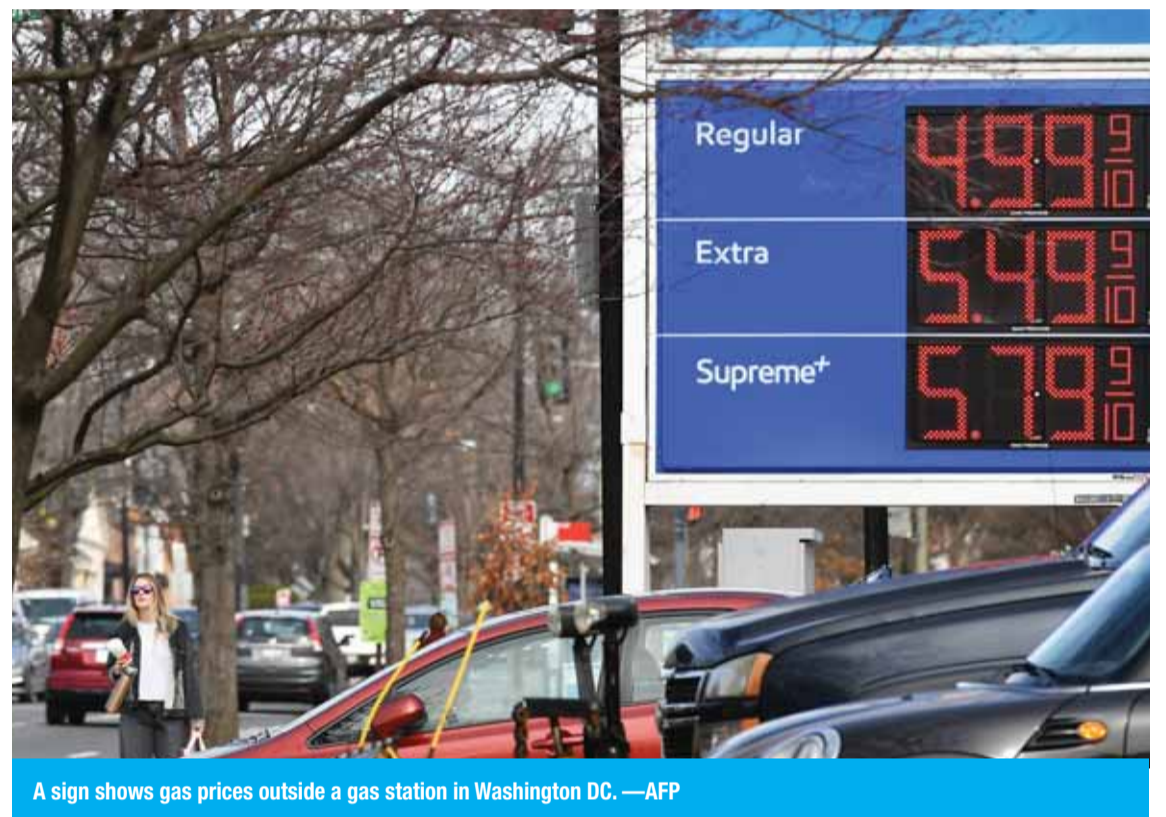
In its public diplomacy, Beijing seeks to position itself as a neutral player, calling for peace negotiations and condemning NATO for providing military assistance to Ukraine. But US media reports, citing intelligence briefings, suggest Beijing may be ready to pull the Russian economy back from the brink of default and even meet Moscow's entreaties for weapons and logistical support for its struggling troops in Ukraine.

Alarmed by the potential emergence of a new authoritarian world order, EU officials including its foreign policy chief Josep Borrell have lobbied China over recent weeks to exert its "considerable influence" on Russia to end the war. Those calls appear to have fallen flat.

"Why would China even consider not to support Russia, or even worse, undermine (its) alliance with Russia?" said Alexander Korolev, Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. "I think China is unlikely to change its position and this will indicate a deeper divide of global geopolitics." Indications of China's next steps are being scoured out from the oblique comments of its diplomats.

Yesterday, state media carried a message from Wang Yi, Beijing's foreign minister, stating "China is not a party to the crisis, still less wants to be affected by sanctions." Already global commodity prices have surged-especially of wheat and corn, which flows from the Russia and Ukrainian breadbasket to China. Meanwhile Chinese state media has been amplifying Russian propaganda messages.

Those include allegations that the Ukrainian mili-



A sign shows gas prices outside a gas station in Washington DC. —AFP

tary is using civilians as "human shields" and a conspiracy theory that the United States is developing biological weapons in the former Soviet state.

But for all the chumminess between Xi and Putin, the two countries have a long history of mistrust which is yet to be wiped away.

"China's stance is not so much pro-Russia as anti-US," explains Alexander Gabuev, a China-

Russia expert at the Carnegie Center Moscow. And the unexpected war, which came three weeks after Putin visited Xi in Beijing, may yet challenge a friendship described as having "no limits" following that tour. "The more protracted and brutal the conflict, the more difficult the situation for China will be," said Ni Lexiong, a professor at the Shanghai Institute of National Defense Strategy. —AFP

### Ireland fines FB for EU privacy law breaches

**DUBLIN:** Ireland yesterday imposed a fine on Facebook parent company Meta for breaching EU data privacy laws, in the latest action in Europe against the business practices of US tech titans.

The fine against the social media giant, which owns WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook, amounted to a total of 17 million euros (\$18.7 million) following an inquiry into 12 data breaches, said the Data Protection Commission (DPC). EU member Ireland, which hosts the regional headquarters of a number of leading tech firms including Apple, Google and Twitter, has played a role in policing the bloc's strict General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

The Irish data watchdog said Meta's platforms had "failed to have in place appropriate technical and organizational measures" in the context of

the 12 personal data breaches. The data breach notifications were received by the DPC over a six-month period between June 7, 2018 and December 4, 2018, it said.

"This fine is about record keeping practices from 2018 that we have since updated, not a failure to protect people's information," a Meta spokesperson told AFP. "We take our obligations under the GDPR seriously, and will carefully consider this decision as our processes continue to evolve."

Two European supervisory authorities working as part of the GDPR's decision-making process raised objections to the initial DPC decision, but "consensus was achieved through further engagement between the DPC and the supervisory authorities," the Irish commission said. In September last year, Ireland hit WhatsApp with a record 225-million-euro fine following pressure from other European regulators to increase an initial penalty. In a draft finding submitted to other European regulators for approval, the DPC proposed imposing a fine of between 30 and 50 million euros, but a number of national regulators



DUBLIN, Ireland: In this file photo taken on October 07, 2021, People walk by Facebook's office in the business and financial sector of Dublin City centre. —AFP

rejected the figure, triggering the launch of a dispute resolution process.

The GDPR, which came into force in 2018, has been viewed as a powerful weapon for EU members to curb the excesses of big tech companies,

giving national watchdogs cross-border powers and the possibility to impose sizeable fines for data misuse. US Big Tech companies have faced probes and huge fines in Europe, as well as plans for EU-wide legislation to rein them in. —AFP

### Fed begins policy meeting as it gears to raise rates

**WASHINGTON:** The Federal Reserve opened its two-day policy meeting yesterday as it prepares to raise borrowing rates for the first time since the pandemic began in an effort to tamp down rising inflation. Policymakers face a difficult task of trying to contain prices without stamping out economic growth as costs for housing, food and energy rise at rates not seen for 40 years and the economic fallout from the Russian invasion of Ukraine makes the situation worse.

A Fed spokesperson confirmed the meeting began as scheduled at 1300 GMT, and markets will get the decision today at 1900 GMT, which is expected to see the benchmark interest rate rise by 0.25 percentage points from zero, where it has been since March 2020. Fed Chair Jerome Powell "will be walking a tightrope, balancing the needs to raise rates and rein in a more systemic rise in inflation with the need to avert a meltdown in credit markets," Grant Thornton chief economist Diane Swonk said. "The collapse of the economy in 2008-09 proved that financial crises are much harder to recover from than a Fed-induced slowdown."

Powell has expressed confidence that the central bank is well equipped to handle inflation risks, but has acknowledged the uncertainty surrounding the impact of the war. The latest data confirmed the ris-



WASHINGTON, United States: This file photo shows the Marriner S Eccles, US Federal Reserve, building in Washington, DC. —AFP

ing pressures as the US producer price index (PPI) rose 10 percent for the 12 months ended in February, and goods prices posted their highest monthly increase on record, largely due to energy, the Commerce Department reported yesterday. Oil prices have soared since the start of the war in Ukraine, but yesterday retreated below \$100 a barrel amid optimism about peace talks between Kyiv and

Moscow. But investors are seeing rising credit costs in anticipation of a series of rate hikes by the Fed.

"It's a bit of tangled economic mess right now unfolding before our eyes, which is why the capital markets are a bit of a mess... trading in volatile fashion as investors struggle to figure out the implications of it all." Briefing.com analyst Patrick J O'Hare said in a commentary. —AFP

### German investor confidence in record plunge over war

**FRANKFURT:** Confidence among German financial players slumped to an all-time low over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a regular survey showed yesterday, marking a steeper fall than during the coronavirus pandemic. The ZEW institute's economic expectations index for the coming months plunged by 93.6 points to minus 39.3 points, the biggest drop since the survey began in December 1991. In comparison, the indicator fell by 58.2 points as the coronavirus pandemic began in March 2020, when lockdowns forced factories and offices shut and brought international travel to a standstill.

The pessimism was deeper this time with war on the doorstep of the European Union. "A recession is becoming even more likely. The Ukraine war and sanctions against Russia has very seriously worsened the economic outlook for Germany," said ZEW president Achim Wambach. Already sky-high consumer prices were further darkening the picture, with experts forecasting a stagflation-an increase in inflation as well as stagnation of economic output-in the coming months. Just three days before Russia marched on Ukraine, Germany's Bundesbank had predicted that the latest wave of the pandemic risked pushing Europe's biggest economy into a technical recession. —AFP

### World's largest sovereign wealth fund stuck with Russian assets

**OSLO:** Norway's sovereign wealth fund, the world's largest, said yesterday it was unable to divest its Russian assets for now as ordered by the government due to the extended closure of Moscow's stock exchange. At the end of February, the government ordered Norway's central bank, which manages the \$1.25-trillion (1.14-trillion euro) fund, to submit a Russian divestment plan by March 15 in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

The fund held some 27.4 billion Norwegian kroner (\$3.1 billion, 2.8 billion euros) in Russian equities, or 0.2 percent of the total portfolio, at the end of 2021. It said on March 3 it believed its holdings, mainly in energy stocks like Gazprom and Lukoil, were essentially worthless. "Owing to closed markets and extensive sanctions, it is not possible to commence the sale at present," the head of the fund, Nicolai Tangen, and interim central bank governor Ida Wolden Bache wrote Tuesday in a letter to the finance ministry. The Moscow stock exchange has been kept closed since February 25 to avoid a crash following Russia's invasion of Ukraine but is due to reopen next week. —AFP



## Business

# UK slaps sanctions on 350 more Russians, hikes import tariffs

## Sanctions in retaliation for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine

LONDON: The UK yesterday added 350 more Russians to its sanctions list, hiked tariffs on a swathe of imports from vodka to steel, and banned exports of luxury goods in retaliation for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said the asset freeze and travel ban now extended to 51 oligarchs and their families, as well as Russian President Vladimir Putin's "political allies and propagandists".

"Working closely with our allies, we will keep increasing the pressure on Putin and cut off funding for the Russian war machine," she said. Among those added to the sanctions list were Mikhail Fridman and Petr Aven, who are already subject to European Union sanctions, and who this month stepped down from the LetterOne investment fund they co-founded, and Alfa Bank founder German Khan. Former prime minister and president Dmitry Medvedev, Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov, and his foreign ministry counterpart Maria Zakharova were also placed on the list. The UK has been accused of being slow to act against Russian interests compared with its near neighbors in the EU.

Oligarchs previously targeted with travel bans and asset freezes include Chelsea Football Club owner Roman Abramovich, as well as Putin and his foreign minister Sergei Lavrov. The UK has meanwhile severed ties with Russian banks, grounded planes and stopped ships from using its ports, and plans to phase out Russian oil imports by the year-end.

The latest sanctions came as a new law came into effect early yesterday after a fast-track procedure through parliament since the invasion. The Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act notably creates a new Register of Overseas Entities, requiring those behind foreign companies who own UK property to reveal their identities or risk prosecution.

Ministers said it would be a valuable tool for law enforcement agencies to investigate suspicious wealth. Reforms have also been introduced to so-called Unexplained Wealth Orders, protecting agencies from exorbitant legal costs that have previously been a brake on prosecutions. Finance minister Rishi Sunak said it will "enable us to crack down harder and faster on dirty money and those who support Putin and his regime".



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (right) welcomes Sweden's Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson (left) at 10 Downing Street yesterday. The UK yesterday added 350 more Russians to its sanctions list, hiked tariffs on a swathe of imports in retaliation for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

### 'Maximum harm'

On tariffs, the Department for International Trade said the aim was to cause "maximum harm to Putin's war machine while minimizing the impact on UK businesses". "Russian vodka is one of the iconic products affected by the tariff increases, while the export ban will likely affect luxury vehicles, high-end fashion and works of art." The list of goods covered by the additional tariffs include steel, wood, cereals, drinks, fur and white fish-worth £900 million (\$1.2 billion, 1.1 billion euros) a year. "The export ban will come into force shortly and will make sure oligarchs and other members of the elite, who have grown rich under President Putin's reign and support his illegal invasion, are deprived of access to luxury goods," the DIT said.

Britain will deny Russia and its ally Belarus access to

Most Favoured Nation tariffs under World Trade Organization rules. "The UK is working with our international partners and is supporting the WTO to prevent those who fail to respect the rules-based international order from reaping its benefits," it said.

"These tariffs build on the UK's existing work to starve Russia's access to international finance, sanction Putin's cronies and exert maximum economic pressure on his regime," Sunak said.

The UK and other Western powers have imposed tough punitive measures on Russia since Putin sent troops into the country on February 24. But Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said Western sanctions did not go far enough, in a video call to northern European leaders meeting in London.

"There has to be a trade embargo with Russia," he told them via an interpreter. — AFP

## British PM: West must end Russian energy 'addiction'

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called yesterday for the West to end its "addiction" to Russian energy, which he says allows President Vladimir Putin to "blackmail" the world.

Western leaders made a "terrible mistake" when they let Putin "get away" with Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and became more dependent on Russian energy, Johnson wrote in the Daily Telegraph. As a result, "when he (Putin) finally came to launch his vicious war in Ukraine, he knew the world would find it very hard to punish him", Johnson said.

"The world cannot be subject to this continuous blackmail." Johnson's comments come ahead of a visit to Saudi Arabia to talks with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman amid skyrocketing fuel prices blamed on Russia's war in Ukraine. "As long as the West is economically dependent on Putin, he will do all he can to exploit that dependence," he wrote. "If the world can end its dependence on Russian oil and gas, we can starve him of cash, destroy his strategy and cut him down to size." The United States, itself a big energy producer, has already announced a ban on imports of Russian oil, the UK will do the same and the EU has agreed to do so "as soon as possible", Johnson wrote.

He admitted that weaning the West off Russian energy "will be painful". Johnson's spokesman said ahead of his Saudi visit that the government "wants to reduce the volatility and bring prices down for UK businesses". — AFP

### Fears of being 'left out'

On average, each miner in Los Parra can extract one ton a day, although there is no reliable data on the total production from the 50 mines in Lobatera. "The price of coal is low and has fallen over the years, which makes it tougher to work these days," said Pablo Jose Vivas, 61. The miners take their hauls to the mine director who sells it on for \$50 a ton.

The profits are shared out between the members of the cooperative. Vivas, who has worked in mining for more than 20 years, picks up a piece of mined rock and holds it between his blackened fingers. The rock shines in the torchlight that gives it a purple hue, like a precious stone. The miners work in teams. One smashes the rocks with a pickaxe, another fills the wheelbarrow and a third carts it out of the mine.

Outside, several small piles of coal await the arrival of a truck. Tachira governor Freddy Bernal, a loyalist of President Nicolas Maduro, is hoping to encourage foreign investment in Lobatera from Venezuela's allies Russia, China or even India. "That would generate many jobs and a significant economic impact," he said, adding that it would ensure families who have subsisted on mining for more than 40 years would not be left destitute. But the miners are far from convinced. "That would end the basic job because they would arrive with new technologies that we don't know how to use," said Vivas. "Many of us would be left out." — AFP



LOBATERA, Venezuela: A miner works to extract coal from the Los Parras mine in Lobatera, Tachira state, Venezuela. — AFP



HONG KONG: People stand in front of a display showing the Hang Seng Index in Hong Kong yesterday. — AFP

## Oil prices plunge on China lockdowns, stocks waver

LONDON: Oil prices plunged yesterday major crude consumer and global economic engine China placed nearly 30 million people under COVID lockdown. Hong Kong, Chinese mainland and European markets slumped, but Wall Street opened higher, with investors tracking the resurgence of the coronavirus in China, the war in Ukraine and a key US Federal Reserve policy meeting. Crude futures slumped under \$100 per barrel just a week after benchmark contract Brent North Sea soared to a 14-year high close to \$140 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "We have good news and we have bad news," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

"The good news is that oil prices are down sharply... The bad news is that the big drop in oil prices is due to growth concerns which, by extension, don't bode well for earnings growth prospects," O'Hare said.

While the drop in oil prices could ease inflation concerns, analysts warned that the lockdowns in China could worsen a global supply-chain crisis that has played a major role in driving up prices. The stock market "negativity has spread beyond China's borders with chip makers in Europe taking a hit," said Victoria Scholar, head of investment at Interactive Investor. The virus situation in the world's second-biggest economy

has brought more volatility to markets that have swung between fears over the war in Ukraine and hope that Moscow and Kyiv could strike a peace deal. "This double whammy of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, with the fresh chaos caused by Covid in China is rattling nerves," said Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown.

### Harming 'Putin's war machine'

Global stock markets have been in a spiral since Russian troops marched into Ukraine, leading international powers to impose crippling sanctions on the country and numerous companies to pull out. The UK government on Tuesday imposed an additional 35-percent import tariff on a swathe of Russian goods, including vodka, and banned exports of luxury products. "We want to cause maximum harm to (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's war machine while minimizing the impact on UK businesses," the Department for International Trade said. A series of powerful explosions Tuesday rocked residential districts of Kyiv, killing two people, just hours before talks between Ukraine and Russia were set to resume.

Among the hardest-hit stock markets in recent days has been Hong Kong, which was already under pressure from China's regulatory crackdown on technology firms as part of the government's move to tighten its grip on the economy. News that US authorities were also looking to crack the whip over Chinese firms listed in New York added to the selling pressure. Investors are also keeping a close eye on the Fed's two-day meeting which ends Wednesday, with policymakers expected to hike interest rates to bring decades-high inflation under control. — AFP

other potential buyers to shun Russian oil. Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said the government was having conversations "at the appropriate level of the Russian Federation" regarding the purchase. "Discussions are currently underway. There are several issues to be gone into like how much oil is available," he told parliament. Puri added that the government was weighing issues related to insurance, freight and payment for the crude.

Many countries, including European nations, remain heavily dependent on fuel from Russia, the world's second-largest crude oil exporter behind Saudi Arabia. India—the world's third-largest crude importer—currently buys only about three percent of its supplies from Russia, according to government data. New Delhi is also mulling setting up a rupee-ruble trade mechanism for paying for oil and other goods, according to local media reports. Crude oil prices slipped to around \$100 per barrel Tuesday, extending their plunge on markets after reaching a near 14-year high last week.—AFP

## Little oxygen and low pay: Venezuela's risky world of small-scale mining

SAN CRISTOBAL, Venezuela: Henry Alvarez says he began small-scale coal mining in Venezuela's western Tachira state out of "necessity" due to the country's ongoing economic crisis which has deepened during the coronavirus pandemic. He leaves home early in the morning on motorbike for the 45-minute journey to the Los Parra mine in Lobatera, near the border with Colombia.

The Andean town has 50 small-scale mines run by 22 cooperatives, each made up of eight to 10 workers who earn no more than \$120 a month. From Lobatera, the mined coal is moved via clandestine routes over the border to Colombia or the neighboring Merida state to be used primarily for generating electricity.

The lack of oxygen deep inside the mines and little emergency equipment, makes for precarious and "exhausting" work conditions, says Alvarez. "There are many blacksmiths and mechanics here but we cannot work in those" professions, he adds, citing the unprecedented economic crisis that has plunged Venezuela into an eight-year recession and four years of hyperinflation.

Bare-chested, pickaxe in hand, and helmet with a torch on his head, Alvarez quickly becomes covered in a mixture of sweat and black streaks. He tries in vain to wipe off the coal marks with a green cloth. All three of his children have left the country, one each to Chile, Colombia and Ecuador. "Thank goodness they've left," he said, adding that their only options in Lobatera would have been to join him in the mines.

"Who would want to work here?" Around 500 families rely on the Lobatera mines, which are located in a mountainous area only accessible by dirt roads. Temperatures in the area can soar, with the mining pit often the only shelter from the sun. "It's a pretty risky job because we have to use a lot of wood" to hold up the tunnels "and pray to God," said Jose Alberto Trejo, 38, who used to work in construction before subsequently finding employment in Colombian mines due to the lack of job opportunities.

## China unemployment jumps as COVID surge disrupts business

BEIJING: Unemployment in China rose and youth unemployment spiked in the first months of the year, data showed yesterday, as a surge of coronavirus cases rattled businesses and forced closures.

The unemployment rate in cities edged up to 5.5 percent by the end of February, compared with 5.1 percent in December, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said yesterday. Job seekers aged 16-24 were struggling with a 15.3 percent increase in unemployment. But Beijing reported better-than-expected retail sales and industrial output in January and February, according to the statistics agency.

Retail sales for the first two months rose 6.7 percent on-year, it said. This was well above the 3 percent

forecast by Bloomberg analysts. Petroleum products and gold, silver and jewelry saw the biggest price jumps. "Overall, the momentum of January-February recovery remained relatively healthy, though we must acknowledge that the external environment is still complicated and severe, and the Chinese economy faces many risks and challenges," NBS spokesman Fu Linghui said.

China releases combined data for January and February to avoid distortions from the Lunar new year holiday, which can fall in either month depending on the year. Industrial production was up 7.5 percent for the first two months, beating analysts' expectations of a 3.9 percent growth. Fixed asset investments grew by 12.2 percent, with investment in the high-tech manufacturing sector growing by 42.7 percent. Infrastructure investment grew at a modest 8.1 percent and investment in real estate also picked up despite a drop in home prices over the past two months.

Last week, Premier Li Keqiang announced an unusually modest target of around 5.5 percent growth for 2022 — the lowest since 1991 — and warned global "uncertainty" will slow China's growth. — AFP

## India in talks to buy discounted Russian oil

NEW DELHI: India is exploring options for buying Russian crude oil, authorities said yesterday, with prices there plunging to record lows in the wake of a global backlash to the Ukraine conflict. New Delhi enjoys historic diplomatic and defense ties with Moscow, hosting a rare overseas trip by President Vladimir Putin late last year, and has called for an end to the violence in Ukraine but stopped short of condemning the invasion.

Its government is looking to cut a spiraling energy bill after oil prices surged in the wake of the conflict, at the same time as a Washington embargo prompts

## Business

NBK Economic Report

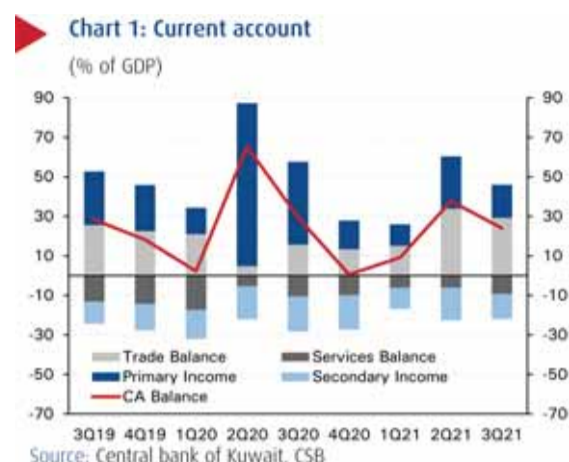
# Kuwait's current account surplus narrowed in third quarter of 2021

## Lower investment income, higher imports of goods and services added to decline

**KUWAIT:** Preliminary data released by the Central Bank of Kuwait shows that the current account surplus narrowed in 3Q21 to reach KD 2.6 billion (24 percent of GDP), down from KD 3.3 billion in the previous quarter. The decline was driven by a combination of lower investment income and higher imports of goods and services. On the other hand, net outflows from the financial account eased to KD 2.2 billion due to a reduction in equity portfolio investments outside of Kuwait. Therefore, the overall surplus of the balance of payments (broad definition) shrank to KD 1.9 billion (18 percent of GDP) from KD 3.5 billion in 2Q21.

The goods trade balance surplus increased to KD 3.2 billion (+8.3 percent q/q) in 3Q21, boosted by higher oil exports on the back of increases in both oil prices (Kuwait Export Crude +7.8 percent q/q to \$73.3/bbl) and oil production (+3.9 percent to 2.45 mb/d). In addition, non-oil exports (including re-exports) rose by 7.8 percent q/q. On the other hand, imports continued to recover, rising by 7.5 percent q/q to KD 2.2 billion, on higher imports of base metals, mineral and chemical products, mechanical appliances, and transport equipment.

The deficit in services nearly doubled to KD 1.0 billion, largely on account of increases in outbound travel (26 percent of total services' payments) and other services payments. These payments offset the increase in services receipts, again largely the travel (inbound), construction, and 'other services' categories. Accordingly, the balance of goods and services continued to improve during the first three quarters of 2021, which could be positively reflected on 2021 real GDP growth. The surplus in the primary income account, which mainly consists of



investment earnings on Kuwaiti assets abroad, fell 20 percent q/q to KD 1.8 billion. This was largely due to a fall in investment income receipts by (-13.3 percent q/q), which comes in line with the loss of momentum in the US and European markets during that quarter. On the other hand, investment income debits (including dividend, reinvested earnings, interest, and rents) increased to KD 0.2 billion, which could be linked to firms' improved performance and the quarterly gains in Kuwait's All-Share index (+7.5 percent q/q).

The secondary income balance, which is almost always negative on account of expatriate remittances abroad, fell slightly to KD 1.4 billion as workers' remittances declined by 1.7 percent q/q. However, workers' remittances increased during the first three quarters by 8.6 percent y/y.

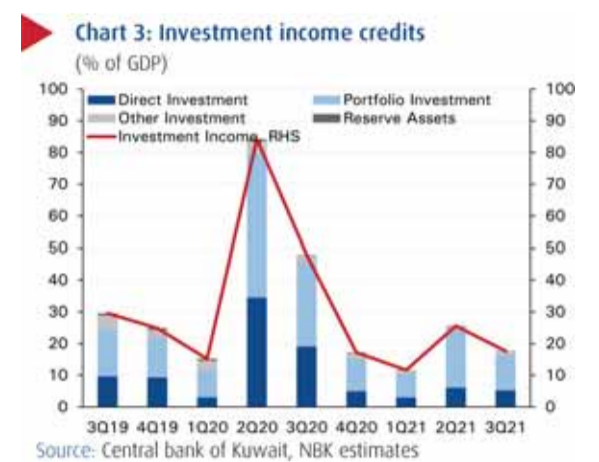
The capital account, which mainly includes capital transfers receivable and payable between Kuwait and the rest of the world, registered a net capital



inflow of KD 0.5 billion in 3Q21 (this includes KD 0.2 billion in war reparations payments owed to Kuwait by Iraq for the 1990 invasion).

The financial account, which deals with the net acquisition of financial assets and liabilities, registered a net outflow of KD 2.2 billion, down from KD 2.6 billion in the previous quarter. This means that Kuwait accumulated more overseas assets. Direct investments registered a net outflow of KD 0.7 billion due to increased overseas investments (equities) by Kuwaitis, while FDI in Kuwait remained below historical averages at KD 28 million. In addition, portfolio investments in equities abroad continued to ease, reaching KD 3.7 billion, down from the peak of KD 6.8 billion in 4Q20. Moreover, 'other investments' net inflows rose to KD 2.2 billion due to a decline in government assets (loans and deposits) abroad.

Central bank reserves increased by KD 296 million in 3Q21 to reach KD 14.0 billion, a sec-



ond consecutive quarter of gains. These reserves covered around 11.5 months of imports. However, by the end of 4Q21, official reserves edged back down to KD 13.7 billion. The fall in the last quarter resulted from the decline in the CBK's FX deposits at banks abroad.

Overall, the above figures highlight that Kuwait's external position remains extremely strong. The current account is estimated to register a sizable surplus overall in 2021, benefiting from the improvement in oil prices (+70 percent to an average of \$70.5/bbl). In 2022, the external position is expected to benefit further from the surge in oil prices and production, with the trade balance potentially posting one of its largest surpluses in more than a decade. On the flip side, however, financial market volatility in emerging and advanced economies could adversely affect Kuwaiti investment earnings, offsetting some of the positive impact of higher oil prices.

## Germany warns against Kaspersky anti-virus software

**BERLIN:** German cyber security agency BSI yesterday urged consumers not to use anti-virus software made by Russia's Kaspersky, warning the firm could be implicated in hacking assaults amid Russia's war in Ukraine. Russia's military and intelligence activities in Ukraine, and its threats to EU and NATO allies, particularly Germany, mean there is "a considerable risk of a successful IT attack", the Federal Cyber Security Authority (BSI) said in a statement. "A Russian IT manufacturer can itself carry out offensive operations, can be forced to attack target systems against its will, or be itself spied on as a victim of a cyber operation without its knowledge, or be misused as a tool for attacks against its own customers," the agency warned.

Companies and operators of critical infrastructure are particularly vulnerable but individuals could also be hit, the BSI said, inviting anyone in doubt to contact it for advice. The United States banned government agencies from using Kaspersky software as early as 2017.

Kaspersky has always rejected accusations that it works with the Kremlin. But its business was badly hit by the US ban, which came into effect at a time when the company's software was installed on hundreds of millions of computers worldwide. Military and cyber specialists fear that Russia's invasion of Ukraine could lead to an outbreak of cyberattacks—a "cyber Armageddon" which would have major consequences for civilians in both countries and also globally, through a spillover effect.

But a worst-case scenario has so far been avoided, as the attacks observed appear to be contained in their impact and geographical scope. Germany has in recent years repeatedly accused Russia of cyber espionage attempts. The most high-profile incident blamed on Russian hackers to date was a cyberattack in 2015 that paralyzed the computer network of the lower house of parliament, the Bundestag, forcing the entire institution offline for days while it was fixed. Russia denies being behind such activities. —AFP

## Russia limits grains exports to ex-Soviet states

**MOSCOW:** Russia has introduced restrictions on the export of grains, of which it is a major supplier, to four former Soviet countries to secure domestic supplies and avoid a spike in prices. "Russia is introducing a temporary ban on the exportation of grains to the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union," the government's press service said in a statement late on Monday.

The EEU is a Moscow-led trade club of ex-Soviet republics, which includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia. The Russian government also said it would

## IBS partners with Harvard School to offer virtual education program

**KUWAIT:** Dr Yaqoub Alrefaei, the Director General of the Institute of Banking Studies (IBS), announced that IBS is currently providing in collaboration with Harvard Business School (HBS), a virtual executive education program, designed specifically to support the development of senior leaders in the banking and finance sector in the GCC countries given the current challenges, in particular the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic that have affected the business world and the global economy. The program is designed to aid leaders in the banking and financial sector to adapt to the new work environment and achieve success in such difficult circumstances.

Dr Alrefaei pointed out that the program shall provide online training classes-as part of the innovative, new professional training methods - through Harvard Business School's training platform.

He added that the 2022 program, titled "leading in a world transformed," consists of two integrated themes, namely, "Financial Markets Strategy" and "Leadership". The program shall focus on the critical role of leadership and management in formulating and implementing financial, technical and lead-

## UK unemployment falls below pre-pandemic level

**LONDON:** Britain's unemployment rate has fallen below its pre-pandemic level, data showed yesterday, but wages are eroding at the fastest pace in eight years as inflation soars. The UK unemployment rate dropped to 3.9 percent in the three months to the end of January from 4.1 percent in the final quarter of last year, "returning to pre-coronavirus pandemic levels", the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said. Welcoming news that the number of unemployed fell to around 1.34 million people, finance minister Rishi Sunak added he was confident the labor market was in a "good position to deal with the current global challenges".

stop exports of "white and raw cane sugar to third countries".

The restrictions on grains exports expire on June 30 and those on sugar on August 31, said the government, adding that the decision was taken "to protect the domestic food market given the situation of external restrictions". Western nations have imposed a spate of sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine that make it difficult to import goods into the country.

For several days, some Russian supermarkets have imposed limits on how much people can buy of several products, including sugar. Images of empty shelves have circulated on social networks but visits by AFP journalists to a selection of food shops did not find any shortages.

According to Russia's national statistics agency, Rosstat, the price of sugar jumped by 13 percent the week of March 5-11. On Sunday, Russian officials declared there was no short-

ership strategies to address the challenges, along with the various management and leadership skills and techniques required for the digital transformation in the financial sector to keep pace with the rapid developments in this field. He added that HBS shall discuss real case studies related to the financial and banking sectors in addition to other sectors which will enhance the analytical skills of the executives and provide them with the tools, techniques, frameworks and ideas to promote performance, innovation, and the organizational culture. Moreover, the program shall consist of a number of live interactive virtual group activities throughout the period of the training.

He added that the program targets executives such as department heads and their counterparts, and shall run over two weeks, 13-24 March 2022. Upon completion, participants shall receive attendance certificates from the Harvard Business School. Dr Alrefaei pointed out that the program is a part of Kafa'a initiative which was launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait in September, 2019. The programs included in this initiative are sponsored by the Kuwaiti banks and organized and executed by IBS. This program aims to develop executive leaders and staff in all sectors, including the banking and financial sectors.

He pointed out that the first program was conducted in the State of Kuwait in 2010, and continues to be held since then on an annual basis, alternately in one of the GCC countries, and last year's program- the twelfth - was held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He added that in light of the

There are worries that Russia's invasion of Ukraine, soaring global inflation and renewed COVID lockdowns in China will hamper the world's economic recovery. The ONS added that the number of UK workers on payrolls jumped 275,000 to a record-high 29.7 million in February.

### Wages hit

Wages, however, are being eroded with Britain experiencing the highest rate of annual inflation in almost 30 years. Taking inflation into account, average pay excluding bonuses was down one percent in the quarter to the end of January. "Bumper bonuses are skewing pay figures, so on initial glance everything in the jobs market looks rosy," said Sarah Coles, senior personal finance analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. "However, something far more worrying is lurking underneath the headline figures, because once you take inflation into account, pay excluding bonuses has fallen faster than at any time for almost eight years."

age of sugar in the country. But according to certain local media, in countries such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, sugar has largely disappeared from the shelves and its price has doubled. The Russian restrictions on grains exports include wheat, silage, rye, barley and corn. Both Russia and Ukraine are major wheat exporters and the conflict has already sent waves through global commodities markets and seen prices for grain climb precipitously. The Russian government's decision provides for certain exceptions, including for the pro-Russian breakaway regions of Donetsk and Lugansk in eastern Ukraine.

The International Monetary Fund warned on Monday that the conflict could imperil global food security. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also warned Monday that the world must act to prevent a "hurricane of hunger and a meltdown of the global food system". —AFP



current situation around the COVID-19 pandemic, the Central Bank along with the Kuwaiti banks are keen to continue providing this distinguished program virtually.

In conclusion, Dr Alrefaei pointed out that the development of the talented and qualified nationals in all Kuwaiti banks will remain a top strategic priority especially in the current circumstances, considering the role of executives in developing their organizations. He went on to explain that collaboration amongst the GCC countries in areas of common interest such as training and development has always been and will remain an item of top priority. Dr Alrefaei expressed his thanks and appreciation to all parties participating in this program from inside and outside Kuwait, wishing everyone more success, progress and prosperity.



The cost of living is set to soar further from April owing to a tax hike on UK workers and businesses plus increases in energy bills. And the Bank of England is expected to raise interest rates for a third meeting in a row tomorrow to help bring down inflation. "The further tightening in the labor market in January will only encourage the Bank of England to raise interest rates on Thursday, probably from 0.50 percent to 0.75 percent," said Capital Economics chief economist Paul Dales. —AFP





# Palestinian cultural exhibition

The Palestinian Heritage Center, in cooperation with the Palestinian Embassy in Kuwait, inaugurated the 54th Palestinian heritage exhibition under the theme "A heritage spanning generations". The exhibition runs from March 15 to 18 at Al-Sadu

House from 10 am to 8 pm. Palestinian embroidery using silk threads has been one of the most important aspects of Palestinian identity through the ages. Palestinian women in the past, both young and old, used to work

for hours to embroider their dresses. Embroidery in the old days began with geometric shapes, then developed to images from the surroundings, as dresses are characterized with nature's colors of green and red. Some symbols of nature are

also used, such as cypress trees surrounded by orange trees, flowers, jasmine and the famous olive tree. These elements were and are still present in Palestinian embroidery works.



## LAPA organizes musical evening at Shaheed Park



In the presence of nearly a thousand traditional folk song lovers, LAPA organized a musical evening with performances by folk artists Samah Khaled and Faisal Al-Saad in Al-Shaheed Park yesterday. The musical evening is a first in a series of "heritage evenings" celebrating local and Arab arts after an enforced absence due to the COVID-19 pandemic for two years.





Visitors sit behind the fence of a lion enclosure at the Sudan Animal Rescue centre in Al-Bageir, south of the capital Khartoum. — AFP photos



Othman Muhammad Salih, founder of the Sudan Animal Rescue centre, sits close to lionesses and cubs at the facility in Al-Bageir reserve, south of the capital Khartoum.

## ONCE-STARVING LIONS ROAR BACK TO LIFE IN SUDAN SANCTUARY

**K**andaka the lioness was once sick and emaciated in a rundown zoo in Sudan's capital, but thanks to wildlife enthusiasts she now thrives in a reserve watching her cubs grow. She was among five lions suffering from starvation and disease with visibly protruding ribs and flaccid skin, held in grim cages with rusty bars in Khartoum's Al-Qurashi zoo. Conditions worsened as Sudan's economic crisis deepened in the wake of months-long protests in 2019 that led to the toppling of former dictator Omar Al-Bashir.



Othman Muhammad Salih, founder of the Sudan Animal Rescue centre, pets a lioness at the facility in Al-Bageir reserve.

Of the five lions in the ramshackle zoo, two died. The animals' plight shot to public attention two years ago after an online campaign prompted veterinarians, conservationists and animal enthusiasts the world over to rush to their aid. Along with the two other surviving lions, Kandaka was moved to the Al-Bageir reserve. "Their health has since improved greatly,"



A lioness follows an animal keeper carrying food in a wheelbarrow from behind the fence of an enclosure at the Sudan Animal Rescue centre in Al-Bageir, south of the capital Khartoum.

said Othman Salih, who founded the reserve in January 2021. The site, an hour's drive south of Khartoum, spreads over some four hectares (10 acres), or about the size of six football pitches.

As a testament to her recovery, the five-year-old lioness was called Kandaka—the name of Sudan's ancient Nubian queens. It is a term that has come to be associated with the women who played a vital role in the protests that unseated Bashir. She is now thriving in Al-Bageir, one of 17 lions from across Sudan.

### Daily struggle

But keeping the reserve up and running comes with its own set of steep challenges. Volunteers, often juggling full-time jobs with their passion for animal welfare, have been struggling with long commutes, soaring prices and limited resources. The challenges have increased since last year's military coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, which triggered regular mass protests and roadblocks. "The prices are very high," said Salih, who

travels to the reserve all the way from Khartoum every day.

The reserve's running costs remain high, including providing more than 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of meat for the big cats daily. It has so far been kept afloat by donations and tours for school-children and families. But Sudan, one of



A lioness looks on in an enclosure at the Sudan Animal Rescue centre in Al-Bageir.



Othman Muhammad Salih, founder of the Sudan Animal Reserve centre, holds a turtle up to be touched by a visiting child at the facility in Al-Bageir reserve, south of the capital Khartoum.

the world's poorest countries, has been reeling from a plunging economy due to decades of international isolation and mismanagement under Bashir.

Almost one third of Sudan's 45 million people are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022, according to the United Nations.

"Lots of Sudanese people are hungry," said Salih. "So all aid is funnelled to the people. It's only natural." But Salih says the government and private businesses have done little to support the reserve. "We try to get by through charging for entry tickets," he added, with entrance costing between \$2-4. "But it is still not enough, and we often pay from our own money to cover the cost."

### Source of hope

But the reserve remains a source of hope for many. "I still go there every day," said volunteer Moataz Kamal, who lives in the capital's twin city of Omdurman. "It's like the world outside doesn't exist when I am here." He pointed in particular

to the survival of a male lion from the eastern city of Port Sudan, after battling years of starvation and severely poor health.

The lion was named Mansour, which translates to the "victor", for overcoming such conditions. It is not known how many lions survive in the wild in Sudan. A population lives in Dinder National Park, a UNESCO biosphere reserve, on the border with Ethiopia. African lions are classified as a "vulnerable" species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Their population dropped 43 percent between 1993 and 2014, with an estimated 20,000 left in the wild. But Salih still hopes that his reserve will push through hardship and rescue more animals, and remind Sudanese of the wildlife that has been lost from the country. "Perhaps one day, we will be able to have elephants, giraffes and zebras that have disappeared from Sudan," said Salih. — AFP

## Dolly Parton ducks out of Rock Hall of Fame running

**D**olly Parton on Monday said she would withdraw her name from consideration for this year's class of Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees. In a statement the country icon said "even though I'm extremely flattered and grateful to be nominated for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, I don't feel that I have

earned that right."

Artists including Beck, Devo, Kate Bush, Eminem, Carly Simon and Rage Against The Machine are among this year's crop of artists in the running for the coveted honor. "I do hope the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame will understand and will be willing to consider me again-if I'm ever worthy," Parton, 76, wrote. "This has, however, inspired me to put out a hopefully great rock n' roll album at some point in the future, which I have always wanted to do!" Country stars are not foreign to the Cleveland-based Hall of Fame-Johnny cash, Jimmie Rodgers and Chet Atkins are all among its ranks. Acts can be inducted 25 years after their first commercial music release. — AFP



In this file photo US singer and songwriter Dolly Parton arrives for the 57th Academy of Country Music awards at the Allegiant stadium in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

## Art sales hit all-time high in 2021

**A**rt auctions saw a record year in 2021 with \$17.1 billion (15.6 billion euros) in sales as the market continued its rapid growth in Asia and recovered from its coronavirus slump, experts Artpice said Monday. The figure marked a 60-percent increase on 2020, when sales were hit by the initial disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 28-percent compared with 2019, according to the firm's annual report.

"The global art market regained much of its customary dynamism, and a whole lot more as well," the report said. It was boosted by a number of big-name auctions such as the \$45-million Botticelli and \$34.9-million Frida Kahlo sales in New York. There was also the landmark moment when digital artist Beeple sold a NFT for \$69 million, the third-highest figure ever paid for a living artist.

Most NFTs are sold on crypto-exchanges (Ethereum alone sold some \$40 billion of them last year) that do not qualify for Artpice's monitoring of "regulated auctions". But it still counted some 300 traditional auctions of NFTs, worth \$232 million in all, putting the medium ahead of photography.

"The health crisis accelerated the art market's digitization — 87 percent of the 6,300 auction houses that we follow now have a back-office dealing with online sales," Artpice president Thierry Ehrmann told AFP. Contemporary art counted as anything created after 1945 — accounts for a growing share of sales,

with 20 percent of the market, up from 3 percent in 2000.

China, with \$5.95 billion or 35 percent of all sales, now counts the world's largest art market. The United States, on 34 percent, was pushed into second place, though its market is still more diversified, selling more artworks at a lower average price compared with China. South Korea has seen rapid growth-entering the top 10 with \$237 million in sales, up from \$58 million before the pandemic.

The effects of Brexit and competition from Hong Kong were felt on Britain's art market, which saw sales drop 10 percent

on 2019 to \$1.99 billion. "Hong Kong is increasingly asserting itself on the global chessboard and competing directly with the English capital," Artpice said.

An increasingly active market also means fewer items are being left unsold. A record-low 31 percent of items did not find a buyer in 2021, compared with traditional levels between 34 and 39 percent. Gerhard Richter and Banksy remain the best-selling living artists-some 1,186 Banksy artworks were sold in 2021 for a total of \$206 million. — AFP





Devotees chant religious hymns during Holi celebrations, the Hindu spring festival of colors at Shri Krishna Janmasthan temple at Mathura in India's Uttar Pradesh state. — AFP photos



Revelers daubed in colors sing religious hymns during the Lathmar Holi celebrations.



Widows sit around a tray filled with Gulal (color powder) as they participate in Holi celebrations.



School students along with their teachers take part in preparing herbal colors inside the premises of a school ahead of Holi celebrations.



# Widows brighten the day as India celebrates Holi

India's colorful festivities to mark Holi are underway, unburdened by coronavirus fears for the first time in three years, including in a town usually associated with grief as a so-called "city of widows". The raucous spring festival sees millions across the country hurl colored powder at each other in a kaleidoscopic celebration of the end of winter and the triumph of good over evil.

Revelries peak on Friday when a public holiday will see large street carnivals around the country, but the party started early in the northern city of Vrindavan, where elderly women daubed in splotches of saffron danced the day away together.

"Because of the coronavirus lockdown over the last two years, we could not celebrate Holi," 72-year-old Shakuntala Davi told AFP. "Now there's no lockdown, no coronavirus," she added. "We are so happy, I have no words to explain."

Vrindavan is a holy pilgrimage town, traditionally associated with the Hindu deity Krishna. But it is also home to around 2,000 widows who have been shunned by their families after the deaths of their husbands. The idea of their participation in festive occasions has traditionally been taboo in India's conservative Hindu heartland, and their involvement in Holi celebrations only began a decade ago.

Coronavirus derailed last year's Holi party, with the capital New Delhi and several states banning public gatherings out of fear they would become super-spreader events. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced he was not participating in festival celebrations in March 2020, as the pandemic accelerated its alarming initial spread throughout the world. — AFP

Revelers daubed in colors sing religious hymns during the Lathmar Holi celebrations.



## Paris graffiti legend C215 on his Ukraine mural

The huge blue-and-yellow mural covering the side of a Paris apartment block is a reminder, says Paris-based artist C215, of the human cost of the war in Ukraine.

But it is also testament to the talents of a man whose graffiti skills helped him overcome a traumatic youth to become one of France's leading street artists—a one-time Banksy collaborator who has tagged walls all over the world.

Real name Christian Guemy, the 49-year-old unveiled the huge new portrait of the Ukrainian girl last week in the 13th arrondissement of Paris.

It carries a quote from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who said to his staff when he was elected in 2019: "I really don't want my photos in your offices, because I am neither a god nor an icon, but rather a servant of the nation. Instead, hang pictures of your children and look at them whenever you want to make a decision."

"It's a universal message of support," Guemy told AFP at his studio. "It challenges us to think about the ongoing humanitarian drama in Ukraine and the responsibility of politicians to do something. I can't ignore the incursions of big politics into people's daily lives."

### Heroes

Guemy's pictures are often of regular people, such as the child victims of conflicts from Syria to Kosovo to Rwanda. He also depicts historical figures—heroes of French republicanism such as resistance fighters or the Charlie Hebdo journalists murdered in 2015. In his studio, stencils of Nelson Mandela and Jean-Michel Basquiat are propped up against the walls. "Perhaps some are too simplistic for the elites, but they are clear enough to

reach a very large audience, including in working class areas," he said.

"I want my works to be more important than me, to unite people in a society where everything is divisive." Born in 1973 in Bondy, a tough suburb on the outskirts of Paris, Guemy was amused by drawing from a young age without expecting anything more from it.

"It was a place totally disconnected from culture," he said. "I grew up in the world of the night: violence, drugs, alcohol." His mother had him when she was 13 and his grandparents raised him as if they were his parents and she was his sister. Five years later, his mother killed herself—a tragedy he says he has now "overcome".

### 'Too tragic'

Bright and multi-lingual, he landed a job in luxury furniture exports, but after a painful break-up, gave up his job to start doing graffiti in the streets, with no inking of the success it would bring. "I started stenciling my daughter's portrait around her house to signal my presence and channel my depression," he said.

He developed a simple method—cutting out faces in card without any prior drawing then spray-painting them. That led to portraits of other people—generally people who have done a little more than life expected of them".

Soon after he began, he was spotted by members of Banksy's team and ended up collaborating with the British artist and appearing in his 2008 documentary "Exit Through the Gift Shop".

He felt "too French, too tragic" to continue their partnership, but it had opened doors and he found himself travelling the world, putting together exhibitions, publishing books and helping to design video games. The thing that he is actually proud of, however, is his work in prisons (24 and counting). "That's the work that I want people to remember. The older I get, the more I realize that caring for the weakest, the most fragile, is what we should constantly be focused on." — AFP

## Eurovision says Ukraine confirmed for song contest in May

The organizers of the Eurovision Song Contest said Monday that Ukraine was confirmed to participate in this year's annual musical pageant in May. Eurovision Executive Producer Simona Martorelli said the delegation from Ukraine had confirmed and sent in all required materials, even on time. "This is absolutely admirable, given the situation," Martorelli said.

Ukraine's pick this year is the Kalush Orchestra, with the rap lullaby "Stefania". Sung to a mother, the song incorporates traditional Ukrainian music and includes the line: "I'll always find my way home even if all the roads are destroyed".

Martorelli added that the artists would try to tape a "back-up video" required by all those invited to the contest in case they cannot participate live. "Hopefully they will be able to make it," Martorelli said. Eurovision's executive board decided on February 25 — the day after Russia invaded Ukraine—to exclude Russia from this year's contest. The flashy annual musical event, which has millions of viewers in Europe and even Australia, is scheduled for May 10-14 in Turin. Organizers said this year's contest would focus on the theme of peace. — AFP



French street artist and painter Christian Guemy (right) known as C215 poses in front of his fresco depicting a Ukrainian young girl with a quote attributed to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. — AFP

## Sports

# Mass brawls, attacks as football violence spreads in Latin America

## Fan unrest is spiraling out of control

**SAO PAULO:** A string of outbreaks of violence, several deadly, suggest that fan unrest in Latin American football is spiraling out of control. Images of a mass brawl at a game in Mexico on March 5 that left 26 seriously injured and led to 14 arrests went viral and attracted added attention because the country is set to co-host the 2026 World Cup with the USA and Canada.

On the same evening there were savage attacks beside a stadium in Palmira, just outside the Colombian city of Cali, between America and Deportivo Cali fans. The next day, a man was shot dead in a confrontation between fans of Atletico Mineiro and Cruzeiro in Brazil. While academics who study the issue say that the end of coronavirus restrictions, which have been blamed for increases in violence in French and English football, are a fac-

tor, there are other underlying problems.

"There is no way to end violence in football, that should be very clear," Heloisa Reis, a professor at the Unicamp University of Sao Paulo said. "But it can be reduced. For that, a very comprehensive public policy is needed," said Reis, the author of a book about the problem. Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru have enacted laws to quell excesses by punishing hooligans with jail or even cancelling sporting events. Some of these initiatives replicate steps in Europe to control hooligans, such as biometric identification or video surveillance in and around stadiums.

### 'Toxic masculinity'

After the riot in Queretaro, Mexico banned travelling fans from games—a measure used in

Argentina, Brazil and Colombia—but questioned by experts because, they argue, the fans still travel and the violence moves to the streets. Despite their best efforts the death toll remains huge: 157 in Brazil between 2009 and 2019, 136 in Argentina in the last 20 years and at least 170 in Colombia between 2001 and 2019.

"The great failure of the policies adopted is that they focus exclusively on the security component," says sociologist German Gomez, a researcher at the Colombian Association of Sports Studies. Specialists agree that measures tend to ignore academic studies or social background frustrations stemming from unemployment, inequality or drug and alcohol consumption.

Reis argues the root of the problem is "toxic masculinity". Football matches provide an arena for

competition between men to gain power over rivals, especially on their own territory, through physical force. Reis advocates public policies focused on the education of men but she is not optimistic. "We have lived under male domination for centuries. The male values reproduced are domination, strength, courage. Is there a prospect of ending that? There is not," she said. Specialists and fans perceive an increase in violence since COVID restrictions ended and fans returned to the stadiums. "These are the consequences of such a prolonged confinement, in which people when they return to a public event have a need to break out of that confinement," said Gomez. In Brazil, at least nine incidents have been reported since February 12, including the shooting dead of a Palmeiras fan and the stoning of team buses, in which players were injured. —AFP

## Medvedev, Tsitsipas crash out of Indian Wells Masters

**INDIAN WELLS:** Daniil Medvedev was sent crashing out of the ATP/WTA Indian Wells Masters in a stunning defeat to Gael Monfils on Monday that ended the Russian's three-week reign as world number one. On a day of upsets in the California desert, Medvedev was the highest profile casualty to be sent packing, outfoxed 4-6, 6-3, 6-1 by veteran Frenchman Monfils.

The shocks continued in the evening session as Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas tumbled out to 21-year-old American Jenson Brooksby. Brooksby, ranked 43rd in the world, advanced to the last 16 with a 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 win. Earlier, the 35-year-old Monfils scored his first victory over a world number one since 2009 with a superb display to dispose of US Open champion Medvedev. The defeat means Novak Djokovic will on Monday return to the top of the world rankings, three weeks after Medvedev became number one.

Monfils sealed victory in 2hr 6min after converting his sixth match point. "I'm in my zone and I'm a tough opponent for anyone," Monfils said. "It's been a long time since I've beaten a world number one, so I'm pretty happy." Reigning US Open champion Medvedev had looked to be in control after taking the first set immediately after breaking Monfils for a 5-4 lead. But after Monfils took the second set—clinching with a cheeky underarm serve—Medvedev's composure evaporated in the decider.

The Russian earned a code violation for smashing his racket in frustration after being broken in the first game, and Monfils raced through the gears to seal a deserved victory. Medvedev said he would aim to reclaim his number one ranking at the Miami Open next week. "Now I know I'm going to lose it (the ranking), so I have Miami to try to get it back," Medvedev said. "Usually feeling a little bit better in Miami in terms of tennis, so we'll try to play good there."

### Nadal marches on

"When I play my best tennis, my good tennis, it's really tough to beat me. But that's the toughest part of tennis is to reproduce it time after time." Monfils, the 26th seed, will face talented young Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz in the fourth round. Alcaraz, seeded 19, advanced to the last 16 with a confident 6-2, 6-0 demolition of compatriot Roberto Bautista Agut, the 15th seed. As Medvedev was left reflecting on his early exit, Rafael Nadal's unbeaten start to 2022 continued with a straight-sets defeat of Britain's Dan Evans.

The 21-time Grand Slam champion recorded his 17th straight victory of the year with a 7-5, 6-3 defeat of the 27th seed. "Today was a step forward," Spain's Nadal said. "There is no other chance but play very well the next day if I want to keep going. If not, I'm going to go home." Nadal will play Reilly Opelka in the last 16 after the American 17th seed downed Canada's Denis Shapovalov, seeded 13, 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 6-4.

### Azarenka tears

In the women's singles, Veronika Kudermetova advanced to the last 16 after her Czech opponent Marie Bouzkova retired in the second set at 6-4, 0-2. Greece's Maria Sakkari, looking to build on a breakout 2021 which included two Grand Slam semi-finals appearances, overwhelmed another Czech, Petra Kvitova, in straight sets. Sakkari booked her place in the fourth round with a 6-3, 6-0 win over the two-time Wimbledon champion.

After the tearful exit of four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka on Saturday, there was another emotional flashpoint as Victoria Azarenka succumbed to Kazakh 17th seed Elena Rybakina 6-3, 6-4. Rybakina's victory was overshadowed by a bizarre incident which came while Azarenka prepared to serve while trailing 6-3, 2-2. Play was held up for several minutes as the 32-year-old two-time Australian Open champion dissolved into floods of tears, waving away intervention from the chair umpire saying "I'm sorry, I'm really sorry." Rybakina described the incident as a "very strange situation." "I just hope everything is good with Vika because I don't know what happened," she said. "Hope everything is okay." —AFP

## Zain supports jet ski World champion Al Abdulrazzaq

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, proudly sponsors Kuwaiti champion and Jet Ski world No 1 Yousef Al Abdulrazzaq. The company's support extends throughout the upcoming season that features local, regional, and international competitions. Zain is thrilled to continue its support of Al Abdulrazzaq, whom the company sponsored throughout his professional career for the past 14 years.

During this time, Al Abdulrazzaq has achieved a long list of accolades and international success, where the Kuwaiti champion faced the world's top pro racers from around the world and raised Kuwait's flag high. Al Abdulrazzaq is currently preparing to compete in a number of local, regional, and international tournaments as part of the upcoming season, including competitions in Kuwait, Dubai, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Mediterranean Sea, Italy, Poland, United States, Thailand, Sharjah, and more.

Previously, Yousef Al Abdulrazzaq - who is ranked world No 1 - attained a long list of accolades in the most prestigious of championships, including the gold medal and title of the UIM-ABP Grand Prix of Kuwait, the first international competition of its kind to be held at the champion's homeland back in 2020. Al Abdulrazzaq also attained the first-place title in the third round of the Runabout GPI title race during the UIM-ABP Aquabike Haier Grand Prix of Qingdao, China as part of the UIM-ABP Aquabike Class Pro World Championship in 2019.

## Kuwait shooters shine at WCup Championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait shooters continue to perform excellently at the World Cup Championship in Cyprus as the Trap team (Talal Al-Rashidi, Nasser Al-Miqli and Abdelrahman Al-Faihan) won the gold medal after a fierce competition with 14 teams from around the world. India took the second position while Poland grabbed third. President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Duajj Khalaf Al-Otaibi lauded the achievements of the team. Al-Otaibi dedicated the victory to 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, government and Kuwaiti people. He also commended the efforts of the champions. Al-Otaibi thanked the Public Authority for Sport and its Director General Dr Humoud Fulaiteh for their continued support.

## La Liga and ABDG join forces to launch 'LaLiga Academy Kuwait'

**KUWAIT:** LaLiga and Austrian Business Development Group are partnering to launch 'LaLiga Academy Kuwait', with the aim of helping the development of professional football in the country, as well as empowering young people through sport. This center will join the list of nine academies that LaLiga has around the world with locations in India, China, United Arab Emirates, two in the United States, Canada, Indonesia, Russia and Vietnam.

With a focus on the comprehensive training of players, in the last seven years LaLiga has developed more than 500 sporting projects, training more than 175,000 players in a unique methodology developed by the organization's Sports Projects department.

In May of this year, the Jaber Stadium will host tryouts, where LaLiga coaches will identify the most promising young Kuwaiti talents and give them the opportunity to get one of the scholarships to study for a year in the new long-term LaLiga Grassroots programs that will be run at the new ESC Madrid Centre: LaLiga Talents and LaLiga Academy, two programs that combine sporting and academic training with five scholarships for this summer's LaLiga Camps in Madrid.



Waleed Al Khashti and Yousef Al Abdulrazzaq pose for a photos.

The contest is considered the biggest championship for this sport in the world, and is organized by the Union Internationale Motonautique (UIM), the world's governing body of powerboating. Al Abdulrazzaq topped the world championship's overall points rank, and have also achieved the first-place title in the second round in Italy, which both strengthened his world rank, certified by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

Zain's support to the Kuwaiti Champion for 14 years comes in line with the company's Corporate

Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy towards supporting Kuwaiti sports and athletes. Al Abdulrazzaq continues to raise the Kuwaiti flag high by achieving many internationally renowned titles year after year.

Zain's role not only concentrates on economic and business activities, but also extends to contribute significantly in various areas within the Kuwaiti society, including sports. The company has endless confidence in the competencies of Kuwaiti athletes and their capabilities in excelling in different fields, on both regional and international levels.



"This partnership between LaLiga and ABDG Sports will be vital for the improvement of the sports industry in Kuwait," says Abdulla Ajrash, co-founder and CEO of Austrian Business Development Group. "Aiming to shape the future generation of football athletes (male and female), this project will help Kuwaiti football to reach the highest standards that have already been set by the top European leagues led by LaLiga. Furthermore, this project will be in line with the United Nations Sustainable Goals which involves a significant educational dimension amongst other aspects."

For Maite Ventura, LaLiga's general director in the Middle East, this agreement means "bringing the

LaLiga brand and its values to Kuwait, which reflects our commitment to helping the development of football in the country. Through the Academy and our programs, which will be supervised by highly trained LaLiga coaches, we want to help create a development pathway that will help young players to become professionals.

"LaLiga Academy Kuwait is a unique project that will feature a world class facility," said Kevin Delaplace Haro, Regional Business Development Manager at ABDG Sports. "All our pitches will meet FIFA standards in terms of size and turf quality, and we will have an indoor pitch to allow football to be played all year round."

Sports

# Benzema breaks French record but limps off ahead of Clasico

## Benzema becomes the highest French goalscorer in history

**PALMA:** Karim Benzema became the highest French goalscorer in history on Monday after his double gave Real Madrid a 3-0 win over Mallorca, sending them 10 points clear at the top of La Liga. But the Frenchman had to go off late on with what looked like an injury in his lower left leg, giving Madrid a serious headache before Sunday's Clasico against Barcelona.

Vinicius Junior, who opened the scoring, and Rodrygo also suffered problems in the second half. "We will look at it in the next few days," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti. "They don't seem like very serious things. Rodrygo was a knock, Mendy has felt something in his adductor and Karim, after a jump, didn't feel good. We'll see if they can recover for Sunday."

Benzema's absence for the game at the Santiago Bernabeu would come as a serious blow to Madrid, after the striker continued his scintillating recent run with two more goals at Son Moix. After scoring a hat-trick to help Madrid defeat Paris Saint-Germain 3-1 in the Champions League last week, the 34-year-old's penalty against Mallorca took his career tally to 412 goals, putting him one above Thierry Henry in the all-time list of French scorers.

Benzema then made it 413 for him and three for Madrid with a superb header late on, only to limp off in obvious discomfort. Madrid's considerable advantage over Sevilla at the top of La Liga means the Clasico this weekend will not carry the significance of previous

meetings, even if Barca's recent surge has had some wondering if a comeback is still possible.

Yet there will be no doubt Barcelona would love to rubberstamp their progress under Xavi with a victory at the home of their fiercest rivals while a win for Madrid would serve as further confirmation of their dominance this season. "We have the advantage and it's good at this point in the season," said Ancelotti. "We have to think about winning on Sunday, that's all."

Mallorca had the better of the chances in the opening period, the first of them falling to Vedat Muriqi, who shot wide at the back post after a superb cross from Brian Oliván. Vinicius Junior was Madrid's biggest threat and he was unfortunate to pick up a yellow card for his reaction to a high challenge from Mallorca's Pablo Maffeo, who was lucky not to be sent off. The altercation riled the home crowd too and Mallorca benefitted, their best chance coming soon after.

Dani Rodriguez clipped a delightful ball over the top for Angel Rodriguez to run onto and the ball fell loose for Maffeo to carry just in front of the penalty spot. Maffeo had only Thibaut Courtois to beat but his scuffed finish hit the post. Madrid's momentum at the end of the first half continued early in the second and in the 55th minute, they took the lead. Fede Valverde pressured and then robbed Idrissu Baba and while Mallorca's fans wanted a foul, Benzema played on, rolling left to Vinicius, who had a simple finish.

Vinicius was key to the second as well, swivelling



**PALMA:** Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema celebrates after scoring his team's second goal during the Spanish League football match between RCD Mallorca and Real Madrid CF on March 14, 2022. —AFP

out of trouble in midfield and playing Benzema through on the left. By the time Benzema passed across the box, Vinicius had caught up, pushed over by Oliván just as he went to finish. Benzema converted the penalty to

break the French record and then added another late on, heading in brilliantly inside the post from Marcelo's cross. He celebrated by leaping into the air but could not continue for long. —AFP

## Gulf Bank launches the 'Off-Road Challenge'

**KUWAIT:** As part of its ongoing commitment to social responsibility and its continuous support of local youth, Gulf Bank, in cooperation with the Suffix company for sports events management and Kuwait Motor Sport Club, announced the launch of the Off-Road Challenge. The challenge is set to be the first sports event of its kind in Kuwait, and will take place on Friday, March 18th from 1-6 PM.

During the press conference held yesterday, the Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Fahad Al-Sharrah, said that dozens of local youth will be given the opportunity to practice their beloved sport and pursue their passions - all while competing for valuable cash prizes.

He pointed out that the application to take part in the competition was open to off-roading amateurs and professionals over a period of five days, as the organizing committee received dozens of requests for participation. The popularity of the competition reflects the youth's interest in off-roading, and sets the stage for the expectation that thousands of people will attend the competition set to take place in Bneider.

Al-Sharrah added that the participants will compete on both natural terrain and prepared industrial barriers, with the degree of difficulty ranging from easy to medium. The competition circuit has been prepared with various rough roads, using sand, rocks, water basins, and other challenges that the competitors must pass through, all while maintaining the strictest security and safety measures.

Al-Sharrah affirmed Gulf Bank's interest in sponsoring sporting events as part of the Bank's role in promoting local youth's mental and physical health. Gulf Bank greatly prioritizes the local youth segment both in terms of its banking services and its commitment to their social wellbeing.

He pointed out that Gulf Bank, based on its motto "Always With You," presents a distinct model for sustainability programs that include all segments of the local population, resulting in multiple initiatives that promote a great quality of life, including sports, health, and education activities.

Social responsibility is one of the main pillars



(From left) Fahad Al-Sharrah, Ahmad Al-Amir and Ahmed Altwalsh seen in a group photo.

of Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) social responsibility program, heading various educational initiatives throughout the year that have a sustainable impact on the lives of youth and society.

### A successful partnership

On his part, representative of Suffix company for sports events management, Ahmed Altwalsh, said: "We are proud to partner with Gulf Bank to organize the Off-Road Challenge, the first sports event of its kind in Kuwait. We look forward to putting on a successful event both in terms of our athletes' participation and public turnout."

He pointed out that Suffix's partnership with Gulf Bank in organizing sporting events extends longer than six years, with Suffix assisting in organizing the annual Gulf Bank 642 Marathon. The marathon was recently awarded a Bronze Ranking by World Athletics, an honor that Gulf Bank shares among only 128 marathons around the world.

Altwalsh also notes that the upcoming race will

consist of 9 stages, with each stage varying between natural terrain and industrial challenges. Contestants will be evaluated by a panel of judges, and will be judged based on their timing and performance in their respective car categories.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with the different relevant parties to achieve it.

## Immobile breaks Lazio's Serie A scoring record with Venezia winner

**MILAN:** Ciro Immobile broke Lazio's all-time Serie A scoring record on Monday with the only goal in his team's 1-0 win over struggling Venezia which moved them fifth. Captain Immobile, who also had a goal ruled out for offside just after the break, smashed home a 58th-minute penalty to take his top-flight tally with Lazio to 144, one more than Italian goalscoring icon Silvio Piola. Piola is Serie A's all-time leading scorer with 274 goals over a 25-year career in which his biggest honour was the 1938 World Cup for his national team.

He played at Lazio for nine of those years and scored 149 times overall for the Roman club, another record broken towards the end of last season by Immobile, who is now on 176 Lazio goals in all competitions after netting a league-leading 21st of the season. "I need to say thanks to the team, in every match and every season they're by my side, helping me to beat each record," Immobile told DAZN.

"All that you have once you finish playing is how people feel about you. I'm really proud of what I'm doing here, and I thank the fans, who've truly supported me from my first day here." Since Immobile joined Lazio in the summer of 2016 only Lionel Messi and Robert Lewandowski in Europe's top five leagues—England, Spain, Germany, France and Italy—have scored more goals than the Italian international.

The 32-year-old's winner came on the evening Lazio honored with a pre-match silence another important captain in Pino Wilson, who led the club to their first league title in 1974 and died aged 76 just over a week ago. The goal was especially sweet as it allowed Lazio to move above Atalanta and most importantly Roma ahead of Sunday's capital city derby.

Maurizio Sarri's side are two points ahead of their local rivals after one defeat in their last eight matches, which came in the dying seconds against title-chasing Napoli a fortnight ago. "In the week leading up to the derby I bump into a lot of Roma fans who ask me not to play!" joked Immobile. Venezia meanwhile stay in the relegation zone, three points from safety after a third straight defeat and the 16th of their first season in Serie A in nearly two decades. —AFP

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24840300
24812000	Al-Razi Hospital
Amiri Hospital	24846000
22450005	Physiotherapy Hospital
Maternity Hospital	24874330/9
24843100	
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	
25312700	Kaizen center
Chest Hospital	25716707
24849400	Rawda
Farwaniya Hospital	22517733
24892010	Adaliya
Adan Hospital	22517144
23940620	Khaldiya
Ibn Sina Hospital	24848075

## Clinics

### CHANGE OF NAME

I, Mustafa S/o Gulam Abbas Pathan holder of Indian Passport No. Z3201408 issued at Kuwait on 28/09/2015 Civil ID 278021202169 will be adding (Surname) Pathan in my passport hereafter known by (Given Name) Mustafa

(Surname) Pathan in all my dealings and documents vide gazette no. P-2173095. (C #1429) 16-3-2022

I hereby declare to change my name from Tamanna Mohammad Rameez Pasha (in passport no: M2619219) to Tamanna Pasha. (C 1427) 13-03-2022

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LONDON: Crystal Palace's Danish defender Joachim Andersen (right) controls the ball during the English Premier League football match between Crystal Palace and Manchester City on March 14, 2022. — AFP

## City's title bid hit by Palace stalemate

### Wasteful Man City in a damaging 0-0 draw at Palace

LONDON: Pep Guardiola refused to panic after Manchester City wasted a host of chances in a damaging 0-0 draw at Crystal Palace on Monday that severely dented their bid to retain the Premier League title. Guardiola's side had 18 shots and 74 percent of the possession, but left Selhurst Park ruing a series of misses on a significant night in the title race.

Bernardo Silva and Aymeric Laporte were guilty of the most glaring miscues, with Palace keeper Vicente Guaita keeping the leaders at bay with several saves. With second placed Liverpool having won at Brighton on Saturday, City are now just four points clear of Jurgen Klopp's team. Liverpool can close to within one point of City if they win their game in hand at fourth placed Arsenal today.

But Guardiola showed no signs of losing his cool as he insisted he was happy with City's performance and their position in the title battle. "We played a good game and created a lot of chances but couldn't convert. Sometimes it happens," he said. "I

would prefer to have won, of course, but the way we played was amazing in a difficult stadium with the grass not perfect. "There are many games still to play. We have to win a lot but the way we played, no regrets about the team."

Given Liverpool's red-hot form, the stalemate in south London could tip the balance of power towards Merseyside. Liverpool have been so relentless that City need to be perfect to hold them off, and this draw, together with the recent defeat against Tottenham, have left them vulnerable to the Reds' sustained assault. "Luck doesn't exist in football. We have to score goals and we didn't do it," Guardiola said.

After making a host of changes for the goalless Champions League tie against Sporting Lisbon last week, Guardiola recalled Kevin De Bruyne and Riyad Mahrez as he reverted to the line-up that dominated the Manchester derby. Guardiola insisted City were treating the match like "a final"

because of the threat posed by Palace, who beat them 2-0 at the Etihad Stadium in October. Mahrez tried to set the tone when he cut inside to the edge of the Palace area for a curling effort that whistled past the far post.

#### City frustration

Silva should have put the champions ahead after Guaita spilled De Bruyne's blast but, rather than shoot, he elected to dribble round the Palace keeper and watched in horror as the ball rolled out for a goal-kick. In a spell-binding period of City pressure, John Stones was inches away with a 25-yard rocket that deflected wide, while Mahrez tested Guaita with a low drive. De Bruyne hooked an audacious effort over his shoulder, forcing Guaita to palm away, before Laporte produced an awful miss.

Joao Cancelo's fierce strike cannoned back off the post to the unmarked Laporte, who had the goal at his mercy but somehow contrived to shoot high

over the bar from close-range. Guardiola's men were pouring forward in waves but Palace refused to let the floodgates open and Guaita saved again from Mahrez, who also shot narrowly wide at the end of a one-sided first half. Soon after the interval, De Bruyne hit the post from an acute angle before Mahrez fired the rebound over. Camped in Palace's half, City were becoming visibly frustrated by Palace's obdurate resistance.

Guardiola held his head in his hands after Silva stretched but failed to reach Jack Grealish's cross as it flashed across goal. City had no answer to Palace's massed defense, although Guardiola's refusal to make a substitutions was a curious move. "I thought a lot about making changes but they were playing well. The guys in the side had the ability to score," Guardiola said. By the time Grealish's shot was blocked, City appeared resigned to their fate and, in a fitting finale, Laporte could only head De Bruyne's free-kick tamely at Guaita. — AFP



WELLINGTON: Australia's Annabel Sutherland takes a successful catch to dismiss West Indies' Aaliyah Alleyne during the 2022 Women's Cricket World Cup match between the West Indies and Australia yesterday. — AFP

## Australia crush West Indies at World Cup

WELLINGTON: Australia routed the West Indies by seven wickets in Wellington yesterday to maintain their perfect record at the Women's Cricket World Cup. The tournament's red-hot favourites produced another ruthless display to race to a 4-0 winning record at the one-day showcase, highlighted by an unbeaten 83 from Rachael Haynes. The win puts the six-time champions at the top of the standings with a healthy run rate, virtually guaranteeing a semi-final spot.

The West Indies have won two of their four matches and remain in with a chance of making the top four in the round-robin standings. The West Indies won the toss and elected to bat but were stunned when Ellyse Perry took two wickets in successive balls to leave them at 4-2. "Early wickets up

front made a difference in the game that really put us in front and put them under pressure," Australian captain Meg Lanning said.

Perry clean bowled Hayley Matthews for duck then coaxed an edge off the first ball faced by Kycia Knight. It could have been worse but Deandra Dottin and Staphanie Taylor were both given reprieves by the third umpire. West Indies skipper Taylor made the most of her chance by battling on to 50 but could not find any support with Shemaine Campbelle the next highest score on 20. Perry finished on 3-22 and Ashleigh Gardner took 3-25 as the West Indies were skittled for 131 in 45.5 overs.

The paltry total was never going to be enough against the strongest batting line-up in women's cricket, but the West Indies did well to make Australia work for 30.2 overs to reach the 132-run target. Taylor said the West Indies needed a total of about 250 to defend but she was heartened by a solid bowling display and optimistic about her side's chances of advancing. "We still have three more (pool) games to go, that's a lot of cricket," she said. "We just have to go back to the drawing board and regroup." — AFP

## Jokic wins MVP duel as Nuggets down Sixers

LOS ANGELES: Nikola Jokic won his duel with potential MVP successor Joel Embiid as the Denver Nuggets came from behind to score a 114-110 road victory over the Philadelphia 76ers on Monday. The much-anticipated showdown between reigning NBA MVP Jokic and Sixers ace Embiid-seen as the front-runner for this year's award-did not disappoint.

Serbian star Jokic finished with 22 points, 13 rebounds and eight assists as Denver halted their two-game losing streak to improve to 41-28. Embiid led the scoring for Philadelphia with 34 points while James Harden added 24. Denver maintain their sixth place position in the Western Conference—the last

of the automatic playoff berths.

Jokic was backed with 21 points from Bones Hyland while Will Barton chipped in with 20 points. A Denver victory had looked like an unlikely outcome after the Sixers poured on the points in the first quarter, leading by 15 going into the second period. The Sixers lead jumped out to 19 points at one stage in the second quarter before Barton (10 points) and Jokic (seven) helped cut the deficit to just five points at the break.

Hyland then erupted for 12 of his 31 points in the final quarter—all from three-point range—as Denver outscored the Sixers 33-22 to wrap up the win. Crucially, Denver's defense bottled up Embiid and Harden in the fourth quarter to stanch the Sixers scoring, restricting the Philadelphia stars to a combined 11 points. Jokic meanwhile delivered the highlight reel-worthy moment of the game late in the fourth quarter, making an incredible running jump shot to put the Nuggets 112-108 ahead with 1min 32sec remaining. — AFP



PHILADELPHIA: Nikola Jokic #15 of the Denver Nuggets shoots the ball against the Philadelphia 76ers on March 14, 2022 at Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia. — AFP