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Assembly renews confidence in public works minister

5-year program discussed • Court upholds jail for MP over tribal primaries

Polestar 2: First fully electric car brand arrives in Kuwait



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi with the automotive team.

KUWAIT: Polestar, the Swedish premium electric performance brand, confirms its arrival in Kuwait with the Polestar 2. Polestar has appointed BNK Automotive, the authorized distributor of Volvo Cars in Kuwait, as its representative in the country. Nils Mosko, Head of Strategy and Business Development at Polestar, commented: "We are excited to bring Polestar to Kuwait. As a premium

electric brand, we found a natural partner in BNK Automotive, and we are pleased to join their portfolio of automotive brands."

"As we witness the global shift towards electrification in the automotive industry, we are honored to be in a position to catalyze this change in Kuwait towards a brighter, greener future," said Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi of BNK Automotive. (See Page 8)



KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works Ali Al-Mousa gestures after MPs rejected a no-confidence motion against him at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly yesterday rejected a no-confidence motion against Minister of Public Works Ali Al-Mousa, renewing confidence in the minister who was grilled just three weeks after assuming office. The opposition-sponsored motion needed 24 votes to pass, but it only secured 22

votes, with 21 other MPs voting for the minister. Under Kuwaiti law, Cabinet ministers are not allowed to vote on no-confidence motions. MPs backing the minister insisted yesterday that the minister has started dealing with issues but wanted more time, adding they have trust that the minister is a reformist.

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News in brief

Saudi King undergoes tests

RIYADH: Saudi King Salman left King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh after he underwent some successful medical tests and changed the battery of his pacemaker. HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable to King Salman to congratulate him on the successful medical checkups. He wished the Saudi king everlasting wellbeing and the kingdom more progress and welfare under his wise leadership. — Agencies

US to sell F-15s to Egypt

WASHINGTON: A senior US general told Congress Tuesday that the United States will sell Egypt advanced F-15 fighter jets. "In the case of Egypt, I think we have good news, in that we are going to provide them with F-15s, which was a long, hard slog." Central Command head General Frank McKenzie told the Senate Armed Services Committee. He did not provide details on the sale, and the State Department, which has to sign off on it, has yet to officially notify Congress of a sale, as it is required to do. — AFP

Russia exits Council of Europe

STRASBOURG, France: Russia yesterday ceased to be a member of the Council of Europe after over a quarter of a century of membership in the pan-European rights body, the council said in a statement. Moscow announced Tuesday that it was quitting the council, ahead of the formal decision taken yesterday by the body's committee of ministers to expel Russia over its invasion of Ukraine. In a hugely symbolic moment, the flag of Russia was lowered and removed from its staff outside the Council of Europe headquarters. — AFP



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is received by Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan (left) and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (right) during a one-day visit to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates yesterday. — AFP photos

British PM meets Saudi, UAE leaders

RIYADH: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson met oil-rich Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to lobby for higher production yesterday after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent markets into turmoil. Johnson spoke with Prince Mohammed after talks with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed in the United Arab Emirates.

The UK leader is hoping the oil-rich Gulf states will raise production to help calm oil prices, which

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British-Iranians freed after UK settles Iran debt

LONDON: Two British-Iranians flew home yesterday after being released from years of detention in Iran, as the UK government confirmed it had paid a long-standing debt over a cancelled defense contract. "Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori will return from Iran today," British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss

said. "They will be reunited with their families and loved ones."

UK lawmaker Tulip Siddiq, who represents the north London district where Zaghari-Ratcliffe's family live, tweeted a photo of her constituent smiling on board a plane. "It's been 6 long years - and I can't believe I can FINALLY share this photo," she wrote. Zaghari-Ratcliffe's husband Richard Ratcliffe told AFP at the family home that "the first thing she always wanted to do was me make her a cup of tea".

"I'm relieved that the problems were solved," he said, standing next to their young daughter Gabriella, adding that the government should make

sure "it doesn't happen again". Truss also announced that Morad Tahbaz, an Iranian-American who also holds British nationality, has been released from prison "on furlough" to his Tehran home. Addressing parliament later yesterday, Truss said: "The agonies endured by Nazanin, Anoosheh, Morad and their families must never happen again."

The pair were released as major powers in Vienna close in on renewing the landmark 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on regulating Iran's nuclear program. The deal gives Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its

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Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

Zelensky invokes 9/11; Putin says invasion on track

KYIV: Ukraine's leader yesterday issued an emotive appeal to US lawmakers for greater Western intervention against Russia, which insisted its invasion was going "successfully" despite the West ral-

lying to Kyiv's side via arms and sanctions. In a landmark virtual address to Congress, President Volodymyr Zelensky invoked Pearl Harbor, the 9/11 attacks and Martin Luther King Jr as he showed a video of the destruction inflicted on his cities by three weeks of Russian attacks.

Ukrainian officials said 10 people had been killed while queuing for bread in the northern city of Chernigiv, and an unspecified number died in a Russian strike on civilians fleeing the besieged city of Mariupol. Dull booms echoed across the deserted streets of Ukraine's capital Kyiv, with only an occasional vehicle

passing through sandbagged checkpoints, and very few permits granted to break its latest curfew.

Kyiv has been emptied of around half of its 3.5 million people but Eduard Demenchuk, a private-security employee in his 50s, was among those who have stayed. "It's worrying, of course. It's war after all. But we try to stay calm, we won't allow panic," he told AFP by telephone, after stocking up on groceries for the duration of the curfew. "To tell the truth, I wasn't planning to leave Kyiv anyway," Demenchuk added.

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Local

Changing 'servant' term to 'domestic worker' - laudable and good decision

Domestic workers entitled to their rights like other workers

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Domestic workers are entitled to their rights like any other workers, Philippine Labor Attache to Kuwait Nasser Mustafa said after a decision by the National Assembly to amend the term 'servant' to 'domestic worker' in local laws. Mustafa said the Philippines changed the term 'servant' in 2012 to protect domestic helpers' rights.

"It's a laudable decision from the part of the National Assembly of Kuwait. The widely accepted international term should be domestic worker as defined under the International Labor Organization Convention No 189 which we, the Philippines, ratified in 2012. I will quote our former labor secretary, saying domestic work is work and thus domestic workers worldwide are like other workers, entitled to decent work," Mustafa said.

The Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers, Convention No. 189 was adopted at the 100th International Labor Conference in Geneva on June 16, 2011. The ILO convention 189

emphasizes the basic entitlement of all domestic workers to (a) the promotion and protection of their human rights; (b) respect and protection of fundamental principles and rights at work; (c) effective protection against all forms of abuse, harassment and violence; and (d) fair terms and decent living conditions.

The Philippines deploys the most domestic helpers to Kuwait after India. The Filipino population in Kuwait is around 230,000, of which 65 percent are domestic helpers. The Philippines is a major source of housemaids for Kuwait, along with Sri Lanka and India. Other labor exporting countries such as Nepal, Indonesia and Ethiopia have requested the signing of agreements to start sending workers to Kuwait.

The Philippines and Kuwait last year agreed and signed a tripartite agreement in which Kuwait agreed to provide Filipino housemaids with decent and appropriate housing equipped with all the necessities, suitable food and clothing, and medical treatment in case of sickness pursuant to the

healthcare insurance system of Kuwait.

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.

Adi Kuntarto, Minister Counsellor for the Indonesian Embassy, said changing a term in a legislation is common in many countries, but for him this was necessary. "The change from 'servant' to 'domestic worker' by the National Assembly was certainly done with good intentions, to sync with international laws related to human rights. We certainly welcome this effort and hope sincerely that the objectives in changing the term can be achieved.

We hope and pray that it is not limited to changing the terms, but also to ensure that all parties concerned will always uphold human rights," he added.



A domestic worker cleans the kitchen in this file photo.

The Indonesian government banned the deployment of their domestic helpers to Kuwait and other Middle East countries in 2009 over failure by authorities there to protect its domestic workers against abuses and maltreatment by employers.

Kuwait to bolster Arab Competition Network operations

CAIRO: Kuwait seeks all possible venues to bolster the operations of the Arab Competition Network, a seminal platform for competitiveness in the region, said a Kuwaiti official yesterday. In his address to the opening session of the Arab Competition Network meeting, organized by the Arab League, Vice President of Kuwait's Competition Protection Agency (CPA)

Asaad Al Anbai said that event would set the record for the establishment of the Arab network, leading to fair economic and financial competition in the Arab world.

The economic challenges presented by the current global trends, required cooperation among Arab countries to safeguard means for sustainable development and boost mechanisms for food security and diversified natural resources, indicated the Kuwaiti official. He added that economic growth, levels of inflation, and the strength of currencies were governed by the current status quo, which if left unchecked, would lead to malpractices affecting fair competition.

Al-Anbai stressed that it was paramount

for Arab countries to figure out policies encouraging economic growth and competitiveness, establishing agencies and organizations dedicated to these particular causes.

Kuwait's CPA had set a five-year national plan to seek just and fair competition to boost the country's economic development, he noted. The plan would give the CPA the authority to enforce laws guaranteeing fair play and competitiveness, Al-Anbai affirmed. The CPA was established in 2012 to enforce and promote fairness in the Kuwaiti market and boost the country's economy. The Arab Competition Network has 17 Arab members including Kuwait. —KUNA



Vice President of Kuwait's Competition Protection Agency (CPA) Asaad Al-Anbai

MENA could benefit from digital economy

WASHINGTON: The universal adoption of digital technologies in countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) would reap huge socio-economic benefits, amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars each year and a much-needed surge in new jobs, said a new World Bank report. The report "The Upside of Digital for the Middle East and North Africa: How Digital Technology Adoption Can Accelerate Growth and Create Jobs" offered sound evidence of how the widespread use of digital services such as

mobile money and digital payments would boost economic growth.

It added that a core reason for this boost was that digital technologies reduce informational costs that constrain economic transactions, and those costs are lower when many more people use the technologies. The report indicated that fully digitalizing the economy could lead to a rise in GDP per capita of at least 46 percent over 30 years, or in dollar terms a long-term gain of at least \$1.6 trillion. During the first year, this GDP per capita gain for the region would be almost \$300 billion, the report estimates.

The increase would be more marked in lower-income MENA countries, an increase by at least 71 percent since gains are driven by closing the access gap to digital technologies. The access Economics gap is wider for non-high-income countries. "The gains from shifting to a more digital economy are exponential and governments should do everything they can to

remove barriers preventing such a transition. The sooner and faster the push, the bigger the gains," said Ferid Belhaj, World Bank Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa.

"A digital transformation would provide jobs in a region where unemployment is unacceptably high, particularly among the youth and women. With concerted effort, this narrative can change," he added. The report predicted universal adoption of digital technologies would double the female labor force participation rate by about 20 percentage points over a 30-year period (from 40 million women to 80 million over that time). The report highlighted a digital paradox unique to the MENA region.

While MENA countries' populations have embraced social media use—more than expected given their levels of GDP per capita—the populations' usage of the Internet and digital tools like mobile money to pay for services is lower than expected given the

country's income levels. One likely reason for this reticence in using digital technology for financial transactions is a lack of societal trust in government and corporate institutions, and regulations that make the digital transformation more difficult.

Policy regulations suggested by the report include opening up MENA's telecommunications market to more competition, which could help to increase the availability and use of mobile money and digital payments, with the additional benefit of increasing financial inclusion by expanding access to financial accounts.

Action is also needed to strengthen the enabling regulatory framework for e-commerce transactions, including e-signatures, data privacy protections and cyber security. Prioritizing reforms needed to increase the use of digital payments, to overcome the digital paradox, is essential to accelerate the digital economy transformation. —KUNA

Zelensky invokes 9/11; Putin says...

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"If need be, we will take arms and will stand to defend the city."

Russian rocket fire also hit a train station in Zaporizhzhia, used by refugees fleeing Mariupol, regional authorities said. Some 20,000 residents have been allowed to leave Mariupol. But exhausted, shivering evacuees speak of harrowing escape journeys and rotting corpses littering the streets. Kyiv rejected Russian demands to impose neutrality on Ukraine, and Zelensky demanded the United States and its NATO allies impose a no-fly zone, so that "Russia would not be able to terrorize our free cities".

Switching to English, Zelensky addressed US President Joe Biden in saying: "I wish you to be the leader of the world. Being the leader of the world means to be the leader of peace." The speech received standing ovations from the members of Congress, much like Zelensky's prior addresses to the UK and EU parliaments—which were also rich in historical references most likely to strike a chord

with their influential audiences.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, however, also reached back to history as he denounced the West's "pogroms" against Russia and its sanctions "blitzkrieg", which he said had failed. At a televised government meeting, Putin insisted the invasion was "developing successfully, in strict accordance with plans". "And we will not allow Ukraine to serve as a springboard for aggressive actions against Russia," he added.

NATO will hold an emergency summit next week in Brussels with Biden attending - but it has so far resisted Zelensky's pleas for direct involvement for fear of starting World War III. NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said the alliance would put "substantially more forces" on its eastern flank, but was not planning to deploy forces to Ukraine. Biden and other NATO leaders have instead been stepping up military support for Ukraine including anti-tank weapons that have helped to stall Russian forces north of Kyiv.

Coinciding with Zelensky's speech, a White House official said Biden would unveil another \$800 million of military aid, expected to include more anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles. Zelensky had earlier responded to the hacking of Ukrainian TV news with a message demanding Ukraine lay down its arms. The hack was "the latest childish provocation" from Moscow, he said. —AFP

government in domestic economy prevents the participation of the private sector, the low quality of education where the level of 12th graders in Kuwait is equal only to seventh graders in advanced countries, in addition to the low quality of infrastructure.

Minister of Finance Abdulwahab Al-Rasheed said 72,000 Kuwaitis work in the private sector and the government aims to increase this to 100,000 over the next five years. He said the breakeven price of oil, where there will be no deficit in the budget, is \$90 a barrel, and the government aims to cut it to \$70 a barrel.

MP Saifi Al-Saifi lashed out at the program, saying there can be no plan without a timetable, adding that it is not enough to have a program in 26 pages with spending exceeding KD 100 billion. Saifi said if the government implements just 10 percent of the program, "ministers will be champions", adding that the government does not have legislation to carry out the program. He said the difference between Kuwait and the rest of the Gulf is like the difference between a Nokia phone and an iPhone. The Assembly is scheduled to hold a special session today to debate the rights of retired Kuwaitis.

Meanwhile, the court of appeals yesterday upheld a two-year jail term against MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa and former MP Sultan Al-Shemmari and others for taking part in outlawed tribal primaries. The verdict is not final as it needs to be looked by the court of cassation, the country's top court whose verdicts are final.

British-Iranians freed after UK...

Continued from Page 1

nuclear program and Tehran said yesterday that "two issues" remain with the US to restore the deal.

Truss confirmed that, with diplomatic assistance from Oman, London and Tehran had "in parallel" resolved a £394-million (\$515-million) debt dating back to the 1970s and the era of the Shah of Iran. The debt payment deal was reached "after highly complex and exhaustive negotiations", Truss said, and the money can only be used for humanitarian goods.

The families of both Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Ashoori believe they were being held as political prisoners until the issue was settled. The UK has consciously avoided saying the detention of the pair, and others held in Iran, was linked to the debt for an order of tanks that was cancelled after the 1979 Islamic revolution. Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said yesterday that Iran had received the money "a few days ago", adding

British PM meets Saudi...

Continued from Page 1

soared to nearly \$140 a barrel before dropping below \$100, and help end the West's dependency on Russian oil following the invasion.

In their talks, Johnson and Prince Mohammed discussed "regional and international issues of common interest and efforts exerted in their regard, including the developments in Ukraine", the official Saudi Press Agency said, without mentioning any talks on oil. Johnson met Prince Mohammed after discussing "the stability of the global oil markets" with Emirati royal Sheikh Mohammed, according to the UAE's official WAM news agency.

"The leaders welcomed the long-standing partnership between our two countries and discussed opportunities to increase collaboration between the UK and UAE on energy security, green technology, and trade," a Downing Street spokesperson said.

Before leaving for Riyadh, Johnson stressed Britain's "very important relationship" with the oil-rich Gulf. "It's not just a question of looking at the OPEC countries and what they can do to increase supply, though that is important," Johnson told

that it was "wrong to link Iran receiving its debt... to the release of these people".

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a project manager for the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the news and data agency, was arrested in Tehran on a visit to family in 2016. She was sentenced to five years in prison for plotting to overthrow the government. Last year she was given a further 12-month jail term for taking part in a rally outside the Iranian embassy in London in 2009.

Ashoori, a retired engineer from southeast London, was arrested in 2017 and jailed for 10 years on charges of spying for the Zionist entity. The pair landed in Muscat on a Royal Air Force of Oman flight, the foreign ministry said. They were expected to land in the UK later yesterday. Tabbaz was arrested alongside other environmentalists in Jan 2018 and sentenced to 10 years in jail for "conspiring with America".

Sacha Deshmukh, Amnesty International UK's chief executive, welcomed the "fantastic news" of the releases, saying both were "jailed on trumped-up national security charges". The government must renew "its calls for the release of the UK nationals Mehran Raouf and Morad Tabbaz, both of whom are still going through an ordeal all too similar to Nazanin and Anoosheh's," he added. —AFP

British media. "When we look at the dependency the West in particular has built up on Putin's hydrocarbons, on Putin's oil and gas, we can see what a mistake that was because he's been able to blackmail the West."

Johnson's spokesman said he would also ask Prince Mohammed to condemn Russia's President Vladimir Putin over the assault on Ukraine.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which are two of the world's biggest oil exporters and both have ties to Moscow, have so far avoided taking a position against Russia. But Johnson said before leaving that the impact of Putin's "brutal and unprovoked" assault will be felt far beyond Europe. He said as Western sanctions begin to bite, a new international coalition was needed to offset their impact on consumers already feeling the pinch from rising inflation.

"The world must wean itself off Russian hydrocarbons and starve Putin's addiction to oil and gas," he said in a statement. "Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are key international partners in that effort." The UAE and Saudi Arabia are the UK's two largest economic partners in the region, with bilateral trade worth £12.2 billion and £10.4 billion respectively in 2020, Johnson's office said.

Russia is the world's largest producer of gas and one of the biggest oil producers. Like the United States, Britain plans to phase out Russian oil imports by the end of the year, as part of wide-ranging sanctions targeting Russian businesses and billionaires. —AFP

Assembly renews confidence...

Continued from Page 1

In its regular session yesterday, the Assembly agreed to amend the law governing the housing authority to exempt its projects from the prior supervision of the Audit Bureau for the next five years to accelerate those projects to meet ever-rising demands for government housing.

The Assembly also discussed the government's five-year program (2021/2022- 2024/2025), which highlights the main development objectives the government aims to achieve over the next five fiscal years. Minister of Oil and Electricity and Water Mohammad Al-Fares said the program is based on main issues including reforms, restructuring public funds, developing human resources and boosting renewable energy.

The minister said the implementation of the program faces major challenges, mainly the rising budget deficit, adding that the expected budget deficit over the next five years is expected to be between KD 45 billion and KD 60 billion. Challenges also include the low productivity of the public sector, adding that the big contribution of the

Local

4.3% of cancer patients in Kuwait are children

Al-Saleh: 52.1 % male, 53.8% of patients younger than 10 years old

KUWAIT: Chairman of the board of the National Campaign for Cancer Awareness (CAN) Dr Khalid Al-Saleh said the incidence of cancer in children is less than that in adults, adding the number of cases in children reached 120 cases - 4.3 percent of total cases of all types of cancer. Saleh said during a press conference in cooperation with I Want to Learn Society held earlier in the week to spread awareness about cancer in children that 52.1 percent of cancer patients are male, and about 53.8 percent are younger than 10 years old.

Dr Saleh said 40.3 percent of cancers are diagnosed in the blood, while more than 55.5 percent are tissue tumors, with surgery recommended for 29.4 percent of cases. He said most cases (74.8 percent) received chemotherapy and 14.3 percent received radiation, adding 89.1 percent of affected children are still living.

Dr Saleh said the strategy that is more effective to reduce the burden of children's cancer and improve health results is to focus on speedy and accurate diagnoses, then allowing for successful treatment, in addition to supporting care designed for this purpose. He said early detection is not effective in children's cancer, so the ideal solution is early diagnosis so that treatment can be done quickly to result in full recovery. He added that



children who complete their treatment need continued care to monitor their condition in order to make sure that they do not get cancer again.

Meanwhile, media personality Aneesa Mohammad Jaafar aka Mama Aneesa said this humanitarian action for children with cancer aims at supporting them until they recover. She called

on all citizens and residents to help children at all stages, because they are the beacons of the future.

Stem cells consultant at NBK Children's Hospital Dr Sundus Al-Shareeda said 21 children who had cancer and other illnesses benefitted from stem cell transplants, be it their own or from donors. She said most cases were successful

and patients recovered. Pediatrician and member of I Want to Learn Society Dr Maha Buresli said around 100 to 120 children are diagnosed with cancer every year, adding international protocols and modern technologies contribute to a recovery percentage that nearly matches the global rate.

Oil Minister affirms Kuwait's capability of achieving 2035 vision

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil, Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr Mohammad Al-Fares affirmed yesterday that Kuwait has all necessary components to achieve its aspirations for Kuwait's 2035 vision under the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

This came in a visual presentation given by Minister Al-Fares to the National Assembly during its complementary session. He explained that Kuwait's developmental journey is challenged by great obstacles, illustrating that this calls for com-

prehensive reformative action and a national strategy to ensure sustained development. It also requires a sense of awareness, responsibility and cooperation between the legislative and executive authorities.

Dr Al-Fares delved into the challenges posed by the Coronavirus pandemic proposed, slow economic recovery and fluctuation in oil prices, which have all taken their toll on the national economy. The Minister of Oil illustrated that the government work plan is comprised of four main axes, the first relates to economic recovery, the second revolves around reshaping the public sector, whereas the third concerns the development of human capital and the fourth relates to improving the infrastructure and employing the use of renewable energy.

A number of executive initiatives with set timetables, objectives and indicators that are periodically monitored, are planned for each of the four axes, Minister Al-Fares added. He noted that His Highness the Amir's unprecedented directives of initiating

national dialogue between the two authorities paved the way for further collaboration and created a positive atmosphere for more development.

Crude price drops

Meanwhile, the price for OPEC's daily basket of crude dropped by \$7.81 to \$102.86 per barrel (pb) on Tuesday, compared with \$110.67 pb Monday, the cartel said. The monthly average for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' basket of crude last month was \$69.89 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. The OPEC+ alliance also agreed to follow up on the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic to monitor its repercussions on the market, making immediate adjustments if necessary.—KUNA



Minister of Oil, Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr Mohammad Al-Fares



KFF, EQUATE launch awareness campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) and EQUATE Petrochemical Company yesterday launched an awareness campaign (Safe Home) in the Avenues Mall and will continue until March 23. Colonel Mohammad Ibrahim, the Force Public Relations director, said that the campaign highlights safety measures in homes and private housing, and focuses on electricity, child tampering, and safety in eleva-

tors, swimming pools, and private kitchens, in conjunction with the upcoming month of Ramadan.

He stressed the importance of following the safety guidelines and acquiring means of fire protection to avoid accidents, mainly the quick evacuation and calling emergency number 112, as well as educating domestic workers on how to act in such situations. Colonel Ibrahim urged citizens and residents to visit the KFF booth at the Avenues to benefit from the awareness programs that KidZania Company participates in, which will organize activities for children. The opening was attended by Supervisor of the Awareness and Public Relations Colonel Majed Bejad, while the first emergency operations planner Sultan Reda attended on behalf of the EQUATE company.—KUNA



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ICSK blesses class with 'Aashirvaad' ceremony

KUWAIT: The virtual platform of ICSK Khaitan echoed with the blessings on the eve of Saturday, 12th March, 2022 when the ICSK family came together to bid farewell to the outgoing batch of class XII. The event began reciting the verses from the Holy Quran followed by the lamp lighting and national anthem of Kuwait. A semi classical dance performed by Joyelin, the dancing damsel of ICSK Khaitan invoked the Blessings.

A warm welcome speech was delivered by the school Principal KG Shirsath. He showered his blessings and best wishes on the young aspirants and encouraged them to move ahead in life with perseverance and confidence. His power of words rejuvenated them physically and emotionally while he emphasized that they must carry the values which ICSK had inculcated in them, wherever they go.

The benign presence of the Chief guest Dr Karamjeet Singh was a blessing to the students of class XII. Dr Karamjeet Singh is the Vice Chancellor of Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, India. Dr Singh was the Registrar of Punjab University, Chandigarh and Professor in Finance & Strategic Management, University Business School, Punjab University and Chandigarh.

Besides, he is the former President of Indian Accounting Association. Dr Singh has three and half decades of experience in teaching and research. He positively impacted and guided the future life and career of the students and shared his direct experiences. Honorable board of trustees, principals, vice principals and deputy vice principals of all branches graced the function with their eminent presence and showered their blessings upon the farewell batch.

On behalf of all parents, Jithesh MIP enlightened the students with his inspirational speech and advised them to believe in themselves and to do hard work which will surely lead them ahead. The valedictory message by the Supervisor Sumitha Shanmugan left an indelible impact on the students. She shared her memories and advised her dear students to make a continuous effort towards their goals until they achieve it completely.

Representing science, commerce and humanities batch respectively - Theo Mathew, Ahmed Layan and Aysha Sheeraz thanked and expressed their deep love and gratitude to the Principal and teachers who had consistently guided them in the right direction throughout the years. They reminisced their fun-filled days in school and expressed how difficult it is for them to go out of the portals of their alma mater.

The spate of cultural events commenced with a motivational song followed by a captivating dance performance by the junior batch beguiled everyone and took over the scene. Awards and mementoes for different positions honoring each and every student were distributed by the dignitaries for their achievement over years.

Titles like Best Academician - Ahmed Layan; Best Artist - Aylin Sheby; Best Sportsperson-Ibrahim Hasib; Best Leader-Akash Alexes; Best All Rounder-Grita Godley were distributed. Showers of blessing poured through a touching video presented by teachers and a lovely video dedicated by class XI showed all the warmth and love they have for their beloved ones.



KUWAIT: Commerce and Industry Ministry inspectors issued three citations during an inspection campaign in Jahra and Farwaniya governorates. Two citations were due to lack of price tags and one for selling at a higher price than the announced.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Artistes perform during a youth theater festival on Tuesday. —Xinhua

Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan up 143.2%

Overall exports to Japan surge 93.8%

TOKYO: Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan soared 143.2 percent from a year earlier to JPY 89.9 billion (\$760 million) in February, up for the 11th consecutive month thanks to high export bills, government data showed yesterday. Kuwait posted black ink with Japan for 14 years and one month, the Finance Ministry said in a preliminary report. Kuwaiti overall exports to Japan surged 93.8 percent year-on-year to JPY 99.8 billion (\$843 million) for the 11th straight month of expansion.

Imports from Japan plunged 31.8 percent to JPY 9.9 billion (\$84 million), down for the sixth month in

a row. Middle East's trade surplus with Japan swelled 111.8 percent to JPY 760.7 billion (\$6.4-billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region expanding 73.7 percent from a year earlier. Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and other natural resources, which accounted for 94.4 percent of the region's total exports to Japan, jumped 75.0 percent.

The region's overall imports from Japan edged down 0.3 percent on sluggish demand for automobiles and machinery. Japan logged a global trade deficit of JPY 668.3 billion (\$5.6 billion) in February

for the seventh straight month of red ink, as surging energy bills and a weaker yen continued to push up the value of its imports.

Exports from the world's third-biggest economy grew 19.1 percent from the year before, buoyed by robust shipments of steel, mineral fuels and automobiles. Imports inflated 34.0 percent on higher energy prices, especially crude oil and LNG. China remained Japan's biggest trade partner, followed by the US. The trade data are measured on a customs-cleared basis before adjustment for seasonal factors. —KUNA

Gulf Bank, GUST Career Fair's Diamond Sponsor

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing initiatives to empower local youth, and to consolidate its role as the preferred employer in the Kuwaiti financial sector, Gulf Bank wrapped up its Diamond sponsorship of the Gulf University of Science and Technology (GUST) annual Career Fair, which took place March 13-14. During the career fair, Gulf Bank representatives shed light on the nature of the workplace at the Bank, providing detailed overviews of career prospects and job opportunities available for recent graduates. Representatives also conducted on-the-spot interviews with interested applicants.

The Bank's pavilion attracted a large number of male and female students who were eager to learn about Gulf Bank's various departments, work environment, and driven by a reputation of excellence that Gulf Bank has proudly maintained over the years as one of the most prominent employers of young talent in Kuwait.

As part of its continuous support to sustainability, Gulf Bank offered human & environmentally conscious experience to students in the pavilion, by using a robotic automated job application process, in the pavilion that was made of recycled materials. At the end of the event, students and GUST employees planted 500 trees, in addition to receiving greenery giveaways with plantable seeded tags from Gulf Bank.

AAW receives Swiss Head of Mission and charge d'affaires

KUWAIT: Chairman and CEO of Ali Abdulwahab Al Mutawa Commercial Co (AAW), Faisal Ali Abdulwahab Al-Mutawa, and Senior Deputy CEO Khaled Al-Mutawa received the Swiss Head of Mission, HE Yasmine Chatila Zwahlen at the company's headquarters on Tuesday, 15 March 2022.

HE Zwahlen was recently appointed the new Swiss Head of Mission in Kuwait, holding the title of charge d'affaires. She conveyed to Al-Mutawa her desire to strengthen Swiss-Kuwaiti relations in her new post, highlighting the importance of developing relationships with the commercial sector and facilitating investment and bilateral partnerships.

In turn, Al-Mutawa said: "We are looking forward to strengthening Swiss-Kuwaiti relations and expanding the opportunities for business and trade



The career fair included an awareness seminar on "cyber security" and data science to help and enable students to obtain jobs in the field of technology and data science. Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, Salma Al-Hajjaj, noted: "Gulf Bank's participation in this year's GUST Career Fair comes as part of our continuous efforts to support young Kuwaiti talent and our continuous efforts to enhance their skills and competencies."

Al-Hajjaj pointed out that the Bank's latest sponsorship of the GUST Career Fair falls in line with the Bank's ongoing efforts to consolidate its position as the Kuwaiti Bank of the Future, and falls within the Bank's strategy for the year 2025. Gulf Bank is keen to attract young talents across various fields, as local youth are the generation that is capable of keeping pace with the latest innovations and the rapid digital development in the banking sector both locally and globally.

Al-Hajjaj affirmed the Bank's keenness to support

the national "New Kuwait 2035" vision, which targets employment in the private sector and the development of Kuwaiti youth, as well as encourages the growth and development of local talent, a goal that is reflected in the increasing rates of national employment at Gulf Bank in recent years.

She added, "We are proud that Gulf Bank is one of the leading banks that invests generously in human capital to enhance its employees' competencies and skills, as we are firm believers that our employees are the foundation from which we can achieve our strategic goals. We aim to keep providing our people with the latest expertise and skills necessary to keep pace with the major banking developments happening in the banking industry." She stated that the training and development of employees is a cornerstone of the Bank's economic sustainability efforts, as Gulf Bank continues to recruit and train Kuwaiti talent to become future leaders in the private



between our two countries. We are truly honored by Zwahlen's visit today, during which we discussed ways to solidify our ties and establish new collaborations with leading global Swiss brands that meet consumers' expectations and contribute to the growth of the Kuwaiti market."

He added: "We wish Her Excellency continued

success in her new position and we look forward to welcoming her back in the near future." AAW is one of the oldest and largest retail and distribution companies in Kuwait, with world-class operations in different sectors. The company is a distributor of over 100 global brands in Kuwait's surging wholesale and retail market.



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HONG KONG: Workers move the body of deceased person from a truck into a refrigerated container at the Fu Shan Public Mortuary in Hong Kong yesterday amid the city's worst-ever COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak that has seen overflowing hospitals and morgues and a frantic expansion of the city's spartan quarantine camp system. —AFP

Hong Kong suffers deadly COVID wave

City-state records a million infections and more than 4,600 deaths in three months

HONG KONG: Workers in PPE gear in Hong Kong carted the bodies of coronavirus victims into refrigerated shipping containers yesterday as the city's morgues run out of space from a deadly Omicron surge.

In under three months since the highly transmissible variant broke through, Hong Kong has recorded nearly a million infections and more than 4,600 deaths—the bulk of them from the city's unvaccinated elderly population. A funeral industry representative told local media the soaring death toll had seen a crunch in the city's coffins supply, with only 300 remaining and expected to be gone by the weekend.

Leader Carrie Lam acknowledged the supply issues during a press conference Wednesday, and said two more shipments of coffins will arrive in Hong Kong from the mainland soon.

"I learned from the Food and Health Bureau last night that they are endeavoring to arrange transportation (of coffins) by water," she said. She added that officials have been trying to help families concerned about post-mortem affairs, including how to retrieve bodies already transported to public morgues without a doctor issuing a death certificate.

"We will try to find a way for the family to take the body back so that they can arrange the funeral soon. The crematoriums... have also been working day and

night at full capacity," Lam said. Outside Fu Shan Public Mortuary on Wednesday, workers in full PPE gear moved bodies covered in black tarp from a truck into rows of shipping containers.

Beaches closed
Researchers estimate the infection toll in Hong



Morgues overflowing; coffins in short supply

Kong is significantly higher than official figures, likely already reaching half its 7.4 million population. Lam has taken hits from all sides on her handling of the crisis, with her administration blamed for the spiraling deaths and unclear messaging about a potential lockdown and mass testing. Chinese social media users

have reacted angrily in the past few days, saying the spread of COVID in the mainland is due to Hong Kong's sluggish epidemic response.

Tens of millions in mainland China were abruptly placed under stay at home orders this week, after the emergence of more than 3,000 daily new cases as Beijing battles to maintain its zero-Covid strategy.

In nearby Shenzhen, all 17.5-million residents were locked down on Monday after an Omicron flare-up in factories and neighborhoods linked to Hong Kong. After photos emerged of maskless Hong Kong residents sunning at a beach—which drew vitriol from Shenzhen's netizens—authorities announced Wednesday that government-managed beaches will be cordoned off starting today.

"As we see a surge of people going to beaches, we have to take appropriate measures in order...to reduce the public's movements to ensure safety," Lam told reporters. This new measure adds to Hong Kong's already strict distancing rules, including wearing masks while hiking and a ban on gatherings of more than two.

The embattled chief executive—whose job is up for grabs in a few months—has so far declined to say if she will run for another term. The selection process was postponed to May because of the wave of COVID cases, and any further postponement would be up to Beijing, Lam said. —AFP

China boosts bed spaces as Omicron outbreak spreads

BEIJING: China moved to free up hospital beds as officials yesterday reported thousands of new cases from an Omicron-led coronavirus outbreak that has put millions under lockdown and raised fears for the health system. Just three weeks ago China was reporting under one hundred COVID cases daily, but that number has swelled past 1,000 per day for a week.

It logged 3,290 new confirmed infections yesterday, including 11 severe cases, China, where the virus emerged in Wuhan in late 2019, has largely kept it under control since then through strict measures, and has not reported any COVID-related deaths for more than a year.

But the highly transmissible Omicron variant is posing a stern challenge to its zero-COVID strategy, resulting in the 17.5 million residents of the southern tech hub of Shenzhen being locked down and other cities also under tight restrictions. Authorities previously sent all patients with any symptoms to specialist hospitals.

But the National Health Commission late Tuesday said patients with mild COVID cases could isolate at a central quarantine facility to ease pressure on hospitals over fears of a looming bed shortage.

"Patients with Omicron variant strains are main-

ly asymptomatic infections and mild cases, most of them do not require serious treatment," the National Health Commission said.

"All admission to designated hospitals will take up a lot of medical resources." Images of patients lying on gurneys outside hospitals in Hong Kong, where hospitals have been overrun by a surge in cases, have spooked mainland officials, who are now also rushing to build makeshift hospitals in some provinces. Footage on state broadcaster CCTV yesterday showed dozens of giant cranes assembling "temporary hospitals" in northeast China's Jilin province, which has reported more than 5,000 cases over the past week.

The province of more than 24 million residents has only 22,880 hospital beds.

Mass testing campaign

As of Tuesday, 6,000 railway carriage-style hospital rooms—first erected during the early days of the pandemic in Wuhan—have been put in place in Jilin City and the nearby metropolis of Changchun, to deal with a feared influx of patients. As well as leaving tens of millions of people under lockdown across the country, the latest spike in cases has sparked long queues outside mass testing sites and tight controls at ports, raising the risk of trade disruption.

In China's biggest city, Shanghai, authorities continued to ramp up a mass testing campaign that so far has seen at least 1.2 million tested in recent days, according to state media. Shanghai has closed school campuses and this week began locking down individual residential compounds with cases or suspected close contacts for at least 48



DALIAN, China: Residents queue to undergo nucleic acid tests for the COVID-19 coronavirus in Dalian, in China's northeastern Liaoning province yesterday. —AFP

hours for testing in a targeted approach, as fatigue with zero-COVID develops.

But city authorities said yesterday that in coming days they would also begin locking down and testing an unspecified number of "key areas" in Shanghai, suggesting an expanded test mandate across the city of 25 million people. A lockdown in major tech hub Shenzhen has prompted fears from analysts of a drag on growth as many factories and businesses closed.

Major Apple supplier Foxconn said yesterday it had resumed some operations at sites where production and accommodation were on the same site. The capital Beijing reiterated earlier rules that banned all travelers from areas with reported cases in the past 14 days, while other arrivals must show a recent negative COVID-19 test. —AFP

Ties between the two countries had collapsed in 2010 following the death of 10 civilians in a Zionist raid on the Turkish Mavi Marmara ship, part of a flotilla trying to breach a blockade to carry aid into Gaza. But Erdogan took a step towards reconciliation by calling Zionist entity's President Isaac Herzog following his inauguration in July.

He then hosted Herzog in Ankara last week, the first trip by a Zionist entity head of state to Turkey since 2007, in a visit both men hailed as a turning point in bilateral relations.

' Hamas concerned'

Experts have said that Erdogan's move towards Zionist entity had little to do with Palestinian



QUITO: Ecuadorian biologist Diego Batallas shows a Rhinella festae toad at the National Institute of Biodiversity in Quito. —AFP

Ecuadorian toad breaks its silence after 100 years

QUITO: Ecuadorian biologist Jorge Brito was trekking through the forest when he heard what he thought was the chirp of a cricket. What he found changed a century of scientific belief.

"At first I thought it was some sort of cricket out there vocalizing, but then I paid attention," said Brito, from Ecuador's national biodiversity institute. It was, in fact, a type of brown toad with rough skin called *Rhinella festae* that has a prominent nose and had been considered mute since it was first discovered 100 years ago. "While it did not inflate its vocal sack, you could see a small flicker" on its chin, said Brito. He caught it and took it to a laboratory to study with his colleague Diego Batallas.

"The first time I heard it, I said: Wow, that's not the sound of a toad, it's like a little bird," Batalla told AFP. The toad, which measures between 45 and 68 millimeters in length, lives in the mountainous Ecuadorian regions of Cutucu and Condor, extending over the border into the Amazonian region of Peru.

The discovery was first reported in February in Neotropical Biodiversity magazine, where Brito and Batallas described the sound made by the toad. "It is the first time this unique song of the *Rhinella festae* has been recorded and it's surprising because it shouldn't sing," Batallas told AFP.

The toad does not have the vocal sack that allows most amphibians to amplify their calls so that they can be heard up to one kilometer away. "The fact that this species can sing (without the vocal sack) makes it unique," added Batallas, who used to sing in a choir.

Batallas said that the faint sound emitted by the *Rhinella festae* demonstrates that some species of amphibians could have evolved in such a way—perhaps as an anti-predator measure—as to "not need their song to be heard very far away." In the case of the *Rhinella festae*, it emits a sound as a greeting, whereas other species of toad croak as part of a mating ritual or as a warning. —AFP

Hamas faces risk, opportunity from warming Zionist entity-Turkey ties

GAZA CITY: A diplomatic thaw between Zionist entity and Turkey has created challenges for Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, which counts on Ankara's support, but could also offer it a more "trustworthy" middleman to deal with the Jewish

state, experts say. With Turkey's ties to Zionist entity effectively broken for more than a decade, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has fostered a close relationship with Hamas, which took power in the Gaza Strip in 2007.

In addition to providing financial and logistical support to the group, which is considered a terrorist organization by much of the West, Turkey is also home to senior Hamas officials, including Salah Al-Aruri, a long-standing Istanbul resident. Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and former chief Khaled Meshal visit Turkey often. Erdogan is a vocal supporter of the Palestinian cause and a fierce critic of the Zionist entity—but he altered regional strategy earlier this year by initiating an outreach to Zionist entity.

affairs, and that the Turkish leader was likely motivated by a desire to shore up his struggling economy through improved ties with a key regional economic power. But Hamas will feel the effects of the rapprochement, said Mokhaimer Abu Sa'ada, a political scientist at Al-Azhar University in Gaza. "Hamas is concerned," he told AFP.

"Zionist entity is expected to increase the pressure on the Turkish authorities. I expect that Hamas leaders will leave, perhaps for Beirut or Iran, because Istanbul will no longer be welcoming."

Sources involved in the Erdogan-Herzog bilateral talks, who requested anonymity, said the presidents discussed the presence of Hamas leaders in Turkey, a longstanding Zionist grievance. —AFP

International

Russian troops hold Chernobyl workers 'hostage' amid fears for reactor safety

Russia has built 'a military base' at Chernobyl with missile-launching batteries

CHERNOBYL: A hundred technicians are working under armed guard to maintain the defunct Chernobyl nuclear plant in northern Ukraine, held hostage for three weeks by Russian forces who seized the compound in the first hours of the invasion. Tired and poorly fed, they were working the night shift when Russia captured the site of the 1986 core meltdown that sparked the worst nuclear reactor catastrophe in history.

Relatives and colleagues contacted by AFP say the crew members have been unable to return to their homes in nearby Slavutych, the city built to house Chernobyl workers after the disaster.

"Physically and morally, they are exhausted," said the wife of one technician, who like others at the site can communicate with the outside world only via telephone. "They think that no one cares about them, neither the Russian government nor the Ukrainian government," she said, adding that they are getting only two small meals a day.

"They can take a shower, but with no soap, no shampoo, they can't brush their teeth. They can't change their clothes or wash them. There is no supply of medicines. They are sleeping on the floor, on some desks or on chairs." Around 100 other people, including security personnel, are also being detained at the site.

It is unclear why Russian soldiers seized Chernobyl, where the destroyed reactor is kept under close supervision within a concrete and lead sarcophagus, and the three other reactors are being decommissioned. In 2017, the site was one of several Ukrainian targets hit by a massive cyberattack

thought to have originated in Russia, which briefly took its radiation monitoring system off-line.

On Sunday, several dozens of people, including women and children, held a protest in Slavutych over the treatment of personnel at the plant and the potential safety risks. Electricity was cut to Chernobyl on several occasions since the Russian takeover. "Our boys are not just hostages but prisoners in a Russian concentration camp," one woman at the protest told local television.

'Deeply worried'

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi, said Tuesday that the Chernobyl technicians and guards were being forced to work "under enormous stress without the necessary rest". To ensure against radioactive risks, "operating staff must be able to fulfil their safety and security duties and

have the capacity to make decisions free of undue pressure," he warned.

A Chernobyl engineer told AFP that employees themselves are "deeply worried that they will be on the front line if an accident happens." The pool where the spent fuel is stocked is "overpacked by 40 percent" she added, and "backup pools should be empty but they are also filled with other spent fuel. This situation is against international nuclear safety regulations."

Contacted by AFP, officials at Ukraine's atomic energy agency were unavailable to comment on the claims. Russian forces also shelled and captured the Zaporizhzhia atomic power plant, Europe's biggest, on March 4, causing a fire that



This Maxar satellite image taken and released on March 10, 2022 shows a close-up view of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Pripyat, Ukraine. —AFP

raised alarm in Europe over a possible nuclear catastrophe.

Playing with fire

For Karine Herviou, deputy director general France's IRSN nuclear safety watchdog, "there is no risk of an explosion at the site."

"Unlike at nuclear plants that are in operation, a sustained loss of electricity supply to the site will not cause an accident," she said. But the risks of war remain, with the relative of one technician saying that Russia has effectively built "a military base" at Chernobyl complete with missile-launch-

ing batteries. "The strategy is brilliant on the war side, but for humanity it is absolutely insane-no one will fire a missile on Chernobyl to destroy" Russian forces, said the relative, himself a former employee at the site. He said the chances of a disaster were high, not least because of alleged safety breaches by Ukrainian authorities-which he claims to have seen first-hand-and because the soldiers guarding the employees "don't know what's going on".

"In nuclear safety, you always try to forecast the worst scenario and try to avoid it. Right now, they are trying to hide it, like the USSR did in 1986," the relative said. —AFP

Polish school offers Ukraine teens 'semblance of normalcy'

WARSAW: Stuck to the door of one Warsaw high school is the sign "Laskavo prosimo do shkoli", or "Welcome to school" in Ukrainian, along with the flags of Poland and Ukraine.

Chattering in Russian and Ukrainian, teenagers who have just fled their war-torn homeland use magnetic key cards to enter and are welcomed again with a large yellow-blue flag and the slogan "Slava Ukraini" or "Glory to Ukraine". It is their first day of school in Poland, where the 13- to 15-year-olds have sought shelter since Russia invaded their country.

Divided into two groups of 20, they are greeted by their new teacher, who shuttles from one classroom to the other throughout the lesson. From the Ukrainian city of Lviv, a refugee just like them, Mariana Druchek, lays out the plan for the day and passes out a maths test.

"Uh oh," comes the response. Viktoria, 16, and 15-year-olds Polina and Zoriana are in a panic.

"It's on things we covered three years ago, in grade eight-I forgot it all," said Viktoria, to which

the others chime in with "same". But they relax soon enough. By break time, they are all smiles, saying the atmosphere is "really good" and "positive" and "the class and school in general are all right".

It is as if their mad dash out of Kyiv with barely any luggage-to the backdrop of bombs and blasts-was already fading somewhat into the distance.

But the sense of danger is still there. "We're afraid the Russians will even make their way over here, because everything is possible," Viktoria told AFP.

'Education and peace'

Limanowski High School has been able to accommodate the new students and hire new teachers thanks to funding from the mayor's office. On day one, Renata Kozlowska, a city official for the school's neighborhood of Zoliborz, came to welcome the teenagers.

She told them that "all of Poland is with you" and stressed that they have the right to "an education and peace". The teenagers-who come from various cities, including Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Lutsk and Ivano-Frankivsk-will follow a pared-down version of Poland's curriculum, including English, Polish, history, maths, physics and gym.

The classes will be taught by Ukrainian teachers who themselves had fled the war, with a bilingual educator at the helm of each group.

"What's most important is to offer them some semblance of normalcy and quiet," the school's principal Andrzej Wyrozemski told AFP. Druchek, who crossed into Poland with her three children just



WARSAW: Translator and assistant Katia helps students from war-torn Ukraine in a class newly created for them at the Limanowski High School in Warsaw on Tuesday. —AFP

after the invasion, agrees. "It's not a matter of maintaining their knowledge levels, but to make sure they have psychological support and friends, that they know that everyone wants to help," she said.

Janusz, a Polish student at Limanowski, said he is all for the initiative, calling it "cool" to have welcomed the Ukrainians into their school. "It means they can keep going to school and won't be thinking non-stop about what's going on in Ukraine," he added. While the new students will be attending separate classes from their Polish counterparts, the school is keen on helping them integrate. Each Ukrainian will be partnered up with a Pole their age to join for after-school activities and the like. —AFP

Javelin anti-tank missile, symbol of Ukraine's resistance

KYIV: Images of Ukrainian troops carrying Javelin missile launchers on their shoulders have flashed around the world, making the anti-tank weapon-capable of piercing the most sophisticated armor, and particularly useful in guerrilla warfare-a symbol of Ukrainian resistance to Russia's invasion.

Western states, which want to support Ukraine militarily without entering into direct conflict with Russia, have massively stepped arms deliveries to the Ukrainian army since Moscow launched its invasion on February 24. According to a senior US official, the Ukrainians have already received some 17,000 anti-tank weapons from various Western countries, including several hundred Javelin launchers, and Washington announced on Saturday new military aid totaling \$200 million and including the anti-tank weapon.

Ukrainian forces have also received thousands of other anti-tank weapons, including British NLAWs, Swedish-made AT4s and Carl-Gustavs, German Panzerfausts and Spanish Instalaza C90s.

to provide humanitarian aid during a visit to Kyiv on Tuesday.

But NATO defense ministers were wary over the idea as they arrived in Brussels for urgent talks on Russia's war against its neighbor. "I'm afraid we're still in too early stages to talk about that," said Dutch Defence Minister Kajsa Ollongren.

"First we have to have a ceasefire. We have to see a withdrawal from Russia. There has to be some kind of agreement between Ukraine and Russia, and I think the talks are still going on."

She added: "It's always good to think about what comes after that, but first, we

'Saint Javelin'

But it is the US-made Javelin that has become the weapon of choice, to the point that a meme circulating on social media has transformed it into a religious icon borne by Mary Magdalene, an emblematic saint of the Orthodox church.

Dubbed "Saint Javelin," protector of Ukraine, she brandishes one of the missiles under a halo in the yellow and blue of the Ukrainian flag. As well as becoming a symbol of support by the United States, Ukraine's most powerful ally against Russia, the Javelin is also prized by the military for its technical characteristics.

Equipped with two explosive charges, it can pierce the most sophisticated tanks in the world, and in particular the Russian T-90, whose own explosive armor reacts to the impact of a projectile in order to reduce or even stop it penetrating the tank.

The first charge of the Javelin explodes on contact with the tank, and it then releases a second, more powerful charge, which pierces the armor. With a range of 2,500 meters (yards), it can be used in direct attack mode to destroy a target or, if fired upwards, to shoot down a low-flying aircraft such as a helicopter.

But it can also be used in indirect attack mode, from above: the missile rises up to 160 meters in altitude and then falls vertically on to its target, like the javelins of the ancient Roman legionaries.

It is this trajectory from above that makes it such a

need to achieve that."

Estonian Defence Minister Kalle Laanet said that a proposed peacekeeping mission was "one of the possibilities and, of course, we have to look to all the possibilities which can help Ukraine".

But he said a deployment would need the backing of the United Nations Security Council where Russia holds a veto. Britain's defense minister Ben Wallace said he would need to "look at the details first before making any decisions about what happens".

NATO has rebuffed pleas from Ukraine to intervene in the conflict, including imposing a no-fly zone to help halt Russian bombings. The US-



The US-made projectile has become the weapon of choice for many Ukrainians.

formidable weapon against tanks, because the vehicles' entry hatches are on the top side, and that is where they are most vulnerable.

Lighter than other anti-tank systems that require a tripod, the Javelin can be launched from a soldier's shoulder. The projectile is ejected a few meters from the launcher before the propulsion system kicks in, which allows a soldier to be less easy to spot and even allows it to be used from inside a building. —AFP

NATO allies wary on call for Ukraine 'peace mission'

BRUSSELS: NATO allies refused yesterday to back a Polish call for the alliance to send an armed peace mission to Ukraine, but vowed to keep supplying arms despite threats from Moscow.

Poland's Vice Premier, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, suggested a peacekeeping deployment in Ukraine

led alliance says its direct involvement in non-member state Ukraine could spark a confrontation with Russia that may spill over into nuclear war.

NATO allies have instead been sending weapons to help Ukrainian forces to defend their country, especially vitally needed portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems.

Moscow has warned that any deliveries are legitimate targets for its military to strike.

But NATO defense ministers insisted they would keep arms flowing to Ukraine. "We support their ability to defend themselves and we'll continue to support them going forward," US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said. —AFP

International

North Korea suspected ballistic missile explodes after launch

Likely a failed test of Pyongyang's so-called 'monster missile': Analysts

SEOUL: North Korea fired a suspected ballistic missile that exploded mid-air shortly after launch, Seoul said yesterday, with analysts warning it was likely a failed test of Pyongyang's so-called "monster missile".

The launch—North Korea's tenth suspected weapons test this year—comes after the United States said the nuclear-armed country was preparing to fire an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) "at full range" for the first time since 2017. Despite biting international sanctions over its weapons programs, Pyongyang conducted seven missile tests in January and twice launched components of what it claimed was a "reconnaissance satellite".

with a red-tinged ball of smoke zigzagging across the sky as debris fell near the capital. The US military this week said it had "enhanced" missile defense systems in South Korea.

Monster missile?

North Korea has carried out three ICBM tests—the last in November 2017 of a Hwasong-15 — deemed powerful enough to reach Washington and the rest of the continental United States. But the country has been observing a self-imposed moratorium on testing long-range and nuclear weapons since leader Kim Jong Un embarked on a flurry of high-level diplomacy in 2018.

Negotiations with Donald Trump, US president at the time, collapsed a year later and since then Kim has doubled down on his plans to modernise his military while ignoring US offers of talks. "Signs indicate the North test-fired Hwasong-17 today," Cheong Seong-chang, a senior researcher at the private Sejong Institute told AFP.

"With Russia now highly unlikely to agree to additional sanctions on the North in case of such a test-launch amidst its invasion of Ukraine, Pyongyang appears to have judged it was the optimal time to proceed," Cheong said. The failure of the Wednesday launch will be closely studied by Pyongyang, and it can take around three tests to ensure the missile is functioning, he added. "I expect the North to conduct one or two more test-launches before April 15," he said. North Korea will mark the 110th anniversary of the birth of founding leader and Kim's grandfather Kim Il Sung in April and likes to mark key domestic anniversaries with military parades or launches.

"The Kim regime wants to demonstrate new technical achievements around the 110th birth anniversary of its founder, Kim Il-sung," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "If the most recent missile launch was indeed a failure, North Korea will almost certainly continue to test," he added. Satellite images indicate that North Korea is preparing for a



SEOUL, South Korea: People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul yesterday after North Korea fired an 'unidentified projectile' but appeared to have immediately failed according to the South's military. — AFP

military parade for the April anniversary.

The fact that the Wednesday launch failed indicates it was not just "an ordinary missile", North Korean studies scholar Ahn Chan-il told AFP. The timing, during a South Korean presidential transition and while the world is focused on Ukraine, also indicates Pyongyang is seeking maximum leverage, he added.

A fresh ICBM launch would be an early challenge for South Korea's new president-elect, Yoon Suk-yeol, who has vowed to take a harder line against the North's provocations. Yoon has not ruled out the possibility of dialogue with Pyongyang, but analysts say his hawkish position puts him on a completely different footing to his liberal predecessor and significantly reduces the prospect of substantive engagement. — AFP



US had warned North was preparing to fire an ICBM

South Korea and the US said last week those tests were actually of a new ICBM system that has never been launched before—likely the Hwasong-17, dubbed a "monster missile" by analysts after it was first unveiled at a parade in October 2020. The suspected ballistic missile "seems to have exploded in midair shortly after launch," Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff told AFP.

The launch was from the Sunan area in Pyongyang around 09:30 am (1230 GMT), they said—the same site as the February 27 and March 5 "satellite" tests. Nuclear-armed North Korea has long coveted an ICBM that can carry multiple warheads, and the US said last week the recent tests marked a "serious escalation" of the country's weapons programs.

But the specialist NK News site reported that the Wednesday launch ended in "catastrophic failure"

US homeland security chief signs Costa Rica migration deal

WASHINGTON: The United States homeland security secretary on Tuesday signed a deal to address migration in Central America during a visit to Costa Rica. The country is one of the main transit routes for migrants making their way north in the hope of reaching the US, and the American government has tried to deter people without documents from reaching its southern border with Mexico.

According to the Costa Rican government, the agreement seeks to boost the fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking, while exploring options to "strengthen current programs for the integration of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees."

Alejandro Mayorkas, the US homeland security secretary, hailed the "historic" agreement—the first of its kind in the region—and spoke of opportunities it would bring to people "to achieve their dreams."

"We selected Costa Rica as the first partner and friend to sign such an important agreement because of its leadership in the matters that impact the region and, quite frankly, the world," he said after meeting President Carlos Alvarado. "This agreement speaks of possibilities. As the president of Costa Rica has addressed and as our president of the United States has addressed, it is all about possibilities and possibilities become realities when we invest."

Mayorkas arrived in Costa Rica's capital San Jose after visiting Mexico, where he met with President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. The Mexican authorities said there was a need to invest in Central America and generate greater opportunities that prevent migration. In recent years, the flow of undocumented migrants has increased, while Washington has tightened its immigration policies.

Since taking office in January 2021, US President Joe Biden has pledged a more humane immigration policy and sought to dismantle a controversial Trump-era border program that denies asylum seekers entry to the United States while their case is reviewed. Officially called the Migrant Protection Protocols, then-president Donald Trump's "Remain in Mexico" program saw tens of thousands of non-Mexican asylum seekers—mostly from Central America—sent back over the border pending the outcome of their applications.

According to the United Nations, last year almost a million Mexicans and Central Americans fled their countries due to violence, lack of opportunities, climate change the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP



BASTIA, France: Members of the public applaud protesters holding molotov cocktails in front of Bastia's prefecture in Bastia after a rally in support to Corsican nationalist figure Yvan Colonna a week after he was attacked in prison in Arles. — AFP

Cautious welcome in Corsica for Paris' autonomy offer

AJACCIO, France: Paris could offer Corsica "autonomy" to calm tensions between the Mediterranean island's fierce independence movement and the French state, a key minister said yesterday, but local leaders said actions must follow the promises. "We are ready to go as far as autonomy. There you go, the word has been said," Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin told regional newspaper Corse Matin as he embarked on a two-day visit following days of sometimes violent protests.

With President Emmanuel Macron seeking re-election next month, the offer from France's "top cop" will fall under especially close scrutiny from voters and rivals. "We'll have to talk about" what form a new Paris-Corsica relationship would take, Darmanin told news channel BFM, warning that "the talks will necessarily be long, necessarily be difficult". Whatever the result, Corsica's "future is fully within the French republic," he added.

Darmanin also said that "there can be no dialogue while violence is going on. A return to calm is an indispensable condition". The interior minister's visit follows

repeated outbreaks of violence at demonstrations over a savage prison attack on Yvan Colonna, one of a group who assassinated Paris' top official on the island, prefect Claude Erignac, in 1998.

Prosecutors said some 102 people were injured on Sunday alone, 77 of them police officers, during clashes in Corsica's second-largest city Bastia. Corsican nationalists have blamed the French state for the attack on Colonna, regarded by many as a hero of the independence cause.

But Darmanin said the convicted killer had been attacked by a jihadist fellow inmate over "blasphemy" in "a clearly terrorist" act. "This talk of a crime by the state is excessive, not to say intolerable," he told Corse Matin.

Nevertheless, the government has already tried to soothe nationalist anger by removing an "especially notable prisoner" status from Colonna and two of his accomplices. That could allow for their transfer to a prison on Corsica rather than the French mainland, a key nationalist demand for all prisoners they see as "political".

Corsica's pro-autonomy regional council president, Gilles Simeoni, told AFP that these were "important words that open up prospects, but they ought now to be extended and firmed up". Simeoni, one of several elected officials Darmanin will meet in Corsican capital Ajaccio, added that autonomous status is "common law for many European regions and especially for all the major islands in the Mediterranean." The island would need "strong signals before believing" change was coming, regional parliament head Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis said.—AFP

Gambians flee border zone amid Senegalese anti-rebel operation

BUJINHA, Gambia: Dozens of Gambians have fled border villages, fearing for their safety after the army in the neighboring West African country of Senegal launched an operation against separatist rebels this weekend. On Sunday, Senegal announced a military operation in the southern region of Casamance, aiming to dismantle bases belonging to the separatist MFDC group.

The Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) has led a low-intensity conflict in Casamance since 1982 that has claimed several thousand lives. The southern region is separated geographically from the rest of Senegal by The Gambia, a tiny country that surrounds a river of the same name. With recent fighting in Casamance, frightened residents in Gambian border villages have begun to flee, describing bush fires and the sound of the shooting.

"We have never experienced such a dire situation," said Ismaila Bojang, who had fled to the village of

Bujinha about five kilometers (three miles) from the border. Bojang, a traditional chief of the border village of Karrol, said that the conflict had ignited fires in the bush and killed and scattered livestock. "We are here but our minds are on Karrol," he said, sitting on a woven mat. Another resident of the same village, Tuti Jammeh, said that some had fled Karrol barefoot and were now sleeping several to a bed in Bujinha.

"We heard gunfire and we had to leave," she told AFP, adding that she would likely move further inland

News in brief

Thai jailed for killing Swiss tourist

BANGKOK: A Thai man has been jailed for life for the robbery and murder of a Swiss tourist whose body was found near a waterfall on a popular beach resort island. The partially-clothed remains of Nicole Sauvain-Weisskopf, 57, were found on the island of Phuket, where she had travelled under a scheme to reopen Thailand to tourists after COVID-19 travel restrictions were eased. A court on Phuket ruled on Tuesday that Theerawat Tortip met Sauvain-Weisskopf at the waterfall and intended to rape her, but instead killed her and stole her money, a justice spokesman said. Theerawat confessed to murder, concealing a body and robbery. — AFP

Zionist entity to start flights to Sharm

JERUSALEM: Zionist entity is to launch direct flights to Sharm el-Sheikh on Egypt's Red Sea coast next month, in an expansion of air links between the two countries, officials said yesterday. "The route from Ben Gurion International Airport to Sharm el-Sheikh will open soon. Flights are expected to begin during the intermediate days of Passover next month," a statement from the Zionist entity's prime minister's office said. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said: "This agreement will bring the Zionist entity and Egypt closer together." The statement said the new airlink had been discussed in September talks between Bennett and President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. — AFP

Polish, Czech, Slovenian PMs return

WARSAW: Polish, Czech and Slovenian prime ministers arrived back in Poland yesterday morning, after travelling to Kyiv to show their solidarity with Ukraine. Their visit to the Ukrainian capital was the first by foreign leaders since the Russian invasion on February 24. "Polish, Slovenian and Czech delegations safely returned from Kyiv to Poland," Polish government spokesman Piotr Mueller said on Twitter. Polish public television showed images of a convoy of vehicles leaving the station in the city Przemysl, close to the Ukrainian border, where the leaders arrived by train. — AFP

Vietnam ends quarantine for visitors

HANOI: Vietnam announced an end to quarantine for international travellers yesterday, as it seeks to restart its tourism industry after two years of strict COVID-19 restrictions. The only virus requirement for visitors will be a negative COVID test, the country's ministry of health said in a statement. The communist state's tourism sector was worth up to \$32 billion a year before the pandemic, but it ground to a standstill during the pandemic as the government restricted travel. — AFP

S Korea hits 400,000 plus cases

SEOUL: South Korea reported more than 400,000 new coronavirus cases yesterday, a new record, as the country continues to ease restrictions despite the Omicron-fuelled wave of infections. Health authorities said 400,741 cases were recorded, the country's highest daily figure since the pandemic began two years ago. The latest spike in cases is the "last biggest challenge" facing the country, Sohn Young-rae, a senior health official, told a press briefing. The government had anticipated caseloads in this ballpark, he said.—AFP



SAN JOSE: Handout picture released by Costa Rican presidency showing Costa Rican President Carlos Alvarado (right) and US Secretary of National Security Alejandro Mayorkas (left) during his official visit to the presidential house in San Jose, Costa Rica, on Tuesday. — AFP



BUJINHA, Gambia: Internally displaced Gambians sit under a tree after arriving in the village of Bujinha on Tuesday. — AFP

THURSDAY, MARCH 17, 2022

Business

Polestar 2: First fully electric car brand arrives in Kuwait

BNK Automotive appointed as official representative of Polestar cars in Kuwait

Polestar



Bader Naser Al-Kharafi with the automotive team



Polestar team with one of the first Polestar customers



Bader Al-Kharafi and Tariq Al-Sultan

KUWAIT: Polestar, the Swedish premium electric performance brand, confirms its arrival in Kuwait with the Polestar 2. Polestar has appointed BNK Automotive, the authorized distributor of Volvo Cars in Kuwait, as its representative in the country.

Nils Mosko, Head of Strategy and Business Development at Polestar, comments: "We are excited to bring Polestar to Kuwait. As a premium electric brand, we found a natural partner in BNK Automotive, and we are pleased to join their portfolio of automotive brands."

"As we witness the global shift towards electrification in the automotive industry, we are honored to be in a position to catalyze this change in Kuwait towards a brighter, greener future," says Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi of BNK Automotive. "BNK Automotive is proud to launch Polestar - the first fully electric car brand in Kuwait."

Polestar retail

Polestar cars are purchased online through a simplified, 100 percent digital process, which is complemented by physical retail locations known around the world as Polestar Spaces and Polestar Destinations. These bespoke retail environments allow consumers to interact physically with the brand, meeting with Polestar Specialists to explore the car in more detail, including test drives. The first Polestar Space in Kuwait is planned to open to the public in Kuwait City later in 2022.

Polestar 2

Polestar 2 brings avant-garde design and a unique ownership experience to the premium compact electric segment, providing an all-vegan interior as standard, sustainable execution of materials, leading technology and useable performance.

Launched internationally in 2020, Polestar 2 has won high favor with customers, fans and the world's press during its first year on sale. Awards and acco-

- Polestar 2 brings avant-garde design, unique ownership experience
- A home charging station with each Polestar
- The first car in the world to feature Google built-in



Graeme Lambert giving presentation about Polestar



"As we witness the global shift towards electrification in the automotive industry, we are honored to be in a position to catalyze this change in Kuwait towards a brighter, greener future": Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

lades include Car of the Year titles in Norway and Switzerland, BBC Top Gear magazine's Best All-Round EV, Red Dot's Best of the Best for Product Design, and the coveted Golden Steering Wheel in Germany.

"Polestar 2 is a very attractive, powerful car with an avant-garde, modern design that really stands out and our customers are very passionate about it," says Polestar CEO, Thomas Ingenlath. "It is that perfect combination of key attributes when it comes to the pleasure of driving, the joy and the fun of it - the emotional aspect."

Polestar 2 was the first car in the world to feature Google built-in. The Android Automotive OS infotainment system provides a solid and adaptable digital environment for apps and vehicle functions to coexist and brings embedded Google services to a car for the first time - including the Google Assistant, Google Maps with support for electric vehicles and the Google Play Store. Natural voice control and an 11-inch touch screen display bring the new interface to life.

"With a range of up to 480 km, drivers can ease their mind as they drive around the streets of Kuwait," says Achraf Tamim, General Manager of BNK Automotive. "In addition, we provide a home charging station with each Polestar to satisfy our customers' needs at all times. Lastly, there is a rise of public charging stations around the country, which further proves that the electric future is here."

In Kuwait, the Polestar 2 model range will include two versions, offering a mix of performance and range. The standard range single motor version will feature a 170 kW/ 330 Nm electric motor and a 69 kWh battery pack. The range-topping long range dual motor variant has two electric motors and a 78 kWh battery, with a total output of 300 kW and 660 Nm. Detailed pricing and specifications will be released alongside online order bookings-, later in 2022. Interested customers can register to stay updated at <https://www.polestar.com/en-kw/>



Photo from the launch of the event



Photo from the Polestar press event

Business

Shenzhen: Lockdown in China's Silicon Valley rattles investors

Firms told to switch to working from home; factories halt production

SHENZHEN: Its factories tool the world with mobile phones, while some of China's best tech brains go there to churn out apps and games—but Shenzhen is now in lockdown as the coronavirus inflicts economic pain on the country and rattles markets. Residents in the city of 17.5 million—sometimes dubbed China's answer to Silicon Valley—have been ordered not to leave unless necessary and public transport has been halted as the country battles its worst virus outbreak in two years.

Most firms have been told to switch to working from home, which is impossible for many factories whose disruption is fuelling unease over supply chains and services. But how significant is Shenzhen to China's economy?

Hi-tech exports

Home to Chinese tech giants including Huawei and Tencent, Shenzhen ranks third among Chinese cities in economic output meaning any prolonged closure will be felt sharply. "It is a manufacturing hub and also a tech centre for China," Hong Hao, of financial services firm Bocom International, told AFP.

Already, major Apple supplier Foxconn has suspended operations in Shenzhen while other tech manufacturers such as Netac Technology also halted some production. Mechanical and electronic products make up 80 percent of exports from the southern powerhouse, which neighbors Hong Kong.

"This is a very significant lockdown and I think the full impact is yet to be revealed," Hong added.

Ripple effects

Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist of Pinpoint Asset Management, said consumption would be "hurt quickly and severely" in a lockdown, followed by production and investment. "It's a ripple effect," Hong of Bocom said, noting that other parts of China which depend on Shenzhen's output could be hit.



SHENZHEN, China: This file photo taken on March 14, 2022 shows residents lining up to undergo nucleic acid tests for the COVID-19 in Shenzhen, in China's southern Guangdong province. — AFP

"They would be working less efficiently than before." At least six companies on Apple's supplier list are based in Shenzhen, where other producers such as electric-vehicle firm BYD are also based.

But some businesses deemed essential remain open. Restrictions across the country hitting key hubs could pile pressure on China's growth target of around 5.5 percent—already the lowest annual GDP target in decades—while Shenzhen's proximity to Hong Kong is

stoking fears of challenges in stopping transmission.

Port operations

The Yantian port, among the world's busiest, is also in Shenzhen. It is the largest single port in China, with economists noting it accounts for 10.5 percent of China's foreign trade container throughput.

In previous outbreaks, the port has been forced to suspend the processing of containers, leading to back-

logs, and the current outbreak adds to worries over already-high shipping prices. The port appears to be operating for now, although virus cases could trigger disruptions. Economists say the impact depends on how long restrictions persist. Zhaopeng Xing of ANZ Research told AFP he believed authorities "can manage Omicron" as well as before within a month or so. "The shock is short-lived," he said, adding that it would be unlikely to hit the long-term outlook. — AFP



KUWAIT: Union of Investment Companies (UIC) holds a press conference yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait Investment Forum to be held on March 22: UIC

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Union of Investment Companies (UIC) held a press conference yesterday on the activities of the fifth Kuwait Investment Forum titled 'Investing in Kuwait, missed and available opportunities'. Secretary General of the Forum Madhi Al-Khamees said the forum is being held after two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which upended the economy and investment.

"This forum brings together two important sectors: Economy and media. I would like to thank all participants including the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Kuwait Banking Association," stressed Khamees.

President of UIC Saleh Al-Selmi spoke about the investment role of Kuwait in attracting foreign investments to the country. "This forum is a great opportunity for investors to highlight their ideas and suggestions, in addition to discussing the obstacles that they face with officials. The forum aims to find solutions by discussing the role of the government in investing and the rules and regulations related to it," he noted.

Khamees then reviewed the agenda of the forum,

which includes two sessions. "The first session will be held on Sunday, March 22 at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry titled 'Solid Investment with Strong Vision'. This session will include presentations by the minister of commerce on Kuwait's vision for the investment sector, rules and regulations for investing, the private sector's vision for economic reforms, stimulating the economy, presented by Saleh Al-Selmi, and KBA's vision presented by Dr Fayed Al-Kandari," he outlined.

This forum will bring together specialists from all fields of the investment sector from different institutions including the private sector, public sector, parliament, government and some Arab institutions. "Each session will be followed by a panel discussion held by representatives of various institutions including the Kuwait Economic Society, Kuwait Transparency Society, Kuwait Accountants Society and the Real Estate Union," added Khamees.

The second session is titled "Small Businesses Between the State's Vision and Reality". "Small enterprises suffered a lot during the pandemic, and many ended in bankruptcy. This session will include the solutions and alternatives to overcome the obstacles, the laws regulating these businesses, government's vision for the demands of the entrepreneurs and competition protection," he explained.

Specialists from the field will participate in this session, including representatives of the National Fund for Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises, National Assembly, Public Authority for Manpower, Competition Protection Agency and others.

Sugar rush: Kazakhstan sees food prices rise over Russia fallout

ALMATY: Authorities and retailers in Kazakhstan raised alarm over panic-buying and rising prices yesterday as neighboring Russia restricts food exports to limit the damage of sanctions triggered by its invasion of Ukraine. The five countries of ex-Soviet Central Asia are strongly dependent on imports from Russia and have already seen local currencies slide after the sanctions trained on the Russian economy hammered the ruble.

A surge in demand for sugar is the latest symptom of Ukraine invasion contagion after Russia announced plans to restrict exports of key foodstuffs last week.

The weekend saw a spree of panic-buying of sugar in Kazakhstan, which shares a land border with Russia that is among the longest in the world as well as membership of a trade bloc, the Eurasian Economic Union. An AFP correspondent in the region's richest city, Kazakhstan's Almaty, saw customers piling in to a supermarket belonging to the country's leading chain, Magnum, on Saturday and emerging with five-kilogram bags of sugar. Dmitri Shishkin, a spokesman for the chain, said Wednesday that the supermarkets were currently not stocking sugar as they figured out new supply routes. The cost of sugar in smaller shops in Almaty

has almost doubled, and Shishkin expects "a significant jump" in sugar prices when Magnum is able to begin selling again, he told AFP.

"We normally stock a week's worth of sugar. It was bought up in just two days," Shishkin said of the rush. Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev warned the nation Wednesday that food prices were likely to "break absolute records" in connection with events in Ukraine. In an address, he stressed the importance of a successful spring sowing campaign to ensure food security. Central Asian countries suffered one of their worst droughts in three decades of independence last year as a low-precipitation spring gave way to a baking summer that caused crop failures and massive cattle die-offs.

Russia's government confirmed Monday that it was ceasing exports of both "white and raw cane sugar to third countries" and grain to the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union after announcing the plans last week. Russia's restrictions on grain exports expire on June 30 and those on sugar on August 31, Moscow said Tuesday, noting that the decision was taken "to protect the domestic food market given the situation of external restrictions". — AFP

Far from Kyiv, Africa feels economic fallout from Ukraine crisis

LAGOS: From airlines in Nigeria to shoppers in Malawi, Africans are feeling the impact of the Ukraine crisis in wrenching increases in the price of fuel, grain and fertilizer. Global oil prices scaled decade-long highs of more than \$100 a barrel shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, inflicting a hefty blow to many businesses south of the Sahara.

Both Ukraine and Russia are also major suppliers of wheat and other cereals to Africa, while Russia is a key producer of fertilizer. The impact of the war and the West's sanctions against the Kremlin are already starting to translate into higher prices for farm inputs and imported grain, AFP bureaus in Africa report.

For Lagos baker Julius Adewale, the crisis is a perfect storm. Nigeria's fragile power grid had recently been supplying just a few hours of electricity per day, forcing Adewale to turn to diesel-fueled generators for power—the cost of which has now soared.

"There is no light since yesterday and we've been running on gen since yesterday," Adewale said this week, as workers stacked piles of loaves in his bakery. "(The) cost of production has increased immensely." Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer and biggest economy, but it has little refining capacity. The government subsidizes the cost of petrol, but diesel and aviation fuel are sold at market price.

Several local airlines warned this month they were forced to cancel flights due to aviation fuel scarcities. Diesel used to sell in Nigeria at around 300 naira (0.72 cents) a liter but now goes for 730 (\$1.75) a liter. "I don't know how we are going to cope because 70 per cent of industries are running on diesel," Lanre Popoola, a regional chairman of Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), told local media. "Other businesses are also running limited hours on diesel as they cannot afford to use generators all day."

Hardship ahead

If the crisis is sustained, said Eurasia Group analyst Amaka Anku, African countries which are big importers of fuel and grain will rank among the losers, although exporters of those commodities may be among the winners. There are also countries that are heavily indebted, such as Ghana, which will struggle with higher borrowing costs as investor risk appetite lowers, she said.

Gas producers like Tanzania, Senegal and Nigeria may benefit from Europe's moves to end its dependence on Russian energy, said Danielle Resnick at the Brookings Institution think tank.

But, she said, the immediate challenge was hardship for African families, millions of which are already struggling to get by. "War in Ukraine means hunger in Africa," International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Sunday.

High prices will for instance aggravate food insecurity in conflict-torn Ethiopia, where nearly 20 million people are in need of food aid.

Inflation already here

In many parts of Africa, the inflationary machine has already lurched into higher gear, AFP bureaus report.

In Kenya, a two kilogram (4.4-pound) bag of wheat flour now sells for 150-172 Kenyan shillings (US\$1.3 to US\$1.5), compared to less than 140 shillings in February.

Sub-Saharan Africa's No. 3 economy usually gets a fifth of its imported wheat from Russia and another 10 percent comes from Ukraine, according to government figures. As for fertilizer, a 50-kilo bag that cost 4,000 shillings last year now changes hands for 6,500 shillings (\$57) — a figure that is likely to increase as the planting season starts this month.

In the Ugandan capital Kampala, Ukraine's crisis has already caused a surge in prices of soap, sugar, salt, cooking oil and fuel. "Most of the essential commodities are produced locally but some ingredients are imported

and their prices are being dictated by the shocks on international markets," Junior Finance Minister David Bahati told AFP. Cooking oil has risen from 7,000 shillings per liter (\$1.94) in February to 8,500 shillings (\$2.4) and a kilo of rice from 3,800 to 5,500 shillings, according to Kampala retail shops.

"My family of four people spend an average of



5,000 shillings to cater for food and other necessities but this is no longer enough... I now spend more than 10,000 shillings," Ritah Kabaku, 41, a shop assistant in Kampala, told AFP.

'Victims of war'

Wary of Ukraine-fueled inflation, Mauritius' central bank has raised its key interest rate to two percent—its first hike since 2011. "It is unfortunate that as the sky cleared after COVID-19, more clouds appeared," Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth said in a televised speech. In Somalia's capital Mogadishu, prices for fuel, cooking oil, construction materials and electricity have shot up. "A week ago, the 20-litre jerrycan of cooking oil was \$25, today it's about \$50. A litre of gasoline was \$0.64 and today it runs about \$1.80 — it's crazy," said Mohamed Osman, a trader. In southern Africa, bread and cooking oil prices in Malawi have shot up by an average 50 percent. "This war doesn't concern us and it is not right that we should be paying such a high price," Fatsani Phiri, an auditor who was buying bread in the capital Lilongwe. "We cannot always be victims every time there is a war somewhere in the world." — AFP

IEA cuts oil demand outlook, fears Russia supply 'shock'

PARIS: The International Energy Agency cut its world oil demand forecast for 2022 yesterday, warning that sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine could spark a global supply "shock". "Faced with what could turn into the biggest supply crisis in decades, global energy markets are at a crossroads," the IEA said in a monthly report. "While it is still too early to know how events will unfold, the crisis may result in lasting changes to energy markets," said the Paris-based agency, which advises developed countries.

Russia, the world's biggest exporter of oil, has been hit with a slew of international sanctions over the war in Ukraine, which sent oil prices soaring. While the measures exclude the energy market, the IEA said major oil companies, trading houses, shipping firms and banks have "backed away from doing business with the country". — AFP

Business

The Med gets first offshore wind farm as Italy vows energy revolution

Accelerated investment in renewables remains the only key strategy: Draghi

TARANTO, Italy: The Mediterranean's first offshore wind farm is rising from the shallows off Italy, its turbines a symbol of hope for a Europe suffering an energy crisis exacerbated by war. The park will stretch out from the port in Taranto, a city in the south blighted by a noxious steel plant and unemployment, but which now finds itself centre stage in the country's race to scale up green power.

"This is a big chance to change hearts and minds on renewables," said Fabio Maccacchia, an activist in Taranto, where child tumors are well above the average but poor locals cling to jobs in dirty energy.

The Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine in February prompted an outraged European Union to pledge to sharply reduce its dependency on Russian gas, and expand clean energy faster to compensate.

Italy is one of Europe's biggest guzzlers of gas, which currently represents 42 percent of its energy consumption. It imports 95 percent of the gas it uses, 45 percent of which comes from Russia. An "accelerated investment in renewables... remains the only key strategy in the long term," Prime Minister Mario Draghi told parliament last week, with Rome planning to stop using Russian gas by 2025.

As the Ukraine conflict rages, Italy's cabinet has approved six new wind farms to be built on land, from Sardinia to Basilicata, and has committed to unlocking "several tens of gigawatts of offshore wind power".

Deep waters

Offshore is more complicated: average water depths in the Mediterranean are much deeper than in areas such as the North Sea, making bottom-fixed installations difficult and costly. The Mediterranean is also one of the world's busiest waterways, as well as the sea in Europe most prone to severe climate change.

But the invention of floating turbines has increased its potential. France recently held the world's first auction for a commercial-sized floating offshore wind farm, and other Mediterranean countries such as Greece and Spain are also planning auctions for large-scale projects, according to the WindEurope association. Once complete, the Beleoico farm off Taranto's sandy beach in Puglia, down in the heel of Italy's boot-shaped peninsula, will have 10 bottom-fixed, red and white-bladed turbines.

Together they will be capable of powering 21,000 homes. Renexia, the company behind it, says it also has plans for a vast floating wind farm with 190 turbines off the island of Sicily, which would produce energy for 3.4 million families and create hundreds of jobs.

Sunken treasures, beach views

The project has met some opposition from locals convinced it would ruin the view in tourist

hotspots—though Renexia's general manager Riccardo Toto told AFP it would be "practically invisible" from the coast. Treasure hunters have been known to uncover sunken ancient artefacts off Sicily, but there are none on the site in question, he said.

The turbines can also boost, rather than damage, biodiversity by acting as artificial reefs. Italy's Ecological Transition Ministry has received 64 expressions of interest for floating offshore wind farms—but the number of projects held up by bureaucracy is "staggering", WindEurope said. Beleoico, which Renexia hopes will be operational by May, has been 14 years in the making.

Greenpeace Italy head Giuseppe Onufrio slammed the delays as "absurd". "Some (farms) are authorized after six, seven years, and the technology changes year by year and so the risk is that plants are authorized despite being outdated."

Cut red tape

Draghi insists the government "is working to streamline procedures, cut red tape and speed up investments". But Davide Tabarelli, economics professor and head of energy think tank Nomisma Energia, told AFP he was "amazed and stupefied" to see Draghi describe renewables as the "only key strategy". Beleoico, a symbol of Italy's off-



ROME: CEO of Italian renewable energy group Renexia, Riccardo Toto poses in Rome. —AFP

shore potential, "is constantly being thrown around as the immediate solution to the energy crisis, and the fact that we can do without gas, especially Russian gas". But there are several "serious problems", he said, not least the difficulties storing wind energy, for suitable batteries do not exist, leading to waste.

Rome's vow that it is readying to turn off the gas to punish the Kremlin is remarkable, he added, "as if, after 30 years of promises on renewables, the problem could be solved in the space of a few weeks". —AFP

KFH provides 'Thimar' plan for future retirement

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

KFH is keen to meet the customers' desires to achieve a secure life after the hard work for many years. KFH offers the harvest of the fruits, through "Thimar" plan, so that the customer can enjoy a comfortable retirement life worthy of his life journey.

Among the conditions of the investment plan is that the customer's age is between 21 and 55 years. The investment period ranges from 5 years to 39 years. The investment plan "Thimar" advantages include the following: the investment amount or monthly payments may be amended at any time and the amounts shall be automatically transferred on monthly basis from the customer account to the flexible investment plan "Thimar" account. Also, the customer can withdraw 60 percent of the balance in the first year and 60 percent every year after the first withdrawal. The customer can automatically increase the monthly investment amount once every two years. It is possible to deposit specific financial payments in addition to the monthly deductions without affecting the schedule of the investment plan. The saving amount and accrued profit during the investment period shall fall due upon expiration of the investment plan. The investment plan can be cancelled at any time and the invested amount and profits accrued on the date of closing shall be refunded to the customer.

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

Al-Khalifah wins KD 10,000 in ABK's Alfouz weekly draw

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced Abdulrahman Fahad Al-Khalifah as the winner of KD 10,000 in the Alfouz weekly draw. The draw was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on 14 March 2022.

The Alfouz draw account offers ABK customers the chance to win life-changing rewards. With Alfouz, ABK customers will get a chance to win KD 10,000 in Kuwait's highest single weekly draw and the ultimate grand prize of KD 5,000 monthly additional income for 10 years. Both new and existing ABK customers can benefit from this opportunity, with a minimum account balance of KD 100 only.

ABK encourages everyone to open Alfouz draw account and/or increase their balances to have more chances in winning in the upcoming draw which will happen on 21 March. The higher the deposits are, the higher the chances to win.

Al-Sayer and Lexus win coveted Service Hero Award 2021

KUWAIT: Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons and Lexus Kuwait, won the most distinguished award for service at the annual awards distribution event for the year 2021, which was held virtually by Service Hero, the only indicator in the region to measure customer satisfaction, in a framework for Service Hero's efforts to foster a culture of service excellence where brands and customers thrive.

In her welcoming speech to the participants during the virtual awards ceremony, Faten Abu-Ghazaleh, President of Service Hero, reviewed the transformations that took place in many aspects of life during the year 2021 in light of the recovery and adaptation to the second year of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, noting that the capacity of the facilities striving to provide the best customer experience despite the challenges that they withstand.

She pointed out that "the ability of brands, including Lexus in the service sector, to provide the best customer experience despite unprecedented challenges," and talked about the prosperity of brands that she defined, including Lexus, which won in the service sector as "the brand's ability to maintain levels of service to satisfy its customers not only for today, but for the days to come so that its customers prefer it over their peers."

Lexus has always been keen to be a pioneer in after-sales customer service. On this occasion, Faisal Bader Al-Sayer, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons said: "We are making every effort to provide an impressive customer experience and constantly strive to develop our services. Despite the pandemic and strict restrictions, we have sought to operate service centers with the highest standards of safety and hygiene for everyone. Yes, we pay attention to every detail and adhere to the highest standards. That is why we invest in the most advanced equipment and systems and always strive to develop our professional technicians on a consistent basis to take care of our customers' cars to the highest standards because our goal is to give customers an amazing experience with Lexus."

Abu-Ghazaleh notes, "Based on our 12 years of data from over a quarter of a million validated customer reviews, we have seen that majority of brands, around 74 percent, underperform in terms of customer satisfaction because they score 70s or lower from a total of 100 points means that they don't meet all the points or needs of their customers." She said only 21 percent of brands score between 80 and 85, which is a good score. But the group that will really thrive is a handful of brands, the 4 percent who have averaged scores in the high 80s over the past 12 years. These brands have the best relationships with their customers, which



means they have gained customer loyalty."

Methodology

The index's rankings come from 23,661 validated evaluations by consumers, male and female, of different age groups, nationalities, and educational level. Kuwaitis in general, men in particular, with a master's degree or higher between the ages of 40 and 49, had the lowest satisfaction rate.

During the award ceremony, the winners, including the Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons Establishment Company, presented Lexus videos demonstrating their efforts in maintaining service excellence, in line with the "Triple Excellence" Service Hero concept, which defines the strength of "leadership", and to the extent to which the "heart" of the team strives to attract customers, and the systems adopted to convince the "mind". The winning brands demonstrated how to prioritize during 2021, including strategic direction, employee motivation, and resource optimization, despite all the limitations they faced in an effort to provide the best experience for their customers, and to what extent these brands were able to enhance the team's enthusiasm and passion for work. During the period of working from home, facing other operational challenges, and how it was able to maintain the quality of service without affecting sales.

With its headquarters in Kuwait, Service Hero is the only customer satisfaction indicator in the Middle East, and it follows the protocols of ESOMAR, the former European Organization for Opinion and Marketing Research, and complies with the principles and guidelines of the World Organization for Self-Regulation and Ethical Practice. An independent advisory board oversees the Service Hero Index to ensure impartial and objective results that accurately reflect consumer prefer-

Norway to keep gas output, exports to Europe at maximum

OSLO: Norway, Europe's second-biggest supplier of natural gas, yesterday announced steps to keep its gas production at maximum levels to help Europe reduce its dependency on Russian gas. The Norwegian Petroleum and Energy Ministry agreed to adjust the production licenses of three offshore fields—Oseberg, Troll and Heidrun—so that they can prioritize gas production over oil. The measures "will not increase the daily total Norwegian gas production significantly, but will contribute towards maintaining today's high export volumes of Norwegian gas", the ministry said.

Norway covers between 20 and 25 percent of the European Union's and Britain's gas needs, while Russia accounts for between 45 and 50 percent. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, the EU has sought to reduce its Russian gas imports by two-thirds.

Norway's gas exports are however squeezed by production capacities, already churning at maximum levels, and

the distribution system via pipelines. Norway's sole liquefied natural gas (LNG) unit, which makes it possible to deliver gas by ship in liquid form, was damaged in a fire in September 2020.

Located in Hammerfest in northern Norway, it will be back in service by mid-May, according to its operator, energy giant Equinor, making it possible to then increase export volumes. According to Equinor, adjusting the production licenses at the Oseberg field will make it possible to export an additional 1 billion cubic meters up to September 30, when maintenance work is scheduled to be conducted. The Heidrun field will meanwhile be able to increase its deliveries by 0.4 million cubic meters in the full year 2022. Equinor said that "1.4 billion cubic meters of gas meets the gas demands of around 1.4 million European homes during a year". The Troll field has meanwhile been authorized to increase its production by up to 1 billion cubic meters in the event of loss of production from other fields. —AFP

TotalEnergies won't seek compensation for Myanmar exit

PARIS: France's TotalEnergies said yesterday that it would not seek financial compensation for its withdrawal from Myanmar over concerns about human rights abuses since a coup last year.

The French energy giant and US partner Chevron announced in January that they would pull out of the Yadana gas field, with TotalEnergies citing the "worsening" situation for human rights and the rule of law. "In light of the exceptional situation, TotalEnergies has chosen to withdraw from Myanmar without seeking any financial compensation for its assets," the company said in a statement.

The field in the Andaman Sea provides electricity to Myanmar and neighboring Thailand. TotalEnergies had been under pressure from human rights groups to cut its financial links to the junta since the army seized power from a

civilian government in February 2021. Human Rights Watch says natural gas projects are Myanmar's single largest source of foreign currency revenue, generating more than \$1 billion every year. TotalEnergies said its withdrawal from Yadana and the MGTC pipeline would take effect on July 20.

The company's 31.4 percent stake in the Yadana gas field was the biggest in a consortium that included Chevron, Thai firm PTTEP and Myanmar's army-controlled MOGE. TotalEnergies said PTTEP will take over its equity share. The Thai company said earlier this week that it would take over the running of the Yadana gas field in July. While Chevron has said it will also exit the Yadana gas field, the French firm said that the US company "has also decided to take over TotalEnergies' equity share, thereby increasing its stake in Myanmar". —AFP



ences, making the company's results a reliable benchmark that provides transparent insight and in-depth information on companies. The council includes academics and business professionals representing leading companies and institutions in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates: Including: the American University of Kuwait, the Australian College of Kuwait, the Gulf University for Science and Technology, Abu Dhabi University, and Zayed University. Since 2010, Service Hero has collected more than 350,000 documented and certified consumer reviews covering more than 350 companies in the private sector.

Business

Ooredoo Kuwait Group holds annual and extraordinary general assembly

93.102% of shareholders attend the meeting

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait Group -National Mobile Telecommunications Company K.S.C.P "Ooredoo" - held its annual and extraordinary general assembly meeting yesterday at Ooredoo Tower. The meeting was attended with a presence of 93.102 percent of the shareholders and (35 fils per share) cash dividend was declared to the shareholders already registered in the company's record date of March 31, 2021.

During the meeting, the agenda was reviewed; the financial statements and reports were stated, discussed and approved while all other articles on the agenda were also discussed. The Group's Annual Financial Report included the most prominent achievements of the group during the year 2021 was also reviewed.

Optimism

In a statement delivered on the occasion of the Annual and Extraordinary General Assembly Meeting, Dr Youssef Mubark Al-Sellili, board member stated the fact that "2021 was indeed a challenging year where economies and businesses have been deeply affected by the pandemic, however, where there are challenges, there are opportunities. I pride Ooredoo Kuwait on its flexibility, robust performance, effective strategies and operations, and success in 2021 which reflects our efficient management style. We proved our ability to not only change, but rather transform: to promise and prove; through listening to people inside and outside the company; employees, customers, managers, partners and the community."

He added "I remain highly optimistic, that we will overcome this situation in 2022 and for the years to come; where the world will have to adjust to the new normal".



Revenues growth

Speaking of the financial growth, Al-Sellili said: "Our financial performance reported a solid set of results for the year ended 31 December 2021, as market activity improved due to the easing and lifting of COVID-19 restrictions in some of our core markets. Furthermore, we saw an increase in customer confidence in the business due to our ongoing commitment to provide innovative products, which further supported our strong performance for the year.

Consolidated revenue for NMTC increased slightly to KD 602 million for 2021, with an EBITDA margin of 34 percent. In Kuwait, the focus remained on cost optimization and digital transformation, resulting in an increase in EBITDA of 18 percent and an improved EBITDA margin of 29 percent. In Tunisia, revenue increased by 5 percent. In Algeria, the business reported strong numbers as revenues were up by 8 percent in local currency terms. Palestine reported a 9 percent increase in revenue to KWD 33.8 million, with an increase in EBITDA of 17 percent, primarily driven by operational efficiencies. With the uptick in tourism, Maldives reported a 2 percent increase in revenues. Furthermore, the business now serves over 368 thousand customers.

We remain optimistic about 2022, as we continue to focus on enhancing our product portfolio, driving cost optimization initiatives, and further broadening our customer base across all markets in which we operate."

Digital solutions ahead

Al-Sellili concluded by saying: "In continuation of its ongoing efforts to accelerate the digital transformation, and in line with its business strategy to constantly provide the latest digital services to its customers and the public, Ooredoo has successfully delivered and maintained its leadership position by the end of 2021."

Al-Sellili added: "As we look ahead over the next year, and we promise we will invest in more efforts towards building smarter, safer, and stronger solutions as well as offering exclusive offers and plans for all our customers. NMTC group will unite efforts to dominate the telecom industry in the coming year and in the post-pandemic era." The annual and extraordinary general assembly meeting was attended by the board member, Dr Youssef Al-Sellili, in addition to Ooredoo Kuwait Chief Executive Officer- Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain, Chief Finance Officer Fadi Kawar, Chief Commercial Officer Tapan

Tripathi and a number of other representatives of the executive management. It witnessed the presence of Kuwait Clearing Company and the Ministry of Commerce.

Pandemic's positive impact

Commenting on the financial results of 2021, Ooredoo Kuwait CEO Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain said: "Amidst the backdrop due of COVID-19, we at Ooredoo were adamant to continue evolving despite any challenge, ensuring that each day, year, partnership, collaboration, event or crisis becomes the drive that moves us steadily forward towards innovation and growth. That was the vow of the confident family of Ooredoo. We were determined to turn challenges into opportunities. Today, I am proud to say that we successfully delivered and maintained our leadership position by the end of 2021."

Al-Babtain added: "However, with the gradual ease of travel restrictions, supported by the stabilization of oil prices, Kuwait's population has witnessed a slight uptick. With this, the company reported 18 percent increase in EBITDA to KD 61.1 million in 2021 supporting an improved EBITDA margin of 29 percent. Revenue also increased to KD 210.5 million in 2021."

Digital evolution

Speaking about the digital growth journey of Ooredoo, Al-Sellili said: "Amid these COVID-19 pandemic circumstances, Ooredoo's companies sought to offer digital services that serve its clients and have developed their digital sales strategy to ensure clients have access to these services. The best in market solutions and future plans were also devised to deal with any emergency. The fast spread of COVID-19 imposed restrictions on movement in the countries we operate in negatively affecting most commercial and economic activities. This contributed to a faster transformation from the traditional business model to a digitalized business which meant using more data and a dependence on digital services and solutions that customers, whether individuals or institutions, benefited from." From his side, Chief Executive Officer, Ooredoo Kuwait, Al-Babtain said: "Today, millions of people depend on the online connection to study and work from home, attend virtual meetings, and shop online. Thus, Ooredoo Kuwait constantly improves its products, services, and offerings to serve the community. Ooredoo Kuwait's digital user base witnessed a significant growth supported by an increase in sales through "MyOoredoo App".

Awards

Al-Babtain expressed his gratitude as Ooredoo Kuwait was honored over the year of 2021 by several entities and won many prestigious awards in recognition of its excellence and innovation in maintaining its leading position as a main contributor to the local community and serving the public interest, along with provide its customers with high quality telecommunication services.

Ooredoo has proudly announced that it has won 3 categories at the 2021 Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards. It has won in the following categories: "Innovation in Business Information Apps", "Innovation in Customer Service Management, Planning & Practice", and "Achievement in Growth".

The Gold Stevie Award for "Innovation in Business Information Apps" category was awarded in recognition of the company's MyOoredoo application. While the Silver Stevie Award for "Achievement in Growth" category was in specific a recognition of Ooredoo Kuwait's milestones in business, technology and digital services in the telecommunications sector. Lastly, Ooredoo received the bronze Stevie Award for "Innovation in Customer Service Management, Planning & Practice - Telecommunications Industries" category. More and above, Ooredoo was named the "Kuwait's Fastest Mobile Network" for 2021; awarded by the Ookla, the company behind Speedtest, and the global leader in fixed broadband and mobile network testing applications, data and analysis.

Ooredoo also won three prestigious awards at Advertising Creativity Award 2021 - the ninth edition held by the organizing committee of the Arab Media Forum, in the "Best National TVC", "Public Relations Stars" and "Brand Excellence" categories.

During the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) Effie Awards 2021, Ooredoo won the silver award in the "New Product and Service Introduction" category, and

in 1918, when Russian revolution leader Vladimir Lenin refused to recognize the debts of the tsar deposited by the uprising. Russia defaulted on domestic, ruble-denominated debt in 1998.

Dollar payment possible?

Analysts at JPMorgan have said that US sanctions should not directly restrict Russia's ability to service its debt. According to the US Treasury, interest payments to American entities "are permissible through May 25," on bonds issued by Russia's central bank, finance ministry or national wealth fund before March 1. After that date, they would need authorization to



Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain and Dr Youssef Mubark Al-Sellili

the bronze award in the "Omni-Channel Shopper Solution" category, for the successful advertising campaign "Inconsistent Internet Connection, unstable Mood". At last, Ooredoo was recognized as the "Best Internet Service Provider" at the annual Service Hero Awards for the year 2020, endorsing the company's long standing commitment to its customers. Recognized as the benchmark in the telecom industry, Ooredoo Kuwait was recognized for its excellence in offering complete coverage at high speeds, multiple plan options to suit different needs along with offering an excellent customer service.

Exclusive products for B2B

Al-Babtain said Ooredoo continued achieving excellence and outstanding successes during 2021, through developing strategic partnerships that helped it to better understand the factors of change in consumer behavior. Hence, B2B and enterprises in Kuwait were offered a wide range of exclusive products during 2021. Ooredoo has entered a reseller agreement with BT, a leading provider of global communications services and solutions. The scope of services includes managed connectivity and voice services, collaboration and contact centre solutions, as well as cloud-based security services and consultancy.

Further, Ooredoo has announced its collaboration with Nokia, a trusted partner for critical networks, in which Nokia will be supplying Ooredoo Kuwait 5G Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) equipment for the operator's customer premises. An early pioneer of FWA, Ooredoo is now offering the Nokia FastMile 5G Gateway as a premium internet device for residential and business customers. Ooredoo Kuwait is using FWA to extend the reach of its fiber network to premises not easily connected with direct fiber lines. This will support the company to significantly increase its fixed broadband customer base across the country.

Assurance & sustainability

Al-Babtain concluded his statement with a clear tone of optimism and said: "Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has been again an extraordinary performer during the tough times the world went through, and achieved greatness.

Today, we mark this year by celebrating everything we have accomplished - from bringing new innovative digital solutions to our customers, to supporting the government and community during the crisis, collaborating with well-established companies, and more. Ooredoo Kuwait will continue the journey of success."

Financial Highlights:

- Net profit attributable to NMTC increased to KD 19 million in 2021, representing a strong growth of 468 percent compared to KD 3 million in 2020. Net profit growth was supported by solid operational and financial earnings from Ooredoo Kuwait, Ooredoo Tunisia, Ooredoo Algeria, Ooredoo Palestine and Ooredoo Maldives.
- EBITDA increased by 5 percent in 2021 to KD 208 million, compared to KD 197 million in 2020.
- Consolidated revenue increased to KD 602 million in 2021, compared to KD 593 million in 2020. Revenues in KD were positively impacted by the gradual easing of restrictions in Kuwait, healthy Tunisian market growth, record revenue in Palestine, and strong num-

continue receiving these payments.

Western sanctions have crippled the Russian banking sector and financial system and precipitated a collapse of the ruble. A default cuts a state off from the financial markets and a potential return is unlikely for several years.

Fitch also said Tuesday that it understands that the foreign investors did not receive interest payments on domestic bonds due on March 2 because of restrictions imposed by the central bank.

"This will constitute a default if not cured within 30 days of the payments falling due," said the debt ratings agency. — AFP

bers in Algeria in local currency terms.

The Group's operational performance and achievements can be summarized as follows:

Ooredoo Kuwait

Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain, Ooredoo Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer, said: "The COVID-19 pandemic and a decline in Kuwait's population continued to put pressure on Ooredoo Kuwait's performance during 2021. However, with the gradual ease of travel restrictions, supported by the stabilization of oil prices, Kuwait's population has witnessed a slight uptick. With this, the company reported 18 percent increase in EBITDA to KD 61.1 million in 2021 supporting an improved EBITDA margin of 29 percent. Revenue also increased to KD 210.5 million in 2021."

"It goes without saying that Ooredoo has made quantum leaps in the world of telecommunication, technology, cybersecurity and security services, making it a well-reputed company with a leading position in the world of innovative digital services, information technology, Internet and communications," Al-Babtain added.

Ooredoo Kuwait's 5G rollout increased further during 2021. Ooredoo Kuwait's continued commitment to its customers through providing world-class services was recognized by the Stevie International Business Awards where the Company was awarded a Gold Stevie in the "Mobile On-Demand Application" category for the My Ooredoo App, as well as a Bronze Stevie for Ooredoo Kuwait's volunteer program in the "Corporate Social Responsibility Program of the Year" category.

- 35fils per share cash dividend declared
- Consolidated revenues KD 602m in 2021

Strategic partnerships

Among this year's remarkable partnerships are: Ooredoo's collaboration with the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), the leading provider of digital banking services in Kuwait and the region, to develop digital services, products and solutions that contribute to enriching customer experience in both institutions. The signing of the MoU came as part of the strategic partnership and well-established relationships between Ooredoo and NBK, and their keenness to provide cutting-edge digital services and solutions that contribute to meeting the needs of all customers to get an exceptional experience from leading institutions in both the financial services and telecommunications sectors.

Digital transformation & sustainable growth

In continuation of its ongoing efforts to accelerate the digital transformation in the country, and in line with its business strategy to constantly provide the latest digital services to its customers and the public, Ooredoo has announced the adaptation and utilization of "Kuwait Mobile ID". It is a mobile application provided by the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) that provides users with a digital civil ID accredited for identification and digital signature for both government and private sector, for secure authentication of identities at any of its branches, sales channels, online at <https://shop.ooredoo.com.kw>, or through the MyOoredoo application.

Ooredoo first operator in Kuwait and the region to rolls out eSim online purchases in Kuwait. Ooredoo is the first telecom operator in the State of Kuwait and region to offer customers the ability to conduct a complete purchasing process of a new eSIM online, and without any physical interaction or signature utilizing "Kuwait Mobile ID", a mobile application provided by the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI). PACI provides users with a digital civil ID accredited for identification and digital signature for both government and private sector.

Ooredoo Kuwait announced that it won the title "Speedtest Awards Winner 2021" by Ookla, the company that operates the famous website Speedtest.net, a tool that measures network speed on users' devices. The award is based on speed test results conducted by hundreds of thousands of actual smartphone users in Kuwait.

Russia faces debt payment amid default fears

MOSCOW: Russia is due to make an interest payment on its foreign debt yesterday as sanctions over the Ukraine conflict have raised concerns that Moscow could default. Moscow would face its first default in decades if it fails to make \$117 million (107 million euros) in interest payments on two dollar-denominated bonds. Sanctions over Russia's operation in Ukraine have targeted \$300 billion of its foreign currency reserves held abroad.

Without access to these funds, concern has mounted that Russia could find itself forced to default. Indicating an intent to pay, the finance ministry announced earlier this week it had sent a payment order for "a total of \$117.2 million." Finance Minister Anton Siluanov denied on Monday that Russia would not be able to make the payments and accused the West of pushing the country towards an "artificial default".

But he warned that Russia was prepared to service the debt in rubles, according to the exchange rate of Russia's central bank on the day of the payment. While Russia's foreign currency government bonds issued since 2018 contain provisions for repayment in rubles, it was not the case for the interest payments due yesterday. A payment in rubles would constitute a default at the end of a 30-day grace period, according to Fitch Ratings.

Russia last defaulted on foreign currency-held debt



MOSCOW: A view of a closed McDonald's restaurant at a shopping mall in Moscow yesterday. — AFP

Zara owner Inditex profits soar, but warns of war impact

MADRID: Global clothing giant Inditex, which owns Zara, yesterday posted a sharp increase in 2021 profits but warned sales would be impacted by Russia's war on Ukraine. The world's biggest fashion retailer, whose financial year closed at the end of January, said its annual net profit hit 3.2 billion euros (\$3.5 billion), nearly 200-percent higher than in 2020 when the pandemic took hold. Turnover rose 36 percent to 27.7 billion euros, compared to 20.4 billion in 2020, while revenue from online activity rose by 14 percent, accounting for just over a quarter of its total sales. The figures were lower than those seen by analysts at FactSet, who predicted profits of 3.7 billion euros on a turnover of 28 billion euros, with the Spanish group blaming it on reduced footfall when Omicron hit late last year.

The fashion group, which owns eight brands including upmarket Massimo Dutti and teen label Stradivarius, warned that this year's sales would be impacted by its closure of operations in Russia as a result of its war on Ukraine. When the invasion began in late February, Inditex closed all its stores in Ukraine and on March 5 suspended all retail activity in Russia, its biggest market after Spain, shutting its 502 shops and suspending all online transactions. Although Inditex did not say what the impact would be, analysts said it could be significant as the Russian market accounts for nearly 10 percent of the textile giant's sales and 8.5 percent of its operating profit. —AFP



Players compete during a National domino tournament in Valencia, Venezuela. — AFP photos



Elderly people play dominoes in tables set up at the Plaza Bolivar of the Petare neighborhood in Caracas.

Dominoes the game for everyone in Venezuela

Efren Rodriguez leaves the table annoyed as his fellow players, drunk and laughing, cry out "Zapato! Get out!" The 32-year-old has just suffered an embarrassing defeat in a game of dominoes in the little fishing village of Chichiriviche on Venezuela's Caribbean coast. Zapato means shoe in Spanish and in dominoes is the equivalent of a "duck" in cricket—a score of zero. Dominoes "is the favorite past-time for everyone ... in the rich people's clubs just like poor neighborhoods, in urban centers and rural areas," wrote late former president Rafael Caldera in the prologue for Alfredo Fernandez Porras's book "The Art of the 28 Pieces." In Venezuela it is played in pairs, like Bridge, making it a more strategic game than when played one-on-one.

'Killing time'

Efren Velazquez, the president of the Venezuelan Dominoes Federation, says "70 to 75 percent" of the country's 30 million people play the game. "You will always find a dominoes set in any house and whenever there is a family get together." Dominoes is often played in bars while drinking alcohol and in many places, like Chichiriviche, some 50 kilometers north of Caracas, it is played



A man takes part in a domino match during a National domino tournament in Valencia.

only by men. Far from the tourist beaches, young men play on old wooden tables, sat on plastic chairs, tree stumps or old beer barrels while the drink itself flows, as does rum, whiskey and anise liquor.

The Chichiriviche players even use a dominoes set that was a freebie from a whiskey manufacturer. "Take that!" says one player as he slams his piece down on the table theatrically, making the others bounce. "I play to kill time ... it's emotional. You win, you play another

game and you win again," said fisherman Ruben Mayoral, 26. "I play football and everything but I prefer dominoes." "They gave me a 'shoe', I didn't get one point; Zero! And they were teasing me ... it's always like this," said Rodriguez.

Star brothers

It is a completely different atmosphere in Valencia where one of the four annual national titles is taking place in a large hotel conference room. Some 300 seasoned players play in silence punctu-



Elderly people play dominoes in tables set up at the Plaza Bolivar of the Petare neighborhood in Caracas.

ated only by the sound of the pieces being shuffled after each game. Some wear the jersey of the national team, others their state shirt. And here, women like Carlimar Aparicio are allowed to play. She says men always tell her she can't play but then they always end up calling me to play with them."

"It's a sport," said Luis Marquina, 41, a seven-time world champion whose brother Carlos, 45, has also been crowned six times as the best on the planet. "We view it from a sporting per-

spective, it's not that you can't play dominoes with a beer, but when we're in a competition we're taking part in a sport." There are no winks, no shouts and no theatrical gestures, referees even walk around the room between the tables. "We have national, Pan-American, continental championships ... it is played everywhere in the world. We hope it will be an Olympic event one day," said federation president Velazquez.

'Passing comments'

Far away from the world or even national championships in the Petare neighborhood of Caracas, which is often described as the largest slum in the world, a pensioners club hosts dominoes games every afternoon. "It's fun, you have to use your brain. It's mental agility, a mental sport. You have to think like in chess," said Pedro Roberto Leon, a retired police officer. "Sometimes there are arguments but they're quickly forgotten." And while some play, those waiting their turn delight in pointing out mistakes. "Those that pass comments are the only ones that never make a mistake," joked Enrique Benavente, 48, a technician.—AFP

COS launches collection for Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr, the art of dressing

COS presents a limited-edition capsule of ready-to-wear pieces created in honour of the Holy Month of Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr. Designed for the modern woman, the collection incorporates several Middle East exclusives including elegant women wear designs, classic wardrobe staples and kids wear for mother-daughter styling.

Paying particular attention to colour, the collection's palette features mood-lifting hues of hot tangerine while bold prints in fuchsia adorn sophisticated silhouettes. From coordinated tonal sets to fluid, loose-fitting dresses and trousers, COS' craftsmanship is present in each piece, building a unique wardrobe foundation.

Elegant occasion wear focusing on

modernity in delicate pastel shades of lilac, spearmint, and lemon transition the collection seamlessly from Ramadan to Eid celebrations. Crafted using several sustainably sourced materials softly draped breathable fabrics, such as linen, move effortlessly from day to evening. In addition, contemporary detailing brings a sense of joy and luxury to the holiday wardrobe through beautiful textures, knotted details, and gentle pleating. The collections are available on cos.com and in selected COS stores in the Middle East. The Ramadan collection launches mid-March, and the Eid collection is available from April.



Prepared sunbeds are seen at a resort hotel in Antalya.



A general view of Kaleici marina in Antalya.

Uncertainty for Russian tourists in Turkey hotspot as war rages

With its shimmering azure waters, secluded coves and golden sands, Turkey's Mediterranean coast is a destination beloved by Russian tourists, nearly five million of whom visited last year. But many visitors currently on holiday in the area now fear they will be unable to return home because of extensive Western sanctions on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine.

Restrictions on card payments and flight operations have also raised fears of a slump in Russian tourism to Turkey, a key source of revenues for Ankara. Holidaymaker Margarita Sabatnikaya, 31, says her vacation plans have been thrown into doubt and that she fears being stranded. "We have come here for a holiday with our children. It's unclear when we'll return to Russia, by which plane," she said.

Sabatnikaya said that she wanted to continue her holiday but her bank cards had stopped working. "It's unclear how to stay here and how to survive," she said. While flag carrier Turkish Airlines says flights to and from Russia will "continue for the moment", no frills carrier Pegasus has suspended its services leaving its customers desperate to rebook elsewhere.

Dozens of Western countries have banned Russian planes from their airspace while some carriers operating flights to Russia have had their insurance

policies cancelled. Some Turkish holiday operators have cited the impact of Western sanctions when cancelling the plans of their Russian clients.

US card giants MasterCard and Visa have suspended their Russian operations, although Russian cardholders in Turkey are able access to their funds through Russia's homegrown payments system Mir. "We heard the company that brought us here stopped flights but I am not sure," said Russian tourist Anton Gavrilov, 34. "Of course I had a little bit of cash but if I'd like to pay with my card I don't know if it will be possible for me," he added having swapped the icy Moscow winter for Turkey's sun-kissed Mediterranean coast.

'Very serious'

The damage wrought on Turkey's crucial travel industry will depend on how long sanctions on Russia are enforced for, industry experts say. But there is a chance that Russians fleeing their homeland could offset some of the losses, they say. "We foresee that the impact of this crisis on Antalya tourism will be very serious," Anna Yigit, deputy general manager of an Antalya resort hotel, told AFP.

"We are prepared for it, we have antibodies!" Around 4.5 million Russian and two million Ukrainian tourists descended on Turkey last year. The government was hoping for a post-COVID rebound this year, with a target of almost \$35 billion (38 billion euros) in total tourism revenues, back at pre-pandemic levels.

"Russians were among number one arrivals for Turkey before the pandemic, maybe this year Turkey was on course for 10-15 million Russian tourists," said Washington Institute fellow Soner Cagaptay. All this "will be lost if the sanctions are so severe that the Russian middle class won't be able to afford travel to Turkey," he said. Turkey has weathered a drought of Russian tourists before when,

in the first half of 2016, Ankara shot down a Russian warplane over Syria. In this conflict Turkey has sought to avoid antagonizing the Kremlin despite Kiev using Turkish drones in the battlefield.

'Don't know what to do'

Holidaymaker Gavrilov said he fears this holiday will be his last as sanctions have caused the ruble to reach all-time lows against the dollar. "It will be really hard to afford a trip for family," he said. Hoteliers in Turkey's resorts have been left guessing how many Russian guests will pull out of their bookings, although there has not yet been a wave of cancellations. Russian tourists who paid a deposit for holiday packages may not now be able to afford to pay the difference after the ruble slumped in value. Western restrictions on flights to and from Russia have pushed up air fares for the countries that continue to have services to Russia, like Turkey.

Typical ticket prices have jumped from 180 euros to 400 euros. One Russian family told AFP they paid 900 euros for a one-way ticket from Russia to Antalya on a "low-cost" airline. Anastasia Zanolotnaya, 27, a diving instructor living in Antalya for four years, said many Russians who came to Turkey for holidays were now stranded.

"I have two Russian friends who stay with me right now. They cannot get back because (plane tickets) are very expensive," she told AFP. Ukrainian tourists are also affected. "We came for holiday in early February, now (me and my family) cannot go back," said Olga, who declined to give her surname. "We should have returned just two days after the war. No flight now. We have a small amount of money now. We don't know what to do." — AFP





People attend a preview of an exhibition by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei titled "In Search of Humanity" at the Albertina museum in Vienna.



A woman looks at a work by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei during a preview for his exhibition "In Search of Humanity" at the Albertina museum in Vienna, Austria.

AI WEIWEI WARNS OF 'SHAKING FOUNDATION' OF DEMOCRACY

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has revealed the "shaking foundation" of democracy, Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei said as he unveiled what he said was the biggest retrospective of his work to date. Reflecting on the war and the massive refugee crisis it has created, Ai expressed fears for "our... so-called peaceful life since World War Two" "Suddenly we feel the... foundation is shaking of democracy and freedom," he told journalists in Vienna Tuesday.

He was speaking at the Albertina Modern gallery where the show, "In Search of Humanity", opened yesterday. While condemning Russia's invasion of its neighbor as "unacceptable", Ai expressed concern about increasing global divisions. A "Cold War psychology is not going to work", he said. The new exhibition, which he described as "critical and radical", displays several works that are responses to

the experiences of those fleeing war and persecution.

There is a striking arrangement of life jackets found on the shores of the Greek island of Lesbos, arranged around a giant crystal ball in a lotus-like installation. That piece is also typical of the monumental nature of much of the work on show, which comprises more than 50 tons of material. None of his previous shows, he said, had had such broad coverage of his work. It charts the evolution of his artistic work and political activism over several decades.

Dystopian dolls' houses

What Ai calls the current "crisis of human rights and freedom of speech" is starkly portrayed in a life-size replica of the cell where he was held and interrogated after his 2011 arrest by the Chinese police. A set of dioramas beside it depict



Chinese artist Ai Weiwei poses during a preview of his exhibition "In Search of Humanity" at the Albertina museum in Vienna, Austria. — AFP photos

scenes from his interrogation, like dystopian dolls' houses. Some of his more recent works, such as the treadmill used by his friend Julian Assange during his stay at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, are perhaps not the easiest to read. Others

however, pack a more direct emotional punch.

A huge installation makes use of twisted rebars salvaged from a school destroyed in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, which killed more than 80,000

people. The work stands as a testament to the thousands of children killed when poorly constructed school buildings collapsed. Irreverence and humor are also on display, such as in the series of photos of Ai's famous middle finger directed at sites such as the ceremonial gate in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. They are arrayed beneath a four-letter word lit up in neon.

He also makes extensive use of Lego as a medium in one case to recreate the Saudi flag. Instead of the Islamic profession of belief, the flag is emblazoned with the reported last words of journalist Jamal Khashoggi during his 2018 murder in Istanbul's Saudi consulate: "I can't breathe". The show runs until September 4. — AFP



Artist Haider Ali (left) works on a truck at a workshop in Karachi.



Artist Haider Ali (right) works on a truck at a workshop in Karachi.

Putin book tops UK bestsellers after Abramovich sued author

A book about Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle written by a British journalist has topped the UK bestseller list, its publisher said yesterday, after the author was sued by Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich. Catherine Belton's "Putin's People", first published in 2020, "is the number one bestselling NF (non-fiction) paperback in the UK", William Collins Books publishing director Arabella Pike said in a tweet. It was at number seven on The Sunday Times bestsellers list last week.

The critically acclaimed book by a former Financial Times Moscow correspondent faced an onslaught of law suits from Russian oligarchs including Abramovich, three of whom have now been targeted by UK sanctions. The book was a Sunday Times best-seller when it first came out and sales have spiked again as the war in Ukraine focuses interest on Russia's leader. "I wish the circumstances were different. But I'm very grateful for all the attention to Putin's People," Belton tweeted.

She thanked publisher Harper Collins "for making sure that it remained on the bookshelves despite an unprecedented barrage of lawsuits last year". The publisher eventually settled out of court in December last year with the main claimant Abramovich. It agreed to alter some passages in future editions of the book about him, including over the Kremlin's role in his acquisition of Chelsea football club.

Belton spoke to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday at a discussion on the use of such lawsuits to hinder public participation in politics. "No matter how good the sourcing is on some of these claims, and how great the public interest is, the cases are just too expensive to defend, the system is stacked in favor of deep-pocketed litigants from the outset," she told the committee. "Quite frankly when we were facing it at the beginning, I didn't know whether the publisher would be able to withstand the barrage of claims," she said.

"I mean this is five big cases from some of the world's richest men all at the same time, and I didn't know whether we would have to withdraw the book." Abramovich, who bought Chelsea in 2003, was placed under UK sanctions on March 10, including an asset freeze, a travel ban and a ban on transactions with UK individuals and businesses. These sanctions mean he would now not be able to launch such legal action at the High Court using a British law firm. The UK has altered legislation to make it easier to impose sanctions on oligarchs who have already been placed under sanctions by ally countries. — AFP

Pakistani truck artist gives new flair to kicks

Haider Ali dabs a brush with an iridescent glob of paint and gets to work on a pair of sparkling white trainers—his latest canvas for a carnival of color celebrating Pakistani culture. Pakistan's lorries are renowned for "truck art": candy-colored murals depicting South Asian animals, celebrities and religious icons. The tradition transforms the highways and cities into kaleidoscopic processions. And now Ali—a veteran truck artist—has transposed the painting onto sneakers.

"A client came to me from the US asking me to paint shoes," he explained. "I told him an exorbitant fee to discourage him but he agreed, so I decided to get on with it." He labors on each pair for up to four days, charging select clients \$400 for

a set featuring bespoke patterns and motifs.

Since he started painting trainers in January, he has dispatched eight pairs to places in Pakistan and abroad—with new orders arriving every four days after a surge of social media interest. "The ideas keep coming to me," the 42-year-old mused. "It's in human nature to decorate ourselves and the things around us." Cross-legged in his Karachi rooftop studio, he flips a pair of high-top Nikes to reveal the image of a luminous pink hawk and a gazing yellow eye, framed by hypnotic bulbous fringes. Another pair ready for shipping bears a shimmering peacock.

'In the zone'

Some say the practice of adorning

trucks began in the 1940s when hauliers crafted vibrant logos communicating their brand identity to a largely illiterate public. Others claim the artistic one-upmanship began with bus drivers competing to lure passengers. Today, the trade is one of Pakistan's most famous cultural exports, cutting against the country's more austere reputation for social conservatism.

Ali comes from a family of truck artists, who eked out a living at the roadside yards where drivers eagerly surrender slim pay packets to decorate their vehicles. Strolling through the Yusuf Goth truck yard, his tinted glasses and slight swagger lend him an air of celebrity. "I get in the zone when I feel a connection to the art," he said. "If I pause, the ideas stop flowing." He came to fame outside

Pakistan when his work was exhibited at the US Smithsonian Museum in 2002, helping him hone a reputation as an international ambassador for truck art.

He has applied his craft to a plane, a VW Beetle, and even a woman's body at the Burning Man festival in the United States. Ali's cottage industry offers numerous advantages. He is stowed away from the din of the roadside yards, and his fashion clients give him full creative freedom, unlike truck drivers who peer over his shoulder. But as with trucks, the decoration on shoes will not last forever. After three or four years, it will chafe, crack and fade—offering a fresh canvas for yet more artwork. — AFP



In this picture truck artist Haider Ali works on a pair of sneakers at his workshop in Karachi. — AFP photos



Truck artist Haider Ali works on a pair of sneakers at his workshop in Karachi.

Ton-up Babar and Shafique foil Australia's victory bid

Pakistan thwart Australia's hopes of a quick win

KARACHI: Skipper Babar Azam hopes Pakistan's batters can keep faith in their abilities as they attempt to create history by chasing the highest-ever target in Test cricket to beat Australia in Karachi. Azam cracked a fighting century with great support from opener Abdullah Shafique Tuesday as Pakistan thwarted Australia's hopes of a quick win in the second Test in Karachi.

Set a daunting 506-run target, Azam knocked his sixth Test century—and second against Australia—to guide Pakistan to 192-2 and raise hopes of an improbable victory, or even a fighting draw. At the close Azam was unbeaten on 102 and Shafique 71 as the pair added 171 for the third wicket, leaving the home team needing another 314 runs in the 90 overs of the final day for a win, or bat out three sessions for the draw.

"The match hasn't finished yet," Azam told the host broadcasters. "We need to continue batting like this and keep the belief (to create history). "Definitely, my hundred was needed by the team and my plan was to build a partnership, which Shafique and I did, but we need to continue like."

Pakistan lost Imam-ul-Haq (one) and Azhar Ali (six) before Shafique and Azam led the fightback, leaving Australia wicketless in the last session—despite taking the second new ball after 80 overs. Azam top-edged a sweep off spinner Mitchell Swepson towards short fine-leg for two to reach the three-figure mark, his first in 21 innings since his 143 against Bangladesh in Rawalpindi in February 2020.

His hundred came in 247 minutes with 12 boundaries. Shafique was as solid as his skipper, having so far hit four boundaries and a six as he and Azam batted defiantly for 265 minutes. No team has ever chased more than the 418-7 the West Indies amassed against Australia at Antigua in 2003, while Pakistan's highest successful chase was 377 against Sri Lanka at Pallekele in 2015.

Australia, resuming their second innings at 81-1, batted for just 26 minutes at the start of play to add 16 runs before declaring on 97-2. The visitors scored 556-9 declared in their first innings then dismissed Pakistan for 148. The home team had hoped Azhar would anchor the second innings but the senior batsman was trapped lbw by Cameron Green while trying to evade a short-pitched delivery.

Azhar chose not to review as he trudged off but was left to regret it as television replays showed he had gloved the ball. At 21-2, Australia seemed to have the upper edge and were looking to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series but their efforts were thwarted by a slow turning pitch and the brilliance of Pakistan's batting pair. Australia could have had Shafique on 20 but the experienced Steve Smith spilled a straightforward catch in the slips off pacer Pat Cummins.

Australia's batting coach Michael Di Venuto described the chance as part of the game. "Smith has good hands and he takes nine out of ten such catches but that happens," said Di Venuto. "It's going to be



KARACHI: Pakistan's captain Babar Azam (right) plays a shot during the fifth and final day of the second Test cricket match between Pakistan and Australia yesterday.—AFP

hard work (tomorrow) and since there is variable bounce on the pitch, it's going to be interesting." Despite cracks on the National Cricket Stadium pitch, Australian spinners Nathan Lyon and Swepson failed to get vicious turn. Earlier, Haq and Shafique were all caution as it took them until the fifth over to score the first run before Lyon struck.

The in-form Haq, who scored a hundred in each innings of the drawn first Test in Rawalpindi, was

trapped lbw for one as he failed to connect with a sliding delivery. Earlier, Marnus Labuschagne was bowled off a sharp Shaheen Shah Afridi delivery for 44 to prompt skipper Cummins to call Australia's innings to a close with first-innings century-maker Usman Khawaja, who was born in Pakistan, remaining 44 not out. Australia are on their first tour of Pakistan since 1998, having previously refused to tour the country because of security fears.—AFP

Irving casts spell over Magic with record 60

LOS ANGELES: Kyrie Irving scored a career-high 60 points in a dazzling display as the Brooklyn Nets stretched their NBA winning streak with a 150-108 thrashing of the Orlando Magic on Tuesday. Nets star Irving—who had bagged 50 points last week in a victory over Charlotte—delivered another performance for the ages against an outclassed Magic at Orlando's Amway Center. Irving's tour de force surpassed his previous career best of 57 points, set in 2015 while playing for the Cleveland Cavaliers in a victory over the San Antonio Spurs.

"I felt good," Irving said after his epic display. "It really is a testament to the way we've been gelling as a team—us just giving each other confidence and doing the right things. "When you can get 60 in the flow of the game and it doesn't seem forced, and you're not putting up a few too many bad shots, and you come to the bench and guys are supporting you, telling you to go after the record—that makes the basketball worth it." The 29-year-old Australian-born seven-time All-Star made 20-of-31 from the field, making eight of 12 attempts from outside the arc. A career-high performance for Irving looked inevitable after an explosive first half from Brooklyn. The Nets piled on 48 points in the first quarter alone before adding 38 in the second quarter to lead 86-56 at half-time.

Irving contributed 41 points in that devastating first half, leaving him only 16 shy of his individual record. He

brought up 50 points—the sixth half-century of his career—with a driving layup in the third quarter, prompting appreciative chants of "Kyrie, Kyrie" from the Orlando crowd. Two free throws saw him reach his record at 57 and then a magical three-point pull-up from 26 feet saw him hit the 60-point mark.

'Crazy numbers'

Irving's points haul came 24 hours after the Minnesota Timberwolves' Karl-Anthony Towns scored 60 in a victory over the Spurs. It is the first time different players have scored 60 points or more on consecutive nights in the NBA since 1962. It also came two days after team-mate Kevin Durant scored 53 in a weekend win over the New York Knicks. Irving admitted the friendly rivalry with Durant was spurring him on. "Across the league guys are putting up crazy numbers, but when you have two guys on the same team competing, friendly competition, brotherly competition," Irving said.

"Of course we talk about it but we really want to be savants about this. We take the game seriously, we want to be efficient with it, and make everyone feel good. And prove to every team in the league we can be efficient defensively and offensively." Irving admitted the ovation from the Orlando crowd had been a career first. "This is what the game is about, just bringing the love, performing well and doing it with a humble approach," he said.

Nets coach Steve Nash was left awestruck by Irving's display. "He's just incredible," Nash said. "I felt like he had my career highlight reel in the first 12 minutes of the game," the two-time NBA MVP said. "It's special to watch him every night, but it's even more special on a night like this, where he gets whatever he wants and has total command. A pleasure to see it up close and be a part of it."—AFP



CHELTEMHAM: Jockey Rachael Blackmore jumps the final hurdle on Honeysuckle on their way to victory in the Champion Hurdle on the first day of the Cheltenham Festival at Cheltenham Racecourse.—AFP

Honeysuckle and Blackmore retain Hurdle crown

CHELTEMHAM: Rachael Blackmore and the remarkable Irish mare Honeysuckle retained the Champion Hurdle crown with an impressive victory on the first day of the Cheltenham Festival on Tuesday. Blackmore cruised clear on the Henry de Bromhead-trained star to beat home 2020 champion Epatante and make it 15 wins from 15 hurdles races. The duo have become an iconic partnership in Ireland, even having their images printed on a postage stamp.

They are used to making history—Blackmore was the first female jockey to win it last year and this year Honeysuckle became the first mare to win the race twice. Unlike last year, Blackmore and Honeysuckle returned to a rousing roar from a day-one record-breaking crowd of 68,567 spectators—who were forbidden in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

"She's an incredible mare," said Blackmore, wearing a yellow and blue armband in support of Ukraine after the invasion by Russia. "She kind of decides in a race when she's happy to go on, I haven't stopped her from doing that yet. "She's just an incredible mare. The work that goes into her at home is unbelievable as well, Henry's got a great team of staff and they deserve all the credit for this as well."

'Rock and roll'

One of those staff, travelling head girl Zoe Smalley,

was in tears. "There was a lot of pressure I love her to pieces," she said. "All day Saturday I did not know if I would get them here because all the boats were cancelled. She is incredible!" De Bromhead said he is always expecting the unbeaten run to come to an end. "She's incredible—it is the never-ending fairytale. I always prepare for myself for it to end but it never does," he told ITV.

"If goodwill and all the good lucks could win you a race she'd have won by a furlong because I think most people here were willing her to win. "The support we get for her is just mental. You have to pinch yourself with how lucky you are to train a horse like her." For owner Kenny Alexander, it was a memorable day to have brought his wife to Cheltenham for the first time. "If you don't get nervous today, what is the point in owning them? I always get nervous," he told the BBC.

"Today we were well revved up. It is rock and roll. "I've got my wife here. First time at Cheltenham. Very, very special day. I am glad all the crowd (were) here as well." Honeysuckle-winning her 11th Grade One race—also gave the Irish punters a boost after failing to land a win in the first three races on the card. Nicky Henderson's 9-4 joint-favorite Constitution Hill romped to a brilliant 22-length victory over stable-mate Jonbon in the Festival-opening Supreme Novices' Hurdle.

Marie's Rock made it a double for Henderson in the Mares' Hurdle, edging out Queens Brook. Favorite Edwardstone took the Arkle Trophy, while Brazil ran down Gaelic Warrior in a dramatic finish to the Boodles Juvenile Handicap Hurdle, winning in a photo-finish. "It's unbelievable, I'm so lucky to have a horse like him," said Brazil's trainer Pdraig Roche. "We thought he'd run well coming into today. He was improving with every run so we were hopeful but to go and win was just amazing."—AFP

Badosa keeps WTA defense on track

INDIAN WELLS: Spain's Paula Badosa kept her Indian Wells WTA title defense on track Tuesday, holding off determined Canadian Leylah Fernandez to reach the quarter-finals in the California desert. Badosa, seeded fifth, saved five of the six break points she faced and kept last year's US Open runner-up under pressure—converting three of her 12 break chances. "Today was very tough," said Badosa, who lifted the trophy last October in a tournament moved from its usual March date because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Leylah is an amazing player, very fast and good timing. I knew I had to fight and serve very well. I think I did that the entire match." Badosa is vying to become the first woman to win back-to-back Indian Wells titles since Martina Navratilova in 1990-91. She gained the upper hand in the second set with a break for 3-2, then saved a pair of break points in the eighth game to take a 5-3 lead. "In the important moments, like 4-3, down the break points, I think I stayed very composed," added Badosa, who next faces Veronica Kudermetova, a 7-6

(7/5), 6-7 (5/7), 7-5 winner over Marketa Vondrousova. World number four Iga Swiatek, the highest-ranked player remaining in the women's field, rallied from a set down for a third straight match to book her quarter-final berth, beating German veteran Angelique Kerber 4-6, 6-2, 6-3.

Swiatek, the 2020 French Open champion, is coming off a title in Doha last month, but the 20-year-old admitted it took her a while to figure out how to tackle Kerber — another former Grand Slam champion. "Truth be told, I wasn't really sure what my tactics should be, if I should be more aggressive or play more patient game," Swiatek said. "But at the end I think I made the right decision in right time, in right moments of the match." She said Kerber showed her a different game than she'd expected after practicing with the German. "I felt like she wanted to use her experience and kind of trick me," Swiatek said. Swiatek next faces American Madison Keys, who beat British qualifier Harriet Dart 6-1, 6-4. Former world number one Simona Halep of Romania, seeded 24th, swept into the quarter-finals with a 6-1, 6-4 victory over 26th-seeded compatriot Sorana Cirstea.

Halep, a two-time Grand Slam champion is in the quarters for the fifth time at Indian Wells, where she lifted the trophy in 2015. Halep will play Petra Martic for a

place in the semi-finals. Croatia's Martic beat Liudmila Samsonova 7-6 (8/6), 6-4. Sixth-seeded Maria Sakkari of Greece advanced with a victory over Australian qualifier Daria Saville, who was trailing 4-1 when she retired with a left thigh injury. Sakkari will play Elena Rybakina, who beat Viktorija Golubic 7-6 (7/5), 6-2.

In the men's tournament, sixth-ranked Matteo Berrettini shook off mid-match doldrums to defeat South Africa's Lloyd Harris 6-4, 7-5 to reach the fourth round while world number seven Andrey Rublev powered past American Frances Tiafoe. The 25-year-old Italian Berrettini, winner of five ATP titles but seeking his first Masters 1000 crown, is the second-highest ranked man left in the draw behind fourth-seeded Rafael Nadal. But he admitted he'll need to do better after a victory in which he trailed 4-1 in the second set. "I got a little bit nervous," he said. "I didn't like how I handled the start of the second set. I let the anger out a little bit, which helped." A dozen aces also helped as Berrettini won five straight games to secure the victory. Rublev, who has captured titles in Marseille and Dubai this year, pushed his ATP match winning streak to 11 with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Tiafoe. American John Isner powered past Argentina's Diego Schwartzman 7-5, 6-3. Isner, who towered over his opponent by 38 centimeters, fired 13 aces and didn't face a break point.—AFP



INDIAN WELLS: Paula Badosa of Spain plays a forehand against Leylah Fernandez of Canada in their fourth round match on Day 9 of the BNP Paribas Open on March 15, 2022.—AFP

Sports

Motorcycle-mad Indonesia hosts first motorcycle GP in 25 years

Villages relocated to make way for circuit's construction

JAKARTA: Indonesia hosts its first motorcycle grand prix in 25 years on Sunday, confident that concerns surrounding the new track will be forgotten once racing begins in front of a sell-out crowd. The archipelago nation of 270 million people is motorbike mad-many get around on two wheels-and there is a palpable sense of excitement at the prospect of world-class racing returning.

Even President Joko Widodo is a fan and tried out the Mandalika International Street Circuit when he officially opened it in November, having a go on a custom-made green Kawasaki bike. Sunday's race is the second stop on the 2022 MotoGP calendar after the opening race in Qatar two weeks ago, won by Enea Bastianini of Italy.

The new 4.3-kilometre circuit hugs white-sanded coastline on the island of Lombok, which wants to rival its better-known neighbor, Bali, as a tropical holiday destination. The track complex is part of those ambitions. There is great anticipation, but also angst and anger-the circuit is part of a mega-tourism infrastructure project denounced by the United Nations over the eviction of families. Some refused to leave and were still encamped at the track in November.

Track concerns

When the track hosted a World Superbike race that same month there were concerns about the track surface. Riders during MotoGP testing in February made similar complaints, saying the track was dirty and breaking up dangerously, with debris and stones flying into them like bullets. Turn one was of particular concern. World champion Fabio Quartararo reportedly called it "a total disaster".

Organizers dismissed those fears as teething problems, carried out urgent resurfacing in places and are

confident the track is now in tip-top condition. "The condition that must be improved was the peeling asphalt, which created no grip for the racers," Cahyadi Wanda, vice-president of the Mandalika Grand Prix Association, told AFP. "This work was completed on March 9. All of that work was 100 percent complete." Wikanto Arungbudoyo, a MotoGP fanatic, is keeping his fingers crossed.

"I am eager to know what the riders say about the resurfaced track. Will we get positive feedback from them or maybe, God forbid, the problem gets worse? "Indonesia is very much capable of holding a grand prix here," he added. The country hosted motorcycle grand prix in 1996 and 1997 near the capital Jakarta, but its ambitions of becoming a mainstay of the sport were torpedoed by the Asian financial crisis. For all the track's breathtaking scenery and the excitement, there are other controversies. Several villages were relocated-voluntarily or by force-to make way for the circuit's construction.

Deadly quake, evictions

When AFP visited in November about 40 families, along with their cattle and dogs, were still holding out in the centre of the circuit despite alleged intimidation to cede their land. Environmentalists also question the wisdom of hosting large-scale events on an island under threat from natural disasters. Lombok is still struggling to rebuild following an earthquake in 2018 which killed more than 500 people and caused extensive damage.

Authorities hope the circuit complex will create thousands of jobs and attract up to two million foreign visitors a year, as Indonesia attempts to reinvigorate its crucial tourism industry which has suffered badly in the coronavirus pandemic. COVID restrictions mean



JAKARTA: Repsol Honda Team's Spanish rider Marc Marquez (center, #93) and other MotoGP riders take part in a motorcycle parade in downtown Jakarta yesterday.—AFP

there will not be many international visitors this time and tickets are too expensive for local people. But underlining the excitement, all 63,000 tickets for Sunday's race day have sold out and those who cannot afford a ticket will watch from a nearby hill.

Yurson Hadi, head of Lombok's tourism agency, said that many hotels-among them five-star ones-were

also all booked up. "Hopefully this event will be a good start for tourism recovery in Lombok and also Indonesia," he said. The MotoGP racers will first take to the track on Friday for two free practice sessions. On Saturday there will be a final practice session and qualifying to decide pole position for Sunday's race, which begins at 3:00pm.—AFP

Premier League can cope without Russian cash: UK

LONDON: UK Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston has called for a "more robust" approach to the test for Premier League owners and directors and said football could manage "perfectly well" without Russian investment. Britain last week sanctioned Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich-described by the government as part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle-following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

It has reignited the debate over the ownership of English clubs five months after a Saudi-led consortium bought Newcastle despite concerns raised by Amnesty International over Saudi Arabia's human rights record. A fan-led review launched by the government has indicated that an independent regulator is needed to protect the future of key aspects of the English game.

Appearing before lawmakers on the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport select committee, Huddleston said: "We recognize and the Premier League recognize that the owners' and directors' test needs further work, it needs to be more robust. "I think we're at a turning point for English football. The fan-led review is pivotally important. We recognize there are failures in the structure and governance of English football.

"If it was all working perfectly we'd never have needed the fan-led review which will be pivotal because it will contain an independent regulator." Russian billionaire Abramovich has had his British assets-including Chelsea-frozen but Huddleston said he did not want the European and world club champions, operating under a special government licence, to go bust.

"The action we've taken is precisely to stop that from happening because what we've enabled is for Chelsea to continue to operate and play and for staff to be paid," he told the MPs. "We are working with Chelsea and the fans that the measures we have put in place primarily impact Roman Abramovich and make sure he does not benefit. We want to make sure the sanctions hit those we intend to hit and not others." —AFP



Kuwait women football

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Juventus Academy Women football team defeated Fatayat Al-Oyoun 1-0 during their seventh round match of the Women's Football League and topped the table with 15 points while Al-Oyoun remained with 11

points in second place. Meanwhile, Gulf University team defeated Tadamon 2-0 and moved to fourth place with 9 points while Tadamon remains in fifth with 7 points. Schools Association team defeated Salwa Al-Sabah team 4-0 - remaining in third place with 10 points while Salwa Al-Sabah team grabbed last with 6 points only.



Chelsea withdraw 'bizarre' request

LONDON: Chelsea have withdrawn their request for their FA Cup quarter-final against Middlesbrough to be played behind closed doors following "constructive talks", a spokesman for the Football Association said on Tuesday. The Premier League club said hours earlier they wanted Saturday's game at the Riverside played in an empty stadium after the British government blocked them from making new ticket sales, with only existing ticket holders allowed to attend matches.

The Blues have pushed ministers for relaxations to the strict operating licence put in place after Russian owner Roman Abramovich was sanctioned last week as part of a set of punitive measures following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The licence is designed to prevent Chelsea and by extension their billionaire owner-described by the government as part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle-from generating new revenue. The club issued a statement on Tuesday calling for the FA Cup sixth-round tie to be played behind closed doors in the interests of fairness and "sporting integrity". But the Championship club hit back with a strong statement of their own, making a pointed reference to the reasons Chelsea were in their current situation and saying they would resist the club's actions "in the strongest terms".

"We are aware of Chelsea's request to have Saturday's Emirates FA Cup sixth-round tie played behind closed doors and find their suggestion both bizarre and without any merit whatsoever," Middlesbrough said in their statement. "Given the reasons for these sanctions, for Chelsea to seek to invoke sporting 'integrity' as reason for the game being played behind closed doors is ironic in the extreme," it added. Chelsea Supporters' Trust said it had asked the club to withdraw their request, while the government saw "no reason" why the match should be played without fans. The FA later confirmed the match would take place in front of supporters as planned. "After constructive talks between the FA and Chelsea, the club has agreed to remove their request for the Emirates FA Cup quarter-final tie against Middlesbrough to be played behind closed doors," a spokesman tweeted.—AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

| | | | |
|---------------------------|------------|---------------------|----------|
| Sabah Hospital | 24812000 | Khalidiya | 24848075 |
| Amiri Hospital | 22450005 | Kaifan | 24849807 |
| Maternity Hospital | 24843100 | Shamiya | 24848913 |
| Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital | 25312700 | Shuwaikh | 24814507 |
| Chest Hospital | 24849400 | Abdullah Salem | 22549134 |
| Farwaniya Hospital | 24892010 | Nuzha | 22526804 |
| Adan Hospital | 23940620 | Industrial Shuwaikh | 24814764 |
| Ibn Sina Hospital | 24840300 | Qadsiya | 22515088 |
| Al-Razi Hospital | 24846000 | Dasmah | 22532265 |
| Physiotherapy Hospital | 24874330/9 | Bneid Al-Gar | 22531908 |
| | | Shaab | 22518752 |
| | | Qibla | 22459381 |
| | | Ayoun Al-Qibla | 22451082 |
| | | Mirqab | 22456536 |
| | | Sharq | 22465401 |
| | | Salmiya | 25746401 |

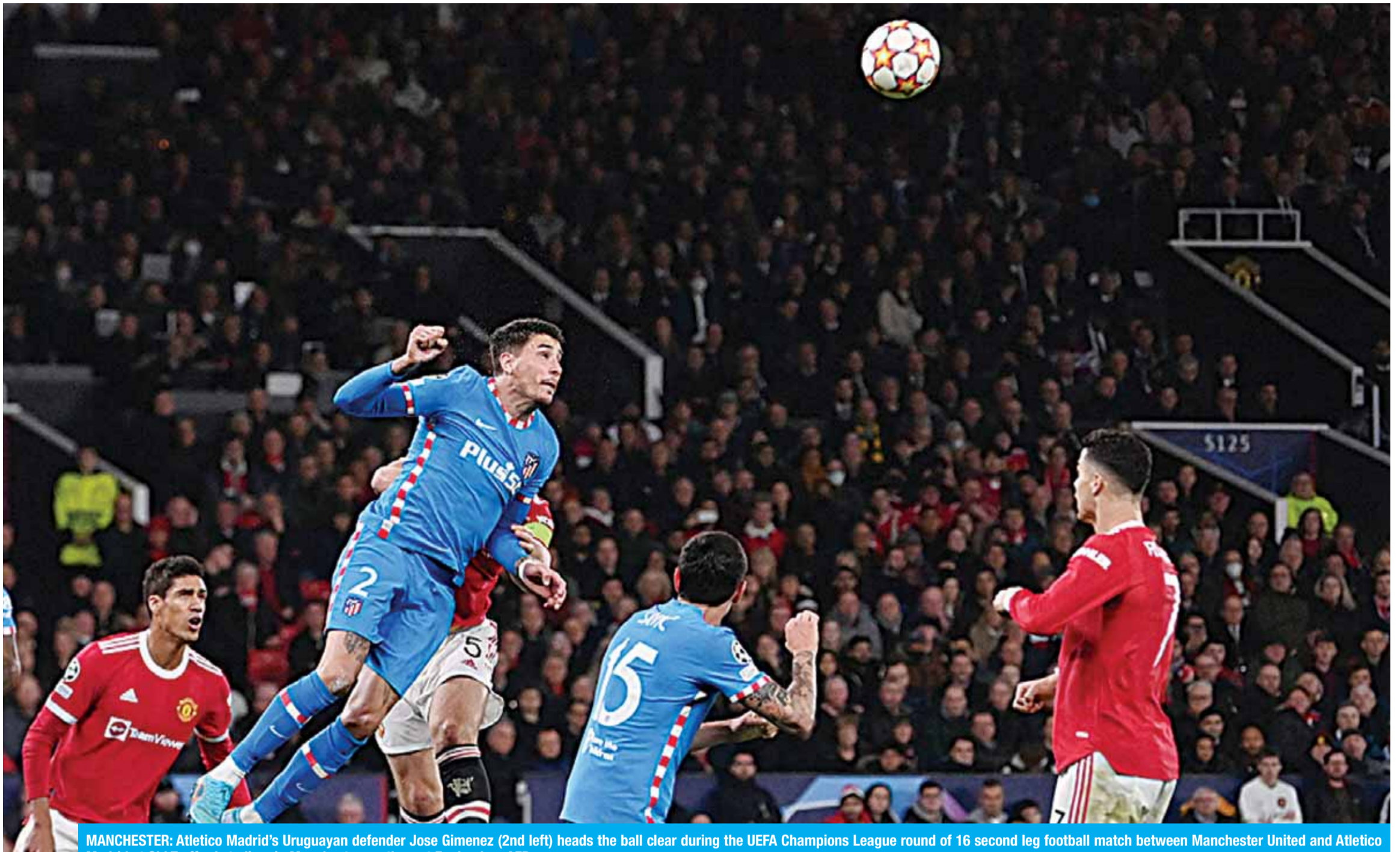
Clinics

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| Kaizen center | 25716707 |
| Rawda | 22517733 |
| Adaliya | 22517144 |

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

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MANCHESTER: Atletico Madrid's Uruguayan defender Jose Gimenez (2nd left) heads the ball clear during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match between Manchester United and Atletico Madrid at Old Trafford stadium in Manchester, north west England. —AFP

United bow out of Champions League

Champions League exit rounds off miserable Man Utd season

MANCHESTER: "We are not good enough," admitted Manchester United goalkeeper David de Gea when faced with the fact the Red Devils will now go five years without winning a trophy. A limp 1-0 home defeat to Atletico Madrid on Tuesday saw United bow out of the Champions League at the last 16 and the final chance of silverware from a miserable season slip away.

The despondent reaction to the full-time whistle as Atletico boss Diego Simeone sprinted down the Old Trafford touchline in celebration was in stark contrast to the jubilation that greeted Cristiano Ronaldo's homecoming for a 4-1 win over Newcastle in September. Ronaldo's return to the club where he first made his name as a global superstar was supposed to be the difference maker in the bid to challenge again for major trophies.

After finishing second to Manchester City in the Premier League last season, Jadon Sancho and Raphael Varane had already been signed for in excess of £100 million by the time Ronaldo snubbed the advances of City in the final days of August. Rather than a return of the glory days Ronaldo experienced under Alex Ferguson prior to his then world record move to Real Madrid in 2009, he has succumbed to the slide United have been on ever since Ferguson departed as manager in 2013.

Interim boss Ralf Rangnick is United's fifth manager since the legendary Scot stepped aside with the club that used to boast about being the best in the world, now being left behind by local rivals Manchester City and Liverpool. Since Ferguson led United to a third Champions League final in four years in 2011, they have spent £1.2 bil-

lion on players for a return of winning just two knockout ties in European club football's top competition.

For the fifth consecutive year, United's European season was ended by Spanish opposition. But this version of Atletico are a far cry from the sides that reached two finals in three years between 2014 and 2016 only to be foiled by Ronaldo's Real Madrid. Just like United in the Premier League, Simeone's men face a battle in the final months of the La Liga season just to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Yet, they held out with ease after Renan Lodi rounded off a well-worked counter-attack to open the scoring four minutes before half-time. "We were fully aware that against this team you need to score the first goal yourself," said Rangnick, fully aware of his own side's

limitations. Ronaldo had consistently been the scourge of Atletico in the Champions League in years gone by - also scoring hat-tricks to knock them out for Real in 2017 and Juventus at this stage in 2019.

However, the competition's all-time record goalscorer has now bowed out in the last 16 for the past three years. The 37-year-old has finally started to show his age in recent months and for the first time he completed 90 minutes in the Champions League without registering a shot. Whether Ronaldo stays for the second year of his contract at United will depend heavily on if they make it into the Champions League next season. Yet, cutting their losses looks like the best solution for both parties as United face up to another expensive and extensive rebuild under a new manager. —AFP

Benfica stun Ajax, book Champions League quarters

AMSTERDAM: Darwin Nunez headed home in the 77th minute as Benfica stunned Ajax to reach the Champions League quarter-finals on Tuesday, winning the second leg of their last-16 tie 1-0 in Amsterdam to advance 3-2 on aggregate. The Portuguese side had not managed a single attempt on target until Uruguayan striker Nunez beat goalkeeper Andre Onana to Alex Grimaldo's free-kick and headed in to silence the Johan Cruyff Arena. Ajax, who had dominated the first half, could not recover from that blow and go out while two-time European Cup winners Benfica look forward to Friday's draw for the quarter-finals.

Having sent Barcelona packing in the group stage, they will now appear in the last eight for the first time since 2016. "We are among the eight best teams in Europe. The team worked so hard to achieve this against really difficult opponents," said Benfica coach Nelson Verissimo. Ajax's star striker, Sebastien Haller, had been hoping to score in an eighth consecutive Champions League game this season having netted a remarkable 11 goals in his first seven appearances in the competition.

Yet he was upstaged by the 22-year-old Nunez as Benfica's own prolific forward found the target for the 26th time in all competitions since the start of the campaign. "We were not good enough in either box. We should have scored but didn't take our chances and then we conceded an avoidable goal," French-born Ivory Coast international Haller told broadcaster Canal Plus. "It was the



AMSTERDAM: Benfica's Argentine defender Nicolas Otamendi (right) and Ajax Amsterdam's Dutch midfielder Daley Blind go for a header during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match on March 15, 2022. —AFP

perfect game for them. We leave with regrets but unfortunately that is football. The team who dominate do not always win. We just have to learn from our mistakes."

A swashbuckling Ajax side had won all six games in the group stage before twice leading against Benfica in the first leg in Lisbon only to have to settle for a 2-2 draw. Haller, who has 32 goals in total this season, had scored at both ends in that game and he had the ball in the net in the seventh minute here only for the effort to be ruled out because Dusan Tadic was flagged offside in the build-up.

Erik ten Hag's prolific side, who are top of the Dutch Eredivisie, looked at their best in the first half but could not find a way through as Steven Berghuis blasted over on the volley from just inside the box. Ryan Gravenberch then unleashed a superb shot that was tipped over by Benfica goalkeeper Odiseas Vlachodimos, and they did not look as threatening in the second half. Instead they found themselves behind for the first time in the tie as Nunez struck, and a Benfica team who lie third in the Portuguese league, 12 points behind leaders Porto, held on to join the cream of Europe's elite in the last eight. —AFP

'Scrapy' England beat India to keep WCup hopes alive

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: England skittled India to keep their faltering Women's Cricket World Cup defense alive yesterday, but not before a brittle batting display chasing a small target produced some nervous moments. In a must-win match after three successive defeats, England dismissed India for 134 in 36.2 overs at Mount Maunganui as spinner Charlie Dean took a career-best 4-23.

The four-time champions made a poor start to the run chase and were two wickets down with just four runs on the board before overhauling their 135 target with more than 18 overs to spare. "It's a relief to be honest, we just needed that," said captain Heather Knight, who top scored for her side with an unbeaten 53 in England's 136-6 in 31.2 overs.

"It was a bit scrapy in the end, a few more wickets than we'd like, but hopefully it's the start of a momentum shift." England's campaign remains on a knife-edge and they must win their remaining pool games against New Zealand, Pakistan and Bangladesh to avoid an early exit. India have two wins from four matches, putting them level with New Zealand and the West Indies on points in the race for the semi-finals.

England's decision to bowl after winning the toss paid dividends when Anya Shrubsole sent Yastika Bhatia on her way for eight and Mithali Raj for one. Raj's dismissal involved a sharply taken catch from Sophia Dunkley, lifting the spirits of an England team that has been plagued by poor fielding at this year's tournament. There was a further bonus for England when Deepti Sharma was run out for a duck attempting a reckless single, leaving India at 28-3 after eight overs.

That brought together Smriti Mandhana and Harmanpreet Kaur, who both scored centuries and forged a record-breaking 184-run partnership in India's last match against the West Indies on Saturday. There were no such heroics against England as Kaur was dismissed for 14 and Mandhana managed 35 as India slumped to 71-6. Richa Ghosh offered some resistance with 33 but India could only set a modest 135-run target.

England made a disastrous start to the run chase as Tammy Beaumont and Danni Wyatt managed just one run each. It could have been worse, with fast bowler Jhulan Goswami beating Nat Sciver's bat, only for the ball to gently roll off her pads and hit the stumps without dislodging the bails. Sciver was on four at the time and advanced to 45 before hitting an easy catch when trying to lift the run rate. There was a flurry of wickets as England closed in on the total but they finished comfortably. —AFP