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KD 3,000 grant to pensioners in limbo after govt-Assembly row

Finance minister reveals grant to cost KD 589m, benefit 200,000 retirees



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem is seen during a special parliamentary session yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The KD 3,000 grant to pensioners, announced by the government this week, appears to be in doubt after disagreements between MPs and the government regarding a draft law to amend pension legislation. During a special Assembly session yesterday, the government included the grant, covering some 200,000 pensioners and costing KD 589 million, in amendments to the pensions agency law, which called for raising the retirement age by three years.

MPs rejected the amendment and following several hours of debate, they passed a recommendation calling on the government to separate the grant from the legislative amendments. The government is unlikely to accept this recommendation, which threatens the grant.

The move came following heated debate between MPs and the government, which wanted to raise the retirement age to 65 for men in exchange for the grant. Under the proposed amendments, the government also pledged to increase pensions by KD 20 every year. The Assembly decided to send those amendments

back to the concerned parliamentary committees to discuss them.

During the debate in the special session, MPs proposed that the KD 3,000 grant for pensioners be made annually, while some lawmakers said the amount is too small considering the huge profits posted by the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS), the state-run pension agency, estimated at KD 7 billion.

Finance Minister Abdulwahab Al-Rasheed said that the profits made by PIFSS are real, but most of them are due to a rise in the value of assets, adding it is not wise to liquidate assets to pay grants. The minister warned that without gradually increasing the retirement age, it is possible that PIFSS may not be able to pay pensions after a few years.

The minister said that it is not justifiable legally, constitutionally and morally to make a public establishment pay profits while it is facing an acute actuarial deficit and the government is transferring KD 500 million yearly to pay the shortfall. Rasheed said the cost of the KD 3,000 grant is KD 589 million, benefitting close to 200,000 pensioners. The minister insisted that amendments call to gradually raise the retirement age of government employees

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News in brief

Entry visas valid for 3 months

KUWAIT: The General Administration of Residency Affairs announced entry visas will be issued with a validity of three months from Sunday, March 20, 2022.

Ardiya suspect kills self in jail

KUWAIT: An Indian man arrested in connection with the recent killing of a Kuwaiti couple and their daughter in Ardiya died by suicide at the Central Jail where he was being held late Wednesday.

UAE cargo ship sinks off Iran

TEHRAN: An Emirati cargo ship sank in Gulf waters off Iran, triggering a search and rescue operation in heavy seas yesterday which recovered all but one of its 30 crew. The search was continuing for the final missing crewmember with two rescue vessels combing the waters. State media reported that the vessel - a car transporter - had capsized in heavy winds off the Iranian port of Asalouyeh. MarineTraffic, an online tracking service, identified the ship as the "Al Salmi 6". — AFP



An Emirati cargo ship sinks nearly 50 km from the port of Asalouyeh in southern Iran yesterday. — AFP

Netflix tests fee to share accounts

SAN FRANCISCO: Netflix on Wednesday said it is testing charging a fee to subscribers who share their accounts with people who don't live in their homes. In the coming weeks, Netflix will begin offering subscribers in Chile, Costa Rica and Peru the option to add as many as two people to "sub-accounts" at a monthly fee of \$2 to \$3. Netflix said it will allow people already sharing accounts to transfer profile and viewing history information to new sub-accounts. — AFP

British-Iranians reunited with family in UK

LONDON: Two British-Iranians imprisoned for years in Iran were reunited with their families in the early hours yesterday, tears of joy and long hugs marking the culmination of years of campaigning and earlier false hopes. Their release on Wednesday came as the British government confirmed it had paid a longstanding debt over a cancelled defense contract, and as major powers inch closer to renewing the Iran nuclear deal in Vienna.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 43, a project manager for the Thomson Reuters Foundation, and 67-year-old engineer Anoosheh Ashoori touched down at RAF Brize Norton in southwest England just after

01:00 am (0100 GMT), following a stopover in Oman. Both appeared relaxed, smiling and waving briefly at the cameras before heading towards the building where their families were waiting.

As they stepped out of the plane, Zaghari-Ratcliffe's seven-year-old daughter Gabriella could be heard asking "Is that mummy?" and then shouting "Mummy!" as she recognized her, a live video showed. The footage, posted on Instagram by Ashoori's daughter Erika, streamed the two families' first meeting after years of enforced separation - Zaghari-Ratcliffe has been detained since 2016, and Ashoori since 2017.

Gabriella ran towards her mother as the released pair entered the room, and loud sobbing could be heard as the families kissed and held each other. "Do I smell nice?" Zaghari-Ratcliffe, clinging to her daughter, asked in mock surprise. "I haven't had a shower in 24 hours!" The project manager worked for the philanthropic arm of the Thomson Reuters

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BRIZE NORTON, England: Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori, who were freed from Iran, gesture after landing yesterday. — AFP

Tunisians snub poll on reforms as crisis bites

TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied, who last year grabbed power in what critics labelled a coup, has now asked voters for their political views - but days before the online poll closes, fewer than six percent had taken part. Most people in the small

North African country are more concerned with food shortages, unemployment and financial woes than in joining in the process to help rewrite the constitution.

The online questionnaire was launched in January, more than half a year after Saied sacked the government, froze parliament and seized near-total power in a decisive blow against the country's political elite. The results are to be presented to a committee of experts - handpicked by Saied - who will then draft a new constitution ahead of a referendum in July.

But with just days to go until the portal closes on

Sunday evening, only 412,000 people - under six percent of the seven-million-strong electorate - had taken part. "It's clear that there's a lack of interest in this consultation," said analyst Hamza Meddeb. "The timing wasn't well thought-out." Saied's July power grab abruptly suspended the mixed presidential-parliamentary system enshrined in Tunisia's 2014 constitution, a hard-won compromise between rival ideological camps reached three years after a revolt toppled dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Tunisia has often been praised abroad as the only democracy to emerge from the Arab Spring uprisings.

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War in Ukraine wheat belt hits Egypt pockets

CAIRO: Soaring bread prices sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine have bitten into the purchasing power of consumers in Egypt, a leading importer of wheat from the former Soviet states. For the first time since he took office, President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi on Tuesday ordered a price cap on unsubsidized bread after the cost of the Egyptian staple rose by as much as 50 percent.

The move is designed to cushion the invasion's impact on a country where, according to Michael Tanchum of the Middle East Institute, "keeping

the price of Egypt's staple food affordable has been the bedrock of regime stability" for 60 years. A fortnight ago, 1,500 Egyptian pounds (\$95) was enough for Shaimaa Mohamed to buy a month's worth of groceries. Now, the mother of three says it is barely enough for two weeks.

Mohamed warned her children that the family would have to tighten its purse strings after a kilogram of rice went from eight to 12 pounds seemingly overnight. "I was in the same store 15 days ago, and today for the same price I have only filled half of my shopping cart. What happened?" she said. The answer lies thousands of kilometers away in Ukraine, once known as "the bread basket of Europe". Russia invaded its neighbor on Feb 24, causing the price of grain, oil and other essential commodities to climb worldwide.

Continued on Page 2



CAIRO: An Egyptian man works in a bakery at a market yesterday. — AFP

Local

Central Bank of Kuwait raises discount rate to 1.75 percent

CBK decides to change the rates of monetary policy instruments

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has announced raising the discount rate from 1.50 percent to 1.75 percent. A CBK press release said as part of the Bank's vigilant monitoring of domestic and international economic and geopolitical developments in addition to monetary policy trends in the global economies, as well as in light of the Federal Reserve's decision passed in its meeting held on 15-16 March 2022 to raise the dollar interest rate by 0.25 percent.

The CBK Board of Directors decided to raise the discount rate by 0.25 percent from 1.50 percent to 1.75 percent effective from yesterday. Furthermore, the CBK decided to change the rates of monetary policy instruments by varying percentages for the entire interest rate yield curve, up to the 10-year term. This includes repurchases (Repo), CBK bonds and tawarruq, term deposits, direct intervention instruments, as well as public debt instruments.

In this regard, Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel said that by raising the discount rate, CBK strives to maintain an environment conducive to sustainable economic growth considerate of inflation rates, and affirm the attractiveness of the Kuwaiti

Dinar as a lucrative and reliable store for domestic savings, being a mainstay of monetary policy.

The Governor added, the decisions taken by the Central Bank of Kuwait, whether around changes to the discount rate (raising or cutting) or regulating liquidity in the banking sector through the various instruments to maintain monetary and financial stability are informed by thorough assessments of the latest local and global economic data. This data includes economic performance indicators such as economic growth and inflation rates, local liquidity levels, developments in deposits, and interest rates for the Kuwaiti Dinar and main foreign currencies, and forecasted trends that could impact the national economy.

To ensure a prudent monetary policy, the CBK utilizes advanced analytical and forecasting models to determine the current and future economic state, capable of incorporating various economic indicators and their complexities and interdependencies. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the CBK had adopted an accommodative monetary policy and reduced the key discount rate twice by 125 bps to a historical low of 1.50 percent.



KUWAIT: Photo shows Central Bank of Kuwait building in Kuwait City.

PAM, Sierra Leone Embassy ink MoU

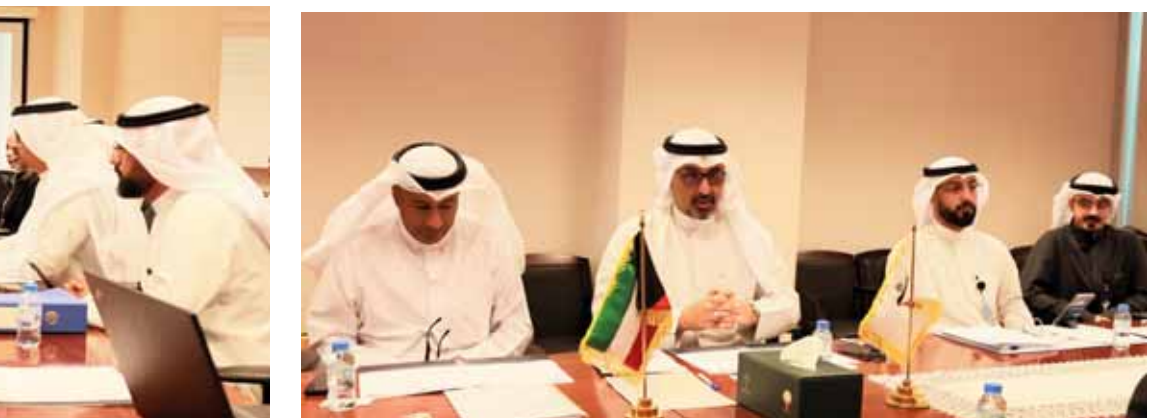
By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Embassy of Sierra Leone on recruiting private sector and domestic workers during a meeting held yesterday. PAM plans to open channels for recruiting workers from new countries and increase the number of countries from which Kuwait recruits laborers for both the private and domestic sectors.

The meeting concluded with drafting the final form of the bilateral agreement on the procedures



that will be taken to realize this agreement. PAM was represented by Director of International Relations



Jaber Al-Ali, Director of the Recruiting Department Naser Al-Musawi, legal researcher Abdulaziz

Mohammed and other officials. Sierra Leone was represented by officials from the embassy.

War in Ukraine wheat belt hits...

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"In Egypt, prices of wheat and sunflower oil have escalated due to Egypt's reliance on Russia and Ukraine for 85 percent of its wheat supply and 73 percent of its sunflower oil," the UN's International Fund for Agricultural Development said yesterday. Per capita bread consumption in the country is almost 130 kg per year, well above the world average, according to official figures.

The North African country's popular flatbread, which has increased from one pound to 1.25 per loaf, is considered a litmus test for the economy. Concerns have heightened as Egypt - a country where a third of the 103 million-strong population lives in poverty - gears up for Ramadan, which begins in April. Consumption usually rises as households stock up for the month, but with inflation at a three-year high of 10 percent in February, the situation is looking bleak in the final weeks before the country's Muslims start fasting.

Bankers JPMorgan have stirred talk of an anticipated devaluation of the Egyptian pound, which would be the second within six years. Egypt's poor and working class shouldered the burden in 2016, when a slate of austerity measures - including a 50

percent currency devaluation and subsidy cuts - were enforced to secure a three-year, \$12-billion bailout loan from the International Monetary Fund. Food insecurity in Egypt poses "an existential threat to its economy", according to the Middle East Institute.

In efforts to mitigate the shock of the ongoing crisis, the government announced last week a \$1 billion increase to the state's wheat provision bill. Of the state's \$5.5 billion budget for food subsidies, 57 percent is dedicated to bread, and 70 percent of Egyptians depend on this. On Tuesday, Sisi directed the government to set a cap on the price of unsubsidized bread, after private bakeries hiked prices by as much as 50 percent last week.

Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli lectured traders last week, calling on them "not to exploit the situation", while asking Egyptians "to ration their consumption to limit the recourse to world markets" where prices are skyrocketing. State media says authorities have seized thousands of tons of goods, launched legal proceedings against dozens of traders and shut down businesses for allegedly manipulating prices in recent days.

Businesses are not the only reason prices are going up, according to Islam Mohamed, marketing manager at a food import company. "The cost of transporting and unloading cargo from Europe has gone up 30 percent because of the price of oil," he told AFP. "That will be reflected in consumer prices." In his affluent neighborhood on Cairo's western outskirts, "some people suggested boycotting the bakeries that raised the price of bread", the 34-year-old told AFP. — AFP

negotiations". Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said Wednesday that Iran had received the money but that it was "wrong to link Iran receiving its debt... to the release of these people". Truss said the money can only be used for humanitarian goods.

The pair's release also comes 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 nuclear program, and Tehran on Wednesday said that "two issues" remain with the US to restore the deal.

Before her return, Zaghari-Ratcliffe's husband, Richard Ratcliffe, who has twice gone on hunger strike to highlight his wife's plight, told AFP "the first thing she wanted was for me to make her a cup of tea". "I'm relieved that the problems were solved," he said, adding that the government should make sure "it doesn't happen again". Ashoori's family said their "family's foundations were rocked" when he had been detained. "Now, we can look forward to rebuilding those same foundations with our cornerstone back in place," they said in a statement. — AFP

and 35 years for men.

A majority of lawmakers categorically rejected this amendment, saying this will be another way of taking back the grant and other benefits. MP Hasan Jowhar said Kuwait has assets worth \$800 billion invested overseas, adding that Kuwait should learn from the Russian example by investing more locally and helping citizens.

Several MPs insisted that the government is giving the grant to pensioners with one hand and taking away benefits from employees with the other. MP Saud Al-Mutairi said "the real problem is giving a grant to a section of people and making another section pay for it. We are before a landmine".

Russia TV protester quits channel, turns down asylum offer

PARIS: A Russian editor who protested Moscow's military action in Ukraine during a state TV news broadcast said yesterday she is quitting her job but not accepting France's asylum offer, calling herself "a patriot". Marina Ovsyannikova, an editor at Channel One television, barged onto the set of its flagship Vremya (Time) evening news on Monday, holding a poster reading "No War."

She was detained and a Moscow court rapidly fined her 30,000 rubles (260 euros). But despite being freed she could face further prosecution, risking years in prison under draconian new laws. She told France 24 television from Moscow on Thursday that she had "handed in all the documents" for her resignation from Channel One. "It's a legal procedure," she said.

Ovsyannikova, who has two young children, said she had "broken the life of our family with this gesture," with her son in particular showing anxiety. "But we need to put an end to this fratricidal war so this madness does not turn into nuclear war. I hope when my son is older he will understand why I did this," she said.

French President Emmanuel Macron had offered earlier this week asylum or other forms of consular protection to Ovsyannikova, saying he would bring up her case with Russian leader Vladimir Putin. But Ovsyannikova told Germany's Der Spiegel in an interview published yesterday that she would not take up his offer and would stay in Russia.

"I don't want to leave our country. I am a patriot,



Marina Ovsyannikova

my son is even more so. We don't want to leave in any way, we don't want to go anywhere," she said. She told Der Spiegel that she had prepared her action alone but indicated she believed many colleagues privately sympathized with her. "Most people who work for state television understand very well what is going on. They know only too well that they are doing something wrong," she said.

She told France 24 that some of her colleagues had resigned but that many were unable to even if they wished. "I am happy that people handed in their notice but the economic situation is very hard and people find it very hard to stop their work," she said.

Press freedom activists outside Russia accuse its state television of painting a severely distorted picture of the war in a bid to maintain support for what the Kremlin calls a "special military operation". Ovsyannikova's prime-time on-air message in Russian read: "Stop the war. Don't believe propaganda. They are lying to you here." — AFP

British-Iranians reunited with...

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news and data agency and was arrested in Tehran on a visit to family in 2016, accused of plotting to overthrow the regime.

Ashoori, a retired engineer from southeast London, was arrested in 2017 and jailed for 10 years on charges of spying for the Zionist entity. Both families believe they were being held as political prisoners until a debt between Britain and Iran 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.

But soon after the release was announced, British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss confirmed that London and Tehran had resolved the £394-million (\$515-million) issue "after highly complex and exhaustive

KD 3,000 grant to pensioners in...

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by three years starting from 2024, adding that even after that, the retirement age in Kuwait will be the lowest in Gulf countries. He added that employees can still avail of the benefit of early retirement after serving for 30 years for women

Tunisians snub poll on reforms...

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But many Tunisians have long become disillusioned with a political class seen as corrupt and incompetent, meaning Saied's move initially sparked a wave of support. Meddeb believes that if the consultation had taken place immediately, participation could have been much higher. But seven months on, he said, "the president has shown that he didn't have a project or a program to improve Tunisians' daily lives".

In the streets of Tunis, few people seem interested in the exercise. Saied "just wants to use the public to achieve his own goals", said shop-owner Safia. Her colleague Hassen agreed. "People are sinking into poverty and despair and Saied keeps telling us about the political regime," he said. "We're really tired."

Tunisia is locked in a grinding economic crisis which began long before the coronavirus pandemic sparked mass job losses and the war in Ukraine threatened to exacerbate shortages of basic goods. Years of high unemployment and inflation have left many families struggling to get by - and with little interest in high politics. As the consultation draws to a close, stalls have appeared in Tunis to encourage citizens to do their "national duty" and fill in the form, which covers politics, the economy, social

problems, health and other issues.

Saied also ordered Prime Minister Najla Bouden to make internet access free for the final 10 days of the consultation finishing on March 20. Sarra, a 32-year-old civil servant, said it was "good to try and gather people's opinions then put the necessary reforms in place". But many other Tunisians are skeptical.

"People are dying of hunger but all they care about is the consultation," one wrote online. Some asked by AFP said they were not even aware of the exercise - despite an information campaign on national television, even during religious programs. "They should have come and looked for us on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter," said student Wajdi.

Saied, accused by his rivals of wanting to bring autocracy back to Tunisia, has made no secret of wanting to install a more presidential regime. The Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party and several other political blocs have called for a boycott of the consultation. Ennahdha's archenemy, staunchly anti-Islamist lawyer and Free Destourian Party chief Abir Moussi, has also accused Saied of using state resources for his personal political project.

The exercise has received little support from civil society groups. Meddeb said the president had "not built a coalition" to bring his project to fruition. "Kais Saied doesn't represent change any more, he's just busy opening new fronts" against his political rivals, he said. "He moves forward alone, maps out his route alone and is deciding the fate of the country alone." —AFP

Local

Kuwait, GCC and US conduct military drills in Colorado

Drill simulate air threats, missile attacks, airspace operations



KUWAIT: The military exercises (Eagle Resolve 2022) concluded at (Fort Carson) base in the US state of Colorado, under the guidance of Kuwait Army, and with participation of GCC States, USA and friendly countries. In a statement, Kuwait Defense Ministry said yesterday, that the two-week exercise aimed to enhance regional defense cooperation between the GCC countries and other friendly countries.

The drill included a command center exercise (CPX) based on scenarios that simulate air threats, missile attacks, air-

space and border protection operations, in addition to counterterrorism operations, crisis and disaster management, the statement added. On the sidelines of the exercise, a symposium for senior officials was held under the title: (Integrated Air and Missile Defense), in participation with the Kuwaiti delegation headed by Assistant Commandant of the Air Defense Force, Brigadier General Khaled Al-Shariaan and the presence of a number of senior military leaders and officers from the GCC countries, the US Central Command, and lecturers from various

civilian bodies.

On his part, Commander of the Joint Duty Force of the exercise (Eagles Resolve 2022), Brigadier General Mubarak Al-Zoubi affirmed that the drill achieved its goals of exchanging and acquiring experiences, unifying concepts and visions on enhancing integration in air and missile defense, coordinating efforts to combat terrorist operations and the safety of population and infrastructure.

Brig Gen Al-Zoubi referred to the development of the coordination and cooperation level among ministries, insti-

tutions and government departments in crisis management, and supporting the military and security operations, raising combat readiness to confront challenges and threats at the local and regional levels.

This exercise, in its fifteenth edition, is part of a series of exercises. It was hosted by the State of Kuwait, in its thirteenth edition in 2015 and the fourteenth in 2017, with the participation of various ministries and state institutions related to military and security operations and concerned with crisis and disaster management. —KUNA



MOI, KEPS boost ties

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Anwar Al-Barjas met Dr Wijdan Al-Iqab, Head of Kuwait Environment Protection Society, to strengthen cooperation and partnership between the MoI and KEPS. This includes producing a series of documentaries on the wildlife of Kuwait as part of activating the cooperation protocol between the two parties. These

awareness and environmental projects will improve Kuwait's wildlife. Dr Iqab praised the cooperation of all sectors of the MoI that provide all kinds of logistical support for KEPS's team, which is working on the eighth edition of a TV series documenting wildlife in Kuwait, which will be aired during the holy month of Ramadan.

"The Interior Ministry is the main partner of KEPS. Various departments including traffic, operations, public security, land borders, public relations and security media, along with the environment police, are providing great logistical support including issuing the necessary entry and photography permissions inside border areas that are rich in wildlife, in addition to providing protection to our working team," stressed Iqab.

Chairman of Petrochemicals Industries Company resigns

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of Qurain Petrochemicals Industries Company Sheikh Mubarak Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah resigned his post following the announcement by Kuwait projects company (KIPCO) and Qurain petrochemicals industries about a preliminary agreement to merge. Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah was Chairman of Qurain since it was founded - over 15 years, and was one of the company's success

pillars as chairman.

The company witnessed a record development and became a landmark in the private sector and in the state, next to the prestigious companies in Kuwait Bourse. Informed sources said the resignation was due to his reservations towards the takeover in which there will be so much harm to small shareholders in Qurain Petrochemical Industries Company.



Sheikh Mubarak Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah

Kuwait's oil gains \$2.63

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil gained \$2.63 during trading sessions to reach \$105.05 per barrel (pb) as opposed to \$102.42 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Benchmark Brent futures dropped \$1.89 to \$98.02 pb and West Texas Intermediate lost \$1.40 to close at \$95.04 pb. Meanwhile, the price for OPEC's daily basket of crude went up by \$1.20 to \$104.06 pb on

Wednesday, compared with \$102.86 pb Tuesday, the cartel said.

The monthly average for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' basket of crude General 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



KUWAIT: A handout photo released by the official Kuwaiti News Agency shows the Al-Ahmadi refinery south of Kuwait City.

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OPEC, EU discuss energy situation

BRUSSELS: European Union Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson had an online conversation with OPEC Secretary General Mohammad Sanusi Barkindo, her spokesperson Tim McPhie told a news conference in Brussels yesterday. Replying to a question by the Kuwait news agency, KUNA, McPhie said, 'The conversation is in the context of the global challenges that we face on the energy markets.' In recent weeks there have been coordinated release of oil stocks with a number of international partners to try and get an ease on the pressure of prices in the markets. So that was the context of the conversation,' he said. Asked if the EU Energy Commissioner was planning to visit the Gulf region soon, he replied, 'I don't have anything at the moment to confirm in terms of upcoming visit to the Gulf region'. — KUNA

KFH concludes eventful national days program

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) concluded its integrated national days program which has comprised various activities and events for the customers and the public in its campaign "Kuwait is Precious Forever". KFH has also launched the national days TVC which has gathered record number of views on day one of its launch. KFH organized a series of events, namely the national days related event (Morouj) to share with the customers and the public the joy of national days festivals. KFH presented several valuable prizes during the competitions held for the public including all segments and ages. Several media representatives were present to cover the event which has tremendously attracted the interest of the public.

Kuwaiti Heritage

KFH pavilion witnessed remarkable attendance by the public as it comprised various activities. It hosted officials from (Sadu House) society who have given live courses to the public on the most significant hobbies and handicrafts related to the genuine Kuwaiti heritage e.g., weaving ...etc. Activities included also the national campaign launched by KFH recently in celebration of the national days titled "Kuwait is Precious Forever".

25,000 visitors

KFH events during national days were not focused in one location. In fact, other events were also held in different locations e.g., PRO-TRUCK event in which KFH played as a strategic partner for the third year consecutively. The event was held in Benaidar area amidst a huge public attendance which comprised more than 25 thousand visitors. The event also included the participation of more than 55 enterprises covering international restaurants and cafes and Kuwaiti youth projects. KFH participation in these events depicts its keenness to support the Kuwaiti youth segment which is one of the bank's priorities. KFH has launched several initiatives including "Support Kuwaiti Youth businesses" initiative which

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) concludes its National and Liberation Day celebrations. In order to honor our country and display our pride, ABK held a broad range of internal and external initiatives. An important part of ABK's campaign was the creation of the festive song entitled 'Omri Lahli' with acclaimed Kuwaiti artist Essa Al Marzouq. Kuwait has enriched the lives of so many and has provided infinite opportunities to people from all walks of life.

In order to capture the spirit of the nation and to show our devotion, ABK prepared an internal commemorative plan where employees partook in the celebrations with each other and with customers across the Bank's multiple branch network that is spread across Kuwait. Commenting on the internal program of events, Loai Muqames, CEO of ABK - Kuwait said, "ABK's branch network and various departments proudly participated in a competition entitled "Best Creative Design" where they decorated their respective branches and units.

We were impressed and thrilled with their creativity, and our customers responded positively to the decorations and the staff's enthusiasm. It was very difficult to pick winners amongst such creativity, but six winners were selected and they received cash prizes." The winners of the Branch decoration competition are as follows: first place went to Al Shaab branch, second place



went to Al Jahra 1 branch, and third place went to Al Adnan branch.

The winners of the Division/Unit decoration competition are as follow: first place went to the Retail Banking Division, second place went to the Human Resources Division, and third place went to the Call Center In order to further celebrate with the people of Kuwait and to leave a lasting legacy, ABK released what has become a widely popular song. Regarding the song, Muqames said, "As ABK was deciding to create a song, we wanted to ensure we included the youth of Kuwait and to highlight their rich talents.

The aim of the song was to truly encapsulate the spirit of Kuwait through the portrayal of the themes of unity, solidarity and cohesion. It encompassed a fusion

of traditional and modern Kuwait and the production was inspired by today's youth. To show the diversity of Kuwait, the song was filmed in scenic locations across the country. To ensure all of ABK's employees felt the spirit of the celebrations, the 'Omri Lahli' song was played at the Head Office and staff were presented with Kuwait-themed giveaways."

In conclusion, Muqames said, "I would like to extend my gratitude to the ABK team that drove the success of 'Omri Lahli'. The song was released on ABK's social media channels and has garnered an impressive 1.6+ million views and remains an everlasting gift to our country. I would also like to thank the staff and branch network for their enthusiasm and to congratulate the winners of our campaign."



has started in 2015 and continuing.

Walk challenge

KFH presented, on the national days festival, the virtual walk challenge "V-FIT" in collaboration with the application V-THRU. Participants received valuable prizes after scoring the required number of steps after walking in the same location. Each participant achieving 1000 steps has received a purchase coupon of KD 1/- to use it in the V-THRU application to support Kuwaiti youth businesses participating in the application or participate in the (Kuwait Greening) initiative launched by KFH.

Banking products carrying Kuwait flag

KFH introduced, through its pavilions in various events, one of its products which was launched in February national festivals which carries Kuwait flag (Oasis, Signature - Platinum). The products are eco-friendly manufacturing wise, thus reflecting the inclusiveness of KFH national program in its events and activities in addition to the banking products which it provides to customers. KFH has provided during the event the Mobi Baitak vehicles to facilitate banking services to customers including cash withdrawal and deposit, balance inquiries, change password and other banking services.

'Kuwait is Precious Forever'

The national TVC (Kuwait is Precious Forever) has achieved a record number of views approximating 4 million views on YouTube and other social media. The product has focused, in text and scenes, on enhancing the national identity and maintaining



the heritage as part of the social responsibility and KFH keenness to celebrate national festivals with the society.

Outstanding role in social media

KFH accounts on social media channels played a significant role in the national competitions organized by KFH and which have witnessed remarkable attendance by the public and the distribution of various prizes. Also, KFH organized video series on the national days and illuminated its head office with Kuwait flag. KFH has interacted with the public through its branches which have entertained customers during the national day holidays. Kuwait Food dishes and gifts were distributed.

500 customers benefited

KFH organized the (KFH EXIT) event in Benaidar area. The event achieved remarkable success in presence of a huge audience. The event included competitions and valuable gifts and the participation of more than 10 Kuwaiti businesses including restaurants and cafes. KFH has favored its customers holding MasterCard with exclusive advantages through its pavilion in the event. KFH provided a special discount KD 4 on any project present in the event in collaboration with V-THRU application. Total No. of KFH customers holding MasterCard who have benefited from the discount approximated 500 customers.

Palestinian kids celebrate their tradition and culture



By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Balad Al Khair and Himam Al Shabab Club yesterday organized a community event for Palestinian children (4 to 12 years). The event



Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

showcased cultural performances and exhibition of Palestinian homemade products. "We do organize this event annually but due to COVID-19, we were unable to celebrate it for two years. Now we can celebrate this special day with the

kids," said Noor Arar. "We want to inculcate the sacrifices of our people back home and educate them about the suffering of our people. We want them to know why we have to remember them and put our case in

their hearts and mind," she said. The Palestinian children were treated with various activities from games, sumptuous traditional food, dances, costumes, native craft and skit about Palestine causes back home.



Diplomats voice outrage at Belarus over rights abuses, invasion role

Xi says country will 'stick with' its zero-COVID strategy

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KHARKIV: Black smoke rises into the sky from the Barabashovo market - one of the largest markets in the eastern Europe covering an area of more than 75 hectares - which is reportedly hit by shelling, in Kharkiv yesterday amid the ongoing Russia's invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

Russian strikes kill 21 civilians

Ukraine warns of new 'Wall' between 'freedom and bondage' in Europe

KYIV: Ukraine's leader yesterday charged Moscow with building a new Cold War wall across Europe "between freedom and bondage", as his government said Russian shelling had killed 21 civilians near one city. Three weeks in to their devastating invasion, Russian forces also stood accused of bombing a theatre sheltering many civilians and marked with the word "children".

Kyiv emerged from a 35-hour curfew to its own fresh destruction, as Russian troops try to encircle the Ukrainian capital as part of their slow-moving offensive. Beneath a Kyiv apartment block damaged by a downed rocket, AFP journalists saw a distraught man crouched over a body draped in a bloodstained cloth, after the latest in a series of early-morning attacks. The 21 were killed when overnight artillery fire pounded a school and a cultural centre in the town of Merefa outside the hard-hit eastern city of Kharkiv, regional prosecutors said.

In besieged Mariupol to the south, searchers were combing through the smoking rubble of the Drama Theatre. Ukrainian officials said more than 1,000 civilians had been sheltering in a basement bomb shelter beneath the theatre, and that Russian shelling was continuing. Human Rights Watch said it was at least 500.

'Tear down this wall'

President Volodymyr Zelensky said the "number of dead is not yet known" at the theatre, but the airborne

attack showed "Russia has become a terrorist state". Zelensky addressed the German parliament a day after a speech to the US Congress, when he secured \$1 billion in new US military aid, including Stinger anti-aircraft missiles used against Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

Zelensky reached back to that Cold War era as he drew on a 1987 speech in Berlin by US president Ronald Reagan: "Dear Mr Scholz, tear down this wall," he implored German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. "It's not a Berlin Wall-it is a wall in central Europe between freedom and bondage and this wall is growing bigger with every bomb." In an overnight video message, Zelensky also urged Russians to lay down their arms and abandon an invasion that has drawn swingeing Western sanctions against President Vladimir Putin's regime.

"If your war, the war against the Ukrainian people, continues, Russia's mothers will lose more children than in the Afghan and Chechen wars combined," he said, referencing the thousands lost in those conflicts.

Putin lashes 'traitors'

US President Joe Biden called Putin a "war criminal", triggering fury in the Kremlin, as the Russian leader also lashed out at "scum and traitors" at home who he said were undermining the war effort.

Russia's defense ministry denied it had targeted the theatre in Mariupol, where local officials say more than

launched on February 24. "I knew I had to go there", he says.

'Despair'

On the eve of the invasion Stakhovsky was on holiday in Dubai with his wife and three children aged four, six and eight, having hung up his racquet as a professional player in January after the Australian Open. The next day, after seeing the television images of Russian bombs falling on his homeland, he says he was plunged into a mixture of "despair" and "misery". Much of his family still lived in Ukraine. He spent the next three days at the hotel in a blur as he tried to get information about the situation on the ground, to find shelter for people

"I was full of adrenaline, I slept three or four hours (overall), I didn't eat". He then told his wife he had decided to go back. "My wife was really upset, I mean, she knew, she understood but she was really upset," he said. But "now she understands that I couldn't really do it other way". The heart-breaking decision torments him every time he thinks of his family. "Leaving the kids is not something I'm proud of," he says.

"My kids don't know that I'm here, well, they know that I'm not at home, but they don't know what war is and I'm trying to not get them involved. I told them I'd be right back, it's been 15 days now... And God knows how many more it's going to be". Like all Ukrainian men aged 18 to 60, Stakhovsky is eligible for call-up by the army and cannot leave the country when

Aden governor Ahmed Lamlas said the outbreak of war in 2015 was a "disaster", leaving the city's infrastructure in ruins. "We are still suffering from the impacts of war," said Lamlas, who narrowly escaped a deadly car bomb attack in October. Yemen has a long history of civil war, and was divided into North and South Yemen until 1990. It descended into brutal conflict again when Iran-backed Huthi rebels launched a military campaign to seize power in 2014, taking large swathes of territory including the capital Sanaa in the north.

Saudi intervention

The following year, after a Saudi-led military coalition intervened to support the internationally recognized government, the insurgents were at the

2,000 people have died so far in indiscriminate Chechnya-style shelling. The ministry said the building had been mined and blown up by members of Ukraine's far-right Azov Battalion, a claim dismissed in the West as Russian disinformation. Satellite images of the theatre on March 14 shared by private satellite company Maxar showed the words "children" clearly etched out in the ground in Russian on either side of the building.

Officials posted a photo of the building, its middle part completely destroyed and thick white smoke rising from the ruins. "The only word to describe what has happened today is genocide, genocide of our nation, our Ukrainian people," Mariupol mayor Vadim Boychenko said.

Escaping default

Addressing the Bundestag by video, Zelensky issued a strong rebuke of Germany's years-long reluctance to sever energy and business ties with Russia.

"We turned to you," he said. "We told you that Nord Stream (gas pipelines) was a kind of preparation for the war. "And the answer we got was purely economic-it is economy, economy, economy but that was the mortar for the new wall." The broader economic consequences from the war could cut global growth by "over one percentage point" in the next 12 months, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development said. —AFP



KYIV: Former Ukrainian tennis player Sergiy Stakhovsky walks prior to an interview with AFP journalists at Independence Square in Kyiv. —AFP

the country is at war.

He says that he finds the strength to go because of his countrymen, whom he has seen sign up "in their thousands". "If we don't stand up, we don't have a country to live in," he said.

Federer 'hopes for peace'

The former tennis pro now carries out two patrols a day lasting two hours each to guard the centre of Kyiv from possible infiltrations, particularly around the palace of President Volodymyr Zelensky, the hero of the resistance against Moscow. "Listen, I am here on foot patrolling," he said, adding of Zelensky that he was "remarkably brave and knows what he's doing, and we all believe he knows what he's doing." —AFP

gates of Aden. They held sway for a few months before being pushed out by loyalist forces. Sporadic violence continues to blight the temporary seat of the government, whose troops clashed with southern separatists in 2018-19 before they reached a power-sharing agreement.

Flags of former South Yemen line the streets of Aden, where the separatist Southern Transitional Council has much influence, with checkpoints set up everywhere. As if civil war and a struggle for the city were not enough, Aden has also been targeted by a number of bombings claimed by the Islamic State group. Along the corniche in Aden stands a large portrait of the former governor, Jaafar Saad, who was killed in a car bomb claimed by the jihadist group in 2015. "Aden will not forget you," its message reads. —AFP



FUKUSHIMA PREFECTURE: A priest inspects the collapsed stone lanterns at a shrine in Minamisoma, Fukushima prefecture yesterday following a 7.3-magnitude quake jolted east Japan the night before. —AFP

Powerful quake rocks east Japan

FUKUSHIMA: People in northeast Japan were cleaning up and surveying the damage yesterday after a powerful 7.4-magnitude quake derailed a bullet train, opened cracks in highways and initially cut power to over two million homes. At least one death was directly caused by the overnight quake, government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno said, but the toll is still being finalized after two suspected fatalities were found to be unrelated to the tremor and one remains under investigation.

Matsuno said 161 people had been injured after the undersea quake off the coast of Fukushima—a region still scarred by a 2011 earthquake and tsunami that led to a nuclear catastrophe—rattled large parts of eastern Japan, including the capital Tokyo. A tsunami warning for waves of up to a meter (3.28 feet) in parts of northeast Japan was lifted in the early hours of yesterday, after authorities recorded water levels up to 30 centimeters higher than usual in some areas.

Multiple smaller jolts continued to hit the region, straining nerves just days after Japan marked the 11th anniversary of the massive quake, tsunami and nuclear disaster in the area. Damage appeared comparatively minor, in a country with tough building codes intended to protect against devastation from frequent earthquakes, and officials said there were no abnormalities at nuclear plants. "We've received reports that there are no data irregularities in the Fukushima Daiichi and Daini nuclear plants and the Onagawa nuclear plant," Matsuno said, referring to the facility crippled in 2011 and two others in the region.

The quake struck at a depth of 60 kilometers at 11:36 pm on Wednesday, and was preceded minutes earlier by a 6.1-magnitude shake in the same area, Japan's Meteorological Agency said. "We had two huge earthquakes. The first one was very big and shook hard. I prepared to evacuate, then the second, bigger one hit," a municipal official in the Fukushima city of Soma told AFP. "I was on the second floor of a two-storey house and I couldn't stay standing, it was very extreme."

Power being restored

In Shirosishi city, employees at a supermarket were cleaning up damage including products that toppled from shelves and a partially caved-in ceiling. "This is really ironic. Exactly a year ago, we also had a similar-scale earthquake," store employee Yoshinari Kiwaki said.

"When we felt the tremor last night, we already knew what we would have to work on here in the morning," the 62-year-old added, saying it would take around a month to get the store back in business. Blackouts hit around two million homes in Tokyo and elsewhere in the immediate aftermath of the quake, but power was progressively restored throughout the night. Matsuno said yesterday afternoon that around 2,800 houses in the northeast still had no power, but most should have it restored by the end of the day. —AFP

Federer's Ukrainian conqueror swaps racquet for Kalashnikov

KYIV: In 2013 he achieved one of the great shocks in tennis history, knocking defending champion Roger Federer out of Wimbledon. Today, the Ukrainian player Sergiy Stakhovsky is a volunteer fighter on a military patrol in Kyiv, which he vows to defend "to the end" against Russian forces. Now 36, he looks much the same as the journeyman player ranked 116 in the world who lay stretched out in his tennis whites on the hallowed London turf after toppling Federer in the second round nine years ago.

But his outfit now could not be more different as he patrols Maidan Square, symbol of Ukraine's "fight for democracy", armed with a Kalashnikov, a pistol in his belt and his 1.93 meter (6 ft 4 in) frame dressed in khaki camouflage. "I cannot say that I feel comfortable around a rifle. I am not sure how I am going to react to shooting at somebody," he tells AFP. "I wish I would never have to be preoccupied with these things." It's been just over two weeks since he returned to Ukraine and signed up for the territorial brigade, the volunteers tasked with helping the army against the Russian invasion

'Here there is nothing': Yemen's Aden scarred by grinding war

ADEN: Bullet-riddled homes, buildings turned to rubble and countless pictures of "martyrs": seven years into Yemen's civil war, the interim capital Aden bears the scars of a conflict that shows no signs of abating. While Aden is now relatively stable, economically the ancient port city has been left on its knees. Water and electricity are intermittent, serving a population that officials say has tripled to more than three million, as people seek safety from fighting raging elsewhere.

International

Diplomats voice outrage at Belarus over rights abuses, invasion role

Lukashenko slammed for ‘enabling Russia’s unprovoked war’

GENEVA, Switzerland: Diplomats at the United Nations voiced outrage yesterday over Belarus’s widespread human rights violations at home, and also for “enabling” Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. At the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, a wide range of countries decried Minsk’s role in supporting Moscow’s war against its pro-Western neighbor, which began on February 24.

US Ambassador Michele Taylor called out authoritarian Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko for the “enabling of Russia’s unprovoked war”. “The Belarus authorities’ facilitation of Russian aggression has contributed to an unconscionable humanitarian toll on the people of Ukraine... and to a dangerous crisis which could irrevocably harm global security and that of every sovereign state,” she told the council.

Icelandic Foreign Minister Thordis Kobrun Reykford Gylfadottir, speaking for the Nordic and Baltic countries, chimed in. “The Lukashenko regime is on a destructive path, at home and abroad,” she warned in a video statement.

“We reiterate in the strongest possible terms our condemnation of Russia’s illegal and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine and Belarus’s involvement in it.”

Belarus representative Andre Taranda repeatedly interrupted the speakers with “points of order”, decrying that they were not using appropriate UN language by referring to the Belarus government as a “regime”. He also decried the many comments relating to the invasion of Ukraine, which he said was beside the point, since the meeting was meant to discuss the latest UN report on the rights situation inside Belarus.

Taranda was also not happy with that report,

presented by UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet, saying it was “full to the brim with insinuations and... accusations”, and revealed the UN rights office’s “double standards”. He received backing from some countries, including Venezuela, Cuba, China and Russia, who hit out at the rights office for politicization by bowing to “foreign pressure”.

In the report, Bachelet had warned Belarus was crushing dissent and blocking victims of widespread violations, including torture and arbitrary detention, from seeking justice, creating a “situation of complete impunity”.

‘Brutal repression’

The violent crackdown on the massive protests around that election saw at least 37,000 people detained between May 2020 and May 2021, the report said. By the end of 2021, 969 people were in prison on likely “politically motivated charges”, the report said, with some given sentences of 10 years or more. The report

did not touch on Minsk’s role supporting Russia’s ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine, or the impact that might have on rights inside Belarus.

But Bachelet said yesterday the numbers imprisoned on politically-motivated charges had now risen to 1,085. She also highlighted that more than 900 people were arrested last month during protests against the so-called “constitutional referendum”, which saw the country vote to host nuclear weapons and Russian forces permanently. “Belarus’s actions supporting Russia’s war in Ukraine mirror its brutal repression at home,” said US Ambassador Taylor.

Meanwhile, Canada yesterday unveiled fresh sanctions against 22 Belarus defense department

Canada sanctions Belarus over Russia attacks on Ukraine



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with his Belarus’ counterpart Alexander Lukashenko at the Kremlin in Moscow on March 11, 2022. —AFP

officials for allowing Russia to launch attacks on Ukraine from its territory. The announcement, Canada’s foreign ministry said in a statement, “sends a clear message to President Putin’s accomplices: those who support violations of Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence will be held accountable.”

Ottawa accused the senior Belarus officials — including the head of its air force, Victor Soyko — of supporting Russia’s attack on Ukraine and “allowing their country to serve as a launch pad for

the Russian invasion.” Canada had already imposed sanctions in 2020 on Belarus’s President Alexander Lukashenko after he claimed an overwhelming victory in an August election the opposition said was rigged, as well as more recently on members of Lukashenko’s inner circle.

This latest round brings the number of individuals and entities in Russia, Moscow-ally Belarus and Ukraine sanctioned by Canada to more than 500 since Russia’s February 24 invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

News in brief

Irish PM tests COVID positive

WASHINGTON: Ireland’s prime minister Micheal Martin tested positive for COVID-19, forcing him to leave a gala event attended by President Joe Biden and upending plans for the two leaders to celebrate Saint Patrick’s Day at the White House yesterday. Martin, who holds the position known as the Taoiseach in Ireland, was pictured sitting next to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi at the Ireland Funds Gala event at the National Building Museum in Washington late Wednesday shortly before leaving due to a positive PCR test. —AFP

Mozambique cyclone toll 53

JOHANNESBURG: The death toll from a cyclone that lashed northern Mozambique last week has risen to 53, authorities in the northern Nampula province said. The last official toll was 22 but 31 more bodies have been found in Mossuril district in the wake of Cyclone Gombe, local authorities said late Wednesday. The area on the Indian Ocean coast is largely inaccessible now as road links have been disrupted by felled trees. “The situation is dramatic. The number of deaths may be even higher, as we continue rescue operations in the most affected districts,” said Mety Gondola, a senior Nampula official, who arrived in the area on Wednesday by ship. —AFP

UK missile system in Poland

WARSAW: Britain will deploy its latest medium-range missile defense system in Poland, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace announced yesterday in Warsaw. Poland, which borders Ukraine, risks becoming a future target of Russian attacks after Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine on February 24. The Sky Sabre system will help Poland defend its airspace from Russian weapons. “As a NATO ally and a very old ally, Britain stands by Poland as Poland carries much of the burden of the consequences of this war,” Wallace said after a meeting with Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak. —AFP

Too early for second booster: Watchdog

AMSTERDAM: It is too early to call for a second COVID-19 booster shot, Europe’s medicines watchdog said yesterday, despite a rapid spike in new infections caused by the rampant Omicron variant. Speaking at the European Medicines Agency’s bi-weekly press conference, the EMA’s vaccines strategy head added that scrapping coronavirus rules in many countries may have played a role in the current rise in cases. “We notice that infection rates are increasing again in some member states after the steady decrease we witnessed over the past few weeks,” Marco Cavaleri said. The Amsterdam-based agency is “continuing to monitor the effectiveness of Covid-19 vaccines against the Omicron variant,” Cavaleri said. —AFP

Canadian leaves a life behind to go help Ukraine

VANCOUVER: Vartan Davtian bought a ticket to Ukraine, on Wednesday leaving behind a job and a safe, quiet life in Canada to go defend the country in which he grew up. At the airport in Winnipeg in Canada’s western Prairies region, dressed in a khaki T-shirt, he bid farewell to friends, before dragging to the check-in counter 13 oversized pieces of luggage bursting with medical supplies, clothes and a few personal items—all tied with blue and yellow straps.

The 37-year-old said it seemed an obvious decision to put his life on hold instead of standing idly by as bombs fall on Ukraine, where his family still lives. “It’s not right that Russia (is) doing this, and it’s not right for other countries to be staying (on the sidelines) and watching,” he told AFP before his

Lonely passengers ride ghost trains back to Ukraine

LVIV: The station in the west Ukraine city of Lviv teems with outgoing passengers, vying for seats on trains leaving the war-torn nation.

But on a desolate platform, far from the main hall, carriages disgorge small huddles of refugees returning home despite the conflict still raging with Russia to the east. While grateful for Europe’s welcome, many find themselves unable to start a new life abroad.

Wiping a tear from her grandson’s eye, Svitlana Natalukha, 60, says her family travelled for a total of five days, first escaping Ukraine, then turning back. The grandmother, her 28-year-old daughter Galyna Kanuka, and two grandsons left home in the eastern Kharkiv region and arrived safely in Poland, but came to Lviv on Wednesday.

The family praised Poland’s hospitality but were paralysed by the mammoth prospect of a rootless new life abroad. “Volunteers helped a lot, but only at the place where they are located,” said Kanuka, huddled on the chill-swept platform next to a

flight departed.

“The whole situation is not right.” Born in Armenia, Davtian spent his childhood in Ukraine before immigrating to Canada 14 years ago.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, he quit his oil sector job and started making plans to go help his former compatriots fighting Russian invaders.

As his departure approaches, he explains that it didn’t feel right to “stay and watch” from the safety of Canada the broadcast news or social media postings about what was happening on the ground, while his sister, nieces, cousins and other relatives and friends were in the grip of war.

“What’s the purpose of your life then?” he says. He describes only seeing war on television in his youth.

“And suddenly, I wake up and I see rockets destroying buildings and killing your neighbors and families,” he says, his voice trembling. It is hard for most to imagine, he suggests, especially in Canada, which is almost 8,000 kilometers (5,000 miles) away from the fighting.

“I have never done this before,” he adds, in refer-

mound of packed bags. “They were telling us to carry on to other cities and find more volunteers there.” The family also cited a language barrier complicating the treatment of one son’s illness for their decision to return.

Return to danger

Three million have fled Ukraine since the Russian invasion began three weeks ago, according to the United Nations. There are no official figures for the numbers choosing to return as the conflict grinds on. But this week, AFP witnessed three trains carrying between 100 and 250 passengers from the Polish city of Przemyśl for Lviv.

Some were foreign volunteers answering Ukraine’s call for military support, others ferried aid supplies, but most were women and children bearing indigo Ukrainian passports.

At the Lviv station, a handwritten sign above a stairwell where travelers are waved aboard trains heading for the border tells them: “Come back home, the motherland is waiting for you.” Conductor Oleksandr, who declined to give his surname, said as many as 300 sometimes make the return trip—about a third the number crammed into his train preparing to make the outward journey.

He said “first there were no such cases” but “lately many women with children started coming back”.

and sewage.” Declared a nature reserve in 2006, Al-Heswa was one of 35 initiatives awarded the UN’s Equator Prize in 2014 for meeting climate and development challenges through sustainable use of nature.

Wastewater that had previously flown into the sea was treated and redirected to create an artificial wetland on the site of a former garbage dump, attracting the migratory birds. The initiative was the first of its kind in Yemen, improving livelihoods, creating jobs and generating about \$96,000 in revenue in 2012. “The communities behind Al-Heswa Wetland Protected Area have successfully transformed a garbage dump into a functioning wetland ecosystem that provides a breeding site to more than 100 migratory bird species,” the UN Development Programme said at the time.

But since 2014, Yemen, already the region’s poorest country, has been embroiled in conflict between the government, supported by a Saudi-led military coalition, and the Houthis rebels. The reserve has been left in ruins by the fighting. The director of Yemen’s department of nature reserves, Salem Bseis, said the



BRANDON, Canada: Ukrainian-Canadian Vartan Davtian, from Brandon, Manitoba, sits for a portrait while packing his bags to travel to Europe to support the Ukrainian resistance. —AFP

ence to armed combat. “But to watch all the news and all that stuff, I thought, I’m not gonna hesitate.” After connecting flights, Davtian expects to reach Warsaw, Poland, and from there cross the border into Ukraine. —AFP



LVIV, Ukraine: People fleeing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine board an evacuation train to the Polish city of Przemyśl at the railway station of the western Ukrainian city of Lviv on Wednesday. —AFP

Although many nations—particularly in the EU—have made special provisions welcoming those leaving the war zone, it is hard to soothe the refugees’ fears over starting a new life. “They feel like they won’t be looked after in the long run,” said Oleksandr, perched in the cab of a hissing engine car.

“One woman said she stayed for a couple of days homeless there and it was better to come back to Ukraine.” —AFP



AL ASWAH, Yemen: A view of the Al-Heswa natural reserve in Yemen’s southern city of Aden. —AFP

wastewater treatment tanks had not been serviced since 2015. —AFP

International

China's Xi says country will 'stick with' its zero-COVID strategy

Hong Kong's Lam mulls easing pandemic rules as public tolerance 'fading'

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping said the country would "stick with" its zero-COVID strategy, state TV reported yesterday, as the world's most populous nation battles its largest outbreak since the early days of the pandemic. "We must always continue to put people and life at the forefront, stick to scientific accuracy and dynamic-zero, and curb the spread of the epidemic as soon as possible," Xi said, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Speaking at a meeting of China's top leaders, he said China must "raise the level of scientifically accurate prevention and control and continuously optimize disease control measures".



China's daily infections swell past 1,000 cases

Just three weeks ago China-one of the last nations in the world to stick to a policy of stamping out every COVID case-was reporting under 100 infections daily, but that number has swelled past 1,000 per day for a week. The country 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 challenge to the zero-COVID strategy, resulting in cities including the southern tech hub of Shenzhen being locked down and others placed under tight restrictions.

Xi also called on the country to "strengthen technological key areas like vaccination, rapid testing and drug research" to make virus curbs more "targeted".

The president said there was a need to step up

"prevention and control guidance" for severely affected areas, and "swiftly control local clustered outbreaks", according to CCTV. He also stressed the need to step up prevention at ports of entry as imported infections rise.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong's leader said yesterday she was mulling easing some of the city's coronavirus restrictions due to waning public tolerance, but could not provide a roadmap out of the current Omicron-fuelled crisis. Carrie Lam's administration has been pummeled by all sides over its unclear public messaging and handling of Hong Kong's fifth wave, which has brought nearly a million cases and 4,600 deaths in less than three months. The jump in case numbers comes despite the finance hub putting in place border restrictions since the pandemic's start and deploying some of the harshest social-distancing measures outside mainland China.

Since Omicron broke through in January, there have been bans on public gatherings of more than two, restrictions on night-time dining and mandatory masking while doing outdoor activities. The latest new restrictions came yesterday, when public beaches were closed. But Lam told a press conference that "the time has come" to review the restrictions. "Not because the number of cases has come down... but I have a very strong feeling that people's tolerance are fading," she said.

"Some of our financial institutions are losing patience about this sort of isolated status of Hong Kong," she added, promising an update would come "around March 20 or 21".

When pressed on a roadmap for a way out of the crisis, she declined to give specifics. "The most difficult part of fighting the virus is that we cannot fully predict what's going to happen." Despite two hard-won years of breathing room due to Hong Kong's adherence to the mainland's zero-COVID strategy, the city is currently seeing scenes reminiscent of the pandemic's start, with mounting elderly deaths and overcrowded



BEIJING: Police in protective gear cordon off an alley after new confirmed cases of COVID-19 were detected in an area of Beijing yesterday. — AFP

hospitals. Authorities initially announced plans for mass testing of the city's 7.4 million people accompanied by a lockdown, before rolling them back. The panic fuelled by mixed messaging and further restrictions prompted a record-high exodus of 65,400 local and foreign residents from the finance hub in February. International banks such as JPMorgan and Bank of America have been working on relocation plans in view of flight bans and potential lockdown, according to a Financial Times report last week.

And Lam's near-daily press conferences about COVID have done little to stop rumors about mass testing and lockdown plans.

'Very grateful'

Researchers estimate Hong Kong's infection toll is significantly higher than official figures, likely already reaching half its population. China has offered to aid Hong Kong in its COVID battle, including providing

about 400 medics who arrived this week to support the city's health workers.

But members of the health sector, lawmakers and reporters have repeatedly raised questions about the visiting medics' legal liabilities. On Wednesday a reporter from local NowTV channel asked Lam how patients' complaints over the medics will be handled-drawing wrath from a pro-Beijing group that started a petition calling for the journalist's firing.

Newspaper Ta Kung Pao-affiliated with Beijing's liaison office-also published an article alleging questions of liability were "seditious" and could run afoul of China's national security law.

By yesterday afternoon, NowTV news channel issued an apology for the reporter's question at the press conference. "We are very grateful for the selfless support from the central government and mainland China," it said. Hong Kong authorities have said the city will shoulder ultimate responsibility. — AFP

East Timor heads to the polls amid political deadlock

DILI, East Timor: East Timor will hold presidential polls tomorrow, with the winner facing a COVID and cyclone-battered economy, as well as a protracted political impasse. Around 860,000 voters are registered to choose the next head of state in Southeast Asia's youngest country.

The field of 16 candidates includes incumbent Francisco "Lu-Olo" Guterres, as well as former president and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jose Ramos Horta and former Catholic priest Martinho Gerardo da Silva Gusmao. While the presidency is mainly a ceremonial post in the tiny half-island nation of 1.3 million, pundits see this as a chance to reset a political balance currently deadlocked between the two main parties.

"We have to get the machine going again after a paralysis that generated an economic crisis because of the inability to vote on budgets" for several years, said Christine Cabasset, a specialist on Timor and deputy director of the Bangkok-based Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia.

First hammered by the pandemic, East Timor's economy took another hit last year when Cyclone Seroja struck, killing at least 40 people on its half of the island and transforming communities into wastelands of mud and uprooted trees. Sitting President Guterres, from the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin) party, was elected in 2017 with around 57 percent of the vote.

But the 67-year-old former guerilla fighter's shot at a second term has been complicated by Ramos-Horta, another key figure in the independence struggle who served as prime minister from 2006 to 2007, and then as president from 2007 to 2012. Some of the country's biggest political heavyweights, including the National Congress of the Reconstruction of Timor-Leste (CNRT) and its charismatic leader and the country's first president Xanana Gusmao, have switched to endorsing the 72-year-old this election. General Lere Anan Timor, also from the Fretilin party, is another serious challenger.

If no one manages an absolute majority, a second round of voting will be held on April 19. The winner will take office May 20, as East Timor celebrates its 20th anniversary of independence from Indonesia, which occupied the neighbouring former Portuguese colony for 24 years.—AFP



DILI, East Timor: Supporters of the Fretilin party attend a campaign rally in support of incumbent president Francisco Guterres, known as Lu-Olo, as candidate for president for the upcoming elections in Dili, East Timor on Wednesday. — AFP



TOKYO: Schoolgirls are pictured after classes in Tokyo. Every school has its rules, but tough regulations at some Japanese institutions, mandating everything from black hair to white shoelaces, are facing increasing criticism and even legal action. — AFP

Black hair, white shoelaces: Japan school rules under fire

TOKYO: Every school has its rules, but tough regulations at some Japanese institutions, mandating everything from black hair to white shoelaces, are facing increasing criticism and even legal action.

Toshiyuki Kusumoto, a father of two in western Japan's Oita, is seeking court intervention to protect his younger son from regulations he calls "unreasonable". They include rules on hair length, a ban on styles including ponytails and braids, prohibition of low-cut socks and a stipulation that shoelaces be white.

"These kinds of school rules go against respect for individual freedom and human rights, which are guaranteed by the constitution," Kusumoto told AFP. Later this month, he will enter court-mediated arbitration with the school and city, hoping authorities will revise the rules.

Change is already under way in Tokyo, which recently announced that strict rules on issues such as hair color will be scrapped at public schools in the capital from April. But elsewhere, the rules are fairly common and Kusumoto,

who recalls chafing at similar restrictions as a child, hopes his legal action will bring broader change.

"It's not only about our children. There are many other children across Japan who are suffering because of unreasonable rules," he said. Such regulations, which generally come into force when children enter middle school at around age 12, emerged after the 1970s, according to Takashi Otsu, an associate professor of education at Mukogawa Women's University.

At the time, "violence against teachers became a social problem, with schools trying to control the situation through rules", he told AFP. "Some kinds of rules are necessary for any organization, including schools, but decisions on them should be made with transparency and ideally involving students, which would allow children to learn democratic decision-making," he said.

The array of regulations has been defended as helping ensure order and unity in the classroom, but there have been other challenges. In 2017, an 18-year-old high-school girl who was repeatedly ordered to dye her naturally brown hair black filed a lawsuit in Osaka seeking compensation of 2.2 million yen (\$19,130) for psychological suffering.

The case made national headlines and eventually led to the government last year instructing education boards to examine whether school rules reflect "realities around students".—AFP

Malian junta orders French broadcasters RFI, France 24 off air

BAMAKO: Mali's ruling junta ordered French broadcasters RFI and France 24 off the air on Wednesday night, complaining they had falsely accused the army of committing abuses. The government in Bamako "categorically rejects these false accusations against the courageous FAMA (Malian Armed Forces)," spokesman Colonel Abdoulaye Maiga said.

The junta is "initiating proceedings... to suspend broadcasts by RFI and France 24... until further notice," he continued. RFI and France 24 were still broadcasting yesterday morning in the conflict-ridden Sahel nation. There is no recent precedent in Mali for major foreign news media to be taken off the air.

RFI (Radio France Internationale) and France 24 cover African news extensively and have a strong following in the former French colony. The junta, which seized power in August 2020, said there had been "false accusations" in a report early in the week in which RFI aired comments from alleged victims of abuse by the army and shadowy Russian private-security group Wagner. Maiga said Malian news websites, newspapers and its national radio and TV stations were all "banned from rebroadcasting and/or publishing programs and news articles put out by RFI and France 24".

He compared the French broadcasters to Rwanda's Radio Mille Collines—a notorious outlet that incited listeners to exterminate minority Tutsis during the 1994 genocide. In its statement, Mali's junta also accused Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Michelle Bachelet, the UN human rights chief, of making false allegations against the government. HRW this week released a report accusing Malian soldiers, as well as jihadists, of a wave of civilian killings. An impoverished nation of 21 million people, Mali has over the past decade been wracked by Islamist violence. Swaths of the country are in thrall to myriad rebel groups and militias. Thousands of soldiers and civilians have been killed and hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes. —AFP



PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA: Relatives of jailed opposition members protest in front of Phnom Penh Municipal Court in Phnom Penh yesterday as the court sentenced opposition figures including exiled opposition leader Sam Rainsy over an alleged plot to topple strongman ruler Hun Sen. — AFP

"This is very unjust. I expected he would be released today. Please, international community help my husband," So Ith, the wife of one defendant, told AFP. For the defendants sentenced to five years in prison, the court suspended part of their terms, so they will serve three years and eight months.

The charges related to Rainsy's planned return to Cambodia in 2019, when he called on people to rise up against Hun Sen. Around 150 opposition figures and activists have been put on trial for treason and incite-

ment charges—mostly for sharing social media messages supporting Rainsy's return to the kingdom.

"This is just another day of injustice here in Cambodia. It's the norm now, injustice is the norm," said Theary Seng, a lawyer and activist who is herself facing treason and incitement charges.

"The suffering of these innocent people, their family members, you see in their faces the suffering waiting for their loved ones to be freed, loved ones who are innocent."—AFP

HANOI: A Cambodian court handed out jail terms yesterday to 20 opposition figures including exiled leader Sam Rainsy, who condemned the judgment as a fresh bid by strongman ruler Hun Sen to quash dissent. Rainsy has lived in France since 2015 to avoid jail on a number of convictions he says are politically motivated, including a 25-year sentence passed in March last year. The court jailed Rainsy and six other senior opposition figures for 10 years, and 13 more activists for five years. One other activist was given a suspended five-year sentence. "The justice system has again been used as a blunt political tool in an attempt to quash opposition to Hun Sen's dictatorship. Opposing dictators is a duty, not a crime," Rainsy wrote on his Twitter account. There were scuffles outside the court as security officers tried to confiscate a banner from the defendants' wives and supporters, knocking some of them to the ground.

"After the verdict was announced, my jailed clients screamed out injustice—they were so angry with the judgment," lawyer Sam Sokong told AFP, saying they would appeal. Outside the court, relatives were bereft.

FRIDAY, MARCH 18, 2022

Business

Moscow stocks crash crushes financial dreams of Russians

Market tumbled 30% leaving investors out in the cold

MOSCOW: The Moscow stock exchange ended 2021 in fine form: a record number of companies were listing their shares, foreign money was flowing in and ordinary Russians were keen on investing.

Everything changed after Moscow sent troops into Ukraine on February 24. The market crashed as indices tumbled 30 percent and was closed the next day, putting it under a dark cloud and leaving investors out in the cold. It is due to reopen on Monday even as the Ukraine conflict drags on and Western sanctions throttle the Russian economy.

Meanwhile, ordinary Russians who had jumped on the stocks bandwagon have seen their investments frozen and are likely to suffer huge losses while the ruble has fallen dramatically in value.

"I'm completely frustrated," said Anna Meshchanova, a 30-year-old graphic artist. "I don't know what to do." She began to invest in the stock market three years ago after having stumbled upon a financial blog. "I thought it was important to have a financial airbag and retirement savings as there is no guarantee the state will pay a good pension," Meshchanova told AFP.

She stepped up investing during the pandemic, putting 10,000 rubles per month (around \$150 at the time but \$90 now) into Russian and US stocks.

Meshchanova said she considers her Russian investments "already lost" and estimates her losses will stand at \$4,500 when the exchange reopens. She is considering whether to transfer her US shares, held by a Russian broker, to an international one.

Investor influx

Russian banks and stock exchanges had been

working for years to attract investors, rolling out new mobile apps to make it easier for them to dabble in stocks. Financial blogs and podcasts flourished. "In 2021, we experienced an enormous inflow of individual investors into the stock exchanges, both the one in Moscow and Saint Petersburg," said Alexander Saiganov, head of analysis at Invest Heroes, a Moscow-based company which provides investors with news and analysis.

"This trend started in 2019 when brokers simplified their procedures for investors," he added.

The number of retail investors grew to more than 15 million in 2021 compared to between two and three million in 2018. Last year, a post-pandemic boom in investing helped drive up trade volume on the Moscow exchange to record levels and six new share listings took place. But already in October the growing geopolitical tensions that led up the conflict in Ukraine began to weigh on Russian share prices and the inflow of investments began to slow.

Nevertheless, at the end of the year, the Moscow exchange unveiled new services to attract additional investors, hoping to boost the number of retail investors to 25 million this year. "We are not only a stock exchange but a technology company," said the stock exchange's director of sales and development Igor Marich.

'Completely unprotected'

Despite calling the February 24 crash unprecedented, analyst Saiganov remained optimistic.

"The Russian market will survive and it may even receive a boost," he said. "For many it will be a way to protect their ruble savings against inflation," which rose above nine percent on an annual basis in



MOSCOW: A man walks past the Moscow's stock market building in downtown Moscow. — AFP

February. Analysts expect inflation to surge even higher in the coming months as the ruble's collapse feeds through into prices for imported goods.

Evgeny Malykhin, head of the Russian investment group Aton, recommends his Russian clients invest in gold, foreign currencies with high liquidity and, once the stock exchange reopens, in firms which are major exporters. The reopening of the stock exchange depends on approval from the cen-

tral bank. It is expected to be done gradually over several days, with trading in bonds and then stocks.

Meshchanova, the graphic designer, said she would try keep a little bit of cash on hand in foreign currencies. "Until February 24 I was sure money in my bank or investment account would always be there to help me," she said.

"But I was wrong," she added. "I understand that I am now completely unprotected." — AFP

BoE hikes rate again as Ukraine war fuels inflation

LONDON: The Bank of England yesterday hiked its main interest rate to its pre-pandemic level to combat runaway inflation that risks soaring far higher as the Ukraine conflict fuels energy costs.

The BoE hiked borrowing costs by a quarter-point to 0.75 percent, its third increase in a row.

The decision came one day after the US Federal Reserve carried out the first of what is expected to be a number of rate hikes this year to tackle decades-high inflation. The UK central bank said the country's annual inflation rate could top 8.0 percent this year, as the Ukraine war fuels already sky-high prices for oil, gas and other commodities. It had previously forecast inflation to peak at 7.25 percent in April.

The BoE even warned that, should wholesale energy prices continue to soar, inflation could potentially be "several percentage points higher" than the prior estimate. Eight members of the bank's nine-strong Monetary Policy Committee, including governor Andrew Bailey, voted to lift its key rate by a quarter point, while Jon Cunliffe wanted it kept at 0.5 percent due to worries over the soaring cost of living.

"Regarding inflation, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has led to further large increases in energy and other commodity prices including food prices," the BoE said in a statement. "It is also likely to exacerbate global supply chain disruptions, and has



increased the uncertainty around the economic outlook significantly." The bank said global inflationary pressures would "strengthen considerably further" over the coming months, meaning that net energy importers including Britain would likely experience slowing growth.

The latest official data showed that UK annual inflation hit 5.5 percent in January, the highest level since 1992. Inflation is rocketing around the world also as economies reopen from the pandemic.

The Fed on Wednesday announced a quarter-point rate hike, the first since it slashed its rate to zero at the start of the COVID-19 crisis. "Like the US Federal Reserve, the bank is signalling an unyielding approach in the face of surging inflation," said Deloitte chief economist Ian Stewart.

"That points to further increases in interest rates on both sides of the Atlantic in the next 12 months, and to weaker growth." The European Central Bank last week "significantly" lifted its inflation forecasts for the eurozone on sky-high energy prices and uncertainty over the war in Ukraine, but it gave itself time before raising interest rates. — AFP

disruptions brought on by the conflict are large and are likely to continue into the future", OECD Secretary General Mathias Cormann said in a press conference.

The size of the shock would "depend in part on the duration of the war", said the OECD, a group of developed economies. It modified plans to publish its usual global economic forecasts in light of the high uncertainty sparked by Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine, publishing instead an assessment of the economic consequences of the conflict.

Despite together only accounting for "about two percent" of the global economy, Russia and Ukraine's importance as exporters of raw material, food and energy mean the impact is likely to be felt beyond their borders. Growth in the eurozone risked being cut by up to 1.4 percentage points, according to the OECD.

The negative impact on the continent reflected the "relative strength of business and energy linkages", it

raised the benchmark Selic rate by one percentage point, to 11.75 percent, in line with analysts' forecasts, citing inflation that "continued to negatively surprise" policy makers. Brazil has waged one of the most aggressive interest-rate tightening cycles in the world as it struggles with spiraling prices driven upward by the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic and now Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The latest increase dialed back the pace of monetary tightening a notch — the previous three Selic increases had been by 1.5 percentage points each.

But the committee "considers that, given its forecasts on the risk of inflation expectations remaining above target for a longer term, it is appropriate for the

Moscow says it made debt interest payment, avoiding default

MOSCOW: Russia announced yesterday that it paid interest on foreign debt due this week, avoiding a devastating default for now after it was hit by unprecedented Western sanctions over Ukraine.

The country had risked its first foreign debt default in more than a century if it had missed the payment on two-dollar denominated bonds. But the finance ministry said in a statement that a payment order worth \$117.2 million "was executed" after it was sent to a bank on Monday.

There had been concerns that the sanctions would prevent Moscow from accessing dollars to make the payment, causing a default if it used rubles instead. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia has "all the necessary means" to avoid a default. "Any default that could arise would be purely artificial in nature," Peskov told reporters.

Finance Minister Anton Siluanov accused the West earlier this week of pushing the country towards an "artificial default". Western sanctions have crippled the Russian banking sector and financial system and precipitated a collapse of the ruble.

Ratings agency Fitch warned last week that Russia faced "imminent" default.

Russia last defaulted on foreign currency-held debt in 1918, when Bolshevik revolution leader Vladimir Lenin refused to recognize the debts of the deposed tsar's regime.

added. Those countries "that have a common border with either Russia or Ukraine" would be particularly affected, while bearing the brunt of refugee flows from Ukraine. Governments could mitigate the losses for the economy with "targeted fiscal support", without fuelling faster price rises too much.

The extra push to inflation comes at a time when the pace of price rises around the world is already elevated. On Wednesday, the US Federal Reserve announced a quarter-point increase to its benchmark interest rate to respond to runaway inflation.

Most central banks should continue with their pre-crisis policies in the face of the uncertainty caused by the conflict, the OECD said. It also warned against the risk of a "sharp increase in poverty and hunger", particularly in developing economies, if supplies of wheat from Russia and Ukraine were to be cut off completely. — AFP

cycle of monetary tightening to continue advancing significantly into even more contractionary territory," it said in a statement.

The decision was unanimous by the committee's nine members. It said it expected another hike "of the same magnitude" at its next rate-setting meeting, scheduled for May 3 and 4. Brazil's annual inflation rate stands at 10.54 percent, far above the central bank's target of 3.5 percent.

The economy exited recession in the fourth quarter of 2021, but remains sluggish — and has emerged as a crucial weak spot for President Jair Bolsonaro as he gears up to seek reelection in October. The move came the same day the US Federal Reserve raised its bench-

Russia defaulted on domestic, ruble-denominated debt in 1998.

'No issues servicing debt'

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. Siluanov had warned earlier this week that the debt may be paid in rubles if necessary even though the interest payments due this week had to be made in dollars.

Russia's government said yesterday that the payment was made in a foreign currency, without specifying which. "The payment was carried out in foreign currency. There are no issues with servicing the state debt," the cabinet said on Telegram.

The finance ministry added that it will provide "additional information" on the crediting of the funds. Russia previously said it had asked an American bank to process the payments.

A payment in rubles would constitute a default at the end of a 30-day grace period, according to Fitch Ratings. But analysts at investment firm JPMorgan said US sanctions should not restrict Russia's ability to service its debt. The US Treasury also said interest payments to American entities were "permissible through May 25".

Russia faces more debt payments this month. And Fitch Ratings warned this week that it understands that 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



PARIS: OECD Secretary General Mathias Cormann (left) and OECD Chief Economist Laurence Boone pose before giving a press conference about the impacts and policy implications of the war in Ukraine at the OECD headquarters in Paris yesterday. — AFP

OECD sees one-point hit to global growth from Ukraine war

PARIS: The fallout from the war in Ukraine could cut global economic growth by "over one percentage point" in the first year after the invasion, the OECD said in a report yesterday.

The impact "if sustained" would produce "a deep recession in Russia, and push up global consumer price inflation by approximately 2.5 percentage points", the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development said in its report. "The economic

Brazil hikes key interest rate ninth straight time

BRASILIA: Brazil's central bank raised its key interest rate for the ninth straight time Wednesday, as Latin America's biggest economy continues to reel from surging inflation, now exacerbated by the Ukraine war. The bank's monetary policy committee

mark rate a quarter-point, its first increase since December 2018. Brazil's central bank warned the international outlook had "substantially deteriorated" because of the Ukraine crisis. The specter of inflation is spooking policy makers worldwide. In Brazil, the problem looks set to get worse before it gets better.

Adding to price pressures, state-run oil company Petrobras hiked gasoline prices by 19 percent and diesel by 25 percent last week, citing the impact of the Ukraine crisis on oil markets. The central bank started its tightening cycle a year ago, rapidly raising the key rate from an all-time low of two percent introduced to spur the economy's pandemic recovery. The massive hikes have yet to substantially bring down inflation. — AFP

Business

Oil surges on Russia tensions

Hong Kong stocks rocket to extend surge

KUWAIT: Oil prices soared yesterday on tensions surrounding key producer Russia, as equities diverged with traders tracking also interest rate decisions and China's pledge to support volatile markets. The price of benchmark oil contract, Brent North Sea crude, jumped more than five percent to back above \$100 per barrel after Russia rejected a ruling from the UN's top court to suspend its Ukraine offensive.

"Russia's invasion is still dictating price action... given the country's global importance in terms of supply," Interactive Investor analyst Victoria Scholar told AFP.

The fallout from the war in Ukraine could cut global economic growth by "over one percentage point" in the first year after the invasion, the OECD grouping of developed economies said in a report. The impact "if sustained" would produce "a deep recession in Russia" and further increase global consumer price inflation by approximately 2.5 percentage points, it added.

The warning came as Russia's finance ministry said it had carried out interest payments on two foreign bonds, avoiding default for now after it was hit by unprecedented Western sanctions over Ukraine.

Central banks

Central banks were also in focus with the Bank of England expected to announce a third straight interest rate rise to combat decades-high UK inflation.

"The global economy faces elevated levels of inflation because of various factors, including from surging energy and commodity prices," noted Fawad Razaqzada, analyst at ThinkMarkets.

"While the Fed has just started its hiking cycle, the BoE is well on the way, having raised interest rates in its previous two meetings." In Asia, Hong Kong's main stocks index closed with another massive gain, as investors pile back in after China's pledge to support markets.

Hong Kong stocks soared, extending the previous day's nine percent gain, as investors pile back in after China's pledge to support markets.

The Hang Seng Index jumped 5.79 percent, or 1,163.47 points, to 21,250.97 by the break. The Shanghai Composite Index rose 2.59 percent, or 82.25 points, to 3,252.96, while the Shenzhen Composite Index on China's second exchange added 3.56 percent, or 74.25 points, to 2,160.50.

Investor sentiment was sent rocketing Wednesday after Chinese authorities said they would maintain

capital market stability and adopt measures to handle risks for troubled property developers. The announcement was music to the ears of investors in Chinese tech firms, which have been reeling for more than a year owing to a government crackdown on the sector compounded by recent fears about possible US sanctions if Beijing were to help Russia in its war with Ukraine.

The Hang Seng Tech Index soared more than 10 percent Thursday, having seen a record advance of more than 20 percent the day before.

And market heavyweights in the tech sector also built on their blistering gains, with Alibaba, Tencent, JD.com, XID Inc and Meituan up between seven and 15 percent. "In the short term, it's fund flow and liquidity that's driving up the whole market, on the back of such a cheap valuation level," said Kenny Wen, at Everbright Sun Hung Kai Co.

"But whether the market can keep rallying is really up to the regulatory environment and corporate earnings recovery story."

He added that "tech will keep recovering but it

remains challenging for them to recover to the previous levels, given the shifted regulatory regime in general".

Optimism that China's crackdown on the tech industry could be winding down lifted other sectors that have been in Beijing's crosshairs, including casinos and developers. Troubled Evergrande was up about 20 percent-after an 11 percent gain Wednesday-on hopes for government support as it struggles under a mountain of debt. Yesterday's rally followed a strong performance on Wall Street, where an index of US-listed Chinese firms ended up 33 percent. The advances there were also helped by an upbeat assessment of the US economy by Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell after the bank lifted interest rates-by a quarter point-for the first time since 2018. The Fed was committed to using its "powerful tools" to prevent that, he added, while a gauge of future hikes suggested another six could be on the cards before the end of the year. The move was followed by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority yesterday lifting its own benchmark rate owing to the city's currency peg to the US dollar. — AFP

US, allies meet to discuss pursuit of Russian oligarchs

WASHINGTON: The United States held a meeting with European and other allies on Wednesday of a task force set up to pursue Russian oligarchs and violators of sanctions imposed on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Attorney General Merrick Garland met virtually with representatives from Australia, Britain, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Japan and the European Commission, the Treasury Department said.

"Our sanctions, trade restrictions, and other measures have already imposed significant costs on Russia, its leadership, and those who enabled (Russian leader Vladimir) Putin's unprovoked invasion into Ukraine," Yellen said in a statement.

"This multilateral task force will raise those costs even more, by galvanizing coordinated efforts to freeze and seize assets of these individuals in jurisdictions around the world and deny safe haven for their ill-gotten gains," she said. Mairead McGuinness, EU commissioner for financial services, said the "combined measures are having a significant impact-the Russian economy is in free fall."

"The focus of our work is to stop money flowing to the Russian war machine," McGuinness said. "Wealthy oligarchs need to know that they will not find any safe haven in the EU or elsewhere."

Garland said the United States is "already working with our international partners to freeze and seize properties belonging to sanctioned Russian oligarchs worldwide. "We will continue to work together to take all appropriate actions against those whose criminal acts enable the Russian government to continue its unjust war against Ukraine," the attorney general said.

The Treasury Department said the task force will "collect and share information to take concrete actions, including sanctions, asset freezing, and civil and criminal asset seizure, and criminal prosecution." It said there have already been "notable successes" in seizing luxury yachts owned by Russian oligarchs.

"Collectively, these vessels are estimated to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars," the department said. The United States announced the launch earlier this month of a multi-agency "Task Force KleptoCapture" to pursue "corrupt Russian oligarchs" and sanctions violators.

The move came after US President Joe Biden, in his State of the Union speech, warned Russia's billionaires that the task force would "find and seize their yachts, their luxury apartments, their private jets." "We are coming for your ill-begotten gains," he said. — AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT
WEEK ENDED ON 17 MARCH 2022

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance											Valuation Multiples *			
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1,135	1,120	1,135	1,106	29	28,753,719	-14	-1.23%	12.34%	1,118	1,135	24.2	2.34	2.7%	1.26
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	312	314	316	306	10	18,678,672	2	0.64%	12.54%	310	315	25.2	1.46	2.2%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	237	237	238	234	4	17,643,822	-1	-0.42%	8.72%	236	239	NM	1.03	1.7%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	278	286	287	274	13	38,385,339	9	3.25%	13.94%	283	297	21.7	1.30	1.7%	1.04
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	999	992	1,003	986	17	42,229,380	-8	-0.80%	19.23%	986	1,005	38.9	4.34	1.2%	1.40
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	934	945	945	912	33	5,736,095	11	1.18%	19.62%	931	950	69.8	5.45	0.5%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	356	355	367	348	19	8,226,239	1	0.28%	62.10%	343	365	11.3	1.50	2.8%	1.26
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	212	209	215	195	20	142,988,203	0	0.00%	47.18%	200	212	47.6	2.59	1.8%	0.61
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	137	135	138	135	3	17,458,127	-3	-2.17%	14.41%	134	137	NM	0.82	6.3%	1.00
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	166	160	166	158	8	10,671,715	-5	-3.03%	-10.61%	160	166	24.7	1.16	0.0%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	905	905	915	890	25	4,137,732	2	0.22%	14.12%	897	905	20.0	2.06	1.5%	1.10
501	National Industries	Financial Services	305	292	305	288	17	10,914,674	-12	-3.95%	3.18%	292	301	5.7	1.05	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,369	1,326	1,380	1,180	200	4,966,423	-59	-4.26%	52.24%	1,319	1,350	46.8	1.34	3.8%	0.95
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	994	972	994	959	35	2,781,368	-21	-2.11%	14.08%	970	995	27.6	2.29	5.5%	0.74
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	395	390	400	385	15	12,950,196	-5	-1.27%	12.39%	388	395	NM	1.06	3.9%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	1,029	1,029	1,030	1,000	30	14,406,986	3	0.29%	8.89%	1,020	1,032	2.3	1.11	0.8%	1.47
605	Zain	Telecommunications	630	627	634	617	17	18,914,722	-6	-0.95%	5.38%	626	634	14.4	2.28	3.7%	1.34
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,552	3,680	3,680	3,540	140	1,792,984	110	3.08%	14.14%	3,585	3,704	8.0	4.02	10.8%	0.50
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	217	215	218	213	5	4,651,332	-2	-0.92%	-1.38%	212	217	NM	0.69	0.0%	0.88
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,544	1,681	1,745	1,544	201	1,765,660	101	6.39%	30.31%	1,680	1,770	NM	16.03	1.9%	0.73
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	308	298	310	298	12	175,805,944	-10	-3.25%	7.19%	297	308	20.5	2.30	4.0%	1.15
821	Warba Bank	Banking	288	282	288	280	8	14,267,593	-4	-1.40%	2.92%	278	286	21.5	2.79	0.0%	1.00
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	590	589	595	585	10	3,057,648	-2	-0.34%	0.00%	581	590	18.4	1.66	2.9%	0.43
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	395	392	396	389	7	3,650,743	-2	-0.51%	2.30%	388	398	NM	1.64	0.0%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	225	226	227	223	4	5,966,883	1	0.44%	-0.88%	224	227	19.2	4.01	4.0%	0.60
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,814	2,731	2,870	2,521	349	4,368,222	-49	-1.76%	35.20%	2,680	2,820	35.0	9.71	2.4%	0.73

* As of end of week closing

Business

US Fed raises interest rate in battle against high inflation

Central bank admits risks posed by the war on Ukraine

Collateral Damage: On Cybersecurity

By Eugene Kaspersky

In the last three weeks, the war in Ukraine has shattered the world we knew. Families, relations, partnerships, and ties were affected dramatically in Ukraine, Russia, Europe and the entire world. The avalanche of these tragic events catches us all.

It has also caught my company, the world's largest private cybersecurity business that proudly bears my name. This week the German Federal Office of Information Security (BSI) issued a warning about Kaspersky products, citing potential risks for IT security of those using Kaspersky products and solutions. Without going into details I can say that these claims are speculations not supported by any objective evidence nor offering technical details. The reason is simple. No evidence of Kaspersky use or abuse for malicious purpose has ever been discovered and proven in the company's twenty-five years' history notwithstanding countless attempts to do so.

Without such evidence, I can only conclude that BSI's decision is made on political grounds alone. It is sadly ironic that the organization advocating for objectivity, transparency, and technical competence - the very same values Kaspersky supported for years together with BSI and other European regulators and industry bodies - decided or was forced to drop its principles literally overnight. Kaspersky, the long-time partner and contributor of BSI and German cybersecurity industry, was given mere hours to address these bogus and unfounded allegations. This is not an invitation for dialogue - it is an insult.

Despite continuous calls from Kaspersky to conduct a deep audit of our source code, updates, architecture and processes at Kaspersky Transparency Centers in Europe, BSI has never done so. This decision also conveniently omits the fact that Kaspersky has for years pioneered greater transparency with a multi-million euro effort of relocating the threat data of our European customers to Switzerland as a part of our Global Transparency Initiative. That is why I consider the BSI decision as an unwarranted and unjust attack on my company and specifically on Kaspersky employees in Germany and Europe. More importantly this is also an attack on the large consumer base in Germany trusting Kaspersky, which two weeks ago was awarded as the best security offering (by AV-Test). It is also an attack on the jobs of thousands of German IT security professionals, on law enforcement officers we have trained to combat cutting-edge cybercrime, on German computer science students we have helped obtain job-ready skills, on our partners in research projects in the most critical areas of cybersecurity, and on tens of thousands of German and European businesses of all sizes which we have been protecting from the whole spectrum of cyberattacks.

The reputational and business damage of the BSI decision is already quite significant. The only question I have - to what end? Not having Kaspersky in Germany will not make Germany or Europe safer. Quite the contrary. The BSI decision means that German users are strongly advised to immediately uninstall the only antivirus that according to AV-Test, an independent German IT-Security Institute, guarantees 100 percent protection from ransomware. This means that the leading German industrial equipment manufacturers will no longer receive information about critical vulnerabilities in their software and hardware from Kaspersky ICS-CERT - an organization hailed for its responsible disclosure work by these very same manufacturers. This means that German automotive giants will remain oblivious to the bugs that may allow an attacker to overtake the entire on-board computer system and change its logic. This means a huge blind spot on the attack surface for European incident responders and SOC operators, who will no longer be able to receive threat data from across the globe - and from Russia in particular.

My message to BSI, which now seems to be avoiding contacts with our German team, is simple: we consider this decision to be unfair and outright wrong. Nonetheless, we remain open to addressing any concerns you may have in an objective, technical, and honest manner. We are thankful to the European regulators and industry experts who have taken a more balanced approach by calling for additional technical analysis and scrutiny of security solutions and the IT supply chain, and I am fully committed to providing all the information and cooperation that is required from Kaspersky throughout this process. And to our German and European customers I want to say that we are immensely grateful for your choice of Kaspersky, and that we will continue to do what we do best - protecting you from all cyberthreats no matter where they are coming from, while being fully transparent with regard to our technology and operations.

The war in Ukraine can only end through diplomacy, and we are all hoping for a cessation of hostilities and continuing dialogue. This war is a tragedy that has already brought suffering to innocent people and repercussions across our hyper-connected world. The global cybersecurity industry that has been built on the basis of trust and cooperation to protect the digital links connecting us with each other may well be its collateral damage - and thus leave everyone even less safe. *Note: This is Eugene's open letter in response to the warning against the use of Kaspersky products by the German Federal Office for Information Security (BSI).*



Eugene Kaspersky

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve escalated its battle against the wave of price increases battering the US economy, raising the benchmark interest rate on Wednesday even as it acknowledged the risks posed by the war in Ukraine.

At the conclusion of its two-day meeting, the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) announced a quarter-point rate hike, the first since 2018 and since it cut the rate to zero at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The central bank clearly signaled that the move, already well telegraphed by Fed officials in the weeks leading up to it, would be the first in a series.

"We're not going to let high inflation become entrenched. The costs of that would be too high," Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell told reporters, adding that the FOMC is committed to using its "powerful tools" to prevent that. The central bank is walking a tightrope to ensure its inflation-fighting efforts don't derail the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic even as Russia's invasion of Ukraine introduces new uncertainty in an economy battered by supply chain snarls and labor shortages.

In a statement, the FOMC said the fallout from the war in Ukraine is "likely to create additional upward pressure on inflation" and also could "weigh on economic activity," although the "implications for the US economy are highly uncertain." The Fed moved swiftly in March 2020 to prevent the pandemic from sending the world's largest economy into a severe downturn, but as the virus waned and businesses reopened, inflation has roared back, with prices for gasoline, food, cars and rents pushing the consumer price index to a four-decade high.

Powell said supply chain issues were worse and more long lasting than expected, and acknowledged

that "inflation is likely to take longer to return" to the Fed's two-percent goal.

'Hawkish mood'

Blaming the "elevated" inflation on "supply and demand imbalances related to the pandemic, higher energy prices and broader price pressures," the statement said "ongoing increases" in the policy rate will be "appropriate." Markets are expecting a total of seven rate hikes this year, and while the committee typically moves in quarter-point steps, Powell said it could be more aggressive if needed.

"If we conclude that it would be appropriate to raise interest rates more quickly, then, then we'll do so," he said. Kathy Bostjancic of Oxford Economics said "the heightened uncertainty surrounding the full economic and market impact from the Russia-Ukraine war led policymakers to start conservatively."

"However, the Fed's revised interest rate dot plot and inflation forecasts signal the FOMC overall is in a very hawkish mood, as it is very determined to lower inflation," she said in an analysis.

Powell warned that in addition to higher global oil and commodity prices, "the invasion and related events may restrain economic activity abroad and further disrupt supply chains, which would create spillovers to the US economy." But he said there is little chance of a recession in the next year, noting that "the American economy is very strong and well positioned to handle tighter monetary policy."

Dissenting vote

The FOMC also released new quarterly economic projections, showing members of the committee raised their median inflation forecast for the year to 4.3 percent from 2.6 percent previously, and slashed

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka seeks IMF bailout

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka will seek an International Monetary Fund bailout, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said on Wednesday, to battle record inflation and unprecedented food and fuel shortages as the country runs out of dollars to finance imports.

The South Asia nation is in the throes of its worst economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1948 with long queues forming outside gas stations and rolling daily blackouts imposed across the country. "Subsequent to my discussions with the International Monetary Fund, I have decided to work with them," Rajapaksa said in an address to the nation a day after meeting with an IMF delegation in Colombo.

A huge crowd stormed the president's seaside office over runaway prices with the rising cost of food, medicine and other essential goods causing serious hardship for Sri Lanka's 22-million people.

Rajapaksa urged residents to play their part and conserve imported energy to help authorities manage the

scarce foreign exchange reserves. "By limiting the use of fuel and electricity as much as possible, the citizens too can extend their support to the country at this time," Rajapaksa said.

"I hope that you will understand the responsibility lies with you at this challenging time." He added that IMF help was needed to secure "a new method" to repay external debt and sovereign bonds this year with around \$6.9 billion needed this year for debt servicing.

Long hard road

The coronavirus pandemic has hammered the island's tourism sector - a key foreign exchange earner - while foreign worker remittances have also declined. Sri Lanka's foreign reserves, which sat at \$7.5 billion when Rajapaksa took office in November 2019, dropped to \$2.3 billion at the end of February. The president said the foreign exchange crisis was the root cause of his country's current issues, adding he was aware of the "difficulties" faced by people queuing for long hours to buy essential goods.

"Today, I am determined to make tough decisions to find solutions to the inconveniences that the people are experiencing," he said. But former central bank deputy governor W A Wijewardena said he expected Rajapaksa to announce a full-fledged



COLOMBO: A man watches Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa addressing the nation on his mobile phone along a street in Colombo on Wednesday. —AFP

IMF funding program to address the balance of payments crisis. "I think his address didn't go far enough," Wijewardena told AFP. "The market was looking for a mention of IMF funding that would have underwritten the (entire) economy."

Economist Rehana Thowfeek said the government has a lot of work to do to revive the battered economy.

"Good to hear reassurances from the president of the IMF route," she

told AFP. "The sooner a formal request is made (to the IMF), the sooner Sri Lanka can begin down the long and hard road ahead."

International rating agencies have downgraded Sri Lanka since the pandemic hit, effectively blocking its access to commercial borrowings. They have also raised doubts about Colombo's ability to service its external debt amounting to just over \$51 billion. —AFP

Canadian Pacific railway threatens 'crippling' lockout

OTTAWA: Major railway Canadian Pacific has threatened to lock out employees as early as Sunday if contract negotiations are not settled, warning this would lead to "crippling" economic disruptions.

In a statement late Wednesday, CP said it issued a 72-hour notice to Teamsters Canada of its plan if the union and the company are unable to come to a negotiated collective agreement or agree to binding arbitration. Despite daily talks assisted by federal mediators, CP said both sides "remain far apart" after the union this week rejected CP's latest offer on wages, benefits and pensions.

A work stoppage, it warned, would "impact virtually all commodities within the Canadian supply chain, thereby crippling the performance of

Canada's trade-dependent economy." Canada relies heavily on rail to move commodities across the country — the second-largest in the world by geography — to ports for overseas shipping, and to the United States, where it acquired last year Kansas City Southern (KCS).

Canadian manufacturers, grain shippers and farmers have lamented the prospects of the labor strife adding to shipping woes on the heels of COVID-19 supply chain disruptions and after heavy rains and mudslides last year washed out track and cut off access to Canada's largest port, in Vancouver.

They warned that shipments of grain, potash and coal, for example, could be curtailed at a time of soaring commodity prices. A fourth work stoppage at CP in the past decade would affect nearly 3,000 locomotive engineers, conductors, train and yard workers across Canada. The union's members had previously voted 96.7 percent in favor of a strike.

Labor Minister Seamus O'Regan tweeted that the government is concerned about the "impacts of a potential work stoppage" and has urged both sides "to work together to resolve their issues and reach a deal as quickly as possible." —AFP

In 2020, Lebanon defaulted on its sovereign debt for the first time in its history.

The IMF launched negotiations last month on a program to help pull the Middle Eastern country out of its economic crisis, which has seen the currency collapse, inflation hit triple-digit levels and poverty climb. Rice said fund staff will also meet again this month with Tunisian authorities and seek to build on the "good progress that has been made in understanding their reform policies."

The North African nation in mid-November requested an IMF loan program for an economy plagued by low growth as well as high public debt, inflation and unemployment. President Kais Saied sacked the government and suspended parliament on July 25 last year, and the requested IMF bailout would be the fourth since Tunisia's revolution.

Meanwhile, a Lebanese judge yesterday arrested the brother of Central Bank governor Riad Salameh, both of whom are suspected of embezzlement and money laundering, judicial sources said. —AFP

Days of anemic inflation over, says Lagarde

FRANKFURT: Inflation is unlikely to return to the anemic levels seen before recent energy-fuelled price spikes even after the effects of the Ukraine war have worn off, ECB chief Christine Lagarde said yesterday. Rather, consumer price growth is "increasingly likely to stabilize at our two-percent target over the medium term", she said, referring to a period understood as beyond three years.

Spelling the end of the weak inflation plaguing the eurozone over the last decade, Lagarde said monetary policy today "is facing a new challenge". "We are increasingly confident that inflation dynamics over the medium term will not return to the pattern we saw before the pandemic," she said.

At the same time, "we need to manage a shock that, in the short term, pushes inflation above our target and reduces growth". The ECB has thrown billions worth of stimulus measures at the problem of stubbornly low inflation that had beset the eurozone over the last decade.

The efforts have kept the economy in the black, but with the coronavirus pandemic drastically disrupting supply chains, the eurozone has lately seen record consumer price leaps.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24, has further piled on the price pressure, and the ECB now sees inflation reaching 5.1 percent for the year. Lagarde said the stronger price trend ahead has prompted ECB governors to stay on the path of dialling back the stimulus that had been designed to fight disinflationary risks. Nevertheless, she said the ECB will remain flexible and "ready to revisit our plan if the incoming data require us to do so". —AFP

Business

Reconnaissance discusses enhanced GCC-Japan cooperation in Indo-Pacific

Al-Anjari: Forum called to celebrate 60th anniversary of the beginning of diplomatic ties between Kuwait and Japan

KUWAIT: Reconnaissance Research held a forum in cooperation with the Embassy of Japan in Kuwait on 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)' and its possible effectiveness for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to secure their maritime security and economic prosperity. The forum aimed to discover views toward issues of both East Asia and the GCC from the perspective of "Rule of Law at Sea", as well as find possible solutions to achieve stability and prosperity in both regions. The forum was attended by diplomats, ambassadors, and faculty members at both Japanese and Kuwait universities.

During his opening remarks, Kaneko Koji, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Japan in Kuwait, said on behalf of Ambassador-designate of Japan to Kuwait, Morino Yasunari, that the Indo-Pacific region is witnessing dynamic developments and is full of further economic potential, where it is also well connected with the GCC countries by the vigorous trade and logistics.

Kanneko stressed that the rule of law at sea can fully seize opportunities and utilize resources for further development because this principle would promote peace and stability by denying unilateral attempts to change the status quo, such as the events taking place in East and South of China Sea, adding that the rule of law is one of the components of their diplomatic concept of (FOIP), which contains connectivity and capacity-building in maritime security as well.

He added: "It is no coincidence that the official establishment of the relations between both countries came after months of Kuwait's independence. Japan was among the closest countries to the modern founders of the state of Kuwait."

Al-Anjari affirmed that Reconnaissance Research seeks to make matters such as cultural diversity and geographical difference factors of convergence between the Japanese and Kuwaiti people, to build more cooperation relations. Al-Anjari expressed his appreciation to all participants, and affirmed the determination and continuation of Reconnaissance to move forward as an independent platform, to hold seminars and various events with all countries that have official diplomatic relations with Kuwait.

Long-standing relations

Kanehara Nobukatsu, Professor at Doshisha University, addressed the development of long-standing and economic relations between the GCC countries and Japan, where it became the GCC's foremost trading partner. On the subject of Japan's current view on the rule of law at sea, Prof Kanehara affirmed that Japan's Gulf policy is largely based on its economic interests, which depend on securing oil supplies and sea lanes from Gulf countries to their final destination in Japanese ports, adding "We believe that international water is half European, Asian, and African. We have to



(From left): Kaneko Koji, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Japan in Kuwait, Prof. Abdullah Sahar, Ambassador-Designate of Japan to Kuwait, Morino Yasunari, Abdulaziz Al-Anjari and Yousef Alghusain

ing the Russian bad decision to attack Ukraine, which would weaken the country's economic situation and would be the end of the "Russian empire."

With reference to China, he said "After 1970, China stood with Japan against Russia, but after the Cold War ended, they started a spectacular economic growth," "we believed that they will be with us one day and they will be like us," but "under Sea of Japan our expectation was betrayed. In particular, in the law of the sea, they become expansionist and this is very wrong because the sea is free for everyone."

Kanehara confirmed that China's interest is with Japan, adding "We have to persuade China that their interest is with us and they can't pursue their interest by force that is detrimental to the interests."

"The Russian economy is the size of South Korea, it's not that big so we can live without Russia but it is very difficult to live without China. But still, China can't pass the size of the West, they can never catch up with us. India will stand up, as its population is ten years younger than the Chinese. The simple prosperity is moving from China to India. We can manage the transformation time only when we stand united," he clarified.

Commenting on Kanehara, Jonathan Gilbert, Ambassador of Australia to Kuwait said: "When I talked to Kuwaitis about the Indo-Pacific, I received questions on why Indo-Pacific matter to Kuwait. I'm surprised when they ask such a question, Kuwait's history is deeply related to the east and all your major customers are in the Indo-Pacific region. But, I feel from the (Kuwaiti) government's perspective that the region (East) doesn't get the attention it deserves (from Kuwait)," he pointed out.

"The Indo-Pacific region, from my perspective, while staying here in Kuwait for four years, is very important to the country's interest not just in terms of history but also in terms of the economic reality of that. The economic center is moving east, and it's about technology and green revolution" he pointed out.

Power and interest

For his part, Dr Abdullah Sahar, Professor at Kuwait University, said that Japan imports about 4 million barrels of oil per day from the Gulf countries, and Kuwait in particular exports about 9 percent of Japan's needs, and about 90 percent of Japanese oil tankers pass through the Gulf to Japan.

Concerning the attacks that took place on Japanese oil tankers at sea and the destruction of Kuwaiti oil wells during the Iraqi invasion, Sahar said "Japan and the Gulf states talked of having huge storage in one of the Japanese islands that could accumulate about 19 million oil barrels to counter any kind of emergency."

He added that having storage in one of the Japanese islands is not enough, where international laws must be applied on the sea. But according to him, the application of international law is not easy to apply, explaining: "I wish for international law to be applied but it's not the real story of international relations. We have to distinguish between what's reasonable and acceptable. International law isn't necessarily reasonable. So what imposes the international law is power and interest."

"International law does not have to be logi-



Abdulaziz Al-Anjari and Prof Abdullah Sahar

"Reconnaissance will move forward as an independent platform and will hold seminars and various events with all countries that have official diplomatic relations with Kuwait"

cal and what imposes law is power and personal interests. That is shown on China where it is one of the countries that cannot be excluded from the international community due to its economic power that imposes its dominance over neighboring countries."

Dr Sahar explained "China will always move towards its interest depending on how much power it has and since we're witnessing an international shift of powers. Countries with powers will always try to find their ways to be at the top of the pyramid. That's the reason why we have such political difficulties and conflicts around the region. It's not a matter of condemning Russia, and not a matter of being sympathetic with Ukraine, it's a matter of how we think of international law in a rational manner based on our historical experience and on what is political science is saying to us."

"We can't disassociate our national security and Japanese national security from international security, since we are in a stage of shifting from one system to another. We have to accept the fact that we have to change security terms and definitions," the professor said.

The professor then stated, "The United States and Europe are fading away and China is moving towards the top of the international pyramid. In one way or another, maybe by 2040, China will be at the top international economic system surpassing the US."

Sahar called on the Gulf states and Japan to consider their security prospective and try to manage and balance the relations between China and the United States.

Regional security

In response to a question about how the Gulf countries, particularly Kuwait, can invest in the relationship with Japan to enhance new and needed regional security, he said that the

bilateral relations shouldn't only be depending on oil exchange, there should be a commercial exchange like investing in small companies and business projects, adding "I think the Gulf should exchange oil for technology, not for money. Technology is the future."

In conclusion, Fahad Al-Shatti, Senior Vice President of Strategic Projects at Agility Global Logistics, praised the Kuwaiti-Japanese relations that began in the fifties and developed after Kuwait agreed in 1958 to grant the Japanese "Arabian Oil Company" a concession for oil and gas, and this agreement was one of the most significant aspects of cooperation and it established diplomatic relations between Kuwait and Japan.

Al-Shatti urged Japan to increase technological and petrochemical exchanges, stressing that the presence of raw materials in the region would deepen the relationship between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Japan.



Jassim Qabazard



Aref J. Al-Akhwand
National Security Bureau



Abdulaziz Al-Anjari



Kanehara Nobukatsu, Professor at
Doshisha University



Fahad Al-Shatti



Australian Ambassador



Kaneko Koji

International law

Regarding Kuwait, he stated that Kuwait expressed its firm position to support the international law and, among others, the principles in the UN Charter in face of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which we highly appreciate "I believe that there is great potential for Japan-Kuwait joint actions to promote the rule of law under FOIP. I look forward to very meaningful discussions by the distinguished speakers and from the floor today," he concluded.

In his turn, Abdulaziz Al-Anjari, Founder and CEO of the Reconnaissance Research, said that today's forum came to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the beginning of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and Japan.



Adnan Al-Bahar and Mohammed Alnaki

share the responsibility to defend free trade of the sea since we achieved this."

In this regard, the professor stressed the importance of forming an agreement to protect and encourage mutual investment to establish more business partnerships in all priority sectors.

He remarked: "Today, climate change and green technology are very important for the Japanese economy. We have to think beyond the oil, and we're moving to the age of the green technology. We will be helping the Arab nations to reach a better future."

Kanehara said that the Gulf region and its stability are vital for Japan, noting that, to achieve or maintain it, there are many challenges to be considered and tackled based on the principle of friendship and mutual respect. He noted that the achievements of humanity say a lot about wars and people are equal regardless of skin color or religion, condemn-

- Kaneko Koji: Great potential for Japan-Kuwait joint actions to promote the rule of law under FOIP
- Prof Kanehara Nobukatsu addresses long-standing economic ties between GCC, Japan
- Prof Kanehara Nobukatsu affirms Japan's Gulf policy is largely based on economic interests
- Australian ambassador: Indo-Pacific region is very important to Kuwait's interest
- Dr Abdullah Sahar: Japan imports about 4m bpd of oil from the Gulf countries
- Fahad Al-Shatti praises Kuwaiti-Japanese relations that started in fifties



Ambassador-designate of Japan to Kuwait Morino Yasunari and Hussam Marafie.



Australian ambassador and Oman ambassador



Japan ambassador and UAE ambassador

Lifestyle | Features

St Patrick's Day parades return to Ireland after COVID hiatus

Ireland yesterday heralded the return of St Patrick's Day festivities after a two-year halt due to coronavirus, as hundreds of thousands of Irish and international visitors flocked to the capital Dublin and beyond. Events celebrating Ireland's patron saint were some of the first to be called off in 2020 as mass gatherings were shelved, pubs closed and international travel stopped. But with restrictions now lifted, Ireland is ready to revel in all things Irish. The government and organizers of Dublin's giant parade are billing this year's event as a symbol of the country's return after COVID.

"A core message of this year's St Patrick's Day is that Ireland is reopening," the Department of Foreign Affairs said. Government ministers and diplomats have fanned out across Europe and the globe, from Chile to Japan, to renew ties with the Irish diaspora and those of Irish heritage. But in Washington on Wednesday, prime minister Micheal Martin tested positive for coronavirus, on the eve of a scheduled visit to the White House for a traditional event to present the US president with a bowl of shamrock. Incumbent Joe Biden is of proud Irish

stock, and frequently references his family roots in the west of Ireland. St Patrick is also a patron saint in Nigeria, where a stronger version of the country's famous black and white stout, Guinness, is popular. The spectre of fresh COVID measures has hung over events in Dublin, where up to 400,000 people are expected to watch 3,000 participants. They all normally takes 18 months to organize. The go-ahead was only given in January, forcing organizers to work around the clock to make it happen, said festival director Anna McGowan. "It has been just one of the most intense planning periods I think this festival has ever seen," she told AFP.

Ukraine tribute

Dublin Airport has said it expects 800,000 passengers to travel through in the 12-day St Patrick's Day period from March 12 to March 24. Nsiidwa Nunu Kambauwa, 29, turned up early for the parade with her sister and five-year-old nephew, their faces painted in the green, white and orange of the Irish tricolor flag. "I've been here for 10 years and I've never been to the parade, because I'm always working. So today I decided to



A French tourist poses for a photograph ahead of the annual St Patrick's Day parade in Dublin. — AFP

come up," said Kambauwa, who is originally from Malawi.

"I don't know the rest of the people but I'm too excited because we've been closed. "Some countries were opening the restaurants or pubs and everything, but we didn't after lock down so I'm kind of

really excited to have everything back." The government declared the celebrations "in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, acknowledging their resilience and courage and assuring them of our unwavering support". Along the parade route, normally swathed almost entirely in

green, lamp-post banners and the bridges over the River Liffey will fly the blue and yellow colors of Ukraine.

Hollywood actor John C Reilly, from Chicago, has been appointed international guest of honor-one of many participants from the United States, to where many Irish emigrated in the 19th and 20th centuries. At The Temple Bar pub, which shares its name with the buzzing area that contains many of Dublin's most famous watering holes, staff were bracing for the busiest day of the year.

Barman Andrew Roche said that with pubs closed until midday, people would be "loaded up" outside waiting to come in after the parade. Roche, who had only been working months at the pub when it opened for the last St Patrick's Day, said he expected "the biggest Paddy's day in a long time". Preparations were being made to make sure the pub "was as efficient as possible", he added. On the day, "There's never a moment where there aren't five taps pouring beer and there's constantly beer going out and money coming in," he said. — AFP



Flowers bloom across Gaza despite Zionist siege



Despite years of the Zionist siege and various obstacles, Palestinian farmers preserve tradition of planting flowers across Gaza as spring approaches, hoping to share their blooming flowers, of all types and colors, with the rest of the world. — KUNA



TV comedy that launched Zelensky to presidency back on Netflix

The comedy satire in which Volodymyr Zelensky unexpectedly becomes Ukraine's president-his now war-time job in real life-will be aired again on Netflix, the streaming platform announced Wednesday. The resurrection of the TV series "Servant of the People" comes amid a global outpouring of praise for the former comedian now leading his outgunned country's fight

against the Russian invasion. "You asked and it's back," Netflix tweeted. On Tuesday Zelensky received a standing ovation as he addressed the US Congress via video link with an impassioned plea for more weaponry and the establishment of a no-fly zone to help



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

Ukraine survive the Russian invasion, which began February 24.

In the 2015 series, Zelensky, who is now 44, plays a teacher who unexpectedly becomes president after a video of him complaining about corruption goes viral. It was a huge hit in Ukraine and launched Zelensky's career in politics. He was elected president in 2019 as the star of a party with the same name as the TV series. He got more than 70 percent of the votes. The French-German TV channel Arte has been airing "Servant of the People" online since November 19, citing huge interest. Since the first days of the invasion, channels that have acquired the rights to air the series include Channel 4 in Britain, ANT 1 in Greece and PRO TV in Romania. The series was first on Netflix from 2017 to 2021. — AFP



Pop royalty from Sting to Madonna denounce Russian war

Condemnation by Madonna, a Russian tour cancelled by Iggy Pop, Pink Floyd pulling out of streaming platforms-Western music stars have rallied to the Ukrainian cause. Sting has racked up 2.2 million views on Instagram for his acoustic rendition of "Russia", a song he released in 1985 calling for de-escalation and peace. "I never thought it would be relevant again but in the light of one man's bloody and woefully misguided decision to invade a peaceful, unthreatening neighbour the song is once again a plea for our common humanity," he said in the introduction. The British star dedicated the song to "the brave Ukrainians fighting this brutal tyranny and also the many Russians protesting this outrage despite threats of arrest and imprisonment".

Another iconic 1980s group, The Cure, have been selling T-shirts with their name in the blue-and-yellow of the Ukrainian flag to raise money for the UN's refugee agency UNHCR. Band leader Robert Smith has been retweeting messages about Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, currently on trial and facing 13 years in a prison colony.

Other stars from the world of pop and rock have cancelled tours to Russia. "Our thoughts are with the Ukrainians and all the brave people who oppose this violence and seek peace," tweeted Iggy Pop as he announced the cancellation of his Moscow date in July. Nick Cave and Gorillaz are among other bands cancelling Russian shows. "Our thoughts and love go out to the brave people of Ukraine, their heroic leader, and all those suffering from this senseless war," said Cave in a statement.

'We love Russia'

Scottish band Franz Ferdinand also cancelled their tour but emphasized the distinction between the Russian government and people. "We love Russia. This great country has inspired our band

through its art and literature and since we first played there 17 years ago, we have built a rich and deep relationship with our Russian fans," they said in a statement. "We know you see the madness of your country's leadership. We know you do not want war," they added.

Others have been more virulent. "This is Hitler coming back to haunt us," Stevie Nicks of Fleetwood Mac wrote on Instagram. Madonna also made the com-



Madonna

parison in an Instagram post which combined images of the destruction in Ukraine with her song "Sorry" (lyrics: "You're not half the man you think you are").

Dave Gilmour of Pink Floyd, who said his daughter-in-law was Ukrainian, has pulled all his music from Russian and Belarusian streaming sites. "Putin must go," he said on Instagram. Younger stars, too, have expressed their shock on social media. Rapper Nicki Minaj tweeted: "To every mother fleeing with your children, saying goodbye 2 your husband... I can't imagine how afraid and alone you must feel. God, pls help them." — AFP



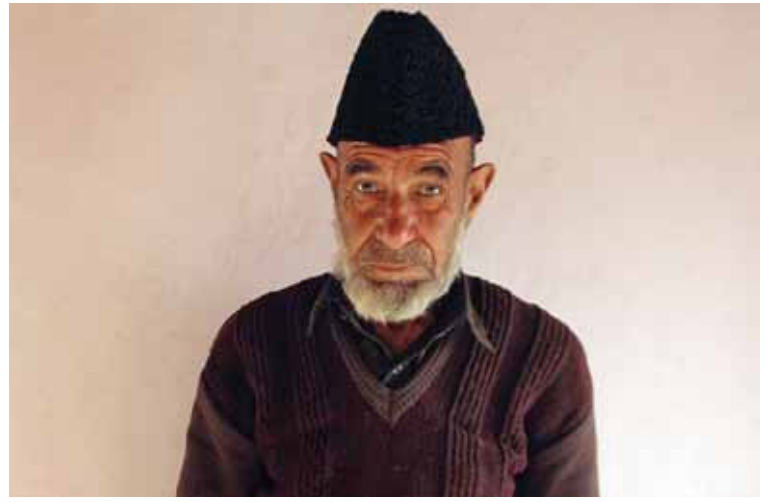
Sting



An Afghan man wearing a turban poses for a photograph at the Shaidayee refugee camp in Injil, Herat province. — AFP photos



An Afghan hat vendor wearing an Uzbek cap waits for customers at his stall in a market near the Pul-e Khishti Mosque in Kabul.



An Afghan man wearing a Karakul hat poses for a photograph in Ghazni.

CROWNING GLORY: AFGHANISTAN'S COLORFUL HEADGEAR CULTURE

At the crossroads of central and south Asia, Afghanistan has for centuries been a meeting place for cultures and ethnicities, as evidenced in the striking assortment of headgear worn by its people. The style of a cap or turban confers status and standing on its wearer, and also signifies what part of the country they come from or which ethnic group they belong to. An Uzbek cap, for example-flat and round, and worn tight-is decorated with colorful woollen embroidery and common among Afghans from the northern regions of

Mazar-i-Sharif, Faryab and Jawzjan.

Pashtuns, Afghanistan's biggest ethnic group from which the hardline Islamist Taliban mostly hail, often prefer plain black turbans, wrapped tightly over a cap with a "tail" falling on the shoulder. Villagers say a Pashtun boy marks his entry into manhood when he takes on the turban. In southern Kandahar, young men don round, soft caps that are split in the front above the forehead, while elderly men, especially farmers, prefer turbans and scarves.

Afghan women in some rural areas,

particularly in the western province of Herat, also wear embroidered caps over or under a chadar shawl which flows over their shoulder. The pakol, meanwhile, worn by Tajiks, is soft with chubby rolls of sheep wool to keep cold heads warm in winter.

It became emblematic of late anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, who wore it perched far back on his head, and his fighters from the scenic Panjshir valley. Marriage often calls for an exceptional piece of headgear, such as the Gilgit hat worn by

grooms-similar to the pakol but featuring a feather pinned in the front or on the side for a touch of elegance. One of the oldest styles worn by Afghans is the Karakul, made of the wool of newborn lambs and known as a Jinnah cap across the border in Pakistan-where it was popularised by the country's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. It found new favour in Kabul as a firm staple of former president Hamid Karzai. — AFP



An Afghan man wearing a turban waits in a market in Herat.



Pakol hats are on display for sale at a stall in a market near the Pul-e Khishti Mosque in Kabul.



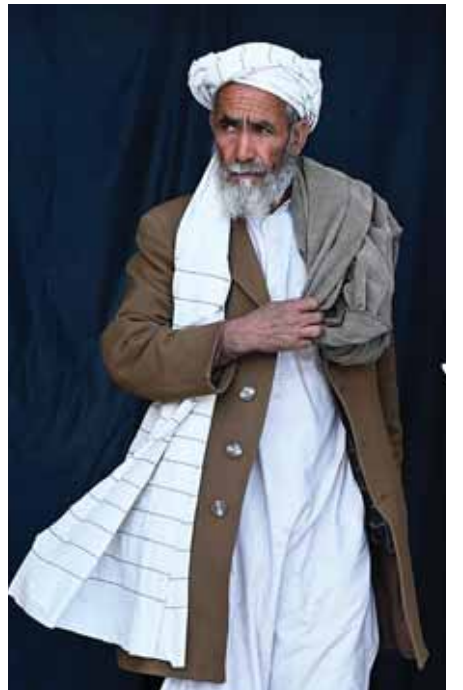
An Afghan man wearing a turban poses for a photograph in the courtyard of Jami Mosque in Herat.



An Afghan man wearing a turban poses for a photograph in Kandahar.



An Afghan man wearing a pakol hat poses for a photograph in Fayzabad, Badakhshan province.



An Afghan man wearing a turban arrives at a mosque in Herat.

French film must be 'more spectacular', says top producer

France's film industry needs to focus on splashier productions to stay ahead in the streaming era and keep its cinemas alive, the head of Paris-based Pathe Films told AFP. The production company is currently having global success with CODA, a US remake of a French film about an aspiring singer and her deaf family that is gunning for Oscar glory later this month. But Pathe's major focus in the coming months is the sort of big-budget spectacle it sees as vital to drawing crowds back to the other side of its business-its cinema chain.

It has a series of tent-pole projects that

leverage some of France's best-known characters, including reboots of the Asterix franchise ("Asterix & Obelix: The Middle Kingdom") and "The Three Musketeers" both due over the next year. Also in the pipeline are films about Charles de Gaulle's time in wartime London and a new version of "The Count of Monte Cristo". "To attract the public, France needs films that are more spectacular," Pathe's president Ardavan Safaee told AFP in an interview at its Paris headquarters. "The sorts of films we created until recently-this mass of 300 films per year-that system isn't viable in the long-term."

'Authenticity'

Pathe has found great success abroad with the sort of prestige dramas-"Slumdog Millionaire", "The Queen", "Selma"-that can struggle to find backing in superhero-obsessed Hollywood. CODA, a rare US production for the company, is doing particularly well, picking up a string of awards. On Sunday, it won BAFTAs in London for its screenplay and supporting actor Troy Kotsur-the first ever for a deaf

person at those awards. That points to one major change in the few short years since the French original, "La Famille Belier", in 2014.

"The parents in the original were played by actors who weren't deaf-today we wouldn't do that," Safaee said. "The extremes of this debate aren't good-actors are still actors. We also produced Virginia Efira in 'Benedetta' and she isn't a nun from the 17th century," he added, laughing. "But using deaf actors was important in this film. It gave it authenticity."

Streaming competition

Back home, however, it is no surprise why Pathe wants to step up its game: it is competing for the attention of 8.4 million French households with a Netflix subscription. The government has fought to protect its heavily subsidized film industry and vast network of cinemas (the most per capita in Europe) with strict rules about how long streaming platforms must wait to get hold of new releases.

Netflix has bought concessions-investing 200 million euros this year alone in French productions, including 40 million for 10 cinema releases-but that has only reduced the delay from three years to 15 months. Safaee said France's protections are important but may go too far.

Italy and Spain have fewer rules, which has been devastating for their cinema chains, he said. But that has also attracted more investment from streamers, particularly for series, that will likely foster a new generation of talent. "For now, it's working in France, but if the platforms continue to grow and help our neighbors grow, and we don't give them a place... we will fall behind," warned Safaee. "If we don't do anything, I'm worried that in 10 years we will be overtaken by our neighbors in Britain, Spain, Italy..." — AFP

Record sale for Picabia at Paris auction: Sotheby's

A painting by Francis Picabia sold on Wednesday for 10 million euros (\$11 million), Sotheby's said, in a record for a work by the late French surrealist painter. "Pavonia", painted in 1929, was among several works by surrealists that the auction house sold for a total of 33 million euros (\$36 million) in the French capital, it said in a statement. "We're particularly proud of having set a new world record for Picabia," said auction director Thomas Bompard.

Another work by the artist had previously sold for 8 million euros (\$8.8 million). "Pavonia" depicts overlapping images inspired by motifs in the ancient

city of Pompeii. It was first commissioned by art dealer Leonce Rosenberg to decorate his wife's bedroom in their Parisian apartment.

Among the other paintings on sale, Belgian artist Rene Magritte's "Le paysage fantome" went for 2.1 million euros (\$2.3 million) and his "Le Palais de la Courtisane" for 2 million euros (\$2.2 million). They fetched far less than his "L'Empire des lumieres", which was sold for £59.4 million (\$79.4 million, 71.4 million euros) at the start of the month, shattering the record for one of his works. — AFP



Visitors look at "L'autre Son de Cloche" by Belgium artist Rene Magritte, during a presentation at Christie's auction house in Paris. — AFP

Sports

From stones to selfies: Australia super fan welcomed in Pakistan

500 photographs taken every day

KARACHI: When Australian cricket fan Luke Gillian last visited Pakistan in 1998, home supporters threw stones at him when he ventured out in public. These days everyone wants a selfie. Gillian is back in Pakistan with a small contingent of Australian fans on their first tour of the country in nearly a quarter of a century—and has been blown away by the welcome they have received. Australia for 24 years, along with many international teams, declined to tour Pakistan on security grounds.

The situation became worse after a fatal terror attack on the Sri Lanka team bus in Lahore in 2009, after which Pakistan had to play “home” games abroad for a decade, mostly in the United Arab Emirates. But the cricket-mad nation is lapping up the current tour by the world’s top-ranked Test team, which will see the three-Test series go to a decider in Lahore next week after draws in Rawalpindi and Karachi.

“It was perceived to be too dangerous to go outside,” Gillian said of his visit on Australia’s last tour in 1998. “When I did get outside there were large groups of people walking in the streets and I had rocks thrown at me. ‘And I went, ‘Nah, I am just going to go back home, I don’t need to put up with this.’” Nearly a quarter of a century later, attitudes have changed. “I reckon, in Rawalpindi, 500 photographs were taken of me every day, easily,” the 51-year-old from Victoria told AFP.

Piece of cake

“I have been given I don’t know how many cups of tea, how many pieces of cake, bottles of Pepsi, water and just little incidentals people have given us as a ‘thank you’-free haircuts, free laundry.” Like most Australians, Gillian took to cricket as a child. “You grow up with cricket in your blood,” he said. “You often hold a cricket bat or a ball before you know how to walk, and as soon as you can walk, you mark your run-up to bowl.”

Over the years he has visited every major cricket-playing nation—even socializing with Australian greats such as Shane Warne, Adam Gilchrist, Michael Clarke and Justin Langer. But those days are a thing of the past, with modern players under intense social media scrutiny, coupled with strict anti-match fixing protocols to keep players away from “undesirable” elements such as illegal bookmakers.

“Now there is a strong disconnect between myself and the team,” said Gillian. “Let’s go back 15 years... I would still get text messages (from players), saying: ‘We are going to go for a beer in this place after the game, if you want to join us’. It’s gone and I miss it,” he said. Gillian said he decided to make this trip as much to support Pakistan’s efforts to re-establish itself as a safe cricketing destination as to shout for Australia.

“I am here for the game, to show the outside world that we can actually watch cricket and travel to



KARACHI: A local resident poses for a selfie with Australian cricket fan Luke Gillian (right) in Karachi. — AFP

Pakistan and be safe, be happy and enjoy,” he said. Socially this is so much more relaxed than it was 24 years ago. It is so much easier to be here. So much easier to enjoy Pakistan. “I think that love, and the embrace

of each other and the game itself, if that goes across to the wider audience, then it can sell the great game and sell the connect between the two nations and two cultures. “Win or lose, it doesn’t matter.” — AFP

Nadal neutralizes Opelka as Alcaraz and Norrie win

INDIAN WELLS: Rafael Nadal battled past big-hitting American Reilly Opelka 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/5) on Wednesday to push his 2022 record to 18-0 and reach the quarter-finals of the Indian Wells WTA and ATP Masters. The 35-year-old Spaniard, who won a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title at the Australian Open in January and lifted the trophy in Acapulco last month, stayed on track for a fourth title in the California desert. But he had all he could handle from the 2.11m tall American, including a raft of serves that topped the 140 mph mark and had Nadal’s back against the wall—literally. “I manage it so-so,” he said of Opelka’s serve, which the Spaniard stood as far back in the court as possible to receive. “I don’t know if the cameras can follow me like 10 meters behind the baseline.” Opelka saved the only break point of a tense first set. A patient Nadal worked the rallies in the tiebreaker and after he gained a 4-3 lead Opelka produced three straight errors to surrender the set.

Impervious on his own serve in the opening set, Nadal gave Opelka a break chance with a double fault in the fifth game of the second and the American pounced on it. Unable to take advantage of a break point in the next game, Nadal saved three more break points in the seventh game before breaking back to knot it at 4-4. Nadal roared ahead in the second set tiebreaker, and after Opelka saved two match points with thundering serves the Spaniard finished it off with a winner. Nadal became just the second player to start a season 18-0 since the ATP Tour launched in 1990. Novak Djokovic has done it twice, starting 41-0 in 2011 and 26-0 in 2020. The Spaniard will face Australian Nick Kyrgios, who advanced on a walkover when Jannik Sinner withdrew due to illness, on Thursday. Nadal was followed into the quarter-finals by 18-year-old compatriot Carlos Alcaraz, who notched another breakthrough with a 7-5, 6-1 victory over 35-year-old Gael Monfils of France.

Alcaraz, into his first Masters 1000 quarter-final, is the youngest Indian Wells ATP quarter-finalist since 17-year-old Michael Chang in 1989. Alcaraz, winner of the title in Rio de Janeiro last month, gradually ramped up the pressure with a powerful ground game, converting his third break chance in the opening set with a forehand winner. He didn’t face a break point in the match, and gained an early edge in the second set with a deft drop shot that caught Monfils flat-footed behind the baseline. Monfils, who captured a title in Adelaide in January, had upset world number one Daniil Medvedev in the third round, but his tournament ended with a whimper as he was broken for the fourth time of the night in the final game. Should they both advance Alcaraz would meet his idol, Nadal, in the semis. “It would be amazing, but first I have to win quarter-finals,” said Alcaraz, who next faces defending champion Cameron Norrie. —AFP



INDIAN WELLS: Rafael Nadal of Spain returns a shot to Reilly Opelka during the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on March 16, 2022. — AFP



BRIDGETOWN: Dan Lawrence (left) and Joe Root, of England, celebrate their 100 partnership during the first day of the 2nd Test between West Indies and England at Kensington Oval on March 16, 2022. — AFP

Root century puts England in command against West Indies

BRIDGETOWN: Dan Lawrence’s last-over impetuosity cost him a maiden Test hundred but Joe Root’s composed, unbeaten century guided England to a comfortable 244 for three at the close of the first day of the second Test against the West Indies in Barbados on Wednesday.

England’s captain reached stumps at 119 off 246 deliveries with 12 fours and has already gone a long way towards justifying his decision to bat first again on winning the toss in conditions not dissimilar to the placid pitch on offer in the drawn first Test in Antigua a week earlier. His 164-run third-wicket stand with Lawrence at Kensington Oval turned the screws on a West Indies team that contributed to its own plight.

Wicketkeeper Joshua da Silva dropped a leg-side catch offered by Root off senior pacer Kemar Roach when on 34, while Alzarri Joseph, in the unfamiliar position of first slip, missed a straightforward chance offered by an attacking Lawrence off Jayden Seales in the final session. Energized by that reprieve off the second new ball, Lawrence was not prepared to exercise caution even with the end of play approaching.

Consecutive boundaries to the bowling of Jason Holder took him to 91 but in attempting another full-blooded off drive off what proved to be the final ball of the day, he gave a simple catch to home skipper Kraigg Brathwaite at short extra-cover. “It was obviously disappointing for Dan the way it ended but this was a really great, positive day for us,” said England’s batting coach Marcus Trescothick.

“We have a great platform to build from and obviously those two, the way they are playing at the moment, put the West Indies under some real pressure.”

Morikawa, Hovland chase World No 1 spot at PGA Valspar

MIAMI: Playing partners Collin Morikawa and Viktor Hovland, the world’s number two and three players, will be chasing the summit of the global rankings at the US PGA Valspar Championship. Five of the world’s 10 top players will compete at Innisbrook’s par-71 Copperhead course at Palm Harbor, Florida, with Spain’s Jon Rahm in jeopardy of losing the number one spot. American Morikawa, the reigning British Open champion and 2021 PGA Championship winner, and Norway’s Hovland, who won at Mayakoba in November and the World Challenge in December, are each at the highest ranking of their respective careers.

Trescothick, the former England opener, was full of praise for Root as a batsman and leader following his 25th Test ton. “To have the discipline and the approach the way he is going about his business, it’s a real example for everyone else within our side. “It’s great to see that hunger, that desire to keep coming back for more in Test cricket, given that he’s just coming off a hundred in the last Test.”

Crawley goes for a duck

Root had come to the crease in just the fourth over of the day after Seales removed Zak Crawley without scoring. Fresh from an excellent century in the second innings at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, the upright right-hander touched a seaming delivery through to Da Silva who make no mistake falling low to his right. Mindful of a double-failure in his debut Test in Antigua, the other opener, Alex Lees, played with exaggerated care through his three hours at the crease, facing 138 deliveries and finding the boundary on only three occasions. His vigil ended in the afternoon session when left-arm spinner Veerasammy Permaul trapped him leg-before for 30 to end a 72-run second-wicket stand with Root.

Permaul was one of three slow blowers employed by Brathwaite who seemed keen to increase the West Indies over-rate and therefore avoid the docking of World Test Championship points and assessing of fines on the players as was the case in the first Test of the three-match series. Lawrence was positive from the moment he came to the crease, striking 13 fours and one six off 150 balls. With Root already in full flow by the time he arrived, it provided an entertaining spectacle for a near full house dominated by delirious English visitors.

West Indies retained the same 11 from the first Test but England were forced into two changes due to a growing injury and illness list among their fast bowling stocks. Saqib Mahmood, who played in the five-match T20 series at the same venue in January, was already earmarked for a debut in place of Mark Wood, the tear-away pacer who sustained a painful right elbow injury during the opening encounter. —AFP

Morikawa or Hovland, together in the groups, would become world number one for the first time with a victory. Morikawa would take the top spot with as low as a three-way share of second-provided Hovland isn’t the winner. “It would be huge,” Morikawa said. “It would be definitely a part of my career I would remember but I want to stay there as well.

“Anyone would love to get there and everyone would see the satisfaction in the work and everything you have put in. But whether I get there next week or whether I get there whenever or whether I don’t get there, the work is not going to stop because I feel I can still get better. “I want to be the best in the world but that’s going to require a lot of consistency, a lot of other areas of my game to be a little more consistent. I’ve shown it in certain events where I’m able to put it together but I want to keep doing that, keep working on those little things.”

Morikawa said thoughts of taking the top spot have snuck into his thoughts and prevented his best efforts in prior events. “I think the biggest thing for me is just I need to focus on this week,” he said. “I say that every

Record-breaking Babar up there with the best after Pakistan heroics

KARACHI: Pakistan captain Babar Azam has long established his credentials in limited-overs cricket, but his 196 against Australia put him up there with some greats in the long form of the game too. Azam fought valiantly for 10 hours and seven minutes in an innings lasting 425 deliveries to help Pakistan salvage a draw on Wednesday in the second Test in Karachi. His heroic innings became the second-longest knock in the fourth innings of a Test, just 36 minutes behind Michael Atherton’s 185 not out that ensured England saved the 1995 Johannesburg Test against South Africa. Azam added 228 for the third wicket with Abdullah Shafique (96) and 115 for the fifth with Mohammad Rizwan (104 not out) as Pakistan defied the Australian attack for 171.4 overs. The epic draw kept the three-match series—Australia’s first in Pakistan for 24 years—tied at 0-0 after the first Test also ended in a draw in Rawalpindi.

Former Pakistan captain Misbah-ul-Haq told AFP that Azam’s performance was “career defining”. The 27-year-old Azam’s remarkable effort was the highest score by a captain in the fourth innings of a Test, surpassing Atherton’s South Africa knock and propelling him above the likes of Don Bradman and Ricky Ponting. Azam also became the highest individual scorer for Pakistan in the fourth innings of a Test, surpassing Younis Khan’s 171 not out against Sri Lanka in 2015.

His masterclass kept the Aussies at bay after the visitors dominated for five days and looked certain to win the match, having set the hosts a mammoth 506-run target. “In terms of the context of the game, with the team under pressure, him being captain and as batter who had not scored a hundred for some time, this is his best innings,” Misbah said. “Such a match-saving innings gives you belief. I think this will go a long way in establishing his Test credentials,” added Misbah, under whose captaincy Azam played his first Test in 2016.

Fab five?

Azam has a long-held ambition of becoming the best in the game. From a ball boy at Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore in the 2007 Test between Pakistan and South Africa, Azam graduated to play in the 2010 Junior World Cup and then skipped his country at the same tournament two years later—scoring the most runs on both occasions. He learnt the art of occupying the crease with a memorable 266 for State Bank against Habib Bank in the domestic Quaid Trophy Silver league in 2014, heralding his arrival. Five months later he made his one-day international debut—and did not look back. But he was slow off the mark in Test cricket, his first century not coming until the 32nd innings.

“I was never in doubt about his talent because he has a solid technique,” said Misbah. “He started to blossom in the West Indies (2017) and Australia (2019).” Azam hit 104 and 97 on the Australia tour, suggesting he could rank alongside Australia’s Steve Smith, India’s Virat Kohli, New Zealand’s Kane Williamson and England’s Joe Root—the so-called “Fab Four”. Azam is ranked number one batsman in the International Cricket Council’s ODI and T20I rankings, but eighth in Tests. —AFP

time, but there have been times where it crept in, where you think about world number one, you think about what I need to do. “I really want to focus on (winning) this week because I want to win. It feels like it has been a while.”

American Justin Thomas, ranked eighth, became world number one for just over a month in 2018. The 2017 PGA Championship winner appreciates the feat of reaching the top spot since he hasn’t been there in a while. “It feels like a really long time,” Thomas said. “I’ve looked at it before, especially in terms of the points that I’ve had. There’s a lot of years and a lot of months and weeks where I would have had the number one in the world ranking at other times. But that’s unfortunate. It doesn’t matter. It’s an irrelevant kind of thing.

“I just think it’s really a huge accomplishment and it’s very hard to get to. I don’t think I under-appreciated how hard it was to get there. I may have under-appreciated how hard it is to stay there. “To just consistently be that consistent, that good, all the time is something that’s very, very hard to do.” —AFP

Sports

Dinwiddie buzzer-beater as Mavericks down Nets

Giannis helps Bucks overcome a spirited Kings side

LOS ANGELES: Spencer Dinwiddie scored a buzzer-beating three-pointer as the Dallas Mavericks staged a dramatic comeback to end the Brooklyn Nets' four-game winning streak on Wednesday. Dinwiddie's 25-foot winner sealed a pulsating tussle in Brooklyn which had been dominated by a thrilling duel between Nets star Kevin Durant and the Mavericks' Luka Doncic.

Durant looked to have edged the Nets into a game-winning position with 10 seconds remaining after sinking a three-pointer from 27 feet to put Brooklyn 111-110 ahead, just after Doncic's fadeaway jumper gave Dallas a slender 110-108 lead. But with the last play of the game, Doncic worked the ball to Dinwiddie on the edge of the arc and the shooting guard made no mistake with the three for a 113-111 victory. It capped a superb fourth-quarter performance from Dinwiddie, who scored 15 of his 22 points in the final period.

Dinwiddie, who joined Dallas in a trade from the

Washington Wizards last month, insisted Doncic, who finished with 37 points with nine rebounds and nine assists, should take the credit. "That was Luka making a play rather than me doing anything special," Dinwiddie said. Brooklyn looked to have taken a decisive advantage after leading 91-79 at the end of the third quarter in front of a sellout 17,981 crowd at Brooklyn's Barclays Center arena.

But Dinwiddie's late burst of scoring helped the Mavs outscore the hosts 34-20 in the final period to seal victory.

Durant led the Nets scoring with 23 points, while Goran Dragic added 21. The Mavericks improved to 43-26 with the win to remain fourth in the Western Conference while the Nets fell to 36-34 in the East. In other games, the Golden State Warriors were given an injury scare after Steph Curry limped out of their 110-88 home defeat to the Boston Celtics in San Francisco.

Curry hobbled back to the locker room in the first half with a sore foot after the Celtics' Marcus Smart dived into the Warriors star's left ankle. Curry did not return and the Celtics pulled clear for a convincing win, with Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown each contributing 26 points. In Sacramento, Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 36 points to help the Milwaukee Bucks overcome a spirited Kings side.

A neck-and-neck encounter went down to the final few minutes before the Bucks pulled clear thanks to a combined 27 points in the final quarter from Antetokounmpo, Khris Middleton and Jrue Holiday. In Cleveland, Joel Embiid celebrated his 28th birthday with a 35-point display as the Philadelphia 76ers held on for a 118-114 win over the Cavaliers. The Sixers looked to be cruising after a dominant first half which included a 42-point second quarter to put them 72-59 ahead at the break.

But an improved Cavaliers defensive display stifled the Sixers' scoring in the third period as the home side outscored the visitors 31-13 to lead by five heading into the final quarter. Philadelphia took control in the fourth quarter however, with Embiid, James Harden and Tyrese Maxey combining for 25 points to shepherd the Sixers over the line. Embiid finished with 35 points, 17 rebounds and five assists, with support from Maxey (25 points), Harden (21) and Tobias Harris (19).

Suns thrash Rockets

Embiid was in anything but a celebratory mood however after a game which saw the Sixers almost squander a 17-point lead. "Obviously we made the right plays at the end, but we can't keep blowing these leads," Embiid said. "We've got to do a better job, especially when we get these leads-staying focused, getting stops, and moving the ball on offense."

In other games, Devin Booker scored 36 points to inspire the Western Conference-leading Phoenix Suns to a blowout 129-112 win over Houston. In Washington, Nikola Jokic scored 29 points in the Denver Nuggets' 127-109 win over the Wizards. In Minnesota, Karl Anthony-Towns followed up Monday's 60-point masterclass with 30 points as the Timberwolves romped past the struggling Los Angeles Lakers 124-104. The Lakers were never in contention as Minnesota led from start to finish, outscoring the visitors 31-17 in the first quarter alone.—AFP



NEW YORK: Spencer Dinwiddie #26 of the Dallas Mavericks drives against Nic Claxton #33 of the Brooklyn Nets during their game at Barclays Center on March 16, 2022.—AFP

Pumas stun Revolution

MEXICO CITY: Mexican side Pumas UNAM sent the New England Revolution crashing out of the CONCACAF Champions League on Wednesday, overturning a 3-0 first-leg deficit before winning on penalties to book their place in the semi-finals of the regional club tournament. New England, bidding to join fellow Major League Soccer side New York City in the last four, were left shellshocked by a rampant Pumas at Mexico City's Estadio Olimpico.

A goal in each half from Pumas striker Juan Dineno raised hopes of an improbable comeback before Sebastian Saucedo lashed a strike into the roof of the net on 59 minutes to make it 3-0 on the night, 3-3 on aggregate. Both teams had chances to snatch victory in a frenetic closing passage of play, with New England's Omar Gonzalez seeing a header saved at point blank in stoppage time by Pumas goalkeeper Alfredo Talavera.

With no extra time, the game went straight to penalties. New England's Sebastian Lletget handed the initiative to Pumas after blazing his team's fourth penalty over the bar to leave the shoot-out at 2-2. Nicolas Freire then scored to put Pumas 3-2 ahead, and although US international Jozy Altidore levelled with his team's fifth kick, Dineno stepped up to fire the Mexican side into the semi-finals, winning the shoot-out 4-3. The defeat capped a disappointing night for MLS sides in the tournament, the premier club competition for teams from Central America, North America and the Caribbean (CONCACAF). Earlier, Montreal were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Liga-MX side Cruz Azul, who went through to the semi-finals 2-1 on aggregate.—AFP

Reality of relegation threat dawning on sinking Everton

LIVERPOOL: Everton's Premier League clash with Newcastle yesterday has been labelled the struggling club's "biggest game for 20 years" as they stare down the barrel of a financially ruinous relegation. Frank Lampard's arrival at Goodison Park to replace the unpopular Rafael Benitez as manager has not had the desired effect. A dismal run of eight defeats in their last nine league games has left Everton out of the relegation zone only on goal difference.

Games in hand on all their relegation rivals should offer some hope, but there is little confidence on the blue half of Liverpool that they can escape after taking only nine points from the last 60 on offer. Following the visit of Newcastle, Lampard's men face four of the top six in West Ham, Manchester United, Liverpool and Chelsea, plus a relegation six-pointer against Burnley.

"Everton's home game versus Newcastle is their biggest game in 20 years," said former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher, himself a boyhood Everton fan. "I don't think Evertonians believe they're going to stay up. Their fixtures are horrific." Relegation at any time would be a major financial blow to a club that has lost a combined £260 million (\$339 million) between 2017 and 2020, with accounts for the 2020/21 season also expected to show a huge deficit.

Making their situation even more grim, Everton have already lost a major revenue stream in Alisher Usmanov, who has been sanctioned by the UK govern-

ment for alleged links to Russian President Vladimir Putin amid the war in Ukraine. Everton have suspended sponsorship agreements with Usmanov's USM Holdings, which had naming rights to the club's training ground and first option on naming rights for the new £500 million stadium-due to open in 2024 - as well as Russian companies Megafon and Yota.

Years of mismanagement at all levels are coming back to bite the Toffees. Everton owner Farhad Moshiri has funded over half-a-billion pounds in transfers since his takeover in 2016, the vast majority of which has produced little return on the field.

'Absolute disgrace'

Many more millions have been frittered away in pay-offs for the sackings of former managers Roberto Martinez, Ronald Koeman, Sam Allardyce, Marco Silva and Benitez as Everton have consistently changed not just the man in the dugout but what they are looking for in a boss. "No matter what manager you are picking it is not working," added Carragher. "The players are an absolute disgrace at Everton, they really are."

Only Manchester United, Liverpool and Arsenal have won more English top-flight titles than Everton. Their glory days of the 1980s may be long gone, but they have been a constant presence in the Premier League era. Not since 1954 have Everton been out of the top flight and, despite Carragher's jibes, the players appear to appreciate how perilous their position is.

"There is nowhere to hide and it's time to step up," said Everton defender Mason Holgate after Sunday's 1-0 home defeat against Wolves. "If you look at the squad we've got we shouldn't be anywhere near here." Former Chelsea boss Lampard is only eight games into his reign, but there will not be many matches bigger than Newcastle's visit on Thursday if he is to avoid the embarrassment of a relegation on his CV.—AFP

Amir Annual Grand Prix kicks off Sunday

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sport Club facilities are now ready for the launch of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Annual Grand Prix on Sunday March 20th, 2022. The event will be held at the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex.



Obaid Munahi Al-Osaimi

Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Obaid Munahi Al-Osaimi said the opening ceremony will be at 5:00 pm in the presence of Representative of His Highness the Amir, Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Mishal Al-Jaber

Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Al-Osaimi, on behalf of the Kuwait Shooting Federation Board of Directors thanked His Highness the Amir for sponsoring this important tournament.

He said the Higher Organizing Committee made sure that all is ready and inspected the ranges and other facilities. He added that there will be a friendship championship between the Japanese and Kuwait Shooting Federations as well as the Kuwait Paralympic Committee to mark the 60 years of diplomatic relations between Japan and Kuwait. The competition will be in the 10-meter air rifle. Obaid Al-Osaimi concluded his statement by thanking Public Authority for Sport and its Director General Dr Humoud Fulaiteh for their continued support of KSSC activities.

Remarkable Shiffrin wins overall World Cup title

COURCHEVEL: American skier Mikaela Shiffrin won the women's overall World Cup title for the fourth time in her career yesterday, bouncing back from a disastrous performance at the Beijing Winter Olympics. Shiffrin finished second in the Super-G in Courchevel in the French Alps to give her an unassailable 236-point lead over her closest rival, Slovakia's Petra Vlhova, with two races left this season.

Vlhova, the defending champion, finished 17th, outside the top 15 scoring places. Ragnhild Mowinckel of Norway won the race and immediately congratulated Shiffrin with a hug. At 27, Shiffrin has equalled the record of her retired compatriot Lindsey Vonn by winning the crystal globe trophy for a fourth time. Only Austrian great Annemarie Moser-Proell, with six titles in the 1970s, has done better. Shiffrin set up the win with a rare victory in the downhill 24 hours earlier.

"The whole season has been ups and downs, and the downs have been very, very low for me, some of the toughest moments of my career and of my life," she said. "Every time I have a tough moment, it brings back the other tough moments and I just get so low, and I just want to go home. I felt it five days ago, I felt it at the Olympics. "So it's quite special to come here after everything to be able to accomplish and achieve maybe the biggest goal I had for myself this season." Shiffrin won three straight overall World Cup titles from 2017 to 2019 before the death of her father Jeff in 2020 led to her taking most of that year off.—AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
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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



NORD: Chelsea's English defender Trevoh Chalobah (left) and Lille's Turkish forward Burak Yilmaz jump for the ball during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match between Lille (LOSC) and Chelsea FC on March 16, 2022. —AFP

Troubled Chelsea book CL quarters

Tuchel praises players amid uncertainty about club's future

LILLE: Chelsea coach Thomas Tuchel praised his players for remaining focused amid the uncertainty about the club's future after they progressed Wednesday to the Champions League (CL) quarter-finals, where he said they would be "the team nobody wants to play". The reigning European champions came from behind to beat Lille 2-1 in northern France and win their last-16 tie 4-1 on aggregate with Christian Pulisic and captain Cesar Azpilicueta scoring their goals.

The victory came on the same day it emerged that the Ricketts family, owners of Major League Baseball team the Chicago Cubs, were leading a consortium looking to buy the club while British athletics great Sebastian Coe announced his involvement in a rival takeover bid. Reeling from the impact of UK government sanctions imposed on their Russian billionaire owner Roman Abramovich, it

was also reported on Wednesday by Sky Sports that EU sanctions mean Chelsea cannot sell tickets for their next Champions League home ties. If confirmed that would mean Chelsea playing behind closed doors in Europe at Stamford Bridge.

"Thanks for ruining my evening," Tuchel said when that was put to him as he spoke to reporters at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy. "Can we speak about it when it's confirmed? Let's see. Today I'm happy we are in the last eight." Chelsea have now played five games since Abramovich put the club up for sale on March 2 and won them all. Since losing 1-0 at Manchester City in mid-January, Tuchel's team have lost just once, on penalties to Liverpool in the League Cup final.

"Chelsea is so clear what it demands from every employee and from every player-play your role to the limit, live up

to it and take responsibility," Tuchel said when asked how he and his team managed to maintain their concentration amid all the turmoil. "This is what Chelsea is about and that sharpens your mentality and brings out the best in you because it is normal to do it on a daily basis and because this mentality has been installed over years and years. "That is why it is possible that we can stay focused and produce results, as we do now when things are uncertain and unstable around us."

'Not the best idea'

Tuchel admitted that Chelsea had got it badly wrong in putting in a request for their next game, an FA Cup quarter-final away to Middlesbrough on Saturday, to be played behind closed doors in the interests of fairness and "sporting integrity". The club, who are only allowed to operate under a special licence, cannot

sell tickets, with only existing ticket-holders allowed to attend matches. "Let me put it like this-we love to play in front of spectators and I don't think spectators of our opponents should suffer from the consequences," said the German. "It was not the best idea. We love to play in front of spectators and I am happy it was turned down."

Despite all the turbulence, Tuchel's team will be in today's draw for the Champions League quarter-finals along with fellow Premier League sides Liverpool and Manchester City as well as Real Madrid, Atletico Madrid, Villarreal, Bayern Munich and Benfica. "I want us to be the team nobody wants to play," Tuchel said. "It's a big step to do it again and again and that is why we fight for top-four places in maybe the toughest league in the world and we fight now again in the top eight teams. "This brings out the very best in us."—AFP



MONTEVIDEO: River Plate's Matias Alfonso (Front) and Liverpool's Pablo Gonzalez vie for the ball during their Sudamericana Cup first round second leg all-Uruguayan football match on March 16, 2022. —AFP

Liverpool sink Arsenal; Kane lifts Spurs

LONDON: Jurgen Klopp urged Liverpool to finish the job as they moved within one point of Premier League leaders Manchester City after Diogo Jota and Roberto Firmino inspired a crucial 2-0 win against Arsenal on Wednesday. Klopp's side took advantage of City's goalless draw against Crystal Palace on Monday thanks to their smash-and-grab raid at the Emirates Stadium.

Arsenal enjoyed a sustained period of pressure that could easily have yielded the opening goal, but Alisson Becker made a superb save to deny Martin Odegaard and Liverpool capitalized to steal the points. Liverpool, chasing an unprecedented quadruple, have won nine successive league games, scoring 23 goals and only conceding twice. Having trailed City by 14 points on January 15, Liverpool have hunted down the champions impressively, putting the race in their own hands as they eye a second title in three seasons.

A victory against Watford in their next league game on April 2 would set the stage for a seismic showdown with Pep Guardiola's team at the Etihad Stadium on April 10. "We've obviously had a good period. It's what we need. We're one point behind, but it's still the same. We have to win football matches," Klopp said. "It's better to be one point behind than 14 points. But in 10 years, do you think somebody will say you should be proud of finishing second? Probably not."

"We know we have a special group here and we're trying to squeeze everything we can out of the situation." Finding a way to subdue an in-form Arsenal side who had won their previous five league games to climb to fourth place made the victory in rain-soaked north London even more impressive. "It's big. Coming here and winning against Arsenal is already special, but winning the game like it was is even more special," Klopp said.

Klopp threw down the gauntlet to City this week when he admitted he wants Liverpool to be as "annoying as possible" in the title race. There is no doubt Liverpool are proving extremely irritating, especially since they beat the Gunners with Mohamed Salah starting on the bench after suffering a foot injury in Saturday's win at Brighton. After several years in the doldrums, Arsenal are on the up and the vibrant atmosphere at the often subdued Emirates reflected that renewed confidence in Mikel Arteta's young team. —AFP

Villarreal humiliate Juventus, cruise to CL quarter-finals

TURIN: Villarreal reached the quarter-finals of the Champions League on Wednesday after inflicting a humiliating 3-0 defeat on Juventus in Turin to go through 4-1 on aggregate. Penalties from Gerard Moreno and Arnaut Danjuma and Pau Torres's tap-in in the final quarter of an hour were enough for Unai Emery's well-organised side to see off the Italians at the Allianz Stadium and make Friday's last-eight draw. "It's a magical night," said Moreno to Movistar+. "We thought we could do it, we've always shown that in the big games we compete, the team gives its best... we all want to be in there with the best in Europe, we're going to keep dreaming and we're going to do it together." Europa League holders Villarreal stunned Juve with three sucker punches after spending most of the match on the back foot, content to hold off the hosts' attacks which got less potent as the match wore on.

An embarrassing loss was just Juve's second since the end of November and punctures a dogged run of form which has put them back into the league title race at home. Massimiliano Allegri's side were loudly booed off by the home crowd who watched their team shrink from a promising start and bounce off a yellow wall before being bundled out of the competition.

Italy are now without a single representative in this season's Champions League as it moves into its latter stages, as a cynical, clinical Villarreal beat a Serie A team at their own game. "For the first 75 minutes we played well, we had chances in the first half. They put themselves behind the ball and only an episode like the one that happened could have changed the course of the match," Allegri said to Amazon Prime. "They had nine men behind the ball and they didn't come out to counter-attack... Their intention was to take advantage of a piece of good fortune."

Villarreal floor Juve

Missing a host of starters and with Paulo Dybala, Giorgio Chiellini and Federico Bernardeschi only on



TURIN: Villarreal's Argentinean goalkeeper Geronimo Rulli (Rear center) grabs a shot from Juventus' Serbian forward Dusan Vlahovic (left) during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match on March 16, 2022. —AFP

the bench, Juve started well and had the first opportunity in the 11th minute of a breathless first half when Alvaro Morata had his powerful header well saved by Geronimo Rulli. Two minutes later Morata was involved again when he and Juan Cuadrado, who had supplied the cross for the Spaniard's header moments before, stepped on each other's toes and allowed a huge chance to shoot go begging.

Then Dusan Vlahovic had a long-range drive pushed aside before he was denied by the crossbar, his first-time strike from Mattia De Sciglio's cross beating Rulli but thwacking out off the woodwork in the 21st minute. Juve were almost punished for their inability to put away their chances seconds later when Giovanni Lo Celso charged forward with teammates swarming into the home team's box and with options to either side curled a shot just wide.

Villarreal clearly decided to shut up shop in the early minutes of the second half in the hope of

stemming the flow of Juve chances and the game slowed down to almost a crawl until Adrien Rabiot thumped an effort from distance at Rulli and Cuadrado fired wide on the hour. The away side easily held Juve at bay for the rest of the match and when Francis Coquelin was clumsily brought down by Daniele Rugani, substitute Moreno was fresh enough to send his spot-kick past Wojciech Szczesny with 12 minutes remaining. Moreno's goal, which came after referee Szymon Marciniak's pitchside video check, deflated the crowd and when Torres pushed home the second from Serge Aurier's cross in the 85th minute the game was well and truly up.

The boos began to ring around the stadium, and they only got louder when Matthijs de Ligt charged down Danjuma's shot with his arm in the closing moments and the Netherlands international made it a perfect evening for Villarreal, and a nightmare for Juve.—AFP