

7 Japan PM presses Modi for Indian 'action' on Ukraine



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Russia goes hypersonic as Ukraine urges peace deal

Dozens dead after military barracks hit • Hundreds trapped under bombed theatre

KYIV: Russia said yesterday that it had unleashed hypersonic missiles against an arms depot in Ukraine, the first use of the next-generation weapons in combat, after Kyiv's embattled leader pressed for "meaningful" talks to end a conflict now in its fourth week. Moscow also said its troops had broken Ukrainian defenses to enter the strategic southern port city of Mariupol, and destroyed radio and intelligence sites just outside Odessa.

If confirmed, the use of Russia's new Kinzhal (Dagger) hypersonic missiles, which can elude most defense systems, would mark a new escalation in Russia's campaign to force Ukraine to abandon hopes of closer ties with the West. Ukrainian air force spokesman Yuri Ignat told AFP that the weapons depot in Deliatyn, a village near the border with Romania, had indeed been hit but "we have no information of the type of missile".

"There has been damage, destruction and the detonation of munitions," he said. "They are using all the missiles in their arsenal against us." Ukraine officials also admitted they had "temporarily" lost access to the Sea of Azov,

though Russia has effectively controlled the coastline for weeks after surrounding Mariupol. Russian President Vladimir Putin, who unveiled the Kinzhal missile in 2018, has termed it "an ideal weapon" that flies at 10 times the speed of sound - analysts say Russia is leading the hypersonics race, followed by China and the US. Moscow's announcement came hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky again appealed for peace, urging Russia to accept "meaningful" talks in his latest Facebook video. "This is the time to meet, to talk, time for renewing territorial integrity and fairness for Ukraine," he said. "Otherwise, Russia's losses will be such that several generations will not recover."

Ukraine claimed yesterday that a Russian general had been killed by strikes on an airfield outside Kherson, just north of Crimea, saying he was the fifth top-ranking officer killed since the invasion began on Feb 24. Fierce resistance has managed to stall Russian forces outside Kyiv and several other cities in the east, making them vulnerable to Ukrainian attacks against supply lines.

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KUWAIT: People in traditional Yemeni attire are seen at the Yemen stand during an entertainment event at Abraj Park in Adailiya organized by the Deanery of the Diplomatic Corps with the participation of embassies and international organizations to mark Kuwait's National and Liberation days, International Women's Day and the arrival of spring. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Pages 12 & 13)

News in brief

4 US troops killed in crash

OSLO: A US military plane taking part in NATO exercises has crashed in Norway, killing all four American troops on board. The four were taking part in the Cold Response military exercises involving 30,000 troops from NATO and partner countries. Their plane, a V-22B Osprey aircraft belonging to the US Marine Corps, was reported missing on Friday evening south of Bodo in northern Norway. — AFP



CANAKKALE: Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan poses for photos during the inauguration of the 1915 Canakkale Bridge on Friday. — AFP

World's longest suspension bridge

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday opened the world's longest suspension bridge over the Dardanelles strait in northwestern Turkey - which cuts travel time between Asia and Europe to six minutes. The \$2.8-billion "1915 Canakkale Bridge" has a main span of 2,023 km between its towers, making it longer than the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge in Japan. — AFP

Finland world's happiest nation

HELSINKI: Finland has been named the world's happiest country for the fifth year running, in an annual UN-sponsored index that ranked Afghanistan as the unhappiest, closely followed by Lebanon. Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia recorded the biggest boosts in wellbeing. The largest falls in the World Happiness table came in Lebanon, Venezuela and Afghanistan. Kuwait ranked 50th on the list. — AFP

US 'troubled' by Assad visit to ally UAE

DUBAI: Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's visit to the United Arab Emirates left the US "profoundly disappointed", it said yesterday, urging allies to avoid normalizing ties with a regime accused of "horrific atrocities". Assad's surprise trip on Friday was his first official visit to an Arab country since civil war erupted in his country in 2011, killing close to half a million people.

It was the latest sign of warming relations between Syria and energy-rich UAE - a key US ally which also normalized ties with the Zionist entity in 2020. "We are profoundly disappointed and troubled by this apparent attempt to legitimize Bashar Al-Assad," US State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement sent to AFP yesterday.

Assad, he said, "remains responsible and accountable for the death and suffering of countless Syrians, the displacement of more than half of the pre-war Syrian population, and the arbitrary detention and disappearance of over 150,000 Syrian men, women and children. As US Secretary of State

Continued on Page 2



ABU DHABI: Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad is greeted by Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan on Friday. —AFP

China reports first two COVID deaths in a year

SHANGHAI: China reported two COVID-19 deaths yesterday, its first in more than a year, underlining the threat posed by an Omicron outbreak that has triggered the country's highest case count since the pandemic's onset. The National Health Commission

said both deaths occurred in Jilin, the northeastern province which has been hardest hit by a nationwide rise in cases that has prompted lockdowns or tight restrictions in several cities.

The deaths were the first reported in mainland China since Jan 2021, and bring the country's death toll from the pandemic to 4,638. China reported 4,051 new infections yesterday, down from 4,365 the day before, the health commission said, with more than half of the new cases in Jilin. Beijing's communist leadership has touted the low death rate relative to other countries as evidence of the strength of its one-party governance model.

The two new deaths were buried in the health commission's daily report, and state-controlled media made little mention of them. Officials in Jilin later said both victims were male, 65 and 87 years old, and both had a range of underlying health problems associated with advanced age. The coronavirus emerged in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019 but China has largely kept it under control through strict border controls, lengthy quarantines and targeted lockdowns.

But the highly transmissible Omicron variant is posing a challenge to the effectiveness and

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Egypt unveils five tombs at Saqqara site

SAQQARA: Egypt unveiled yesterday five ancient Pharaonic tombs at the Saqqara archaeological site south of Cairo, the latest in a series of landmark discoveries in the area. Saqqara is a vast necropolis of the ancient Egyptian capital Memphis, a UNESCO World

Heritage Site home to more than a dozen pyramids, animal burial sites and ancient Coptic Christian monasteries.

Egyptian archaeologists discovered the five tombs northeast of the pyramid of King Merenre I, who ruled Egypt around 2270 BC. According to Mostafa Waziri, the head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, the five tombs — all of which are in good condition — belonged to senior royal officials. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities said one of the tombs belonged to a top official named Iry. A limestone sarcophagus and colorful decorations

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SAQQARA, Egypt: Mostafa Waziri, head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, holds a small statuette yesterday inside one of five ancient Pharaonic tombs recently discovered at this archaeological site. — AFP

Local

Kuwait expresses concern over those missing in Syria

Gulf state condemns all human rights violations

GENEVA: Kuwait has expressed grave concern about the fate of all those missing as a result of the conflict in Syria. This was in a speech delivered by Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN and Other International Organizations in Geneva Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim, before the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), which runs from last February 28 to April, 1.

Under international law and in line with UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2474, parties to armed conflict bear the primary responsibility to take all possible measures to determine the fate of people reported missing as a result of hostilities, to communicate with families during the search process, Al-Ghunaim added.

Kuwait urges the UN Secretary General to put an end to the practice of arbitrary detention as well as forced disappearance of tens of thousands of people, to respond to the urgent calls of families across Syria who seek to reveal the fate and whereabouts of the missing, he confirmed. Kuwait urges all parties to the conflict to take all appropriate measures to pay utmost attention to the cases of children reported missing as a result of the armed conflict in Syria and to take appropriate measures to search for these children as well as determine their identities.

He said that Kuwait is still fully convinced that there can be no military solution to the Syrian crisis and that the only possible solution is a political one that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people, according to the Geneva Communiqué of 2012 and the UNSC Resolution 2254. Kuwait also urged UNHRC to act to stop further humanitarian negative repercussions, expressing its aspiration for everyone's cooperation with the efforts of the UN Secretary General's Envoy to Syria Geir Pedersen, aimed at achieving peace in this country.

All human rights violations suffered by the



Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim

Syrian people were strongly condemned by Kuwait, calling for an end to this conflict, along with finding a just and comprehensive solution that meets the aspirations of all Syrian people. He underscored that Kuwait is deeply concerned that the parties to the conflict in Syria continue to commit explicit violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The brutal conflict caused the Syrian people to suffer several human deaths and a large number of human rights violations, in addition to widespread destruction that affected cities, villages and farmland, he explained, adding that there is no longer a safe haven for civilians, which caused displacement, he explained. They are deeply concerned about the suffering of millions of Syrians from the consequences of displacement and seeking asylum towards other countries, as the Syrian conflict continued for the 11th year, he said.

Al-Ghunaim explained that Kuwait assumed its humanitarian responsibility towards Syria since the outbreak of the conflict, as it took the initiative to host the first donor conference and participated



IDLIB: A Syrian boy with his face painted in the colors of the Ukrainian flag, attends a rally marking 11 years since an anti-regime uprising in Syria's rebel enclave of Idlib. —AFP

in several subsequent conferences, during which it made pledges totaling \$1.7 billion. He confirmed Kuwait's support for the call of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to ensure that the greatest amount of humanitarian aid reaches the needs of civilians throughout Syria.

Kuwait hopes that the UNSC will reach a consensus regarding the renewal of Resolution 2585 next July related to the entry of humanitarian aid into Syria. In the same context, Kuwait expressed

concern over the repercussions of the collapse of the health care system in Syria and the decline in the number of hospitals along with health centers as a result of armed attacks on them, at a time when a large proportion of the health workforce is migrating abroad in search of a safe haven. The destruction of basic infrastructure in Syria has deepened the economic crisis and pushed humanitarian needs to their highest levels since the conflict began, he pointed out. —KUNA

Kuwait's Speaker participates in Arab geopolitical group meeting



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem participates in the meeting.

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem participated yesterday in the coordination meeting of the Arab geopolitical group, on the sidelines of the 144th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference in Indonesia. The meeting, which was chaired by the President of the Arab Parliamentary Union, Bahraini Parliament Speaker Fawzia Zainal, discussed the importance of intensifying the efforts of the Arab parliamentary movement in order to overcome obstacles and find appropriate solutions to Arab files, Al-Dostor news network said in a statement.

The meeting covered topics and issues to be discussed at the Parliamentary Union of the Islamic Cooperation (PUIC) Conference,

along with ways of unifying and coordinating relevant positions. Also during the meeting, MP Dr Obaid Al-Mutairi was chosen uncontested as a representative of the Arab group in the emergency item drafting committee of the IPU Conference.

The meeting was also attended by MP Dr Hamad Al-Matar and Secretary General of the National Assembly Adel Al-Loughani. Al-Ghanem and his accompanying delegation arrived in Bali, Indonesia, on Friday, to participate in the IPU Conference, which will start on Sunday and continue until March 24. —KUNA



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem on sidelines of the meeting. —KUNA photos

Russia goes hypersonic as...

Continued from Page 1

Britain's defense ministry said yesterday that Russia has been forced to "change its operational approach and is now pursuing a strategy of attrition". "This is likely to involve the indiscriminate use of firepower resulting in increased civilian casualties," it warned. But as in previous negotiations there appeared to be little progress in reaching a ceasefire, with Putin accusing Ukraine of "numerous war crimes" during a call late Friday with French President Emmanuel Macron.

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss accused Moscow of using the talks as a "smokescreen" as it carried out "appalling atrocities", saying she was "very skeptical" they would produce a breakthrough. Friday's attack on the arms depot was the latest strike in western Ukraine, which until a few days ago had remained relatively

unscathed by Russia's push toward key cities from the north and east.

On Friday, Russian forces destroyed an aircraft repair plant near the airport of Lviv, where millions of people have fled as rockets and shelling continue to rain down on Kyiv. In Mariupol, rescuers were still searching for hundreds of people trapped under the wreckage of a bombed theatre where over 1,000 people had been seeking shelter when it was struck on Wednesday. There was still no information about potential fatalities, Zelensky said, but 130 people had been saved so far - some "heavily injured".

"This is no longer Mariupol, it's hell," said resident Tamara Kavunenko, 58. "The streets are full with the bodies of civilians." Russian forces also carried out a large-scale air strike on Mykolaiv in the south on Friday, killing dozens of young Ukrainian ensigns at their brigade headquarters. "No fewer than 200 soldiers were sleeping in the barracks" at the time of the attack, a Ukrainian serviceman on the ground, 22-year-old Maxim, told AFP. "At least 50 bodies have been recovered, but we do not know how many others are in the rubble," he said. —AFP

southern tech hub of Shenzhen, home to 17.5 million people. But Shenzhen's measures were partially eased following Xi's comments.

Shanghai, meanwhile, has moved schooling online and rolled out mass testing, but has avoided a full lockdown. Authorities have said people with mild cases can isolate at central quarantine facilities, having previously sent all patients with any symptoms to specialist hospitals. But tens of millions of people remain under stay-at-home orders across China due to the outbreak, which has sent daily reported new cases soaring from less than 100 just three weeks ago to several thousand per day.

Beijing also has watched nervously as Hong Kong has struggled to contain an Omicron outbreak that has sent deaths in the semi-autonomous southern Chinese city soaring into the thousands. Mainland China officials have moved to create new hospital beds over fears the virus could put the health system under strain. Jilin has built eight "makeshift hospitals" and two quarantine centers. —AFP

Egypt unveils five tombs at...

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were found in the tomb. The remaining tombs belonged to other members of the royal court, including a "steward of the royal house" and a priestess who was "responsible for the king's beautification".

In Jan 2021, Egypt unveiled ancient treasures found at Saqqara, including more than 50 wooden

sarcophagi dating back to the New Kingdom (16th to 11th centuries BC) - a discovery famed Egyptologist Zahi Hawass said "rewrites history".

The Egyptian authorities hope to inaugurate the new Grand Egyptian Museum near the Giza plateau later this year, after its opening was repeatedly delayed. It is hoped that the new museum, in addition to various archaeological discoveries in recent years, will help revive the country's vital tourism industry.

The sector has been battered by successive blows, including a 2011 uprising, the coronavirus pandemic, and now a halt of Russian and Ukrainian tourists, who account for a large portion of visitors to the country. —AFP

US 'troubled' by Assad visit...

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Antony "Blinken has reiterated, we do not support efforts to rehabilitate Assad, and we do not support others normalizing relations," Price said.

"We have been clear about this with our partners... (and) we urge states considering engagement with the Assad regime to weigh carefully the horrific atrocities visited by the regime." Friday's visit by Assad to the UAE came as Russia - a key Damascus backer which also has solid ties with the Emirates - pressed its war on Ukraine.

Syria's war erupted in March 2011 after the brutal repression of anti-government protests, and a year later the UAE, like most Arab countries, broke ties with Damascus. But the UAE reopened its embassy in the Syrian capital in Dec 2018, suggesting an effort to bring Assad's regime back into the Arab fold. On Friday, Assad and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, discussed the "fraternal relations" between the two countries, the official news agency WAM reported.

Talks also centered on efforts to "contribute to the consolidation of security, stability and peace in the Arab region and the Middle East", said WAM. Sheikh Mohammed said he hoped the visit would "pave the way for goodness, peace and stability to prevail in Syria and the entire region", it added. The pair also discussed ways of "preserving the territorial integrity

of Syria and the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country," it said, as well as means of providing "political and humanitarian support for Syria".

Syria's state news agency SANA said the meeting had helped to "strengthen cooperation" between the two sides. Photographs released by Syria's presidency showed Assad also meeting with Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, during the one-day visit. Syria's complex war drew in numerous players, including jihadists and foreign players such as Iran and Russia, and battered its economy.

In Sept 2015, Russia began launching air strikes in support of Syria's regime, a turning point in the conflict that eventually helped Assad regain control of most of the country. Assad has praised the invasion Russia launched against Ukraine on Feb 24 as a "correction of history". The UAE hosts American troops and has been a strategic partner to the United States for decades, but its economic and political ties with Russia are growing.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia, two of the world's biggest oil exporters, have so far avoided taking a position against Russia. Russia's war on Ukraine has impacted Gulf-US relations, experts say, as oil giants like the UAE and Saudi Arabia resist appeals by Washington and other Western capitals to raise oil output in a bid to rein in prices.

Last year, the UAE called for Syria's return to the Arab League, which had suspended its membership after the onset of the war. And in November, the UAE's top diplomat met Assad in Damascus for the first time since the conflict started, a move slammed by the US. Syria's war has killed about half a million people, displaced millions and devastated its infrastructure. —AFP

China reports first two COVID...

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long-term viability of the government's zero-COVID strategy. In recent weeks some official sources have suggested China may at some point need to co-exist with COVID-19 as other countries are doing, warning of the economic impact of mass lockdowns.

President Xi Jinping said on Thursday that China would stick with its zero-COVID strategy but allow for a more "targeted" approach. While in the past full lockdowns could be expected for any outbreak, authorities around the country have responded with varying measures to the latest viral spread. Some cities have been closed off, including the

Local

Kuwaiti women effectively helped in stemming COVID

Summit tackles issues such as gender equality, empowering women

NEW YORK: The Kuwaiti women has played an effective role in stemming spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the country, a senior Kuwaiti diplomat affirmed. The Kuwaiti women, over the past two years, in particular, were present among state, medical personnel, frontline workers and volunteers to check the pandemic in Kuwait, said Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi, Kuwait Representative at the 66th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

The commission session is held two years after the pandemic outbreak that spread to all countries inflicting "unaccountable losses and damage" at the political, social, economic and health levels, Ambassador Al-Otaibi said. Moreover, the world is suffering from armed conflicts, climatic change and natural catastrophes affecting people, particularly the women, he added.

He has affirmed that the commission session tackles issues such as the women status, gender equality, empowering women and girls, noting necessity of engaging the females in mapping out national policies regarding the environment and the climate. "We in Kuwait are proud of the fact that the Kuwaiti women is involved in the decision making with respect of the climatic and environmental policies," Ambassador Al-Otaibi said, informing attendees that the Kuwaiti women work in the oil, energy, agricultural, power, engineering, scientific research and business sectors.

Kuwait is seeking to adopt a national low-carbon policy until 2050, enacting required legislations and laws intended to cut harmful emissions and coping with their negative effects, he said. Additionally, there has been special attention to increasing natural

reserves, covering 15 percent of the Kuwaiti territories and increasing proportion of renewable energy to 15 percent.

Provision of the Kuwaiti Constitution stipulates that people are equal and there is no indiscriminate whatsoever on gender, origin, language or religious bases, he said. In light of such considerations, the State of Kuwait has exerted all possible efforts to empower the women, boost her rights and engage her in all types of activities at various levels, he said, noting that women has occupied leading posts and taken part in enacting laws. Kuwait is proud of establishing social security "where no one is excluded," he affirmed, noting that the state secures social care for all segments of the society, with particular care for the women, the youth, citizens of special challenges and the retirees. —KUNA



Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi Society

Kuwaiti doctor elected as the ASNRT president

KUWAIT: Dr Turki Al-Otaibi of Kuwait has been elected as president of the Arab Society of Nephrology and Renal Transplantation (ASNRT), the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health (MoH) announced on Friday. Al-Otaibi has become the first Kuwaiti doctor to win this role in an unprecedented achievement for Kuwait and its health sector, the ministry said in a press statement.



Dr Turki Al-Otaibi

He was handpicked during an ASNRT general assembly meeting of its board of directors on the sidelines of the 15th Congress of ASNRT, held in Kuwait from March 16-19, the ministry added. During the meeting, the conferees discussed and approved financial and administrative reports, according to the statement. Dr Al-Otaibi holds the position of head of the kidney department at the ministry's Hamed Al-Issa Center for Organ Transplantation, it indicated.

He previously held many positions and presented several scientific lectures in numerous international medical institutions due to his professional role in the field of kidney diseases and transplantation. ASNRT, based in Cairo, was established 32 years ago and organizes a congress every two years in one of the Arab countries with wide Arab as well as international participation to shed light on modern protocols in the field of kidney transplantation. —AFP



Kuwaitis Dr Turki Al-Otaibi is elected president of Arab Society of Nephrology and Renal Transplantation during 15th ASNRT General Assembly session. —KUNA

Kuwait oil up \$5.76

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil barrel rose \$5.76 to reach \$109.18 per barrel (pb) on Friday, compared with \$103.42 pb, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. In international markets, Brent crude oil contracts rose \$1.29 to reach \$107.93 pb, while West Texas crude went up \$1.72 to reach \$104.70.

Meanwhile, the price of OPEC basket of thirteen crudes stood at \$104.96 a barrel, compared with \$104.06 the previous day, according to OPEC Secretariat calculations. The OPEC Reference Basket of Crudes (ORB) is made up of the following: (Algeria), Girassol (Angola), Djeno (Congo), Zafiro

(Equatorial Guinea), Rabi Light (Gabon), Iran Heavy (Islamic Republic of Iran), Basra Light (Iraq), Kuwait Export (Kuwait), Es Sider (Libya), Bonny Light (Nigeria), Arab Light (Saudi Arabia), Murban (UAE) and Merey (Venezuela).

The annual average of the cartel's basket price hit \$69.98 a barrel last year. The 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

Yemen's minister touts GCC's constructive part

ADEN: Yemeni Information Minister Moammer Al-Eryani yesterday commended the constructive role of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in resolving multiple crises experienced by Yemen. In a press statement, he also spoke highly of the GCC's backing to regional and international initiatives (mainly consultations in Geneva, Kuwait, Stockholm and Riyadh) which are aimed at finding a political solution to the Yemeni standoff.



Nayef Falah Al-Hajraf, Secretary General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), speaks during a press conference in the Saudi capital Riyadh on March 17, 2022. Gulf Arab countries are seeking to host rare talks between Yemenis warring parties, including the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, in Riyadh at the end of the month, officials said. —AFP

"The fervent efforts of the GCC Secretariat General to organize and host inter-Yemeni consultations in Riyadh are an extension of its unwavering positions based on backing an end to war and finding a political solution to the Yemeni crisis," he said. The Yemeni minister reiterated the legitimate government's persistent and relentless eagerness to bring comprehensive, just and sustainable peace back to his country.

Meanwhile, the six-nation Gulf bloc said it seeks to host discussions between Yemen's warring sides in Saudi Arabia, despite the Houthi rebels' rejection of talks in "enemy countries". Saudi Arabia leads a military coalition fighting on the side of the Yemeni government against the Houthis. The secretary-general of the Saudi-based Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Nayef Al-Hajraf, told reporters discussions would be held between March 29 and April 7 in Riyadh.

"Invitations will be sent to all and the conference will be held in attendance of those who come," he said. "We hope that everyone will participate and not miss this opportunity." But the Iran-backed rebels said earlier that while they were open to finding a peaceful solution to the seven-year war, they would not travel to Saudi Arabia. "We will welcome an invitation to dialogue that does not take place in enemy countries," a Houthi official said on condition of anonymity. "We will always extend our hand for peace," the official said.

OIC welcomes initiative
Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Hussein Taha has welcomed the initiative launched by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on hosting intra-Yemeni talks in Riyadh late this month. In a news statement, Taha affirmed support to a political solution to the Yemeni crisis and encouraged dialogue amongst all Yemeni parties.

He also voiced its backing to implement the Riyadh agreement, lauding all efforts, mainly Saudi Arabia and UN, to reach a ceasefire and push ahead the political process. Taha called on all Yemen's parties to engage in this initiative in order to stop the bloodshed, reach a political solution, end the conflict, achieve the interest of Yemen's people and back the region's stability and security, according to the statement.

On Thursday, GCC Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajraf announced the Council's call for all Yemeni parties to hold talks on March 29 in Riyadh. Speaking at a news conference, Al-Hajraf said all realize sincere and continued efforts made by the GCC that aim to end the Yemeni crisis, meet aspirations of Yemenis, restore stability, and maintain Arab and regional security. —Agencies

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Brazilian humanitarian aid to Ukraine

KUWAIT: On March 7th, 2022, a cargo airplane of the Brazilian Air Force landed in Warsaw, Poland, transporting 11.6 tons of humanitarian aid for Ukrainians. The flight was joined by a team of the Brazilian Foreign Service, who were sent to the border area between Ukraine and Poland, to assist Brazilian citizens.

Altogether, the Brazilian humanitarian donation included nine tons of dehydrated high nutrition food (which amount to around 360 thousand meals); 50 water purifiers with the combined capacity to purify around 300 liters of water daily; and half a ton of 20,000 types of essential medical supplies and medicines. On the occasion, 42 Brazilians were repatriated, together with 20 Ukrainians with relatives in Brazil; five Argentinians; and one Colombian. The 20 Ukrainians who flew to Brazil were given humanitarian visas valid for six months.

The concession of humanitarian visas for Ukrainians is valid since March 3rd. Applications may be made through the Brazilian Embassies surrounding the conflict region. The Ukrainian community in Brazil is estimated at 600 thousand people. Brazil occupies, at the moment, a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council and supported the UN Resolutions so far adopted regarding the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. From the beginning of the conflict, Brazil has been clear about its position in defense of the principles of respect of sovereignty, self-determination and territorial integrity of states.

—Embassy of Federative Republic of Brazil

Kuwait denies withdrawal of immunity

KUWAIT: Kuwait's General Consulate in Los Angeles yesterday absolutely dismissed recent media reports on a US federal court verdict lifting its immunity. "There is no case whatsoever of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Los Angeles at the (US) Federal Court for the time being," the consulate said in a press statement. The consulate called on everybody to seek information from reliable and credible sources. —KUNA

Kuwait assists Yemenis

KUWAIT: Kuwait has maintained steady flow of aid for war-impooverished Yemenis whose country is witnessing a deepening humanitarian crisis. Up to 23.4 million people in Yemen need assistance, the UN Secretary General Assistant for Humanitarian Affairs, Martin Griffiths, affirmed during a recent UN Security Council session on Yemen.

Access to basic food and necessities such as medical care has become quite limited in many regions in the country, said Chairperson of the International Committee of the Red Cross Peter Maurer. Sensing the Yemenis' dire need for help, Kuwait pressed on with its humanitarian campaign to relieve the impoverished in the war-stricken nation.

Corner stone for constructing a hospital was laid to serve inhabitants of Maarib, Al-Jof and Al-Baidaa. The project was sponsored by Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charity, as part of the continuous "Kuwait on your side" humanitarian campaign. Expressing deep gratitude for the gener-

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Jassim Al-Muqahwi and his co-driver Thamer Al-Mutairi compete in their Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX during the Kuwait International Rally south of Kuwait City on March 18, 2022. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Arab Parliament welcomes blacklisting Houthi militia

Nuclear weapon-free Iran 'helpful for regional security'

CAIRO: The Arab Parliament welcomed yesterday the European Union decision to include the terrorist Houthi militia on the blacklist among the other groups subjected to sanctions under UN Security Council Resolution No 2624. The Arab Parliament affirmed in a statement that this decision considers support for Yemeni legitimacy and a new step to end the terrorist acts carried out by the Houthi coup militia and the humanitarian violations and war crimes against the innocent civilians of the Yemeni people.

It added that Houthi militia committed several crimes by targeting Saudi Arabia and the UAE with booby-trapped drones, as well as its direct threat to the security of international navigation in the Red Sea region, calling countries all over the world to stop the ongoing crimes committed by the Houthi militia.

The statement reiterated its firm position and support for all Arab and international efforts on reaching a comprehensive political settlement of the

Yemeni crisis based on the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative, the comprehensive national dialogue and the UN Security Council resolutions, especially Resolution. The UN Security Council labeled the Houthis as a terrorist group for the first time, following an ongoing series of cross-border drone and missile attacks.

Nuke-free Iran

Meanwhile, commander of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) Gen Frank McKenzie said his country is willing to work with Iran provided that the latter is not nuclear-armed. "Iran continues to be "the greatest threat to regional security and stability," he told reporters at CENTCOM HQ in MacDill Air Force Base Tampa, Florida.

"They (Iranians) furnish weapons and support proxies across the region who engage in acts of terror and undermine local governments, all advancing Iranian interests," he affirmed. "Iran's ballistic missile

threat has continued to advance and expand with greater ranges and accuracy. "CENTCOM has continued to watch Iran and its proxies as we act as a deterrent to Iranian attacks on US interests," Gen McKenzie noted, adding, "The number one objective of the United States with regard to Iran is that Iran not possess a nuclear weapon."

"So I think any solution that closes that path to them contributes to regional security, because we will all like to work with an Iran that is not a nuclear-armed Iran," he stated, noting that, "the best way to get to there is probably through a negotiated agreement," he said.

Negotiations between P4+1 and Iran on return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA of 2015) have reportedly entered endgame in Vienna but the process hit a snag when Russia - a staunch ally of Iran, demanded exempting its trade with Iran from the sanctions recently imposed by the Western countries amid Ukraine conflict. —KUNA



Officials sign a deal for the construction of a hospital to serve Maarib, Al-Jof and Al-Baidaa. —KUNA photos

ous Kuwaitis, Maarib Governor Abedrabbo Muftah said the hospital would be quite helpful to cut deaths' rates among mothers and children in Maarib and the neighboring provinces.

In Taiz province, Society of the Revival of Islamic Heritage delivered devices for treating cardiac conditions-donated by Kuwaiti citizens. Dr Ilan Abdulhaq, Taiz Undersecretary, lauded the Kuwaiti initiative that would aid poor Yemenis suffering from cardiac illnesses, thanking the



Kuwaiti 'Tarahom' charity delivers an oxygen generator at the Al-Mohtseb Hospital in Al-Khalil.

State of Kuwait, namely His Highness the Amir, the government and people for standing on the Yemenis' side under dire conditions. In Palestine,

the Kuwaiti "Tarahom" charity delivered an oxygen generator for Al-Mohtseb Hospital in Al-Khalil. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The fire fighting teams were able to put out fire that broke out yesterday in a house in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh area. The firefighters rushed to the scene and were able to control the fire. No injuries were reported.



Japan PM visits India for 'candid' talks on Ukraine

Freud, a 'mad' president and a century of European diplomacy

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The fourth round of negotiations since 2018 was meant to create vast marine reserves to prevent biodiversity loss, oversee industrial-scale fisheries and share out the "genetic resources" of the sea.

UN talks on high seas treaty fail

High Seas Alliance still hopeful of a treaty in 2022

PARIS: The clock ran out Friday at UN talks to forge a legally binding treaty to protect open oceans beyond national jurisdictions, with no schedule set for prolonging the discussions. This fourth round of negotiations since 2018 — preceded by a decade of preliminary talks—was meant to create vast marine reserves to prevent biodiversity loss, oversee industrial-scale fisheries and share out the "genetic resources" of the sea.

"We have not come to the end of our work," said conference president Rena Lee, a diplomat from Singapore, noting that the COVID pandemic had caused major delays.

"I believe that with continued commitment, determination and dedication, we will be able to build bridges and close the remaining gaps," she said at the end of Friday's session. It now rests with the United Nations General Assembly to give the green light for another round of talks.

"All efforts must be devoted in the coming months to secure this long-awaited treaty in 2022," said Peggy Kalas, president of the High Seas Alliance, a coalition of more than forty major NGOs and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

A so-called High Ambition Coalition of European Union nations and 13 other countries, including India, Australia, Canada and Britain, have endorsed the same goal. Some nations and many environmental groups have called for at least 30 percent of the world's oceans to be granted protected status, a target also to be on the table at UN biodiversity talks later this year.

Currently less than one percent of open ocean enjoys that status, according to the High Seas Alliance.

Oceans produce half the oxygen we breathe, regulate the weather and provide humanity's single largest source of protein. But they are being pushed to the brink by human activities.

Marine genetic resources

Carbon dioxide emissions and global warming drive



No schedule set for continuing discussions

devastating marine heatwaves and acidification. The UN's climate science advisory body has projected that more than 99 percent of shallow water corals will die if average global temperatures rise more than degrees above preindustrial levels.

"The oceans as a whole are becoming warmer, the salinity levels are increasing. There's less oxygen for marine life," said Liz Karan, an expert with The Pew

Charitable Trusts.

Humans have also fished some marine species to the edge of extinction, and used the world's waters as a garbage dump. Today, a patchwork of agreements and regulatory bodies govern shipping, fishing, and mineral extraction, while the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, negotiated in the 1970s, lays out rules for how far a nation's zone of influence extends beyond its shores.

But despite two decades of consultations, there is still no treaty protecting international waters beyond national jurisdiction, accounting for about two-thirds of the world's oceans.

Another contentious question is who gets a share of the benefits from the exploitation of what are known as "marine genetic resources." Poorer countries fear they will be sidelined as wealthier nations scour the seas for the next wonder ingredients for the pharmaceutical, chemical or cosmetic industries, and lock up the spoils in trademarks and patents.

Will McCallum, head of oceans for Greenpeace UK, said wrapping up a deal by the end of this was crucial. "We're not disappointed to have a 5th session," he told AFP. "But if a deal is not concluded in 2022 the chances of having a solid treaty are practically zero."

"Ministers and heads of state need to step up ahead of the next round of negotiations to ensure we land the strong treaty," he added. The treaty covers the so-called high seas, which begin beyond national exclusive economic zones that extend 200 nautical miles (370 kilometers) from their shores. —AFP

Biden warns China against backing war on Ukraine

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden laid out to Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Friday the "consequences" of any backing for Russia in its war against Ukraine, the White House said, as Beijing showed no sign of joining Western condemnation of the invasion. The comments came during a nearly two-hour phone call between the leaders of the world's two largest economies, focusing on Ukraine, where China's close ally Russia is in the fourth week of a bloody assault.

The White House said that Biden described to Xi "the implications and consequences if China provides material support to Russia as it conducts brutal attacks against Ukrainian cities and civilians."

The White House refused to characterize Xi's response to the warning or say how hard Biden pushed him. "It wasn't about making asks, it wasn't about making assessments. It was about having an ongoing dialogue," Press Secretary Jen Psaki said. But she said that "is something we'll be watching and the world will be watching." Beijing was ambiguous about Xi's position after the call.

Chinese state television CCTV reported that Xi said the war was "in no one's interest" and that "state-to-state relations cannot go to the stage of military hostilities."

However, there was no mention of direct criticism of Russian President Vladimir Putin and a readout from the Chinese foreign ministry laid some responsibility for Russia's invasion of its neighbor to the West. "The US and NATO should also have dialogue with Russia to address the

crux of the Ukraine crisis and ease security concerns of both Russia and Ukraine," the foreign ministry noted.

With the Chinese leader refusing to condemn Putin, Washington fears Beijing could go further, delivering financial and military support to Russia and transforming an already explosive transatlantic standoff into a global dispute. If that were to happen, not only could China help Russia to weather sanctions and continue the war, but Western governments would face the painful decision of how to strike back at the world's second-biggest economy, likely prompting turmoil on international markets.

Washington is racing to ward off that crisis, both by warning of fallout for China and appealing to Xi's ambitions to be a world player. China should "understand that their future is with the United States, with Europe, with other developed and developing countries around the world. Their future is not to stand with Vladimir Putin," Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman told CNN. Secretary of State Antony Blinken earlier urged China to use its "leverage" on Moscow.

The Biden-Xi call the first since November-came after US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Yang Jiechi, the Chinese Communist Party's chief diplomat, held what the White House called a "substantial" seven-hour meeting in Rome this week. Against a backdrop of already intense US-Chinese tensions over Taiwan and trade disputes, the ability or failure of Biden and Xi to come to an understanding on the unfolding mayhem in Europe will reverberate widely.

Xi and Putin symbolically sealed their close partnership when they met last month at the Winter Olympics in Beijing—just before Putin launched his onslaught on Ukraine. Since then, Beijing has stood out by refusing to join the international outcry over the invasion, while taking the

out of funds, forcing them to slash "life-saving" programs. "A shortfall in funding means the needs of people will not be met," Auke Lootsma, the UN Development Program's resident representative to Yemen, told AFP. "The outlook for next year looks very bleak for Yemen. This is the bleakest situation we've had so far in the country."

Some 80 percent of its around 30 million people depend on aid for survival, after seven years of a conflict that has killed hundreds of thousands of people, directly or indirectly. The UN voiced disappointment after Wednesday's conference raised less than a third of the target to help 17.3 million of Yemen's needy. It has repeatedly warned that aid agencies are running

out of funds, forcing them to slash "life-saving" programs. "A shortfall in funding means the needs of people will not be met," Auke Lootsma, the UN Development Program's resident representative to Yemen, told AFP. "The outlook for next year looks very bleak for Yemen. This is the bleakest situation we've had so far in the country."

Famine conditions

The violent struggle between Yemen's internationally recognized government, supported by a Saudi-led military coalition, and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels



BRIZE NORTON, UK: A handout picture released by the Free Nazanin campaign group shows Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe (center) hugging her husband Richard Ratcliffe (right) and their daughter Gabriella upon her arrival at RAF Brize Norton. —AFP

Tehran demanded £27,000 to release UK/Iran national

LONDON: The family of a UK/Iranian man freed this week after spending five years in a Tehran jail were forced to pay Iran £27,000 (\$36,500, 33,000 euros) in order to secure his return home, they said yesterday.

Anoosheh Ashoori, a retired engineer from southeast London, was arrested in 2017 and jailed for 10 years on charges of spying for Zionist entity. He flew home on Wednesday having been released along with compatriot Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe after Britain reached a deal with Tehran over a historic military contract debt.

But his release was only secured after the family were able to meet a last-minute demand to pay a fine, they said. "On March 14th, Dad's conditional release was signed and communicated to us," the family wrote on fundraising site Crowdfunder.

"We had been waiting for 5 years for Dad to come home and were suddenly told that the only thing now stopping this...was an arbitrary £27,000 fine which we suddenly had to pay," they added.

"We had less than 12 hours to raise the money, taking out loans using our credit cards, and opening new accounts," Ashoori's wife, Sherry Izadi, told the Guardian in comments published yesterday.

"My only thought was: 'How are we going to do this in time?'" The Crowdfunder appeal had already raised more than £33,000 yesterday, £6,000 above the target.

Fate of third prisoner unclear

The families of both Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Ashoori believe they were being held as political prisoners until the historic debt was settled. The final deal was reached "after highly complex and exhaustive negotiations", UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said. The fate of a third British/Iranian held in Tehran was yesterday unclear.

Truss announced on Wednesday that Morad Tahbaz, who also holds US nationality, has been released from prison "on furlough" to his Tehran home. But relatives said he had been taken back to Evin prison after only 48 hours at his family home in Tehran. The UK Foreign Office said that he had gone to the prison to have an ankle tag fitted, but had yet to give an update on whether he had been returned. The ministry said Iran would be in breach of its commitments if the 69-year-old conservationist was kept in jail. His sister Taraneh Tahbaz told AFP that the family feared he was being "used as a pawn". —AFP

Yemen on the brink as aid pledges fall short

DUBAI: The United Nations and aid groups have warned of grave consequences for Yemen after an international pledging conference failed to raise enough money to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in the war-torn country. Overshadowed by the conflict in Ukraine, aid-starved Yemen—already suffering the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according to the

has pushed the country to the brink of famine.

The UN's World Food Programme has said the levels of hunger risk becoming catastrophic as the Ukraine crisis pushes up food prices. Even before Russia invaded its neighbor, the WFP said Yemeni food rations were being reduced for eight million people this year, while another five million "at immediate risk of slipping into famine conditions" would remain on full rations. "Clearly, pressing concerns over events in the Ukraine cast a shadow on (the pledging) event," Abeer Etefa, a WFP spokesperson for the Middle East and North Africa region, told AFP. —AFP

International

Freud, a 'mad' president and a century of European diplomacy

French historian revisits a key moment in history as war returns to Europe

PARIS: Finding a lost manuscript by Sigmund Freud has caused a French historian to revisit a key moment in European diplomacy 100 years ago that reverberates today as war returns to the continent.

"Le Président est-il devenu fou?" (Has the president gone mad?) by Patrick Weil takes a fresh look at US president Woodrow Wilson (1913-21), who helped forge the Treaty of Versailles after World War I and tried to establish lasting peace through the creation of the League of Nations.



Patrick Weil takes a fresh look at Treaty of Versailles

Wilson, of course, failed: the treaty's harsh conditions on Germany created resentment that helped fuel the rise of the Nazis. Nor could he convince his colleagues in Washington to approve the treaty—it was never ratified by the US, dooming the League of Nations at birth. Back in the 1930s, Freud, the godfather of psychoanalysis, blamed Wilson's failure on messianic hubris, rooted in his repressed homosexuality and obsession with his father.

His text was not published until the 1960s, long after

his death, and was rubbished by US reviewers, with The New Republic calling it either "a mischievous and preposterous joke... or else an awful and unrelenting slander upon a remarkably gifted American president". But Weil says there may be something to Freud's critique.

'Hysteria'

Whenever things went against Wilson, Weil writes, "he would plunge into hysteria", blaming everyone but himself. Frequent minor strokes throughout Wilson's life may also have affected his sanity and undermined his ability to conclude the deal.

Certainly, many of his contemporaries, including British leader Winston Churchill and later US president Franklin Roosevelt, considered Wilson to be "crazy". Weil told AFP in an interview. They kept that quiet, he said, because Wilson's reputation was important in building momentum behind the creation of the United Nations after World War II. Weil uncovered Freud's original manuscript in an unmarked box in the archives of Yale University. Freud had co-written his tract with a US diplomat, William Bullitt, and the original shows that some 300 changes were made by Bullitt before it was finally published in the 1960s, cutting many key psychological insights.

Weil uses his finding to help reassess the debate around the Treaty of Versailles—a story with grim relevance now as the world seeks ways to negotiate with Russia. "One can't help noticing how the personality of certain leaders plays a role in the dangers faced by the world—today as much as yesterday," he said.



BLACKPOOL, UK: Commemorative souvenir mugs featuring depictions of former Conservative Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher (left) and Winston Churchill are pictured for sale at the Conservative Party Spring Conference, at Blackpool Winter Gardens in Blackpool, north-west England on Friday. — AFP

'NATO before the fact'

France's prime minister in 1919, Georges Clemenceau, is often blamed for pushing too hard to punish Germany, wanting to crush any chance of its resurgence—a move that spectacularly backfired.

But Weil puts a different spin on events, having dug up documents that show that France's primary aim was to win security guarantees from the US and Britain—a sort of early form of NATO—in case of future German aggression. "It is NATO before the fact, and it is a

French request to create it," Weil said.

Wilson's failure to see the importance of a defense pact—or to convince his colleagues in Washington—ultimately doomed Europe to more war, he argues. "It was an obsession of Roosevelt (during World War II) not to commit the same mistakes," said Weil. "What's important in today's context is that the leaders in 1945 had that experience of 1919. Churchill, Roosevelt—they were there (at Versailles). They had that experience that today's leaders do not." — AFP



HOSTOMEL, Ukraine: This handout picture released Friday by Maxar satellite image shows a burning city market grocery store and damaged residential buildings, in Hostomel northwest of Kyiv. — AFP

Boosting Ukraine's anti-air batteries proves easier said than done

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden has promised to help Ukraine get air defense systems with a longer range than the S-300 anti-aircraft system, a first-generation Russian competitor to the US Patriot, whose range is more limited but which would be sufficient to protect Kharkiv or Kyiv, two cities close to the Russian border, where most of the missiles that pound them are fired from.

These S-300s could come from former Soviet bloc countries that still deploy them, in particular Slovakia and Bulgaria, where US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has been visiting in recent days.

But Ukraine's army is not trained to handle the sophisticated US weaponry. On the other hand, they know how to handle the S-300 anti-aircraft system, a first-generation Russian competitor to the US Patriot, whose range is more limited but which would be sufficient to protect Kharkiv or Kyiv, two cities close to the Russian border, where most of the missiles that pound them are fired from.

But those countries still depend on the S-300 for their own security and are demanding a substitute—in other words, Patriots—before giving them to Ukraine. "We're

willing to do so immediately when we have a proper replacement," Slovak Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad told reporters on Thursday during a meeting with Austin in Bratislava.

'Not enough'

On Friday, the Netherlands said it would deploy a Patriot battery to the Sliac military base in central Slovakia, and Germany confirmed it would send two more batteries to the country, which could facilitate the transfer of Slovakia's only S-300 battery to Ukraine. But the German and Dutch Patriots will not arrive in Slovakia immediately—the Netherlands expects delivery would be on April 15 at the earliest—and time is running out for the Ukrainian army. While several countries may be ready to supply Kyiv with spare missiles for the S-300, Ukraine needs a lot of complete systems, including radars and monitoring stations.

"One S-300 is better than none," said Brent Eastwood, defense editor at 1945, a foreign policy web magazine. But "it's still not enough."

Ukraine had around 100 S-300 batteries before President Vladimir Putin launched his invasion last month, and the Russian army claims to have destroyed about 40 at the very outset of the war on February 24, Eastwood, a former US soldier, recently wrote.

The country is vast, and just protecting a city takes a lot, he said. "If I were a war planner for Ukraine, I would want four S-300 batteries for each quadrant of Kyiv. This deployment would make me sleep better at night," he said.

One other NATO country, Greece, has S-300s, but they, too, will need to be offered replacements. However, even if the Pentagon, whose Patriot inventory is relatively limited, decides to lend its Patriots to these countries, it will take several weeks for them to reach their destination.

Washington is trying to convince allies in other regions to lend theirs, but again, it is not straightforward. US Chief of Staff General Mark Milley may have asked Japan for help on Thursday. He phoned his Japanese counterpart to discuss "the current security environment in the Pacific and Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine," according to an account of their conversation released Friday by the Pentagon. — AFP

Elderly Ukrainians find shelter in metro carriages

KYIV: It is not clear what makes Valentyna Katkova cry more: illness and old age, or the fact that she now lives in a Kyiv subway car, fleeing Russian bombing. The 77-year-old is one of some 200 Kyivans who have found shelter in a metro station in the northwest of the city as Moscow's forces slowly try to encircle the city.

Some of them are elderly people, who prefer the artificial leather seats of the subway car to sleeping on mattresses or in tents on the granite floor of the Syrets station. Dressed in a lilac coat and a knitted hat, Katkova appears in the sliding doors of a blue subway

An ocean away, Russian-Americans feel war backlash

CARACAS: In the days after Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine, the Russian School of Mathematics, a network of popular after-school academies across the United States, felt it had no choice but to speak out. Calling the war "a source of great, real, and concrete pain for all of us," the school made clear in a statement: "We stand with the Ukrainian people against Putin, his regime, and the Russian military invasion of Ukraine."

It also urged patrons not to conflate the school with the Kremlin's actions. As Russian bombs level Ukrainian cities, the horror is acute among Russian-Americans, many of whom also have relatives and friends in both Russia and Ukraine. And as Russian-themed restaurants face vandalism and threats in US cities and Russian musicians are dropped from line-ups—some feel Putin's war has cast a shadow over their entire community and heritage. Founded in Boston 25 years ago by two Jewish refugees from Belarus and Ukraine who were educated in Saint Petersburg, the math school explained that it was named after the "historic tradition of Russian mathematics." "Regardless of their country of origin, no one is responsible for this war but Putin and his regime," it wrote.

'Bear the shame'

On the first day of the invasion, Alexander Stessin, a Moscow-born oncologist in New York, woke up to a friend's text message telling him the world would never be the same. "It was absolute shock, absolute horror, and that feeling hasn't subsided," said Stessin. "For me, it felt like my whole world came crashing down."

Nearly 2.5 million Americans are of Russian ancestry, according to the US census bureau, and the community of Soviet-born immigrants with links to Russian culture, many of them Jewish refugees, is larger still.

Stessin's own family emigrated in 1990 when Stessin was 11, but he maintained deep ties to the country of his birth, publishing award-winning books in Russia. The 43-year-old is well aware his pain is "nothing compared to what the Ukrainian people have to bear." But nonetheless, he says, "I think we will all have to bear the shame by virtue of being Russian, we cannot escape it."

'Cancel everything Russian'

In that climate, Eugene Koonin, a distinguished biologist and member of the US Academy of Sciences, felt compelled to initiate an open letter against the invasion. Signed by several dozen Russian-speaking scientists hailing from the former Soviet Union who work at the National Institutes of Health, a flagship US research agency, it condemned Putin's "aggressive, genocidal, pointless war."

But in an interview with AFP, Koonin also spoke out against international academic journals returning papers submitted by Russian scientists, and collaboration with Russian scholars being halted by governments or university councils. "Russian scientists who work and live (in Russia) now, remain our colleagues

car with a yellow stripe—Ukraine's national colors. She is hard of hearing, speaks unintelligibly and cannot stop crying when asked about how many days and nights she spent in the cold and damp subway dungeon. "Since February 24," the woman says, the date when Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine.

Her daughter, son-in-law, son and granddaughter have spent their nights on the 100-metre platform of the station for the past three weeks. "And I, like an old one, am here. That's because I've had a stroke, a heart attack—so here I am, sleeping in the carriage," Katkova said. She barely fits on the hard seats inside the car, a plastic water bottle and a cup resting on the window ledge above her.

'Life is more important'

The Kyiv metro, with some of the deepest stations in the world, has been a haven for thousands of Kyivans since the first days of the war. Train traffic



CARACAS: Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaido and his wife Fabiana Rosales are seen outside their house in Caracas. — AFP

except those who profess support" for the regime, said Koonin, who was trained in Soviet Russia but has lived in the United States for three decades.

"They deserve our compassion and help," he said, warning that "blanket prohibitive action" against Russian academics was "short-sighted and detrimental." As the war spills deep into the cultural sphere, Stessin likewise warned against the temptation to "cancel everything Russian"—regardless of any ties to Putin's regime. While New York's Metropolitan Opera and Carnegie Hall invoked support for Moscow in cutting ties with star soprano Anna Netrebko and conductor Valery Gergiev, orchestras in Cardiff and Zagreb went further by removing Pyotr Tchaikovsky from their programming. — AFP

Clinton, Bush show solidarity with Ukraine

WASHINGTON: Two former US presidents, Democrat Bill Clinton and Republican George W. Bush, showed their support Friday for Ukraine in the face of Russia's invasion by visiting a Ukrainian church in Chicago. The two men, who wore blue and yellow ribbons in the colors of Ukraine's flag, laid bouquets of sunflowers, the country's national emblem, in front of the Catholic Church of Saints Volodymyr and Olha before taking a moment to reflect.

The initiative aimed to show their "solidarity with the people of Ukraine" after Russia launched a war against its neighbor last month, according to a video of the visit posted on Clinton's Twitter account. "America stands united with the people of Ukraine in their fight for freedom and against oppression," the tweet said. That sets the 42nd and 43rd US presidents apart from Donald Trump, the 45th president, who just before the invasion described Vladimir Putin's strategy of amassing troops on Russia's border with Ukraine and then recognizing the independence of two pro-Russian separatist territories as a stroke of "genius." — AFP

continues on only one of the tracks at each of the stations, while the other now hosts a train for those who want to live there.

Seventy-year-old Nina Piddubna, Katkova's neighbor in the next car, complains of having felt unwell in the first days of her stay here. "I felt very bad here, I had a fever," says the woman, sitting in the car and wrapped in a blue woolen blanket.

She adds that she even lost consciousness one day, though the "caring" metro staff quickly gave her first aid. But Piddubna is ready to endure such hardships for the sake of safety, which is provided by the station located 60 meters (197 feet) deep underground.

"We don't have a shelter at all" in her apartment located just a few kilometers (miles) from the fierce fighting in the northwestern outskirts of Kyiv, she laments. "It is deep here. Though it is damp and you can catch a cold, you still come here, because life is more important." — AFP



KYIV: A 77-year-old woman has found shelter in a metro station in the northwest of the city as Moscow's forces slowly try to encircle the city. — AFP

International

Japan PM visits India for 'candid' talks on Ukraine

Modi, Kishida discuss the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine

NEW DELHI: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida arrived in India yesterday with officials in Tokyo predicting "candid discussions" about New Delhi's unwillingness to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Unlike fellow members of the Quad alliance — Japan, Australia and the United States — India has abstained in three UN votes deploring Moscow's actions, calling only for a halt to the violence.

Earlier this month in a four-way call of Quad leaders, Kishida, US President Joe Biden and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison failed to convince India's Narendra Modi to take a tougher line. A joint statement had said they "discussed the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and assessed its broader implications" — without any condemnation of Moscow. A separate Indian readout pointedly "underlined that the Quad must remain focused on its core objective of promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region."

Ahead of Kishida's visit, the first by a Japanese premier since 2017, a foreign ministry official said Tokyo was "aware" of Delhi's "geographical location and historical ties to Russia". "But at the same time we share fundamental values and strategic interests so naturally there will be candid discussions about how we view the Ukraine situation, and also expect to hear a similar explanation from

Prime Minister Modi," the official told reporters. He added that Modi, 71, and Kishida, 64, would also discuss "issues closer to our region" such as a "free and open Indo-Pacific" — a reference to China — and bilateral issues.

"That will be more the opportunity to take stock of the bilateral cooperation as well as reaffirming our shared strategic vision and interests rather than emphasizing on what our differences are," the official said. India's foreign ministry said only that the talks aimed to "review and strengthen the bilateral cooperation in diverse areas as well as exchange views on regional and global issues of mutual interest so as to advance their partnership for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond."

'History books'

Modi and Morrison are also due to hold a virtual summit on March 21 focused on trade, when the Australian premier may also press his Indian counterpart to fall more into the Western camp over Ukraine. Russia has been India's main arms supplier since the Soviet era, but today Delhi also needs more support from the Quad and others in the region and beyond in the face of an increasingly assertive China.

Asked about India's stance and its continued purchases of Russian oil, White House press secretary Jen Psaki this week urged all foreign nations to "think about where you want to stand when history



NEW DELHI: Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (right) and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi arrive for a photo opportunity before their meeting at the lawns of the Hyderabad House in New Delhi yesterday. —AFP

books are written". Tensions between New Delhi and Beijing have been high since a 2020 clash on their disputed Himalayan border killed at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers. Both have since sent additional military hardware — in India's case

much of it Russian-made — and thousands of extra troops. In a possible sign of thawing tensions, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi will reportedly travel to India later this month, the senior-most official to visit since the 2020 clash. —AFP



'Free and open Indo-Pacific' to remain focus

UK warns against post-Ukraine reset with Putin

LONDON: The West must not try to "normalize relations" with Russian President Vladimir Putin after his invasion of Ukraine, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said yesterday, calling the crisis a "turning point for the world". "There are some around the world... who say that we're better off making accommodations with tyranny... I believe they are profoundly wrong," the British leader told his Conservative Party's Spring conference in Blackpool, northwest England.

"To try to renormalize relations with Putin after this, as we did in 2014, would be to make exactly the same mistake again, and that is why Putin must fail. "This is a turning point for the world and it's a moment of choice. It's a choice between freedom and oppression," he added.

His Foreign Secretary Liz Truss warned Saturday that peace talks to end the conflict could be a "smokescreen" for more extreme Russian military manoeuvres. "I'm very skeptical," Truss told The Times newspaper in an interview. "What we've seen is an attempt to create space for the Russians to regroup. Their invasion isn't going according to plan. "I fear the negotiation is yet another attempt to

create a diversion and create a smokescreen. I don't think we're yet at a point for negotiation," she added. Truss echoed comments by British intelligence that Putin could turn to "more and more extreme actions", noting "appalling atrocities already".

Oligarch warning

Chief of Defense Intelligence Jim Hockenbush said on Friday that "the Kremlin has so far failed to achieve its original objectives. It has been surprised by the scale and ferocity of Ukrainian resistance and has been bedevilled with problems of its own making. "Russia is now pursuing a strategy of attrition. This will involve the reckless and indiscriminate use of firepower. This will result in increased civilian casualties, destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure and intensify the humanitarian crisis," he added.

Truss said that Britain could potentially act as a guarantor if any settlement is reached, and claimed Putin "didn't believe" the international community would impose the scale of sanctions that it has.

Britain has recently targeted high-profile oligarchs, including Chelsea Football Club owner Roman Abramovich. Truss suggested it was "extremely difficult" to envisage those sanctions being lifted, saying the oligarchs "have enabled Vladimir Putin to do what he's doing".

Russia yesterday admitted using advanced hypersonic missiles for the first time in the Ukraine conflict as Kyiv's embattled leader Volodymyr Zelensky called for urgent peace talks. Johnson dis-

missed Putin's claims that he launched the offensive in order to prevent Ukraine joining NATO, saying "he knew perfectly well there was no plan to put missiles on Ukrainian soil".

Instead, "he was frightened of Ukraine because in Ukraine they have a free press and in Ukraine they have free elections," said the prime minister. "And he feared the implicit reproach to himself. Because in Putin's Russia, you get jailed for 15 years just for calling an invasion an invasion. And if you stand against Putin in an election, you get poisoned, or shot," he added. —AFP



MYKOLAIV, Ukraine: A picture taken yesterday shows the body of a Ukrainian soldier covered with a sheet next to the military school hit by Russian rockets the day before, in Mykolaiv, southern Ukraine. —AFP

missed Putin's claims that he launched the offensive in order to prevent Ukraine joining NATO, saying "he knew perfectly well there was no plan to put missiles on Ukrainian soil".

Instead, "he was frightened of Ukraine because in Ukraine they have a free press and in Ukraine they have free elections," said the prime minister. "And he feared the implicit reproach to himself. Because in Putin's Russia, you get jailed for 15 years just for calling an invasion an invasion. And if you stand against Putin in an election, you get poisoned, or shot," he added. —AFP



DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania: The site of the lorry-bus collision in which 23 people have died near Dar es Salaam on Friday

Still worse was a 2006 accident that saw a 26-seater bus carrying 74 passengers veer off the road near the northern town of Arusha and plunge off a bridge into the river, killing 54 people. —AFP

Tanzania bus, lorry collision kills at least 23

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania: At least 23 people have died after a bus crashed into a lorry in eastern Tanzania on Friday, the police said. "The death toll is now 23" after one of those injured died, said police head of operations and training Liberatus Sabas.

A police chief in the eastern region of Morogoro, Fortunatus Muslim, said the accident occurred in Melela Kibaoni, some 200 kilometers (120 miles) west of the coastal city and economic hub Dar es Salaam. "The truck driver, who was heading from the Dar es Salaam port to the Democratic Republic of Congo, was overtaking a motorbike when the two

vehicles collided head-on," he said.

The bus was travelling in the other direction from the western city of Mbeya to the coastal city of Tanga, he added. The presidency late Friday said 22 people had died and another 38 had been injured in the crash. After the latest death, 37 remained injured on Saturday.

"Three injured have been transferred to Muhimbili National Hospital in Dar es Salaam for further treatment," Sabas added. President Samia Suluhu presented her condolences on Twitter, and urged "road users to adhere to traffic rules".

Tanzania has seen a spate of fatal traffic accidents. On Monday, four people were killed in a coach accident outside the southwestern town of Tunduma, near the Zambian border, on its way to Dar es Salaam. In May 2017, 35 people — 32 of them schoolchildren — were killed in a bus crash. The vehicle had been speeding.

Two years earlier, 42 people were killed in a collision between a coach and a lorry.

and farming sectors. I am very happy that I've voted for a candidate based on my conscientiousness." 35-year-old Filomena Tavares Maria told AFP outside the polls that opened at 7 am (2200 GMT) and are due to shut at 3 pm.

Preliminary results are expected later today but an official result will be announced sometime next week. First hampered 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. Political tensions between the two largest parties — Guterres' Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin) and the National Congress of the Reconstruction of Timor-Leste (CNRT) — have also risen in the past four years, leading to a political deadlock that has seen the government fail to pass a budget.

Sidalia dos Santos said she hoped the new president could lead an economic recovery. "I hope the candidate that I voted for can improve our lives, especially in the health and education sector," the 22-year-old student said. Outside the polling station, Ramos-Horta said the financial

situation would be his main priority: "The most important thing for me is to strengthen the stability and build a better economy". Earlier in the week, he said he felt compelled to return to politics because Guterres had "breached the constitution" and overstepped his presidential role.

But Guterres, a 67-year-old former guerilla fighter, said he was confident the elections would bring him a second term. "I believe I will win this election and people will reconfirm their rights through the election. If I am re-elected, I will keep defending the democratic rights of our country and create sustainable development". Around 860,000 were registered to vote at the country's 1,500 polling stations. If no one wins an absolute majority, a second round of voting will be held on April 19 and the winner will take office on May 20, East Timor's 20th anniversary of independence from Indonesia, which occupied the former Portuguese colony for 24 years.

Major political events in East Timor have often been marred by violence and conflicts. In 2018, more than a dozen people were injured and several cars torched after clashes between main parties Fretilin and CNRT. —AFP

News in brief

Italian tourist killed by shark

BOGOTA: Italian tourist died Friday after being attacked by a shark off the coast of Colombia's San Andres island in the Caribbean Sea, local media reported. The 56-year-old man, identified by Colombian press as Antonio Roseto Degli Abruzzi, was swimming near a cliff when he was bitten by the shark. "Yes, he died," a senior Navy official, who asked to remain anonymous, told AFP. The Teleislas channel said the unusual attack took place in an area known as "La Piscinita," on the southwest side of San Andres, which is about 380 kilometers (235 miles) off the coast of Nicaragua. —AFP

Seven injured in Bissau clashes

BISSAU, Guinea-Bissau: At least seven people were injured Friday in clashes between police and supporters of the former ruling party of Guinea-Bissau, according to an AFP journalist. The incident took place in the capital Bissau at the headquarters of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) opposite the presidential palace. Police used tear gas and truncheons to disperse the supporters of the PAIGC, which led Guinea-Bissau to independence from Portugal in 1974 and still contests the 2019 election of President Umaro Sissoco Embaló. "We deplore the events of this evening. The security forces broke into the headquarters (of the PAIGC) where a meeting of the party's central committee was being held," party spokesman Joao Bernardo Vieira said. —AFP

Morocco wants proof of Pegasus claims

RABAT: Morocco on Friday demanded Amnesty International provide evidence of its report that Rabat used Zionist entity-made Pegasus spyware to monitor activists, including a human rights campaigner from the disputed Western Sahara. Pegasus, developed by the Zionist NSO group, can hack into mobile phones without a user knowing, enabling clients to read every message, track a user's location and tap into the phone's camera and microphone. In July 2021, a global investigation revealed Pegasus has been used by repressive regimes to target journalists, dissidents, diplomats and others. The Moroccan authorities have consistently denied using the spyware, and dismissed a report by rights group Amnesty as "arbitrary accusations", the government's Inter-ministerial Department for Human Rights said Friday. —AFP

Spain holds mass for trawler victims

MARIN, Spain: Spain's King Felipe VI attended a memorial service on Friday for 21 sailors who died or are missing at sea after a Spanish fishing trawler sank last month in stormy waters off Canada. The king and his wife, Queen Letizia, shook hands and embraced relatives of the victims at the packed church service in the port of Marin in Spain's northwestern region of Galicia where the trawler was based. Hundreds of people who could not fit inside the church watched the ceremony on a large screen set up outside. —AFP

East Timor votes in presidential election

DILI: East Timor's citizens were at the polls yesterday to elect a new president, hoping the most competitive election in the history of Southeast Asia's youngest country will end a protracted political impasse. Voters lined up outside polling stations at the crack of dawn to choose between a record 16 candidates led by two revolutionary heroes in incumbent Francisco "Lu-Olo" Guterres and former president and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jose Ramos-Horta.

Following temperature checks and hand sanitization, they were ushered to the polling booths where they dabbed their fingers in ink to show they had voted. Several mothers carrying babies were among those eager to elect a new president. "I hope the leader that I have voted for can pay more attention to the education, infrastructure

Business

SUNDAY, MARCH 20, 2022

Zain partnering with Cisco to deploy routed optical networking in Kuwait

Announcement made during Zain's participation at MWC 2022 in Barcelona



Eaman Al-Roudhan with Zain and Cisco executives at Barcelona

BARCELONA, MWC: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, is working with Cisco to deploy Routed Optical Networking in Kuwait, delivering the most advanced and cost-effective solutions to its enterprise customers.

The announcement was made during Zain's participation at the GSMA Mobile World Congress 2022 in Barcelona, Spain. The agreement was attended by Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan, Zain Kuwait Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq, Zain Group CTO Nawaf Al-Gharabally, Cisco Vice President for Customer Experience, EMEAR Adele Trombetta, Cisco Vice President for Service Provider Customer Experience, EMEAR Mario Sebastian Miguel, as well as Cisco SP Managing Director, MEA Region Mohammad Tantawi.

MWC is the GSMA's flagship mobile industry and technology event, and this year focuses on a number of themes including 5G Connect, Advancing AI, CloudNet, FinTech, Internet of Everything, Tech Horizon, and more. Historically, building and operating a multi-layer architecture has always been a challenge. Thanks to game-changing innovations that span across silicon,

- Collaboration to help multi-service 5G transport networks
- Zain's strategy is centered around digital transformation leadership
- Zain building strong information technology infrastructure for Kuwait
- To deliver most advanced, cost-effective solutions to Zain's enterprise customers



Zain Kuwait and Cisco are working together to build a new architecture based on routed optical networking to disrupt the way networks have been built for years

routing systems and standardized 400G coherent pluggable optics, complex layers can finally converge into a simpler and more scalable architecture with evolving cost structures and efficiencies. Zain has spearheaded this transition, resulting in a network that is easier to maintain, faster to adapt and optimized to operate.

Over the past decade, Zain has been building the strong information technology infrastructure critical for Kuwait to achieve robust economic growth. This new solution will significantly expand the

reach and services to the entire Kuwait industry verticals, to reassure mission critical of can't-go-down environments with high availability and resilience needs. Zain Kuwait plans to use network slicing to create differentiated use cases for the enterprise market. Network slicing has been touted as one of the key opportunities enabled by 5G.

With Cisco's Routed Optical Networking solution, Zain will be able to increase capacity and scalability while reducing footprint and power for a lower carbon impact, that's inline to Zain's

commitment to be a positive influence on the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the community.

Eaman Al-Roudhan, Chief Executive Officer, Zain Kuwait said: "In today's ever-changing markets, every business is undergoing digital transformation one way or another, and this has naturally resulted in growing demand for the reliability, speed, and efficiency of 5G connectivity. Simplification and automation are at the heart of our vision and execution plans, and we look forward to more successes with Cisco, to deliver on our

promise for a fully digitized Kuwait".

Adam MacHale Vice President, EMEAR Service Provider, Cisco, said: "Service providers are looking for a solution that offers investment protection, simplification and automation to support the massive growth of 5G services and Broadband without requiring linear cost increases in Capital Expenditures (CAPEX) and Operating Expenditures (OPEX). Routed Optical Networking is a key enabler for Zain Kuwait to maintain their growth and protect their investment while increasing scalability with less footprint and power for a lower carbon impact".

Zain's strategy is centered around digital transformation leadership and empowering the community to enjoy a smarter portable lifestyle, as well as using advanced technology to enable an easier and more flexible life. The company places itself as an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait. Today's announcement contributes to proving the company's full potential in triggering the digital community and will enrich its collaborations in Telecom and IT areas with its strategic partners on multiple levels.

Telegram booms as Russia's digital landscape shrinks

MOSCOW: The Telegram messaging app has become a go-to platform since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, despite concerns over its data security and defenses against misinformation.

It has benefitted from the gap left by Russia's blocking of Facebook and Instagram, offering a platform for mass messaging in a way similar to social media.

The platform also provides one of the last windows on Russia, but also an open channel to the horrors facing an under siege Ukraine. "Our main hope is connected with Telegram channel," Galina Timchenko, director of the independent news site Meduza that Russia has moved to block, told the Committee to Protect Journalists.

According to daily figures provided by Telegram, the app has been downloaded over 150 million times since the beginning of the year, with the official figure of half a billion active users dating back to January 2021. Prior to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, Telegram benefitted from not using the same economic model of the big American platforms that generate revenue with data on their users.

Downloads jumped in 2021 when a report from ProPublica investigative journalists claimed that Facebook teams were viewing messages sent via WhatsApp, contrary to company assurances.

At the same time, Telegram has benefitted from the image of its creators, brothers Pavel and Nikolai Durov, Russian citizens who left their home country in 2014.

Under pressure from the authorities, Nikolai sold his stake in VK, which he had created, rather than hand over the personal data of activists to the government. "Telegram is now a very nice revenge story, and we all love a good revenge story," said Enrique Dans, a professor specializing in information systems at the IE Business School in Madrid. "Will that be enough to make Telegram the world's favorite messaging app?"



That's a whole lot to say. The app still has a lot of things to demonstrate in areas such as security, encryption and business model," he added. While the platform run from Dubai claims to be secure, it does not encrypt messages by default, as does the Meta owned WhatsApp says it does.

In addition, "Telegram's profile has grown enormously in recent weeks, and that has raised the stakes about the impact of misinformation on the platform," said Jamie MacEwan, a media analyst at Enders Analysis. Messaging platforms in general have long faced criticism over their capacity to combat misinformation. Contacted by AFP, Telegram said it employs "several hundred professional moderators to keep the platform safe for users", a team that is "constantly growing".

"Meta employs tens of thousands of moderators and huge problems still slip through the net," said MacEwan. "It is unclear how much investment in moderation Telegram can support on its current funding model." The company's model was fully funded by Pavel Durov until 2018, before raising \$1.7 billion from investors, with the hope of launching its own cryptocurrency and becoming an alternative to Visa and Mastercard.

But the project fell through due to lack of regulatory approval in the United States, and the company repaid most of the funds. Entirely free, Telegram started advertising last year, but with a reduced, highly regulated offering, and guaranteeing that it would not use users' private data for targeting.

In April 2021, the Russian business daily Vedomosti reported that the company was preparing to go public in 2023, and was aiming for a valuation of between \$30 billion and \$50 billion. — AFP

Last apps standing?: Telegram, WhatsApp duck Russia bans

WASHINGTON: Chat platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram have avoided being blocked by Russia—unlike some of the world's biggest social networks—in a tenuous tolerance that experts warn could end suddenly.

Years of tension between Moscow and US-based Facebook and Twitter erupted into confrontation after the invasion of Ukraine, with the platforms targeting state-tied media and then finding themselves restricted in Russia. YouTube, which has barred channels linked to Russian state media globally, was on Friday also facing a direct threat of being blocked after Russia's media regulator, Roskomnadzor, accused the site's owner Google of being "anti-Russian."

Messaging apps, however, have gotten a pass so far in part because Meta-owned WhatsApp is less suited for mass communication, while Telegram's ability to blast information to large groups has made it useful both for independent media and the Kremlin.

"I think it's unlikely Russia will ban Telegram because they are so short on platforms where they can operate," said Sergey Sanovich, a postdoctoral researcher at Princeton University, who noted that authorities in 2020 aborted efforts to block the service. Telegram, criticized as having a lax content policing policy, offers a forum for Russian authorities to promote narratives friendly to their internationally condemned war. Russia still operates accounts on platforms like Facebook, despite blocking the service at home, but this week the Silicon Valley giant took down posts from Moscow's pages that contained misinformation about its deadly offensive.

Telegram has become an essential exchange for news on the war, with its growth accelerating after the Kremlin's latest crackdown on independent



media and the lock-out of apps like Facebook and Instagram. An average of 2.5 million new users joined Telegram daily in the last three weeks, the firm said, about a 25 percent jump from the weeks prior.

But experts highlighted a risk to Telegram and its users due to a lack of default, end-to-end encryption that potentially leaves the company susceptible to government pressure to turn over information.

Alp Toker, director of web monitoring group NetBlocks, noted WhatsApp has put in place firewalls that offer insulation against that sort of pressure. "By improving their security and adopting end-to-end encryption technology, they have essentially protected their own platform from legal risk and potential demands for content access requests," Toker added.

WhatsApp's use for one-on-one or group chats make it less of a target for Russian authorities for now, but that could change if it became known as a key platform for protests against the war.

"Primarily, Roskomnadzor has been very concerned about channels and news and ways of disseminating information to large numbers of people, which WhatsApp and such are less good for," said Eva Galperin, director of cybersecurity at Electronic Frontier Foundation. But Toker noted that the question hasn't reached a critical point yet for authorities, partly because it was social media platforms, many of them now blocked, that had played a key role in organizing. — AFP

Business

BoJ says no tightening as oil stirs inflation in Japan

Japan's prices are finally rising, but will it last?

TOKYO: Japan's central bank chief said on Friday the country will likely reach its key two-percent inflation target as oil rates surge, but the bank will continue monetary easing policies because the price rises are caused by external factors. The Bank of Japan has struggled to lift inflation for nearly a decade with the world's third-largest economy swinging between periods of sluggish inflation and deflation, both considered bad for growth.

"Unlike in the US and Europe, inflation is currently at around 0.6 percent, and is likely to rise to about two percent after April," BoJ governor Haruhiko Kuroda told reporters following a two-day policy meeting. "Most of the rise in prices will be caused by increases in international commodity supplies, energy, and food import prices, so naturally it is not necessary or appropriate to tighten monetary policy."

The United States Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest rate on Wednesday for the first time since 2018 in a bid to tackle soaring inflation. Kuroda said consumption in Japan is expected to further recover from a pandemic dip as the government lifts restrictions which mainly require restaurants and bars to limit opening hours in Tokyo and elsewhere on Monday.

Japan's core consumer prices, which exclude volatile fresh food, rose 0.6 percent in February from a year earlier, government data showed Friday. The internal affairs ministry said the rise was driven by food prices and utility bills due to a surge in energy costs linked to the Ukraine crisis.

It met market expectations as the sixth straight monthly gain, and the sharpest rise since February 2020. The BoJ's target of sustained two-percent inflation is seen as key to spurring healthy economic growth in Japan. But analysts say that even if the target is hit in the coming months, it is unlikely to last.



TOKYO: BoJ governor Haruhiko Kuroda speaks to reporters following a two-day policy meeting.

"Once the energy-price shock and deterioration in terms of trade is gone, prices will decline again," Shigeto Nagai of Oxford Economics told AFP ahead of the BoJ meeting. Excluding energy prices as well as fresh food, Japan's consumer prices were down 1.0 percent in February, the 11th straight monthly fall, the ministry said.

Prices skyrocket

From rice balls to nappies, prices are rising in Japan. But unlike inflation seen in many other places, the increases are long-sought but also unlikely to last, analysts say. Since the 1990s, the country has swung between periods of sluggish inflation and deflation, where prices are falling—both considered bad for growth. The central bank has tried an array of policies including pushing interest rates to rock-bottom to encourage spending and reach a two-percent inflation target, seen as key to boosting prosperity in the world's third-largest economy.

It hasn't worked: in 2021, the price of goods, not including volatile fresh food, inched down by an average of 0.2 percent. But pandemic recovery demand, as well

as a surge in oil and other commodities linked to the Ukraine war, may finally be achieving what the Bank of Japan couldn't.

Major Japanese companies have started raising the price of goods in a previously unthinkable, and sometimes controversial, fashion.

The maker of beloved children's corn snack Umaibo was even forced to apologize for the "commotion" caused by rumors ahead of a price rise amounting to two US cents, the first increase since its 1979 debut. Other hikes have also made headlines in a country where wages and prices have long been stagnant. The increases have been tough to make, according to Shigeto Nagai of Oxford Economics.

The so-called lost decades that followed Japan's 1980s boom have "cemented a deflationary mindset" among consumers, he told AFP.

"People believe that wages and prices will not grow," and so companies fear losing ground to competitors if they price items higher, he explained. On a narrow, bustling street in eastern Tokyo, shopkeepers said they felt squeezed by a pandemic downturn and higher costs for essentials such as cooking oil, flour and fuel. But many prefer to absorb extra costs rather than pass them on. "We have been in business for over 70 years... we are extremely close to our customers," said Satoshi Okubo, whose family shop sells sweets and chevy udon noodles.

"For now, I am swallowing the increased costs," he told AFP. "We will only decide to increase our prices when it becomes absolutely necessary."

Shrinkflation

Some companies have instead opted to reduce the size of products while leaving the price unchanged, a move dubbed "shrinkflation". But this risks irritating customers like Masayuki Iwasa, 45, who since 2020 has

documented shrinking goods and price increases on his website "Neage", which means "price hikes" in Japanese. "Some companies clearly say what they are doing, and others don't. If they announce what they are doing, I think customers would understand," he told AFP.

Despite the challenges, prices have been climbing in Japan since the autumn, albeit at nowhere near the blistering pace seen in Europe or the United States, where inflation recently hit a 40-year high of 7.9 percent. Core consumer prices, excluding fresh food, increased by 0.6 percent on-year in February, according to data released Friday, and some economists predict Japan could reach its two-percent inflation target in the coming months.

That level is "not sustainable" though, Nagai said, because it is driven by external factors and intensified by a weaker yen. One key to achieving longer-lasting price rises is wage increases, which for decades companies have kept low in part to avoid hiking the cost of products for consumers.

Jobs once for life and laden with benefits have been swapped for cheaper part-time roles, often occupied by women, and even those with lifetime jobs have seen paltry pay rises. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has made wage increases a central plank of his economic policy, calling for companies to lift salaries by three percent in annual spring wage negotiations.

Recent years have produced only marginal increases as trade unions prioritize job protection, however, and this year's first negotiations have been disappointing for Kishida and the unions. Nagai also warns that unexpected events such as the wave of the Omicron coronavirus variant could impact efforts to hike inflation. "We have been hoping for 'revenge consumption' by consumers (after pandemic restrictions), but many households have really experienced a sharp deterioration in real disposable income," he said. — AFP

UK trade benefits post Brexit not certain, MPs warn

LONDON: Economic benefits to Britain from trade deals struck following Brexit are "extremely uncertain", a cross-party committee of UK lawmakers concluded in a report published Friday.

The warning by the Public Accounts Committee comes as Britain next week holds talks with the United States as it looks to secure a trade deal with the world's biggest economy. London has negotiated a host of international trade deals with other nations since formally leaving the European Union at the start of last year. However, the committee cast doubt on the government's goal of having 80 percent of the UK's trade covered by free-trade deals by the end of 2022. A deal with the US would contribute almost one-quarter of that target, it said. The government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson was "pursuing a state-by-state approach to allow the UK to trade more at a state level with large economies such as California".

At the same time it called for "clearer and more complete information to parliament and the public to improve transparency, communications and understanding of trade agreements". The report concluded that there "is no guarantee that the agreements will deliver actual economic benefits" unless the Department for International Trade "provides vital support to help businesses use the agreements, particularly for smaller" ones.

"The Department needs to ensure that its approach to trade has coherence and that there is sufficient clarity about how government is making trade-offs across different policy areas, such as agriculture, the environment and human rights," the Committee added.

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Britain's International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan will hold discussions in Baltimore on Monday and Tuesday—and in the UK in the coming weeks. The dialogues "will explore how the United States and United Kingdom can collaborate to advance mutual international trade priorities rooted in our shared values", the British government said in a statement this week. — AFP

GM buying out SoftBank's \$2.1bn stake in Cruise self-driving cars

NEW YORK: American automaker General Motors announced Friday it is acquiring SoftBank's \$2.1 billion stake in its autonomous car venture Cruise. In addition, GM will chip in another \$1.35 billion investment to cover a commitment made in 2018 by the Vision Fund of SoftBank, a Japanese telecom giant.

The Detroit firm has ramped up its investments in autonomous technology and its build-out of electric vehicle capacity as it looks to curb emissions and engage in a technology race with Tesla and other self-driving ventures. Cruise last month opened a sign-up page to allow consumers to take a driverless ride.

"Cruise has made self-driving cars a reality and is a leader on the pathway to commercial autonomous ridesharing and delivery, creating significant value for both GM shareholders and Cruise's minority shareholders," GM said in a statement. GM bought Cruise Automation in 2017, which was spun out as a separate company in May 2018. GM is the main investor in the venture, which also is backed by Microsoft, Honda and Walmart. Late last year, the company announced plans to boost investment in electric and autonomous vehicle technology by \$7 billion to \$27 billion through 2025. GM chief Mary Barra has said the goal is to have a "world with zero crashes, zero emissions and zero congestion." — AFP



SHANGHAI: A delivery man delivers an order outside of a locked down neighborhood after the detection of new cases of COVID-19 in Huangpu district, in Shanghai. — AFP

'Iron army' of grocery runners feeds Shanghai as COVID hits

SHANGHAI: As many Shanghai residents shelter from COVID at home, a common sight on the megacity's suddenly subdued streets is the racing, swerving scooters of food-delivery riders.

Firms including Meituan, Alibaba-owned Ele.me, Pinduoduo and Dingdong Maicai are struggling to keep up with a rush of orders from sequestered citizens in need of groceries and disinfectants.

At a sorting centre in central Shanghai run by Dingdong Maicai, staff are working overtime to handle double the demand of a week ago, when the metropolis of 25 million people began battering down the hatches. Shanghai has so far avoided a citywide lockdown but authorities have closed school campuses, sealed off some residential compounds and launched a rigorous round of mass testing.

Dingdong Maicai has hired 300 additional staff across the city in recent days, some of them restaurant workers left idle by closures. China's hordes of scooter delivery drivers were hailed as national heroes two years ago when they kept untold millions fed during huge lockdowns when the virus first emerged.

The lessons learned from 2020 — and no small amount of bravado—have helped companies stay on top of the crush this time around. "We are an iron army. Whatever artillery fire we face, we react quickly," said Zhang Yangyang, manager of the bustling yet tidy Dingdong sorting depot.

Since its initial outbreak faded two years ago, China

has largely kept the virus under control through a tough zero-COVID strategy. Although its national daily case number — 4,365 reported Friday—is unremarkable globally, it represents the country's worst uptick in infections since the start of the pandemic. With the highly transmissible Omicron variant spreading, authorities have imposed stay-at-home orders or other restrictions in several cities.

But unclear messaging about their plans has sowed public confusion, helping to fuel binge-buying and the resulting burden on business managers like Zhang.

"I don't have a weekend," Zhang said. China has one of the world's biggest and most developed ready-meal and grocery delivery sectors. Slick smartphone apps enable users to place one-click orders from virtually any restaurant or food store within a several-kilometer radius, with the apps even displaying the delivery rider's body temperature. Food runners report they are currently making up to 100 deliveries a day, which are often left outside housing complexes to avoid human contact.

Dingdong Maicai staffer Li Yawu has found himself suddenly working up to 15 hours a day, after which he goes home to "soak my feet". "It would be untrue to say I wasn't scared in the beginning," he said of delivering to neighborhoods where COVID has taken hold. "But when you deliver food into a user's hands and there is that much gratitude in their eyes... I don't feel scared anymore." — AFP

German gas supply concerns mount for coming winter

BERLIN: Germany, which relies heavily on Russian gas, has major concerns over securing supplies for next winter and is doing all it can to secure alternatives, Minister for Economic Affairs Robert Habeck said yesterday. "If we do not obtain more gas next winter and if deliveries from Russia were to be cut then we would not have enough gas to heat all our houses and keep all our industry going," warned Habeck.

Supplies are "not yet completely guaranteed," Green Party member Habeck told Deutschlandfunk radio. He added that the government of Europe's biggest economy was preparing for the possibility of shortages "which we hope can be avoided."

Habeck was later Saturday headed for Qatar, one of the world's three biggest exporters of liquefied natural gas (LNG), which European states are increasingly counting on as a means of weaning themselves off Russian gas in the wake of Moscow's invasion of



Ukraine. Half of Germany's LNG imports come from Russia. Habeck, also minister for climate affairs, has already recently visited another gas powerhouse Norway, as well as current top global exporter the United States. This weekend he is also due to make a stop in the United Arab Emirates.

Berlin has come in for criticism over its opposition to an immediate embargo being imposed on Russian energy supplies as a means of choking off a major source of Moscow's foreign earnings.

Brazil jobless rate up slightly but still lowest since 2016

BRASILIA: Brazil's unemployment rate rose slightly to 11.2 percent for the November-January quarter, the government reported Friday. Average incomes dropped 10 percent over the previous year, it added. The unemployment rate was slightly lower than the 11.3 percent expected by analysts consulted by the business daily Valor, and marks the first rise after nine consecutive drops.

Brazil measures unemployment in rolling periods of three months. The rate for the October-December quarter stood at 11.1 percent. January's figure—published by Brazil's statistics agency, IBGE—nonetheless showed a strong improvement over the same period last year, when the rate was 14.5 percent. While the rate remains relatively high, it is the lowest level for the November-January quarter since 2016, when it was at 9.7 percent. Twelve million workers remain jobless in Latin America's largest economy. According to IBGE's Adriana Beringuy, the decrease in unemployment is largely due to the recovery in retail, a sector whose number of employees is now higher than before the pandemic, thanks to a recovery in consumption.

"The result in this group is relevant and demonstrates a repeat of the expansion seen in the second half of last year," she added. But the IBGE also found that workers' average income continued to fall, with a decline of 9.7 percent over the past year.

The number of people employed in the underground economy, where work is often intermittent and precarious, remained very high: 38.5 million in the November-January quarter, or 40.5 percent of the workforce. Brazilians' purchasing power was also impacted by rising inflation, complicated by the war in Ukraine. Year-on-year inflation was 10.54 percent for February, with a monthly price hike of 1.01 percent—the highest since 2015 for February. Brazil's GDP grew by 4.6 percent in 2021, after a 3.9 percent drop in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysts forecast almost flat growth in 2022, at only 0.49 percent. — AFP

But Germany believes a boycott could cripple the German economy and saddle society with huge rises in energy prices as well as lead to shortages. While Russia has come under fire for its war in Ukraine, Habeck conceded in a Friday interview with ARD television that, where energy policy is concerned, a moral dimension "does not really exist." Qatar, which is to host the World Cup later this year, and the UAE have both faced international criticism over human rights. — AFP

Business

Sri Lanka secures \$1bn Indian lifeline as IMF signals support

New Delhi, Colombo enter into credit agreement

COLOMBO: Cash-strapped Sri Lanka has secured a billion-dollar credit line from India to buy urgently needed food and medicine, officials said Friday, as the IMF confirmed it would discuss a possible bailout. The South Asian nation is suffering its worst economic crisis since independence in 1948, with crippling shortages of essentials and fears it will default on its foreign debt or ask bondholders to take a "haircut" on repayments.

India and Sri Lanka formally entered into the credit agreement on Thursday during Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa's visit to New Delhi. Treasury Secretary Sajith Attygalle told reporters in Colombo.

"India stands with Sri Lanka," Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar said on Twitter. "\$1 billion credit line signed for supply of essential commodities." The latest loan was on top of another \$500-million Indian credit line to help its island neighbor buy oil.

Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund on Friday confirmed it was considering President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's surprise Wednesday request to discuss a bailout. "We will discuss with the authorities how best we can assist Sri Lanka going forward," IMF spokesman Gerry Rice said in a statement to reporters in the capital.

Rajapaksa's announcement that he would go to the IMF—a U-turn from his previous position—increases the likelihood that Sri Lanka will seek to renegotiate some of its estimated \$51 billion in foreign debts. Rice said the IMF had already highlighted the urgent need for Sri Lanka to implement a

"credible and coherent strategy to restore macro-economic stability and debt sustainability."

Around \$6.9 billion of Colombo's debt needs to be serviced this year. Its foreign currency reserves stood at about \$2.3 billion at the end of February.

Sri Lanka earlier this year asked one of its main creditors, China, to help put off debt payments, but there has been no official response yet from Beijing.

Sri Lanka's tea crop suffered its lowest yield in 13 years, official data showed Friday, reducing output in its main export commodity as the island grapples with its worst economic crisis in seven decades. The country's agriculture sector was hit hard by a ban on agrochemicals imposed last April as the government introduced an ambitious plan to make Sri Lanka the world's first nation to rely solely on organic farming.

The ban was lifted by October following backlash from the industry but farmers were left unable to access imported fertiliser as the country simultaneously ran out of dollars to finance imports with the pandemic battering Sri Lanka's tourism sector.

"What we are seeing today is a self-inflicted wound on the tea industry," a senior tea broker at the Colombo Tea Traders' Association told AFP.

Monthly tea crops dropped to 18.16 million kilos (39.95 million pounds) in February, down nearly 20 percent from the corresponding period last year, the Sri Lanka Tea Board figures showed. "This is the lowest crop for the month since 12.8 million kilos were recorded in 2009," broking firm Asia Siyaka said.

The government has said an unprecedented shortage of food, fuel and medicines is due to the



COLOMBO: An opposition activist wears a mask depicting Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa as he protests along with others against rising living costs, at the entrance of the president's office in Colombo. —AFP

collapse of its foreign reserves. Tea exports brought in \$1.3 billion annually before the fertilizer ban.

Industry officials added that around 10 percent

of Sri Lanka's exports had also been affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Both countries are top buyers of Sri Lanka's aromatic black tea. —AFP

Bitcoin to the rescue: Cryptocurrencies' role in Ukraine

WASHINGTON: Cryptocurrencies have taken on an unprecedented role in the war in Ukraine, helping the government raise millions of dollars to fund its fight against the Russian invasion. Why has Ukraine turned to cryptocurrencies, and how is the nascent crypto industry changing its reputation and having an impact amid the clouds of war?

How much crypto has been raised?

At the outset of the conflict, Ukrainian officials posted addresses for two crypto wallets on their Twitter account, giving donors a direct and clear address to which to send contributions.

The wallets attracted more than \$10.2 million (9.2 million euros) just four days after the start of the invasion. Since then, more than \$100 million worth of crypto has been raised, with the "Crypto Fund for Ukraine" run by Michael Chobanian—the founder of the Ukrainian crypto exchange Kuna-accounting for 60 percent of all donations.

"We are still collecting crypto. It is being spent on aid like daily rations and bullet-proof vests and helmets," the 37-year-old Ukrainian told AFP. Initially, two funds were set up, one for humanitarian purposes and the other to support the Ukrainian military.

However, after the violence escalated across Ukraine, the funds were merged and focused fully on supporting the military, said Chobanian. He said that the majority of crypto donations came in the form of Bitcoin, Ethereum and the stablecoin Tether—a coin pegged one-to-one to the dollar.

What are the benefits of donating in crypto?

Aid packages sent to Ukraine in fiat money from the United States and the European Union dwarf cryptocurrency donations, but the latter allow individuals to get involved. US crypto charity, "The Giving Block", told AFP that cryptocurrency donations have the potential to attract "younger donors" who are looking to support various causes. Another reason crypto donations are of value to Ukraine is because they are less influenced by geopolitical or macroeconomic factors. Chobanian points to the depreciation in the value of the Ukrainian hryvnia as a result of inflation.

An extra advantage of donating in cryptocurrencies is the speed of the transfers. Bank wires may take up to 24 hours to be validated between two countries. However, cryptocurrency transfers typically take less time.

What are the drawbacks?

Despite the success of crypto in aiding the Ukrainian war effort, it has not always been a smooth ride.

In the early days of the conflict, the deputy minister for digital transformation wanted to issue Ukraine's own crypto as a symbolic gesture for Kyiv's cause, but the project was eventually cancelled.

To make matters worse, people seized the opportunity to mint and market fake versions of the planned government-issued crypto. "There was a lack of communication" within the government, said Chobanian, who now works closely with the ministry.

"It was the first day of the war," he recalls. Moreover, cryptocurrencies have become a staple part of Ukraine's shadow economy—used as a medium of exchange in online crime, tax avoidance and capital flight.

According to data analytics firm Chainalysis, transactions from Eastern Europe to other regions are particularly high, and the company suggests that "capital flight could account" for some of the crypto movement in the area. —AFP

Nomo Bank launches Apple Pay for all its customers

KUWAIT: Nomo Bank, the digital bank of the Bank of London and the Middle East "BLME", a subsidiary of Boubyan Bank Group, has launched Apple Pay service for all its customers. Apple Pay is the most secure digital payment method allowing the bank's customers to process all their transactions using Apple's smart devices (iPhone, iPad, Mac, and Apple Watch). This is a very important step towards using the bank's digital services, making it easier and more comfortable and safe to use such services in customers' daily payment and purchase transactions.

Abdulla Al-Tuwaijri, member of BLME's Board of Directors, stated: "This step comes as a part of Nomo Bank's keenness on developing a group of innovative digital payment solutions in order to keep up with the challenges of this era, while providing customers with state-of-the-art payment technology to offer them a unique banking experience that meets their expectations and needs while ensuring the highest levels of protection and security."

"This step highlights the bank's strategy aiming at offering digital banking services and allowing customers to manage their savings smoothly and easily", he added.

On his part, Andrew Ball, BLME's CEO, stated: "We take pride in this important milestone in Nomo's journey, which just started little months ago, confirming BLME's vision to establish a digital Islamic bank to keep up with our customers' ambitions and to meet the needs of everyone looking to manage his wealth in a better way, while having access to cutting-edge banking services at the same time."

"Nomo's customers enjoy full control over their

savings and wealth in their London-based accounts around the clock, regardless of where they are. This is mainly attributed to the safe and smooth Nomo App, which offers various innovative digital banking services and products", Ball added.

This service will allow the customers of Nomo Bank to make payments easily, whether through the app or during online purchase without having to create an account or fill out credit card's information or shipping and billing information every time.

Another security feature in the design of Apple Pay is that when you pay using your banking cards, card numbers are not stored on the device, rather, a personal encrypted account is created for the device and then stored in the approved chip.

Various uses

Al-Tuwaijri, who also serves as CEO, Private, Consumer & Digital Banking at Boubyan Bank, went on to add: "You can use Apple's devices such as iPhone or Apple Watch to make payments in stores, restaurants, cafes, hotels and many other places around the world smoothly in addition to using them in online purchases using Touch ID or Face ID."

"Just imagine how easy it is to have your banking card on your phone or watch, how this can make your life easier and your daily banking transactions smoother since you will be one swipe away from performing your transactions using contactless POS terminals", he added.

Al-Tuwaijri elaborated: "Ever since the launch of Nomo Bank last October, we have been witnessing a continued growth whether in the number of customers or the innovative digital banking products offered by the bank, which are highly welcomed and used by our customers."

"Despite the customers' base is mainly limited to the UK and Kuwait currently, the bank is looking forward to an expansion in GCC countries and then internationally to literally become "the World's First



Abdulla Al-Tuwaijri

Andrew Ball

Islamic Digital Bank" that meets everybody's needs and offers high-quality digital services", he added.

Al-Tuwaijri concluded: "We will be launching the app for Android users soon in addition to offering real estate finance services to customers interested in owning real estate properties in the UK."

Modern bank

All Boubyan and non-Boubyan customers can open a UK-based current account with Nomo Bank, whether in pound sterling or USD in just a few minutes and receive a pound sterling debit card on their address within 5 days to be able to use this card anywhere around the world.

Nomo Bank offers daily Sharia-compliant banking services along with investment opportunities to an increasing customer base in Kuwait that has special international banking needs. It allows its customers as well to process quick international transfers right from the app against fully transparent fees.

It is worth mentioning that Nomo Bank is the retail brand of BLME, a fully licensed bank in the UK, subject to the supervision of financial authorities in the United Kingdom, with a majority stake owned by Boubyan Bank.

KFH partners with Alshaya Group within KFH rewards program

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced a partnership with Alshaya Group to join "KFH Rewards" program, which represents an important addition to the customers of the program aimed at encouraging the use of "KFH" credit and prepaid cards, inside and outside Kuwait, by earning points for each purchase transaction. In a purchase process starting from KD 1, the points can be exchanged for other purchases from the stores participating in the program. Points are registered, exchanged and purchased through an application downloaded on mobile phones or the website of "KFH Rewards" program.

KFH Executive Manager Credit and Charge Card Products, Talal Al-Arbeed, said that joining Alshaya Group to the series of companies participating in "KFH Rewards" program is a qualitative development in the total benefits offered by the campaign, pointing out that the partnership between the two sides allows the customers of "KFH Rewards" program to redeem their points in the Alshaya Group stores, which cover 47 brands and about 342 stores and locations for sale in Kuwait.

Al-Arbeed stressed that the program comes as part of efforts to enhance the benefits for customers and achieve their satisfaction, noting that for every 1 KD of purchases inside or outside Kuwait, the customer earns points of disposal in other purchases with a group of the most prestigious stores and service outlets numbering more than 150 locations. Additionally, all KFH card holders who are eligible

Fed's Waller favors 'aggressive' rate hikes to combat inflation

WASHINGTON: The US central bank should move more quickly to increase the benchmark lending rate in order to contain high prices despite

to participate in the program are automatically enrolled in KFH Rewards Program, and KFH points can be redeemed through the electronic voucher via the KFH Rewards program's mobile application or through the website directly at the participating stores. There are several offers and features accompanying the launch of the new "KFH Rewards" program, which includes customers who download the rewards program application for the first time, receive 1,000 points.

Al-Arbeed added: The program, in its current initial phase, includes a distinguished group of companies with international brands. This includes a variety of sectors, with more than 100,000 members to date, with the participation of more than 150 merchants, and several new partners are being attracted to the program to provide more options for replacing rewards to the distinguished customers who use the eligible KFH cards included in the program.

Al-Arbeed explained that there are three different categories of cards with "KFH Rewards" program, and each category determines the exclusive and special offers that the customer receives, which includes: Holders of the black cards and the silver cards category, can earn points through all local and international stores and through the use of all points of sale and e-shopping, and they can also transfer "KFH" points to any other member of the program. Customers holding the green cards can earn points through the stores participating in the "Baitak Rewards" program only, and the total "KFH" points are added within 24 hours. After each purchase, the customer is eligible to earn points, provided that the customer is not participating in any other promotional program for bank cards.

Al-Arbeed stressed that the program comes on the heels of many developments made to KFH cards in terms of design, services and benefits, which motivates customers for more usage and to benefit from the available advantages,

the uncertainty surrounding the war in Ukraine, Federal Reserve Governor Christopher Waller said Friday. The Fed raised the policy rate by a quarter point on Wednesday, bringing it off zero for the first time since the pandemic began, as the US economy faces the highest annual inflation in four decades, and is under more pressure due to rising commodity prices as the result of the war.

Though Waller had advocated for a bigger increase immediately, he said he refrained from

which include the safety and ease of use. Bank cards have become a global language and a safe means in financial dealings, especially travel. Al-Arbeed noted that KFH launched "Oasis Club" credit card products in collaboration with Kuwait Airways, which includes: KFH "Oasis Club" MasterCard World Elite credit card, exclusively for private financial services customers, and KFH "Oasis Club" MasterCard World credit card exclusively for customers of "Al-Ruwad" and "Al-Tamayoz" and for those who meet the conditions. Al-Arbeed added: "KFH has provided the latest payment methods locally and globally to customers, including the payment service for digital wallets via phones and smart watches, in collaboration with the three largest global technology applications Samsung Pay, Fitbit, Garmin, including Visa and MasterCard cards, and works on points of sale that are compatible with NFC technology and are compatible with smart phones and tablets running iOS and Android. KFH has also launched many campaigns for encouraging customers to use cards, the latest of which was the "With your card... the Journey begins" campaign with KFH MasterCard, which provide customers with a unique banking experience and many opportunities to win valuable prizes of Land Rover Defender cars and miles from the "Oasis Club" of Kuwait Airways. KFH also launched "Ready for Summer?" campaign, in addition to a campaign to use digital wallets via phones and smart watches for its customers Samsung Pay, Fitbit, Garmin.



Talal Al-Arbeed

pushing for that this week because of the Russian invasion. "Inflation is raging," Waller said on CNBC. "The data is basically screaming at us to go 50 (basis points), but the geopolitical events were telling you to go forward with caution."

Getting a handling on inflation this year and next will require "some aggressive rate hikes earlier in the year," which would mean half-point moves "at one or multiple meetings in the near future." —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Geeta Devi (right), senior journalist of 'Khabar Lahariya' (Waves of News), interviews a woman who she says was abandoned by her husband, while reporting in Banda district, Uttar Pradesh state. — AFP photos



Geeta Devi makes a video with her phone during an interview with a woman who she says was abandoned by her husband, while reporting in Banda district, Uttar Pradesh state.



Meera Devi, managing editor and reporter of 'Khabar Lahariya' (Waves of News), watches a video on her phone in her office in Banda district, Uttar Pradesh state.

OSCAR SPOTLIGHT SHINES ON INDIA'S RURAL WOMEN JOURNALISTS

An all-women team of smartphone-toting, low-caste reporters who chronicle India's hardscrabble heartland may give the cinema-mad country its first Oscar-winning film, after their own story became a critically lauded documentary. The journalists of "Khabar Lahariya" (Waves of News) have built a huge following across Uttar Pradesh, a northern state with more people than Brazil, covering a beat that runs from cow thefts to sexual violence and corruption. They have earned the respect of their village communities by covering local stories often overlooked by India's established media outlets, but only after a relentless battle to be taken seriously by authorities—and even their own families. "Just stepping outside the household was a big challenge... I had to fight many battles," reporter Geeta Devi told AFP. "Even my father was dead against me. He said, 'You can't do this work, this is not something that women are supposed to do.'" As with her colleagues, Devi is a member of the Dalit community, the lowest rung in India's rigid caste system and the victims of an entrenched culture of prejudice and humiliation. In Banda, a riverside town a few hours' drive from the Taj Mahal, Devi interviewed a woman rendered destitute after she was abandoned by her husband. But as word got around that a Khabar Lahariya reporter was nearby, others



Managing editor and reporter of 'Khabar Lahariya' (Waves of News), speaks to village women while reporting in Banda district, Uttar Pradesh state.

approached her to implore coverage of their own woes—municipal neglect leading to a lack of clean drinking water and dirty, overflowing drains. Some women took her aside to privately share their stories as victims of sexual harassment and violence—issues often hushed up under the weight of small-town stigma. Formal discrimination against Dalits was abolished a long time ago, but they are still often barred from entering temples or houses belonging to higher

castes, and remain targets of violence. As members of a marginalized community and women in the deeply patriarchal villages of India's Hindi-speaking heartland, Khabar Lahariya's correspondents have a unique insight into local affairs, and Devi says she is proud to be part of a team working with a "feminist lens".

'Women who give hope'
Their endeavours are the subject of "Writing with Fire", an Oscar-nominated

documentary that has taken the film festival circuit by storm and already won the Special Jury Award at Sundance. The fly-on-the-wall narrative shows dedicated journalists preparing to transition from their legacy newspaper operations to digital production, unbowed by their encounters with dismissive police and fearsome local strongmen. "It's a very inspiring story. It's a story about women who give hope," Rintu Thomas, the film's director, told AFP at an Academy Awards preview event in Los Angeles. "I think that is very strong and powerful, especially in the world that we are in right now where there is so much mistrust of the media," she added. India is home to the world's most prolific film industry and cinema holds a rarefied place in national culture, with stars enjoying almost divine status and people often queuing to watch the same movie multiple times. But no Indian-produced film or documentary has ever won an Academy Award, despite locally shot foreign productions "Gandhi" and "Slumdog Millionaire" each winning Best Picture in years past.

'We can achieve anything'
Parts of India have prospered in the three decades since market reforms brought a jolting end to decades of sclerotic, socialist-inspired central planning. Khabar Lahariya works in areas left

behind by the economic boom, where life has barely changed even as new wealth transforms the country's urban landscape and culture. Meera Devi, the outlet's managing editor, says her work is driven by a passion for giving a voice to those left out of India's success story. "When I fight for the rights of the minorities, tribals and other marginalized sections of society—when these people get heard and get justice, I feel very good," she said. Born in a remote village and married at 14, Meera had to fight against the odds to get a college degree. The 35-year-old joined the media house in 2006, soon after it began publishing, initially working on stories of cattle theft and tragic family disputes before moving on to local politics. Her work has sent crooks to jail and shamed officials into ordering the repair of rundown roads, as well as charting the rising tide of Hindu nationalism in the country's rural hinterlands. "The men here are not used to seeing powerful women, especially in a field like journalism. But we are changing that outlook," she said. "We have proved that if women are given the right opportunities, we can achieve anything. Once you give women the freedom they deserve, you simply cannot stop them." — AFP

Filmmakers rename 'Russian Arm' camera system 'U-Crane'

A camera system used in countless Hollywood films and previously known as the "Russian Arm" has been renamed by its inventors to "U-Crane" in tribute to the country it came from. The gyro-stabilized crane mounted on a car roof is used to give dynamic coverage of car chases and stampedes, allowing the audience to swoop alongside a fast-driving hero. It is a staple of action blockbusters, including the "Fast and Furious" franchise, "Black Widow" and pretty much anything starring Tom Cruise. Up until recently, the device, developed by Kyiv-based Filmmotech in the 1990s, has been known as the "Russian Arm". But no more. "The NEW OFFICIAL name of Filmmotech's world famous system is now U-CRANE in honor of (its) country of origin and their heroic fight against Russian aggression," the US branch of the firm said on Instagram last month. "The gyro stabilized crane system was designed and built in Ukraine by Filmmotech and will continue to be built in Kiev for years to come!" Trade magazine Variety, which first reported the name change, said Filmmotech employs around 250 people in under-siege Kyiv. Kevin Descheemaeker of Filmmotech USA told the title the name "Russian Arm" had been removed in tribute to Ukrainian film engineer and company owner Anatoliy Kokush, and to the company's Ukrainian employees. "I emailed our international group to take down all the signage on our arm cars, trucks and trailers, websites and no longer use the hashtag #russianarm," Descheemaeker said in a statement. "As a group we decided that U-CRANE would be a more respectful alternative and that is how the movement on social media started." Russian forces attacked Ukraine three weeks ago, forcing millions of civilians to flee their homes, some across international borders. — AFP

French film must be 'more spectacular'

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." — AFP

Ballet greats unite for Ukraine's benefit gala

World famous ballet dancers from Russia and Ukraine, Argentina, Cuba, France and Japan come together yesterday for a gala to raise funds for Ukraine and send a message of peace. "We as artists have talent and we need to use this talent to say what we believe in," Ukraine's Ivan Putrov, co-organiser of the event to be held at the English National Opera's London Coliseum, told AFP. "Art has a voice and is the voice that we use," said Putrov, who was a principal dancer with London's prestigious Royal Ballet from 2002 to 2010. Putrov and Romanian ballerina Alina Cojocaru both trained in Kyiv and decided to mobilize the world of ballet for this "humanitarian appeal" in the face of Russia's invasion. Now, they have united a team of exceptional dancers to "raise funds that will save lives," Putrov said. The message is not only for the West and those in Ukraine, but also Russia. "Some Russians will hear us and will raise their voice... because what's happening is outrageous," he said. Stars taking the stage include Russia's Natalia Osipova, Argentina's Mariana Nunez and Japan's Fumi Kaneko, all from the Royal Ballet, and France's Mathieu Ganio from the Paris Opera. Ukraine's Katja Khaniukova, Spain's Aitor Arrieta and the United States' Emma Hawes of the English National Ballet will also perform on the night. The evening hopes to raise more than £100,000 (\$130,000, 120,000 euros) for the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)



A barricade is pictured in front of the National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet in Odessa. — AFP photos

UK charity collective which includes the British Red Cross and is helping victims of the war. "Is art appropriate in such a horrible circumstance? Of course it is, because it gives hope, it gives inspiration to people," said Putrov. **Loaded with symbolism**
The Ukrainian national anthem will open the evening, which will close with "The Triumph of Love" from the ballet "Raymonda", with music by Russia's Alexander Glazunov. In between there will be 13 symbolism-laden choreographies such as "No Man's Land" by Liam Scarlett, "Lacrimosa" by Gyula Pandi and "Ashes" by Jason Kittelberger.

Russian composers including Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff will also be played. "Russian culture doesn't have anything to do with (President Vladimir) Putin, and equally Putin has nothing to do with Russian culture," said Putrov. Osipova, one of the most famous Russian dancers outside her country, declined to be interviewed. But her presence "signifies that Russia doesn't equal aggression," said Putrov. Cuba's Javier Torres of the Northern Ballet will perform "The Death of a Swan" by Camille Saint-Saens. The piece is about a paraplegic who loses one of his limbs and "represents fighting for what you have lost," Torres told AFP. "It talks about fighting to the end and that's how I wanted to interpret it," he said, thinking of "people who try to resist what happens to them," like the Ukrainians mired in war or the Cubans who have suffered under decades of US sanctions and embargoes, and "even by the Russians" in Soviet times. "I have that pain, I have that anguish that every Cuban who lives outside of Cuba has, because we know the needs that are experienced there," he said. He said he has not previously mixed art with politics, but yesterday's gala is "a humanitarian duty as a dancer, as a human rights defender, first as a person and then as an artist." — AFP



Concrete blocks with French national motto 'liberty, equality, fraternity' written on it form a barricade in front of the National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet in Odessa.

Lifestyle | Feature



A Lebanese band entertains visitors at Lebanon's stand during an event at Abraj Park in Adailiya organized by the Deanery of the Diplomatic Corps with the participation of embassies and international organizations to mark Kuwait's National and Liberation days, International Women's Day and the arrival of spring. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Yemenis in traditional attire.



Lebanese in traditional attire.



Embassies participate in cultural event



Performers from Afghanistan.

By Nawara Fattahova

Around 25 embassies participated in a cultural and entertainment event held at Abraj Park in Adailiya yesterday. This event was held on the occasion of the national and liberation days of Kuwait, International Women's Day and the arrival of spring. Hundreds of visitors enjoyed sampling various traditional dishes and desserts of the participating countries. They also got information about these countries, the touristic and investment opportunities there, and some of their products. Musical performances by the participating embassies regaled visitors.

Kyrgyz Ambassador Azamat Omar Karagulov said they are celebrating Nowruz (Persian New Year) along with

the national days of Kuwait. "We welcome you to the booth of Kyrgyzstan, where we have a traditional tent, inside which we have different products including food, souvenirs, and others," he said.

Valerie Zarian from the department of tourism at the Embassy of South Africa spoke about their participation. "We are giving touristic information about South Africa and about our culture. We are glad that after the pandemic, we can again gather and participate in public events. We have on display today various South African products such as tea, natural juices, biscuits, spices and others. We also explain about the popular places to visit in South Africa, as many people are looking for new destinations. It's the perfect place for a honeymoon, especially due to the pleasant climate," she told Kuwait Times.



Traditional sweets on display.



An African band entertains the crowd.





Bhangra dancers from India.



Performers from Nepal.



Bhutanese in traditional attire.



Kyrgyz in traditional attire.

Deputy Ambassador of Malawi Alison Edson Liwanda noted they are showcasing investment opportunities in Malawi. "Malawi is an agricultural country and produces many products that are exported to Kuwait. We would like to show people here what we have to offer and are ready to facilitate imports. Malawi is also a very good touristic destination, and there are many natural reserves suitable for adventures," he said.

Indian Ambassador Sibi George expressed his happiness to participate in this event that marks Kuwait's national celebrations. "Today we are presenting Indian music, dance, culture and of course Indian food. India always participates in celebrations in Kuwait as our bilateral relations are excellent, vibrant

and traditional, which connect people together," he pointed out.

Counsellor at the Embassy of Turkey Emre Biral noted that this event is a great opportunity to come together after the pandemic. "We are welcoming spring, so we are happy to participate in this event, during which we can display our traditional sweets and costumes. In addition, we have many booklets about various touristic places in Turkey," he said.

Aala from the Iranian embassy explained about the table setting of Nowruz, which falls on March 20. "The Nowruz table consists of seven items all starting with the letter S, symbolizing happy things to spread love and wealth," she said.



An Arab band entertains the crowd.



People enjoying the festive atmosphere at the event.

Sports

Swiatek and Sakkari set up Indian Wells WTA title clash

Swiatek won four straight games to seal the win

INDIAN WELLS, United States: Maria Sakkari ended Paula Badosa's bid for a repeat title at Indian Wells on Friday, beating the defending champion to set up a final clash with former French Open winner Iga Swiatek. Greece's Sakkari triumphed 6-2, 4-6, 6-1 to end Badosa's bid to become the first woman since Martina Navratilova in 1990-91 to win back-to-back Indian Wells titles.



'It was really intense'

Poland's Swiatek beat two-time Grand Slam winner Simona Halep 7-6 (8/6), 6-4. Ranked fourth in the world, Swiatek was already assured of rising to a career-high third in the world. Either she or sixth-ranked Sakkari can claim the No. 2 spot with a victory in today's title match. "Really it's over my expectations," said Swiatek, who said she came into the prestigious event in the California desert doubtful she

could follow up her fourth career title in Doha with another deep tournament run.

But she rallied from a break down in each set and saved two set points in the first-set tiebreaker to notch a 10th straight WTA match win. "It was really intense," Swiatek said, "really physical. I think we had the longest rallies I played here."

The 20-year-old evened her head-to-head record against Halep at two wins apiece, but she admitted it required a change in mindset taking on a player who was once ranked so much higher than herself. "I had to fight to the end and be mentally stronger," she said. "Simona is a really strong player mentally and she's not giving up so I wanted to do that better."

Halep, who was hindered in 2021 by calf and knee injuries, gained a 5-4 lead with her second break of the opening set, but she couldn't close it out in the next game and they went to the tiebreaker. The Romanian again had the upper hand in the tiebreaker, but at 6-4 she fired a backhand long and Swiatek won the next three points-saving a set point with a deep backhand volley then clinching the set with a blistering return of a Halep second serve. A frustrated Halep was warned after thumping her racquet down in disgust and Swiatek, her confidence bolstered, broke Halep for a 2-1 lead in the second.

Speechless Sakkari

But the set unfolded much like the first. After having her left thigh taped by the trainer, Halep reclaimed the break and grabbed another to move ahead 4-2 on a pair of forehand errors from Swiatek. But once again the Romanian couldn't maintain the advantage and Swiatek won four straight games to seal the win.

Sakkari goes into the final buoyed by the knowledge that she has won three of four prior encounters with Swiatek. The Greek player shook off an opening break of her serve to win six of seven games on the way to pocketing the first set, breaking Badosa twice as the Spaniard struggled with her serve. Badosa battled back in the second, breaking Sakkari twice on the way to a 3-2 lead and hanging on to force a third, in which Sakkari's aggression and power were too much for her opponent.

"I just had full faith and I believed in myself every single moment," said Sakkari, who fought back tears as she spoke to fans after the match. "I'm just speechless right now." Sakkari has reached seven semi-finals in her last 10 tournaments, including a run to the final at Saint Petersburg last month. But she had never won a semi of an elite WTA 1000 event in four prior attempts. She'll be vying for just her second career title, her first coming on clay in Rabat in 2019. — AFP



INDIAN WELLS, United States: Iga Swiatek, of Poland, hits a backhand return at the Indian Wells tennis tournament in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

Amir's International Shooting Grand Prix to be launched today

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's International Shooting Grand Prix will be launched today in the presence of His Highness the Amir representative, Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Mishal Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex.



Obaid Al-Osaimi

Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Obaid Munahi Al-Osaimi said in a statement that Chairman and Board Members of KSSC thank His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his unlimited support for Kuwait shooting sport and designating an annual Grand Prix that is now one of the most important tournaments on the ISSF agenda, adding that this support is one of the main reasons for Kuwait shooters outstanding results at all levels.

Al-Osaimi said the Grand Prix will have 200 shooters from 20 countries that arrived in Kuwait in order to win this coveted cup in the Skeet and Trap events for both men and women. He added that there will be a friendship championship between Kuwait and Japan Shooting Federations in cooperation with Kuwait Paralympics committee in celebration of 60 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.



Fatat basketball team defeat Salwa Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: Fatat Basketball team defeated Salwa Al-Sabah 84-49 in their match that was held at the federation's hall at Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah complex in the second round of the Women's Basketball League.

The second match saw Qurain club defeat Oyoun in a landslide 84-2. The first match had a competitive first half as Salwa Club players kept up with their oppo-

nents, but the third and fourth quarters had Fatat tighten up their defense and attacked well to end the match in their favor comfortably. Deputy Chairwoman of the Woman's Committee at Kuwait Basketball Association Hanan Al-Zayed appreciated the participation of Fatayat Al-Oyoun and Salwa Al-Sabah Clubs in the league adding "we are proud with the participation of the two clubs and the committee will support all clubs technically and physically".

Al-Zayed said that players, particularly the new ones should not pay attention to the results at the current time as the start is very difficult and we must consider the technical differences and experiences between players. She said once players gain more practical experience much differences will disappear in the coming seasons.

Quartararo on pole as Marquez crashes twice

MANDALIKA, Indonesia: MotoGP world champion Fabio Quartararo will start today's first race in Indonesia in 25 years from pole position after a dramatic qualifying session that saw Marc Marquez twice crash out.

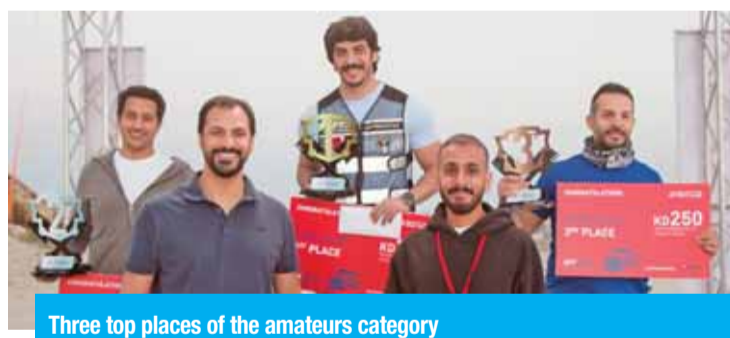
After waiting so long for top-class racing to return, Indonesia's motorbike-mad fans were given a treat in incident-packed qualifying on the steamy island of Lombok yesterday. France's Quartararo, who went fastest in practice on Friday on the new Mandalika circuit, topped qualifying with a time of 1 min 31.067 sec on his Yamaha, with Spain's Jorge Martin second on the grid, 0.213 sec back.

Also on the front row, in third, was France's Johann Zarco. Like Martin, he rides a Ducati. Italy's Enea Bastianini, who won the season-opening Qatar race earlier this month on his Ducati, qualified fifth. "It was great to be back in (pole), it was a long time, super happy," said the 22-year-old Quartararo, whose last pole position was at the Catalunya Grand Prix in June last year.

"We did not make so many mistakes in qualifying and that is thanks to the team because we never gave up." Quartararo's title defence started in meek fashion in Qatar when he came a disappointing ninth. Spain's six-time world champion Marquez will start Sunday's race on Lombok 15th after a calamitous qualifying run. He was involved in a high-speed crash on Friday in practice and took another tumble off his Honda at Turn 13 in the first round of qualifying. He immediately sprinted off to grab his other bike in a frantic effort to record a competitive lap and get into the second session of qualifying. But, pushing too hard, the 29-year-old went flying off once more just minutes later, this time at Turn 12, and was clearly annoyed with himself. —AFP



Three top places of the professionals category



Three top places of the amateurs category



Gulf Bank team

Amateurs, professionals take part in Gulf Bank's 'Off-Roading' Challenge

KUWAIT: Amid a huge turnout of spectators of all ages, Gulf Bank successfully wrapped up the first sports event of its kind in Kuwait: The Gulf Bank "Off-Roading" Challenge. The event was held on Friday in Bneider, with the participation of tens of off-roading amateurs and professionals who competed over the course of five hours.

After fierce competition between the contestants, who overcame both natural and artificial barriers, the Organizing Committee announced the 6 winning athletes of the race, 3 from the professional category: Talal Al-Sabah, Youssef Al-Mutawa and Abdul Aziz bin Saghir, and 3 from the amateur category: Suleiman Al-Khudari, Faisal Al-Hajri and Majed Al-Qaisi.

This year's Off-Roading Challenge was the first event of its kind in Kuwait, and was held by Gulf Bank, in cooperation with the Suffix company for sports events management and Kuwait Motor Sport Club. On the sidelines of the race, the Gulf Bank team held mini competitions for spectators and visitors. Spectators were asked questions related to the Off-Roading Challenge. The Deputy General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Ahmad Al-Amir commented: "We would like to congratulate the Off-Roading Challenge first-place winners. We are looking forward to putting on more sporting and social events that meet the needs and aspirations of all segments of our society, especially as we start to navigate our new, post-pandemic normal."

He added: In light of the large public attendance, especially from the youth group, and the large number of requests to participate in the past from amateurs and professionals in the "Off Road" sport, which reflects the

interest of the youth in practicing this sport, and based on their demands, we are considering developing and organizing the event annually. As part of its ongoing commitment to social responsibility and its continuous support of local youth, Gulf Bank is keen to organize multiple sporting events throughout the year, providing local youth with the opportunity to practice their beloved sports and pursue their passions - all while competing for valuable cash prizes.

He stated that sustainability programs, particularly social responsibility, represent one of the main pillars of Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy, which focuses on all financial, environmental and social aspects, in a way that contributes to the development of society and enhances its leadership in all fields, through the application of sustainable practices with great effectiveness.

On his part, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Fahad Al-Sharrah, said that the participants competed on both natural terrain and artificial industrial barriers, with the degree of difficulty ranging from easy to medium. The competition circuit was prepared with various rough roads, using sand, rocks, water basins, and other challenges that the competitors met head-on, all while maintaining the strictest security and safety measures. Al-Sharrah affirmed Gulf Bank's interest in sponsoring sporting events as part of the Bank's role in promoting local youth's mental and physical health. Gulf Bank greatly prioritizes the local youth segment both in terms of its banking services and its commitment to their social wellbeing.

He pointed out that Gulf Bank, based on its motto "Always With You," presents a distinct model for sustainability programs that include all segments of the

local population, resulting in multiple initiatives that promote a great quality of life, including sports, health, and education activities.

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

A Successful Partnership

On his part, General Manager at the Suffix company for sports events management, Ahmed Al Majed, said:



Photo of one of the stages

"We are proud to partner with Gulf Bank to organize the Off-Roading Challenge, the first sports event of its kind in Kuwait. We were extremely impressed to witness all the athletes' performances and the huge public turnout, a true testament to the event's success."

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

The race consisted of 9 stages, with each stage varying between natural terrain and industrial challenges. Contestants were evaluated by a panel of judges, and were judged based on their timing and performance in their respective car categories. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with the different relevant parties to achieve it.

Sports

Ukraine's Mahuchikh defies odds to win world indoor high jump gold

Mahuchikh forced to flee her home, to make the 2,000km trip to Belgrade



BELGRADE, Serbia: Winner Ukraine's Yaroslava Mahuchikh (R) celebrates after victory in the women's high jump final during The World Athletics Indoor Championships 2022 at the Stark Arena, in Belgrade, yesterday. — AFP

BELGRADE, Serbia: Yaroslava Mahuchikh overcame the "total panic" of armed conflict in her native Ukraine to win gold in the high jump at the World Indoor Championships yesterday. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Mahuchikh was forced to flee her home, hide out in a cellar and eventually make the 2,000km trip over three days to Belgrade to face what she dubbed her own front line.

The reigning European indoor high jump champion, who won Olympic bronze in Tokyo last summer and world outdoor silver in Doha in 2019, left her home in Dnipro just three weeks ago as the conflict escalated. Training, needless to say, was low on her list of priorities. But she did succeed in finding her way to Serbia after "hundreds of phone calls, many changes of direction, explosions, fires, and air raid sirens". "This medal is for Ukraine, all my country, all my people, all the military," said Mahuchikh. "I must protect our country on the track."

"Before we went to the field, the only thought in my mind was about Ukraine because too many terrible things have happened there. I even doubted that I could jump at all, but my coach said I must go out and perform with the shape and fitness I had before the start of the Russian invasion."

Arsenal on Wednesday. "In the last few years we've pushed each other on insane levels." The feeling is mutual with former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss Guardiola hailing Liverpool "the toughest opponent I have ever faced in my 13 years as a manager."

Quadruple v treble

Rather than record points tallies, it is history-making trophy hauls that both sides have their eye on this season. Liverpool have already ended City's four-year hold on the League Cup to claim the first silverware of the season.

Both sides are also in FA Cup quarter-final action on Sunday as City travel to Southampton and Liverpool face Nottingham Forest. However, it is the balancing act of two legs of a Champions League quarter-final either side of a potential title decider when they meet at the Etihad on April 10 that could make the difference. Friday's draw for the latter stages of the Champions League kept the sides apart until at least the final.

But it was Liverpool who got the kinder draw for the last eight as they face Benfica, while City take on Atletico Madrid. After establishing an era of domestic dominance, City's priority has to be ending their quest to be crowned European champions. "In the Premier League right now, we are leading. Right now, today, the destiny is in our hands," said Guardiola on Friday. "Everyone knows what we (have to) do. It is a marvellous challenge. We try to do it."

No side has ever won a quadruple of Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup in the same season. Only Manchester United in 1998/1999 have managed the treble of Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup.

However, both sides have proven capable of breaking the barriers of what seemed possible in recent seasons. There is every chance their paths will cross again in Paris for the Champions League final on May 28 with either a quadruple or treble on the line. — AFP

deliveries and stroked 12 fours. Blackwood, who offered a bit more adventure in a 183-run fourth-wicket partnership with his skipper, fell just before the close of play for 102. His third Test century and second against England spanned almost five hours in which he faced 215 balls and struck 11 boundaries.

While the opening batsman's marathon effort was typically understated and free of any moment of real danger, his partner through most of the day lived a charmed life from the very start of his innings and needed those moments of good fortune to provide the sort of stability the West Indies desperately needed after England took the upper hand in the morning session.

Blackwood came to the crease just before lunch at 101 for three and immediately survived an LBW appeal to the bowling of Ben Stokes, who had just removed the usually obdurate Nkrumah Bonner. Even the bowler appeared to concur with umpire Nigel Duguid's verdict

Coming into the competition at 1.88m, Mahuchikh had a failure at 1.92 and two at 2.00 before making the latter height. She sailed over 2.02 to ramp up the pressure on Eleanor Patterson. The Australian responded by passing, so the bar was raised to 2.04m. But when Patterson failed at the new height, Mahuchikh was left celebrating in the Stark Arena, the crowd rising for a standing ovation with a handful of Ukrainian flags fluttering.

Painted nails in support

Patterson claimed silver with 2.00m, with Kazakhstan's Nadezhda Dubovitskaya taking bronze (1.98). "To win a silver behind Yaroslava makes it even more special," said Patterson, who had painted her nails with a blue and yellow love heart in support of Ukraine. "She's had to deal with such hardships that no one deserves to, so I'm incredibly proud of her too. I'm in the same hotel as the Ukrainian team and I was able to see them beforehand and exchange small smiles and little gestures of support."

Mahuchikh said she had been grateful for the support shown to her and the five other members of the all-female Ukraine team in Belgrade. "I saw that Eleanor had manicured her nails with Ukrainian

colours and a big yellow heart," she said. "My heart right now is with all people who support us and defend Ukraine."

Mahuchikh's teammate Iryna Gerashchenko, who fled her Kyiv home with her husband and dog amid "everything at once: bombs and rockets" but no kit, finished fifth in the high jump with a best of 1.92m. "I have such respect for both girls and all the Ukrainians who have made it here," added Patterson. "It's incredible to see them and phenomenal for Yaroslava to come away with the gold."

Mahuchikh's victory came in the absence of Russia's Mariya Lasitskene, who won gold in Tokyo competing as an accredited neutral athlete. But Lasitskene was ruled out of the world indoors following World Athletics' ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine.

Looking ahead, Mahuchikh said she had "no idea" how she would prepare for a busy season that includes the world outdoor championships in Eugene, Oregon, and the European championships in Munich, Germany. "I am so sorry that I cannot go back to Ukraine. I want to go back as soon as possible," she said, adding that she would now temporarily travel to Germany with her kit sponsor. — AFP

Liverpool reel in City for another title tussle

MANCHESTER, United Kingdom: Liverpool and Manchester City are embroiled in another tense fight for the Premier League title with both sides having aspirations of multiple trophy-winning seasons in the final few months of the campaign.

City appeared to be cruising towards a fourth Premier League title in five seasons when a 1-0 victory over Chelsea in mid-January took them 13 points clear at the top and 14 ahead of Liverpool. Two months on, the gap is down to one point as Liverpool have made full use of two games in hand and a few rare slip-ups from the champions to set up another fascinating title race between two of the best sides the English football has ever known. Pep Guardiola's reign in Manchester and Jurgen Klopp's revival of sleeping giant in Liverpool have consistently seen the record books rewritten in recent years.

Record breakers

Between them City and Liverpool have lifted the last four Premier League titles and at least one has reached three of the last four Champions League finals. Three years ago a historic title race was also decided by a solitary point as City's 98 held off Liverpool's 97. Those points tallies have only ever been bettered in English football history by City's 100 in the previous 2017/18 season and Liverpool's 99 in 2019/20 as they ended a 30-year wait to win a league title.

"I know the only chance we have is to win an incredible amount of games because our opponents do," said Klopp after Liverpool's ninth consecutive league win at

Brathwaite, Blackwood lift WI against England

BRIDGETOWN, Barbados: Kraigg Brathwaite and Jermaine Blackwood produced an almost perfect captain, vice-captain double-act with determined centuries to lift the West Indies to 288 for four in reply to England's first innings total of 507 for nine declared at stumps on the third day of the second Test at Kensington Oval on Friday.

Brathwaite was at his most obdurate in accumulating an unbeaten 109, his tenth Test hundred, in more than eight hours at the crease in which he has faced 337

Barca and Real Madrid plot their way back

MADRID, Spain: Real Madrid will be underdogs in the Champions League quarter-finals and Barcelona will not be there at all, the draw on Friday setting the context for a Clasico of two giants desperately seeking a return to the elite. Despite their momentous comeback against Paris Saint-Germain, Madrid are still rated fifth favourites in the Champions League this season and were widely considered a good draw for Chelsea, who outplayed them to reach the final last year.

Barca, meanwhile, had to wait another hour to find out their fate in the Europa League, where their chief threats are no longer the likes of Bayern Munich and Manchester City but Leipzig, Atalanta and West Ham. Certainly, Barcelona's decline has been far more severe but Real Madrid have deteriorated too, a series of underwhelming transfer windows and cautious coaching appointments contributing to an iconic team being allowed to grow old and increasingly stale.

And yet both head to the Santiago Bernabeu today with hope that a new era may be about to begin. For Madrid, the greatest optimism comes from the expected arrival of Kylian Mbappe who, in one move, would fast-track them from one generation to the next, the kind of statement signing that could define the club for a decade and force the rest of the team to catch up.

Questions still linger about how Madrid replace the likes of Luka Modric, Karim Benzema and Toni Kroos and there is a debate around Carlo Ancelotti. A more progressive coach might be better placed to compete with the likes of Pep Guardiola and Jurgen Klopp. Barcelona have already taken that bold step by hiring

of not out and after brief deliberation. Joe Root opted not to challenge the decision.

England's captain and the rest of his team, together with their thousands of supporters packed into the ground were left to rue that decision as television replays projected that the ball would have hit the leg-stump. Then in the final session, with the second new ball taken and debutant Saqib Mahmood in the midst of a testing spell, Blackwood was comprehensively yorked on 65, only for the celebrations of his first Test wicket to be cut short by confirmation of a clear no-ball delivered by the seamer.

Temper appeared to boil over shortly after as England's frustration grew and the other on-field umpire, Joel Wilson, had to intervene on at least two occasions to calm the situation down when Stokes seemed to exchange words with Blackwood. "I always love to play against Ben Stokes, even from our days at the Under-19 World Cup," was Blackwood's explanation of the



BARCELONA, Spain: Barcelona's Spanish coach Xavi addresses a press conference in Barcelona yesterday, on the eve of the Spanish League football match against Real Madrid. — AFP

Xavi Hernandez, a risky but needed appointment that has so far paid off.

If Madrid's enthusiasm is rooted in a super-star signing, Barca's stems from a forward-thinking coach over-seeing the emergence of a hugely exciting crop of youngsters. Pedri, Ansu Fati, Gavi, Nico Gonzalez and Ronald Araujo could form an impressive core for years to come, with recent performances giving Barca belief they can land a statement victory over Madrid this weekend, at least psychologically, given it will have little bearing on the title race. A win would also lend evidence to the theory Barcelona are ready to challenge in La Liga next season, even if Europe's most powerful clubs might still be further off.—AFP

exchange at the end of the day's play. "It just motivates me to do even better so I don't mind it at all."

More importantly, the dapper right-hander acknowledged that an important contribution was necessary from him. "It was very special today to go on and score a hundred. I've been putting in a lot of work with the batting coach (Monty Desai) and the only disappointment is that I wasn't able to bat through to the end of the day." With the close of play looming Blackwood padded up to a delivery from occasional leg-spinner Dan Lawrence to be palpably LBW, necessitating the arrival of Alzarri Joseph as nightwatchman who will resume on the fourth morning with his captain. Taking particular delight in his innings in front of the few home fans who were at the venue, including for the first time, his mother, Brathwaite nevertheless acknowledged that the job was far from over for the West Indies to work themselves into a position of safety. "We are still behind by over 200 runs so tomorrow is crucial again," he noted.—AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khaldiya	24848075
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Kaifan	24849807
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shamiya	24848913
Mubarak Al-Kabir		Shuwaikh	24814507
Hospital	25312700	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Chest Hospital	24849400	Nuzha	22526804
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Adan Hospital	23940620	Qadsiya	22515088
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Dasmah	22532265
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
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Mr. Jinesh Jose, son Mr. Jose Chilampikunnel Joseph, resident of Chilampikunnel House, PO Kalichanadukkam Nileswar, Kasaragod DT, Kerala-671314 and Ms. Sheena Mol, daughter of Mr. Poullose Thattarayil Paily, resident of Thattarail, Chennaypara, Thrissur-680653, Kerala both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters/ telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

First Secretary (Community Affairs)
and Marriage Officer,
Embassy of India, Kuwait.
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BIRMINGHAM, United Kingdom: Aston Villa's English midfielder Jacob Ramsey (C) runs with the ball during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Arsenal at Villa Park in Birmingham, central England, yesterday. —AFP

Saka sends Arsenal closer to CL return

'We are there with 10 games to go'

BIRMINGHAM, United Kingdom: Arsenal took another big step towards ending a five-year exile from the Champions League as Bukayo Saka's strike beat Aston Villa 1-0 to open up a four-point lead in fourth in the Premier League. The Gunners could even increase that gap with a game in hand over fifth-placed Manchester United and were well worthy of the three points against a toothless Villa despite the narrow scoreline.

"We are there with 10 games to go," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta. "We have this feeling that we really want it, you can sense it and we're going to give it a go." A run of 10 wins from their last 13 league games has propelled Arteta's men to the front of the race to join Manchester City, Liverpool and Chelsea in the top four

after getting off to their worst start to a league campaign in 67 years.

Arteta had complained about the tight turnaround his side faced after Wednesday's 2-0 home defeat to Liverpool. But there was no sign of tiredness from his young side yesterday as they penned Villa back for the opening 45 minutes. "It was a tough first half because we allowed it to be tough," said Villa boss Steven Gerrard. "Our performance lacked belief. It wasn't until half-time onwards we showed we could be better in the game."

Saka shines

Emile Smith Rowe returned to the starting line-up as one of two changes as Gabriel Martinelli and Aaron Ramsdale missed out through illness and injury

respectively. Smith Rowe had the first chance inside the three minutes when he fired over from Martin Odegaard's pass.

Odegaard and Thomas Partey were dominating the midfield and a nice move between the two deserved a better finish from the Ghanaian as he fired straight at Emiliano Martinez. The former Arsenal goalkeeper then denied his former club the opening goal with a stunning save low to his left to prevent Ezri Konsa turning into his own net from Saka's dangerous cross.

Saka was a constant threat and fittingly got the only goal on 30 minutes when Villa failed to clear a free-kick and he fired low past Martinez from the edge of the area. Arsenal players surrounded referee Andy Madley moments later begging for a red card after Tyrone Mings caught Saka, but the England interna-

tional got away with just a booking.

Villa improved after the break but lacked the creativity to break Arsenal down as Philippe Coutinho failed to hit the heights of his best form since joining on loan from Barcelona. John McGinn curled a shot just wide and Ollie Watkins' deflected effort came back off the outside of the post with Villa's best chances to snatch an equaliser.

Ramsdale's absence meant Bernd Leno was making his first Premier League appearance since August. The German was not forced into a save until the final kick of the game when he parried Coutinho's free-kick to safety. He was mobbed by his teammates at full-time as Arsenal celebrated a big three points in their quest to get back to European football's elite competition. —AFP

Qatar's Invincibles lift WCup hopes

DOHA: When Al Sadd wrapped up a second straight Qatar title by stretching their unbeaten league run to 49 games, they were inevitably dubbed the 'Invincibles' after another team that reached the same number. While the 12-team Qatar League is not as formidable as the 2003-4 English Premier league, unlike Arsenal, Al Sadd have turned their run into two league titles in a championship loaded with millionaire imports.

Their form has inspired hopes for the national team in the country that is hosting the World Cup. Al Sadd's squad contains the bulk of Qatar's national side, as well as a former Arsenal star Santi Cazorla and ex-Premier League regular Andre Ayew. Run by owners with seemingly bottomless pockets and training on manicured turf in Doha's notorious heat, Al Sadd have swept aside rivals featuring the likes of Belgian defender Toby Alderweireld at Al Duhail and Colombian James Rodriguez at Al Rayyan.

Alderweireld's side beat Al Sadd this week in the Amir's Cup, the top domestic knockout. Al Rayyan, however, got rid of former France coach Laurent Blanc last month because they could not compete in the 12-team Qatar Stars League. Al Sadd coach Javi Gracia, battle-hardened at Watford in England and Valencia in Spain before taking over when Xavi Hernandez returned to Barcelona in November, said his players had "achieved something very special".

Cazorla, who spent six seasons at Arsenal, said Al Sadd's streak dating back to March 2020 was simply "historic". Having equalled Arsenal's unbeaten run, the Qataris see nothing stopping them getting past AC Milan's 58-game streak in Italy in 1991-93 and Celtic's 69 games in 2016-2017 in Scotland. Romania's Steaua Bucharest went unbeaten for 104 league matches from 1985 to 1989. "The Wolves", as they are known, see their home success as a launchpad for the Asian Champions League starting in April, and the World Cup that Qatar will host in November-December.

'Good for club and country'

Defender Tarek Salman said he felt he was part of a "golden generation" at Al Sadd along with national captain Hassan Al-Haydos and the foreign



DOHA, Qatar: File photo shows Hassan Mattar, Qatari former striker who played for the Al-Sadd and Qatar clubs, is surrounded with trophies and cups at the headquarters of the Al-Sadd club in the Qatari capital Doha. —AFP

contingent. "Most of Al Sadd's players are internationals and this (success) stimulates enthusiasm, courage and the desire to be fully ready for the World Cup," the 24-year-old told AFP.

Al Sadd players make up about three-quarters of the national side. Salman said this was "good for club and country" as they have developed a deep understanding over the years. Qatar, winners of the Asian Cup in 2019, face growing expectations to at least get past the first round in this year's World Cup, their debut on football's biggest stage.

As for Al Sadd, Salman is looking even further ahead to a third straight Qatar title "even if, God forbid, there was a defeat," as well as the Asian Champions League. Al Sadd won the Asian title in 2011 but failed in the early stages in the last two years. Salman repeated apologies made by the players and vowed: "This year will be different."

He acknowledged there was envy from other clubs, after criticism that Al Sadd's success was undermining the Qatar championship. But Salman highlighted how Al Hilal have dominated the Saudi Arabian league in recent years and won two of the

past three Asian Champions League titles.

In Qatar, "all clubs have resources and all clubs have the power to buy and sell players. "The difference between Al Sadd and others is that Al Sadd is smart and has good elements that know how to develop players and take them to a level that distinguishes them from other teams.

"This superiority will be in our favour at the World Cup because most of the players in the team are from Al-Sadd." Muhammad Ghulam Al-Balushi, a product of the Al Sadd system who is now its sporting director, said the club's victories showed how it is "a castle built for achievements and breaking records."

"It is no secret that most of the national players at the World Cup will be from Al Sadd, and this confirms that Al Sadd prepares players to be ready," he said, challenging other clubs to match Al Sadd's work-rate. "We lost the league two years ago, losing one or two matches, with the same team we have now. But we came back, corrected the mistakes and worked. Now we are getting results." —AFP

Embiid sparks Sixers, Durant leads Nets

LOS ANGELES, United States: Joel Embiid delivered a fourth consecutive 30-point performance as the Philadelphia 76ers powered to a 111-101 victory over the Dallas Mavericks on Friday. Embiid finished with 32 points, eight rebounds and four assists while posting a career-high five steals in a superb all-round display at Philadelphia's Wells Fargo Center. The Cameroon international and NBA MVP contender was one of five Sixers players to finish in double digits as Philadelphia pulled away in the second half.

James Harden added 24 points with 12 assists while Tobias Harris scored 14. Georges Niang grabbed 12 points from the bench-all from three-point range-and Matisse Thybulle chipped in with 10 points. The win saw the Sixers improve to 43-26 in the Eastern Conference, three games back from conference leaders Miami.

A gritty Sixers defensive performance also bottled up the Mavericks' talisman Luka Doncic. The Slovenian star was restricted to 17 points with 10 assists. Jalen Brunson led the Mavs scorers with 24 points. After edging five points clear at half-time, Philadelphia took control after the interval, extending their lead to 20 points early in the fourth quarter before closing out a convincing win.

It was a disappointing outcome for Dallas after the high of earlier this week, when Spencer Dinwiddie's last-gasp winner had earned the Mavs a pulsating victory over the Brooklyn Nets in New York. The Mavs remain firmly on course for an automatic playoff berth however. Dallas are 43-27 for fifth place in the Western Conference table.

In Brooklyn, the Nets bounced back from Wednesday's buzzer-beating defeat to Dallas with a 128-123 win over the Portland Trail Blazers. Kevin Durant spurred the Nets with 38 points as they recovered from an 18-point third-quarter deficit to dig out victory.

LeBron 'having a blast'

Seth Curry added 27 points-including seven three-pointers-to spark Brooklyn, who improved to 37-34 and remain in eighth place in the Eastern Conference. "It was critical, that was a hard-playing team we played today," Curry said. "We had to really earn this one. K (Durant) was good again and he carried us offensively."

In Toronto, LeBron James scored 36 points as the Los Angeles Lakers halted their three-game losing streak with a 128-123 overtime win over the Raptors. But the unlikely hero for the Lakers was under-fire point guard Russell Westbrook.

Westbrook forced a steal, snatched the loose ball and then nailed a three-pointer on the buzzer to lock up the game at 116-116. The Lakers then pulled ahead in overtime to claim victory. "It was big-time from him," James said of Westbrook's game-tying three-pointer. "The season hasn't gone the way we would like it to go, but I'm having a blast just playing this game." —AFP