

5 Freed British-Iranian woman criticizes UK release efforts



8 Ukraine war raises specter of 'famine' in parts of the world



16 Clasico demolition vindicates Barca, shifts doubts to Real



Kuwait, Saudi Arabia agree to develop Durra gas field

Crude prices soar • Riyadh says Houthi attacks 'threat' to oil supplies



KUWAIT: HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al-Saud at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Saudi Arabia's energy minister has signed a document with his Kuwaiti counterpart to develop the Durra gas field, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation said in a statement yesterday. The Durra field, which is shared between the two states, is expected to produce one billion standard cubic feet per day of gas and 84,000 barrels per day of condensates, according to the statement.

The plan, signed by Mohammad Al-Fares and his Saudi counterpart Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, entails the use of cutting-edge and environment-friendly methods to ramp up gas output from the vital project, a joint endeavor between Saudi-based Aramco Gulf Operations Company and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company.

As per the deal, gas output will be divided evenly between the neighbors, at a time where soaring consumption has led to growing demand for energy in the two

countries. Durra is located in the Kuwait-Saudi Neutral Zone, where production is divided equally between the two countries.

Oil prices soared yesterday as a weekend attack on Saudi facilities and EU discussions on banning Russian crude raised concerns over global supplies. Top producer Saudi Arabia warned that Yemeni rebel attacks on the kingdom's oil facilities pose a "direct threat" to global supplies. Saudi Arabia "will not incur any responsibility" for shortages in oil supplies in light of the Iran-backed Houthi attacks, the foreign ministry said in a statement. These cross-border assaults are a "direct threat to the security of oil supplies in these extremely sensitive circumstances witnessed by the global energy markets", it added.

The statement comes a day after the kingdom acknowledged a temporary drop

in production after the Houthis attacked a refinery with an armed drone. It urged the international community to "stand firm" against the Houthi insurgents. Oil prices have repeatedly spiked above \$100 per barrel lately, driven by supply concerns centered on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. They rose higher again yesterday. Brent crude was up more than seven percent at more than \$115 per barrel at one stage.

Analysts said the main mover of the market was news of the EU considering a ban on Russian oil imports, although the Houthi attacks on Aramco were also cited. The drone assault on the YASREF refinery in Yanbu Industrial City on the Red Sea "led to a temporary reduction in the refinery's production", the Saudi energy ministry said Sunday. It added that the drop would "be compensated for from the inventory", but did not provide numbers. — Agencies

News in brief

Abdullah Al-Nibari laid to rest

KUWAIT: Former MP Abdullah Al-Nibari was laid to rest yesterday after he passed away late Saturday. Born in 1936, he was one of the founders and Secretary General of the Kuwait Democratic Forum. Nibari was the target of an assassination attempt, along with his wife Faryal Al-Freih, on June 6, 1997. (See Page 3)



Abdullah Al-Nibari

Jail, fine for assaulting police

KUWAIT: The interior ministry said any person who assaults a member of the police who is breaking up a gathering, meeting or demonstration with the intent of resisting or disrupting their job duties will be jailed for a period not exceeding five years and fined KD 5,000, or either of the two penalties.

Limited Cabinet reshuffle in works

KUWAIT: Informed sources said Oil Minister Mohammed Al-Fares will be given the Cabinet affairs portfolio, while Public Works Minister Ali Al-Mousa will take over the electricity and water portfolio from Fares as part of a limited Cabinet reshuffle. Information Minister Hamad Rouh El-Din will get the youth portfolio, they added.

Egypt currency plunges 17%

CAIRO: The Egyptian pound plunged nearly 17 percent in value against the US dollar yesterday, following a rise in inflation and amid mounting economic hardships. The pound was trading at 18.20 to the dollar by closing time at banks, from 15.70 the previous day. — AFP (See Page 10)

Lebanon central bank chief charged

BEIRUT: A Lebanese judge yesterday charged central bank chief Riad Salameh with "illicit enrichment" and money laundering after he failed to attend a court hearing for the fifth time, a judicial source told AFP. Judge Ghada Aoun also charged Salameh's brother Raja with "facilitating money laundering" after he was arrested last week over financial misconduct, the source said. — AFP (See Page 9)

Families grapple with spiraling prices in Kuwait

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Kuwait's consumer inflation continues to remain decade-high with food prices hovering above pre-COVID levels amid a raging war in Ukraine and rising oil prices. As the holy month of Ramadan approaches, inflation has become severe, as most household staples such as vegetables, fruits, meat and

Plane carrying 132 crashes into mountain in China

BEIJING: China Eastern confirmed there had been fatalities after a jet carrying 132 people crashed into a mountain in southern China yesterday, shortly after losing contact with air traffic control and dropping thousands of meters in just three minutes. The Boeing 737-800 flight from the city of Kunming to the southern hub of Guangzhou "lost airborne contact over Wuzhou" city in the Guangxi region yesterday afternoon, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC).

The jet was carrying 123 passengers and nine crewmembers. China Eastern confirmed late yesterday that at least some people involved in the crash

fish stubbornly edged higher in the last few weeks.

Inflation in the country has been further compounded by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as the war has thrown global food supply chains out of gear, experts say. According to the latest report by the Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau, the annual inflation rate in Kuwait stood at 4.30 percent in January 2022, unchanged from December 2021, which is the highest level since October 2011.

Kuwait's inflation has soared rapidly and has now become one of the highest among GCC countries, prompting changes in consumer behaviors for many families in Kuwait. Minister of Commerce and Industry Fahd Al-Shuraian recently warned about the serious developments that are taking place globally. "We are facing a global problem, and the

had been killed, without providing more information or giving details on any survivors. "The company expresses its deep condolences for the passengers and crew members who died in the plane crash," the airline said in a statement.

The disaster prompted an unusually swift public reaction from President Xi Jinping, who said he was "shocked" and ordered an immediate investigation into its cause. Hundreds of firefighters were dispatched to the scene in Teng county near Wuzhou, state media reported, as nearby villagers rushed to help the rescue effort. "Everyone went to the mountains," Tang Min, who runs a restaurant a few kilometers from the crash site, told AFP by telephone.

Fears for the fate of the jet spread yesterday as local media reported that China Eastern flight MU5735 had not arrived as planned in Guangzhou after taking off from Kunming shortly after 1:00 pm. Flight tracking website FlightRadar24 showed no data for the flight after 2:22 pm.

Continued on Page 2

Anti-Rohingya violence is genocide: US

WASHINGTON: The United States officially declared yesterday that violence against the Rohingya committed by Myanmar's military amounted to genocide, saying there was clear evidence of an attempt to "destroy" the Muslim minority. Citing the killings of thousands and forcing close to a million to flee the country in 2016 and 2017, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he had "determined that members of the Burmese military

committed genocide and crimes against humanity against Rohingya."

"The military's intent went beyond ethnic cleansing to the actual destruction of Rohingya," Blinken said at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. "The attack against Rohingya was widespread and systematic, which is crucial for reaching a determination of crimes against humanity." The US move did not come with new direct repercussions against the already heavily sanctioned Myanmar regime and dozens of members of its leadership.

But Blinken said it will support international efforts, including in the International Court of Justice, to bring cases of crimes against humanity against the regime.

Continued on Page 2

situation in the world is now dangerous. We may go through a difficult period if we do not prepare ourselves for such a situation. However, the government is always there and will do its best to bear the differences in prices that occur due to shipping or transportation," he assured.

"Everything is very costly now. Prices of meat, milk and fish have skyrocketed. Egg prices also have gone up a bit. We are cutting back on all non-essential stuff in our family budget," said Amelia Fernandez, an expat resident. She, like many others, expected prices would go back to pre-COVID levels since the pandemic has subsided. But, not only retailers did not roll back the prices, they hiked the prices of most essential commodities.

Continued on Page 2



WUZHOU, China: Photo shows the site where a China Eastern plane crashed in Tengxian county in Guangxi region yesterday. — Xinhua



In this file photo taken on Oct 9, 2017, a Rohingya refugee reacts while holding his deceased son after crossing the Naf river from Myanmar into Bangladesh in Whaikhyang. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Audit Bureau stresses importance of 63rd meeting

Topics include latest publications and best professional practices

DOHA: Kuwait Audit Bureau yesterday stressed the importance of the 63rd meeting of the Executive Council of the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI) and its role in developing audit bureaus in the Arab countries. In a statement to KUNA, Director of the Training and International Relations Department at the Audit Bureau, Dr Saud Al-Zamanan said that the Bureau participated in the meeting with many interventions, reports, and recommendations.

The meeting discussed the ARABOSAI's activities during the 2021, the report of the Regulatory Standards Committee and its recommendations, the

organizational chart and structures, the organization's strategic plan and approval, and the report of the Sustainable Development Committee headed by the Kuwaiti Audit Bureau. It also reviewed reports on the activities of the Council, the General Secretariat and the organization's subcommittees, in addition to following up with initiatives proposed by the presidency of the Council.

The meeting presented the bodies' reports on their participation in committees and working groups emanating from the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI). Al-Zamanan stated that the agenda of the

meeting included the approval of the archive system manual and the procedures of the control office, the approval of the final account for the year Economics 2021 and the estimated budget for the year 2022. It set up the date of the next meeting of the ARABOSAI's Executive Council and the 14th session of the General Assembly that would be held in Saudi Arabia.

Other topics including latest publications concerned and the best professional practices of the Supreme Audit Institutions are discussed, as well as standards and developments in this aspect in the supervisory work and the development of the

supervisory mechanism, means and methods for the supervisory authorities (ARABOSAI) is a regional, independent, permanent, non-political professional organization that enjoys legal personality and aims to promote good governance and transparency, ensure accountability and combat corruption.

The Kuwaiti delegation to the meeting is headed by the President of the State Audit Bureau Faisal Al-Shaya, and includes the Observer of International Relations Heba Al-Awadi, and the Chief Auditor in the Department of Oversight of Defense, Security and Public Affairs Abdullah Al-Shaitan. — KUNA

PM hosts Saudi energy minister



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday received at Seif Palace the visiting Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz Bin Salman Al-Saud. The meeting was attended by Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad bin Khaled Al-Saud. Also present in the meeting were the

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Oil, Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr Mohammad Abdulatif Al-Fares, Head of the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdul Aziz Al-Dekheel and Deputy Chairman, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah. — KUNA

ALESCO honors Kuwait's poet Suad Al-Sabah

TUNISIA: The Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ALESCO) in its 8th session for "Arab Poetry Day" honored Kuwaiti poet Sheikh Dr Suad Al-Sabah and late Algerian poet Mohammad Al-Sa'ehi yesterday. Honoring Kuwaiti Poet Sheikh Dr Suad Al-Sabah during the Arab Poetry Day is a recognition of her distinguished literary and cultural contributions in this domain, President of ALESCO Dr Mohammad Weld Omar said.

"Poet Suad Al-Sabah expressed a free thinking approach throughout her work. She advocated

women issues, supported Arab nationalism and culture," he added in a speech during the ceremony. Weld Omar expressed ALESCO's deep welcoming to poet Suad Al-Sabah as a pioneer Arab intellectual who greatly contributed to the Arab Encyclopedia that had been launched by the organization.

"Poet Suad Al-Sabah was inspired by her beloved country Kuwait, and also her mother and father, whom she lost in the same year, as well as her deceased child," the representative of poet Suad Al-Sabah, Sheikh Fadhela Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah said. Kuwait's Ambassador to Tunisia Ali Al-Thafiri welcomed ALESCO's initiative to honor leading Arab poets like Sheikh Dr Suad Al-Sabah, in recognition to her fruitful contributions to the Arab letters and culture for long decades. Honoring of poet Suad Al-Sabah is also considered as an honor to Kuwait's enormous contributions to the Arab poetry, letters and culture, the diplomat affirmed. — KUNA

Anti-Rohingya violence is...

Continued from Page 1

Blinken noted 2017 remarks by Min Aung Hlaing, the commander-in-chief of the Myanmar military, that the government was "solving" an "unfinished job" in its destruction of Rohingya communities. Blinken added that Min Aung Hlaing led the 2021 coup overthrowing the elected government of Myanmar.

"The brutal violence unleashed by the military since February 2021 has made clear that no one in Burma will be safe from atrocities so long as it is in power," Blinken said, using the former official name of the country. "Anyone in Burma seen as challenging the military's grip on power - regardless of ethnicity or religion, age or political party - will be targeted," he said.

Around 850,000 Rohingya are languishing in camps in neighboring Bangladesh, recounting mass killings and rape of the campaign that was launched against them five years ago. Another 600,000 members of the community remain in Myanmar's Rakhine state where they report widespread oppression. The

US declaration was cautiously welcomed by activists and members of the beleaguered community.

"This should have been done way before. However I believe the US decision will help the ICJ process for the Rohingya," said one displaced member of the community at a camp near Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine. Thin Thin Hlaing, a Rohingya rights activist, also welcomed the US move. "I feel like we were living through a blackout but now we see a light, because they recognize our suffering," she told AFP.

A legal designation of genocide - defined by the UN as acts "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" - could be followed by further sanctions and limits on aid, among other penalties against the already-isolated military junta. A case was opened against Myanmar for genocide at the ICJ in 2019, and the court is currently hearing preliminary arguments on Myanmar's objection to the case.

The Holocaust Museum prepared its own report in late 2017 with the group Fortify Rights that concluded there was compelling evidence of crimes against humanity in Myanmar. The US State Department released a report in 2018 that detailed violence against the Rohingya in western Rakhine state as "extreme, large-scale, widespread, and seemingly geared toward both terrorizing the population and driving out the Rohingya residents." — AFP



TEKNAF, Bangladesh: In this file photo taken on Sept 30, 2017, a Bangladeshi man helps Rohingya refugees to disembark on a boat on the Bangladeshi shoreline of the Naf river after crossing the border from Myanmar. — AFP



Minister visits Pakistani Embassy

KUWAIT: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah yesterday visited the Pakistani Embassy in Kuwait. In

his visit, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah conveyed condolences of Their Highnesses the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah over the passing of former Pakistani president Mohammad Rafiq Tarar. — KUNA

Pakistan mourns

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Pakistan is deeply grieved on the sad demise of the former President of Pakistan Muhammad Rafiq Tarar.

Faisal Majeed, Charge d'Affaires expressed his heartfelt condolences on the demise of former president of Pakistan. "May Allah bless His soul and give strength to the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss. Amen".

Qatar Maritime Defense Exhibition kicks off with Kuwaiti participation

DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad AlThani opened yesterday the Doha International Maritime Defense Exhibition and Conference (DIMDEX 2022) with Kuwaiti participation. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad AlThani took a tour in the Exhibition which held the theme of 'Connecting the World's Maritime Defense and Security Community', during which he was briefed on the latest technologies, innovations and systems related to maritime defense.

Sheikh Tamim was also briefed on various modern equipment and ships equipped with defense systems, communications, radars and other marine industries and services offered by more than 200 local, regional

and international companies. A total of 11 warships from nine countries, in addition to a ship from Qatar will participate in the event at Hamad Port.

Furthermore, 200 exhibitors will be representing all aspects of the global defense and security industry and display the latest innovations and technological products. This event, which is held every two years, is considered the ideal platform to exchange knowledge between governments on industries, as the previous versions of the conference have resulted in signing deals worth more than USD 32 billion, and 27 deals were signed in the previous conference.

During the three-day conference, security experts, industry leaders, academics and decision makers from all over the world will discuss the main challenges facing the maritime security sector. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense is participating with a military delegation that includes the Commander of the Naval Force, Commodore Hazza'a Al-Alalati, the Commander of the Special Naval Units, Captain Mansour Al-Rumayyan, and the Head of the Naval Force Commander's Office Branch, Captain Nabil Al-Mutabqi. — KUNA

Families grapple with spiraling...

Continued from Page 1

Prices have increased faster for food and beverages (7.26 percent vs 7.20 percent in December), transport (4.62 percent vs 4.54 percent), and furnishing and household equipment (2.44 percent vs 2.36 percent), while housing inflation was steady at 2.35 percent. Prices of clothing continued to rise from 5.46 percent to 5.66 percent, according to official estimates.

"This persistent inflation is probably a little more problematic now as it's not only coming from the supply side. It should also be viewed in the context of the current war in Ukraine," said Rashid Alhusaini, a Kuwaiti entrepreneur. While consumers grapple with rising prices of essentials, retailers

continue to face the prospect of supply chain constraints and labor shortages induced by the pandemic. According to reports, market observers warned that up to 300,000 different commodities, whose prices are fixed by the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies, may witness a spike when the Competition Protection Law is enforced. The law prohibits setting a minimum price.

"These days, I buy meat and fish only when there is a promotion in supermarkets," said Yunus Azeez, an expat who works in a travel agency and has a household of seven family members. Lower-wage workers and lower-income households are bearing the brunt of the higher prices of essentials such as groceries, transportation and housing, making it hard for them to escape the budgetary sting. "The supply chain disruptions caused by the pandemic may be further worsened by the current war in Ukraine and the subsequent economic consequences. Definitely, there will be a cascading effect of the war," said a university professor on condition of anonymity. — AFP

Plane carrying 132 crashes...

Continued from Page 1

The tracker showed the plane sharply dropped from an altitude of 29,100 feet to 3,225 feet in three minutes, before flight information ceased. One villager told a local news site that the plane had "completely fallen apart" and he had seen forest areas destroyed by the fire it caused when crashing into the mountainside. China Eastern changed its website to black and white only yesterday afternoon. A January company report said China Eastern had 289 Boeing 737-series aircraft in its 751-strong fleet. State broadcaster CCTV said it had learned that China Eastern will ground all its 787-800 jets as a precaution after the crash. Boeing said in a statement that it was "aware of the initial media reports and... working to gather more information".

Xi called for "all efforts" towards the rescue and to find out the "cause of the accident as soon as possible", according to CCTV. "We are shocked to learn of the

China Eastern MU5735 accident," he said, calling for "the absolute safety of the sector and people's lives". The arrivals board at Guangzhou airport showed the jet's flight information for hours after it had crashed, as staff in full PPE held up signs to direct distraught relatives to a separate area that had been set up to receive them.

One relative waiting in Guangzhou airport told local media that she had been due to board the flight, but had changed her booking at the last minute to an earlier plane. Her sister and four friends had taken the crashed plane, she added. Now she was just "waiting for news", she said. "I feel very sad." A villager near the crash site surnamed Liu told state-run China News Service that he had driven a motorbike to the scene after hearing a loud explosion. He said he saw debris on the ground, including an aircraft wing and fragments of clothing hanging from trees.

China had enjoyed an enviable air safety record in recent years as the country was crisscrossed by newly built airports and serviced by new airlines established to match breakneck growth over the last few decades. A Henan Airlines flight crashed in northeastern Heilongjiang province in 2010, killing at least 42 out of 92 people on board, although the final toll was never confirmed. — AFP

Local

World needs more cooperation to address urgent challenges

Kuwait Speaker delivers a speech at 144th Inter-Parliamentary Union

KUWAIT: The challenges presented to the global community in recent years showed that the world was not addressing problems with due diligence, said Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday. Delivering a speech to the 144th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) held in Bali Island, Indonesia, Al-Ghanem said that the theme of the event aimed at tackling global warming from a parliamentary perspective and called for an intense cooperation not only to meet this problem, but also address other grievances.

Global warming not only touched certain sectors of society, it is a threat of grave consequences for all of humanity, he affirmed, saying that the problem should have a similar

response as in the case of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which crippled the world. Post-World War II, the UN and international organizations had set rules and laws in hope that humanity would avoid misery and wars; however, threats went beyond conflict and into irreversible natural disasters and possible manmade catastrophes, he added.

He went on to say that turning a blind eye to matters such as hunger, economic crises, health emergencies, and humanitarian catastrophes such as the plight of the Palestinian people should not go on without solutions. He reiterated calls for finding solutions now for problems plaguing the world or otherwise, human beings were the ones to blame. —KUNA



BALI: Speaker Al-Ghanem delivers a speech on global warming to 144th IPU Conference in Bali, Indonesia. —KUNA

Receiving complaints

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Public Relations and Security Media of the Ministry of Interior announced yesterday that the ministry is receiving complaints and requests of the public through its social media accounts. These include Twitter and Instagram on @moi_kuw. The ministry's official email address is MoiAsk@moi.gov.kw.

KILS holds 'MUN 2022' conference

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Kuwait International Law Society (KILS) held the 'KILSMUN 2022' conference on Thursday, with a discussion panel on refugees with former employee of the United Nations Hiba Al-Sa'ab, followed by a speech by MP Mohammed Al-Mutair. The event concluded by presenting a model of the MPs' oath.

"The Model United Nations and National Assembly committee of KILS organized this conference to provide an opportunity for participants to experience the real practical work of the parliament and united nations. This conference is the beginning for anyone who aims to enter political or diplomatic life in the



Abdullah Al-Humaidi

future," said Abdullah Al-Humaidi, head of the National Assembly committee of KILS.

The conference discussed real cases happening in our community daily. "We find solutions and present them as law proposals that will be adopted by

MPs. So members of parliament are interested in this conference due to its educational value that adds knowledge for the participants through experiencing parliamentary work," he said. "The development of countries is a result of democratic parliamentary work, which aims through legislation to build the country and develop it to be on the level of developed countries," concluded Humaidi.

This conference is a small model of the United Nations. "Through this con-



KUWAIT: Participants and Deema Al-Othman pose for a group photo during the Kuwait International Law Society's (KILS) 'MUN 2022' conference on Thursday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

ference, we aim to improve the debating skills of the participants through discussing the most important international and local issues," said Deema Al-Othman, head of the Model United Nations committee of KILS. "God created us to build the world based on justice and not to destroy it and kill. But in this present time, we only see wars and killings. We humans were given the right to choose our path, principles and decisions," she said.

The world is facing many humanitarian crises. "Nobody is far from political conflicts. Whether it is Jerusalem, Burma, or the people of Yemen, they all face conflicts and are being killed. You participants have the chance to raise the truth at a time when there is a lot of injustice and corruption. Your performance should be the light for the future generations and support for the oppressed. Never underestimate the power of words - you are the voice of the future," said Othman.



KUWAIT: Family, friends and mourners gather and pray during the burial of a prominent Kuwaiti opposition figure and eight-time MP Abdullah Al-Nibari who passed away on Sunday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Former lawmaker Nibari dies at 85

KUWAIT: Prominent Kuwaiti opposition figure and eight times MP Abdullah Al-Nibari passed away on Sunday, two weeks after the death of his lifelong friend, the opposition leader Ahmed Al-Khatib. The sudden death of Al Nibari was announced during a memorial for Khatib, who passed away on March 7 at his home.

Born in 1936, Nibari began his political life when he was elected to the parliament in 1971 as a member of the leftist Arab Nationalist block. He went on to be reelected eight times, the last of which was in 2003 when, like his friend Khatib, he decided to retire. He was educated in Egypt and UK with degrees in Economics from the American University in Cairo in 1961 and Oxford in 1963. He worked for the central

bank and the state's oil company before quitting the government job to contest the 1971 elections and become a vocal opposition member, leading anti-corruption campaigns.

During those years, he established the Kuwaiti Society to Defend the Public Funds, an anti-corruption platform where several high-profile investigations into corruption in the government and private sector were initiated. It is believed his work in fighting corruption was the reason for the June 1997 attempt on his life by four gunmen as he and his wife drove back home from their beach house. He was badly injured and was forced to a wheelchair for most of his later years. His wife was also hit by a bullet but recovered later.

The four shooters were tried and sentenced to life in prison for the assassination attempt. Nibari was the last living founding member of Kuwait's leftist Al Minabr Al Demokrati, successor to the Arab Nationalist Movement. His death puts in question the future of the struggling party, which failed to secure any seat in the last election in 2020. — Agencies



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Ooredoo pays tribute to strong accomplished mothers, women

KUWAIT: On the occasion of Mother's Day, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, honored the original intention of this special day by focusing on the wellbeing, health and beauty of mothers. As part of its campaign, Ooredoo collaborated with Floward, an online flowers and gifting company, and ensured delivering mothers a beautiful bouquet of flowers on Mother's Day, accompanied by a sentimental message that highlighted their inner and outer beauty as a gesture that would make them happy on their day.



Mijbil Al Ayoub

Ooredoo female employees had the lion's share too of Mother's Day, as the company spoiled them uniquely by collaborating with Nail Station female beauty salon and offered them different services at Ooredoo Tower. Boxes of chocolate and Arabic sweets, along with complementary vouchers from different outlets were also distributed to Ooredoo female employees.

Ooredoo also launched a series of engaging contests on its official Instagram account, to reward its followers with a bottle of VitaJewel. VitaJewel is the modern interpretation of age-old traditions. Many cultures have been vitalizing their water with gemstones for thousands of years. VitaJewel have rediscovered this knowledge with a contemporary, sophisticated approach with the aim of energizing water with the healing power of hand-picked gemstones.

Mijbil AlAyoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Women in Kuwait and the world have never stopped embracing society and engaging in different fields and spheres of life; proving their strong participation, efficient role and high value in societies. Mothers are a critical component of Kuwaiti society. Lovingly and responsibly, the Kuwaiti woman is the mother of all humankind, and thus, unquestionably the supreme mother nurturer."

AlAyoub further extended his appreciation to all the companies that participated in making this Mother's Day a day to remember including: Floward, OLE -a Kuwaiti coffee brand passionately crafted since 2019-, Nail Station beauty salon, Kuwait Aviation Services Company (KASCO), Biosphere Spa, VitaJewel and Mazaya.

Condolence message from Palestine Embassy

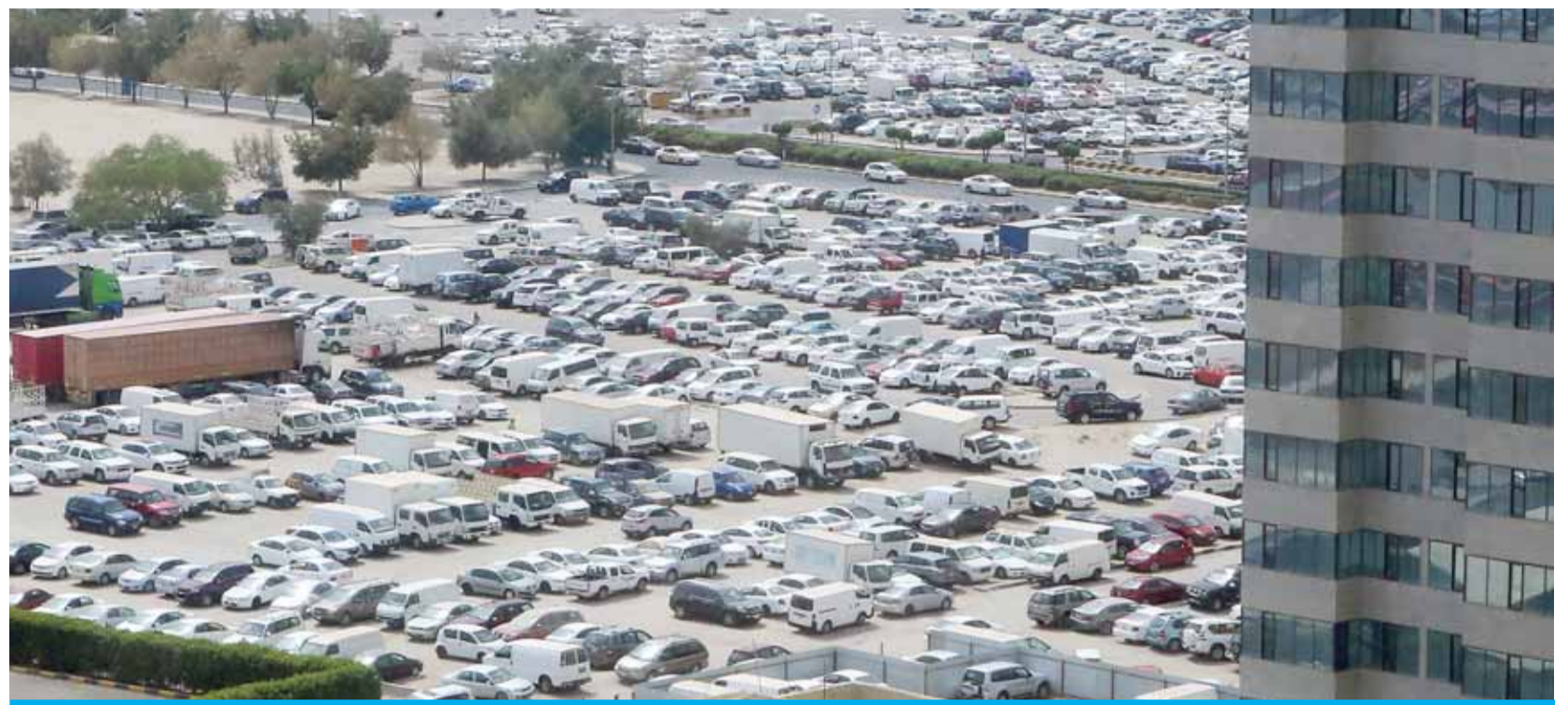
KUWAIT: In the name of President of the State of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas and on behalf of the Palestinian community in Kuwait, I convey my deepest condolences to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait people and Al-Naibari's family on the death of one of Kuwait's great personalities Dr Abdallah Al-Naibari who dedicated his life for the service of Kuwait.



Rami Tahboub

Dr Al-Naibari was one of the important supporters of the Palestinian cause which he took to all local, regional and international venues in defense of the Palestinian rights. Palestine was honored in 2016 with the visit of Dr Al-Naibari as a guest for the seventh congress of Fatah movement where he delivered a speech - expressing the deep ties between Kuwait and Palestine. May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A sea of vehicles are parked in a lot in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait Airways organizes forum 'Women of Aviation'

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways organized a forum on the occasion of the 'Women's History Month' titled 'Women of Aviation' with a panel discussion and hosted the Kuwait Airways' Chief Executive Officer, Maen Razouqi, Director of Legal department, Nada Bourahmah, Aviation Engineer, Maali Salmeen, and the Vice President of KAC's Workers Union, Captain Abdullah Al-Ali. The seminar was attended by numerous women employees of the Company, embodying the spirit of one family, love and understanding among all.

Razouqi was attentive to the opinions and aspirations of the female employees of Kuwait Airways, as well as their ambitions and future plans for the National Carrier to attain greater progress, in all realms that would lead to the success of the work system within the Company.

During the discussion, KAC's Chief Support Officer, Mohammad Al-Fawaz highlighted on the effective role of women at their work and their efficiency in performing the tasks assigned to them and ways to empower them in leadership positions, especially in the field of aviation. He also emphasized on the importance of women in various fields including cultural, economic, political, sports and other sectors.

Al-Fawaz stated, "Women signify a distinguished value in society, thanks to their unremitting efforts that are extended, whether at work, at home or in public events and with their remarkable influence on these. Today, we meet with you and would like to thank and appreciate the contributions you have made for the Blue Bird, which has had a clear imprint for everyone in the various operational and support departments. In addition, we highly appreciate your tangible achievements in enabling Kuwait Airways to reach the highest levels among other airlines and to broaden its horizons."

Gulf Bank wraps up six training programs in partnership with INJAZ Kuwait

KUWAIT: As part of Gulf Bank's ongoing commitment to social responsibility and as part of its partnership with INJAZ Kuwait, a total of 328 male and female high school and university students took part in six various training programs in 2021. In addition, 36 volunteers from the Bank participated in INJAZ Kuwait's various activities.

A total of 36 Gulf Bank volunteers participated in the programs offered by INJAZ Kuwait last year, including: "Innovation Camp," "My Money and My Future," "Professional Success," "Head Start," "Field Visits" and "The Company Program." The Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Lujain Al-Qenaei, expressed her pride in Gulf Bank's partnership with INJAZ Kuwait, a partnership which has extended for over 16 years, and serves to support the next generation of young entrepreneurs, providing them with the skills required by the labor market in light of the rapidly developing economic sector.

Al-Qenaei said that Gulf Bank is keen to fulfill its social responsibilities towards local youth, high school, and university students by providing them with the skill sets needed for business, allowing them to explore their interests and professional opportunities, in addition to developing career skills and field training.

On her part, the CEO of INJAZ Kuwait, Laila Al Mutairi, said: "One of the main reasons behind INJAZ Kuwait's success and longevity is the support we receive from private sector institutions, companies and supporting entities. In this light, our strategic partnership with Gulf Bank is truly extraordinary, and is one that has thrived for many years. Gulf Bank is a major supporter of our activities - whether it is by providing volunteers, or by facilitating our training programs for students."

She added: "INJAZ Kuwait has trained more than 100,000 male and female students across various training programs which aim to hone the skills of local youth in three areas: workforce readiness, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy. At INJAZ



From his part, the CEO Consultant for Transformation and Development at Kuwait Airways, Khalid Al-Bustan stated that Kuwait Airways renders special attention to the female employees of the National Carrier, pointing out that the Company has developed a future strategic plan, focusing on distinguished female talent, which represents an addition to the Blue Bird, in achieving its objectives in the coming period, especially due to the remarkable development and transformation the Company is witnessing at all levels.

Al-Bustan added, "Organizing this seminar comes within the framework of Kuwait Airways' keenness to consolidate the bonds between the employees and the Management in general, as this is among the priorities of KAC's Management in providing a suitable work environment for all and ensuring high quality of productivity."

In addition, the Manager of Talent Acquisition at Kuwait Airways, Alaa Al-Yaqout stated, "The forum is part of the plan of direction of Kuwait Airways and the aviation system around the world in empowering women in the field of aviation particularly in Kuwait and the region in general, where we believe that it is very important for women to share their views and work towards building a clear and positive vision towards a better future for the Company."

Al-Yaqout stressed that Kuwait Airways was working diligently to attract distinguished female talent in specialized fields such as aircraft pilots, and in aircraft maintenance engineering and other technical fields. On their part, the participants at the seminar expressed their thanks and appreciation to the Executive Management for their active participation, kind gesture and great interaction which was witnessed by all those present.

Kuwait, we are constantly looking for more ways to serve the youth and prepare them with the skill sets they will need to overcome future challenges." The six programs included the following:

Innovation Camp: The program involved 189 high school students and consisted of an exciting one-day workshop that challenged students to find innovative solutions to a real business challenge using creativity, analysis, and teamwork. Students were divided into teams that competed against each other through a range of coach-led educational activities and games.

During this activity, students were presented with a business challenge and were tasked with proposing a solution in the form of an action plan; volunteer coaches guided the students throughout the task and encouraged students to start thinking about their professional goals.

Field visits: The program included 34 high school and university students who visited a professional work environment for four hours, during which students explored various career paths. Students learned about the importance of professionalism in obtaining a job, while job shadowing inspired students to acquire skills that will make them essential and valuable additions to any workplace.

My Money and My Future: This program included 43 students from middle school, and aimed to enhance students' financial literacy and entrepreneurship, promoting money management skills, knowledge of goods and services, and global markets. Through practical experience, students worked on enhancing their financial literacy and entrepreneurship, in addition to learning about how to start a business and make smart money management decisions.

Professional Success: This program included 18 male and female high school students, and aimed to provide students with the tools and skills necessary to find and retain a job, especially in high-growth professional sectors.

Head Start: This workshop was held with the participation of 44 university students, and consisted of interview training, including three interactive, exciting and experiential learning sessions led by volunteer coaches with extensive industry experience.

The Company Program: Gulf Bank sponsored the largest award in INJAZ Kuwait's "Company Program" competition for the year 2020-2021, while Gulf Bank's Head of Investment Management, Dalya Al-Qassem, participated as an arbitrator in



Laila Al Mutairi



Lujain Al-Qenaei

the (Best Company of the Year) competition.

JAHEZ Career Forum: About 194 male and female university students from the university level participated in the JAHEZ career forum, which showcases local and international community leaders' work experiences to the local youth, with the aim of educating them on the requirements for the modern day workforce.

It is worth noting that INJAZ Kuwait is part of the global network of Junior Achievement worldwide, a non-profit (NPO), non-governmental organization (NGO) driven by Kuwait's private sector. Through strategic partnerships with Kuwait's business and education sectors, and with the help of qualified and dedicated volunteers, INJAZ delivers both Arabic and English language educational programs on entrepreneurial and leadership skills to build successful careers.

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.



Hong Kong to lift ban on flights from nine countries

US Senate launches hearings on first Black woman for SC

Page 6

Page 7



LUHANSK: Servicemen of the Ukrainian Military Forces prepare their equipment to repel a tank attack on a position in the Luhansk region. —AFP

Urban warfare looms if Russians enter cities

Deadly consequences for civilians caught up in fighting

PARIS: The next step in Russia's invasion of Ukraine could lead to urban warfare, an immense challenge for even numerically superior armies with deadly consequences for civilians caught up in the fighting, experts say. Nearly two weeks after the start of the Russian offensive, fears are growing that troops are preparing to launch major moves on Ukrainian cities that have so far escaped their grasp.

Russian artillery and rockets have been striking cities including the capital Kyiv, as well as smaller regional centres such as Kharkiv, Mariupol and Chernihiv. Inhabitants there, as well as in the southern port of Odessa, another strategic target, are now preparing for possible ground attacks.

"You still see them (Russians) holding back compared to what they could be doing," said Michael Kofman, a specialist on the Russian military at the US-based Center for Naval Analyses (CNA). "But I'm fairly concerned that that might actually turn into some smaller or lesser version of Grozny," he said, referring to Russia's offensive against the capital of separatist-controlled Chechnya in the 1990s.

"I doubt that they will try to level cities the way they did in Chechnya but nonetheless I think they're going to see heavy destruction if they attempt an urban assault," Lance Davies, a defence specialist at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in Britain, said that ground operations in hostile cities were "notoriously difficult to fight."

"Urban operations are the worst nightmare for military forces, commanders and political leaders," he said. "The

likelihood of becoming bogged down in brutal house-to-house fighting is almost guaranteed—and an assault on Kyiv would require a huge commitment in resources and manpower, but more importantly place Russian forces in close contact with legally protected civilian populations and critical infrastructure."

Resources



'It would be suicide to send tanks'

There remain doubts about whether Russia has the resources needed to capture and hold urban areas in Ukraine, and whether the country and President Vladimir Putin are ready to accept mounting casualties. A French military source told AFP that the rule of thumb was that attacking forces needed to outnumber defenders 10-1 because the defenders had the advantage of knowing the territory.

Defenders can also benefit from the height advan-

tages from local buildings, with Russian tanks and other armoured vehicles vulnerable to attacks from above. "It would be suicide to send tanks into urban areas," said Alexander Grinberg from the Zionist entity think-tank JISS. "They can't manoeuvre or move around... To conquer cities, you need professional infantry that is very motivated because it is always very difficult." Between 2016-17, the Iraqi army required eight months to dislodge a few thousand jihadists from the Islamic State group in Mosul after they had seized control of the city.

History

John Spencer from the Modern War Institute at the American military academy West Point says that fighting in cities is a relatively modern phenomenon. In Antiquity and the Middle Ages, armies would lay siege to cities but fighting usually took place at their fortifications and populations were often starved into submission.

After this, battles were conducted in open spaces between armies, rather than in inhabited areas. "It was not until World War II that Western military formations experienced heavy and frequent fighting in cities," he said.

The mother of such battles was the fight for the Russian city of Stalingrad (now Volgograd) in 1942-43 between Soviet and Nazi forces, which left an estimated two million people dead. Many Ukrainians have signed up to territorial defence units and are preparing to join the fight. "Every house, every street, every check point will resist, until death if necessary," the mayor of Kyiv, former boxing champion Vitali Klitschko, wrote on Instagram. —AFP

Freed UK-Iranian criticises govt release efforts

LONDON: A British-Iranian charity worker held in Tehran for six years said yesterday that the UK government could have helped free her earlier, and called for all "unjustly detained" prisoners in Iran to be released.

Speaking publicly for the first time since returning home, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe said the UK government knew that Tehran wanted a historic £400-million (\$530-million, 480-million euro) debt to be paid in order for her to be liberated.

"I think it was week two or week three that I was arrested, like six years ago, that they (Iran officials) told me, 'We want something off the Brits. We will not let you go until such time that we get it,'" she told a news conference.

"And they did keep their promise," said Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who flew home last Wednesday with retired engineer Anoosheh Ashoori, 67, after London agreed to settle the sum paid by the Shahr-e Iran government for tanks in the 1970s, before the Islamic revolution.

She described herself as "a pawn in the hands of two governments" who had been caught up in a wider dispute that had "nothing to do" with her, and said all those unfairly detained in Iran in similar circumstances should be freed.

"The meaning of freedom is never going to be

complete (until) such time that all of us who are unjustly detained in Iran are reunited with our families," she added.

"Other dual nationals, members of religious groups, or prisoners of conscience... there are so many other people we don't know their names who have been suffering in prison in Iran."

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, flanked by her husband, Richard, said little of her experience in prison, including in solitary confinement, but said it would "always haunt" her.

She criticised UK diplomatic efforts over the years to get her out, during which time five foreign ministers promised to secure her release. "I was told many, many times that 'Oh we're going to get you home,'" she said. "What's happened now should have happened six years ago... I shouldn't have been in prison for six years," she said.

Hunger strike

Another British-Iranian, Morad Tahbaz, who also has a US passport, is still being held in Iran, and his daughter Roxanne also spoke at the news conference. "He should have been on the same flight and it should happen to the other dual nationals," said Zaghari-Ratcliffe. Tahbaz's sister said earlier yesterday that he had gone on hunger strike and accused the UK government of abandoning him after the two other detainees were released.

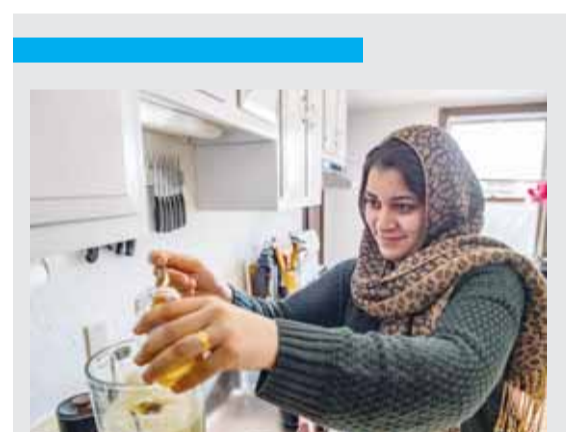
"We've only just found out before we started this afternoon that he's been returned to the prison," Roxanne Tahbaz said. "Contrary to the public statements that have been made, he's not being reunited with his family. And he certainly has not been given a furlough, as was part of the deal that was present-



LONDON: A handout photograph released by the UK Parliament shows Speaker of the House of Commons Lindsay Hoyle (R) speaking with Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe (rear R), her husband Richard Ratcliffe (L) during a meeting at the Speaker's house, in London, yesterday. —AFP

ed to us. "From the outset, we were always assured by the (British foreign ministry) that my father would be included in any deal that was made to release all of the hostages."

Environmental campaigner Tahbaz, in his 60s, was only released on furlough from Tehran's Evin prison on Wednesday and was not allowed to leave the country. After 48 hours he was taken back to prison, reportedly to have an ankle bracelet fitted, but he has not been heard from since. "We have heard through a relative just now... that he's been taken from the prison and he's been taken to an undisclosed location and that he's gone on hunger strike," his sister Tarane Tahbaz told BBC radio. —AFP



CHARLESTOWN, United States: Afghani evacuee Sayeda, 23, (pouring in honey) makes a morning smoothie of fruit, nuts and milk, an American concept she has been trying for a few weeks instead of tea, at her new apartment in Charlestown, Massachusetts. —AFP

Afghans resettled in US face an uncertain future

BOSTON, United States: In a storied corner of Boston, one of America's newest families is finding its feet months after fleeing Afghanistan: Israr and Sayeda are starting work, studying English and setting up home to welcome their first-born child.

But like many of the tens of thousands of Afghans evacuated after Kabul's fall to the Taliban, the young couple — who asked to be identified by first names only — are also taking steps to ensure the rug doesn't get pulled out from under their new life.

Though he worked as a US Army interpreter, Israr and his wife are in the United States on what is known as humanitarian parole, a "tenuous legal status," according to resettlement organizations, that offers only two years residence.

After an arduous, months-long journey that took them from Kabul via Qatar, Washington and a military base in Texas, the pair settled early this year in Boston's Charlestown neighborhood, where they were taken under the wing of a couple they now call their second "mama and papa."

"My papa is working on it," 26-year-old Israr said of his immigration status. "He got me a pro bono lawyer."

Israr had carefully packed all his documents before heading to Kabul airport as the chaotic evacuation unfolded in late August. But after nerve-racking encounters with Taliban at the airport entrances, Sayeda, 23, hid some on her person, hoping they wouldn't search, or beat a woman.

In the event, she was beaten to the point she couldn't walk. Israr, also injured, abandoned the bags and carried her. "I lost my luggage, my important documentation, my money, my clothes, my everything," he told AFP. —AFP

International

Children's hospital in Kyiv faces 'terrible' trauma of war

Ukraine's largest children's hospital is feeling the trauma of the war

KYIV: The horrors of the war in Ukraine can be seen in 13-year-old Volodymyr's empty expression as he lies in the Okhmatdyt children's hospital in Kyiv, playing with a green balloon dog. His father and his cousin were killed when their car was hit by gunfire two days after Russia's invasion. Volodymyr was shot in his jaw, his back, his arm and his leg.

"He can't walk yet, but the doctors told him that he'd be able to step on his feet later," says his exhausted-looking mother, Natalia, 34, sitting on a bed next to her son in a darkened room. Before the war, he loved the things that teenagers anywhere in the world might do—playing on his phone and taking their dog for a walk, she says.

Now he sits listlessly in bed, a livid scar running all the way up from his jaw to the dyed blonde streak of hair that hangs limp over his face. He whispers that today he is doing "good", but doctors say that after three weeks in hospital, Volodymyr still faces more surgery.

They show AFP journalists a graphic picture on a mobile phone of the wound in his face when he was brought in. The war was only two days old when the family's blue Lada car was caught up in a gun battle when Russian reconnaissance forces tried to push into Kyiv.

"We didn't realise who was shooting. As soon as everything ends, we will find out the details. They will be punished," his mother says, compulsively rubbing her arm. She was also wounded. "My injuries will heal, but I can't revive my husband, and I can't revive my nephew too. He was six years old."



Staff say the memories haunt them

'Really terrible'
Ukraine's largest children's hospital is feeling the trauma of the war. "It is really terrible, it is challenging, it is awful," says paediatrician Svitlana Onysko. "We live in the hospital, we don't go home; we are available 24/7, at any time—day, night, morning, evening, we hurry up to help the kids, and it's really terrible and difficult."

"It is difficult psychologically and morally because these are children. But, for us, adults, it is also difficult because it is war." Russian President Vladimir Putin said his invasion was meant to "demilitarise and de-nazify" Ukraine, but the toll on the country's civilians has been heavy.

Kyiv has so far been spared the worst of the Russian bombardment, however the city administration says four children have been killed and 16 wounded in the capital. Most are brought to Okhmatdyt for treatment. The staff say the memories haunt them.

There was the mother called Olga who shielded her one-month-old baby daughter after a shell hit their apartment building and caused damage to a nearby kindergarten in Kyiv. Doctors removed multiple pieces of shrapnel from Olga's body and treated her husband's injured leg.

There was the blonde four-year-old boy who suffered severe shrapnel wounds from a strike in Kyiv, rushed in on a stretcher. And the six-year-old girl whose legs were injured in a blast whose mother died in a missile strike in Hostomel, a town just outside the capital.



KYIV, Ukraine: Volodymyr, 13-year-old, sits in a hospital bed after being injured, in Kyiv. His family's car was caught in gunfire between Russian and Ukrainian troops in Kyiv, on February 26. His father was killed and his mother was injured. —AFP

'Isolate our feelings'

The hospital's neonatal unit itself was hit by shrapnel by one strike. In the early days of the war mothers and babies were even forced to take shelter in the basement whenever air raid sirens rang out. The hospital's hardworking staff are trying to put on a brave face as they deal with what orthopaedic surgeon Vlasii Pylypko calls "terrible injuries". "Since the war started, we treat injured, wounded people. It's children and adults also, with injuries from missiles, from bul-

lets, from rockets," he said. Most of the hospital's staff had no real experience of war. "Many of my colleagues who treat with surgery, we try to abstract, to isolate our feelings," said Pylypko. "And maybe after the war some of us will need psycho-support, but now we only focus on people's treatment, children's treatment." One of them will be Volodymyr, who still faces a long road to recovery. "He has to have another surgery, another treatment, he has bullets lying near the vertebral column." —AFP

US Senate launches hearings on first Black woman for SC

WASHINGTON: Senators were warned yesterday that history would be their judge as they launched marathon confirmation hearings to consider the nomination of Ketanji Brown Jackson to be the first Black woman to serve on the US Supreme Court.

President Joe Biden's pick to join the nation's highest court was formally introduced at the start of televised hearings which are set to be followed by two days of questioning and a day of testimony from outside witnesses.

"Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson is a brilliant legal mind with the utmost character and integrity," Biden tweeted ahead of the hearing. "She deserves to be confirmed as the next Justice of the Supreme Court."

Jackson, a 51-year-old former federal public defender with almost a decade of experience on lower courts, served as a law clerk to Stephen Breyer, the retiring liberal justice she is being nominated to replace.

Democratic leaders plan a final Senate vote by early April, with focus on the court sharpened by the weekend hospitalization of 73-year-old conservative Clarence Thomas, its second Black justice in history, with "flu-like symptoms."

Thomas is expected to be released from hospital in the next day or two. Jackson is the first Black woman tapped for a seat on the court and would also be the first nominee of a Democratic president to be confirmed to the Supreme Court since Elena Kagan in 2010.

"I... ask the members of this committee as we

begin this landmark confirmation process, to consider how history will judge each senator, as we face our constitutional responsibility to advise and consent," Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin said in his opening address.

No 'character assassination'

With her confirmation to replace Breyer and become the court's 116th justice all but assured and the 6-3 conservative balance of the court not in play, the prospects for major drama are low. The Senate Judiciary Committee will meet Monday through Thursday to consider Jackson's nomination, which is being conducted by a 50-50 chamber controlled by Democrats, meaning there is no room for missteps.

No red flags have been raised about Jackson's record that would damage her prospects, and Republicans have pledged to avoid the kind of "character assassination" they argue Democrats staged before the confirmation of Justice Brett Kavanaugh in 2018.

But conservatives have been signaling that they intend to go after Jackson's record as a public defender, her work defending Guantanamo Bay detainees and her tenure on the US Sentencing Commission, which works to "reduce sentencing disparities."

They will also raise rulings they say were too lenient in a bid to frame Biden—via his nominee—as soft on crime ahead of November's midterm elections. High-profile confirmation hearings always present an opportunity for grandstanding by presidential hopefuls so observers are expecting headline-grabbing moments from the likes of Josh Hawley, Ted Cruz and Tom Cotton.

'Baseless charges'

Hawley has already suggested that Jackson has a pattern of "letting child porn offenders off the hook



WASHINGTON: A person wears a shirt in support of Supreme Court Justice nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson, outside the US Supreme Court in Washington, DC, yesterday. —AFP

for their appalling crimes," a charge angrily denied by Democratic leadership and the White House. "These baseless charges are unfair," Durbin told the committee. Hawley's accusations, he added, "fly in the face" of Republican vows to keep the proceedings civil.

Yesterday's hearing began with the 22 members of the Judiciary Committee speaking for about 10 minutes each on Jackson's nomination. The pair formally introducing the nominee—retired Circuit Judge Thomas Griffith and Lisa Fairfax, a law professor at the University of Pennsylvania—will speak for up to five minutes each.

This will be followed by a 10-minute opening statement from Jackson herself. Senators will have time to question the nominee today for up to 50 minutes each. Thursday's hearing includes outside witnesses speaking to her qualifications, including the American Bar Association, which unanimously gave Jackson its highest rating, "well qualified," to serve on the Supreme Court. —AFP



CAPE TOWN, South Africa: Students line up during the morning parade inside the hostel at Chrysalis Academy in Tokai, near Cape Town, on February 1, 2022. Chrysalis Academy was set up in 2000 by local government, in the shadow of the high-security Pollsmoor Prison, a jarring contrast to the leafy surrounding suburb of Tokai. —AFP

Bootcamp offers path from scenic Cape Town's ganglands

CAPE TOWN, South Africa: A troupe of 160 young women in cobalt blue uniforms and sand-coloured bucket hats march across a vast courtyard in lock-step. Two more face the group to give military-style salutes, say prayers and hoist the South African flag high into the air.

The scene looks like a military conscription, but is actually a sought-after programme that takes young people from Cape Town's toughest streets and sets them on a path to employment. "I felt that my life had no direction, but since the moment I got here, got to experience everything that's happening, a lot has changed," said Siphokuhle Kapa, 23, a student at Chrysalis Academy.

Despite Cape Town's reputation as a holiday paradise, its streets rank among the deadliest in the world. All of South Africa has a horrific crime problem, but in 2021 Cape Town's murder rate was by far the highest in the country, at 64 killings per 100,000 people.

Johannesburg's rate, by comparison, was 37. New York's was 5.5. The crime is driven by rampant gangs, combined with high unemployment—things Gibson Jannecke wanted to escape. "I have no history of drug abuse, no history of gangsterism, but it was a big factor in my life that affected me heavily," Jannecke said, recalling his upbringing in the Western Cape town of Macassar. "I couldn't walk to school without being mugged. I could not go out in the street without my parents being worried about gunshots." In 2011, he came to Chrysalis to study youth development. A decade later, he's teaching there.

The academy was set up in 2000 by local government, in the shadow of the high-security Pollsmoor Prison—a jarring contrast to the leafy surrounding suburb of Tokai. "When young people come here, we don't look at them as drug addicts or poor people," said chief executive Lucille Meyer.

"We look at them as whole human beings, but human beings who have lived difficult lives," she said. "We are here as a platform to help them deepen their resilience and unleash their potential."

Chrysalis runs three three-month courses each year for people aged 18 to 25, with two courses for men and one for women. Anyone meeting the criteria can apply online. Restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic have hit all the courses and the current intake of 162 women also has reduced numbers. —AFP

Turkish activist back in court, remanded again

ISTANBUL, Turkey: Turkey's leading activist Osman Kavala, who at the weekend marked his 1,600th day in prison without conviction, appeared before court yesterday for the first time in months, only to have his case adjourned and his detention extended.

The philanthropist is accused of financing 2013 anti-government protests and playing a role in a coup plot against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The case has strained Turkey's ties with the West and become a symbol of Turkey's sweeping crackdown on government opponents.

Kavala has been detained since 2017 in a huge prison complex on the outskirts of Istanbul, in defiance of a European Court of Human Rights ruling to release him.

Last month, the Council of Europe (COE) launched rare disciplinary action against Turkey over the case, which Ankara denounced as interference.

Kavala, who had snubbed court hearings since October, yesterday attended the latest hearing in Istanbul's main court Caglayan via a video link from his prison in Silivri — about 60 kilometres

(40 miles) west of Istanbul.

His presence had built up expectations that the three judges overseeing his trial could be poised to deliver a final verdict. Many Western observers, including diplomats from France and the United States were present in the packed courtroom, an AFP journalist reported.

Erdogan has been trying to salvage battered ties with the European Union in recent months, a bid which intensified after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

'Completely baseless'

But yesterday, the judge accepted the prosecutor's demand to extend Kavala's remand and set the next hearing for April 22. "My ongoing imprisonment is completely baseless," Kavala told court yesterday. He denies the claims and has branded the charges "politically motivated". If convicted, Kavala faces an aggravated life sentence, which has tougher terms of detention.

On March 4, the prosecutor delivered his final opinion, demanding that Kavala be found guilty of "attempting to overthrow" Erdogan's government. Erdogan has openly targeted Kavala and accused him of being an agent of George Soros, a Hungarian-born billionaire US financier and pro-democracy campaigner.

Last October, Kavala said he would not defend himself in court because he lost faith in a fair trial after his case sparked a diplomatic spat.



ISTANBUL, Turkey: People walk past the Caglayan Justice Palace courthouse in Istanbul yesterday. Turkey's leading activist Osman Kavala, who at the weekend marked his 1,600th day in prison without conviction, appeared in court yesterday, in a case that has strained Ankara's ties with the West. —AFP

Erdogan nearly expelled 10 Western envoys, including from the United States and major European powers, after they appealed for Kavala's release last October.

'Nothing legal'

Tolga Aytore, Kavala's lawyer, said the indictment was penned with an "enthusiastic political ideology," adding: "There's nothing legal there." Kavala is on trial with 16 other defendants over the 2013 protests.

Nine out of the other 16 are abroad. The remaining seven were in court yesterday.

Human rights organisations have criticised the case. "Despite committing no internationally recognised crime, he remains arbitrarily detained on baseless charges in a facility far away from his family," said Nils Muiznieks, Amnesty International's Europe director.

Muiznieks accused the prosecutors of seeking but failing "to conjure a crime out of thin air". —AFP

International

Hong Kong to lift ban on flights from nine countries

Hong Kong has recorded more than a million cases and 5,900 deaths this year

HONG KONG, China: Hong Kong will resume international flights from the United States, Britain and seven other countries, the government said yesterday as it announced a loosening of some of the world's toughest COVID-19 restrictions. The finance hub has struggled to maintain China's zero-tolerance policy during an Omicron-fuelled outbreak that has sparked a huge surge in cases and put the city in the spotlight with one of the highest COVID fatality rates in the developed world.

arrivals starting April 1 to seven days in a designated hotel, followed by another seven days of at-home monitoring. Currently, Hong Kong residents trying to return from most destinations face a two-week quarantine stay in expensive hotels.

Suspended mass testing

Lam's administration has been excoriated for its handling of the COVID crisis, with critics calling it unprepared despite two years of breathing room due to its low number of cases before Omicron hit in January. Once the variant broke through, hospital wards were flooded with patients and morgues overcrowded with bodies-leading to a coffin shortage last week.

Unclear public messaging from the government over mass testing and lockdowns has also fuelled bouts of panic-buying-leaving supermarkets shelves stripped bare. Hong Kong, known as "Asia's World City", has seen a record exodus of foreign and local residents, with a net outflow of more than 134,000 people by mid-March.

Yesterday, Lam said that a previously floated plan to mass test Hong Kong's 7.4 million residents was "not appropriate" at this stage, given the city's limited resources. "Our current opinion is to suspend it and whether we will do it depends on the development of the epidemic," the leader said.

Lam also announced that kindergartens, primary schools and international schools will resume in-person teaching from April 19. Beginning April 21, restaurants may stay open after 6:00 pm for dine-in services—currently banned — while public gatherings would be capped at four people, up from the current two.

Hong Kong's deepened international isolation and



HONG KONG: People wait in a queue to check-in for their flight at Hong Kong International Airport in Hong Kong yesterday. — AFP

lack of a roadmap to normality have incited complaints from business and diplomatic communities, even prompting some major international banks to accelerate relocations.

Authorities had repeatedly defended its methods, saying it was necessary to maintain access to the mainland Chinese market—which still has strict border controls. But yesterday Lam signalled an attitude shift—saying the city now has to balance its status as an interna-

tional hub and as a gateway to mainland China.

"For any longer term public health strategy, we will have to take into account both factors that is maintaining Hong Kong's accessibility to the mainland and also ensuring her continued connectivity with the outside world," she said. Tens of millions of people in regions across China have been put under stay-at-home orders since last week when Omicron clusters started threatening the country's zero-COVID model. — AFP

US genocide designation brings little comfort to Rohingya camps

YANGON: The US decision to brand a crackdown by Myanmar's military against the Rohingya minority as genocide is a victory for human rights campaigners but will do little to alleviate the suffering of those still languishing in camps, activists say.

Hundreds of thousands of the mostly Muslim Rohingya community fled the Buddhist-majority country for Bangladesh in 2017, bringing stories of rape, murder and arson, while another 600,000 remain in refugee camps in junta-ruled Myanmar.

On Sunday, Washington said the violence amounted to genocide and crimes against humanity, with media reporting the decision could be followed by further sanctions and limits on aid, among other penalties against the already-isolated junta. Thin Thin Hlaing, a Rohingya rights activist welcomed the move. "I feel like we were living through a blackout but now we see a light, because they recognise our suffering," she told AFP. But she added: "My parents, my sister and my niece still have to live in camps in bad conditions and with no standard of human rights."

More outrage towards Myanmar's military—already an international pariah—will do little to change the wretched conditions many Rohingya live in, said David Mathieson, an analyst formerly based in the country.

"It's hard to see how it (the designation) will

improve the lives of people who have suffered from crushing state repression and extreme violence," he said. "The Myanmar military didn't care about the accusations when they started, and given they're now fighting almost everyone else in the country, I doubt this finding will affect them in any way."

Since ousting Aung San Suu Kyi's government last year, the junta has doubled down on widespread perceptions that the Rohingya are interlopers from Bangladesh and continues to deny them citizenship, rights and access to services. Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing—who was head of the armed forces during the 2017 crackdown—has dismissed the word Rohingya as "an imaginary term". Any sanctions that may follow Washington's designation are also unlikely to damage or dislodge the generals behind the crackdown, Mathieson added.

"Short of the US either actively blocking arms sales... or supplying anti-aircraft assistance to the resistance as they're doing in Ukraine, then Washington has little leverage or punitive options it can exert," he said.

The designation also makes uncomfortable reading for a shadow "National Unity Government" (NUG) dominated by lawmakers from Suu Kyi's ousted party, which is working to overturn the coup. Her National League for Democracy was in power during the 2017 crackdown and her government's handling of the crisis deeply tarnished her reputation abroad.

Her office denied claims that fleeing refugees had suffered rape, extrajudicial killings and arson attacks on their homes by Myanmar troops. When a genocide case opened at the Hague-based International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December 2019, the Nobel laureate travelled to the court to defend the generals, who a little over a year later would oust her government and plunge the country into turmoil. —AFP



UKHIA, BANGLADESH: File photo shows Rohingya refugees walking through a shallow canal after crossing the Naf River as they flee violence in Myanmar to reach Bangladesh in Palongkhali near Ukhia. — AFP



After the highly transmissible variant fuelled a wave of cases, authorities banned flights from nine countries deemed high-risk—including the United States, Britain, France and India. But infections climbed rapidly. Hong Kong has recorded more than a million cases and 5,900 deaths this year, with the bulk of the toll among its unvaccinated elderly population.

Yesterday, Lam said Hong Kong will lift flight bans for the nine countries from April 1. "The epidemic situations in those countries are not worse than Hong Kong's, and most arrivals did not have serious symptoms," she said during a press conference. Hong Kong has also reduced the quarantine period for vaccinated



NEW DELHI: This handout photograph taken yesterday and released by the Indian Press Information Bureau (PIB) shows India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi inspecting the antiquities repatriated from Australia, in New Delhi. — AFP

Modi thanks Australia for returning stolen artefacts

NEW DELHI: Australia has returned 29 religious and cultural artefacts to India, among them several stolen or illegally exported from the country, earning thanks from Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a summit yesterday.

New Delhi has pushed Western governments and museums to identify and return objects of India's "stolen heritage", and hundreds of items from overseas collections have already been repatriated. Thirteen of the works returned by Australia are connected to alleged trafficker Subhash Kapoor, a former Manhattan art dealer who was the subject of a massive US federal investigation known as Operation Hidden Idol.

"I would like to especially thank you for the initiative to return ancient Indian artefacts," Modi told his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison during a virtual meeting of the leaders. "These include statues and paintings that are hundreds of years old and that have been illegally taken out... now we can return them to the places where they belong."

The objects—including sculptures, paintings, photographs and a scroll—date back to the 9th century and were held by the National Gallery of Australia. The museum first announced the return of works it acquired through Kapoor last July, including a US\$5 million

bronze statue of the Hindu god Shiva that had been stolen from a temple in southern India. Kapoor was arrested in 2011 and is currently in jail awaiting trial. He denies all charges. Experts estimate that thousands of artworks are stolen from Indian temples each year and shipped to a thriving international antiquities market.

These artefacts are generally smuggled out under fake documentation and concealed in furniture or garment consignments. Most never return to India. Barry O'Farrell, Australia's high commissioner to India, said the restitution of the artefacts was a symbol of strong diplomatic ties "built on deep bonds of trust and cooperation".

'Distressing backdrop'

Monday's summit between Modi and Morrison focused on the strategic partnership between their two countries, both members of the Quad alliance alongside the US and Japan, along with the ongoing conflict in Ukraine in the wake of Russia's invasion.

"Our meeting today is, of course, set against the very distressing backdrop of the war in Europe, which must never happen in our own region," Morrison said. "The tragic loss of life underlies the importance, of course, of holding Russia to account."

New Delhi enjoys historic diplomatic and defence ties with Moscow and has abstained in UN votes deploring Russia's actions in Ukraine, in a break from other Quad members. Modi did not address the conflict in his comments after the meeting. India and Australia have also been working to finalise a trade deal that would ease export barriers for Indian pharmaceuticals and cut tariffs on some Australian wines, according to local media reports. — AFP

Eyeing China, Japan breaks with past for strong Ukraine response

TOKYO: Japan has broken with years of precedent in its tough response to the Ukraine invasion, and the conflict could reshape Tokyo's defence strategy as it confronts China's regional ambitions, analysts say. When Russia last pushed into Ukraine in 2014, Japan's response was seen as lukewarm, but this time around it has marched in lockstep with Western allies on unprecedented sanctions and tough rhetoric, even sending non-lethal military aid.

And the crisis is already impacting debates on security spending and capacity in a country whose

constitution limits its military to defence. "Japan has been accused before of paying its way out, in a way, just giving money but not being directly involved in any crisis," said Valerie Niquet, an Asia expert at France's Foundation for Strategic Research think tank.

This time, Tokyo is "putting a lot of emphasis on what they are doing... to show that they are not just sitting by and waiting to see how things will evolve". And the speed with which Tokyo has moved on measures such as individual sanctions has been "completely remarkable", said Tobias Harris, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. "This is much further than I thought we would see the Japanese government go." In part, that reflects the extraordinary nature of the conflict, but several other key factors are at play, including the departure of former prime minister Shinzo Abe, who long sought closer ties with Moscow.

Abe, who resigned in 2020, had hoped warmer relations would lead to a breakthrough over disputed islands held by Russia, which Moscow calls the Kurils and Japan calls the Northern Territories. But with Abe gone and years of deadlock on the dispute, Japan's government has felt freer to act against Moscow, though fears about

energy needs have so far stopped Tokyo from pulling out of joint energy projects with Russia.

Eye on China

Looming even larger though is China, with its growing ambitions in the region, including its desire to "reunify" Taiwan and its claims to disputed islands it calls the Diaoyu, known as the Senkaku in Japan.

In the past, Tokyo worried aggressive actions on Russia could push Moscow into Beijing's arms, said James D.J. Brown, an associate professor of political science at Tokyo's Temple University. "Now however, that's completely flipped around," he told AFP.

Instead, the view is that "Japan has to be tough on Russia, because otherwise it sets a precedent, and perhaps encourages China to think that they could do the same thing". In the immediate term, Japan is expected to completely overhaul its view of Russia in its National Security Strategy due later this year.

"Definitely Russia will be very much described as a threat," said Niquet. "In the last one, in 2013, Russia was seen more as, if not an opportunity, certainly not a threat. That will change completely."

Nuclear-sharing discussion

And the Ukraine crisis is likely to strengthen the hand of those calling for more defence spending. In campaigning last year, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party set a long-term goal of raising the defence budget to more than two percent of GDP, up from its traditional one percent.

That is "now something that they can realistically push towards", said Brown. Discussion of obtaining a strike capacity such as attack drones that could carry out first strikes against an enemy has been controversial given the constitutional limits on Japan's military.

But "the images we've seen out of Ukraine are going to be useful for people who want Japan to have a more robust national defence", Harris said. "Self-defence is going to look increasingly like a fig leaf, I suspect."

Even more controversially, Japan's ruling party is set to debate nuclear deterrence, after suggestions from lawmakers including Abe that the possibility of "nuclear-sharing" be considered. That is likely to remain a bridge too far, at least for now.—AFP

TUESDAY, MARCH 22, 2022

Business

Ukraine war raises specter of 'famine' in parts of the world

European bloc working on plan to help farmers

KYIV: The war by Russia in Ukraine risks causing famine in parts of the world because of the two countries' roles as major agricultural exporters, EU ministers in Brussels warned yesterday.

The European bloc is working on a plan to increase the area of EU land able to be given over to farm production, ease import restrictions on animal feed and looking at more direct aid to EU farmers, agricultural ministers said as they held a meeting. The conflict "soon will bring risks of famine," impacting food security not just in Europe but worldwide, France's foreign minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, said as he went into a separate meeting of his EU counterparts in Brussels.

"We need to take up the issue of global food security because we know the scale of cereal production, particularly from Ukraine and Russia, and we see the consequences of the war," he said.

Ukraine and Russia are among the biggest exporters of farm-grown foodstuffs and fertilizers, notably of wheat, maize, rapeseed, sunflower seeds and sunflower oil. Russia is also the biggest supplier of nitrogen fertilizers and the second-biggest of potassic and phosphorous fertilizers.

With Ukraine's access to its ports cut off by the Russian invasion and oilseed production halted, and Russia increasingly isolated from export markets and its entire economy under sanctions pressure, those supplies are shrinking fast. International prices for grains and fertilizers, as a consequence,

soar by between eight and 22 percent, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said last week.

Sky-high prices for oil-needed to ship supplies by sea-will only compound the problem, with vulnerable countries to bear the brunt, the FAO said.

It projected that the number of undernourished people could increase by eight to 13 million people over the course of this year and next, mainly in the Asia-Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa. Oxfam, the British-based charity, noted that a staple like bread is unaffordable in many low-income countries because the wheat is imported.

In a statement, Oxfam urged donor governments to "bridge the gap between what people can pay and higher prices and deliver much needed aid to people facing severe hunger".

But Austrian Agriculture Minister Elisabeth Koestinger said that, "in the coming months of the year and beyond, we have to assume that there will be a shortage of cereals, which are very important for food aid worldwide". While the European Union has enough to feed itself and is a net exporter of farm-grown food because of its generous agricultural subsidies, the Ukraine war could nevertheless impact the cost of animal feed.

Finnish Agriculture Minister Jari Leppa said the EU package should include sufficient flexibility for member states "to tailor support schemes to their



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own specific needs".

His Spanish counterpart, Luis Planas Puchades, said that beyond the main lines of the planned EU steps, "it is quite possible that the Commission will

put on the table some private stockpiling measures in the pig sector". He also said the rising costs of fuel needed to be looked at for fishing vessels, of which Spain boasts a sizeable fleet. — AFP

Japan presses UAE to pump more oil as war spikes prices

TOKYO: Japan on Sunday urged the United Arab Emirates to pump more oil to calm markets rocked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the latest major consumer to lobby Gulf producers.

The plea by Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi came during meetings with Emirati officials which coincided with a visit by Germany's economy minister, three weeks into the Russian offensive.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson also flew to the UAE and Saudi Arabia to push for more oil this week in a bid to ease prices of over \$100 a barrel and secure non-Russian supplies.

Hayashi asked "the UAE to contribute to the stabilization of the international oil market by supplying a greater amount of oil, securing spare

productive capacity as a leading member of OPEC+", a Japanese foreign ministry spokesperson told an online briefing. The UAE supplies about a third of Japan's oil imports. There was no promise of more production from the UAE, which has stressed its alignment with the OPEC+ oil alliance that includes Russia.

Hayashi's talks with UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and Industry Minister Sultan Al-Jaber come after Prime Minister Fumio Kishida made the same request in phone calls with the Emirati and Saudi leadership this week. The UAE "may be more willing to open the taps" than Saudi Arabia as it wants to capitalize on its oil reserves more quickly, Torbjorn Soltvedt, Middle East and North Africa analyst at Verisk Maplecroft, told AFP this week. The UAE's ambassador to the United States last week signaled it favored higher production in OPEC+, sending prices lower. But the UAE reaffirmed its commitment to OPEC+ just a day later.

Calls to raise oil production have so far fallen on deaf ears. "I think you need to talk to the Saudis about that," Johnson said after his trip to Riyadh,



ABU DHABI: A handout image provided by the United Arab Emirates News Agency (WAM) yesterday shows the Emirati Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan (right) with the Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi a day earlier in Abu Dhabi. —AFP

when asked if he had won any guarantees for more oil.

Analysts say oil producers don't have the spare capacity to replace Russian exports, and are reluctant to cause a rift with their OPEC+ partner. They also fear creating market panic if all reserve capacity is used up, analyst Amena Baker from Energy Intelligence

told AFP this month.

However, Germany announced a long-term energy partnership with Qatar on Sunday as it looks to reduce its dependence on Russian gas. The agreement came following a visit to Doha by German Minister for Economic Affairs Robert Habeck, who then travelled to the UAE. —AFP

Philippines allows foreign ownership of telecoms, airlines

MANILA: The Philippines yesterday eased restrictions to allow foreign ownership of airline, telecommunications and shipping operators, as it seeks to boost jobs and spur activity in the virus-hit economy. The archipelago nation has long struggled to attract foreign money, as red-tape, corruption and political uncertainty scared off investors who instead pumped billions of dollars into neighboring nations.

The amendments to the 85-year-old Public Service Act are the latest effort to woo foreign investment and increase competition in sectors long dominated by a few local players. "I believe that with this law, the easing of foreign equity restrictions will attract more global investors, modernize several sectors of public service and improve the delivery of essential services," outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte said as he signed off on the changes.

Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez said foreign equity restrictions would be "eased out" in several sectors, including telecommunications, shipping, airlines, railway and subways.

The amendments do not apply to sectors classified as public utilities, such as water and electricity distribution, where foreign equity remains capped at 40 percent. The president retains the power to block a proposed foreign takeover of a public service. Experts welcomed the relaxation but cautioned more needed to be done to boost confidence in the country's investment environment. "Opening the door does not necessarily mean they will all enter, because it will depend on their review on the feasibility of coming in," said Alvin Ang, an economics professor at Ateneo de Manila University. "They might ask for something else, so that may require fixing or renovating ... that could be ease of doing business, that could be governance, that could be regulatory capacity, that could be quality of support."

A 2020 index published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development shows the Philippines has some of the most restrictive foreign direct investment rules in the world. The Philippines ranked 95 out of 190 countries in the World Bank's



"Doing Business 2020" report. "In itself, it's good, but then you also have to consider other factors that will affect investment sentiment," said Filomeno Sta. Ana, executive director of Action for Economic Reforms. "The outcome of the 2022 elections will be very critical in shaping investments and the economy. If we can get a good leader, interventions like the Public Service Act will provide an additional boost to investor sentiment optimism." Filipinos are set to elect a new president on May 9. — AFP

Fed prepared to raise rates 'aggressively'

WASHINGTON: The US central bank is prepared to raise interest rates by bigger steps than the quarter-point hike announced last week if needed to contain "much too high" inflation, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said yesterday. Consumer prices in the

world's largest economy have surged to the highest seen in four decades, and the Fed last week raised the benchmark lending rate for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic began to try to tamp down inflation pressures.

"If we conclude that it is appropriate to move more aggressively by raising the federal funds rate by more than 25 basis points at a meeting or meetings, we will do so," he said in a speech to an economics conference. Inflation was already rising before the Russian invasion of Ukraine added to new price pressures and supply chain impediments that could spill over to the US economy, he told the National Association for Business Economics.

"There is an obvious need to move expeditiously" to remove the stimulus the Fed provided to the American economy during the pandemic, but Powell said central bankers are prepared to go beyond "neutral" and tighten policy if needed to achieve their goal.

Last week's rate hike was billed as the first in a series, and several policymakers have expressed willingness—or the need-to move in bigger steps. "We

are committed to restoring price stability while preserving a strong labor market," Powell said. He was optimistic the Fed can achieve that without tipping the US economy into a recession, an elusive goal known as a "soft landing." Even with the oil price shock sparked by the conflict in Ukraine, he noted that "today the economy is very strong and is well positioned to handle tighter monetary policy."

But he cautioned that "very little is straightforward in the current context," and there is high uncertainty about the impact of the war. —AFP

Russia bans Instagram and Facebook as 'extremist'

MOSCOW: A Russian court yesterday banned Facebook and Instagram as "extremist", part of sweeping efforts by Moscow to crack down on social media during the conflict in Ukraine.

The Russian authorities have accused US tech giant Meta—the parent company of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp—of tolerating "Russophobia" since President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine on February 24. Facebook and Twitter have been inaccessible in Russia since early March and Instagram was blocked in the country a week ago.

Moscow's Tverskoi district court acceded to a request from prosecutors for the two social media platforms to be banned for "carrying out extremist activities". It ruled that Meta's WhatsApp messenger service would not be prohibited because it is not used to post public statements. There was no immediate comment from Meta.

During Monday's hearing, Russia's FSB security service accused Meta of working against the interests of Moscow and its army during the conflict.

"The activities of the Meta organization are directed against Russia and its armed forces," FSB representative Igor Kovalevsky told the court in a statement reported by Russian news agencies.

"We ask (the court) to ban Meta's activities and oblige it to implement this ruling immediately," he said. Meta had announced on March 10 that the platforms would allow statements like "death to Russian invaders" but not credible threats against civilians. But in what appeared to be damage control, Meta's global affairs president, Nick Clegg, later said the laxer rules would only apply to people posting from inside Ukraine.

Is posting safe?

In court, a Meta representative said that "following public debate" the company had now changed its policy and deemed that "Russophobia and calls for violence against Russian citizens are unacceptable". Experts said yesterday it remained unclear whether it was now illegal for ordinary Russians to post on Facebook and Instagram. Net Freedoms Project said Russians could use Meta's social media "carefully"—for now.

The rights project noted that the prosecution said Russians cannot be prosecuted for simply using the social media. "This means that it can be safe to have accounts and post on Instagram and Facebook," Net Freedoms Project said. It pointed out however that those purchasing Facebook and Instagram advertising could be prosecuted for financing an extremist organization. — AFP



Business

Sri Lanka seeks more Chinese cash as crisis claims fourth life

Island nation is in the throes of its worst economic meltdown

BEIJING: Beijing is considering a request for another \$2.5 billion loan package from crisis-hit Sri Lanka, China's ambassador said yesterday, as a man was stabbed to death while queuing at a fuel station.

The island nation of 22 million people is in the throes of its worst economic meltdown since independence in 1948, with widespread shortages of essential goods and worries that it may default on its \$51 billion in foreign debt. Qi Zhenhong announced that loan discussions were at an advanced stage, but stopped short of saying whether Beijing would agree to a separate request from Colombo to restructure its debt.

"China understands the urgent need of Sri Lanka and its people," Qi told reporters in Colombo. "Relevant authorities in China are promptly studying the request." He said Colombo had asked for a \$1 billion loan and another \$1.5 billion credit line to import goods from China, because the country has virtually run out of dollars to import goods.

Officials said a motorcyclist was stabbed to death by another driver following a dispute over his place in a long queue for fuel at Nittambuwa, just outside Colombo, on Sunday night.

A 70-year-old man collapsed from exhaustion and died in the nearby town of Mirigama the same evening after spending hours waiting for petrol. Two more elder-

ly people have died under similar circumstances since Saturday. Motorists are forced to wait hours outside gas stations to fill up and the government has imposed rolling blackouts as power utilities are unable to pay for foreign oil. Oil and liquefied petroleum gas shipments have been idling outside Colombo's main port, with importers unable to scrape together enough foreign currency to pay for them.

The COVID-19 pandemic throttled Sri Lanka's tourism sector—a key foreign exchange earner—and foreign worker remittances have also declined.

The Chinese ambassador said Beijing had already extended \$2.8 billion in long-term loans and currency swaps since the pandemic. Sri Lanka's Central Bank Governor Ajith Cabraal told reporters recently that Colombo was seeking more loans from China to repay its loans to the country—estimated at over 10 percent of Sri Lanka's external debt.

India last week said it had agreed to give a \$1 billion credit line to buy food and medicines on top of a \$500 million facility granted earlier. Sri Lankan authorities announced last week that the country will seek an IMF bailout. Shortages have wrought havoc on almost every aspect of daily life, with authorities even postponing term tests for nearly three million students because of a lack of paper and ink. — AFP



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



Russians urged not to panic buy sugar and buckwheat

MOSCOW: Russia has plenty of sugar and buckwheat, a senior official insisted yesterday, urging the public not to panic buy staple foods due to President Vladimir Putin's decision to send troops into Ukraine. Washington and Brussels' coordinated response over the Ukraine conflict has made Russia the most sanctioned country in the world, sending the ruble into free-fall and accelerating already spiraling inflation.

Unprecedented Western sanctions have sparked hectic scenes at supermarkets, with customers bulk-buying long-life essentials such as buckwheat, a popular toasted grain that can be eaten both as a side dish or a main course. "I want to calm our citizens: we are fully self-sufficient when it comes to sugar and buckwheat," deputy Prime Minister Viktoriya Abramchenko

told a government meeting in remarks broadcast on television.

"There is no need to panic-buy these goods. There is enough for everybody. Panic-buying only destabilizes the distribution network," she said.

Images of empty shelves and Russians standing in long lines to buy sugar have circulated on social media in recent days. Abramchenko said that Russia this year planned to sow more sugar beet and buckwheat.

"This means that the new harvest will ensure the availability of sugar and buckwheat on the shelves of stores, and Russian confectioners and bakers will receive the necessary amount of sugar," Abramchenko added. She also said there were no food shortages in Russia, adding that the authorities would ramp up imports of supplies from "friendly countries."

On February 24, Putin ordered Russian troops into Ukraine, triggering unprecedented Western sanctions against Russia and sparking an exodus of foreign corporations including H&M, McDonald's and IKEA. Officials in Moscow have sought to downplay the gravity of the Western penalties, promising that Russia will adapt. Putin has said that the country will emerge stronger from the crisis. — AFP

quences because it puts tens of thousands of drivers' out of work, the economist added.

Burundi is the poorest country in the world as measured by GDP per capita, at less than \$240 in 2020, according to the World Bank. — AFP

Quake temporarily shuts down North Sea oil rig

OSLO: Norwegian energy giant Equinor said yesterday it briefly shut down production at its Snorre B oil platform in the North Sea as a precautionary measure following an earthquake.

The 4.6-magnitude quake occurred yesterday at 6:32 am (0532 GMT), according to the Norwegian National Seismic Network.

The tremor could be felt on the platform, which produces between 30,000 and 35,000 barrels of oil per day, but no damage had been reported.

"The production at Snorre B was stopped today, as a precaution, following an earthquake in the North Sea that was registered on the installations," Equinor spokesman Gisle Ledel Johannessen told AFP. Snorre B is located in the Snorre oil field of west coast of Norway, and the oil from the platform is piped 45 kilometres (30 miles) Statfjord B for export and storage.

"After inspections with ROV's we have not identified any irregularities on the seabed or the Snorre infrastructure," Johannessen told AFP.

"We have now started ramping up for normal production again." Norway is the largest producer of oil in Western Europe, but supplies only about two percent of global oil consumption, according to Norwegian Petroleum. — AFP

US, UK ready to resume trade talks in Baltimore

BALTIMORE: Washington and London have chosen the port city of Baltimore—just an hour's drive from the US capital—as the site of Monday's talks on deepening their economic relationship.

The United States is Britain's biggest trade partner, and the two countries are particularly interconnected when it comes to services trade and direct foreign investment. In total, the US and the UK do some \$263 billion (200 billion pounds) worth of trade per year.

Following Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, London has been negotiating agreements far and wide in an effort to boost its international trade footprint—and has sought in particular to reinforce its relationship with the United States. But even though the administration of former president Donald Trump seemed ready to make a new bilateral arrangement with London and had even opened negotiation talks, the administration of current President Joe Biden does not seem to be in a hurry to continue them.

"It's important to remember that these (trade) agreements are just one tool at our disposal," said a senior US trade official on the condition of anonymity. US Trade Representative Katherine Tai, who will lead the American side on Tuesday's talks, is expected to talk about "the need to get creative and think outside the box when it comes to our trade dynamic with the UK," another official said during a telephone conversation with reporters.

"Some of our trade tools were developed decades ago, many decades ago, and don't particularly represent the global challenges that we face today," the second official said.



The United States is Britain's biggest trade partner, and the two countries are particularly interconnected when it comes to services trade and direct foreign investment.

Lebanon CB chief charged with money laundering

BEIRUT: A Lebanese judge yesterday charged central bank chief Riad Salameh with "illicit enrichment" and money laundering after he failed to attend a court hearing for the fifth time, a judicial source told AFP. Judge Ghada Aoun also charged Salameh's brother Raja with "facilitating money laundering" after he was arrested last week over financial misconduct, the source said.

The same charge was filed against Ukrainian national Anna Kosakova, who jointly owns a company with Raja Salameh. Aoun is investigating whether a number of residential apartments in Paris belong to Riad Salameh, according to the judicial source.

His brother had previously claimed the flats belong to the central bank, the source added.

'Work together'

Asked whether this week's meeting marked a revival of negotiations that were interrupted last year, the officials insisted these talks are more about "deciding where to go together," and said they are confident the conversations would be productive. "The purpose of this dialogue is to work together to make our trade smarter, and to help our workers and businesses compete in a really tough global economy," the second official said. Tai and her British counterpart Anne-Marie Trevelyan are expected to address a series of challenges, such as reducing bottlenecks in global supply chains, reducing carbon use, promoting digital trade and supporting their nations' workforces through labor rights, a favorite issue of the Biden administration.

The talks come as the war in Ukraine continues to rage more than three weeks after the country was invaded by Russia, but the meeting in Baltimore is not expected to lead to any announcements of new sanctions against Moscow, the American officials said. That's "in part because many of the major sanctions issues reside with other departments in the US government," the second official said.

The discussions will, however, "be broadly based on the many ways in which we can pursue our shared interests vis a vis Russia, vis a vis China," they said.

The talks will focus on "how the UK and US can use trade intelligently in the modern global economy" while deepening trade links, Trevelyan said last week in announcing her trip, adding that Tai would visit Britain for another round of discussions "later this spring."

The two sides are not likely to discuss their disputes over steel and aluminum in Baltimore, as the topic falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Commerce, the US officials said, but noted progress has been made in resolving that disagreement. Britain and the United States in January announced efforts to put an end to the Trump-era steel and aluminum conflict. The United Kingdom became one of several countries upon which the US imposed an additional 25 percent tariff on steel and an additional 10 percent tariff on aluminum in 2018. — AFP

Rickshaws, motorbike and bike taxis banned in Bujumbura

BUJUMBURA: Burundi yesterday banned rickshaws, motorcycle taxis and bicycle cabs from almost all of its biggest city Bujumbura, accusing the popular low-cost transport providers of causing fatal traffic accidents.

The Ministry of Interior announced late Sunday that the "new perimeter prohibiting access to tricycles, motorcycles and bicycle cabs in the centre of the city of Bujumbura is well and truly in force from Monday, March 21".

Police were posted on roads leading into Bujumbura to enforce the ban, which confines two- and three-wheeler transport providers to the very margins of the city. Earlier the roughly 20,000 operators were permitted in all quarters of the city of 1.2 million except for the very centre.

Last month, Interior Minister Gervais Ndirakobuca accused these drivers of being responsible for the majority of road accidents last year.

Some 1,300 people were killed on the roads and nearly 2,000 injured in that time. The ban was supposed to take effect on March 11 but was postponed to give drivers more time to prepare. Two-wheel vehicles for private use were also banned from the same areas of the city.

More than 600,000 people are estimated to use two- and three-wheelers every day in Bujumbura, where affordable travel options are scarce.

Drivers are mostly young men from rural areas with little other employment prospects, and the ban is expected to hit hard.

"These types of transport are used by a lot of people every day, but the bicycles also supply the city with milk, vegetables and coal, and the rickshaws deliver products to markets and stalls," said one economist who requested anonymity.

The decision would "have catastrophic conse-

Earlier this year, Aoun slapped the central bank chief with a travel ban for alleged financial misconduct and ordered security forces to forcibly bring him in for questioning. The judge is overseeing several legal cases against the central bank governor, who has repeatedly failed to show up at hearings.

Salameh has consistently denied any wrongdoing. He has accused Aoun of "personal enmity", saying the prosecution is politically motivated and part of an "organized campaign to tarnish" his reputation.

Raja Salameh was arrested last Thursday on charges of "money laundering, embezzlement, illicit enrichment and smuggling large amounts of money" out of the country. Lebanon opened a local probe into Riad Salameh's wealth last year, after the Swiss attorney general's office requested assistance in an investigation into more than \$300 million which he allegedly embezzled out of the central bank with the help of his brother.

Salameh also faces lawsuits in other European countries, including France and Britain. Lebanon's top banker of three decades is blamed for policies that contributed to the country's financial collapse, a charge he has repeatedly denied. — AFP

Business

Egyptian currency sheds 13% against greenback

Pound crashes as Ukraine war hits food supply chains

CAIRO: The value of the Egyptian pound shed 13 percent against the US dollar yesterday, registering 17.80 pounds against the greenback after a recent rise in inflation. The local currency in the Arab world's most populous country saw a sharp devaluation in 2016 when it lost nearly half its value against the dollar overnight.

The pound was floated at the time as part of a package of reforms in exchange for a \$12 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund. The pound's value went from 15.70 to the dollar on Sunday to 17.80 at midday on Monday, according to rates listed on state-owned bank websites.

The latest depreciation comes as global food supply chains have been dealt a major blow by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As the world's largest importer of wheat, Egypt relies on both countries for 85 percent of its supplies of the staple, as well as 73 percent of its sunflower oil.

Recently, investment bank JP Morgan predicted that the Egyptian pound would weaken, estimating it to be overvalued by about 15 percent. Inflation in the North African country stood at 10 percent in

February, according to the country's statistics agency, reaching an almost three-year high and driven by a 20 percent increase in food prices. The World Bank has warned that a 30 percent increase in food prices could result in a 12 percent increase in poverty rates, already hovering at about a third of Egypt's 103 million-strong population. Rising prices have prompted the authorities to impose a tariff on unsubsidized bread for the first time.

The Central Bank of Egypt raised key interest rates by one percentage point during an emergency meeting, in a bid to tackle inflation, it said in a statement yesterday. The overnight deposit rate increased to 9.25 percent and the overnight lending rate to 10.25 percent, while the main operation rate was set at 9.75 percent. Egypt is bogged down by a sizeable foreign debt bill that constitutes almost 90 percent of its GDP.

The authorities have embarked on fiscal reforms and sought to overhaul the taxation regime, but have struggled to control the informal sector, which constitutes a large portion of the country's economy, according to experts. —AFP



CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 200 million for three months with a rate of return at 1.375 percent.

NBK-Bahrain reports net profits of BHD 117.68 million for 2021

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait-Bahrain (NBK Bahrain) reported net profits of BHD 117.68 million (KD 94.57 million) for the year 2021, compared to BHD 117.51 million (KD 94.68 million) for the year 2020.

As of end of 2021, NBK-Bahrain's total assets increased by 7 percent y-o-y to BHD 7.43 billion compared with BHD 6.91 billion in 2020. Total shareholders' equity increased by 19 percent y-o-y to BHD 972.97million, where as customers' deposits increased by 53 percent y-o-y to BHD 2.75 billion by end of December 2021.

Commenting on NBK Bahrain's year-end financial results, Isam Al-Sager, NBK Group Vice Chairman and CEO said, "National Bank of Kuwait-Bahrain realized good profits for 2021, despite the unprecedented challenging operating environment worldwide in decades, and their impact on the market, combined with the record low interest rates globally."

"The Group's international operations reinforce the Group's profits, which proves our resilient business model, and at the same time, the success of our regional expansion strategy in hedging against the risks and fluctuations, and its contribution to diversifying income sources," he added.

Al-Sager noted that year after year, NBK-Bahrain continues to consolidate its position in the Bahraini market, which is one of the key growth markets for NBK Group, given the promising growth opportunities and positive prospects of this market. Al-Sager stressed that NBK will continue expansion and reinforcing its competitiveness in the markets it operates in, to ensure regional leadership, as well as stronger future growth.

On his part, Ali Fardan, General Manager of NBK-Bahrain, said: "NBK-Bahrain's results for 2021, in view of the challenges facing the banking sector, are a testament to our diversified business model and quick adaptability to the challenges resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, without deviating from our strategic priorities for this year."

"The bank has taken upon itself to support its customers during the pandemic by deferring credit card installments and payments, in addition to working closely with the Central Bank of Bahrain to mitigate the pandemic's impact, as part of the bank's commitment to its national duties," he noted.

Fardan pointed out that the bank is moving steadily in strengthening its position in Bahrain by providing high-quality banking and financial services to its retail and corporate customers, noting that the bank has great potentials to achieve further growth in the Bahraini market in the future.

Fardan praised the Central Bank of Bahrain's efforts, in particular, and all government agencies, in general, for their continued support extended to NBK-Bahrain and the Bahraini banking sectors. He also highlighted that the great support extended



Isam Al-Sager

Ali Fardan

by NBK Group has contributed to strengthening the Bank's performance, through capitalizing on NBK's high credit ratings, broad relationship network, and leading reputation as one of the top banks in the Middle East, and one of the safest banks in the world.

NBK is the largest financial institution in Kuwait with effective market dominance in the commercial banking market and has been consistently awarded one of the highest credit ratings among all regional banks from Moody's, Standard & Poor's, and Fitch Ratings. NBK also stands out in terms of its local and international network, which includes branches, subsidiaries and representative offices in China, Geneva, London, Paris, New York, and Singapore alongside its regional presence in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Turkey, and the UAE.

ECB's Lagarde sees no signs of eurozone stagnation

FRANKFURT: The eurozone is not showing signs of economic stagnation despite the fallout from the war in Ukraine, European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde said yesterday.

The conflict has fuelled increases in already-high energy prices and threatened to worsen a global supply chain crunch, raising concerns that economies could face stagflation—a period of high inflation but weak growth. "We do not currently see elements of stagnation," Lagarde said at a conference at the Institut Montaigne think tank in Paris.

"Given the recovery that was underway, we do not see stagnation of the economy in 2022, neither in 2023 nor in 2024," she said. The global economy was recovering from the COVID pandemic before Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24. Earlier this month, the ECB cut its eurozone growth outlook as it expects the recovery to be slowed down by the war. It also raised its inflation outlook.

European states were urgently seeking policies to stem the energy inflation tide amid conflict in Ukraine which has sparked price hikes—notably of oil, which has soared past \$100 a barrel. As companies and consumers alike labor under the strain with food and energy prices soaring to multi-decade highs, governments are pondering what means they have at their disposal to react and lessen the pain.

The policy arsenal includes trimming energy taxes and prices, along with targeted state support with some economies across the continent suffering a heavier burden than others. The European Commission said at the start of this month it could extend a suspension on rules on budgetary rigor through to next year as several EU states urged a common response to the war's financial fallout, on the heels of that wrought by the pandemic.

Sweden, whose fuel taxes are the highest in Europe, yesterday announced a temporary tax cut of 1.30 krona per litre (\$0.13/12 euro cents) as part of a \$1.5 billion package of measures.

Belgium and the Netherlands have meanwhile elected to cut VAT on fuel-natural gas, electricity and heating—and also trim fuel taxes to cut pump prices. Belgian consumers will save around 10 euros on a full tank of 60 litres while an average Dutch family will see their energy outlay go down by some 140 euros across January-June.

In Belgium, the poorest households will be able to benefit from a "social tariff" on electricity and natural gas through to September.

The Polish government has extended a range of measures brought in before the Ukraine war erupted which were designed to act as an inflation "shield."

As Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki noted last weekend, "the fight against Putin brings costs" with it. Since February 1, VAT on gas had already been scrapped from its previous level of 23 percent.

Some five million families in Poland—which has welcomed in at least 1.8 million fleeing Ukrainians—are also to receive a package of aid to help them cope with rising food prices. —AFP

US stocks under pressure as oil prices climb

NEW YORK: Major US stock indices dipped early yesterday as oil prices continued to climb and US Treasury yields rose amid the Russian war on Ukraine.

Comments from Baltic states favoring an embargo on Russian oil and gas helped push crude prices further above \$100 a barrel, while Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov warned an oil embargo "is a decision that will hit everyone." Meanwhile, the yield on the 10-year US Treasury note advanced further above two percent as markets digest the Federal Reserve's decision last week to lift interest rates.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell was due to speak later at a conference of economists. Powell has signaled additional interest rate hikes this year to counter inflation.

About 20 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 0.2 percent at 34,674.10. The broad-based S&P 500 was flat at 4,463.11, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index dropped 0.5 percent to 13,826.71.

Boeing shares tumble after fatal China crash

WASHINGTON: Boeing shares dove early yesterday following the fatal crash of one of its jets in China, where the US aviation giant was poised to soon resume deliveries of the 737 MAX. The crash involved a Boeing 737-800 — a different model from the MAX — operated by China Eastern and carrying 123 passengers and nine crew members, according to Chinese aviation authorities.

Shares of Boeing fell 5.6 percent to \$182.06 in mid-morning trading, making it the biggest loser in the benchmark Dow Jones Industrial Average.

The disaster prompted an unusually swift public reaction from President Xi Jinping, who said he was "shocked" and ordered an immediate investigation into its cause.

Stocks are coming off a strong week, with the S&P 500 piling on more than six percent amid bargain hunting and positive trading momentum. Among individual companies, Boeing slumped six percent after a Boeing 737-800 operated by China Eastern crashed in China, killing 132 people. The catastrophe comes as the American plane maker was poised to resume deliveries of the 737 MAX, a different plane, following a lengthy grounding.

Meanwhile, Asian and European markets were mixed yesterday after last week's rally, while oil prices extended gains, with investors keeping tabs on the war in Ukraine as Turkey said Kyiv and Moscow were edging towards a ceasefire agreement. Confidence remains at a premium owing to the crisis in eastern Europe—which threatens to deal a hefty blow to the global economy—as well as central bank monetary tightening measures.

Traders struggled to maintain the buying enthusiasm seen last week that was fuelled by bargain-buying and China's pledge to support beaten-down markets and indication that a crackdown on the tech sector was nearing an end.

Hopes for an end to the war were given a boost Sunday when authorities in Turkey, where Russian and Ukrainian representatives have been negotiating,



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk past an electronic share price board showing the closing numbers on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo. —AFP

said the two sides were close to a deal to stop the fighting. Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said the sides were negotiating six points: Ukraine's neutrality, disarmament and security guarantees, the so-called "de-Nazification", removal of obstacles on the use of the Russian language in Ukraine, the status of the breakaway Donbas region and the status of Crimea annexed by Russia in 2014.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday urged direct talks with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin as the only way to end the war.

"Dialogue is the only way out," he said on CNN. "I think it's just the two of us, me and Putin, who can make an agreement on this." After a healthy performance on Wall Street on Friday, Asia struggled to maintain momentum. —AFP



RENTON: In this file, the Boeing logo is pictured at its Renton Factory, where the Boeing 737 MAX airliners are built in Renton —AFP

Calhoun said on a January 26 conference call with Wall Street analysts. "I feel confident only because of every tea leaf I've been able to watch here, and they're following through every commitment they've made," Calhoun said. —AFP

Business

KFH holds AGM, to distribute cash dividends of 12%, bonus shares of 10%

Bank's achievements highlight its role in maintaining sustainable development, using Islamic finance tools

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) held its annual general Assembly meeting (AGM) with a 75.898 percent quorum and approved the Board of Directors' recommendation of distributing cash dividends of 12 percent and bonus shares of 10 percent to shareholders.

Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq, Chairman of Kuwait Finance House (KFH) said, "On behalf of myself and members of the Board of Directors of Kuwait Finance House (KFH/ the Bank), I would like to present to you the 2021 KFH Group Annual Report."

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed several challenges and produced various economic complications during the past two years. Although the virus risks on global economy continued, KFH has managed to add to its long record of accomplishments other significant achievements which have contributed to the mitigation of the negative impacts of the pandemic in geographies where the bank operates worldwide.

KFH achievements have clearly highlighted the bank's pioneering role in maintaining sustainable development, using Islamic finance tools, which have globally recorded strong performances during the year. We had a proactive vision in encountering challenges and continuing our outstanding role in the development of society and meeting customers and shareholders aspirations, taking into consideration the latest global variables, such as climate change.

KFH Group efforts have driven Islamic banking industry to take the lead, with the Group achieving impressive indicators as one of the largest Islamic banks worldwide and a pioneer in the Islamic financial services industry. We have achieved, by the grace of Allah, significant growth in all basic financial indices and maintained remarkable ratios on assets and shareholders' equity. Also, we have succeeded in reducing costs and increasing profits. Our proactive plans have managed to improve asset quality indicators and troubled debts coverage ratios.

Net profit attributable to shareholders reached KD 243.4 million in 2021 ie, an increase by 64.0 percent compared to last year. Earnings per share reached 28.59 fils ie, an increase by 61.2 percent. Our efforts have succeeded in improving economic environment, enhancing projects, and meeting customers' aspirations. As such, the finance portfolio reached KD 11.4 billion ie, an increase by KD 608 million or 5.7 percent compared to 2020. KFH Group assets increased to reach KD 21.8 billion ie, an increase by KD 286 million or 1.3 percent as at the end of 2021. Our competitive and distinguished performance has attracted more customers and investors with customers' deposits increased reaching KD 15.9 billion in 2021 ie, an increase by KD 550 million or 3.6 percent, thus maintaining our customers' trust.

KFH has succeeded in enhancing the group's capital base as the capital adequacy ratio increased from 17.53 percent by end of 2020 to 18.69 percent by end of 2021.

KFH is continuing its role in leading the Islamic finance industry and offering innovative products and services that



KUWAIT: (From left) Chief Financial Officer Shadi Zahran, AbdulWahab Essa Al-Rushood, Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq, Dr Sayed Al-Tabtabai, and Deloitte representative during the AGM.

would play a significant role in achieving the economic vision and supporting growth and sustainability. We can improve economic environment while observing environmental, social and governance aspects and contributing to the global endeavor to achieve climate safety goals. To this end we have issued the Green Sukuk to finance social and environment-friendly projects. We are proud of having successfully led the arrangement of a sustainable Sukuk issuance, the first of its kind by an Islamic financial institution. Also, it is the first global sustainable Sukuk for Tier 2 capital in favor of KFH-Turkey amounting to \$350 million.

Digitalization

KFH is one of the leading banks to offer innovative digital banking solutions through the launch, for the first time in Kuwait, of several banking solutions. Our online digital services on mobile applications have gained great interest and trust from customers on account of their easiness, efficiency, and diversity. The number of online banking transactions executed by KFH customers through KFHonline or mobile application approximated 160 million in 2021 ie, a growth by 25 percent compared to last year.

Youth capabilities and Inherent Powers

As approximately 250 thousand youths (males and females) are expected to join the labor market in the next five years, it has become imperative for KFH to accommodate the potentials of this category. The Innovation and Communication Department at KFH is seeking to accomplish this mission and enhance KFH market share in this sector by implementing short and mid-term strategies and plans. The bank aims to establish a long-term plan and invest internal and external resources to make KFH the employer of choice for the youth.

Best Islamic financial institution worldwide

In appreciation of the remarkable contributions which the group has made to the Islamic finance industry in all

the markets where it operates, KFH has received various global awards e.g., "World's Best Islamic Financial Institution 2021" from Global Finance, "Best Domestic Bank in Kuwait 2021" from Asiamoney, and several other distinguished awards at the group level, thus reflecting the pioneering position which KFH enjoys locally or in international markets.

AbdulWahab Essa Al-Rushood , Acting Group Chief Executive Officer

Kuwait Finance House (KFH) is a customer-oriented Islamic financial institution as it always considered customer as a partner and one of the fundamental elements of KFH's success. KFH's 4-decade journey has not been easy; however, it was distinguished by outstanding performance, accomplishments and significant results considering the huge volume of well-planned and studied initiatives. It was inspiring to realize the contributions made to the Islamic finance industry and the new horizons it opened to diversify the innovative Islamic financial products and services. Also, KFH's journey was effective in terms of status, robustness and efficiency in encountering challenges and crises and witnessed several developments taking into account its compatibility with the latest financial technology and the unique digital banking solutions applied. KFH is a home for employees and a school for leaders. KFH's journey was and still is the center of global interest. KFH has maintained its leading position as a pioneer in Islamic and financial services industry operating through a regional and global banking network covering 7 regions worldwide, 526 branches, 1,600 ATMs and 15 thousand employees.

Financial indicators

In affirmation of its pioneering position, KFH has exhibited several positives in its financial indicators. KFH enjoys high liquidity ratios and a solid capital base. These factors support KFH's regulatory compliance on one hand while on the other they support business growth, diversify

sources of finance, increase the bank's finance and investment abilities, and enhance expansion in infrastructure projects and various economic sectors in Kuwait and the regions where the group operates e.g., Turkey, Bahrain, Germany, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia.

KFH has achieved remarkable financial results for the year 2021 despite the local and global challenges encountered. Net profit distributable to shareholders for the year 2021 reached KD 243.4 million ie., an increase by 64.0 percent compared to last year.

Total assets reached KD 21.8 billion ie, an increase by KD 286 million or 1.3 percent compared to last year 2020. Depositors accounts reached KD 15.9 billion ie, an increase by KD 550 million or 3.6 percent compared to 2020. Capital adequacy ratio reached 18.69 percent, thus exceeding the ratio imposed by regulatory authorities. This ratio affirms the strength of KFH's financial position.

Non-Performing Financing (NPF) improved as the Group's NPF ratio reached 1.6 percent by the end of 2021 (according to CBK calculation basis) which is a favorable ratio given the economic conditions brought about by the pandemic. The debts coverage ratio from provisions only is remarkable as it reached 319 percent for KFH Kuwait and 326 percent for the group by the end of 2021.

We continue our endeavor to improve asset quality, develop credit policies and governance systems according to best practices. We are keen on increasing investment in green Sukuk in the financing portfolio, namely projects related to carbon emissions, so that we could participate effectively in building a new Kuwait while we play a vital role in driving the wheel of growth for the benefit of present and future generations.

Strategy

KFH has a fully comprehensive and clear strategy focusing on big data management. Open and neutral partnership models of our operations aim to increase flexibility, quality, transparency, and efficiency which our customers seek, as per a clear strategy. Also, it enables us to develop and enhance group products, improve customer service to be the leading bank in Islamic banking industry, expand our creditworthiness, lead growth across main geographies, business sectors and customers. We aim to increase our presence and impact in the banking industry by inter-connecting and bonding the group banks. We continue to strengthen our presence in main international markets as we have long term investments in the Middle East and other regions worldwide. We manage banks in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Our investments in Asia "KFH Malaysia" have expanded, while our branch in Germany is remarkably growing fast.

KFH Capital

In 2021, KFH Capital, the investment arm of the group, led the successful arrangement of sovereign and corporate Sukuk issuance deals exceeding \$15 billion in favor of a diversified customers in various sectors and geographies.



VERS-CHEZ-LES-BLANC, Switzerland: In this file photo, the logo of the world's leading food industry group Nestlé is pictured at the group's Research Center in Vers-chez-les-Blanc above Lausanne. — AFP

Shareholder group urges Nestlé to halt all Russia business

GENEVA: Nestlé must halt all its activities in Russia, the Actares shareholder organisation said yesterday, ramping up the pressure after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky singled out the Swiss food giant. Nestlé has suspended all its imports and exports to Russia, including Nespresso coffee pods and S Pellegrino bottled water, but has maintained deliveries of vital products such as baby food.

In a speech live-streamed to a rally outside the Swiss federal parliament in Bern on Saturday, Zelensky urged Swiss companies to cease doing business in Russia, picking out Nestlé, and condemned firms that carried on regardless despite the siege of Mariupol.

"Actares-shareholding for a more responsible

economy-urges Nestlé to consider President Zelensky's call in the Federal Square to stop doing business with Russia!", the group, one of Switzerland's top shareholders' associations, said in a statement.

Nestlé insisted Sunday that it was not making any profits in Russia, winding down many of the firm's activities in the country following the Kremlin-ordered invasion of neighboring Ukraine on February 24. "We have stopped all our investments there and have ceased all our advertising activities," a spokeswoman told AFP.

"We do not make any profit from our remaining operations in Russia. We are doing everything possible in Ukraine and neighboring countries to help alleviate this humanitarian catastrophe." Several US multinationals have withdrawn from Russia, like the fast food chain McDonald's and the beverage giants Coca-Cola and Pepsi.

Nestlé has been the subject of a call for a boycott circulating on social media networks. Yesterday, Zelensky called on European leaders to cease all trade with Russia in an effort to pressure Moscow to halt its nearly month-long military assault on Ukraine. — AFP

Pakistan, foreign mining firm to revive megaproject

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has reached an out-of-court deal with a foreign firm that has agreed to waive \$11 billion in penalties and revive a mining project stalled since 2011, officials said Sunday.

The consortium Tethyan Copper company-of which Canadian gold firm Barrick and Chile's Antofagasta

Minerals control 37.5 percent each-had found vast gold and copper deposits at Reko Diq in Pakistan's Balochistan province. The hugely lucrative open-pit mine project came to a standstill in 2011 after the local government refused to renew Tethyan Copper's lease, and in 2013 Pakistan's top court declared it invalid.

In 2019, the World Bank's arbitration tribunal committee imposed a 5.8 billion penalty on Pakistan for unlawful denial of mining. After a decade-long legal battle, Pakistani officials announced the out-of-court settlement with Barrick Gold on Sunday.

"The agreement has nullified the award of around \$11 billion on us and secondly Barrick and its partners will invest \$10 billion," Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin said during a press conference.

China property giant Evergrande suspends share trading again

BEIJING: Troubled Chinese property developer giant Evergrande and all its units suspended trading in Hong Kong yesterday morning, according to a notice to the stock exchange.

China's property firms have struggled in the wake of Beijing's drive to curb excessive debt in the real estate sector, as well as rampant consumer speculation. Among those embroiled in the crisis is Evergrande, one of the country's largest developers, which has been involved in restructuring negotiations after racking up \$300 billion in liabilities.

Yesterday, the company announced that trading will be "halted" without giving a reason. "Accordingly, all structured products relating to the company will also be halted from trading at the same time," said a notice to the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. Shares of Evergrande Property Services Group and China

Evergrande New Energy Vehicle Group were suspended. The suspension-the second this year-comes ahead of an expected \$2 billion repayment obligation on Wednesday, and another next month of \$1.4 billion. The embattled developer was labelled as being in default by international ratings firms in December after it failed to repay liabilities on time. Earlier, struggles to pay suppliers and contractors due to the debt crisis led to sustained protests from homebuyers and investors at the group's Shenzhen headquarters in September.

The company has repeatedly said it will finish its projects and deliver them to buyers in a desperate bid to salvage its debts. But in January it was ordered by authorities to tear down 39 buildings on Hainan island because the structures were built illegally on an artificial archipelago in the tourist hub.

The firm has tried to sell assets, with chairman Hui Ka Yan paying off some of the debts using his own personal wealth. Evergrande's woes have had knock-on effects throughout China's property sector with some smaller firms also defaulting on loans and others struggling to find enough cash. The International Monetary Fund warned in late January that the property funding crisis could have spillover effects on the broader economy and global markets. — AFP



SHANGHAI: In this file photo taken on October 09, 2021 a sign of the Evergrande Center is seen at the Evergrande Center building in Shanghai. — AFP

"It will benefit Pakistan and Balochistan for the next 100 years," he added.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said the project "will potentially be the largest gold & copper mine in the world". "It will liberate us from crippling debt & usher in a new era of development & prosperity," he said in a statement.

Balochistan-which borders Iran and Afghanistan-is Pakistan's poorest province, despite its abundance of natural resources. Mining in Balochistan is dominated by small companies focused primarily on marble and granite, experts have said, which waste up to 80 percent of potential yield because of poor extraction techniques.

The country is fighting several low-level insurgen-

cies in the province, waged by Islamist, separatist and sectarian groups. In recent weeks separatists have stepped up attacks with a series of bold raids on state security bases.

Legal expert Osama Malik told AFP that Pakistan's settlement was the only solution and best deal for the provincial Balochistan government.

"There were no further appeals available for the Pakistani side. The country also didn't have the resources to pay the exorbitant damages, one of the highest ever granted by the World Bank's arbitration forum," he said. After reconstitution of the project, Barrick will own 50 percent, the Pakistan federal government enterprises 25 percent, and the Balochistan government 25 percent. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Return Home CEO Micah Truman is pictured leaving following a tour of the Return Home funeral home which specializes in human composting in Auburn, Washington on March 14, 2022. — AFP photos



Truman shows a demonstration "vessel" for the deceased, that has been decorated with flowers, family photos and sports team logos by Return Home.



Truman holds up a t-shirt with a light-hearted slogan reading "I'd rather be compost".



Armstrong is pictured with a bag containing the composted remains of her son Andrew Armstrong at her home in Covington, Washington.

Body composting takes root in US 'green' burial trend

A woodpecker settled on a branch overhead as Cindy Armstrong stood near a grouping of trees, gazing at a patch of soil that contained bits of her son's composted remains. Armstrong is one of a growing number of Americans embracing environmentally low-impact burials for their loved ones. Armstrong recalled that her son Andrew insisted on the so-called "terramation" process after the western state of Washington became the first in the United States to make the practice a legal alternative to cremation in 2019.

"I was mortified," she told AFP. "Now that I've gone through the process, I'm all for this. I will be terramated." The composted remains of Andrew, who died from cancer last year at age 36, have joined remains of dozens of others on a hillside in the town of Kent, in the Seattle area, set aside as their resting place.

Thousands of Americans choose "green" burial - which eschews chemical embalming as well as materials like concrete or metal which come with climate-harming carbon footprints - each year. "He wanted to give back to nature," Armstrong said on a recent March morning, with trees and plants taking root in the

verdant, wet hillside. The land is owned by Return Home, a startup that has performed 40 terramations since launching in the neighboring city of Auburn seven months ago.

'Dying better'

"It's like these people are teaching us to die better," Return Home founder and chief Micah Truman said as he showed AFP a warehouse-sized room with racks of metal containers referred to as "vessels", which hold remains during the 60-day, sealed decomposition process. The space was brightly lit and upbeat music played. Loved ones who visit during those 60 days can pick songs celebrating the lives of those they have lost.

Bodies in vessels are not embalmed, and family members are invited to add flowers or compostable mementos to the straw and other natural ingredients used in the process. The amount of organic material added to the vessels to help in the composting process is about triple the body weight of the human remains inside, resulting in hundreds of pounds of compost being produced. No enzymes are added, the company said. Sensors tracking moisture, tempera-

ture and air flow synched with a computer to optimize conditions for decomposition. Halfway through the process, bones are removed and ground into fine pieces before being put back in the vessel to finish composting. The result looks and feels like ordinary mulch. Families can take as much or as little as they want, with the rest spread at "The Woodland" in Kent. Local zoning rules restrict the land - which was once strewn with ruined cars, some scarred by bullets - from ever



Cindy Armstrong is pictured during a scheduled visit of "The Woodland" where loved ones can spread composted remains in Kent, Washington on March 14, 2022.

being built on.

Green burial

Body composting is part of an eco-friendly funeral trend gaining momentum around the world, according to Green Burial Council president Edward Bixby. "Basically, it's going back to the earth as we came; dust to dust," said Bixby, who opened his first Destination Destiny natural burial cemetery five years ago in New Jersey and has expanded to ten US

states. The council has more than 400 members, some outside the United States, according to Bixby. A single cremation, according to the Green Burial Council, burns about as much fuel as a full tank of a large sport utility vehicle.

Return Home body composting is priced at \$5,000, on par with cremation. Traditional funerals can cost double or triple that. Other green burial options include simply wrapping a body in a biodegradable shroud or putting it in a wooden box and burying it. Silicon Valley-based Coeio sells an Infinity Burial Suit that contains mushroom mycelium in a recipe intended to "neutralize toxins found in the body and transfer nutrients to plant life."

Green burials come with a natural approach to death itself. Loved ones can be involved with preparing bodies for burial, seeing the departed as being a part of life that continues on. "Horror movies and things like that have made people afraid of death and dying," Bixby said. "We have always had the ability to care for our loved ones in death, we just lost touch with it." — AFP



A view of the Mali National Park, designed by Kere, in Bamako, on March 16, 2022.



A view of the reproduction of the Djene Mosque at the National Museum of Mali, designed by architect Kere, in Bamako.

'The Wire' team back in Baltimore for corrupt-cop tale

Two decades after cult favorite "The Wire" hit the screens, its creators are back on the mean streets of Baltimore for a new mini-series, "We Own This City". Unveiled at TV festival, Series Mania, in France this weekend and due to launch in the US on HBO Max on April 25, the show reunites writers David Simon and George Pelecanos for a true-life story about a massive corruption case in the heart of the city's notorious police department.

When police killed young African-American Freddie Gray during an arrest in 2015, it triggered riots in the city and forced the department to introduce reforms and clean up its act. In the process it emerged that a group of eight cops had for years engaged in racketeering and abuse with impunity, extorting money and drugs from dealers. "Baltimore had issues with police brutality and police misconduct for a long time, but the scope of this corruption scandal - I don't think people saw it coming," James Fenton, an investigative journalist who wrote the book on which the new series is based, told AFP at the festival.

Fenton works at the Baltimore Sun, the newspaper which Simon once called home before turning to TV for shows, including "The Deuce", "Generation Kill" and the critical sensation that was "The Wire". "David Simon reached out to me during the trial, saying 'You should write a book... if you do, we can make a show based on it,'" said Fenton. "In some respects, things were dramatized, but some scenes I watched being filmed and it was word-for-word the same, which was incredible," he said.

'Free rein'

The corrupt unit of plain-clothes police tended to target poor, predominantly black neighborhoods, often fabricating evidence to raise their standing in the department. "They felt so secure. They had free rein," said Fenton. This was not straight-forward racism, however: Five of the eight officers involved were black, although the ringleader Wayne Jenkins, who had previously had a glittering reputation, was white. They got away with it for years because victims were reluctant to complain or ignored, Fenton added.

US actor Jamie Hector, who also appeared in "The Wire", plays an officer who disappeared a day before he was due to give evidence in the case. "It felt like coming home, with David, George, the old team. It was always creative, entertaining and still challenging," Hector said at a press conference at the festival. He said he had decided not to meet the officer's family. — AFP

Burkina's 'Opera Village' by its groundbreaking architect

With its imposing, angular proportions made out of clay, laterite and other local building materials, the Opera Village cultural and educational project, designed by Burkina Faso-born architect Francis Kere, blends into the landscape. It overlooks Laongo, a rural community not far from Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou, and is the sort of groundbreaking design that helped Kere scoop architecture's most prestigious award, the Pritzker Prize, this week.

In so doing, the 56 year-old, who holds dual Burkina and German nationality, became the first African to win the honor in its more than 40-year history. Built on 20 hectares of a granite plateau, the Opera Village is shaped like a spiral, with 26 buildings housing workshops, a health center, guest houses and a school. Eventually, at its center will be a performance venue and covered exhibition area with 700 seats. Built in the early 2010s with the aim of combining art, education and ecology, the project was the brain-

child of late German theatre director and filmmaker Christoph Schlingensiefel.

'The simplest material'

Kere was hailed by the Pritzker's sponsors on Tuesday for designs that are "sustainable to the earth and its inhabitants - in lands of extreme scarcity". His Opera Village used local construction materials, such as clay, laterite, granite and wood to allow it to withstand the extreme heat of the region, the site's administrator Motandi Ouoba said. "These are local materials that the architect found on site: Blocks of compressed earth, bricks taken from the site, paving stones made from granite," he said.

Kere "starts with the simplest material, which we commonly share... which our parents used, and he makes something noble out of it," he added. "It's the earth, it's all that's around us, when he brings them together, he brings to life something that is magnificent." It also blends well with local vegetation, contributing to a sense of harmony.



An aerial view of the Village-Opera school, designed by Architect Diebedo Francis Kere, in Laongo, on March 16, 2022. — AFP photos

'Bioclimatic buildings'

The immense roofs overhang the walls and ventilation keeps the temperature in the rooms down, even when it's more than 40 degrees Celsius outside. Kere ensured that "our buildings are bioclimatic, with a double ceiling and openings to dissipate hot air," Ouoba said. The health center's consultation and treatment rooms have dozens of long windows that slide upwards. "With so many openings, patients feel less isolated by hospitalization. They have a view of the landscape," doctor Issa Ouédraogo said.

The stylish classrooms filled with daylight are a far cry from the makeshift decor of many of the schools in Burkina Faso, a country battling a jihadist insurgency since 2015 that swept in from neighboring Mali. "The architecture of the buildings changes everything. We are in perfect classrooms because it is very hot here and not everyone can afford fans or air conditioning," said headmaster Abdoulaye Ouédraogo, who is also an actor and playwright. Six

classrooms can accommodate 181 pupils - and there's a separate space for music, dance, theatre, plastic arts, photography and audiovisual lessons.

'Durable and functional'

Opera Village also serves as a creative residency site for artists, according to Ouoba. "It reminds us that we can get something beautiful, durable and functional from local materials," he said. With its unique architecture, the center attracts around 2,500 visitors every year.

Ouoba hopes that international recognition of Francis Kere will help maintain the curiosity of visitors. "This very prestigious prize is the pride of everyone, especially in these times when Burkinabe news is dominated by terrorist attacks. "We are happy for Mr Kere but also for us who are among the first beneficiaries of his work," he said, in congratulating the architect. — AFP



Schoolchildren attend a lesson in a classroom at the Village-Opera school.

Lifestyle | Features



Flower vendor Shravan Bhor poses for a picture in front of a mural depicting him.



Traffic police inspector Anil Patil poses for a picture in front of a mural painted on a pillar of a flyover depicting him by artists from the Aravani Art Project.

Outcasts turn artists in India



In this photo taken on Feb 19, 2022, artist Ayesha Koli paints a mural on a pillar of a flyover in Mumbai. — AFP photos

On a giant flyover in the sprawling Indian metropolis of Mumbai, a transgender art collective is trying to change attitudes as radically as it transforms the concrete pillars into brightly colored murals. Known as "hijras", individuals identified as male at birth but now part of India's "third gender", have an ambivalent position on the edges of Indian society, respected and feared in turn.

Denied jobs at most workplaces, many are forced to beg at traffic intersections, where they are a common sight in major cities, or on trains. Some turn up at family events such as weddings or birth celebrations, or at new houses, to offer blessings in return for money, sometimes threatening to issue curses if denied.

The Aravani Art Project hopes to challenge the stigma and marginalization by

showing them as artists in the same public spaces where they beg or face abuse. At the latest mural site - one of Mumbai's busiest junctions - the team painted portraits of local residents, among them two cleaners, a vegetable seller and a policeman.

"It's an opportunity for us to show what talent we have," said artist Deepa Kachare. "We have to beg from people by going to marriage functions, babies' births, shops, trains," she said. "We go everywhere to beg but we love to work hard and earn money." The organization - whose projects are commissioned by governments, businesses and NGOs - has brought together dozens of mostly transgender women for street art projects in multiple Indian cities. "People are very happy to see us working as artists," said

Kachare, 26. "Now they think positively when they see us."

"What's exciting for me is to tell them that they are capable of doing anything," said woman artist and Aravani co-founder Sadhna Prasad, 29. "And gender is really something that should be discussed much, much later and what they do and what they want to do in life comes first."

Another transgender woman member of the group, Ayesha Koli, 25 - who still begs on the streets - said her pigment-spattered kurta had become a marker of a different kind. "These days when we wear our 'painting clothes' and go, they ask with curiosity if we paint," she said. "We feel immensely proud in saying 'Yes, we are artists and we paint.'" — AFP

How Spanish cinema hit the big time

With a Golden Bear for Spanish director Carla Simon and four compatriots nominated for Oscars, including superstars Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz, Spanish cinema has now begun to captivate a global audience. When Bardem and Cruz, who have been married for over a decade, were both tapped for Oscars, the 53-year-old actor could hardly contain his excitement. "The fact that (Penelope's) nomination was for a role in Spanish... seems really extraordinary, even historic in terms of the Spanish brand," he said in February.

Unlike other countries with a long and distinguished history of cinema, Spain has struggled to establish itself on the international stage. So far, Luis Bunuel has been the only Spanish director to win the coveted Palme D'Or at Cannes

Film Festival for his provocative 1961 feature "Viridiana". But all that is changing, with Spanish cinema increasingly recognized for its contribution to the silver screen, the most recent being Carla Simon's triumph at this year's Berlinale where she took the top prize for "Alcarras" (2022), a Catalan drama about peach farmers.

And according to Variety magazine, Cruz is rumored to be in the running for president of the jury at Cannes, an honor already bestowed upon the legendary Pedro Almodovar, by far Spain's best-known filmmaker. Cruz herself is the only Spanish actress ever to win an Oscar, taking home the gong in 2009 for best supporting actress in the Woody Allen comedy "Vicky Cristina Barcelona". And if she wins best actress at the Oscars later this month for Almodovar's "Parallel Mothers", it will be a coup for a film entirely "Made in Spain", whose soundtrack has also been nominated for best original score.

Years of work by film schools

The score was written by Basque composer Alberto Iglesias, who has worked with Almodovar for two decades on 13 of his films. This is the fourth time an Iglesias soundtrack has been nominated for an Oscar. For him, there is "strong momentum" within Spanish cine-



Carla Simon

ma. "There is an energy... it has to do with the film schools that have been working for a long time to create new filmmakers," he told AFP.

"It has been really difficult for Spanish cinema to cross the threshold and get into these big international festivals," explains Pilar Martinez-Vasseur, director of the Spanish Film Festival in the French city of Nantes. Spanish films which have received acclaim abroad are often not identified as such, she said, pointing to the 2001 psychological thriller "The Others" starring Nicole Kidman which was directed by Spain's Alejandro Amenabar.

"In Spain, we still have the idea that Spanish cinema is bad, that it's a nest of communists, that filmmakers are pampered, they do nothing and get subsidies," she said, calling for greater support from the government. Filmmaking in Spain receives far less state aid than in France, experts say. Spanish cinema has had to "learn how to break into a globalised ecosystem," said Beatriz Navas who heads the Institute of Cinematography and Audiovisual Arts (ICAA), which is subsidised by the culture ministry.

"This hasn't happened overnight because you need some sort of 'greenhouse' environment where filmmakers can work with freedom," she told AFP. "And the 'incubation time' needs to be sufficient for these productions to achieve the recognition and prestige they deserve."

'Spanish cinema's best moment'

As well as Cruz, Bardem and Iglesias, Spain also has a fourth horse in the Oscar race in the shape of Alberto Mielgo's "The Windshield Wiper" which has been nominated for best animated short film. "This is the best moment for Spanish cinema," said Jose Luis Rebordinos, director of the prestigious San Sebastian film festival. "We are making a lot of cinema and audiovisual productions in Spain, as well as for streaming platforms which is bringing a lot of work so Spanish film technicians are getting better and better," he said.

Spain's Western-friendly landscapes have drawn Hollywood directors since the 1960s and is becoming an increasingly popular destination for filming series - Netflix, which set up its first European studios in Madrid in 2019, scored huge hits with "Money Heist" and "Elite". Last year, the government said it wanted Spain to become Europe's "audiovisual hub", pledging to inject 1.6 billion euros to expand the film and TV production sector by 30 percent by 2025.

"International critics are increasingly focusing on our cinematic output thanks to figures like Almodovar, Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz," said Rebordinos. "They are finding ways to draw more attention to Spanish cinema." — AFP

'Batman' swings high, again topping North America box office

"The Batman" continued swinging from the rooftops this weekend, taking in an estimated box-office-leading \$36.8 million in North American theaters while performing strongly overseas, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. The dark and gritty superhero film from Warner Bros., starring Robert Pattinson in the title role, has passed the \$300 million mark domestically in just three weeks, while nearly doubling that figure overseas, with \$598 million.

In second place for the Friday-through-Sunday period was another dark film, the fantasy animation "Jujutsu Kaisen 0" from Crunchyroll/Funimation (95 percent owned by Sony Pictures). It tells the story of a young student who becomes a sorcerer and battles a cursed spirit. Already hugely popular in Japan, it took in \$17.7 million in North American theaters, which David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research called "a terrific opening" for a rare anime in wide release.

The third spot went to Sony's "Uncharted," at \$8 million. Tom Holland plays an Indiana Jones-style treasure hunter. In fourth was another new release, a slasher film from indie studio A24 simply titled "X," at \$4.4 million. While that total was relatively modest, Gross said, "Horror is not expensive to make" and "X," which has enjoyed good reviews, "should recover its costs and make a few dollars."

And in fifth place was Metro Goldwyn Mayer's road-trip comedy "Dog," at \$4.1 million. It stars Channing Tatum. Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Spider-Man: No Way Home" (\$3.2 million)
- "Death on the Nile" (\$1.7 million)
- "The Outfit" (\$1.5 million)
- "The Kashmir Files" (\$1.5 million)
- "Sing 2" (\$1.5 million) — AFP



Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz

Sports

Monaco overpower PSG 3-0; Mbappe frustrated

Marseille beat rivals Nice; Rennes hammer Metz 6-1

MONACO: Paris Saint-Germain were beaten 3-0 at Monaco on Sunday after a Wissam Ben Yedder double strike, as Neymar and Kylian Mbappe were both booked in a feisty Ligue 1 encounter. PSG remain 12 points clear of second-placed Marseille at the top after the fourth league defeat of the season for Mauricio Pochettino's men, who have been shaken since being dumped out of the Champions League by Real Madrid.

Monaco captain Ben Yedder is now Ligue 1's top scorer with 17 goals after his 25th-minute tap-in from a rebound, and an 84th-minute penalty. Ben Yedder also helped in the build-up for German striker Kevin Volland's goal for Monaco, making it 2-0 on 68 minutes in what was the real turning point of the game as PSG began to chase. Mbappe and Neymar started for PSG and had a string of opportunities as the visitors enjoyed the lion's share of possession, but Lionel Messi was absent with the flu.

Mbappe said the bitterness of the Champions League defeat earlier this month was still felt at the club. "We could win 8-0 and nobody would care, they'd just be thinking about the Champions League," he said. "We need to remain professional, think of our families," said Mbappe, who was full of praise for his old club. "They are a great team, who were playing in European competition," said the 23-year-old. PSG captain Marquinhos described the defeat as a wake-up call.

"If we carry on like that the title will be in danger. We have been warned," he said. "We came here to win and have fun, but that was a catastrophe." PSG coach Pochettino said it was time his players picked themselves up. "On a sporting level, that was shameful. We have to get over the disappointment of being eliminated from the Champions League," the Argentine said. Monaco's Belgian coach Philippe Clement can also thank his goalkeeper Alexander

Nuebel, who made important saves from Mbappe, Neymar and Achraf Hakimi.

Marseille down Nice

Marseille defeated Champions League-chasing rivals Nice 2-1 at the Velodrome to reclaim second from Rennes, who hammered Metz 6-1 earlier in the day. Arkadiusz Milik converted a penalty in first-half stoppage time and substitute Cedric Bakambu added a second on 89 minutes, with Mario Lemina grabbing a consolation goal for Nice. "It feels good. We had revenge on our minds knowing that they knocked us out of the French Cup," said Marseille defender William Saliba. Jorge Sampaoli's team recovered quickly from Thursday's trip to Basel, where Marseille won 2-1 in the second leg of their Europa Conference League last-16 tie to advance 4-2 on aggregate.

"There was a bit of fatigue but we're the kind of team that needs to learn to play flat out every two

days," added Saliba. "We scared ourselves a bit at the end, but the win is what we'll take away. A very good victory against a direct rival." Serhou Guirassy bagged a hat-trick for Rennes as Bruno Genesio's side recorded a fifth straight league win, bouncing back from Thursday's Europa Conference League exit at the hands of Leicester.

Martin Terrier struck the first two goals at Roazhon Park, while Hamari Traore was also on target as Rennes moved above Nice into third. Strasbourg's Champions League push stalled again after a fourth draw in five outings following a goalless stalemate at Lorient, while Angers beat Brest 1-0 to end a seven-match losing run. Bottom club Bordeaux lost 2-0 at home to nine-man Montpellier. Elye Wahi and Florent Mollet scored for the visitors who then had Nicolas Cozza and Mihailo Ristic sent off late in the first half, with Alberth Elis missing a penalty for Bordeaux. —AFP

Swiatek beats Sakkari for Indian Wells title

INDIAN WELLS: Former French Open champion Iga Swiatek beat Maria Sakkari 6-4, 6-1 on Sunday to win the WTA Indian Wells title and move to a career-high ranking of number two in the world. Swiatek's fifth career title was her second in as many tournaments after her triumph in Doha last month, and pushed her WTA match win-streak to 11. It also ensured the 20-year-old from Poland, who shot to prominence with her victory at Roland Garros in 2020, will climb two spots to supplant Barbora Krejickova at number two in the rankings behind Australian Ashleigh Barty on Monday.

"I'm really overwhelmed and honestly my mind is blown," Swiatek said, explaining that coming into the tournament she didn't think it was "realistic" to think she could maintain the level that saw her win Doha for a second straight tournament. "I wouldn't think of myself as someone who's ready to play two tournaments in a row and win it," she said. However, now that she's followed Agnieszka Radwanska as the only Polish players to reach number two in the world, she's aiming even higher. "I feel like getting the number one is closer and closer," she said.

Greece's Sakkari, who came into the tournament ranked sixth in the world and also had a chance to get to number two with a victory, will rise to a career-high third. Both players struggled to find a rhythm on another breezy day in the California desert, where their first set featured six breaks of serve in what Swiatek called "crazy" conditions. "For sure you could see that we are, at the beginning, a little bit stressed, and the wind is also not helping," Swiatek said.

"But I'm pretty glad that I played better and better every game, and I managed to somehow find little bit of balance even in these conditions. "It was pretty hard to actually play the tactics that I wanted because of the conditions. But I wanted just to stay consistent and really solid because that's the most important thing when the ball is going, you know, in weird directions." Trailing 5-4 in the first, Sakkari led 40-30 but sent two backhands into the net to give Swiatek a set point, which the Greek saved with a forehand winner.

Sakkari came up with a service winner to save another set point, then double faulted to give Swiatek a third chance, the Pole taking the set when Sakkari stroked a backhand into the net. With a set in hand, Swiatek dominated in the second. Although she couldn't convert two break points in the second game as Sakkari made it 1-1, Swiatek roared through the next six games to close it out in 80 minutes and remain unbeaten in five career WTA finals.

Sakkari's step forward

Sakkari fell to 1-4 in finals, her only title coming in Rabat in 2019. But she said she leaves the tournament with increased confidence. "I really believe I took a step forward this week, even though I lost today," she said. "I'm disappointed. I'm not going to hide that. I'm very disappointed I did not win today. But there are a lot of positive things that I'll take with me." That includes joining Stefanos Tsitsipas as the only Greek players to be ranked third in world. "When I think about it, I can't believe there's only two girls above me right now," she said. "I'm very proud that myself and Stefanos have actually grown tennis in Greece. Having two players in that ranking position is something huge for us." —AFP

Pakistan stun West Indies to end World Cup drought

HAMILTON: Pakistan ended an 18-match losing streak at Women's Cricket World Cups with an eight-wicket win over the West Indies in Hamilton yesterday, blowing open the race for the semi-finals. In a rain-shortened match with innings of 20 overs, Pakistan bowled superbly to contain the West

Indies' potent batting line-up to 89-7 then overhauled the modest target with seven balls to spare.

It was their first win at the World Cup since the 2009 tournament in Australia, where they also beat the West Indies. "This was desperately needed, we all wanted that win," said spinner Nida Dar, who took a career-best 4-10. "This one goes to all the Pakistani fans who are watching and supporting us."

Pakistan remain out of the semi-finals reckoning with one win in five matches but the shock result will boost the West Indies' rivals in a tight race for the final four. The West Indies can still make the semi-finals but need to beat South Africa and have results involving India and England go their way.

"It's a do-or-die situation now and we have to come out banging," West Indies captain Stafanie Taylor said of her team's match against South Africa on Thursday.

Taylor admitted the total against Pakistan was sub-par, crediting Pakistan's spinners with choking her side's big hitters. "We knew that we had to rotate strike to go big but we couldn't get going," she said. Pakistan won the toss and opted to bowl first after a deluge saw the start delayed by five hours. Pakistan limited the West Indies to 23-1 in the first five overs, then 38-2 at the halfway mark. Dar ended her spell with a flourish, taking two wickets off successive balls to finish the 16th over. —AFP

GAZOO Racing celebrates victory in Rally Sweden

KUWAIT: The GAZOO Racing (GR) World Rally Team (WRT) recently celebrated the first win this season for its new GR YARIS Rally1 vehicle when Kalle Rovanperä secured victory at Rally Sweden in round two of the 2022 FIA World Rally Championship. Rovanperä's fellow Finnish driver Esapekka Lappi claimed third place to complete a double podium finish during his first start for the team since 2018.

All three of the team's drivers were part of a close fight for victory for most of the rally on the unfamiliar, high-speed, snow-covered roads around the event's new base in Umea. As the highest-placed driver in the championship, Rovanperä was disadvantaged by having to run first on the road in the No. 69 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1, however, he concluded the second day leading team-mate Elfyn Evans by 8.3 seconds.

Rovanperä won the first of the final day's four stages to add to his lead and finished 22seconds clear as he and co-driver Jonne Halttunen secured the third win of their WRC career in the No. 69 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1. The win places Rovanperä 14 points clear at the top of the Drivers' Championship. Lappi was in a close fight for second position throughout the last day, and ultimately finished just 8.6 seconds behind in the No. 4 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1 as he and co-driver Janne Fern completed a fantastic comeback weekend with the team. The result saw Toyota take the lead in the Manufacturers' Championship with a 24-point advantage.

Akio Toyoda, President and CEO of Toyota Motor Corporation, commented: "Kalle, Jonne, congratulations on your victory! Also, I would like to thank them for bringing the first WRC victory to the GR YARIS Rally1. The team started working immediately after Monte Carlo, testing on snow to prepare for this rally. We were able to gain precious data on how to improve the hybrid-electric system in the harsh cold environment.

I hope we use this experience effectively not only to win next year, but also to provide data to



suppliers so that we can continue competing in motorsport while working towards carbon neutrality. For the fans, I appreciate your continued support throughout the season until the last round, Rally Japan."

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nurburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established GR, which will consolidate all of its motorsport's activities under

one in-house brand.

Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars,' GR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, GR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone. Round three of the 2022 FIA World Rally Championship is the Croatia Rally, which will take place from 21 - 24 April on the asphalt roads around the capital city Zagreb.

Shooting Grand Prix kicks off in Kuwait



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Annual International Grand Prix was officially opened on Sunday at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex by His Highness the Amir's representative, Farwaniya governor, Sheikh

Mishal Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Competitions for Trap event will take place today for men and women. Kuwait has more than 60 shooters of both genders competing with world shooters to win this tournament's coveted cap. Farwaniya governor said he was honored to represent HH the Amir.

Khalaf Al-Otaibi said Kuwait's shooting had



made outstanding achievements lately - the most recent was winning the team gold medal in the World Cup in Cyprus, as well as the individual bronze medal at the same tournament. He said KSSC is preparing for the Paris 2024 Olympics to get the most possible qualifications for Kuwait team. Al-Otaibi thanked HH the Amir for his patronage and lauded the sup-

port by the President of Asian Shooting confederation.

Jordan's Shooting Federation Secretary Nezar Madhi said the Jordan delegation will continue its participation as usual in this grand prix. Kuwait shooter Mansour Al-Rashidi said he will do his best to win the Skeet medal in the name of Kuwait.

Sports

Zain main partner of Kuwait International Rally 2022

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its main partnership with the Kuwait International Rally 2022 (third round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship). The event, organized by the Kuwait International Motorsports Club at Kuwait Motor Town in Arifjan, came under the patronage of Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Ali Al-Mousa.

The rally was attended by Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Ali Al-Mousa, Deputy Director of Competitive Sports Affairs at the Public Authority for Sports Dr Saqer Al-Mulla, President of the Kuwait International Motorsports Club Emad Bukhamseen, and Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer of Zain Kuwait Waleed Al-Khashti.

During his speech at the opening ceremony, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti said: "Four years ago, Kuwait Motor Town hosted the Kuwait International Rally as the very first global event held at this outstanding sporting venue. Zain was at the forefront of supporters to this event back in 2018, which witnessed great global reception and contributed to elevating the Kuwaiti sports scene".

Al-Khashti added: "We are excited to collaborate with our colleagues at the Kuwait International Motorsports Club to be the main partner of the Kuwait International Rally 2022, which came back after a halt of over two years due to the pandemic".

Al-Khashti explained: "At Zain, we are a strong believer in the vital role played by private sector



Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Ali Al-Mousa recognizes Zain for its sponsorship.



Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer of Zain Waleed Al-Khashti with World Champion Nasser Al-Attiyah and Kuwaiti Champion Mishari Al-Thefiri.

institutions in developing the local youth and sports sectors. We make this belief a reality by supporting and shouldering many of the major competitions and sporting events hosted by the nation, including this rally that is part of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship".

Al-Khashti continued: "In addition, we are very proud to continue supporting and sponsoring many Kuwaiti athletes who represent our nation across

local, regional, and international arenas, and attain the highest accolades, many of which compete in motorsports".

The Kuwait International Rally 2022 was organized by the Kuwait International Motorsports Club in collaboration with the Public Authority for Sports, and represented the third round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship. The competition's 6 rounds were held at Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan,

Lebanon, and Cyprus, and featured some of the top local and regional champions.

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

Juve keep pressure on top three; Roma thump Lazio

ROME: Juventus put their Champions League woes behind them to consolidate fourth place in Serie A on Sunday with a 2-0 win over basement club Salernitana, while Roma stunned city rivals Lazio 3-0 with three first-half goals. Days after their 3-0 European humiliation by Villarreal, Juventus kept their push to recapture the Serie A title alive with a win which moves them one point behind champions Inter Milan who are third, with a game in hand, and were held 1-1 at home by Fiorentina on Saturday. Leaders AC Milan have a three-point advantage on Napoli, with Juve seven points off top spot. "There was a risk that the Champions League elimination would hit us, because no one expected us to go out," said Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri. "The boys reacted well. The important thing was to win, and to stretch the gap over those who are chasing us." In Rome, Tammy Abraham bagged a brace, scoring the opener within the first minute at the Stadio Olimpico. The England striker quickly added a second before Lorenzo Pellegrini's stunning free-kick.

"Today was truly special, because it seemed like the players were able to execute everything we had planned out there on the pitch," said Roma coach Jose Mourinho whose side had lost the first derby 3-2. Roma moved up to sixth at the expense of Lazio who slipped out of the European places. Atalanta jumped above Maurizio Sarri's men into fifth with a 1-0 win over Bologna, as 18-year-old Moustapha Cisse came on as a substitute and scored a late winner on his debut. In Turin, Allegri's Juve stretched their unbeaten league run to 16 matches and have an opportunity to move third when they host Inter in their next game after the international break. Dusan Vlahovic teed up Paulo Dybala to open the scoring in the fifth minute for the Argentine's first goal in two months on the eve of resuming laborious negotiations over a possible contract extension.

The Argentine, whose current deal ends in June, only returned after several weeks out with thigh and hip injuries in the late stages of the loss to Villarreal. This time he played just under an hour and came off to a standing ovation from the fans at the Juventus Stadium. —AFP

Dortmund held at Cologne to leave Bayern 6 points clear

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund were held to a 1-1 draw at Cologne on Sunday as Erling Haaland made his first start in two months, leaving Bayern Munich six points clear in the Bundesliga. After Robert Lewandowski scored twice in Bayern's 4-0 thrashing of Union Berlin on Saturday, second-placed Dortmund lost ground in the title race with seven games left.

"It was intense, there was a lot of back and forth," Dortmund centre-back Manuel Akanji told DAZN. "We had a lot of chances, but in the end we just didn't score. That's not enough." Haaland cut a frustrated figure as he returned to the starting line-up for the first time since January following injury, and has now failed to score in his last three appearances.

Two of those have come as a substitute, but it is the longest the 21-year-old Norwegian has gone without a goal since joining Dortmund in January 2020. Dortmund took the lead after just eight minutes when Marius Wolf snapped up a Jude Bellingham pass and scored his second goal in as many games. Cologne were level by half-time after Anthony Modeste's flick was tapped in at the far post by his forward partner Sebastian Andersson. Dortmund showed few ideas of how to break down the resilient Cologne defence in the second half.

Paulinho grabs two goals

Earlier, Brazilian Paulinho came off the bench to score a late double and give Bayer Leverkusen a morale-boosting 2-0 win at Wolfsburg after a three-match losing streak. Paulinho came on for the final 10 minutes and changed the game with his first Bundesliga goals for more than two years as Leverkusen reclaimed third place in the table. "I'm most happy for Paulinho," Leverkusen captain Lukas Hradecky told DAZN. "He runs and makes spaces for the team, now like a ketchup bottle, his goals burst out."

The 21-year-old winger embarked on a mazy run to the edge of the Wolfsburg penalty area before hitting the net with four minutes remaining. He struck again in stoppage time by heading in a



COLOGNE: Dortmund's German midfielder Marius Wolf and Cologne's Austrian midfielder Louis Schaub (bottom) vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match FC Cologne v Borussia Dortmund on March 20, 2022. —AFP

Kerem Demirbay cross after being left unmarked in the area. Leverkusen's derby defeat at home to Cologne last Sunday was sandwiched between home and away losses to Atalanta in the last 16 of the Europa League. Leverkusen's squad has been decimated by injuries over the last seven days. Dutch right-back Timothy Fosu-Mensah is set to miss the rest of the season after tearing his right hamstring in Thursday's home defeat to Atalanta. Both defender Jeremie Frimpong and attacking midfielder Florian Wirtz will miss the remainder of the season after damaging ankle and knee ligaments respectively in the loss to Cologne.

Frustration for Leipzig

Fourth-placed RB Leipzig were held to a frustrating goalless draw at home to Eintracht Frankfurt. "We are disappointed because of the huge chances we had—normally we take them,"

Leipzig coach Domenico Tedesco told DAZN. Hosts Leipzig had by far the better chances at the Red Bull Arena as Konrad Laimer hit the Eintracht crossbar in the first half after Mohamed Simakan had a shot saved onto the post.

Three days after needing an extra-time goal to squeeze past Real Betis in the Europa League to book a clash with Barcelona in the quarter-finals, Frankfurt looked jaded, failing to have a single shot on target.

Leipzig last played the previous Sunday having had a full week off due to their bye into the Europa League quarter-finals. Their last-16 opponents Spartak Moscow were excluded from the competition as part of a ban by UEFA on all Russian clubs following the invasion of Ukraine. Leipzig have drawn Leverkusen's vanquishers Atalanta in the Europa League last night. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khaldiya	24848075
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Kaifan	24849807
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shamiya	24848913
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shuwaikh	24814507
Chest Hospital	24849400	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Nuzha	22526804
Adan Hospital	23940620	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Qadsiya	22515088
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Dasmah	22532265
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
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MADRID: Barcelona's Gabonese midfielder Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (center) scores a goal during the Spanish League football match between Real Madrid CF and FC Barcelona on March 20, 2022. — AFP

Barcelona humiliate Real Madrid 4-0

Clasico thrashing could change everything for Barca

MADRID: Xavi Hernandez said Barcelona's 4-0 thrashing of Real Madrid could be transformative for the club after their Clasico demolition at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday. Barcelona blew Madrid away as Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored twice either side of goals from Ronald Araujo and Ferran Torres.

The match was billed as a test of Barca's progress under Xavi and they passed with flying colours, a humiliation of their fiercest rivals suggesting they are primed to challenge again for La Liga next season. "It can change the dynamics of the present and the future," said Xavi. "We had lots of chances and we were much better than Madrid, far superior. We deserved to score so many goals."

Asked if Barcelona are back, Xavi said: "It can be. This is the right path." And while the result might have little bearing on the title race this term, a defeat of this magnitude, at home, and against Barcelona, will cause serious reverberations at Real Madrid. It will go down with other historic Clasico thrashings, like when Barca won 6-2 at Real Madrid

in 2009 under Pep Guardiola or 5-0 at home two years later.

Questions will be asked about Carlo Ancelotti's future, with Madrid outplayed tactically and technically by Xavi's Barca, who were faster, slicker and, perhaps most worryingly, could easily have won by more. "We played badly and I planned the game badly," said Ancelotti. "I am sorry for the defeat and I am sad. But we have to keep it in perspective." Madrid were admittedly without the injured Karim Benzema and Ferland Mendy while there could have been a degree of complacency, given they kicked off nine points clear at the top of the table after Sevilla were held to a goalless draw by Real Sociedad.

But none of that will excuse a loss as dramatic as this one, the only relief now that a resurgent Barcelona are still 12 points behind, albeit with a game in hand. Aubameyang's double means he now has nine goals in 11 games for Barcelona and the Gabon striker is looking like a superb January signing. Pedri was outstanding again too-but this was a

night for the bigger picture, as Barcelona's revival made its biggest statement so far.

When Barca were beaten by Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup in January, the Catalans were criticized for celebrating the manner of their narrow defeat. "We are getting closer," said Gerard Pique. After five consecutive losses to Madrid, a win of any kind was the next step for Barca but a hammering like this could be transformative, delivering a huge boost to confidence, vindication of Xavi's project and optimism for next season all in one fell swoop.

'We are back'

Shortly after the final whistle here, Pique tweeted: "We are back." Eder Militao clattered Pedri in the opening minute and that was about as close as Real Madrid got to him all game. Soon, the chances started coming for Barca as Ferran Torres pulled back for Aubameyang but he scuffed straight at Thibaut Courtois, who then had to palm wide a curling effort from Ousmane Dembele. Barca's dom-

inance was growing and in the 29th minute they scored, Dembele racing round the outside of Nacho Fernandez and crossing for Aubameyang to head in.

Vinicius Junior might have changed the game if he had converted after being sent through but a heavy touch allowed Marc-Andre ter Stegen to save. Instead, Barcelona doubled their lead when Ronald Araujo headed in from a corner before half-time and after it, the humiliation began. David Alaba and Militao both committed themselves to sliding tackles and both missed, Aubameyang executing a superb flicked pass to Torres, who made no mistake.

Worse was to come, as Pique's ball over the top allowed Aubameyang to scoop in a brilliant finish for a fourth in the 51st minute. Madrid thought they were spared by the offside flag but VAR intervened and the goal stood. Aubameyang, Torres and Dembele could all have furthered the embarrassment for Madrid, the latter poking wide after skipping in behind and holding off Militao. By then, Aubameyang had gone off, the victory already complete and the stadium quickly emptying. — AFP



COLORADO: Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics drives to the basket during the game against the Denver Nuggets on March 20, 2022. — AFP

Tatum, Brown lead Celtics over Nuggets

LOS ANGELES: Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown finished with 30 points each as the Boston Celtics romped to a 124-104 road victory over Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets on Sunday. Tatum and Brown spearheaded a superb all-round offensive performance for Boston, whose defense successfully bottled up the threat of Denver's reigning NBA MVP Jokic, who was held to 23 points.

Apart from a brief spell in the first quarter, Boston led throughout, pulling clear of Denver with a 35-16 second quarter which included four three-pointers from four attempts by Payton Pritchard. That left Boston up 68-43 at half-time and, although Denver tightened up after the interval, the result was never in doubt as Boston cruised to a third straight victory. The Celtics improved to 44-28 with the win to remain fourth in the Eastern Conference, level on 44 wins with third-placed Milwaukee.

Denver dropped to 42-30 in the Western Conference, and are one place outside the automatic playoff places. Elsewhere on Sunday, Philadelphia

were out-hustled in a low-scoring 93-88 loss to the Toronto Raptors. The Raptors held 76ers big man Joel Embiid to 21 points as defenses dominated at Philadelphia's Wells Fargo Center. James Harden, who finished with 17 points, gave up a late flagrant foul to end the Sixers hopes of forcing overtime. Pascal Siakam led the Raptors scorers with 26 points.

In Sacramento, Devin Booker scored 31 points as the Western Conference-leading Phoenix Suns survived a scare before seeing off the Kings 127-124 in overtime. Sacramento led by 14 points early in the second half against a sluggish Suns, before Booker sparked a fightback with a 19-point third quarter. Booker's rally trimmed Sacramento's lead to just four points heading into the fourth quarter, and from there Phoenix gradually clawed back the advantage before squeaking through in overtime. Booker was backed with 27 points from Mikal Bridges and 21 points from Landry Shamet. Rookie Davion Mitchell led the Sacramento scorers with a career-high 28 points. Phoenix, who have already qualified for the playoffs, improved their record to 58-14 at the top of the West, extending their unbeaten streak to five games.

"It's gratifying just because of so many guys stepping up and making a contribution," Phoenix coach Monty Williams said afterwards. — AFP

Fritz hands Nadal first 2022 defeat

INDIAN WELLS: Taylor Fritz stunned Rafael Nadal 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) on Sunday to win the ATP Indian Wells Masters and end the 21-time Grand Slam champion's perfect 20-0 run to start 2022. Fritz, ranked 20th in the world, claimed his second career title and his first at the elite Masters 1000 level while denying Nadal a record-equalling 37th Masters crown. The 24-year-old American achieved his biggest triumph despite an injured right ankle that was so painful when he tested it Sunday morning he didn't think he'd be able to play.

"This is just one of those childhood dreams, winning this tournament especially, Indian Wells, this is one of those childhood dreams you never even think can come true," the Southern California native said, fighting back tears. "It was just an emotional roller coaster all day," said Fritz, who spent hours leading up to the match receiving treatment to numb his ankle after "basically almost crying because I thought I was going to have to pull out."

"It was a game-time decision," Fritz said. "A lot of members of my team wanted me to not play the match. I'm never going to let them forget that because I went on the court and it was a complete non-issue, didn't feel it at all, didn't hinder me at all." The 35-year-old Nadal, meanwhile, was pushing himself through pain, twice receiving treatment on his upper body for a yet-to-be diagnosed problem that not only hurt but also affected his breathing. "I don't know if it's something on the rib, I don't know yet," Nadal said. "It's a kind of pain that limit me a lot."

Nadal had already said he would skip next week's Miami Masters to give his body a rest and prepare for the claycourt season. After fearing a foot injury that halted his 2021 campaign might end his career, the Spaniard claimed a record-setting 21st Grand Slam singles title with an epic comeback victory over Daniil Medvedev in the Australian Open final, then won the title at Acapulco. Fritz said he was aware that there was "stuff going on" with Nadal even before the match began.

"I can't imagine how banged up someone's body must be after 20-something straight matches, playing as much as he has," Fritz said. "I didn't let it change



INDIAN WELLS: Taylor Fritz poses for photographers after defeating Rafael Nadal of Spain during the men's final of the BNP Paribas Open on March 20, 2022. — AFP

how I was going to play at all. I treated it like I was playing the Rafa that I know, that everybody knows." Batling to the end, Nadal saved one match point in the 10th game of the second set, but in a tense tiebreaker that decided it all Fritz proved too much. After Nadal spun a forehand wide to give up another match point, Fritz put it away with yet another of his big forehand winners.

Fast start for Fritz

Fritz's fitness concerns were at the forefront when the American fell on the very first point of the match. But he seized a 4-0 lead in the opening set in just 19 minutes. Nadal, coming off a draining three-set semi-final victory over 18-year-old compatriot Carlos Alcaraz, appeared to have found his range when he held at love to make it 4-1. But he was unable to make any inroads on Fritz's serve until the American served for the set at 5-2 and Nadal converted his only break chance of the set when Fritz sent a forehand long. However, Nadal was unable to build any momentum, immediately surrendering the break and the set after 39 minutes. Nadal took a medical timeout between sets and gained the first break of the second set for a 2-1 lead. Fritz opened the door for him with a double fault, came up with a big serve then fell to a forehand winner on the Spaniard's second break chance. — AFP