

R **Book your ride. Today.**

Your chauffeur arrived for pickup. Chauffeur Malik has reached your location for pickup.

Download the app

5 Major quake crushes buildings in Vanuatu capital, bodies seen

11 Trump touts \$100bn SoftBank investment, vowing 100,000 jobs

13 Spanish actor and Almodovar muse Marisa Paredes dies at 78

16 MPW completes tasks for hosting of Khaleeji Zain 26

Duke of Edinburgh visits Kuwait

Prince Edward hands Amir message from King Charles, tours Dickson House



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Tuesday the Royal Prince Edward, Duke of Edinburgh, and his accompanying delegation who arrived in the country on an official visit. The Duke of Edinburgh handed HH the Amir a written message from UK's King Charles II dealing with means of boosting further the deep-rooted and historic relations bonding Kuwait and the UK.

The message included an invitation to HH the Amir to visit the UK. HH the Amir asked Prince Edward to relay his greetings to King Charles and his wishes for him to enjoy good health and for the UK people to experience further progress and prosperity. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah also met Prince Edward.

Prince Edward and his accompanying delegation later took a tour of Dickson House Cultural Centre, a historic site symbolizing the depth of Kuwaiti-British relations. Kuwait and the United Kingdom continue to bolster their 125-years-old relations, rooted in shared vision on regional and international matters and mutual commitment by their political leaderships to enhance shared interests. — KUNA (See Page 3)

KUWAIT: (Left) HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Duke of Edinburgh Prince Edward at Bayan Palace on Dec 17, 2024. (Right) The Duke, accompanied by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah and British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis, tours the Dickson House Museum. — KUNA photos

Indian PM Modi to visit Kuwait on historic 2-day trip

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: According to Indian media reports, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Kuwait on Saturday, marking the first visit by an Indian prime minister to Kuwait in 43 years. The visit comes in response to an invitation extended by Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya during his recent trip to India, where he met with Modi. Kuwait, a key supplier of crude oil and LPG to India, is home to a vibrant Indian community of over a million people. Notably, it remains the only GCC country yet to be visited by Modi.

Speaking to the media, Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Adarsh Swaika highlighted the significance of the upcoming visit, noting its momentum follows the Kuwaiti foreign minister's two-day trip to India on Dec 3-4 and the visit of his Indian counterpart to Kuwait in August. "This visit builds on the strong diplomatic engagements in recent months, including His Highness the Kuwaiti Crown Prince's meeting with Prime Minister Modi in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September," he said.

The ambassador emphasized that the flurry of high-level exchanges reflects the growing dynamism of bilateral relations. "Prior to this, the last major interactions were in 2021 when the Kuwaiti foreign minister visited India in March, followed by the Indian external affairs minister's visit to Kuwait in June to mark the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations," Swaika added. A key outcome of the recent diplomatic activities was the signing of the Joint Commission for Cooperation, elevating coordination to the foreign minister level. This framework will facilitate collaboration across various sectors by introducing seven new joint working groups.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Zain unveils new 4WARD 5-year corporate strategy

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle and ICT communications operating in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announced the introduction of '4WARD' - Progress with Purpose, a new five-year sustainable corporate strategy.

The 4WARD strategy was formulated internally through a series of groupwide collaborative workshops led by the Zain Group strategy team and announced during a recent strategy forum held in Kuwait, attended by Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi, senior group executives and management leadership teams from all Zain's and Omantel's

operating entities, shortly thereafter receiving formal approval from Zain Group's Board of Directors.

Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi commented: "4WARD will unleash Zain's full potential in transforming from a Telco to a purpose driven TechCo conglomerate providing 'Better Lives and Lasting Connections'. The 4SIGHT strategy over the years has made Zain a more dynamic and agile organization, having established many customer-focused initiatives that have enhanced the mobile experience for our customers, as well as creating multiple fast-growing and impactful new business streams that are well poised to accelerate further." (See Page 8)



KUWAIT: Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi unveils the new 4WARD corporate strategy.

Zionists keep up Gaza genocide amid truce talks

WASHINGTON/CAIRO: An agreement to halt the 14-month-old war in Gaza and free hostages held in the Palestinian enclave could be signed in coming days with talks in Cairo making progress, sources briefed on the meeting said on Tuesday. Huge Zionist airstrikes killed extended families in homes in two parts of the northern Gaza Strip on Tuesday, while tanks in the south pushed towards a humanitarian zone on the Mediterranean coast, forcing displaced families to take flight again.

The US administration, joined by mediators from Egypt and Qatar, have made intensive efforts in recent days to advance the talks before President Joe Biden leaves office next month. "We believe - and the (Zionists) have said this - that we're getting closer, and no doubt about it, we believe that, but we also are cautious in our optimism," White House spokesperson John Kirby said in an interview with Fox News. "We've been in this position before where we weren't able to get it over the finish line."

The sources said a ceasefire deal could be days away that would stop the fighting and return captives held by Hamas in Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held in Zionist jails. Hamas said in a statement a deal was possible if the Zionist entity stopped setting new



GAZA: A Palestinian man mourns over shrouded bodies of children at Al-Ahli Arab (Baptist) Hospital in Gaza City on Dec 17, 2024. — AFP

Ukraine kills Russian chemical weapons chief

MOSCOW: The head of the Russian army's chemical weapons division was killed on Tuesday in a brazen attack in Moscow claimed by Kyiv — the most senior military figure assassinated in Russia yet as the Kremlin's campaign in Ukraine drags on. Igor Kirillov was killed along with his assistant when an explosive de-

vice attached to a scooter went off outside an apartment building in southeastern Moscow, Russian and Ukrainian officials said.

The attack took place in a residential area in the capital a day after President Vladimir Putin boasted of Russian troop successes in Ukraine, nearly three years after the Kremlin sent soldiers into its pro-Western neighbor. Kirillov, 54, was the head of the Russian army's chemical, biological and radiological weapons unit and in October was sanctioned by Britain over the alleged use of chemical weapons in Ukraine.

A source in Ukraine's SBU security service told AFP it was behind the early morning explosion in what it called a "special operation", calling Kirillov a "war

criminal". Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev, now a senior Russian security official, was cited by the state RIA news agency as saying that Ukraine's military and political leadership now faced imminent revenge for Kirillov's murder.

Russia's Investigative Committee said that an "explosive device planted in a scooter parked near the entrance of a residential building was activated on the morning of Dec 17 on Ryazansky Avenue in Moscow". The blast shattered several windows of the building and severely damaged the front door, according to an AFP reporter on the scene. Russian authorities said they were probing the attack as "terrorism".

Continued on Page 6



Local



KUWAIT: (From left) Bahraini Ambassador Salah Al-Malki, Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah and Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya cut a cake during the celebration of Bahrain's 53rd National Day. — KUNA photos



Senior officials and diplomats rise for the national anthem during a reception hosted by the Bahraini Embassy in Kuwait, celebrating the 53rd anniversary of Bahrain's National Day and the 25th anniversary of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's accession to the throne.

Kuwait, Bahrain celebrate strong relations on Bahrain's National Day

Kuwait's ambassador to Bahrain prays both nations 'will remain united for all time'

KUWAIT: Bilateral cooperation between Kuwait and Bahrain continues to deepen and grow across all sectors, benefiting both nations and their peoples, the Bahraini ambassador to Kuwait said.

Ambassador Salah Al-Malki praised Kuwaiti-Bahraini ties during a reception hosted by the Bahraini Embassy in Kuwait, celebrating the 53rd anniversary of Bahrain's National Day and the 25th anniversary of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's accession to the throne, KUNA reported. The event was attended by Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, along with other senior officials and heads of diplomatic missions accredited to Kuwait.

The ambassador described ties between Kuwait

and Bahrain as strong and deep-rooted, highlighting the continued support from the leadership of both nations. He emphasized the ongoing efforts to strengthen their cooperation for the mutual benefit of both nations.

Ambassador Al-Malki noted that Bahrain is steadily moving toward its foreign policy goals, which are based on principles of balance, moderation, cooperation, dialogue, and human coexistence. He also reiterated Bahrain's commitment to enhancing international cooperation, promoting peace, and advancing efforts to achieve sustainable development, protect human rights, and preserve the environment—efforts that strengthen Bahrain's global standing. On this occasion, the ambassador extended heartfelt congratulations to

King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, and the people of Bahrain.

Kuwait's Ambassador to Bahrain, Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, also extended his congratulations to Bahrain. In a statement to KUNA, he emphasized that Bahrain's national celebrations are a cherished and significant occasion for the people of Kuwait.

"The human story in Bahrain deserves to be told and valued," Sheikh Thamer said, commending Bahrain's efforts to invest in its citizens, improve their quality of life, and create opportunities for personal growth, achievement, and long-term stability. These efforts are aimed at securing a better future for generations to come. He also emphasized

Bahrain's commitment to nurturing a generation with a strong sense of responsibility and dedication to the nation's progress.

Sheikh Thamer also acknowledged the historic ties between Kuwait and Bahrain. He described the relations as "a partnership of joy and sorrow" between the leaderships and peoples of both countries. "Kuwait celebrates Bahrain's national holidays as its own; our joy and unity are one. With God's will, our hearts will remain united for all time," Sheikh Thamer said. He prayed for continued peace, security, and prosperity for both nations under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, wishing them both long life and good health.



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah meets with Romanian Ambassador Mugurel Stănescu.



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef meets with Bangladeshi Ambassador Major General Syed Tareq Hussain.



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef meets with Mexican Ambassador Eduardo Patricio Peña Haller.

Interior minister talks security coordination with diplomats

KUWAIT: Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior, met separately with several ambassadors accredited to Kuwait to discuss enhancing cooperation, particularly in security.

According to the Ministry of Interior, Sheikh Fahad held individual meetings with the Ambassadors of Mexico, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, and Romania: Eduardo Patricio Peña Haller, Major General Syed Tareq Hussain, Ayubkhan Yunusov, and Mugurel Stănescu. During the discussions, Sheikh Fahad em-

phasized Kuwait's commitment to strengthening relations with friendly nations, particularly in promoting regional security and stability. He highlighted the importance of diplomatic cooperation in achieving shared objectives.

The meetings also addressed various mutual interests, focusing on the latest regional and international developments. The ambassadors expressed appreciation for Kuwait's pivotal role in regional security and reaffirmed their countries' commitment to expanding cooperation in all areas.

Additionally, Sheikh Fahad met with a visiting UAE delegation to discuss security coordination between Kuwait and the UAE. The talks centered on enhancing security collaboration and ensuring the collective security of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The UAE delegation commended the discussions as a means to reinforce bilateral ties and cooperation. UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Matar



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef meets with Uzbek Ambassador Ayubkhan Yunusov.

Al-Neyadi, and Colonel Mohammad Al-Sharaf from the Central Agency for Remediating Illegal Residents' Status also attended the meeting. — KUNA

Bahrain marks 53 years of progress, visionary leadership

MANAMA: Bahrain celebrated Monday its 53rd National Day and the Silver Jubilee of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's ascension to the throne. This annual celebration highlights the strong and enduring ties between Kuwait and Bahrain, a relationship that has deep historical roots. Kuwait joins Bahrain in commemorating this special occasion, reflecting the shared values, culture, and history that unite both nations. The ties between the two countries continue to grow through mutual cooperation in a variety of sectors.

Recent high-level visits

In February, His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Bahrain, emphasizing the ongoing collaboration between the two countries. High-level discussions focused on regional issues, particularly within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and ways to enhance Arab unity. To honor this enduring friendship, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa awarded His Highness the Amir with the Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa Medal of Excellent Degree, recognizing Kuwait's role in strengthening bilateral relations.

Since King Hamad's ascension to the throne in 1999, Bahrain has experienced significant development and economic diversification. Under his leadership, Bahrain has established a modern economy and embraced comprehensive development strategies that have led to sustained growth and increased investment opportunities. Bahrain's Vision 2030, with its focus on sustainable development and economic competitiveness, continues to guide the nation toward a diversified, non-oil-dependent economy. Efforts to strengthen the private sector and improve infrastructure have earned Bahrain high rankings in international investment and business environment indices.

Global recognition

Bahrain's progress is reflected in its international rankings. In the 2023 Global Innovation Index, Bahrain ranked 10th globally in "Policies of Doing Business." It is also the freest economy in the MENA region, according to the 2024 report on the Economic Freedom of The World published by Fraser Institute. Additionally, Bahrain's advanced infrastructure, highlighted by its second-place ranking in logistics performance among Arab nations in the World Bank's 2023 Logistics Performance Index, enhances its role as a regional trade hub.

Bahrain has also made strides in digital transformation, becoming a leader in internet penetration and 5G coverage. The country's efforts to enhance governance and e-services have further solidified its position as a regional leader in technology and innovation. Environmental sustainability is another priority for Bahrain. The country is investing in renewable energy and initiatives aimed at reducing carbon emissions, demonstrating its commitment to a sustainable future.

Bahrain's tourism sector is also growing, with the kingdom positioning itself as a leading destination for exhibitions and conferences. The Bahrain December Festival is a testament to this, with a variety of cultural events that attract visitors, including many from Kuwait, further strengthening the ties between the two nations.

The strong relationship between Kuwait and Bahrain, built on shared history and mutual respect, continues to flourish. As both nations celebrate Bahrain's National Day, they reinforce their commitment to continued cooperation, prosperity, and the shared values that unite their peoples. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Participants of Burgan Bank's banking awareness workshops for school and university students pose for photos.

Burgan Bank spreads banking awareness at educational institutions

KUWAIT: In line with efforts to spread banking and financial literacy, Burgan Bank recently organized several visits to two of Kuwait's respected educational institutions: the American United School (AUS) and the American University of Kuwait (AUK). The visits are part of Burgan's annual plan to reinforce the public's financial literacy, upholding its committed support for the "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya) financial literacy and banking awareness campaign, launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks.

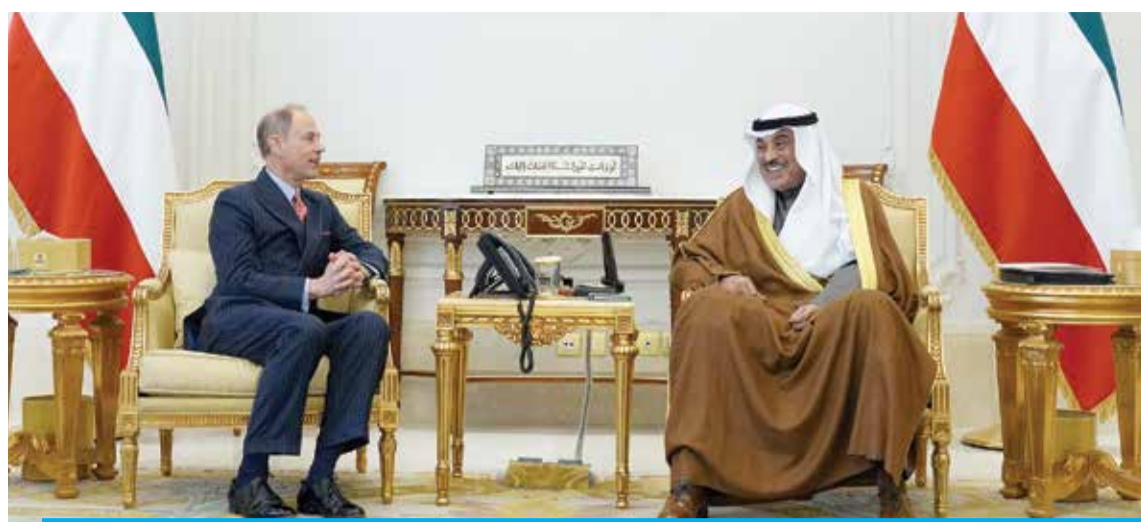
"We are delighted to continue playing an active role in spreading the Diraya messages across the different circles of society. Financial literacy is essential knowledge for people of all ages today, especially adolescents and young adults who rely heavily on digital banking in their day-to-day purchases," said Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Senior Manager for Corporate & CSR Communications at Burgan Bank. "By collaborating with Kuwait's prestigious schools and universities, we aim to prepare today's youths for a future of success and prosperity, achieved in part through sound financial planning and secure banking practices."



Hessa Al-Najadah

Throughout the four years since the launch of Diraya, Burgan Bank has seized every opportunity to raise awareness about the different banking services and products and how they serve customers' varying needs and aspirations. It also continues to dedicate its efforts to guiding members of its community toward the safest banking practices, especially those that rely on digital technology, by regularly raising awareness about the latest scam, phishing, and fraud trends and how to remain vigilant against the risk of falling victim to them. In addition to organizing visits to educational institutions, Burgan Bank has spread Diraya messages across numerous mass media, including radio, newspapers and the bank's social media channels, to empower individuals to make informed financial decisions, build economic resilience and achieve financial well-being. These efforts not only highlight the bank's dedicated commitment to social responsibility but also directly advance its Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategy.

Local



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah welcomes Prince Edward, Duke of Edinburgh, at Bayan Palace on December 17, 2024. — KUNA photos



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with the Duke of Edinburgh during his visit to Kuwait on December 17, 2024.

Kuwait welcomes Prince Edward on visit to strengthen partnership

Visit symbolizes historic Kuwait-UK relationship, which dates back 125 years



(From left) British Ambassador Belinda Lewis, the Duke of Edinburgh Prince Edward and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled are seen together during a luncheon held in honor of the Duke.



Prince Edward and officials tour Dickson House. — Amiri Diwan photos

KUWAIT: Prince Edward, Duke of Edinburgh, began his official visit to Kuwait on Tuesday, where he was warmly welcomed by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace. The visit, attended by senior state officials, underscores the longstanding and thriving relationship between Kuwait and the United Kingdom, built on shared values, mutual respect, and strategic cooperation.

During the visit, the Duke was also received by His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the Prime Minister of Kuwait, alongside key figures including Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, and the British Ambassador to Kuwait, Belinda Lewis. The discussions focused on strengthening bilateral relations, particularly in security, defense, and other key areas of mutual interest.

In the afternoon, Prince Edward visited the Dickson House Cultural Centre, a significant landmark in Kuwait's historical ties with Britain. The Duke explored the center's exhibits, which showcase the deep-rooted history of Kuwait-UK relations and highlight the shared heritage between the two nations.

A history of strong relations

The visit of Prince Edward is a symbol of the growing relationship between Kuwait and the United Kingdom, which dates back 125 years. This historic partnership began with the signing of the 1899

treaty, which marked the start of formal diplomatic relations. Since then, Kuwait and the UK have enjoyed strong political, economic, and cultural ties, which have deepened over the years through mutual support and shared goals.

Kuwait and the UK have aligned their visions on regional and global issues, further cementing their strong bilateral ties. These connections have flourished through regular diplomatic exchanges, high-level visits, and agreements across various sectors. In January 2024, Kuwait and the UK declared the year as the "Year of Kuwaiti-British Partnership," a significant milestone in their enduring relationship. The proclamation, signed in August 2023 during the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the United Kingdom, reflects both nations' commitment to fostering closer cooperation. A joint statement emphasized that the two countries will work together on key areas, including trade, investment, defense, cybersecurity, education, culture, and international development.

The Kuwaiti-British relationship has been further nurtured through the UK-Kuwait Joint Steering Group, established in 2012. This group meets biannually and focuses on areas like economic trade, investment, cultural exchange, education, and development, with an emphasis on tackling global challenges such as climate change, energy transformation, food security, and health.

Kuwait and the UK have long cooperated on issues of defense and regional security. The UK

Tradition or modernity: Age of commercial capacity in Kuwait

By Dr Abdullah Ahmed Alkayat

KUWAIT: The regulation of the minimum age to engage in commerce in Kuwait has undergone significant transformations over the decades, reflecting both historical considerations and evolving societal dynamics. In the 1960s, Kuwait's first commercial law no. 2 of 1961, established the age of commercial capacity — the minimum age at which an individual could lawfully engage in commerce or be recognized as a merchant — at 18 years. This decision aligned with prevailing international standards of the time and recognized that 18-year-olds, as legal adults, were capable of assuming commercial responsibilities.

However, in the 1980s, Kuwait introduced a new commercial law, no. 68 of 1980, raising the age of commercial capacity to 21. This shift represented a more cautious approach, perhaps rooted in concerns about the maturity, experience, and preparedness of younger individuals to undertake the risks and obligations inherent in commercial activities. Today, the question of whether the age of commercial capacity should remain at 21 or revert to 18 is increasingly relevant.

Around the world, many legal systems and jurisdictions have moved toward recognizing 18 as the age of legal capacity for various matters, including commercial activities. This shift reflects the broader acknowledgment that 18-year-olds are legally and practically adults, capable of entering



Dr Abdullah Ahmed Alkayat

into contracts, assuming obligations and participating fully in economic life. For instance, in many modern economies, lowering the age of commercial capacity to 18 has fostered entrepreneurship among youth, allowing them to innovate, start businesses, and contribute to economic development at an earlier stage.

In the GCC countries (Gulf Cooperation Council), the age of commercial capacity is uniformly set at 18 years across all member states, except for Kuwait, where the age of commercial capacity remains at 21 years, reflecting a notable exception to the regional standard. This distinction highlights a divergence in the legal frameworks governing capacity within the GCC, as Kuwait continues to adhere to a higher age threshold for commercial transactions and related responsibilities.

One of the benefits of maintaining the age of commercial capacity at 21 is the added layer of protection it provides to younger individuals who may lack sufficient experience, judgment or

financial knowledge to navigate complex commercial transactions. Commerce, by its nature, involves risks, and raising the minimum age can serve as a safeguard against exploitation, impulsive decision-making or economic failure caused by inexperience.

Additionally, it aligns with cultural perspectives in Kuwait that emphasize the gradual transition to adulthood and the readiness to take on significant responsibilities. From this perspective, the law serves as a means of protecting youth from entering into premature obligations that could have long-term financial or legal repercussions.

On the other hand, proponents of lowering the age back to 18 argue that it better reflects modern realities. Today's youth are more educated, informed, and exposed to the world of business and technology than ever before. Platforms for entrepreneurship, such as e-commerce and digital startups, often attract younger individuals, who possess the creativity and adaptability necessary to thrive in these sectors.

Restricting the age of commercial capacity to 21 may hinder these opportunities and place Kuwait at a competitive disadvantage compared to jurisdictions that allow 18-year-olds to participate in commerce. Furthermore, lowering the age would align Kuwait's commercial law with its civil and international commitments, as 18 is widely recognized as the age of majority across legal systems worldwide.

In addition, the economic landscape has changed drastically in recent decades, particularly with the rise of technology-driven commerce. Many young individuals in Kuwait and globally are now capable of building successful businesses online

through platforms like e-commerce, app development, and social media. These opportunities require minimal capital investment and are often driven by innovation and technological proficiency — skills that younger generations excel at.

By maintaining the minimum age of commercial capacity at 21, the law risks limiting access to these opportunities, thereby stifling young entrepreneurs who could otherwise contribute to the national economy. Countries that embrace youthful entrepreneurship tend to benefit from a more dynamic, competitive, and forward-looking economic environment, a factor worth considering for Kuwait's future.

Overall, the debate over the age of commercial capacity in Kuwait reflects a tension between tradition and modernity. While maintaining the age at 21 offers a protective and cautious approach, lowering it to 18 would empower younger generations to contribute meaningfully to the economy, aligning with global norms and fostering entrepreneurial growth.

As societal values, education, and economic opportunities evolve, Kuwait may need to reconsider whether the current law adequately serves the nation's youth and economic future. Balancing maturity with opportunity is key, and finding that balance will determine the path forward for Kuwait's commercial development. Kuwait can ensure that its legal framework supports both the protection and empowerment of its younger generations in an increasingly competitive global economy.

NOTE: Dr Abdullah Ahmed Alkayat is a Commercial and Capital Markets Law Professor at Kuwait University School of Law.

played a crucial role in supporting Kuwait's territorial integrity, especially after Iraq's invasion in 1990. Since then, the relationship has continued to grow, with both countries collaborating on defense, security, and humanitarian issues, as well as on economic development.

Milestones in recent years

Recent high-level visits have further strengthened this bond. Notably, in October 2023, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited the UK, marking his fourth trip to Britain. This visit, at the invitation of King Charles III, underscored the strength of Kuwait-UK ties and the ongoing commitment to deepening the partnership. Kuwait-UK relations have remained

strong and stable, particularly after Kuwait's independence in 1961. Following the country's independence, Kuwait worked to develop fairer and deeper relations with Britain, which was key in supporting Kuwait's defense and security needs, especially during the Gulf crisis.

As Kuwait and the United Kingdom continue to build upon their historic partnership, both nations look toward a future of enhanced collaboration. With ongoing strategic dialogues and efforts to tackle global challenges, the Kuwait-UK relationship is poised to grow stronger, ensuring mutual benefits for both nations. The Duke's visit is yet another testament to the enduring strength of Kuwaiti-British relations, with both nations committed to advancing their shared goals and aspirations for a prosperous future. —KUNA

Medical University City to revolutionize education, healthcare

KUWAIT: A new project for a medical university city will be key in advancing medical education and healthcare services in Kuwait, said Kuwait's Ministers of Health and Higher Education. During a meeting on Tuesday, the ministers discussed the project's design phases and emphasized their plans to strengthen cooperation between the education and healthcare sectors.

Both ministers highlighted the importance of collaboration between the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Health to ensure the effective implementation of this vital project, which seeks to enhance medical education and provide advanced healthcare services to the community.

Minister of Higher Education Dr Nader Al-Jallal emphasized that the project will prepare and qualify national personnel according to global standards in medicine and research. The campus will feature a teaching hospital and a research center for medical students which will play a critical role in healthcare provision. The integrated teaching hospital will combine healthcare services with student training in a cutting-edge, practical environment.

Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi described the project as a transformative shift for both the healthcare and academic sectors. He noted that the teaching hospital will be a leading institution for advanced medical education and quality healthcare services, offering a training environment aligned with the latest global standards. The project will foster medical innovation and research, further enhancing the sustainability and development of Kuwait's healthcare sector.

The ministers reiterated their commitment to supporting the project, which will contribute significantly to Kuwait's development vision and its global standing in education and healthcare. The meeting included a presentation by the Kuwait University Projects Department on the initial design phases of the Medical University City, along with the proposed budget and implementation procedures. Senior officials from Kuwait University and the Ministry of Health attended the meeting. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The NBK team receives an award from the Bloom Market organizers in recognition for their sponsorship.

NBK sponsors Bloom Market to promote sustainability in Kuwait

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) sponsored the Bloom Market, a pioneering event held at Al-Raya Shopping Center organized by Seeds. The market gathered eco-friendly vendors and sustainable brands in one vibrant space. The market aimed to raise awareness about sustainability, support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and encourage environmentally conscious practices within the Kuwaiti community. The Bloom Market featured vendors across five key sustainability categories: food and beverage, lifestyle and wellness, innovation and technology, fashion and beauty, and a dedicated Bloomies section for children. The event highlighted NBK's strategic focus on fostering innovation while promoting responsible consumer behavior.

The Bloom Market sponsorship is part of NBK's ongoing dedication to driving positive change and supporting projects that promote a sustainable and inclusive future. As a leader in corporate responsibility, NBK continues to support initiatives that align with its sustainability strategy and Kuwait Vision 2035, focusing on environmental protection, youth empowerment, and community development.

Bloom Market was a unique opportunity to bring together organizations and individuals who share a vision for a more sustainable future.

NBK is proud to champion initiatives that encourage innovation and empower local businesses while reinforcing our commitment to building a healthier, greener Kuwait. NBK has consistently been at the forefront of sustainability efforts in Kuwait, earning recognition for its contributions to sustainable economic development and community impact.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A pigeon flies past the rising sun as haze obscures the skyline of Kuwait City on December 17, 2024. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Contractors begin earthworks for phase 3 of new T2 terminal

Construction site obstacles cleared in coordination with authorities: MPW



This photo shows a render of the Kuwait International Airport New Terminal Building (T2).



KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works Dr Noura Al-Mashaan meets with officials to review the Kuwait International Airport New Terminal Building (T2) project's latest developments. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Contractors working on Kuwait International Airport New Terminal Building (T2) project have commenced earthworks and excavation for the food preparation building and service tunnels as part of phase 3 of the development. A statement from the

Ministry of Public Works, released on Tuesday, confirmed that obstacles at the construction site have been cleared in coordination with relevant authorities, including the Ministries of Interior, Electricity and Water, and other key agencies. The statement also noted that materials, equipment, and specialized contractors are being approved, in collaboration with the project consultant and the supervising team, to ensure smooth progress.

Phase 3 of the project involves several critical tasks, including the construction of the food preparation building, technical support center, security checkpoints, employee and cargo inspection areas, waste disposal zones, service tunnels, and aircraft taxiways and parking areas. The terminal is being constructed by the Turkish company Limak Insaat, with operations to be managed entirely by a 100 percent Kuwaiti administrative team.

Minister of Public Works Dr Noura Al-Mashaan reiterated the government's commitment to utilizing all available resources to ensure the timely completion of the T2 project. This statement followed a meeting she held with key officials, including Director-General of Civil Aviation Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Al-Hamoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and representatives from the Ministry of Interior, to review the project's latest developments.

Al-Mashaan, since her appointment earlier this year, has frequently highlighted the need to "overcome obstacles" in the project, though spe-

cific challenges have not been disclosed. Despite previous delays, the ministry remains focused on completing the terminal on schedule, although no definitive completion date has been set. Critics have called for clearer communication, including calls for a public deadline, which some say is not "a miracle" to provide.

No set deadline

The New Airport Terminal, which has been under construction since 2017, was originally scheduled to open by the end of 2023. The \$4.34 billion project is divided into three phases: the first includes the passenger terminal, central station, and service tunnel connections; the second includes car parks, service buildings, and access roads; and the third involves aircraft parking and taxiways. Once completed, the terminal will triple Kuwait Airport's capacity to 25 million passengers annually.

In 2022, the Ministry of Public Works revised the timeline, pushing the completion date to the third quarter of 2024, citing the impact of COVID-19 travel restrictions on labor availability. By December 2023, Phase 1 was 72.64 percent complete, while Phase 2 stood at 68.1 percent, according to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. A ministry spokesperson recently confirmed that the project is now expected to be finished in 2025. Last May, Limak Insaat, the Turkish contractor responsible for building the terminal, reported that work was nearing completion.



calls, and to avoid clicking on suspicious or unknown links, downloading attachments and apps using public Wi-Fi networks, or conducting any banking transactions using these networks. It also called on them to follow the tips and instructions shared by the bank to avoid any scams.

NBK raises awareness by sharing educational material including video clips, text messages, and tips across its social media platforms and other digital channels, as well as reposting CBK's communications. This aims to inform all people and familiarize them with different scams and the required protection methods.

NBK employs its strong customer communication capabilities as well as all its digital channels, which are the most popular among all Kuwaiti banks, to support CBK's endeavors to protect customers and the national economy. NBK is a key promoter and participant in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives to increase financial and banking awareness among different segments of society. As one of the leading local and regional financial institutions, the bank frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector, as well as a wide range of training courses for its employees to enhance their knowledge and expertise in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime.

NBK advises customers to update Civil ID using only official websites

KUWAIT: Pursuing its active role in raising financial awareness and inclusion among different sectors, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues promoting the "Let's Be Aware" banking awareness campaign introduced by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA). In this context, NBK called on customers to always ensure that civil ID and personal documents are renewed and updated through official sources only to protect sensitive information and steer clear of any scams.

With the evolving fraud tactics, scammers may use artificial intelligence to clone the websites and logos of government service agencies to trick victims that they are official websites, such as PACI, MoI or other entities that the public needs on a daily basis for their transactions, the bank advised. It stressed that information and documents should be renewed and updated using only official websites.

NBK affirmed that it will never ask customers for personal information via e-mail, SMS or phone calls, warning them of responding to such scams which target obtaining their banking information to steal their money or information. The bank also urged customers to beware of disclosing any sensitive or personal information to any person or entity through SMS or



Scan & Subscribe
KD 20 a year

For Individuals Only



Scan Now

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First English Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Tel: 24833199 Ext: 220



Syria rulers step up international engagement

One billion users, but controversies mount up for TikTok

Page 6

Page 7



PORT VILA: People inspect a damaged car trapped underneath a collapsed building in Vanuatu's capital Port Vila after a powerful earthquake hit the Pacific island. — AFP

Major earthquake smashes buildings in Vanuatu capital

'Dead bodies lying in the city'

PORT VILA: A powerful earthquake hit the Pacific nation of Vanuatu on Tuesday, smashing buildings in the capital Port Vila including one used by foreign embassies, with a witness telling AFP of bodies lying in the city. The 7.3-magnitude quake struck at a depth of 57 kilometers, some 30 kilometers off the coast of Efate, Vanuatu's main island, at 12:47 pm, according to the US Geological Survey. A 5.5-magnitude aftershock struck minutes later, followed by a string of lesser tremors—shaking the low-lying archipelago of 320,000 people that lies in the quake-prone Pacific Rim of Fire.

The ground floor of a four-storey concrete block in Port Vila—used by US, French, British, Australian and New Zealand diplomatic missions—was flattened, AFP photos showed. US and French embassy staff are safe, the two countries said. The United States closed its embassy until further notice. France said its mission was "destroyed". "There's people in the

buildings in town. There were bodies there when we walked past," resident Michael Thompson told AFP by satellite phone after posting images of the destruction on social media. A landslide on one road had covered a bus, he said, "so there's obviously some deaths there". As well as destroying the ground floor of the diplomatic building, the quake also knocked down at least two bridges and toppled other buildings, Thompson said.

'Completely flat'

The bottom floor of the embassy block "no longer exists," he said. "It is just completely flat. The top three floors are still holding but they have dropped." "If there was anyone in there at the time, then they're gone," said Thompson, who runs a zipline adventure business in Vanuatu. Some people injured in the quake were driven in flat-bed trucks to a Port Vila hospital where others lay in stretchers outside or sat on plastic chairs, their arms and

heads wrapped in bandages, public television VBTC images showed.

Landslips sent tons of earth and large rocks tumbling down a steep hill over the international shipping terminal, images verified by AFP showed. The port buildings did not appear to be damaged. Australian and other regional airlines including Qantas, Jetstar, Virgin Australia, and Fiji Airways diverted or suspended flights—some citing reports of possible damage to the facilities and runway. The quake cut off most mobile networks on the Pacific island, Thompson said.

Broken glass, debris

"They're just cracking on with a rescue operation. The support we need from overseas is medical evacuation and skilled rescue, kind of people that can operate in earthquakes," he said. Video posted by Thompson and verified by AFP showed uniformed rescuers working on a building that had collapsed, crushing parked cars

and trucks below. The streets of the city were strewn with broken glass and other debris from cracked buildings. Nibhay Nand, a Sydney-based pharmacist with businesses across the South Pacific, said staff in Port Vila reported that most of the store there had been "destroyed" and other buildings nearby had "collapsed". "We are waiting for everyone to get online to know how devastating and traumatic this will be," Nand told AFP.

A tsunami warning was issued after the quake, with waves of up to one meter forecast for some areas of Vanuatu, but it was soon lifted by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center. Australia stands ready to help, said Foreign Minister Penny Wong. "Vanuatu is family and we will always be there in times of need," she said in a statement. Vanuatu is ranked as one of the countries most susceptible to natural disasters such as earthquakes, storm damage, flooding and tsunamis, according to the annual World Risk Report. — AFP

Syrians rebuild Maaret Al-Numan, a symbol of war's devastation

MAARET AL-NUMAN: Vegetation grows between crumbled walls and torn asphalt, and not a single street remains intact in Syria's Maaret Al-Numan, a key war battleground town being brought back to life by returnees. Bilal Al-Rihani reopened his pastry shop in the western town this week with his wife and 14-year-old son. The 45-year-old baker couldn't stay away after years of exile, even amid the devastation surrounding him.

Working without water or electricity, the shop bustles with customers as they prepare cinnamon pastries—a family speciality for 150 years. Cars weave through the ruins, honking to announce their arrival. Like Rihani, his customers are former residents displaced by war, eager to rebuild their homes and lives. "I'm doing better business here than in the (displacement) camp!" Rihani said, pointing to the cracked road outside. "This street was the town's busiest, day and night."

Strategic crossroad

Once home to nearly 100,000 people, Maaret Al-Numan was devastated by years of war, turning it into a ghost town and a symbol of Syria's destruction. The town's location on the strategic M5 highway,

linking second city Aleppo to the capital Damascus, made it a key battleground from the outbreak of fighting in 2012. Islamist rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the group now in power after ousting long-time president Bashar al-Assad over a week ago, seized it in 2017. But in 2020, Assad's forces backed by Russian air strikes retook the town after intense fighting, forcing the last remaining residents to flee to displacement camps in Idlib.

The war left Maaret Al-Numan littered with mines and unexploded ordinances, deterring large-scale returns. Authorities have yet to encourage people to return, but the White Helmets, a volunteer rescue group active in rebel areas, were working to clear debris and recover bodies. At one site, they placed four bodies in mortuary bags. "Soldiers from Assad's army, killed by his own people," one White Helmet member said, declining to elaborate. The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011 with the brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protests, resulted in more than half a million deaths and displaced millions of people.

Rebuilding better

At another intersection, a bulldozer clears collapsed stone walls from the streets. "This neighborhood is cleaned up, and we're here to protect the people and their belongings," said Jihad Shahin, a 50-year-old police officer. "Activity is returning to the city, and we'll rebuild better than before." But it is an uphill battle, according to local official Kifah Jaafer. "There are no schools, no basic services. We're doing what we can to help, but



MAARET AL-NUMAN: This aerial view shows destroyed buildings in Maaret Al-Numan, in the north-western Syrian Idlib province. — AFP

the city lacks everything," he said.

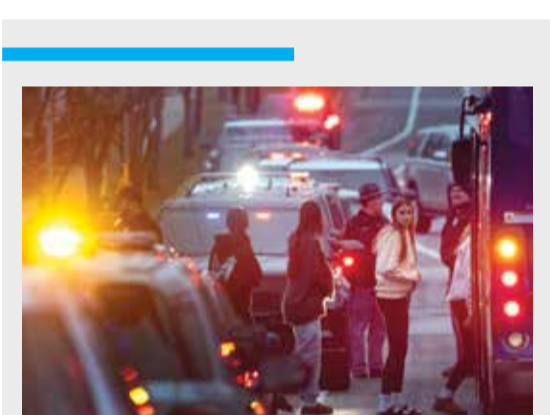
Jaafer, who previously managed an Idlib displacement camp, is now focused on addressing residents' needs as they trickle back. At the town's edge, Ihab Al-Sayid, 30, and his brothers are clearing the collapsed roof of their family home. In 2017, a Russian air strike left Sayid with severe brain injuries requiring multiple operations. Now he's back, brewing coffee on a stove while his four-year-old son plays nearby. "People here are simple," he said. "All we need is security. We came back five days ago to rebuild and start fresh." The bitter cold settles as the sun sets, but Sayid remains optimistic. "We've gotten rid of Assad—that gives us courage." — AFP

cycles" of the national parliament in New Delhi with state assemblies, India's justice ministry said in a statement on Tuesday.

"By synchronizing these electoral timelines, the approach aims to address logistical challenges, reduce costs, and minimize disruptions caused by frequent elections," it added. "This would allow voters to cast their ballots for both tiers of government on the same day in their constituencies, though voting could still occur in phases across the country." Main opposition party Congress said on Tuesday it "firmly, totally, comprehensively" rejects the bill, with spokesperson Jairam Ramesh calling it "unconstitutional". — AFP

Indian party proposes holding simultaneous mega election

NEW DELHI: India's ruling party on Tuesday tabled a parliamentary bill to synchronize state and national elections, a proposal that would vastly extend what is already the world's largest democratic exercise. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) say the concurrent polls proposed by the "One



WISCONSIN: Students are escorted from a church next to the Abundant Life Christian School and loaded on busses to be taken to a reunification center on December 16, 2024 in Madison, Wisconsin. — AFP

15-year-old girl kills 2 in latest US school shooting

WASHINGTON: A 15-year-old female student was identified by police as the assailant who opened fire Monday at a school in the US state of Wisconsin, where a fellow student and teacher were killed and the suspected shooter was found dead. Shon Barnes, police chief in the state capital Madison, told a press briefing that three people had died and seven others were wounded at the Abundant Life Christian School, a private Christian school with about 400 students. "The shooter has now been identified as (a) 15-year-old," Barnes told reporters, identifying the minor by name. "She was a student at the school, and evidence suggests she died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound," he added.

Barnes said a second-grade student called emergency services to report the shooting shortly before 11:00 am local time. Of the six wounded victims who were hospitalized, two students remain in critical condition with life-threatening injuries, two people are in stable condition, and two have been discharged from hospital, the police chief said. A handgun was recovered at the scene, Barnes said, adding that the suspect's family was cooperating with the police investigation. "We are still working to determine a motive," he said.

One witness interviewed by local media said they had heard two gunshots during the attack. "We heard them and then some people started crying and then we just waited until the police came and then they escorted us out to the church," said the child, who was not identified. Monday's violence is the latest in a long line of school shootings in the United States, where guns outnumber people and attempts to restrict access to firearms face perennial political deadlock. Underlining the commonplace nature of mass shootings, the police chief said some medical personnel responding to Abundant Life came directly from training for such an event.

"I think we can all agree that enough is enough," Barnes told reporters. "We have to come together to do everything we can to support our students, to prevent press conferences like these from happening again and again and again." US President Joe Biden condemned the shooting as "shocking and unconscionable" and said the tragedy underscored yet again the need for tighter gun laws. "It is unacceptable that we are unable to protect our children from this scourge of gun violence. We cannot continue to accept it as normal," he said in a statement. "We need Congress to act. Now." — AFP

International

Election-bound Germany braces for Russia disinformation threat

Investigations point to Kremlin-linked efforts to boost extremist parties

BERLIN: As Germany heads for elections, its security services warn that Russia and its sympathizers may step up meddling and disinformation to boost extremist parties and sow doubt about the democratic process. Following charges that Moscow interfered in recent elections in Moldova, Georgia and Romania, authorities in Berlin fear that the February 23 vote will also be a ripe target for pro-Russian propaganda. Media investigations have pointed to Kremlin-linked efforts to support the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and boost the Russia-friendly views of the far-left Alliance Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW).

As the campaign gathers pace, Germany's interior ministry has set up a taskforce to take "the necessary protection measures" against any disinformation, sabotage, espionage and cyber-attacks. "Targeted lies and defamation are part of the toolkit of Putin's propaganda apparatus," Interior Minister Nancy Faeser told the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) newspaper. As Germany and its NATO allies strongly back Ukraine in its fight against Russia's invasion, Germany's foreign intelligence chief Bruno Kahl has warned that "whether we like it or not, we are in a direct confrontation with Moscow".

Kahl said in October that so far in Germany "thankfully there has been no manipulation of the actual voting procedure such as attempts to influence the count" and noted that this would be difficult in Germany. However, he said that Moscow had become adept at identifying socially divisive issues and then "heating them up", such as the COVID pandemic, climate change and Germany's economic woes. Without naming names, Kahl said that "in this way extremes are strengthened and we see on the left and the right of the spectrum that lines from Moscow are sometimes naively parroted" by domestic actors in Germany.

Father, stepmother of murdered UK-Pakistani girl jailed for life

LONDON: A UK court on Tuesday handed life sentences to the father and stepmother of a murdered 10-year-old British-Pakistani girl who died after being subjected to a prolonged "campaign of torture" and "despicable abuse". Urfan Sharif, 43, and Beinash Batool, 30, will serve at least 40 and 33 years respectively for the killing of Sara Sharif. London's Old Bailey court heard that her body was found covered in bites and bruises with broken bones and burns inflicted by an electric iron.



LONDON: A combination of handout photographs shows custody images of (left to right) Urfan Sharif, Beinash Batool and Faisal Malik, respectively father, stepmother, and uncle of British-Pakistani girl Sara Sharif. — AFP

Passing sentence, Judge John Cavanagh said Sara had been subjected to "acts of extreme cruelty" but that Sharif and Batool had not shown "a shred of remorse". "The stress, pain and trauma that this campaign of violence will have caused to Sara is hard to contemplate," he told them. "This poor child was battered with great force again and again," he said.

Sara had been beaten with a metal pole and cricket bat and "trussed up" with a "grotesque combination of parcel tape, a rope and a plastic bag" over her head, the judge said. She was found dead in her



BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (center), Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) co-leader Saskia Esken (right) and Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) co-leader Lars Klingbeil stand on stage as they present their party's electoral program for the legislative elections on December 17, 2024 at the SPD headquarters in Berlin. — AFP

Memes and narratives

A joint investigation by several German media outlets this year charged that a Russian propaganda agency was working to spread memes and narratives online to boost the AfD and undermine support for Ukraine. The Social Design Agency (SDA) had been spreading disinformation in order to increase voters' "fear of the future" and raise voter support for the AfD to 20 percent, the media consortium reported in September. The campaign was being "controlled directly from the Kremlin", according to the report by the SZ daily, public broadcasters NDR and WDR and

other media. According to the report, the SDA publishes memes and caricatures "around the clock on social networks" including Facebook, Instagram, X and Telegram.

One internal SDA directive was to spread the narrative that German support for Ukraine is to blame for the "deepest economic and social crisis in recent history", the SZ said. The daily quoted Germany's domestic intelligence chief Thomas Haldenwang as saying his organization was working hard "to identify the destructive actors and prevent them from destabilizing our democracy". The SDA is also suspected of

involvement in the so-called "Doppelgaenger" campaign, in which fake articles mimicking the style and layout of major German news outlets are spread in support of pro-Russian narratives.

'Amplify tensions'

Germany has also seen a proliferation of claims spread online that seek to undermine trust in the voting process itself. During June's European elections, AFP fact-checked a claim that a small hole in the corners of ballot papers made them invalid. The hole is actually there to aid blind people to vote using a special stencil. One post, viewed thousands of times on Telegram, was from a channel that regularly relays pro-Kremlin messaging.

Many suspicious online items have centered on divisive debates around climate change and targeted Germany's left-leaning Greens party, who are also the declared political enemy of the AfD. While much disinformation on the topic is home-grown, the non-profit group Climate Action Against Disinformation said official Russian media accounts—including those posting in German—seek to "amplify tensions". Leading Greens politicians have been smeared by defamatory articles and AI-manipulated videos falsely accusing them of scandals and criminality.

German news site t-online has reported that the claims had been carefully planted via a mix of YouTube videos, "sponsored" articles in overseas media, and made-up German news sites. The links from these "disinformation portals" were then spread by pro-Moscow accounts on social platform X in an "info-launders" process that the report described as a modern version of Cold War-era KGB practices. Greens lawmaker and security expert Konstantin von Notz warned last week that "the use of AI-generated disinformation such as deepfakes has long been a serious security policy problem". — AFP

One billion users, but controversies mount up for TikTok

PARIS: TikTok's breakneck rise from niche video-sharing app to global social media behemoth has drawn intense scrutiny, particularly over its links to China. The platform faces accusations of espionage in the United States, while the European Union has launched an investigation into claims it was used to sway Romania's presidential election in favor of a far right candidate. So is TikTok a spying tool for Beijing, a fun app, or both?

Romania influence campaign

The EU is probing whether far-right presidential candidate Calin Georgescu's surprise victory in the first round of Romania's presidential election was aided by Russian meddling and "preferential treatment" by TikTok. It is the third investigation the commission has launched against TikTok, which risks fines of up to six percent of its global turnover. The platform said it had taken "robust actions" to tackle election-related misinformation. Russia has denied interfering in the vote.

Under pressure

The United States in April passed a law obliging TikTok's Chinese owner ByteDance to sell off the platform by January 19 on the grounds it allowed China to access data on US users. If not, the platform would be banned in the United States - denying TikTok its claimed 170 million users in the countries. TikTok admitted ByteDance employees in China had accessed Americans' data but it has denied giving data to the Chinese authorities. To protect data, the US government, the European Commission and Britain's government had already banned TikTok from their employees' work devices in 2023.

Teenage ban in Australia

But bans have not halted TikTok's growth. With more than one billion active users worldwide, the platform is a phenomenon for young people attracted by its never-ending scroll of ultra-brief videos. Nearly a

third of TikTok users are between 10 and 19 years old, according to the Wallaroo agency. But that success has brought accusations that the platform encourages the spread of misinformation and illegal, violent, or pornographic content, particularly among young people. TikTok was among the many platforms targeted by a landmark law passed in Australia in November banning under-16s from accessing social media. Social media firms that fail to comply with the law face fines of up to Aus\$50 million (US\$32.5 million) for "systemic breaches". TikTok said it was "disappointed" by the Australian legislation, claiming it could push young people to the "darker corners of the internet".

Opaque algorithm

Its editing features and powerful algorithm have kept it ahead of the game, attracting an army of creators and influencers as well as creating many of its own. But the algorithm is opaque and often accused of leading users into digital content silos. TikTok and ByteDance employees also manually increase the number of views on certain content, according to a report in Forbes. TikTok has said manual promotion only affects a tiny fraction of recommended videos.

In August, the company, under pressure from EU regulators, was forced to ditch a feature in its TikTok Lite spinoff in France and Spain rewarding users for the time spent in front of their screens. In that rewards program, users aged 18 and over could earn points to exchange for goods like vouchers or gift cards by liking and watching videos. It was accused by the EU of potentially having "very addictive consequences".

Disinformation

The app is regularly accused of putting users in danger with the spread of hazardous "challenge" videos. Several children have reportedly died while trying to replicate the so-called blackout challenge, which involves users holding their breath until they pass out. And around one-fifth of videos on topical issues such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine were found to be fake or misleading in a study by misinformation group NewsGuard. AFP, along with more than a dozen fact-checking organizations, is paid by TikTok in several countries in Asia and Oceania, Europe, the Middle East and Spanish-speaking Latin America to verify for internal moderation videos that potentially contain false information. The videos are removed by TikTok if the information is shown to be false by AFP teams. — AFP

Zionists keep up Gaza genocide...

Continued from Page 1

conditions. A Palestinian official close to the mediation efforts said negotiations were serious, with discussions underway about every word.

Zionist Defense Minister Israel Katz said on Tuesday that his country's forces would be free to act in the Gaza Strip even after its war with Hamas ends. "After eliminating Hamas' military and governmental capabilities in Gaza, (the Zionist entity) would have security control over Gaza with complete freedom of action" for the Zionist military, Katz said in a post on X, noting that it was his own "position". Katz said the Zionist entity's future control over Gaza should be "exactly like in Judea and Samaria", the Zionist names for the West Bank which the Zionist entity has occupied since 1967 and where its forces conduct frequent raids.

Sources briefed on the meeting said Netanyahu was on his way to Cairo, but a statement from Netanyahu's office said he had a meeting on Tuesday with senior military and security officials on Mount Hermon, a strategic plateau just inside Syria. Separately, his spokesperson messaged Zionist correspondents to say: "The prime minister is not in Cairo."

Two Egyptian security sources said that Netanyahu was not in Cairo "at this moment" but that a meeting

was underway to work through the remaining points, chief among them a Hamas demand for guarantees that any immediate deal would lead to a comprehensive agreement later. The Egyptian sources said they were making progress and felt that Tuesday night could be decisive in setting the next steps.

Netanyahu had been excused on Tuesday from giving previously scheduled testimony at his corruption trial. He met in the Zionist entity on Monday with Adam Boehler, designated by US President-elect Donald Trump to be his special envoy for hostage affairs. At a press conference in Florida on Monday, Trump reiterated his threat that "all hell is going to break out" if Hamas does not release its hostages by Jan 20, the day he takes office. Later, Trump said that if no ceasefire deal is reached by the time he takes office, "It's not going to be pleasant." He did not elaborate.

US and Zionist officials have expressed growing optimism that negotiations brokered by Egypt and Qatar could produce a deal by the end of the month but have also cautioned that the talks could fall through. Zionist negotiators were in Doha on Monday looking to bridge gaps between the Zionist entity and Hamas on a deal Biden outlined in May. There have been repeated rounds of talks over the past year, all of which have ended in failure, with the Zionist entity insisting on retaining a military presence in Gaza and Hamas refusing to release captives until the troops pulled out.

The Zionist campaign has killed more than 45,000 Palestinians in Gaza, displaced most of the 2.3 million population and reduced much of the coastal enclave

to ruins. Zionist airstrikes killed extended families in homes in two parts of the northern Gaza Strip on Tuesday, medics said. At least 10 people were confirmed killed in an airstrike on a house in Gaza City that destroyed the building, while further north in the town of Beit Lahia at least 15 people were believed to be dead or missing under the rubble of a house hit around dawn.

At least 10 other Palestinians were killed in separate strikes elsewhere in Gaza City and Beit Lahiya, medics said. The Zionist military said on Tuesday two soldiers were killed in the south of the Gaza Strip. In Beit Lahia, the Zionist entity has been operating since October in what it calls an offensive to prevent Hamas fighters from regrouping; Palestinians say the army aims to depopulate a buffer zone on the enclave's northern edge.

In the southern part of the enclave, in Rafah near the border with Egypt, Zionist tanks pushed deeper towards the western area of Mawasi, forcing dozens of families to flee northwards towards Khan Younis, residents said. Hours later, residents said the army blew up several houses in the area and set several tents ablaze.

The Zionist entity has previously designated Mawasi, along the Mediterranean coast, as a humanitarian area. Thousands of Palestinians have lived there in tents for months, having obeyed Zionist orders to move there from other areas for safety. Footage circulating on social media showed lines of thick black and grey smoke rising from the area beside the tent encampment. — Reuters

Ukraine kills Russian chemical...

Continued from Page 1

Ukraine's SBU alleged Kirillov was responsible for using banned chemical weapons on the battlefield. "Kirillov was a war criminal and an absolutely legitimate target, as he gave orders to use banned chemical weapons against the Ukrainian military," the SBU source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP. "Such an inglorious end awaits all those who kill Ukrainians. Retribution for war crimes is inevitable," the source added. There have been assassinations on Russian territory before, but such attacks in Moscow — where fighting in Ukraine often feels distant — are rare. Residents AFP spoke to said they had initially assumed the loud noise they heard came from a nearby construction site. Student Mikhail Mashkov, who lives in the building next door, said he was woken up by a "very loud explosion noise", thinking "something fell at the construction site", before looking outside.

Homemaker Olga Bogomolova told AFP she thought a container had fallen at the construction site but then realized "it was a very strong explosion", saw "broken windows" and that it was something else. Previous targets included nationalist writer Darya Dugina — killed in a car bomb attack outside Moscow in 2022 — and pro-conflict military correspondent Maxim Fomin — blown up in a Saint Petersburg cafe in 2023. — Agencies

International

Syria rulers step up int'l engagement

Jolani says rebel factions will be 'disbanded' • Zionist official calls him 'wolf in sheep's clothing'

DAMASCUS: Syria's new rulers stepped up engagement on Tuesday with countries that deemed ousted president Bashar Al-Assad a pariah, with the French flag raised at the embassy for the first time in over a decade. Assad fled Syria just over a week ago, as his forces abandoned tanks and other equipment in the face of a lightning offensive spearheaded by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

The collapse of Assad's rule on Dec 8 stunned the world and sparked celebrations around Syria and beyond, after his crackdown on democracy protests in 2011 led to one of the deadliest wars of the century. The EU will reopen its mission in Syria following "constructive" talks with its new leadership, the bloc's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said, describing it as a "very important step".

Turkey and Qatar, which backed the anti-Assad opposition, have reopened embassies in Damascus, while US and British officials have launched communications with Syria's new leaders. France, an early backer of the uprising, sent a delegation to Damascus on Tuesday, with special envoy Jean-Francois Guillaume saying his country was preparing to stand with Syrians during the transitional period. An AFP journalist saw the French flag raised in the embassy's entrance hall for the first time since the mission was shuttered in 2012.

After meeting Syria's new leaders, the United Nations humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher said on Tuesday he was "encouraged", and that there was a "basis for ambitious scaling-up of vital humanitarian

support". German diplomats were also in Damascus on Tuesday, while Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni said her country was ready to engage with the new leadership.

Abu Mohammed Al-Jolani, who heads HTS, stressed the need in a meeting with a delegation of British diplomats to end "all sanctions imposed on Syria so that Syrian refugees can return to their country". He also said Syria's rebel factions will be "disbanded and the fighters trained to join the ranks of the defense ministry". "Syria must remain united," he said, according to posts on the group's Telegram channel. "There must be a social contract between the state and all religions to guarantee social justice".

The EU's Kallas said the lifting of sanctions and removing HTS from its blacklist would depend on "when we see positive steps, not the words, but actual steps and deeds from the new leadership". The United Nations expects one million people to return to Syria in the first half of 2025, after the war pushed six million people to seek refuge abroad. Meanwhile, Zionist Deputy Foreign Minister Sharron Haskel accused Jolani of being "a wolf in (sheep's) clothes" because of his jihadist history. Speaking at a press conference, Haskel held up a photo collage of Jolani, showing him while a member of jihadist organizations.

"It is important to avoid falling for the attempt to whitewash jihadist (groups) in Syria. We know who they are and their true nature, even if they change their names, and we understand how dangerous they are to the West," said Haskel. "These are terrorist



DAMASCUS: A gunman stands guard across from Qatar embassy in Syria as staffers arrive to check the building in Damascus to inspect potential damage before resuming operations. Qatar's embassy is set to resume operations, 13 years after it closed in the early stages of an anti-government uprising that sparked years of civil war. — AFP

organizations and this is a wolf in (sheep's) clothes."

In Damascus's old souk, many shops had reopened more than a week since Assad's ouster, according to an AFP journalist. Some shopkeepers were painting their store facades white, erasing the colors of the

old Syrian flag that under Assad's rule had become ubiquitous. "We have been working non-stop for a week to paint everything white," Omar Bashur, a 61-year-old artisan said. "White is the color of peace," he added. — AFP

Tackling climate and nature separately risks worsening crises: UN

PARIS: Overconsumption and unsustainable farming are fueling overlapping crises in nature and the climate, putting crucial ecosystems such as coral reefs at imminent risk of destruction, a landmark UN report said Tuesday. The assessment by the UN's expert biodiversity panel lays bare the complex interplay between nature loss, global warming, and threats to water, food and health—and the role of humans in driving these crises. Three years in the making, their report was agreed by nearly 150 governments after days of painstaking debate, and followed disappointing outcomes for the planet at a string of UN summits.

Tackling any of these challenges in isolation dooms progress on the others, stressed the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). This poses "a real danger in that we'll solve one crisis whilst also making others worse", said Paula Harrison, one of the report's lead authors. In a potent illustration of the multi-pronged threat posed by humanity, the report warned that fast-warming seas, overfishing and ocean pollution put coral reefs on course for extinction within a few generations. "Coral reefs are the most endangered ecosystems and may disappear globally in the next 10 to 50 years," said the sweeping report by scores of international scientists. Such a catastrophic loss would affect a billion people who depend on reefs for food, tourism income, and protection from storms.

Tipping points

The true cost of such destruction is often hidden or outright ignored, the report's authors said. They estimated that fossil fuels, farming and fisheries could inflict up to \$25 trillion a year in accounted costs—equivalent to a quarter of global GDP. "We're just neglecting those tradeoffs," economist James Vause, who contributed to the report, told AFP. Nature underpins more than half the global economy but governments are spending vastly more on its destruction



WRAYSBURY: An aerial view shows floodwater surrounding a van in a residential street in Wraysbury, west of London, after heavy rain brought flooding to much of the country, following Storm Henk. — AFP

than conservation. Vause said \$200 billion annually was spent on biodiversity yet 35 times as much—some \$7 trillion—went into subsidies and other negative incentives that harmed the planet. The report underlined the particularly damaging toll of unsustainable farming, saying it "contributed to biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, and air, water and land pollution". Fisheries were "approaching tipping points", it added.

Solutions

Affluence—not need—was largely behind a growing appetite for food that was being met in part through exploitative farming methods that also risked the emergence of new pathogens. Curbing the overconsumption of red and processed meat would help promote more sustainable farming practices and improve health outcomes. A huge amount of all food grown is wasted while 800 million people go hungry every day, Pamela McElwee, the report's other lead author, told AFP.

"This current system doesn't have to be the way

it is... (it) is not only not working for nature, it's not working for a big chunk of the population," McElwee said. Treating these interlinked crises as separate problems was "duplicative and may be wasting money", she added. It was also counterproductive. For example, planting trees in an effort to address global warming could have a negative knock-on effect for local plant or animal species if done inappropriately. By contrast, involving communities in the management of marine protected areas had delivered up-sides for the environment but also boosted tourism revenue and fish catch for local people.

In California, flooding rice fields instead of burning crop residue improved air quality but also restored salmon populations and sheltered migratory birds. In another example, the authors said treating the parasitic disease bilharzia—which affects 200 million people annually—as an environmental challenge, not just a health one, had improved reinfection rates. In Senegal, cases were cut 32 percent in children and access to clean water improved when lakes were cleared of vegetation on which disease-transmitting snails feed. — AFP

US woman receives gene-edited kidney

WASHINGTON: Towana Looney donated a kidney to her mother in 1999 only for the remaining one to fail several years later as a result of pregnancy complications. The 53-year-old from Alabama has now become the latest recipient of a gene-edited pig kidney—and is currently the only living person with an animal organ transplant—a New York hospital announced on Tuesday. "It's a blessing," she said in a press statement, published three weeks after the procedure at NYU Langone.

The field of xenotransplantation, long an elusive goal for science, is seeing renewed momentum as advancements in gene editing and managing the immune system bring the once-distant prospect closer to reality. Advocates hope it can help address the organ shortage crisis, with more than 100,000 Americans waiting for an organ, including over 90,000 in need of kidneys. Looney had been living with dialysis since December 2016 – eight long years—after high blood pressure from a pregnancy condition damaged her remaining kidney. Although living donors receive higher priority on waiting lists, finding a suitable match proved impossible due to her unusually high levels of harmful antibodies, which made rejection highly likely.

Meanwhile, her body gradually lost accessible blood vessels to support dialysis, leaving her increasingly frail. Looney's surgery marks the third instance of a gene-edited pig kidney being transplanted into a living human. The first, Rick Slayman, 62, passed away in May, two months after his groundbreaking procedure at Massachusetts General Hospital. The second, grandmother Lisa Pasano, underwent the transplant at NYU Langone, where she also received a heart pump. While she initially showed signs of recovery, she had to return to dialysis after 47 days and passed away in July. Despite these challenges, researchers remain optimistic as they refine their techniques, work with improved gene-edited pig kidneys, and select patients who are less critically ill. — AFP



DAMASCUS: An aerial picture shows a view of the destruction at the Yarmuk camp for Palestinian refugees and its cemetery, in the south of Damascus. — AFP

Palestinians flock to cemetery off-limits under Assad

YARMUK: In a war-ravaged Palestinian refugee camp in Syria, Radwan Adwan was stacking stones to rebuild his father's grave, finally able to return to Yarmuk cemetery after Bashar Al-Assad's fall. "Without the fall of the regime, it would have been impossible to see my father's grave again," said 45-year-old Adwan. "When we arrived, there was no trace of the grave." It was his first visit there since 2018, when access to the cemetery south of Damascus was officially banned. Assad's fall on December 8, after a lightning offensive led by Islamist rebels, put an end to decades of iron-fisted rule and years of bloody civil war that began with repression of anti-government protests in 2011.

Yarmuk camp fell to rebels early in the war before

becoming a jihadist stronghold. It was bombed and besieged by Assad's forces, emptied of most of its residents and reduced to ruins before its recapture in 2018. Assad's ouster has allowed former residents to return for the first time in years. Back at the cemetery, Adwan's mother Zeina sat on a small metal chair in front of her husband's gravesite. She was "finally" able to weep for him, she said. "Before, my tears were dry." "It's the first time that I have returned to his grave for years. Everything has changed, but I still recognize where his grave is," said the 70-year-old woman.

Yarmuk camp, established in the 1950s to house Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their land after Zionist entity's creation, had become a key residential and commercial district over the decades. Some 160,000 Palestinians lived there alongside thousands of Syrians before the country's conflict erupted in 2011. Thousands fled in 2012, and few have found their homes still standing in the eerie wasteland that used to be Yarmuk. Along the road to the cemetery, barefoot children dressed in threadbare clothes play with what is left of a swing set in a rubble-strewn area that was once a park. — AFP

News in Brief

Russia to remove Taliban from list of 'terror' group

MOSCOW: Russia's parliament on Tuesday approved a bill that could pave the way for Moscow to lift its designation of the Taliban as a banned "terrorist" organization. Moscow has courted relations with the Taliban since they seized power in Afghanistan after the United States' chaotic withdrawal from in 2021. Officials have since been pushing to remove the Islamist group from Moscow's official list of outlawed "terrorist" groups. The State Duma passed a bill outlining a mechanism for groups to be legally removed from the list – putting the necessary legal framework in place for an expected future decision. The bill now passes to the upper-house Federation Council and then to President Vladimir Putin to sign into law. — AFP

Cyclone Chido kills at least 34 people in Mozambique

MAPUTO: Cyclone Chido claimed at least 34 lives after sweeping across Mozambique, the National Institute of Risk and Disaster Management announced Tuesday. The cyclone first hit the country on Sunday at the Cabo Delgado province, where 28 people were killed, the center said, releasing its latest information as of Monday evening. Three other people died in Nampula province and three in Niassa, further inland, it said. Another 319 people were reported injured by the cyclone, which brought winds of around 260 kilometers an hour and heavy rainfall of around 250 millimeters in 24 hours, the center said. Nearly 23,600 homes and 170 fishing boats were destroyed and 175,000 people affected by the storm, it added. — AFP

EU launches investigation into TikTok over Romania

BRUSSELS: The EU said on Tuesday it had opened a formal investigation into TikTok following allegations the platform was used by Russia to sway the result of Romania's later annulled presidential election. The probe, under a mammoth law known as the Digital Services Act (DSA), centers on concerns the short-video app failed to "assess and mitigate systemic risks" linked to election integrity, the European Commission said. "We must protect our democracies from any kind of foreign interference. Whenever we suspect such interference, especially during elections, we have to act swiftly and firmly," said commission chief Ursula von der Leyen. — AFP

White Xmas dreams dashed as Europe's winters heat up

PARIS: A white Christmas may increasingly become a nostalgic memory as the Northern Hemisphere sees ever fewer snowy winter days due to climate change, with Europe warming quickest, a report warned on Tuesday. Driven primarily by humanity's mass burning of fossil fuels, that decline in days below freezing threatens tourism, the economy and cultures, according to Climate Central. Tuesday's report by the US-based research institute argues that manmade climate change had caused more than a third of the 123 countries and nearly half of the 901 cities studied to lose the equivalent of at least a week's worth of days below freezing—zero degrees Celsius or 32 degrees Fahrenheit—over a decade. The report's analysis is based on the daily minimum temperatures covering the months of December to February—roughly the span of the Northern Hemisphere winter—from 2014 to 2023. Those lows were then compared to a simulation of a climate without the warming effects of humanity's widespread use of coal, oil and gas. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2024

Zain unveils new '4WARD' corporate strategy

Accelerating Zain's evolution into a purpose-driven TechCo conglomerate



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi with CEOs of all Zain entities.

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle and ICT communications operating in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces the introduction of '4WARD' - Progress with Purpose - a new five-year sustainable corporate strategy. This strategy is focused on continuity, acceleration, collaboration and digital innovation, and is designed to foster value creation by fast-tracking the company's evolution from a predominantly mobile centric operator into a purpose driven technology entity.

Zain looks to maximize its full potential as a customer-centric, future-proof, and impactful leading regional TechCo conglomerate. The 4WARD strategy was formulated internally through a series of group-wide collaborative workshops led by the Zain Group strategy team and announced during a recent strategy forum held in Kuwait, attended by Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi, senior Group executives and management leadership teams from all Zain's and Omantel's operating entities, shortly thereafter receiving formal approval from Zain Group's Board of Directors.

4WARD builds on the significant momentum and



Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi unveils the new strategy.

The new '4WARD' - Progress with Purpose strategy comprises of four primary forces, each with three accelerators (thus 12 key accelerators) that will further progress Zain from being a Telco to a TechCo, to meet the ever-growing demand for superior and dynamic consumer and enterprise services:

Customer Delight

Exceeding customer expectations by placing them at the heart of everything Zain does, achieved through delivering superior fixed and mobile connectivity experiences for consumers, businesses, communities, and governments, thus enhancing Zain's position as a provider of choice for all.

Digital Zain

Elevating digital capabilities and innovation to drive expansion and growth through the further development of Fintech activities; artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies; and building out digital infrastructure further.

Purpose and Action

Ensuring that Zain's actions align with meaningful impact and responsibility, through Sustainability, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and other ESG initiatives that lead to systemic change.

Collaborative Growth

Empowerment of the company's 8,000 talented workforce, and fostering a culture of collaboration and partnerships to unlock opportunities and synergies across Zain's ecosystem.

Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi commented, "4WARD will unleash Zain's full potential in transforming from a Telco to a purpose driven TechCo conglomerate providing 'Better Lives and Lasting Connections'. The 4SIGHT strategy over the years has made Zain a more dynamic and agile organization, having established many customer-focused initiatives that have enhanced the mobile experience for our customers, as well as creating multiple fast-growing and impactful new



Al-Kharafi with globally renowned strategists and presenters Jean Oelwang, Gerd Simon, and Zack Kass.



The success of the 4SIGHT strategy over the past five years has seen the establishment of multiple robust entities, namely ZainTECH, Zain Omantel International (ZOI), TASC Towers, Zain Ventures, Tamam, Zain Cash, Bede, Dizlee, Zain Esports, Yaqoot, oodi and a marketing partnership with Red Bull, with more in the pipeline. All these entities offer a wide range of dynamic, business-enriching and life-enhancing services.

This has contributed immensely to Zain's brand value to currently stand at more than US\$3 billion, according to BrandFinance 2024 rankings, a 50 percent increase from its 2020 valuation. The company's commitment to its values and the community, along with its purpose-driven focus on sustainability, inclusion, diversity, and equity powered by innovation, are key drivers for the Zain brand's value success. This drove an improved Brand Strength Index (BSI) rating of AAA-.

Commenting on the highly recognizable Zain brand, Al-Kharafi concluded, "While historically associated primarily with mobile services, we are keen to evolve that association to harness the inherent strengths of the Zain brand and adapt it to mirror the diversified TechCo conglomerate it embodies today. Consequently, we are actively exploring avenues to reposition the Zain brand, aiming to amplify its value by capitalizing on the collective strength of the various new business entities under the widely recognized and reputable Zain umbrella."

Vice-Chairman & Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi:

- 4WARD focuses on accelerating the achievements of the 4SIGHT strategy and realizes Zain's purpose of providing 'Better Lives and Lasting Connections'.
- 4WARD powered by four primary forces: Customer Delight; Digital Zain; Purpose and Action and Collaborative Growth; each designed to drive value creation and unleash Zain's full potential.
- Strategy formalized during meeting of senior management teams from Group and operations.

transformational accomplishments made under the previous corporate strategy, 4SIGHT, which was introduced in 2019 and under which Zain emerged as a multi-core digital player, successfully transforming its fixed and mobile services, and expanding into a number of new business verticals including ICT, Digital mobile operations, Fintech, Entertainment, Digital Infrastructure, Subsea and Cross-Border Connectivity and more.

Ireland fines Meta €251m over Facebook hacks

DUBLIN: An Irish regulator helping police European Union data privacy said Tuesday it had fined Facebook-owner Meta 251 million euros (\$263 million) for a data protection failure that saw Facebook accounts hacked. The Data Protection Commission (DPC) criticized Meta for a security flaw in its vid-

eo upload function which hackers were able to exploit to gain full access to other users' Facebook profiles. Over a two-week period in 2018, unauthorized users were able to hack into around 29 million Facebook accounts globally.

The personal data involved included email addresses, phone numbers, locations and places of work. "The failure to build in data protection requirements throughout the design and development cycle can expose individuals to very serious risks and harms, including a risk to the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals," said Graham Doyle, the regulator's head of communications. "By

allowing unauthorized exposure of profile information, the vulnerabilities behind this breach caused a grave risk of misuse of these types of data," he added.

Meta Ireland and its US parent company remedied the breach shortly after its discovery, the DPC said, and reported the issue to the regulator in September 2018. It is the latest fine in a series issued to the US social media giant and its rivals, as global regulators crack down on tech companies. In September, the DPC fined Meta 91 million euros for failing to put measures in place to protect users' password data and for taking too long to alert the regulator of the issue. — AFP



This illustration photograph shows the Meta (former Facebook) logo on a smartphone.— AFP



Muhammad Al-Duwaihees, AD Huang, Mahmoud Samara, Zhang Jianwei and Yousef Behbahani



From Right to Left - Yousef Behbahani, Malik Maarafi, Muhammed Al-Duwaihees, Mahmoud Samara, Bader Al-Kharafi, Dhari Al-Bader and Abdellatif Al-Sharikh

ALGHANIM INDUSTRIES AND BYD UNVEIL LANDMARK SHOWROOM IN KUWAIT

- The largest BYD showroom outside China paves the way for transformative mobility.
- Cutting-edge electric and hybrid models empower eco-friendly choices.
- Reinforces customer-centric values and long-term commitment to Kuwait's progress.

KUWAIT: Alghanim Industries, (Kutayba Alghanim Group), one of the largest privately-owned companies in the MENA region, celebrated the grand opening of its first BYD Alghanim showroom on the 4th Ring Road in Al-Rai. As the largest BYD showroom outside China, this landmark facility marks a pivotal step forward in Kuwait's journey toward cleaner, more sustainable transportation solutions.



Kutayba Y Alghanim

This opening BYD coincides with its 30th anniversary and the production of its 10 millionth NEV — an unprecedented global achievement. As a pioneer in clean energy, BYD is reshaping the future of transportation through cutting-edge, environmentally responsible innovation. Alghanim Industries' partnership with BYD aligns with its broader strategy to explore new opportunities in energy and sustainability, reaffirming the company's commitment to innovation and excellence in Kuwait's automotive sector and beyond.

This milestone occasion was further distinguished by the attendance of His Excellency Zhang Jianwei, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Kuwait, who commended the partnership as a notable alliance between Alghanim Industries — renowned for its enduring legacy and customer-first ethos — and BYD, a Chinese innovator shaping the future of sustainable transportation.

A Partnership Driving Kuwait's Sustainable Vision

Kutayba Y Alghanim, Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries, reflected on the company's enduring legacy and role in shaping Kuwait's future mobility: "Throughout our long history of serving Kuwait, Alghanim Industries has introduced offerings that enrich everyday life. Today, by partnering with BYD — an international leader in electric mobility — we're not simply adding to our automotive range; we're paving the way toward a cleaner, more innovative transport landscape. This alliance signals a forward-looking commitment to building

a thriving, sustainable future for generations to come."

Building on this perspective, Mahmoud Samara, CEO of Alghanim Industries, emphasized the company's tangible steps toward advancing sustainable transportation: "For decades, Alghanim Industries has operated on a simple truth: serving our customers' needs is what drives real progress. This principle led us to be among the first to introduce electric vehicles to Kuwait and invest in early charging infrastructure — an approach that raised industry standards and redefined what's possible. Now, as we join BYD, an innovator whose vision and values mirror our own, we are moving beyond incremental improvements and embracing an era where sustainability, innovation, and genuine customer focus work in harmony, setting the tone for Kuwait's evolving mobility landscape."

Underscoring the synergy between the two organizations, AD Huang, General Manager of BYD Middle East & Africa, praised the strength of the collaboration: "We are proud to partner with Alghanim Industries, a trusted name whose success across multiple sectors has contributed to Kuwait's growth and development. Their dedication to excellence and a forward-thinking approach aligns perfectly



with BYD's vision for a sustainable future. As we celebrate our 30th anniversary and the production of our 10 millionth NEV, we look forward to working closely with Alghanim Industries to deliver transformative mobility solutions, helping accelerate Kuwait's journey toward cleaner, more efficient transportation."

Paving the Way for Kuwait's Green Future

Beyond the showroom's launch, the partnership between BYD and Alghanim Industries reinforces a long-term vision for sustainable mobility in Kuwait. Alghanim Industries is actively investing in EV infrastructure and home-charging solutions and collaborating with both public and private entities to accelerate the shift toward cleaner energy transportation.

Looking ahead, BYD plans to intro-



General Manager of BYD Middle East and Africa AD Huang

duce models like the Sealion 7, the Shark electric pickup, and the Atto 2 compact SUV, broadening Kuwait's range of environmentally friendly driving options.

With BYD's global expertise and Alghanim Industries' enduring legacy, this collaboration is poised to advance Kuwait's transition toward sustainable mobility — creating a cleaner, more vibrant future for all."

Showcasing BYD's Cutting-Edge Lineup

The BYD Alghanim showroom features a diverse selection of NEVs designed for a range of lifestyles and preferences:

- **BYD SEAL:** An electric vehicle designed for various driving needs, featuring an 82.5 kWh battery that offers a range of up to 570 km on a single charge (WLTC). It includes a sleek design, comfortable interior, and innovative driver-assistance technologies, making it ideal for daily commutes and family outings.
- **BYD HAN:** An electric sedan equipped with a 85.4 kWh battery, providing a range of up to 565 km on a single charge (WLTC). It can reach a top speed of 180 km/h and accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in just 3.9 seconds. The Han EV combines elegant design with cutting-edge technology, advanced safety features, and a state-of-the-art infotainment system.
- **BYD ATTO 3:** A compact electric SUV with a 60.48 kWh battery, offering a range of up to 420 km (WLTC). It is equipped with a front electric motor producing 150 kW (201 hp) and 310 Nm of torque, ensuring a balanced and dynamic driving experience. The BYD ATTO 3 features a spacious interior with advanced infotainment and safety systems.



CEO of Alghanim Industries Mahmoud Samara

- **BYD QIN PLUS DM-i:** A plug-in hybrid sedan featuring an 18.3 kWh lithium iron phosphate battery and a 1.5L engine. It provides a total maximum output of 145 kW (194 hp) and 325 Nm of maximum torque, with an electric range of up to 95 km and a combine driving range of up to 795 km (WLTC). The BYD QIN PLUS DM-i accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in around 7.3 seconds and has a top speed of 185 km/h.

- **BYD SONG PLUS DM-i:** A versatile plug-in hybrid SUV powered by a 1.5T engine paired with an electric motor, delivering a combined output of 270 kW (362 hp). It features an electric range of up to 80 km with a 18.3 kWh



Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Zhang Jianwei

Enhancing Community Engagement

To commemorate the showroom launch, Alghanim Industries announced support for a local road-improvement initiative led by Yousef Al Omran, known as "Bu Jarrah", a prominent social media personality recognized for community-focused projects. While a lighthearted addition, this initiative demonstrates Alghanim Industries' commitment to contributing positively to the surrounding neighborhood.

Event Highlights

The grand opening gathered industry leaders, automotive enthusiasts, and community members. Guests enjoyed a



Bader Al-Kharafi and Mahmoud Samara

battery. It also gives a combined range of up to 890 km (WLTC). The BYD SONG PLUS DM-i offers advanced safety features and a spacious interior for a comfortable driving experience.

Each model comes equipped with advanced features, including high-resolution rotating touchscreens, wireless smartphone integration, over-the-air (OTA) updates, advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS), and premium interiors designed for comfort and convenience.

live performance by Murmuration, a band known for its dynamic and creative flair, adding a festive note to an event that celebrated both innovation and community progress.

In addition to Murmuration's dynamic performance, guests were treated to a captivating recital by six-year-old Turkish qanun prodigy Aytaç Doğan Junior, whose extraordinary talent brought a distinctive cultural flair to the evening's celebration.



CEO of NBK group, Isam Jasem Al-Sager



BYD Alghanim Sales Managers, Salman Al-Najadi and Abdulrahman Al-Merri



BYD Alghanim and BYD delegation group photo



A view of the opening ceremony.

Business

ChatGPT search opens to all users in challenge to Google

OpenAI escalating its threat to Google's dominance

SAN FRANCISCO: OpenAI on Monday said it is making ChatGPT-powered internet search available to all users, escalating its threat to Google's dominance. The San Francisco-based tech firm had beefed up its ChatGPT generative AI chatbot with search engine capabilities in late October, but made the feature available only to paying subscribers. The newly public feature enables users to receive "fast, timely answers" with links to relevant web sources - information that previously required using a traditional search engine, the company said.

The upgrade to ChatGPT enables the AI chatbot to provide real-time information from across the web. "We're bringing search to all logged-in free users of ChatGPT," OpenAI chief product officer Kevin Weil said in a video posted at YouTube. "That means it'll be available globally on every platform where you use ChatGPT." Examples of the new interface demonstrated by OpenAI resembled search results provided by Google and Google Maps, though without the clutter of advertising. They also appeared similarly to the interface of Perplexity, another AI-powered search engine that offers a more conversational version of Google by featuring the sources it referenced in the answer.

"We're really just making the ChatGPT ex-

perience that you know better with up-to-date information from the web," ChatGPT Search product lead Adam Fry said in the video. "We're rolling this out to hundreds of millions of users, starting today." Rather than launching a separate product, OpenAI has integrated search directly into ChatGPT. Users can enable the search feature by default or activate it manually via a web search icon. Since their launch, data on AI chatbots like ChatGPT or Anthropic's Claude have been limited by time cutoffs, so the answers they provided were not up-to-date. In contrast, Google and Microsoft both combine AI-generated answers with web results.

The addition of online search to ChatGPT will raise more questions about the startup's link to Microsoft, a major OpenAI investor, which is also trying to expand the reach of its Bing search engine against Google. OpenAI chief executive Sam Altman has set his company on a path to become an internet powerhouse. He successfully catapulted the company to a staggering \$157 billion valuation in a recent round of fundraising that included Microsoft, Tokyo-based conglomerate SoftBank and AI chipmaker Nvidia as investors. Enticing new users with search engine capabilities will increase the company's computing needs and costs, which are enormous. — AFP



WASHINGTON: This photo illustration shows the ChatGPT logo at an office in Washington, DC. OpenAI on December 16, 2024, said it is making ChatGPT-powered internet search available to all users, escalating its threat to Google's dominance. — AFP

1 in 5 properties in England now at risk of flooding

LONDON: Around one in five properties in England are at risk of flooding, a 15 percent increase from 2018, the Environment Agency warned Tuesday using models incorporating new localized data and climate change projections. Around 6.3 million homes and businesses are located in areas at risk of flooding from one or a combination of rivers, the sea and surface water, up from 5.5 million when the last assessment was conducted in 2018.

"With climate change, the total number of properties in areas at risk from rivers and the

sea or surface water could increase to around 8 million by the middle of the century - or around one in four properties," said the agency, which is tasked by the government with flood management. The models, published as the country cleans up from deadly storms Bert and Darragh, use "cutting-edge" methods that integrate detailed local data, such as new buildings, to make the predictions. For the first time, they also account for the latest UK climate projections from the Met Office. The assessments will be used by the government, Environment Agency and local communities to improve flood resilience.

Around 4.6 million of the identified properties are at risk from flash flooding, where rainwater overwhelms drainage systems, a 43 percent increase since the 2018 assessment. "These changes are almost entirely due to significant improvements in the Environment Agency's data, modeling

and use of technology providing a more accurate assessment of surface water flood risk," said the agency. Around 2.4 million properties are in areas at risk of flooding from rivers and the sea. The updated assessment also showed that 3,500 properties are expected to be in areas at risk of coastal erosion in the period up to 2055, increasing to about 10,100 properties by the end of the century.

"More detailed flood and coastal risk information, which takes climate change into account, is essential for local authorities to be able to plan effectively, to protect their local communities," said Hannah Bartram, from the Association of Directors for Environment, Planning and Transport. As global temperatures rise because of climate change, scientists have warned that heatwaves and other extreme weather events, such as severe flooding, droughts and wildfires will become more frequent and more intense. — AFP



OTTAWA: Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (left) and then Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland speak at a press conference to announce the new trade pact with Canada, US, and Mexico in this file photo. — AFP

Canada deputy PM resigns in tariff rift with Trudeau

OTTAWA: Canada's Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland quit Monday in a surprise move after disagreeing with Justin Trudeau over US president-elect Donald Trump's tariff threats. The resignation of Freeland, 56, who also stepped down as finance minister, marked the first open dissent against Prime Minister Trudeau from within his cabinet, and may threaten his hold on power.

Liberal leader Trudeau lags 20 points in polls behind his main rival, Conservative Pierre Poilievre, who has tried three times since September to topple the government and force a snap election. "It's not been an easy day," Trudeau commented at a fundraiser Monday evening. But in difficult times, he added, "we must all pull together." Freeland's departure came just hours before she was scheduled to provide an update on the nation's finances.

She said in her resignation letter to Trudeau the country "faces a grave challenge," pointing to Trump's planned 25-percent tariffs on imports from Canada. "For the past number of weeks, you and I have found ourselves at odds about the best path forward for Canada." Trump reacted to Freeland's surprise departure late Monday, writing: "She will not be missed!!!" "Her behavior was totally toxic, and not at all conducive to making deals which are very good for the unhappy citizens of Canada," he said in a post on Truth Social.

First elected to parliament in 2013, Freeland, a former journalist, joined Trudeau's cabinet two years later when the Liberals swept to power, holding key posts including trade and foreign minister, and leading free trade negotiations with the European Union and the United States. Most recently, she had been tasked with helping lead Canada's response to the incoming Trump administration. As the first woman to hold the nation's purse strings, she had also been tipped as a possible successor to Trudeau.

LeBlanc takes over

By day's end, Dominic LeBlanc, the public safety minister, was sworn in as the new finance minister, just as the government announced a Can\$62 billion (US\$43.5 billion) deficit - about Can\$22 billion more than projected - due to "unexpected expenses." LeBlanc now takes the reins on negotiating with team Trump, and has promised to be "focused on the challenges" ahead. Canada's main trading partner is the United States, with 75 percent of its exports each year going to its southern neighbor.

Trudeau flew to Florida last month to dine with Trump at the latter's Mar-a-Lago resort and try to head off the tariff threat, but nothing yet indicates the US president-elect is changing his position. In her letter, Freeland said the country needed to take Trump's tariffs threats "extremely seriously." Warning that it could lead to a "tariff war" with the United States, she said Ottawa must keep its "fiscal powder dry." "That means eschewing costly political gimmicks, which we can ill afford," she said, in an apparent rebuke of a recent sales tax holiday that critics said was too costly. — AFP

Japan to make renewables top power source

TOKYO: Japan wants renewables to be its top power source by 2040 in its push to become carbon neutral by mid-century, under government plans unveiled on Tuesday. Thirteen years after the 2011 Fukushima disaster, Tokyo also reaffirmed that it sees a major role for nuclear power in helping Japan meet growing energy demand from artificial intelligence and microchip factories. The world's fourth-largest economy has the dirtiest energy mix in the G7, campaigners say, with fossil fuels accounting for nearly 70 percent of its power generation last year.

The government has already set a target of becoming carbon-neutral by 2050 and to cut emissions by 46 percent by 2030 from 2013 levels. Under the new plans, renewables such as solar and wind were expected to account for 40 to 50 percent of electricity generation by 2040. That marks a jump from last year's level of 23 percent and a previous target for 2030 of 38 percent.

Resource-poor Japan "will aim to maximize the use of renewable energy as our main source of power," according to the draft Strategic Energy Plan. Government experts were reviewing the proposals released by the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy and it was due to be presented to the cabinet for approval. Japan is aiming to avoid relying heavily on one energy source to ensure "both a stable supply of energy and decarbonization", the draft said. Geopolitical concerns affecting energy lines, from the Ukraine war to Middle East unrest, were also behind the shift to renewables and nuclear, it said.

Imports

Nearly 70 percent of Japan's power needs in 2023 were met by power plants burning coal, gas and oil. Almost all must be imported, last year costing Japan about \$500 million per day. The government wants that figure to fall to 30 to 40 percent by 2040. The previously announced 2030 target was 41 percent, or 42 percent when hydrogen and ammonia were included. The new plans forecast a 10 to 20 percent jump in overall elec-

Stock markets mostly drop awaiting US Fed policy update

LONDON: Major stock markets mostly fell Tuesday as attention turned to the Federal Reserve's upcoming policy decision, with traders hoping for guidance on its interest rate plans as president-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office. Wall Street ended mostly on the front foot Monday, with a surge in tech giants helping the Nasdaq to a record high, but Asia was unable to pick up the baton Tuesday.

London slid in late morning deals as official data showing a jump in UK wages growth cemented forecasts that the Bank of England will avoid cutting interest rates this week. Paris and Frankfurt rose, as investors looked past news that German business confidence this month hit the lowest level since the start of the corona-



YUFU: Solar panels are pictured in Yufu, Oita prefecture. Japan wants renewables to be its top power source by 2040, as it pushes to become carbon neutral by mid-century, according to draft government plans unveiled on December 17, 2024. — AFP

tricity generation by 2040, from 985 billion kilowatt hours (kWh) in 2023. "Securing decarbonized sources of electricity is an issue directly related to our country's economic growth," Yoshifumi Murase, the head of the national energy agency, told the government's expert panel on Tuesday.

Nuclear

Unlike the previous plan three years ago, the new draft dropped language on reducing Japan's reliance on nuclear "as much as possible"—a goal set after the 2011 Fukushima disaster. Japan pulled the plug on nuclear power plants nationwide after the tsunami-triggered Fukushima meltdown, this century's worst atomic disaster. However, it has gradually been bringing them back online, despite a public backlash in some places, mirroring nuclear power returning to favor in other countries too. Nuclear accounts for about 20 percent of Japan's energy needs under the 2040 targets, around the same as the current 2030 target. But that is more

than double the share of 8.5 percent of overall power generation that nuclear provided in 2023.

Too little, too late

Hiroataka Koike from Greenpeace welcomed the new plan but said it was "too little, too late", calling for "much larger ambition" on renewables. Japan "has committed to 'fully or predominantly decarbonize power systems by 2035' and, evidently, their current plan doesn't cut it," Koike said. Hanna Hakko from climate think-tank E3G also called Japan's ambitions "quite disappointing". "The power mix suggested by the government is not consistent with Japan's international commitments to tackle climate change and accelerate clean energy transition," Hakko told AFP. "Various scenarios by energy experts show that if the government were to enact supportive policies, renewables could expand to cover between 60 to 80 percent of Japan's electricity generation mix in the latter half of 2030s," she said. — AFP

Tariffs fallout

Investors have started paring their bets on how many times the Fed will cut over the next 12 months owing to still-sticky inflation, a strong labor market and uncertainty about Trump, who has pledged to slash taxes and impose tariffs on imports. Canada's Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland quit Monday in a surprise move after disagreeing with Justin Trudeau over US president-elect Donald Trump's tariff threats.

The resignation of Freeland, who also stepped down as finance minister, marked the first open dissent against Prime Minister Trudeau from within his cabinet, and may threaten his hold on power. That pushed the Canadian dollar to the lowest level against the US dollar since April 2020. In her letter, Freeland said the country needed to take Trump's tariffs threats "extremely seriously." Warning that it could lead to a "tariff war" with the United States, she said Ottawa must keep its "fiscal powder dry." Trudeau flew to Florida last month to dine with Trump at the latter's Mar-a-Lago resort and try to head off the tariff threat, but nothing yet indicates the US president-elect is changing his position. — AFP

Business

Trump touts \$100bn SoftBank investment, vowing 100,000 jobs

A big win for incoming US administration

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Donald Trump on Monday praised Japan's SoftBank for its decision to invest \$100 billion in the United States and create 100,000 new jobs, a big win for his incoming administration. "This historic investment is a monumental demonstration of confidence in America's future," Trump said during a press conference at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida, flanked by SoftBank chief executive Masayoshi Son.

"It will help ensure that artificial intelligence, emerging technologies and other industries of tomorrow are built, created and grown right here in the USA," added Trump, who takes office from US President Joe Biden next month. Speaking alongside Trump, Son confirmed the investment company's financial commitment, adding that Trump's victory had "tremendously increased" his confidence in the US economy. "I am truly excited to make this happen," added Son, 67.

Second commitment

Son's announcement is around double the amount he committed SoftBank to in December 2016, shortly before Trump began his first term as president. The Japanese investment holding company ultimately parted with around \$100 billion through its Vision Fund, with much of the money supplied by sovereign wealth funds in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. "President Trump is a double-down president," Son said on Monday, adding: "I'm going to have to double down."

Son made his name with successful early investments in Chinese e-commerce titan Alibaba and internet pioneer Yahoo, but has also bet on cata-

strophic failures such as WeWork. He has repeatedly said that "artificial super-intelligence" will arrive in a decade, bringing new inventions, new medicine, new knowledge and new ways to invest. The SoftBank Group posted a bumper second-quarter net profit last month, returning to the black after net losses in the first quarter and the previous financial year. The company indicated back in March that it had \$26 billion ready to be deployed for new investments.

Tariff worries

Stephen Moore, an economic advisor to Donald Trump, said the announcement marked a "great day." "The importation of capital into the US is a huge leading indicator for jobs and prosperity to come," Moore, an economist at the conservative Heritage Foundation, told AFP in a message. On the campaign trail, Trump pledged to boost the US economy by cutting red tape and fast-tracking investments, including into the oil and gas sector. US financial markets surged following his victory on November 5, with the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite index and the broad-based S&P 500 both hitting fresh records.

Despite the enthusiasm in the markets, some analysts have voiced concern that Trump's proposals to implement new tariffs on US imports and deport millions of undocumented workers could end up hurting growth, and causing a spike in inflation. "The increased likelihood of substantial new tariffs on US imports would have the most consequential effect on economic growth," economists at Wells Fargo wrote in a recent note to clients, adding they had "bumped up" their inflation outlook and slightly cut their GDP forecast following Trump's win.



FLORIDA: SoftBank CEO Masayoshi Son shakes hands with US President-elect Donald Trump during a news conference at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort on December 16, 2024. — AFP

Other analysts say the impact of Trump's tariff plans will largely depend on how they are actually implemented. "The impact on inflation need not be particularly significant for monetary policy," economists at Goldman Sachs wrote in a recent investor note. But, they added "this could change if the White House imposes a 10 percent universal tariff," refer-

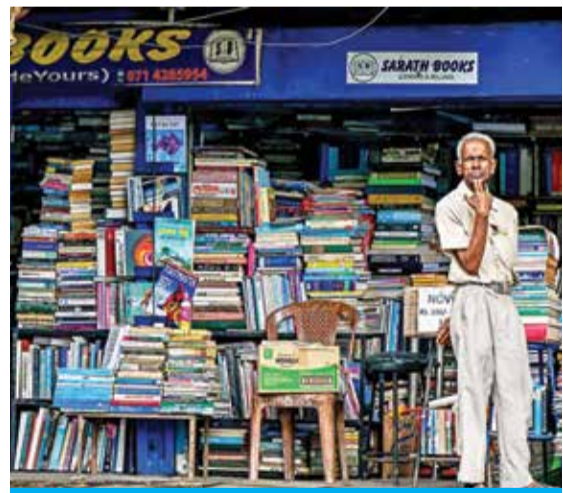
ring to one of Trump's proposals on the campaign trail. Speaking in Mar-a-Lago on Monday, Trump insisted that, "properly used," tariffs would be positive for the US economy. "Our country right now loses to everybody," he said. "Almost nobody do we have a surplus with." "Tariffs will make our country rich," he added. — AFP

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka's bondholders agree debt deal

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka on Tuesday completed its long-delayed foreign debt restructure after the island nation defaulted on its \$46 billion external debt in a dramatic 2022 economic crash, a minister told parliament. Its economy has recovered after getting an International Monetary Fund rescue package and imposing austerity reforms aimed at repairing the government's ruined finances.

"The agreement we have reached today, with announcements from the Singapore and London stock exchanges, is a show of confidence in our government," Harshana Suriyapperuma, the deputy finance minister, told parliament. Leftist President Anura Kumara Disanayake's National People's Power (NPP) coalition had previously criticized the restructure deal as unfair on the impoverished nation and vowed to renegotiate after coming to power.

But since its win in snap parliamentary elections last month, Disanayake has made a U-turn, saying the economic recovery was too fragile to jeopardize with any changes. A majority of private creditors to the South Asian nation agreed in September to a 27 percent haircut on their loans. Disanayake said he would honor a deal secured by his predecessor to restructure \$12.55 billion in international sovereign bonds, a key condition to maintain the \$2.9 billion four-year IMF bailout loan. The opposition criticized the move, calling it a "lucrative deal" for bond holders, opposition economic spokesman Harsha de Silva said. — AFP



COLOMBO: A vendor selling used books waits for customers at his shop in Colombo. — AFP

Ethiopia opens banking sector to foreign investment

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia will partially open its banking sector to foreign banks following a vote by lawmakers on Tuesday, according to local media group FanaBC. Since taking power in 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has been a vocal supporter of opening up the heavily state-controlled economy to competition and foreign investment. But internal conflicts - including a devastating civil war in the northern Tigray region between 2020 and 2022 - have led to sanctions by the United States and hampered reforms.

The new banking law, passed by a majority in parliament, allows foreign banks to open subsidiaries in Ethiopia, according to FanaBC, which is close to the government. Foreign firms will only be allowed to own 49 percent of shares, according to the Addis Standard. "It is a big step forward, as the opening of



SUZHOU: Photo shows employees of Chinese electric truck startup Windrose working on an eclectic truck assembly line at a factory in Suzhou, in eastern China's Jiangsu province. — AFP

Beijing blasts EU sanctions for 'smearing' Chinese firms

BEIJING: Beijing accused the EU on Tuesday of "smearing" Chinese firms after the bloc sanctioned companies from China for supplying Russia's military in the war on Ukraine. China will "take the necessary measures to resolutely protect the proper and legitimate rights and interests of Chinese enterprises", foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said. The European Union added four Chinese companies to a blacklist on Monday for allegedly "supplying sensitive drone components and microelectronic components" to the Russian military.

Two other firms and one Chinese businesswoman were hit for circumventing EU sanctions aimed at stopping equipment flowing to Moscow. The EU has targeted Chinese firms before for supporting Russia's military, but Monday's sanctions were the toughest yet. Lin said on Tuesday the sanctions were "without basis in international law". "When it comes

to Ukraine, China has always done its best to promote peace talks, and has never provided weapons to the parties involved in the conflict," Lin told a regular press conference.

Beijing urges the EU to "stop smearing and blaming China without any factual basis", he added. China presents itself as a neutral party in the Ukraine war and says it is not sending lethal assistance to either side, unlike the United States and other Western nations. But it remains a close political and economic ally of Russia, and NATO members have branded Beijing a "decisive enabler" of the war, which it has never condemned.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock warned during a visit to China this month that Beijing's support for Moscow would impact ties with Berlin. "Drones from Chinese factories and North Korean troops attacking the peace in the middle of Europe are violating our core European security interests," Baerbock said. The EU also took aim at North Korea in the latest package of sanctions on Monday, after Pyongyang dispatched troops to Russia to fight Ukraine. The 27-nation bloc added defense minister No Kwang Chol and deputy chief of the general staff Kim Yong Bok to a list of North Korean officials already blacklisted. — AFP

Anti-graft body raids Indonesia's central bank

JAKARTA: A team from Indonesia's anti-graft body has raided the country's central bank headquarters over a probe about the misuse of funds, officials said Tuesday. Southeast Asia's largest economy has arrested scores of public officials for graft in recent years, and corruption remains rampant despite the government's pledge to end the practice. The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) in September said it was investigating the alleged mishandling of corporate social responsibility funds by Bank Indonesia (BI).

"Indeed, there was a raid by our investigators last night at the BI office" in the capital Jakarta, KPK spokesman Tessa Mahardhika Sugiarto told AFP Tuesday. The central bank also confirmed the raid took place late Monday and that it was related to the alleged graft case. "KPK came to complete the investigation process regarding the allegations of the distributed CSR funds. BI respects and leaves the legal process to KPK according to the procedures, and we support the investigation," BI spokesman Ramdan Denny Prakoso said in a statement Tuesday.

The KPK alleged a portion of the 2023 CSR funds of the central bank and the Indonesian financial services authority have been siphoned and misused for personal gain. No suspects have been announced, and the graft body did not say how much of the funds were misused. Central bank governor Perry Warjiyo said it supported the investigation process but denied the allegations at the time. — AFP



JAKARTA: Workers pull trolleys of goods along the street of a wholesale market in Jakarta on December 17, 2024. A team from Indonesia's anti-graft body has raided the country's central bank headquarters over a probe about the misuse of funds, officials said Tuesday. — AFP

TikTok asks Supreme Court to temporarily block looming US ban

WASHINGTON: TikTok asked the US Supreme Court on Monday to temporarily block a law that would force its Chinese owner to sell the popular online video-sharing platform or shut it down a month from now. The appeal to the nation's top court came on the same day that TikTok Chief Executive Shou Zi Chew met with US President-elect Donald Trump, according to an NBC News report. At a press conference Monday, Trump said he has "a warm spot" for TikTok and that his administration would take a look at the app and the potential for a ban.

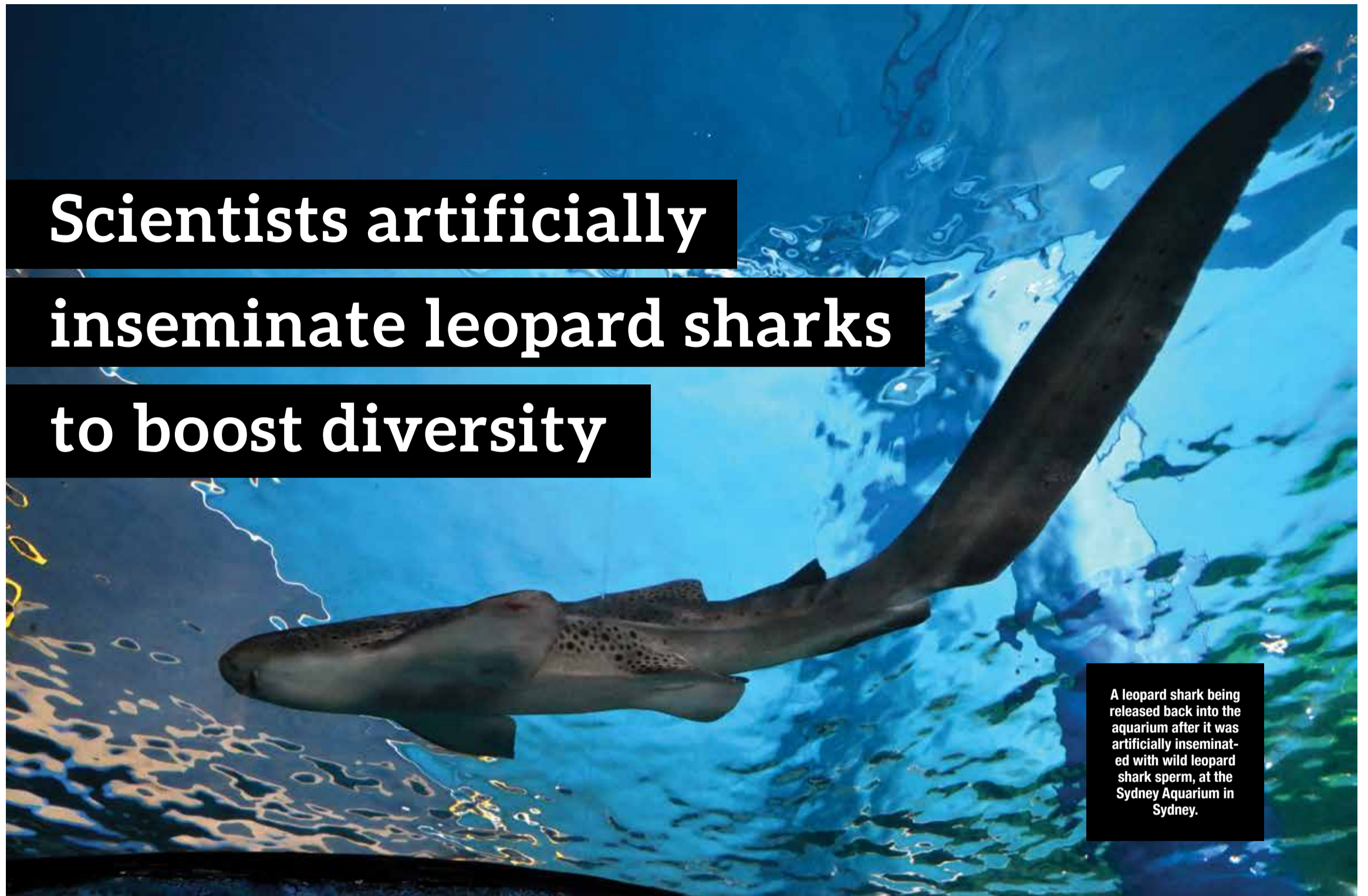
The law, signed by President Joe Biden in April, would block TikTok from US app stores and web hosting services unless its owner ByteDance divests from the app by January 19. TikTok asked for the move to be put on hold while it challenges a lower court ruling that upheld the law, the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act,

potentially with an appeal to the Supreme Court itself. TikTok asked the nation's top court to make a decision by January 6. "Congress has enacted a massive and unprecedented speech restriction," TikTok, which claims to have more than 170 million monthly US users, said in its filing with the Supreme Court.

Should the law come into force it would "shutter one of America's most popular speech platforms the day before a presidential inauguration," TikTok said. "This, in turn, will silence the speech of Applicants and the many Americans who use the platform to communicate about politics, commerce, arts, and other matters of public concern," it added. "Applicants—as well as countless small businesses who rely on the platform—also will suffer substantial and unrecoverable monetary and competitive harms."

The potential ban could strain US-China relations just as Donald Trump prepares to take office on January 20. Trump has emerged as an unlikely TikTok ally amid concerns that a ban on the app would mainly benefit Meta, the Facebook parent company owned by Mark Zuckerberg. Trump's stance reflects conservative criticism of Meta for allegedly suppressing right-wing content, including the former president himself being banned from Facebook after the January 6, 2021, US Capitol riot by his supporters. — AFP

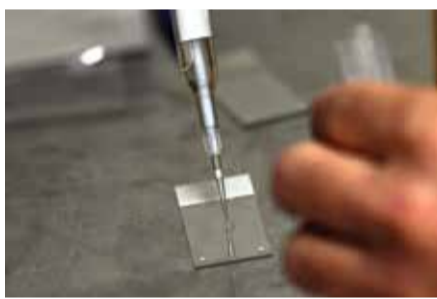
Scientists artificially inseminate leopard sharks to boost diversity



A leopard shark being released back into the aquarium after it was artificially inseminated with wild leopard shark sperm, at the Sydney Aquarium in Sydney.



Ocean Park Hong Kong's chief veterinarian Paolo Martelli using a microscope to examine active sperm from a wild leopard shark to be used in artificially inseminating leopard sharks.



Ocean Park Hong Kong's chief veterinarian Paolo Martelli preparing to examine active sperm from a wild leopard shark under a microscope.

A black-and-cream leopard shark enters a hypnotic-like state of relaxation as scientists at Sydney Aquarium carefully roll her onto her back in a small pool. The shark, named Zimba, is one of the first captive leopard sharks in the world to be artificially inseminated with the sperm of wild sharks in an attempt to build populations around the world. If the process is successful, Zimba's shark pups will be sent to the Raja Ampat region in Indonesia, where the local population is on the brink of extinction due to unsustainable fishing practices and habitat destruction. Artificial insemination allows sharks that would never normally interact to breed and increase genetic diversity, said SEA LIFE Australia and New Zealand regional coordinator Laura Simmons. Simmons hopes that eventually the leopard shark population will be "genetically viable and capable of maintaining a self-sustaining population in the wild".

That could take years, she told AFP, but "this is one step closer to where we need to be". The procedure is one part of a larger worldwide leopard shark breeding program, known as StAR, that involves more than 60 conservation groups, aquariums and government agencies. Globally, about 37 percent of oceanic shark and ray species, including the leopard shark, are now listed as either endangered or critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, a global database for threatened species.

remain plentiful and of least concern, and scientists hope they can help bolster the numbers in other regions. Back at the Sydney Aquarium pool, Ocean Park Hong Kong's chief veterinarian Paolo Martelli inserts a metal tube filled with the sperm of wild leopard sharks into Zimba's underside. The shark is still in a natural state called tonic immobility -- a relaxed condition that allows scientists to work without getting injured.

is the first time it has been used on leopard sharks. "It's not straightforward," he said. Martelli and his team collected the sperm of wild leopard sharks off the coast of Queensland -- which has a large shark population -- and brought the precious cargo to Sydney.

Only three of four samples taken survived the journey. "This species belongs in outside habitats, not in a museum," Martelli said. But as the shark's habitat



Divers securing a black-and-cream leopard shark to be artificially inseminated with the sperm of wild sharks, at the Sydney Aquarium in Sydney.



Ocean Park Hong Kong's chief veterinarian Paolo Martelli (center left) and his team conducting an artificial insemination procedure using wild leopard shark sperm on a black-and-cream leopard shark named Zimba, at the Sydney Aquarium in Sydney.--AFP photos

The whole process takes a matter of minutes and everyone claps and cheers once it is over. Zimba is flipped back onto her stomach and swims around the pool as if nothing happened. Martelli is using a technique he developed and has successfully used on other species, but this

declines, scientists must give a "helping hand" in protecting and conserving this valuable species, he added. "It is safe to say that sharks have suffered a lot in the last century."--AFP

'Species belongs outside'
Australia's leopard shark populations



Ocean Park Hong Kong's chief veterinarian Paolo Martelli and his team conducting an artificial insemination procedure using wild leopard shark sperm on a black-and-cream leopard shark named Zimba.



Experts handling a black-and-cream leopard shark to be artificially inseminated with the sperm of wild sharks, at the Sydney Aquarium in Sydney.



A leopard shark being released back into the aquarium after it was artificially inseminated with wild leopard shark sperm.



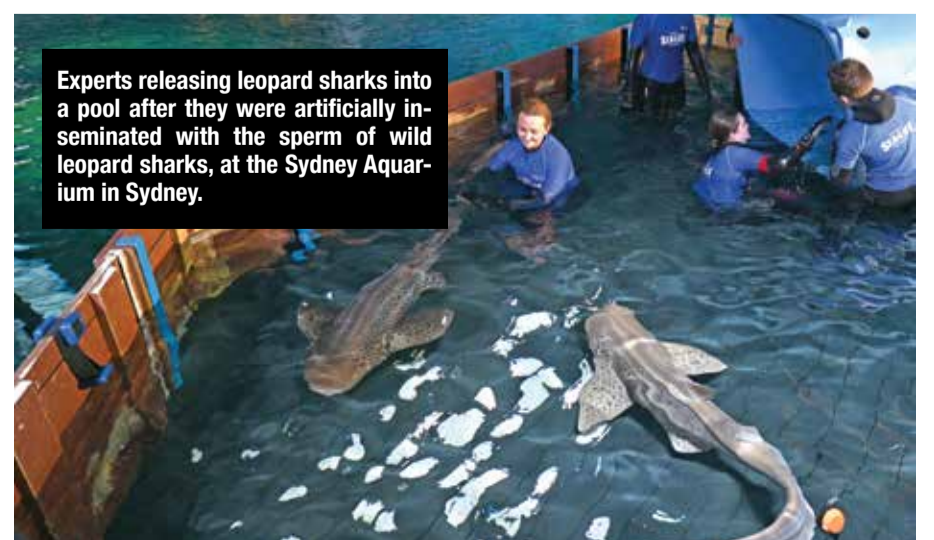
Experts handling a black-and-cream leopard shark to be artificially inseminated with the sperm of wild leopard sharks, at the Sydney Aquarium in Sydney.



Divers preparing to secure a black-and-cream leopard shark to be artificially inseminated with the sperm of wild sharks at the Sydney Aquarium in Sydney.



Scientists and divers securing a black-and-cream leopard shark to be brought to a smaller pool for artificial insemination.



Experts releasing leopard sharks into a pool after they were artificially inseminated with the sperm of wild leopard sharks, at the Sydney Aquarium in Sydney.



Spanish actress Marisa Paredes acknowledges the public before receiving an honorary award for her career at the 32nd Goya awards ceremony in Madrid on February 3, 2018. —AFP photos



Spanish actress Marisa Paredes gestures after receiving an honorary Goya award for her career at the 32nd Goya awards ceremony in Madrid on February 3, 2018.



Spanish actress Marisa Paredes arrives for the screening of the film "Dolor Y Gloria (Pain and Glory)" at the 72nd edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on May 17, 2019.

Spanish actor and Almodovar favorite **Marisa Paredes** dies at 78

Marisa Paredes, an acclaimed Spanish actor who achieved international fame by starring in many films by director Pedro Almodovar, has died at 78, Spain's film academy said on Tuesday. Paredes started acting at 14 and had appeared in more than 75 movies during her career, including Almodovar's "All About My Mother", "The Flower of my Secret", and "High Heels", earning the moniker of "Almodovar's girl". "Spanish cinema is left without one of its most iconic actresses, Marisa Paredes," the

academy said in a statement. "Strong, ambivalent, heartbroken, passionate, enigmatic and ultimately very human women made up the acting work of the woman from Madrid," it added.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on X that he was "devastated" by the death of Paredes, "one of the most important actresses our country has produced". "Her presence in cinema and theatre and her commitment to democracy will be an example for future generations. A heartfelt hug to her family and

loved ones. Thank you, Marisa." Gilles Jacob, former president of the Cannes film festival, paid tribute to Paredes on X for her "calm grace, that gentle cheerfulness that she ignited with one look of her pale eyes".

Paredes was born in a working-class part of Madrid in 1946 as the country recovered from its devastating 1936-1939 civil war under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. "My vocation was born with me... but it had a lot to do with the neighborhood where I lived,"

close to a theatre, she told the film academy. She became a star in Spain, but her international career took off after she first worked with Almodovar in 1983 on "Dark Habits", beginning a long collaboration. "Marisa placed full confidence in me and gave me everything," the Oscar-winning director and symbol of post-dictatorship Spain told French newspaper Liberation in 1995.

Having twice previously been nominated for Spain's Goya national film awards, Paredes was awarded an honor-

ary Goya in 2018. "It's a matter of taking this trade with total rigor and seriousness. It requires dedication, courage, strength: discouragement must not defeat you," she told the Academy magazine upon receiving the prize. She also acted in international films such as "Life is Beautiful" by Italian director Roberto Benigni, and in "The Devil's Backbone" by Mexican Guillermo del Toro. Paredes served as president of the Spanish film academy from 2000 to 2003.—AFP



A woman waits to ride the Holiday Nostalgia Train in New York. —AFP photos



Two women walk out after riding the Holiday Nostalgia Train.

RIDING SUBWAY CARS OF 1930S NEW YORK, AND DRESSING THE PART



People dressed as old-time press photographers wait to ride the Holiday Nostalgia Train.



People wait to ride the Holiday Nostalgia Train.



A man walks off the Holiday Nostalgia Train.

Nearly a century after the New York subway introduced its iconic "R1-9" fleet, the agency is putting some of the railcars back into service -- and city residents are jumping on board. The Metropolitan Transport Authority (MTA), which operates the Big Apple's sprawling -- and sometimes detested -- subway system, is reintroducing R1-9s onto the tracks for a limited time, complete with early 20th century accoutrements. In one car, for instance, a 1960s-style advertisement pays tribute to "the late president" next to a black-and-white photo of John F. Kennedy.

The blast from the past -- made possible through a collaboration between the MTA and the Transit Museum -- is being celebrated by New Yorkers, with some dressing up to match the part. On a cold December Sunday morning, travelers in period-appropriate costume stand alongside passengers in contemporary fashion, forming a delightfully anachronistic mix. Latoya Fulton, a 40-year-old Bronx native who brought her daughter along to share the experience, savors the nostalgia. "I remember riding the train with my



A woman waits to ride the Holiday Nostalgia Train in New York.

mom, going to Yankee Stadium," she told AFP. "I remember just being, just happy looking out the window when we went outside for the outside stop." Paddle ceiling fans swirl overhead and incandescent light bulbs lend a theatrical vibe. With no public address sys-

tem on the vintage trains, a volunteer crewmember is left to call out the approaching stops.

"Test of time"

Rider Fox Hutson dons a military cap and camouflage jumpsuit for the

journey, dressing as if he were a US soldier returning from war. "The past is going away, but this is the only way to preserve it and see some nice people," the 53-year-old photographer said. "It's a test of time, and these things still work." Though the R1-9 train cars were widespread for decades since being introduced in the 1930s, they were fully withdrawn from service by 1977. The cars represent a touchstone in US history, inspiring artists like jazz legend Duke Ellington with his song "Take the A Train." "This was the first mass transit that grew the city," said Todd Glickman, a volunteer with the Transit Museum.

"It used to be in the early part of the 1900s, people would have to live very close to where they worked and where they went to school," he went on to explain. "And because of the advent of the subway system in 1904, people could travel in a short amount of time and that's what created the growth of the city."—AFP



A man rides the Holiday Nostalgia Train.



Two women ride the Holiday Nostalgia Train.

Sports

Dogged India avoid follow-on as third Test heads for draw

Injured Hazlewood likely to miss rest of Australia-India series

BRISBANE: India's Jasprit Bumrah and Akash Deep pulled off an unlikely 10th-wicket partnership on Tuesday to avoid the follow-on and put the third Test against Australia in Brisbane on course for a draw. When the pair came together the tourists still needed 33 runs to take Australia bat again at the Gabba on another day marred by rain delays.

But under gloomy skies, the two managed to see off Australia's much-vaunted pace attack to frustrate the home side on day four. Deep scored the crucial runs with an edge to the boundary just past the outstretched hand of Nathan McSweeney off Australian captain Pat Cummins.

He celebrated two balls later by smashing Cummins over deep mid-wicket for a massive six before umpires took them from the field for bad light with India 252-9, trailing by 193 runs. The five-match series is currently locked 1-1.

Opener KL Rahul, who top-scored with 84, said the batting of the lower order showed how much fight this India team has. Deep was not-out 27 and Bumrah was on 10. "The lower order scoring runs is something that we discuss in our meetings," Rahul said. "The bowlers work really hard on their batting as well so it's good to see them get that partnership. "To avoid that follow-on makes a huge difference."

'Desperation'

Missing pace spearhead Josh Hazlewood, who was only able to bowl one over Tuesday after picking up a match-ending calf injury, Cummins (4-80) and Mitchell Starc (3-83) toiled hard to eke out wickets. After losing almost all of Saturday and Monday due to rain, play was halted three more times on Tuesday.

During that time India were able to edge closer to the follow-on target despite losing wickets at crucial times. But Deep and Bumrah battled hard and put on 39 runs under dark skies and in light rain. "I think the only way to force the game was to enforce the follow-on," Australia's bowling coach Daniel Vettori said.

"There was a desperation to get that final wicket." Resuming the morning at 51-4, Rahul was dropped on the first ball of the day when Steve Smith somehow missed a simple catch at first slip. Rahul and India captain Rohit Sharma saw out the first half-hour and took the score to 74 before Rohit edged a Cummins delivery that moved slightly off the seam to wicketkeeper Alex Carey.

Rahul took advantage of Smith's first-ball lapse and brought up an impressive half-century with a lovely cover drive, shortly before a shower sent the players scurrying from the field for 25 minutes. He added 51 runs to his overnight total before Smith made amends with a stunning catch to dismiss Rahul, diving to his right and taking a one-handed catch at first slip 20 minutes before lunch.

Nitish Kumar Reddy and Ravindra Jadeja put on 53 and looked increasingly comfortable. But just when it looked like the pair would take the score to the 246 needed to avoid the follow-on, Cummins broke through when Reddy played on for 16, leaving Jadeja with only the bowlers to try to avoid the follow-on.

Rain forced an early tea and after the break Jadeja began to take control, farming the strike and moving to 77 before he holed out to Mitchell Marsh at deep square leg. Bumrah and Deep then came together for their memorable partnership.

Meanwhile, Australia pace spearhead Josh Hazlewood is likely to miss the rest of the Test series against India after injuring his right calf during his warm-up before play in Brisbane on Tuesday. Hazlewood, who missed the second Test in Adelaide with a side strain, bowled just one over before leaving the field on the fourth day of the third Test at the Gabba.

With the series locked at 1-1 and the Test seemingly on course for a draw, the 33-year-old's latest injury is a major blow to the hosts. "Josh Hazlewood has sustained a right-sided calf strain which will prevent him from playing any further part in the Test match against India in Bris-



BRISBANE: Australia's captain Pat Cummins (R) attempts a run out of India's Jasprit Bumrah (L) on day four of the third cricket Test match between Australia and India at The Gabba in Brisbane on December 17, 2024. — AFP

bane," a Cricket Australia statement said.

"He sustained the injury during the warm-up this morning and after bowling one over was unable to continue. "He is likely to miss the remainder of the Test series. A squad replacement will be made in due course." Australia's bowling coach Daniel Vettori said Hazlewood was despondent after suffering the injury.

"He felt it this morning in warm-ups and gave it a good crack," Vettori said. "It's just unfortunate for him to come back, put so much effort in after another injury from the side strain in the last Test and to pick

up a calf strain, particularly in these circumstances, was tough on him.

"He's one of the best bowlers in the world and it obviously affects the whole team." The fourth Test begins in Melbourne on December 26 with the fifth and final Test in Sydney from January 3. Vettori said that while he wasn't a selector, the obvious choice to replace Hazlewood in Melbourne was Scott Boland.

The 35-year-old Boland stepped in for Hazlewood in the pink-ball second Test, which Australia won by 10 wickets to level the series. Boland took five wickets in the match. — AFP

Caps, road streak over, shoot to rebound at Chicago

WASHINGTON: The Eastern Conference-leading Washington Capitals will hope to have a short memory Tuesday as they conclude a stretch of two road games in as many nights.

Washington enters a visit to the Chicago Blackhawks on the heels of a 3-1 loss to the Dallas Stars on Monday, a result that ended the Capitals' franchise-record 10-game road winning streak.

Washington had outscored opponents 13-6 over a four-game winning streak before Monday. Although the Capitals were limited to one goal at Dallas, that tally came about in familiar fashion, as Dylan Strome scored when he tipped in Jakob Chychrun's point shot in the first period.

"Try to get a high tip because it's tough for the goalie to pick it up, you know," Strome said. "We talk a lot about getting to the net. It's kind of a give-and-take, if you can get to the net to screen the goalie or try to get a high tip. All of our 'D' gets their shots through, and that's been a huge reason why we've scored this year."

Capitals coach Spencer Carbery appreciates players' commitment, especially as the team has been without star forward Alex Ovechkin (fractured left fibula) for a month.

"We need to continue to find ways to score on the interior," Carbery said. "... We've got to continue to work because those are hard goals to score, but they're imperative goals to score. Imperative to score in this league, especially against good teams."

Chicago has won two of four as it seeks its second two-game winning streak of the season. While the Blackhawks have yielded eight third-period goals in the past three games, they prevented the most recent tally against them from being a back-breaker.

The New York Islanders' Noah Dobson scored 47 seconds into the third period on Sunday in Chicago to tie the game at 3 apiece. Connor Bedard tallied the game-winner with 54 seconds to go, and the Blackhawks added an empty-netter for a 5-3 victory.

Blackhawks interim coach Anders Sorensen hailed the team's resilience as an encouraging sign. "We did bend a little bit, and we were teetering a little bit, but give the guys a lot of credit," Sorensen said. "The composure on the bench was really good. A lot of young players kept their composure and kept making plays when the game was on the line."

Count Bedard among them. He had a goal and an assist, giving him seven points (two goals, five assists) in the past five games. Bedard credits Sorensen's new system as well as his work ethic for the turnaround.

"I feel like he's been really good with me kind of one-on-one, helping me out," Bedard said. "And I think we're playing a little more aggressive, which obviously benefits the offensive side. But, you know, obviously I like to think I can make plays and produce, and that's what I want to do. But he's helped me out a bit, for sure."

Blackhawks captain Nick Foligno missed the Islanders game with an illness. Washington's Andrew Mangiapane was out Monday for the same reason. — AFP

NZ crush England to send Southee out on a high

HAMILTON: New Zealand tore through England's batting Tuesday to crush the visitors by 423 runs in the third Test and send Tim Southee into retirement on a triumphant note.

It was New Zealand's equal-highest victory by runs and a complete reversal from the first two Tests, which England won easily to clinch the three-match series. The hosts sealed a dominant performance in Hamilton by claiming seven wickets in 41.2 overs on day four as England crumbled for 234.

Playing on his home ground at Seddon Park, seamer Southee finished with 2-34 in his 107th and final Test, ending the career of one of New Zealand's finest players. He finishes with 391 Test wickets, second only to Richard Hadlee among New Zealanders.

"I want to thank New Zealand Cricket for everything you have done. My family, who are there for the ride and see the ups and downs," said the 36-year-old. "And my team-mates—these guys have made the ride so much more enjoyable, I have loved every minute."

"And finally the fans. It is always great to turn out in front of numbers. This week has been pretty special to play at Seddon Park in front of a great crowd." New Zealand only needed to take nine second-innings wickets for an emphatic victory because England skipper Ben Stokes did not bat.

Stokes suffered a hamstring injury on Monday and limped off in distress, having torn the hamstring in the same left leg just a few months ago. The scale of the latest injury has not been revealed but that, and the way England capitulated in Hamilton, ended their series on a sour note.

Stokes said England were "completely outplayed". "The first two games of the series, our skill completely outdid New Zealand's skill. This game was basically a flip around of that," said Stokes. "It's severely disappointing as a team because we obviously want to win every game we go out and play. "We're just disappointed that we were nowhere near our best."

Weores retires from Vendee Globe after damage to boat

CAPE TOWN: New Europe Hungarian skipper Szabolcs Weores has pulled out of the Vendee Globe due to irreparable damage to his boat, organizers of the solo, non-stop and unassisted round-the-world sailing competition said on Monday.

The damage to his IMOCA yacht shroud, a key component of the rigging that supports the mast, broke over the weekend while Weores was sailing on a port tack in winds exceeding 40 knots, approximately 700 miles from the Cape of Good Hope.

Professional rigger Weores, competing in the Vendee Globe for the first time, attempted multiple repairs to stabilize the mast, but none provided the safety assurance needed. Despite the yacht's rigging having been newly installed and precisely tuned this year, the rapid shock from unexpected events likely caused internal damage to the

shroud, which later deteriorated under severe wind and wave conditions.

"This was one of the hardest decisions of my life," Weores said. "I've invested years of effort into the Vendee Globe with the dream of completing this journey. Having to step away now is devastating." Weores is currently en route to Cape Town, South Africa, expecting to reach there by Tuesday.

Having completed last year's Route du Rhum, which served as a qualifying race, Weores was the second Hungarian to compete in the Vendee Globe, renowned as one of the sport's toughest challenges, after Nandor Fa.

The approximately 24,000-nautical-mile route begins and ends in Les Sables-d'Olonne, France, taking competitors through the Atlantic Ocean, around the southern capes of Africa, Australia, and South America and back up the Atlantic.

Sailors face some of the most remote and hostile conditions on earth as they battle to complete the iconic course. The race began on Nov 10. Frenchman Yannick Bestaven won the last edition, finishing in 80 days, three hours and 44 minutes. — Reuters



HAMILTON: New Zealand's Tim Southee gestures to the crowd as he leaves the field in his final test after victory during day four of the third cricket test match between New Zealand and England at Seddon Park in Hamilton on December 17, 2024. — AFP

England crumble

After resuming at 18-2, England never threatened their enormous target of 658, their hopes dwindling further when losing Jacob Bethell for 76, Joe Root for 54 and Harry Brook for just one before lunch. They looked comfortable for the first hour before Root departed, having put on 104 for the third wicket with Bethell.

England's greatest run-scorer was trapped lbw attempting to sweep left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner. Having been given not out, New Zealand successfully reviewed, with ball-tracking showing the ball would have hit the middle stump.

It left 33-year-old Root 28 runs short of becoming the fifth player to score 13,000 Test runs. Brook, who scored match-winning centuries in each of the first two Tests, was out cheaply for the second time at Seddon Park, caught behind off a sharply rising Will O'Rourke delivery.

Left-hander Bethell batted fluently, striking 13 fours and a six, until he swung at a wide Southee delivery to be caught at deep point. Ollie Pope (17) was bowled attempting to reverse scoop pace bowler

Matt Henry before Gus Atkinson's hard-hit 43 ended when caught in the deep off Santner.

Matthew Potts and Brydon Carse fell cheaply, also trying to hit Santner out of the ground. All-rounder Santner justified his recall by taking 4-85 to finish with seven wickets in the match, alongside scores of 76 and 49 with the bat.

Having been beaten by eight wickets and then 323 runs in the first two Tests, the Black Caps belatedly gave the home fans something to cheer about. They had come into the series buoyant, having sealed a historic 3-0 sweep in India. Skipper Tom Latham heaped praise on lanky pacer O'Rourke, who also took three key wickets in England's first innings with a scintillating spell of hostile bowling.

"He's been fantastic," Latham said of the 23-year-old. "He's a guy that hadn't necessarily played a huge amount of first-class cricket before he made his Test debut (in February). "Obviously he didn't necessarily get the five wickets or the milestones, but I think the contribution that he made went a long way in that match." — AFP

Vikings dominate Bears, bolster bid for division crown

LOS ANGELES: The Minnesota Vikings, already headed to the NFL playoffs, bolstered their bid for the NFC North division title on Monday, beating the Chicago Bears 30-12 for a seventh straight NFL victory.

Minnesota, assured of a playoff berth after Seattle lost to Green Bay on Sunday, improved to 12-2 and pulled into a tie with the Detroit Lions atop the NFC North. They're in the hunt for the top seed in the NFC with the Philadelphia Eagles also at 12-2 in the East.

Up 13-0 at halftime, the Vikings pulled away with one-yard touchdown runs by Aaron Jones and Cam Akers in the second half. Vikings quarterback Sam Darnold completed 24 of 40 passes for 231 yards with a seven-yard touchdown throw to Justin Jefferson in the first quarter.

A rugged defensive performance from Minnesota saw the Bears held without a touchdown until late in the

fourth quarter when quarterback Caleb Williams found Keenan Allen with a 16-yard scoring pass.

D'Andre Smith ran for 79 yards for the Bears, but he was stopped for no gain on a fourth-and-one play on Chicago's opening possession and again on fourth-and-one in the second quarter. In the third, Swift's apparent touchdown run was negated by a penalty after offensive lineman Doug Kramer failed to report as an eligible receiver when he entered the game.

The Bears settled for a 29-yard field goal, and kicker Cairo Santos added another early in the fourth quarter to pull the Bears within 20-6. Will Reichard booted three field goals for the Vikings, capping the scoring with a 46-yarder with 1:12 remaining.

"Really, to me, it was about our defense's effort tonight," Vikings coach Kevin O'Connell said. "It just felt like when we needed a play, those guys made it." O'Connell said the game was "not to our standard offensively" but added: "It's always good to look up and have 30 points on the board when you feel like maybe you didn't play your best game offensively." — AFP

Sports

Jamal Murray's late shot lifts Nuggets past Kings

Tyrese Maxey puts up 40 as Sixers top Hornets

DENVER: Jamal Murray scored a team-high 28 points and hit the go-ahead hoop with 8.6 seconds remaining as the Denver Nuggets outlasted the Sacramento Kings 130-129 for a dramatic road win Monday night. Nikola Jokic recorded his 140th career triple-double (20 points, 14 rebounds, 13 assists) to help Denver earn its third win in a row. Jokic wound up with his league-leading 10th triple-double of the season. He ranks third all-time in the category behind teammate Russell Westbrook (200) and Oscar Robertson (181). Westbrook nearly notched another, finishing with 18 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds. Sacramento's De'Aaron Fox was the game's leading scorer with 29 points, while Domantas Sabonis had 28 to go with 14 rebounds, six assists and three steals. Malik Monk finished with 25 points and a team-high 10 assists for the Kings. DeRozan had 17 points, McDermott 16 and Keon Ellis 12.

76ers 121, Hornets 108

Tyrese Maxey pumped in 40 points and Paul George racked up 33 points as both sank six 3-pointers, leading injury-ravaged Philadelphia past host Charlotte. The outcome dampened the excitement around the return to action of Charlotte point guard LaMelo Ball, who racked up 15 points and 11 assists while coming back from a calf injury that had kept him out since Nov. 27. The Hornets lost for the 10th time in 11 outings despite Miles Bridges' 24 points. The 76ers made 16 of 38 attempts from 3-point range in their first game after losing both center Joel Embiid (sinus fracture) and rookie guard Jared McCain (torn meniscus in knee) to injury on Friday.

Bulls 122, Raptors 121

Nikola Vucevic scored 24 points and visiting Chicago, which saw a 16-point lead shrink to one, held

on to defeat Toronto. The Raptors cut into the final deficit with a last-second 3-pointer. Coby White added 19 points for the Bulls, who have won two straight. Josh Giddey had 11 points, nine rebounds and eight assists before leaving with an ankle injury in the third quarter. RJ Barrett scored 32 points and Grady Dick had 27 for the Raptors, who have lost five straight. Toronto's Jakob Poeltl left in the fourth quarter with a groin injury. Pistons 125, Heat 124 (OT). Malik Beasley had a season-high 28 points, Cade Cunningham supplied a triple-double and host Detroit topped Miami in overtime. Cunningham had 20 points, 18 assists and 11 rebounds for Detroit, which squandered a 19-point, fourth-quarter lead. Ausar Thompson contributed 19 points and Tim Hardaway Jr. tossed in 16, hitting three consecutive 3-pointers in overtime to wipe out an eight-point Heat lead. Jimmy Butler produced 35 points, 19 rebounds and 10 assists for the Heat, who had their four-game winning streak end. Tyler Herro scored 23 points.

Cavaliers 130, Nets 101

Evan Mobley scored 19 of his 21 points in the second half. Caris LeVert scored all 19 of his points in the first half and Cleveland seized control early and cruised to a rout of Brooklyn in New York. Cleveland led by as many as 37, improved to 23-4 for the best start in team history and is 8-4 since winning its first 15 games. Cameron Johnson led the Nets with 22 points and Day'Ron Sharpe added 15. Brooklyn committed a season-worst 22 turnovers, which resulted in 34 Cleveland points.

Clippers 144, Jazz 107

James Harden scored 24 of his 41 points in the first quarter, Norman Powell added 29 points and



SACRAMENTO: Jamal Murray #27 of the Denver Nuggets drives to the basket during the game against the Sacramento Kings on December 16, 2024 at Golden 1 Center in Sacramento, California. — AFP

Los Angeles ended a three-game losing streak with an easy victory over Utah in Inglewood, Calif. Harden outscored the Jazz 24-20 in the first quarter by shooting 6 of 9 from the floor and 5 of 7 from 3-point range. Ivica Zubac wound up with 19 points and 12 rebounds and Amir Coffey added 16 points for Los Angeles, which improved to 10-6 at home. It was the

most points in a game for the Clippers this season. Jordan Clarkson scored 20 points and Lauri Markkanen put up 17 for the Jazz, who lost their third consecutive game. Utah fell for the eighth time in nine contests and 12th time in 14. Collin Sexton scored 15 points and John Collins added 14 for the Jazz, who slipped to 3-10 on the road. — Reuters



Kuwait's jet ski team.

Great achievement for Kuwait in Jet Ski World Cup

KUWAIT: World champion Mohammed Al-Baz made a historic achievement in the jet ski sport, which is the World Cup Champion for third consecutive time in the highest and strongest category of the championship (Pro GP for senior professionals), and the World Champion Mohammed Al-Baz won the Asian Champion Cup for the second time in a row, making him the first Arab and Gulf rider to win this title, as well as the third place in the World Champion Championship.

Four-time World Champion and Guinness World Record gold medalist Mohamed Bourbabi won the title of World Champion for the third time in this category. He also achieved a well-deserved third place in the Pro GP category. World Champion Fahad Al Rais took second place in the Super Stock Pro class. Champions Yousef Al Khalfan and Salem Al Muta-wa were unlucky due to circumstances beyond their control.



LAS ROZAS DE MADRID: Newly elected Royal Spanish Football Federation president Rafael Louzan (L) embraces Galician Football executive Luis Serantes, after being elected at the Ciudad del Futbol in Las Rozas, outside Madrid, on December 16, 2024. —AFP

Crisis-hit Spanish football federation elects new chief

MADRID: Spain's football federation elected Rafael Louzan as its new president on Monday as it tries to move on from more than a year of turmoil sparked by former boss Luis Rubiales's forced kiss on star player Jenni Hermoso.

Louzan, 57, head of the Galicia football federation since 2014, beat his counterpart in the Valencia region Salvador Gomar by 90 votes to 43 and will lead the RFEF to 2028. But his term could be short-lived as he faces a possible ban from holding public office following a conviction for abuse of office in a previous role.

Spain's Supreme Court is assessing an appeal by Louzan, who could become the fourth RFEF president to be forced out of the job in less than eight years after Angel Maria Villar, in 2017, Rubiales and then Pedro Rocha.

The succession of scandals to rock the RFEF began in August 2023 when Rubiales forcibly kissed Hermoso on the lips after Spain won the Women's World Cup in Australia. Rubiales, who denies any wrongdoing, relinquished his post in disgrace later that year amid a huge public outcry.

He will stand trial in February 2025 with public prosecution requesting a sentence of two-and-a-half years in prison for sexual assault and coercion. Spain's top sports court suspended his replacement Rocha in July for making decisions beyond his remit after taking over as interim president.

Both Rocha and Rubiales were part of a separate corruption probe ordered by a Spanish investigating judge in April. The men's national team has shrugged off the institutional chaos, winning Euro 2024 and gold at the Paris Olympics. Spain will co-host the 2030 men's World Cup with Portugal and Morocco. —AFP

Spain handed kind Women's Euro draw, tough for England

LAUSANNE: World Cup winners Spain will play Italy, Belgium and Portugal at Women's Euro 2025, while England face a tough path to defending their title at the tournament in Switzerland. Reigning European champions and 2023 World Cup runners-up England were drawn alongside France, the Netherlands and debutants Wales in a challenging Group D of the tournament, which runs from July 2-27.

The Netherlands won the tournament on home soil in 2017 under current England boss Sarina Wiegman. Wiegman will take on her native country on July 9, before England conclude their group-stage campaign against local rivals Wales. "We're neighbors so there's a rivalry on the pitch, which is good," Wiegman said to the BBC, looking forward to her team's clash with Wales, who are making their bow at a major international tournament.

"I expect them to get everything out of themselves that they have in them and fight for every yard in the game and enjoy it." France, beaten semi-finalists in the last edition of the Euros, have never won a major tournament in the women's game.

"I think the other teams must be dreading being in the same group as France," said coach Laurent Bonadei. "At this level, all the groups are tough, like Germany's, and even Spain's is an equal group," he added, looking at the rest of the draw.



LAUSANNE: (From L) Finland's head coach Marko Saloranta, Norway's English head coach Gemma Grainger, Iceland's head coach Thorsteinn Halldorsson and Switzerland's Swedish coach Pia Sundhage pose with the trophy during the draw for UEFA Women's Euro 2025 in Lausanne. — AFP

Germany, who have won eight of the previous 13 editions, meet 1984 winners Sweden, Denmark and newcomers Poland in Group C. The Germans won six successive titles between 1995 and 2013 but lost to England after extra time in the final two years ago at Wembley. Hosts Switzerland kick off the tournament against two-time former champions Norway in Group A, which also includes Iceland and Finland. Spain have reached the quarter-finals of the last three European Championships. They made the last four on their debut in 1997.

Spain coach Montserrat Tome told Teledporte that she was "very happy" with her team's draw, as the tournament favorites avoided their bigger continental rivals. However, she said that Spain "have to be hum-

ble", adding that "at international level every match is a problem". UEFA announced ahead of Monday's draw that it would award 41 million euros (\$43 million) in prize money for the tournament, more than doubling the amount from 2022.

The team that wins the final in Basel will receive up to 5.1 million euros—England pocketed 2.085 million as champions in 2022 -- with each of the 16 participating teams receiving 1.8 million euros.

Group stage draw in full:

Group A: Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Finland
Group B: Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Italy
Group C: Germany, Poland, Denmark, Sweden
Group D: France, England, Wales, Netherlands. —AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

| | |
|----------------|----------|
| Kaizen center | 25716707 |
| Rawda | 22517733 |
| Adaliya | 22517144 |
| Khaldiya | 24848075 |
| Kaifan | 24849807 |
| Shamiya | 24848913 |
| Shuwaikh | 24814507 |
| Abdullah Salem | 22549134 |

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| Nuzha | 22526804 |
| Industrial Shuwaikh | 24814764 |
| Qadsiya | 22515088 |
| Dasmah | 22532265 |
| Bneid Al-Gar | 22531908 |
| Shaab | 22518752 |
| Qibla | 22459381 |
| Ayoun Al-Qibla | 22451082 |
| Mirqab | 22456536 |
| Sharq | 22465401 |
| Salmiya | 25746401 |

Hospitals

| | |
|--------------------|----------|
| Sabah Hospital | 24812000 |
| Amiri Hospital | 22450005 |
| Maternity Hospital | 24843100 |
| Mubarak Al-Kabir | 25312700 |
| Chest Hospital | 24849400 |
| Farwaniya Hospital | 24892010 |
| Adan Hospital | 23940620 |
| Ibn Sina Hospital | 24840300 |

Change of Name

I, KHAJA MOHIDDIN, holder of Indian Passport No. T8280602 having permanent address: H.NO. 190 Paddamol Sirvoi, Quepem South Goa-403705, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) KHAJA MOHIDDIN and (surname) MULLA.
#6610 16/12/2024



Walid Ali



Hamad Harbi

Legends urge fans to back Khaleeji Zain 26

One of the most eagerly anticipated editions of the tournament in its 54-year history

KUWAIT: Some of the big names of Kuwaiti football have thrown their weight behind the upcoming Khaleeji Zain 26, praising its organization and urging fans to buy tickets and pack out the stadiums from December 21 to January 3. Formerly known as the Arabian Gulf Cup, the Khaleeji Zain 26 will welcome the eight nations of the Gulf for one of the most eagerly anticipated editions of the tournament in its 54-year history.

And with the organizers applying the finishing touches to what is sure to be a memorable sporting and cultural celebration, some of the former stars of Kuwaiti football have shared their views with only days to go until the opening ceremony at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

Kuwait is in Group A with Oman, Qatar and the UAE, and the past-players are confident that they can advance to the semi-finals following recent promising performances in the World Cup qualifiers. "I am so happy to see the tournament back in Kuwait and I am sure it will be organized to the highest interna-

tional standards," said Faraj Lahib, a key member of the 1998 Gulf Cup winning Kuwaiti side.

"I have been following progress in the media and on social media and it has been refreshing to see the new systems in place, particularly at the stadiums to manage the fans getting access, and the way that fans can purchase their tickets easily online."

Looking ahead to the action, the former striker of the Kuwait Club believes recent form shows that they have every chance of advancing into the knock-out stages. "They are all equal in the group and if The Blues can show a consistent performance I believe they have just as much a chance as the other three teams," he said. "As an ex-player we know the fans expect a strong performance and, even though we didn't win, we showed how well we can perform in the World Cup qualifiers against South Korea and Jordan last month."

Walid Ali is remembered for scoring the winning goal for Kuwait when they beat Saudi Arabia, 1-0, to clinch the 2010 Gulf Cup in Yemen, the last

time that Kuwait picked up the prestigious biennial trophy. He believes the class of 2024 can make an impact on home soil and is also impressed by the levels of professionalism behind the organizing of the event.

"The Gulf Cup is a very important tournament because it can change a player's life if they play well," the midfielder said. "I don't see why The Blues can't do well because we are playing on home soil and they showed what they are capable of against Jordan and South Korea."

"The fans will be motivated and will get behind the team as well. The organizers are providing all the information the fans need, especially being able to buy their tickets through the Hayakom application which means they can get their tickets wherever they are, at home or at work."

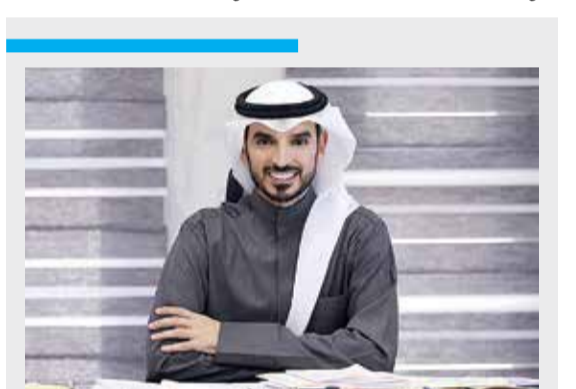
"We have just as good a chance as anyone to get through the group stage," Hamad Harbi was the Golden Boot winner for all Arab leagues in 2006, and says it is the Kuwaiti fans who hold the key to

boosting his nation's chances.

He has urged the supporters to buy their tickets and pack out the stadiums to become the team's 12th man ahead of the first match against Oman on December 21. "Booking the tickets through the application has made it so much easier for fans to buy them and show their support, which will make a big difference for the team," said the former Blues striker from Al-Salmiya Club.

The Khaleeji Zain 26 has taken our organizational professionalism to the next level, so I urge fans to buy tickets, attend the matches and make this a special event that will show Kuwait in a positive light." While Kuwait will play Oman, UAE and Qatar in Group A, the second Group will consist of reigning champions Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Bahrain.

Tickets are on sale now through the 'Hayakom' application for matches that will be played at both the 57,000 capacity Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium and 15,000-seater Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium.



Turki Al-Mutairi

Khaleeji Zain 26 mimicking best Int'l standards

KUWAIT: The Supreme Organizing Committee of the Khaleeji Zain 26 tournament finalizing the finishing touches for the opening ceremony that will be held at 7:00 pm next Saturday, before the opening match of the Gulf Cup hosted by Kuwait, which brings together our national team and its Omani counterpart at 8:00 pm on the same day at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

The supreme organizing committee of Khaleeji Zain 26 has assigned the organization of the opening ceremony to "Baltic Wonder Studio" company provided that it will have an integrated Gulf-Arab character, with a variety of artistic segments, accompanied by the latest sound technologies and light effects, to show the ceremony in a wonderful way that pleases the audience. The Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information for Television Affairs, a member of the Supreme Organizing Committee of the tournament, Turki Al-Mutairi, confirmed that the opening ceremony will witness the participation of a number of local and international artists who will present several performance segments, and said: "We are keen to closely follow the daily rehearsals, through which we monitor every detail, in order to have a successful opening ceremony that emulates the best and highest international standards, and the final preparations have reached an advanced stage, and a test performance will be presented within the next two days."

Al-Mutairi said that the choice of the international company "Baltic Wonder" came after a trade-off with several companies specialized in the same field, and given the successes recorded by the company in major international sporting events, such as the recent FIFA World Cup "Qatar 2022", the Olympic Games in Brazil "Rio 2016", and the Winter Games in Russia "Sochi 2014", adding: "We look forward to seeing a dazzling and exciting opening ceremony, which will be the best introduction to a tournament that is of special interest to the people of the Gulf for its special status, and whose matches usually witness fraternal competition, full of high sportsmanship."

MPW completes tasks for Kuwait's Khaleeji Zain 26 hosting

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Public Works (MPW) announced on Tuesday that it has completed all tasks assigned in preparation for Kuwait's hosting of the Arabian Gulf Cup, Khaleeji Zain 26, slated from December 21 to January 3. Ministry spokesperson Ahmad Al-Saleh told KUNA that the ministry and its teams completed all assigned tasks, including parking areas near Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium and Sulaybiqhat Club, which involved installing accessories, painting, and numbering spaces.

The ministry built approximately 12,000 parking spaces to accommodate the stadium, along with 20 entrances and exits for parking access, Al-Saleh added. It also completed full stadium maintenance, asphalt paving, and three parking lots accommodating about 2,500 cars under the supervision of their Minister Dr Noura Al-Mashaan.

The Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) also constructed entrances and exits on the Sixth Ring Road for VIPs to facilitate smooth access. — KUNA



A group photo of engineers and technicians overseeing the sports facility equipment installation project.

Bach's successor must give Russia cold shoulder

PARIS: The successor to Thomas Bach as International Olympic Committee president must "embody the principles of justice" and that means refusing to welcome Russia back into the sporting world, Ukraine's Sports Minister Matviy Bidnyi has told AFP.

Seven candidates are vying to succeed Bach in an election in March but the German will step down in June 2025 after 12 years in charge. Athletes from Russia and their allies Belarus were allowed to compete under a neutral flag at this year's Paris Olympics, having met strict criteria.

However, momentum appears to be gathering pace for Russia to be re-admitted to the international fold under its own flag. One of the favorites for the IOC job, Juan Antonio Samaranch Junior, told AFP in

September that Russia remained in violation of the Olympic Charter, but said "once the reasons for the suspension are removed, we will have to work very hard to get Russia back".

Bidnyi, though, says over two years into a war sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine there should be no softening of the line. "Our position is clear: sports cannot be a propaganda tool for an aggressor state," he said.

"There can be no return under the national flag of a country that continues to wage the largest war in Europe since World War II." If IOC presidential candidates want to be global sports leaders, they must embody the principles of justice."

Bidnyi, 45, who has been in his post since November 2023, said the candidates should come to Ukraine to see the devastating impact of the conflict. "We would invite them to visit Ukraine, see destroyed sports facilities, and talk to the families of deceased coaches and athletes," he said.

"Perhaps then they would understand that allowing Russia to return under its national flag is not just a dubious step but a concession to Russian hybrid influence." Whatever the future holds for the IOC,

Bidnyi is excited that "Ukraine stands on the brink of a major transformation towards EU membership".

The EU agreed in June this year to start accession negotiations with Kyiv. Bidnyi concedes that in the sporting world, Ukraine needs to sharpen up its act to meet European standards. "This includes transparency in financing, developing grassroots sports through a network of sports clubs, strengthening the role of sports federations, and engaging youth," he said.

'Moved to tears'

Bidnyi says Ukraine is lagging behind when it comes to engagement in sport. "In France over 70 percent of citizens actively participate in sports through more than 160,000 sports clubs," said the former bodybuilder. "In Ukraine, only 15 percent of the population engages in regular physical activity, and we have around 2,000 clubs."

"We must implement changes quickly, and sports clubs must become the foundation for sports federations." There has been talk of bringing the war to an end with incoming US president Donald Trump keen to broker a peace agreement.

Bidnyi says if that happened, Russia should

foot the bill for the rebuilding of sporting infrastructure, although he added that "no amount of money can compensate for the lives of Ukrainian citizens lost". He says that the process "must be approached systematically."

"We will support the development of community sports clubs, multifunctional spaces for various sports, with appropriate conditions for veterans, persons with disabilities, children, and youth." Ukraine has enjoyed a successful year sporting-wise given the extremely tough circumstances.

Yaroslava Mahuchikh broke the 37-year-old women's high jump world record and was one of her country's three Olympic gold medallists—they won 12 medals in all. Their Paralympians brought home 82 medals, 22 of them gold, and in May boxer Oleksandr Usyk defended his world heavyweight title by inflicting British opponent Tyson Fury's first ever defeat. They meet in a rematch this weekend.

However, it is another boxer, Maksym Galinchev, one of over 500 coaches and athletes who have died during the war, that sparked "very strong emotions" in Bidnyi. Guests at Ukraine's house in Paris during the Olympics were addressed by his avatar. — AFP