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## RESILIENT GAZA HAILS TRUCE

Ceasefire takes effect on Jan 19 • Zionists kill scores in Gaza, West Bank

### Amir meets King Charles



**CUMNOCK, Scotland:** Britain's King Charles III meets HH the Amir Shiekh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Dumfries House on Jan 15, 2025. HH the Amir earlier toured Dumfries House and got acquainted with its educational and cultural activities and events. (See Page 2)

#### NEWS IN BRIEF

##### Kuwait reading selective taxes

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investments Noura Al-Fassam said her department is preparing the selective taxation law targeting commodities harmful to human health, with projections the levies would realize KD 200 million (\$648.3 million) annually. In an exclusive interview with KUNA, Al-Fassam said some of the major steps expected to be taken soon to reform taxation in Kuwait includes levying taxes on corporate income. She alluded in particular to decree law 6/2024 for the exchange of information for tax purposes and decree 157/2024 for taxation on multinational entities. — KUNA (See Page 3)



Noura Al-Fassam

##### New Kuwait movie rating system

**KUWAIT:** The ministry of information has implemented a new system for screening movies to inform cinemagoers about the suitability of films for various age groups. Lafi Al-Subaei, Assistant Undersecretary for Press and Publications, announced the system categorizes films as follows: G indicates the movie is suitable for all ages, PG advises parental guidance, PG 12 requires viewers under 12 to be accompanied by an adult, P5 15 stipulates an adult companion must accompany viewers aged 15, R 15 is restricted to those aged 15 and above, and R 18 is restricted to those aged 18 and above. These classifications will be printed on cinema tickets, and the decision takes effect immediately upon publication in the official gazette. — KUNA



Lafi Al-Subaei



**GAZA:** People celebrate along a street in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Jan 15, 2025 as news spread that a ceasefire had been reached between the Zionist entity and Hamas. — AFP

**GAZA/DOHA:** Qatar's prime minister said Wednesday the Zionist entity and Hamas had agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza starting on Sunday and a captive and prisoner exchange after 15 months of war. "The two belligerents in the Gaza Strip have reached a deal on the prisoner and the hostage swap, and (the mediators) announce a ceasefire in the hopes of reaching a permanent ceasefire between the two sides," Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani told a press conference.

US President Joe Biden said Wednesday he was "thrilled" that captives would be freed under the deal and credited "dogged and painstaking" US diplomacy for reaching the accord. "This deal will halt the fighting in Gaza, surge much needed humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians, and reunite the hostages with their families after more than 15 months in captivity," Biden said in a statement.

A Hamas official described the Gaza ceasefire deal as "a great gain that reflects the legend that had been achieved through the steadfastness of Gaza, its people, and the bravery of its resistance." "It is also a reassertion of the occupation's failure to achieve any of its goals," Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters on Wednesday.



(Left) Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani announces the Zionist-Hamas ceasefire and captive release deal at a press conference at the Diwan Annex in Doha on Jan 15, 2025. (Right) US President Joe Biden, alongside Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaks about the deal in the Grand Foyer of the White House in Washington on Jan 15, 2025. — AFP photos



Thousands across Gaza celebrated the deal to halt the hostilities that have devastated much of the Palestinian territory. "I can't believe that this nightmare of more than a year is finally coming to an end. We have lost so many people, we've lost everything," said Randa Sameeh, a 45-year-old displaced from Gaza City to the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. Youths beat tambourines, blew horns

and danced in the street in Khan Yunis in the southern part of the enclave minutes after hearing news of the agreement struck in the Qatari capital Doha.

Pressure to put an end to the fighting had ratcheted up in recent days, as mediators Qatar, Egypt and the United States intensified efforts to cement an agreement.

Continued on Page 6

### PM updates his financial disclosure

**KUWAIT:** HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah on Wednesday visited the headquarters of the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) to update his financial disclosure data, Nazaha Chairperson Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim announced. HH the Prime Minister's keenness on being physically present at the authority's headquarters to update his financial disclosure information affirms his support for Nazaha and sends a message to everybody of the necessity to present and update their financial disclosure,

he said in a statement to KUNA.

HH the Prime Minister's step positively impacts on disseminating transparency and integrity among state personnel, Al-Ibrahim said, affirming that combating corruption tops the government's manifesto priorities. He added that HH the Prime Minister praised the authority, its work mechanisms and the achievements it has made in its realm, calling upon all ministries and public and non-government authorities to cooperate with Nazaha for the optimum execution of Kuwait's strategy for boosting integrity, transparency and combating corruption.

Al-Ibrahim said he along with the staff were pleased with the prime minister's visit, expressing admiration of the premier for setting an example to follow for everyone to adhere to the rules of establishing the authority. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah meets Nazaha Chairperson Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim during his visit to the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority to update his financial disclosure data on Jan 15, 2025. — KUNA





## Local

# Kuwait's Amir visits King's Foundation

## Sheikh Meshal tours Dumfries House facilities on day 2 of UK visit



AYRSHIRE COUNTY: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sits with officials during his visit to the headquarters of the King's Foundation in Dumfries House on January 15, 2025. — Amiri Diwan photos



Sheikh Meshal arrives at Dumfries House for an official tour accompanied by officials.



HH the Amir participates in a conversation during his visit.



Sheikh Meshal plants a tree in the yard during his visit to the King's Foundation's headquarters at Dumfries House as officials look on.

**LONDON:** His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, paid a visit Wednesday to the headquarters of the King's Foundation in Dumfries House, located in Ayrshire County, Scotland, United Kingdom. His Highness toured the facilities and centers affiliated with Dumfries House and was briefed on the various activities and events held at this educational and cultural center.

His Highness the Amir, along with his official delegation, arrived on Tuesday afternoon in Scotland. The delegation includes Sheikh Mohammed Abdul-

lah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, Abdullah Al-Yahya, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other senior officials from the Amiri Diwan and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The visit is set to further strengthen the ties between the two nations and foster cooperation in various sectors.

### About Dumfries House

Dumfries House, a historic landmark in South West Scotland, was built in the 18th century and covers 20,000 square meters. It was originally

commissioned in 1754 by William Crichton-Dalrymple, the 5th Earl of Dumfries, and designed by the renowned architects the Adam Brothers. The house, which was completed in 1759, was furnished in the Rococo style, popular during the period, and featured furniture by the famous English designer Thomas Chippendale.

Dumfries House remained a family residence until 1993, after which it was maintained by the family until it was almost sold at auction in 2007. It was then purchased by a group led by King Charles to preserve

it, given its significant Georgian furniture collection. Since 2018, the Prince's Foundation has worked on developing the house and its gardens, offering training opportunities for youth in traditional crafts. Today, it serves as a tourist destination, venue for events, and a community hub promoting cultural and educational programs. The house is also part of Scotland's heritage sites and hosts various activities, including music events and workshops. The King's Foundation, established in 1986, further promotes traditional urban design and architecture education. — KUNA

## First Deputy Prime Minister honors officers in Wafra fugitive case

**KUWAIT:** First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Interior, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, honored members of the government agency responsible for implementation of court rulings, which successfully apprehended an individual involved in a case of forging Kuwaiti nationality. The individual had been hiding on a farm in the Al-Wafra area.

In a statement issued by the Ministry of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef praised the efforts of the team, emphasizing that this operation serves as an exemplary model of the security forces' competence and ability to handle challenging situations.

He noted that the operation is a live demonstration of the professionalism of security personnel in carrying out their duties, regardless of the circumstances. He stressed the need to intensify efforts and security work to ensure that those wanted for various crimes, particularly those related to forgery and manipulation of national identities, are apprehended.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef further emphasized the Ministry of Interior's commitment to continuing the



**KUWAIT:** Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah speaks to officers who successfully apprehended an individual involved in a case of forging Kuwaiti nationality. The man was found hiding in Wafra. — KUNA

development of its security strategies and enhancing the readiness of its forces to handle various threats to the nation's security. He highlighted that ensuring

security and stability requires continuous commitment from all ministry members and cooperation to uphold the rule of law and achieve justice. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti airlift delivers 40 tons of food, shelter aid to Syria

**DAMASCUS:** The fourth humanitarian airlift flight from Kuwait arrived at Damascus International Airport on Wednesday, carrying 40 tons of food and shelter aid as part of the ongoing Kuwaiti airbridge campaign. The mission is aimed at assisting the most vulnerable groups in Syria under the humanitarian initiative "Kuwait By Your Side," organized by the Al-Salam Charitable and Humanitarian Society, in coordination with Kuwait's Ministries of Social Affairs, Foreign Affairs, and Defense, with the support of the Kuwait Air Force.

Dina Salameh, spokesperson for the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that Kuwait is in continuous contact with the Syrian Red Crescent to assess essential needs and expedite deliveries. The assistance is immediately distributed to the most vulnerable families, including those caring for the disabled, people suffering from chronic illnesses, and those unable to support themselves due to extreme poverty and harsh living conditions. The aid has been distributed in various regions, including Daraa, Lattakia, and Homs, where the humanitarian situation remains dire due to consecutive crises. Salama praised the efforts of the Kuwaiti authorities and charitable organizations for their ongoing humanitarian work, emphasizing that this reflects the true spirit of the Kuwaiti people. — KUNA

## CLM Center children visit Kuwait Times, Kuwait News

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** The children of the CLM Center of Human Development visited Kuwait Times and Kuwait News on Wednesday. The Kuwait Times team provided them with an engaging and educational experience, during which they learned about the newspaper's rich history, its role in the community, and the fundamentals of journalism.

The children were taken on a tour of the various departments, where they gained insights into how news is made. The young visitors showed great enthusiasm and curiosity, and they were particularly eager to ask questions about the sections of the newspaper that aligned with their personal interests, including fashion, travel, and sports.

During a discussion with the team, the children imagined what it would be like to work in journalism, expressing dreams of one day becoming photographers, reporters, or even figures covered in the media.

The visit concluded with an interactive activity where the children could create their own content. With guidance from the team at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, they recorded a short video for social media. In the video, they shared their thoughts on the experience and expressed their creativity.



The children of the CLM Center pose for a group photo with the Kuwait Times team. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



**KUWAIT:** Content creator Yousef Abu Ghazaleh shows children from the CLM Center of Human Development an archived issue of Kuwait Times.



Children play basketball at the Kuwait Times warehouse.



Children learn about making videos for social media with Kuwait Times content creator Dhooha Al-Issa.



## Local

# Kuwait expands addiction services with new rehab center

## 500-bed facility designed for patients in the advanced stages of rehabilitation



KUWAIT: A new state-of-the-art addiction treatment center was inaugurated on Wednesday in the Al-Sabah Health Region, with more than 300 beds.

KUWAIT: A new addiction treatment center in the Al-Sabah Health Region was inaugurated on Wednesday, marking a significant step in Kuwait's ongoing efforts to combat addiction. The rehab center is designed to provide immediate intervention, accelerate treatment, and rehabilitate addicts, helping them reintegrate into society as active and contributing members. This initiative is part of the Ministry of Health's broader vision to improve citizens' quality of life and protect the community from the dangers of drugs.

The new addiction treatment center was generously donated by the National Cooperative Project Committee, a government entity under the Ministry of Social Affairs. During his speech at the opening, Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi said the center was designed according to the highest global standards and aims to provide comprehensive therapeutic and rehabilitative services. He emphasized the ministry's commitment to utilizing all available resources to support individuals suffering from addiction and help them on their path to recovery.

### 500 bed capacity

Dr Hussein Al-Shatti, Head of the Kuwait Center for Addiction Treatment, noted that the new facility is a valuable addition to the center's existing building. The four-storey building has a capacity of up to 304 beds and complements the services offered by the original building, which houses over 200 beds. Together, the two buildings will provide more than 500 beds in total.

The ground floor of the new center is dedicated to rapid interventions and classification, while each floor features various amenities, including a large liv-



KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi and Social Affairs Minister Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah cut a ribbon during the opening ceremony of the new addiction treatment center on January 15, 2025. — KUNA

ing lounge, a dining room, a lecture hall, reception area, buffet, meeting room, individual therapy rooms, a prayer room, and a patient's lounge. The building also includes parking spaces for approximately 100 cars to ensure a comfortable experience for visitors, patients, and their families.

### A halfway house

Dr Al-Shatti explained that the new facility is designed for patients in the advanced stages of rehabilitation, serving as a "halfway house." The program is divided into four phases, each lasting between 6 to 8 weeks, and is supervised by specialized thera-

peutic teams to assess progress and support patients in reaching their treatment goals. The facility also includes a sports activity hall, promoting physical activity as part of the comprehensive rehabilitation process. It adheres to a smoke-free policy to maintain a healthy environment conducive to recovery.

In addition to the specialized therapeutic care, the building relies on a skilled nursing staff that provides round-the-clock services, including emergency interventions and medical test supervision. Multi-purpose halls are also available for administrative meetings, training programs, and counseling and recovery sessions, making the center a well-rounded facility that

## Main features of the new addiction treatment center

### Building capacity

- Four-storey facility with 304 additional beds, complementing the existing center's 200+ beds.
- Total bed capacity: 500+ beds across both buildings.

### Facility design

- Location: Al-Sabah Health Region, Kuwait
- Ground Floor: Rapid interventions and classification services.
- Upper Floors: Large living lounges, dining rooms, lecture halls, individual therapy rooms, patient lounges, and prayer room.
- Sports Activity Hall: Promotes physical well-being as part of the rehabilitation process.
- Smoke-Free Building: To ensure a healthy environment conducive to recovery.

### Support and services

- Dedicated nursing staff available for emergency interventions and medical supervision.
- Multi-purpose halls for administrative meetings, training programs, counseling, and recovery sessions.
- Approximately 100 parking spaces for patients, visitors, and their families.

### Rehabilitation program

- Designed for patients in advanced rehabilitative stages (halfway house).
- Program divided into 4 phases (each lasting 6-8 weeks).
- Supervised by specialized therapeutic teams for progress evaluation and goal achievement.

supports both treatment and professional development.

Minister Al-Awadhi also expressed his deep appreciation to Dr Amthal Al-Huwailah for her ongoing support in facilitating the implementation of initiatives that improve the quality of life for individuals and society. He commended the National Cooperative Project Committee for their generous donation, which demonstrates their commitment to supporting national projects that benefit the Kuwaiti community. — KUNA



KUWAIT: INJAZ Kuwait's CEO Laila Al-Mutairi takes a photo with INJAZ Board members and Zain's team at the company's booth.

## Zain offers training opportunities for youth at INJAZ fair

KUWAIT: Part of its longstanding strategic partnership with INJAZ Kuwait, Zain participated in the second edition of the INJAZ Internship Fair, recently held at Boulevard Hall. During the event, Zain offered students hands-on internship opportunities within the company, enabling them to gain practical experience in the private sector and develop both personal and professional skills in preparation for their future careers.

Zain joined the event's opening ceremony, attended by INJAZ Kuwait's CEO, Laila Hilal Al-Mutairi, members of the INJAZ Kuwait Board of Directors,

Zain's team, representatives from participating organizations, and a large gathering of students from various public and private schools.

This collaboration is a continuation of Zain's strategic partnership with INJAZ Kuwait, which spans over 20 years since the organization's establishment in 2005. Throughout this period, Zain has supported a wide array of academic and training initiatives led by INJAZ, aimed at nurturing the talents and creativity of Kuwaiti youth, empowering them to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations, and equipping them with the skills necessary for success in the workforce and job market.

During the event, Zain highlighted its internship opportunities available under the company's FUN program. This flagship sustainable initiative, launched in 2008, has provided hundreds of students with real-world work experience at Zain through a part-time structure, complemented by a monthly incentive. Participants gain valuable per-

sonal and professional insights, preparing them for their future careers.

Through its strategic partnership with INJAZ, Zain aims to inspire and support ambitious youth in developing their ideas and projects to global standards. This is achieved through various training programs conducted throughout the year, including the annual Company Program competition. Zain remains committed to fostering an environment that nurtures the talents of Kuwait's youth.

INJAZ Kuwait is a non-governmental, non-profit organization dedicated to preparing Kuwaiti youth for success in the global economy. It achieves this through specialized training programs focusing on business management, entrepreneurship, employability, and financial literacy. As a member of Junior Achievement Worldwide, INJAZ Kuwait has trained over 100,000 students from more than 200 schools and universities in the public and private sectors, with the support of over 7,000 volunteers.

## Kuwait to introduce new tax law on harmful goods

KUWAIT: Kuwait is advancing its tax reform agenda with the development of a new selective tax law aimed at harmful goods such as tobacco and sugary beverages. This law is projected to generate approximately KD 200 million (around \$648 million) in annual revenue, marking a significant step in the government's broader efforts to diversify non-oil income sources.

In an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, Noura Al-Fassam, confirmed that the Ministry of Finance is actively working on the selective tax law as part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce Kuwait's reliance on oil revenues. This initiative aligns with the country's long-term economic objectives, including the Kuwait Vision 2035.

Beyond the selective tax law, Al-Fassam emphasized the ministry's focus on other critical tax reforms, including the corporate income tax law, which will apply to businesses operating in Kuwait. These reforms are designed to provide a more sustainable and diversified revenue stream for the country.

Al-Fassam also highlighted Kuwait's recent membership in the OECD's Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS), which includes over 140 countries. This development is a vital step toward enhancing global tax cooperation, combating tax avoidance, and promoting transparency within Kuwait's tax system.

### Multinational tax

The selective tax law forms a key component of a broader legislative package that includes agreements to prevent double taxation and promote international tax cooperation. The multinational entity tax law is expected to generate approximately KD 250 million (about \$810 million) annually, with implementation slated for the 2027-2028 period.

Entities subject to the new law will be exempt from

paying the labor support tax under Law No. 19 of 2000 and the zakat tax under Law No. 46 of 2006 for tax periods beginning January 1 of this year. Additionally, companies contributing to the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science will still be required to make payments, as the multinational tax law does not offer exemptions in this regard.

As for the entities excluded from the law, Minister Al-Fassam clarified that government entities, non-profit organizations, international organizations, pension funds, and investment funds are not subject to the tax, in accordance with the established criteria. She also noted that the initial assessment of entities subject to the new tax law includes around 300 groups, consisting of 20 Kuwaiti groups, 25 Gulf-based groups, and 255 foreign entities operating within Kuwait. — KUNA



Noura Al-Fassam



Zain introduces internship opportunities as part of its FUN program.

## KRCS lays foundation stone for \$800,000 health center in Basra

BAGHDAD: The Kuwait Red Crescent Society announced on Wednesday the laying of the foundation stone for an integrated health center project in Basra, southern Iraq, at a cost of \$800,000. This initiative is in collaboration and coordination with the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, the Kuwaiti Embassy in Baghdad, and the Kuwaiti Consulate in Basra. Dr Naser Al-Tanaka, Vice President of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the project is a donation from Kuwait to the people of Iraq, aimed at serving the residents of Basra Governorate.

He added that the center will be built on a 1,000-square-meter plot of land and will consist of two floors. The center will include laboratories, recovery rooms, an anesthesia room, and X-ray rooms.

The health center is one of the many projects carried out by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society in Iraq. Last December, Kuwaiti First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah inaugurated the Kuwait Surgical Government Hospital in Basra, which was also a grant from Kuwait to Iraq. It features various medical facilities, including patient wards, operating rooms, an endoscopy center and advanced ICU and emergency units. Over the years, the society has organized numerous humanitarian donation campaigns to support the Iraqi people, including providing mobile medical clinics, equipment, ambulances, and medical devices. — Agencies



BASRA: Kuwait Red Crescent Society representatives lay the foundation stone for an \$800,000 integrated health center project in Basra, southern Iraq, on January 15, 2025. — KUNA





KUWAIT: His Highness the then PM Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah tours a tamween storage center with officials in this photo taken in 2020. — KUNA

# New tamween centers to offer larger storage, delivery services

## Operations at 60 new centers across Kuwait to begin in 2027

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Ministry of Commerce and Industry is moving forward with the strategic supply centers (tamween) project, which aims to improve Kuwait's food security by enhancing the storage and distribution of subsidized food items. The subsidized goods, commonly referred to as "tamween" items, include essential products such as rice, milk powder, oil, and other staples, and are available exclusively to Kuwaiti citizens. In an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel said the project focuses on modernizing existing supply centers, upgrading storage systems, and introducing new services, including home delivery for eligible citizens. This initiative is part of the government's efforts to enhance access to essential food items for citizens.

### Project timeline

The project began in 2023, with the Ministry of Commerce working alongside relevant authorities to allocate sites and develop initial designs. The ministry plans to complete the allocation of sites and the

construction of the first supply center by 2024. The entire project will be tendered through the Ministry of Public Works by 2026, with operations expected to commence in 2027.

The Kuwaiti Cabinet reviewed the project on Tuesday, acknowledging its role in strengthening Kuwait's food security. The Cabinet has instructed the Ministry to provide quarterly progress reports on the project's implementation.

### Current challenges

Currently, Kuwait operates 92 supply centers across six governorates, with Hawally having the highest number of 29 branches. Each center serves over 70,000 beneficiaries. However, several of the existing centers face challenges such as limited storage capacity, outdated infrastructure, and ageing equipment, which impact their efficiency. Minister Al-Ajeel discussed these challenges and emphasized the need for an overhaul of the existing centers to improve their functionality and service delivery.



Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel

### Modernization and Kuwaitization

The new project aims to establish 60 modernized supply centers, featuring larger storage capacities ranging from 500 to 1,000 square meters. The new centers will offer a range of upgraded services, including a more efficient food distribution system and the addition of electronic services, such as home delivery to eligible citizens. These improvements

are intended to increase the efficiency of food support services and ensure better access for citizens.

Each new center will be housed in a three-storey building, including administrative offices, expanded

storage areas, and parking spaces of approximately 1,000 square meters. This design is intended to improve the operational efficiency of the centers and provide the necessary space to meet the demands of food support services.

The project will also focus on nationalizing the workforce, with employees from the Ministry of Commerce managing the operation of the centers to ensure effective service delivery.

### Locations across Kuwait

Several locations for the new supply centers have already received approval. The Kuwait Municipality has approved four sites in Al-Adan, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Al-Oyoon and Al-Omariya. However, approval for the Al-Oyoon and Al-Omariya sites by the Municipal Council is still pending. Additionally, the Public Authority for Housing Welfare has approved nine locations in residential areas under construction, including Al-Mutlaa, Jaber Al-Ahmad, Sabah Al-Ahmad, Abdullah Mubarak, South Saad Al-Abdullah and South Sabah Al-Ahmad.

### Workforce development

On the bank's commitment to employee development, Al-Ablani stated: "We strongly believe in the value of investing in human capital. Therefore, we focus on enhancing workforce capabilities by designing and delivering tailored training initiatives, workshops, and educational programs that elevate skills and competencies. Each employee receives targeted training aligned with their career stage, starting from the moment they join the bank."

"All training programs offered by the bank are meticulously crafted by specialized experts to cater to all job levels," he added, emphasizing that the "TAMAKAN" Program presents an outstanding opportunity to develop essential skills for entering the labor market in general, not just for working at NBK.

- Aligning personal ambitions and passions with an organization's strategy is key to career success
- Honesty is essential: Avoid misleading job interviews or false information on your resume
- The private sector offers abundant opportunities for ambitious Kuwaiti youth
- Recognizing employees' contributions and efforts is a core value of NBK's work environment
- Teamwork is a fundamental pillar for the success of large organizations
- We are committed to developing professional, dynamic talent at all organizational levels
- NBK fosters an open-door policy that encourages dialogue and the exchange of ideas

## NBK's training strategy creates capable, professional teams

**KUWAIT:** In its second panel discussion of the season, the TAMAKAN Program, now in its sixth consecutive year, welcomed Emad Al-Ablani, General Manager and Head of Human Resources Group at National Bank of Kuwait (NBK). During the session, he shared his extensive experience and journey of contributing to Kuwait's largest banking institution with the Kuwaiti youth.

The panel discussion saw an enthusiastic exchange, with Al-Ablani discussing key skills essential for the labor market. He emphasized the importance of continuous education, self-development, effective communication, and contributing positively to the work environment. Al-Ablani also shared valuable insights on how to enhance personal skills and abilities, offering practical advice for successfully entering the labor market and ensuring long-term

career requires driven young individuals who are consistently motivated and passionate. There are institutions that prioritize a culture of education and development, and this alignment will create added value both for the employee and the organization."

### Private sector opportunities

Al-Ablani emphasized that the private sector is brimming with job opportunities for ambitious Kuwaiti youth. He encouraged recent graduates to pursue careers in this sector, noting its flexibility and dynamism. The private sector, he explained, offers ample space for innovation, development, and creativity, while also providing a conducive environment for continuous training and professional growth. This enables employees to build a solid foundation, equipped with the skills and expertise necessary to tackle the challenges of an ever-evolving labor market.

He highlighted that NBK's most defining feature is its deep appreciation for the dedication and efforts of its employees, regardless of gender. He emphasized that the bank's work environment is built on the principles of diversity, inclusion and equal opportunities. Furthermore, he noted that advancing within a prestigious institution like NBK demands

exhibit passion and a strong willingness to learn and grow. This is assessed through thoughtful questions that evaluate their responses, reactions and adaptability," he added, emphasizing that honest and transparent answers are key to earning the trust of the interviewer.

He stated: "Even if you lack extensive experience, avoid embellishing or providing inaccurate information, as this can have negative consequences. Instead, focus on demonstrating enthusiasm, genuine interest, adaptability and a willingness to learn quickly."

Al-Ablani encouraged young individuals to showcase their personal skills during interviews and engage actively with the interviewer instead of giving brief answers. He also emphasized the importance of asking questions to make the conversation more dynamic, explaining that the primary purpose of an interview is to uncover personal qualities rather than delve into complex topics, particularly as most job applicants are recent graduates.

Al-Ablani emphasized that NBK views attracting, retaining, and developing top talent as a cornerstone for achieving its long-term ambitions. To this end, the Human Resources Department focuses on building professional and dynamic teams across all levels, supporting employees from their initial entry into the organization to their advancement into senior leadership roles. Additionally, NBK is committed to fostering a work environment that ensures employees' well-being and professional growth.

Al-Ablani highlighted that NBK is dedicated to cultivating a flexible and dynamic workforce through a strategy grounded in four core pillars: aligning the right competencies with the right roles at the right time, preparing future leaders by fostering individuals who inspire and empower innovation, attracting top talent through robust recruitment, retention, and development initiatives, and establishing a sustainable performance-driven culture that prioritizes diversity, inclusion, clear results management, and employee well-being.

### Teamwork

Al-Ablani emphasized the critical role of teamwork for any organization, stating: "Teamwork is a cornerstone of success for major institutions, a defining feature of the work environment at a distinguished organization like NBK. The unique characteristics and capabilities of each individual bring diverse perspectives, enabling better and more comprehensive decision-making. This integration among team members ensures that success becomes a natural outcome of their collaboration."

He emphasized the importance of patience and dedication in achieving career growth, encouraging individuals to continuously ask questions and learn from the experiences of their team members.

In the meantime, Al-Ablani cautioned against making hasty decisions, such as switching departments or jobs in response to criticism or negative evaluations. He emphasized the importance of addressing such feedback constructively, engaging with managers to identify areas for improvement, and focusing on developing the necessary skills to prevent similar evaluations in the future.

He highlighted that NBK fosters an open-door policy, actively encouraging discussion, idea-sharing, and diverse perspectives. Additionally, the bank provides various communication channels that enable employees to voice their opinions, share suggestions and gauge their satisfaction with the work environment.



KUWAIT: Emad Al-Ablani, General Manager and Head of Human Resources Group at National Bank of Kuwait (left) speaks during the "TAMAKAN" Program.

career growth. During the panel discussion, Al-Ablani addressed participants' questions, covering a range of topics from personal interviews to career progression, and how to advance to the top of the organizational ladder.

### Added value

At the start of his conversation with the youth of the "TAMAKAN" Program, Al-Ablani emphasized, "Every individual must identify the added value they can bring to the organization they work for. Setting a clear goal and choosing the right job requires thorough research and careful consideration to make the right decision, whether it's regarding the sector you wish to join or the institution that will offer you a promising and sustainable career path."

Al-Ablani further stated: "Your ambitions and passion must align with the strategy of the organization you wish to work with. Building a successful

three essential qualities: passion, determination and patience.

### Job interviews

Addressing the topic of job interviews, Al-Ablani emphasized the importance of starting with a well-organized resume containing accurate and truthful information. He cautioned against including false details or overstating one's abilities, as misrepresentation can undermine credibility and trust during the hiring process.

Al-Ablani advised the youth of the "TAMAKAN" program, stating: "When attending a job interview, preparation is key. Speak openly and transparently about your skills and experience, and don't hesitate to ask questions about the organization, the specifics of the role, and potential future challenges. This approach demonstrates your genuine interest and enthusiasm for the position."

"We continuously seek young individuals who



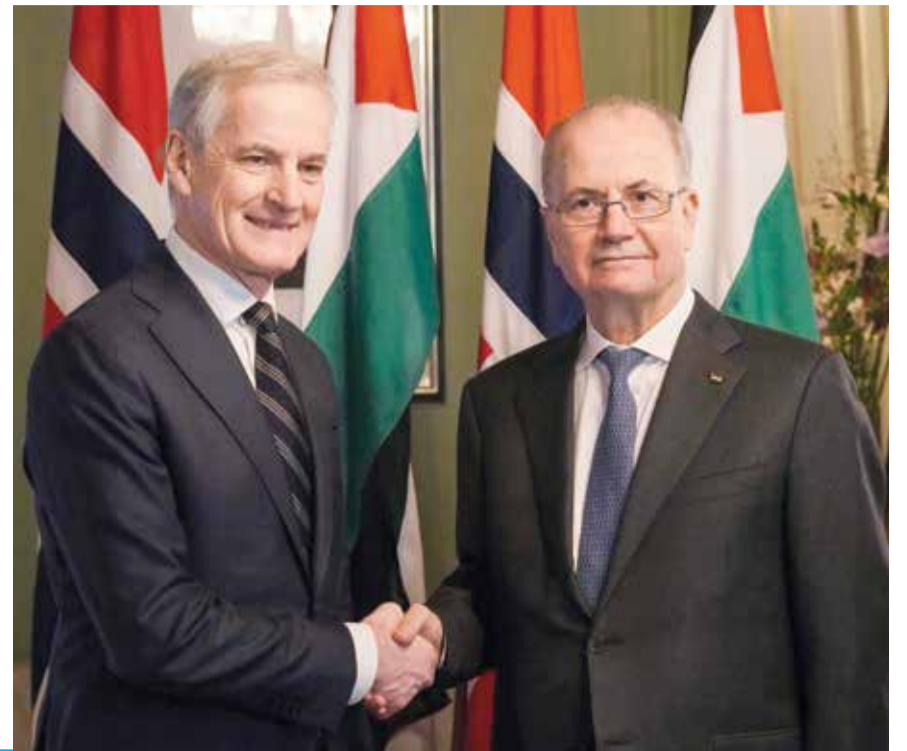


Canadians veto Trump's merger plan

## Imran Khan defiant even as longer sentence looms

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OSLO: (Left) Participants take part in a meeting of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution at Oslo City on Jan 15, 2025. (Right) Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store meets Palestinian Prime Minister Muhammed Mustafa at the government's representative facilities in Parkveien on Jan 15, 2025. — AFP photos

# Call to keep pressure on Zionists

## UNRWA vows to continue aid to Palestinians despite Zionist ban

OSLO: The international community will have to maintain pressure on the Zionist entity after an hoped-for ceasefire in Gaza so it accepts the creation of a Palestinian state, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa said on Wednesday. A ceasefire agreement appears close following a recent round of indirect talks between the Zionist entity and Hamas, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying late Tuesday that a deal to end the 15-month war was "on the brink".

"The ceasefire we're talking about ... came about primarily because of international pressure. So pressure does pay off," Mustafa said before a conference in Oslo. The Zionist entity must "be shown what's right and what's wrong, and that the power on peace and statehood for Palestinians will not be accepted and tolerated any longer," he told reporters.

He was speaking at the start of the third meeting of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution to the Zionist-Palestinian Conflict, gathering representatives from

some 80 states and organizations in Oslo. Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide, the host of the meeting, said a "ceasefire is the prerequisite for peace, but it is not peace". "We need to move forward now towards a two-state solution. And since one of the two states exists, which is (the Zionist entity), we need to build the other state, which is Palestine," he added.

According to analysts, the two-state solution appears more remote than ever. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, firmly supported by US President-elect Donald Trump, is opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state. The Zionist entity is not represented at the Oslo meeting. Norway angered the Zionist entity when it recognized the Palestinian state, together with Spain and Ireland, last May, a move later followed by Slovenia.

In a nod to history, Wednesday's meeting was held in the Oslo City Hall, where Yasser Arafat, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994. The then-head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization,

Zionist prime minister and his foreign minister were honored for signing the Oslo accords a year earlier, which laid the foundation for Palestinian autonomy with the goal of an independent state.

Meanwhile, the UN's Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA will continue to distribute aid in the Palestinian territories despite a Zionist ban due to be implemented by the end of January, its director said Wednesday. Despite serious international concerns, Zionist lawmakers have passed laws to bar UNRWA from operating in the Zionist entity and east Jerusalem.

"We will ... stay and deliver," UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini told a conference in Oslo on Wednesday. "UNRWA's local staff will remain and continue to provide emergency assistance and where possible, education and primary health care," he said. Lazzarini said the absence of communication between UNRWA and the Zionist authorities that will result from the ban will make the agency's work even more dangerous in the Gaza Strip. The Zionist army has been carrying out military

operations there for 15 months.

With no visas, UNRWA's non-Palestinian employees will not be able to enter Gaza and those there now will have to leave, he explained. "Continuing to work will come at considerable personal risk for our Palestinian colleagues," he said. "This is due to the exceptionally hostile operating environment created by (the Zionist entity's) disregard for international law and fierce disinformation campaign against the agency," he added.

UNRWA is considered the backbone of humanitarian operations for Palestinians. It provides aid to some six million Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. The Zionist campaign in Gaza has killed 46,707 people, mostly civilians. The Zionist entity claims that a dozen UNRWA employees were involved in the Oct 7, 2023 assault. A series of probes, including one led by France's former foreign minister Catherine Colonna, found some "neutrality-related issues" at UNRWA but stressed that the Zionist entity had not provided evidence for its chief allegations. — AFP



NEW YORK: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks on 2025 priorities to the UN General Assembly at UN Headquarters on Jan 15, 2025. — AFP

## Humanity has opened Pandora's box of ills: UN chief

UNITED NATIONS: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned on Wednesday that humanity had unleashed a "Pandora's box of ills", including "out of control technology" that risks upending "our very existence". The UN chief was laying out his priorities in a speech to the General Assembly for the year ahead, at a time when the organization faces unprecedented crises and polarization.

"Our actions — or inactions — have unleashed a modern-day Pandora's box of ills," Guterres said. "Four of those ills stand out because they represent, at best, threats that could disrupt every aspect of our agenda and, at worst, upend our very existence: Runaway conflicts. Rampant inequalities. The raging climate crisis. And out-of-control technology."

Guterres' organization is facing some of the worst crises in its history. The organization's top decision-making body, the Security Council, is paralyzed. The war in Gaza has seen the Zionist entity and its allies attack the UN's neutrality, and Blue Helmet peacekeepers have been caught in the crossfire in Lebanon and Syria.

### 'Our tumultuous world'

The return of US President-elect Donald Trump to the White House could further complicate Guterres' agenda, experts have warned. "Yes, there is progress in our tumultuous world," Guterres said, pointing to the relative success of the ceasefire in Lebanon and the pace of renewable energy development. "But let's have no illusions: This is very much a world in turmoil and grave uncertainty."

"Conflicts are multiplying, becoming messier and deadlier. Deepening geo-political divisions and mistrust are adding fuel to the fire. The nuclear threat is at its highest in decades," he said. As conflict rages in Sudan and Gaza, Guterres said "the spectrum of human rights is under constant attack. Impunity is endemic — with serial violations of international law, international humanitarian law and the UN Charter — and systematic assaults on our very institutions."

As efforts to broker a ceasefire between Hamas and the Zionist entity in Gaza appear to be closing in on a breakthrough, Guterres reiterated his call for a durable ceasefire. "I strongly appeal to all parties to finalize a ceasefire and hostage release deal," he said. He also expressed concern about the ongoing reorganization of the Middle East — from Iran to Syria — and what it could lead to. "Across the region, we are seeing a reshaping of the Middle East. What is far less clear is what will emerge," he said.

The UN boss, who for years has made the fight against global warming one of his priorities, again denounced fossil fuel companies "ravaging and savaging our world. Look no further than the hills of Los Angeles. It has gone from the home of disaster movies to a scene of disaster," he said. — AFP

## US bans red food dye, decades after alarm raised

WASHINGTON: Outgoing US President Joe Biden's administration on Wednesday announced a ban on Red Dye No 3, a controversial food and drug coloring long known to cause cancer in animals. Decades after scientific evidence first raised alarm, Red 3, as it is also called, is currently used in nearly 3,000 food products in the United States, according to the nonprofit Environmental Working Group.

"FDA is revoking the authorized uses in food and ingested drugs of FD&C Red No 3 in the color additive regulations," said a document from the Department of Health and Human Services, published in the Federal Register on Wednesday. The decision stems from a petition filed in Nov 2022 by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) and other advocacy groups, which cited the "Delaney Clause" — a provision mandating the prohibition of any color additive shown to cause cancer in humans or animals.

Notably, the FDA determined as early as 1990 that Red 3 should be banned in cosmetics because of its link to thyroid cancer in male rats. However, the additive continued to be used in foods, largely due to

resistance from the food industry. Manufacturers of maraschino cherries, for example, relied on Red 3 to maintain the iconic red hue of their products.

It's also present in thousands of candies, snacks and fruit products — and thousands of medicines, according to a search of a government-run database, DailyMed. "Manufacturers who use FD&C Red No 3 in food and ingested drugs will have until Jan 15, 2027, or Jan 18, 2028, respectively, to reformulate their product," the FDA said. Although the agency acknowledged a cancer link in rats, it maintained that the available evidence does not support such a link in humans, citing differences in hormonal mechanisms between the species and significantly lower exposure levels in people.

### US lags behind

While the FDA determination focused on carcinogenicity, other research has also found potential neurobehavioral effects of synthetic food dyes on children, notably Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). "The body of evidence from human studies indicates that synthetic food dyes are associated with adverse neurobehavioral outcomes in children, and that children vary in their sensitivity to synthetic food dyes," a California government report found in 2021.

Animal studies indicated that synthetic food dyes caused changes in neurotransmitter systems in the brain and produced microscopic changes in brain structure, affecting activity, memory and learning. The

this decade under the Artemis program, leveraging commercial partners to deliver critical hardware at a fraction of the cost of government-led missions.

"Each milestone we complete will provide valuable data for future missions and ultimately keep the United States and our international partners at the forefront of space exploration," Firefly Aerospace CEO Jason Kim said Tuesday. "Firefly is a go for launch. Let's go ghost riders in the sky!"

### Staying upright

On the Japanese side, Tokyo-based ispace's first attempt to land on the Moon ended in an unsalvageable "hard landing" in April 2023. "It's important to challenge ourselves again, after enduring failure and learning from it," ispace founder and CEO Takeshi Hakamada said last week. "Today, we're going back to the Moon," a post on the ispace X account said Wednesday, adding in a promotional video: "Today, we prove our resilience".

Blue Ghost is stacked atop Resilience inside the Falcon 9. SpaceX executive Julianna Scheiman said, and will be deployed first, followed by Resilience nearly 30 minutes later. The two spacecraft have different timelines for reaching the Moon. Blue Ghost aims to complete its journey in 45 days, gradually lifting its orbit around Earth before entering lunar orbit and touching down near Mons Latreille, a volcanic feature in Mare Crisium on the Moon's northeast near side. — AFP



Products that use Red Dye # 3 are seen in this illustrative photograph on Dec 27, 2024. — AFP

United States has been slow to act on Red 3 compared to other major economies. The European Union banned its use in 1994, with similar prohibitions enacted in Japan, China, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand.

CSPI hailed the FDA's decision as long overdue and expressed hope that it would pave the way for broader action on other harmful chemicals in food. "They don't add any nutritional value, they don't preserve the food — they're just there to make food look pretty," Thomas Galligan, a scientist with CSPI, told AFP. "There's growing discussion across the political spectrum about food additives and chemicals, which reflects ongoing failures by the FDA." — AFP

## Private US, Japan lunar landers launch on single rocket

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida: One rocket, two missions: lunar landers built by US and Japanese companies launched their "rideshare" to the Moon on Wednesday, showcasing the private sector's growing role in space exploration. On board the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket that took off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida were Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost and ispace's Resilience from Japan, which will also deploy a micro rover.

Both uncrewed missions aim to build on the success of Texas-based Intuitive Machines, which last year became the first company to successfully touch down on Earth's celestial neighbor. Until recently, soft landings on the Moon were achieved only by a handful of well-funded national space agencies, starting with the Soviet Union in 1966.

Now, however, several emerging US companies are attempting to replicate this feat under NASA's experimental Commercial Lunar Payload Services program, designed to cut costs and stimulate a lunar economy. The US plans to establish a sustained human presence on the Moon later



CAPE CANAVERAL: A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, carrying Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost and ispace's Resilience lunar landers, lifts off from the Kennedy Space Center on Jan 15, 2025. — AFP



## International

## Poland: Russia planned 'air terror'

## Russia strikes Ukraine energy sites in 'massive' barrage

WARSAW/SKNYLIV, Ukraine: Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said on Wednesday Russia had planned acts of "air terror" against airlines worldwide, accusing Moscow of staging sabotage and diversion on Polish soil and beyond. He made the declaration while hosting neighboring Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky for talks in Warsaw, just days before US president-elect Donald Trump's inauguration.

EU and NATO member Poland has been one of Ukraine's staunchest allies since Russia launched a war against Kyiv in February 2022. "Poland plays a key role in Europe in countering the acts of sabotage and diversion that Russia is organizing, and not just on Polish territory," Tusk told reporters. "Russia had planned acts of air terror, and not only against Poland, but against airlines all over the world," he added.

In November, Lithuania carried out arrests as part of a criminal probe into incendiary devices sent on Western-bound planes. According to Polish and Lithuanian media, the devices, including electric massagers implanted with a flammable substance, were sent from Lithuania to Britain in July and could be behind a lorry fire outside Warsaw. The Lithuanian president's chief security adviser blamed Moscow for the incidents. UK anti-terrorism police in October said they were investigating how a parcel burst into flames at a depot earlier



WARSAW: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky meets Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk on Jan 15, 2025. — AFP

this year, after a similar case in Germany blamed on Russia.

Tusk also pledged that Poland, which currently holds the rotating six-month presidency of the European Union, will speed up Ukraine's process to join the bloc. "The Polish presidency will break the impasse that has been evident in recent months," Tusk said. Zelensky told reporters that "the sooner Ukraine is in the EU, the sooner Ukraine becomes a member of

NATO... the sooner the whole of Europe will get the geopolitical certainty it needs".

Polish President Andrzej Duda, who also met with Zelensky on Wednesday, reiterated that Ukraine must be present at the table during any eventual peace talks. "There can be no talks regarding Ukraine, the war's end, Ukraine's independence and sovereignty, without Ukraine's participation," Duda told reporters.

Russia launched a wave of missiles

and drones at Ukrainian energy facilities at dawn on Wednesday, intensifying a months-long bombing campaign at a precarious moment of the war for Ukraine. The Russian barrage came just one day after Kyiv said it had carried out its largest aerial attack of the war on Russian army factories and energy hubs hundreds of kilometers from the front line.

The Ukrainian air force said Russia had launched 43 cruise and ballistic missiles as well as 74 attack drones in the barrage that targeted sites mainly in western Ukraine. Oleksandra Komuna, an elderly resident of the western Ukrainian village of Sknyliv, was at home during the attack when lamps and plaster began falling. "All the doors and windows were blown out, everything was blown out. The car was damaged, and the roof was damaged. There were cracks everywhere. It's such a disaster," she told AFP.

Zelensky was quick to condemn the strikes and called for more robust security assistance from allies abroad. "Another massive Russian attack. It is the middle of winter, and the target for the Russians remains the same: our energy sector," he wrote on social media. The Russian defense ministry confirmed in a daily briefing that its forces had carried out "high precision" strikes on energy facilities that "support the Ukrainian military-industrial complex".

It also repeated the claim that all the

designated targets had been struck. The Ukrainian air force said however that it had shot down 30 of the missiles and 47 drones, while Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said the Russian attack had "failed". Poland had earlier scrambled fighter jets to secure its airspace, it announced on social media, adding that there had been no violations of its airspace over its three-hour mission.

The governor of Ukraine's western Ivano-Frankivsk region said that critical infrastructure facilities had been targeted in the attack, without elaborating. In the Lviv region, which borders EU and NATO member Poland, authorities said two critical infrastructure facilities had been hit in the Drohobych and Striy districts. "There were no casualties, but there was damage," governor Maksym Kozlytsky wrote on social media. National grid operator Ukrenergo urged Ukrainians to limit their electricity use throughout the day after lifting emergency blackouts in seven regions.

The mayor of the southern city of Kherson meanwhile said that "part of our community is without electricity" as a result of the overnight barrage, without giving figures of those without power. Kyiv had earlier issued air raid alerts across Ukraine and AFP journalists heard sirens ringing out over the capital early Wednesday. — AFP

## Canadians veto Trump's merger plan

OTTAWA: Different values, different spelling — different country. Donald Trump's unlikely plan for Canada to become the 51st US state is leading to a surge of national pride north of the border and a pushback against an often imposing neighbor. "There isn't a snowball's chance in hell that Canada would become part of the United States," reacted Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, summing up many Canadians' sentiments.

A new poll by the Angus Reid Institute found 90 percent of citizens reject the idea of linking up with the United States. Canadians told AFP and posted on social media that they pronounce Z as "Zed" north of the 49th parallel and not "Zee" like Americans, measure temperatures in Celsius not Fahrenheit, and would never get used to paying for a doctor visit.

They wisecracked about adding a beaver or a maple leaf to the American flag, and whether they could keep saying sorry as a figure of speech if they became American, while fretting about who would inform King Charles that Canada was quitting the Commonwealth. "Forever neighbours. Never neighbors," a Vancouver strip club joked on its signage, focusing on how Canadians don't follow US spelling.

Even some so-called Trump groupies are cool to a merger. "I'm very proud to be Canadian. I love this country. I enjoy visiting the United States, but Canada is home," Paul Koidis, a Trump supporter in Toronto, told AFP. Some Americans and Canadians sound and look alike, and they watch the same movies, he and others noted, and their economies and security are deeply integrated. But each has a very different mindset, Koidis insisted.

Trump has "unified Canadians more than we have ever before!" former prime minister Jean Chretien said in an open letter, calling Trump's remarks insulting and an "unprecedented threat to our very sovereignty". "We built a nation across the most rugged, challenging geography imaginable. And we did it against the odds. We may look easy-going. Mild-mannered. But make no mistake, we have spine



WINDSOR, Canada: The American and Canadian flags fly at the Ambassador Bridge border crossing in Ontario on Feb 9, 2022. — AFP

and toughness," he said.

Mark Brawley, an American Canadian professor of international relations at McGill University in Montreal, said "there are stark differences" between the two peoples. "We have different values and they're incompatible for us to become one country," he told AFP. Although Canada-US free trade since 1994 arguably brought the two sides closer together, he said Trump's trolling is sparking a backlash and "will reinforce Canadian nationalism".

More and more Canadians have been egging on their political leaders to take a firm stand against Trump's designs on Canada. Michael Connolly, a history student from Alberta in western Canada, said Canadians like himself who do not support the US president-elect were angered by Trump's remarks. "We are a sovereign nation with a unique identity and culture that deserves respect," he said, urging Ottawa to "push back against American imperialism".

In the eastern province of Quebec, which twice sought to separate from Canada in failed referendums in 1980 and 1995, Trump's threat to use "economic force" against Canada in order to achieve his goal has become a serious topic of conversation among Marie-Josée Roussy's family and friends. They all agree, she said. "My God, no! We don't want to be the 51st state. We're fine as neighbors, we help each other, we cooperate, but no, we don't want to be American." — AFP

connected phases. The first, it said, would last 42 days and involve a temporary halt to military operations on both sides, the withdrawal of Zionist forces away from population centers and towards Gaza's borders, and the temporary cessation of flyovers by Zionist warplanes and reconnaissance aircraft for 10 hours each day.

Al-Qahera cited an Egyptian security source as saying coordination was "underway" to reopen the Rafah crossing on Gaza's border with Egypt "to allow the entry of international aid to improve conditions". State-owned Al-Ahram newspaper also reported that talks were underway to open the crossing.

Zionist government spokesman David Mencer had previously said the first phase of a deal would see 33 Zionist captives freed, while two Palestinian sources close to Hamas told AFP that the Zionist entity would release about 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in exchange. A source close to Hamas said that the initial hostage release would be "in batches, starting with children and women". Negotiations for a second phase would commence on the truce's 16th day, a Zionist official said, with media reports saying it would see the release of the remaining captives.

Among the sticking points in successive rounds of talks had been disagreements over the permanence of any ceasefire, the withdrawal of Zionist troops and the scale of humanitarian aid for the Palestinian territory. The UN's Palestinian refugee agency, UNRWA, facing a Zionist ban on its activities set to take effect later this month, said it will continue providing much-needed aid.

Netanyahu, who vowed to crush Hamas in retaliation for the Oct 7 attack, has opposed any post-war role for the militant group in the territory. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday the Zionist would ultimately "have to accept reuniting Gaza and the West Bank under the leadership of a reformed" Palestinian Authority, and embrace a "path toward forming an independent Palestinian state".

He added that the "best incentive" to achieve Zionist-Palestinian peace remained the prospect of normalization between the Zionist entity and Saudi Arabia. Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Mustafa, speaking in Oslo, said the latest push for a Gaza ceasefire showed international pressure on the Zionist entity "does pay off". — Agencies

## Cocaine use nearly doubles in France

PARIS: Cocaine use in France has nearly doubled and consumption of hard drugs like heroin and ecstasy is also rising, a study said Wednesday, the increase taking place as drug-related violence spreads across the country. Some 1.1 million people used cocaine at least once in 2023, according to a report published by the French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDT). The previous report, released in 2022, put the number of users at 600,000.

The new figures put France in 7th place in Europe in terms of cocaine consumption. Record levels of global cocaine production and the drug's changing image were among the factors behind the increase, it said. People are now using cocaine not just as a recreational drug for the well-off, but to cope with intense workloads or rough working conditions in blue-collar industries like fishing, Ivana Obradovic, deputy director at OFDT, told AFP.

The use of crack — a solid form of cocaine — is also spreading and cocaine is now increasingly perceived as "less dangerous" as opposed to 20 years ago, said Obradovic. A drug that stimulates the central nervous system, cocaine is made from the leaves of the coca plant in South America. While its price has remained virtually unchanged — a gram of cocaine cost 66 euros in 2023, compared with 60 euros in 2011 — the purity of cocaine is on the rise, with 73 percent in 2023 compared to 46 percent in 2011.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia — the world's three biggest cocaine cultivators — produced 2,700 tons of the drug in 2022, compared with 1,134 tons in 2010. French authorities have seized more and more of the drug in recent years. In 2023, France seized 23.5 tons of cocaine, compared with 4.1 tons in 2010. In the first 11 months of 2024, nearly 47 tons of cocaine were seized.

## Heroin

The use of heroin and the mind-altering drug MDMA, commonly known as ecstasy, is also on the rise, the report said. MDMA use has jumped from



CAYENNE, French Guiana: French customs officers discover cocaine hidden in a suitcase as they inspect the bags of a passenger flying to Paris at the international airport on March 24, 2024. — AFP

400,000 to 750,000 people between 2019 and 2023, according to the study. "It was among young adults that there were the biggest increases in experimentation and use during the year," particularly of stimulants such as cocaine and MDMA, said Obradovic.

Drug experimentation involving heroin, an extremely potent opioid, is also on the rise in France, with the number of users estimated at 850,000 people, a rise of 350,000 consumers compared with the previous study. "The use of heroin is no longer confined to the most disadvantaged sections of society," Obradovic said, adding that "more socially integrated" individuals often prefer to sniff it.

While in the past heroin consumption was concentrated in places like the department of Meuse in northeastern France it can now be found anywhere in the country. Cannabis remains the most popular illegal drug in France, with five million annual users in 2023. The rise in the drug use comes as drug-related violence spreads, with shootouts now erupting in what were previously quiet corners of the country.

Authorities have said drug crime is crippling daily life in France, and Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau has vowed to intensify the fight against narcotics and drug-related crime. Gangland violence long associated with big cities like the port of Marseille has expanded, with victims and perpetrators getting increasingly younger. The illicit drug trade in France is estimated to generate between 3.5 and six billion euros a year. — AFP

## RESILIENT GAZA HAILS TRUCE...

Continued from Page 1

The announcement comes after months of failed bids to end the deadliest war in Gaza's history, and days ahead of the inauguration of US President-elect Donald Trump, who immediately hailed the deal before it was officially announced by the White House. "We have a deal for the hostages in the Middle East. They will be released shortly. Thank you!" Trump said on his Truth Social network.

Trump had warned Hamas of "hell to pay" if it did not free the remaining captives before he took office, and envoys from both his incoming administration and Biden's outgoing one had been present at the latest negotiations. "This EPIC ceasefire agreement could have only happened as a result of our Historic Victory in November," Trump added in a lengthy second post. The president-elect added that his White House would "continue to work closely with (the Zionist entity) and our Allies to make sure Gaza NEVER again becomes a terrorist safe haven".

The Zionist military campaign in Gaza has killed 46,707 people, most of them civilians. The health ministry said 62 people were killed in the Palestinian territory in the past 24 hours. The ministry added at least 110,265 people have been wounded in more than 15 months of war. Gaza's civil defense agency said on Wednesday that strikes across the territory killed at least 24 people including a seven-year-old boy.

A Zionist strike killed five Palestinians in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin Wednesday, the Ramallah-based ministry of health announced shortly after news broke of a ceasefire deal in Gaza. On Tuesday, the ministry said a Zionist air strike on the Jenin refugee camp killed six people, including a teenager. "There are six martyrs and several injured as a result of the (Zionist) bombing of Jenin refugee camp," the Ramallah-based ministry said. It said among those killed was 15-year-old Mahmud Ashraf Mustafa Gharbiya.

Egypt's state-linked Al-Qahera news outlet reported that the framework agreement comprised three inter-

## S Korean President Yoon arrested over martial law attempt

SEOUL: Impeached South Korean leader Yoon Suk Yeol was arrested on Wednesday over his failed martial law bid, ending a weeks-long standoff with authorities and becoming the first sitting president to be detained in the nation's history. Yoon, who faces charges of insurrection over his short-lived effort to impose martial law last month, said he would comply with investigators to avoid "bloodshed".

A former prosecutor who led the conservative People Power Party (PPP) to election victory in 2022, Yoon could face the death penalty or life in jail if found guilty of insurrection. He had sought to evade arrest for weeks by remaining in his residential compound, protected by members of the Presidential Security Service (PSS) who had remained loyal to him.

His guards had installed barbed wire and barricades at the residence, turning it into what the opposition called a "fortress". Yoon, who had vowed to "fight to the end", managed to thwart a first arrest attempt on Jan 3 following a tense hours-long impasse between the guards and anti-graft investigators working with police.

But before dawn on Wednesday, investigators presented the fresh warrant to Yoon's guards, then had to bypass bus barricades and cut barbed wire to get inside the compound, a CIO official told reporters. Hundreds of police officers and investigators from the Corruption Investigation Office surrounded the residence, some scaling perimeter walls and hiking up back trails to reach the main building.

After a standoff of about five hours, authorities announced Yoon had been arrested and the impeached leader released a pre-recorded video message. "I decided to respond to the Corruption Investigation Office," Yoon said in the message, adding that he did not accept the legality of the investigation but was complying "to prevent any unfortunate bloodshed".



GWACHEON, South Korea: South Korean impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol arrives at the complex building housing the Corruption Investigation Office on Jan 15, 2025. — AFP

Shortly after he was taken to the CIO offices in a convoy, investigators began questioning Yoon but they said later he exercised "his right to remain silent". He refused to be filmed during questioning, a CIO official told reporters, before Yoon was transferred to a detention center for the night. Outside the CIO offices, a man set himself on fire, a local fire department official told AFP. Local media reported that he died in hospital.

In a Facebook post published after he was detained — which Yoon said he wrote while holed up in his residence — the suspended leader repeated election fraud claims and spoke of "hostile" nations attacking the country, alluding to North Korea. AFP reporters earlier witnessed brief scuffles at the gate of the residence, where Yoon's die-hard supporters had been camped out to protect him, as authorities first moved on the compound. His supporters were heard chanting "illegal warrant!" while waving glow sticks and South Korean and American flags. Some lay on the ground outside the residential compound's main gate.

Yoon shocked the nation late on Dec 3 when he declared martial law, claiming he needed to safeguard South Korea "from the threats posed by North Korea's communist forces and eliminate anti-state elements". He deployed troops to parliament and lawmakers defied them and voted against martial law. Yoon revoked martial law after just six hours. — AFP



## International

# China, Sri Lanka agree to boost ties

## Xi hails 'historical opportunity' for relations in talks with Dissanayake

BEIJING: Chinese leader Xi Jinping said relations between China and Sri Lanka faced a "historical opportunity" to foster ties, in talks with the island nation's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Wednesday. "China-Sri Lanka relations face a historical opportunity to build on the past and forge ahead," Xi told Dissanayake during the bilateral meeting in Beijing, according to state broadcaster CCTV. The two sides should see ties from "a strategic perspective and build a China-Sri Lanka community with a shared future."

The countries signed 15 cooperation documents, including agreements on economic and technological development and aligning China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' with Sri Lanka's 2030 digital economy blueprint. "It is necessary to strengthen people-to-people exchanges between the two sides and enhance new ties between the two peoples," Xi told Dissanayake, according to the Chinese state broadcaster.

"I am willing to work with you, Mr

President, to chart a new vision for the development of bilateral relations and promote new and greater achievements in China-Sri Lanka's friendship and cooperation," Xi told Dissanayake on Wednesday, speaking at the Great Hall of the People. Welcoming more Chinese investment, Dissanayake told his host: "China has supported important and valuable infrastructure development in Sri Lanka via the Belt and Road Initiative and China has been and remains a key development partner."

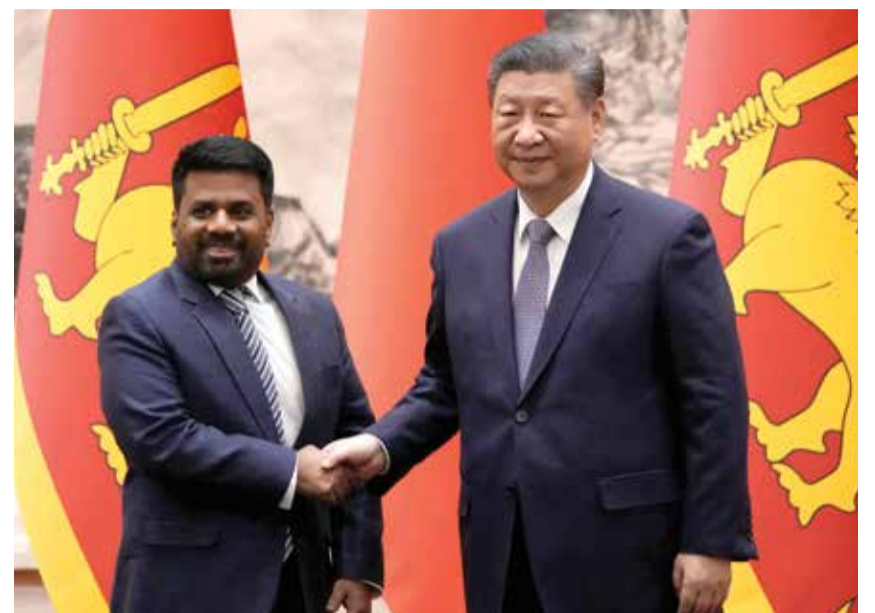
Leftist Dissanayake's visit to China comes after he was given a red-carpet welcome to India by President Narendra Modi during his first overseas trip as premier in December. Dissanayake came to power in September and consolidated his power after his party won a landslide in snap parliamentary polls in November.

China and India are meanwhile competing for influence in the Indian Ocean region. Sri Lanka sits astride the world's busiest shipping route, which links the

Middle East and East Asia, giving its maritime assets strategic importance. But Sri Lanka defaulted on its foreign borrowings in 2022 during a crisis that caused months of food, fuel and medicine shortages.

China accounted for more than half of Sri Lanka's bilateral debt at the time of the economic crash. In December 2017, unable to repay a huge Chinese loan, Sri Lanka handed its Hambantota port in the south of the island to a Beijing company on a 99-year lease for \$1.12 billion, raising questions about Chinese investments in the country.

Xi told Dissanayake that China would "actively support Sri Lanka in focusing on economic development and promote high-quality cooperation" under Beijing's Belt and Road infrastructure initiative. China would also strengthen cooperation with Sri Lanka to "jointly address climate change... uphold the unity and strength of the global South, and contribute to regional peace, stability, development and prosperity", Xi said. — Agencies



BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping meets Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake during a signing ceremony at the Great Hall of the People on Jan 15, 2025. — AFP

## India's triple naval launch shows self-reliance: Modi

MUMBAI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Wednesday the launch of two Indian-made warships and a submarine was key to its "quest towards self-reliance" as New Delhi bolsters defense against regional rivals. New Delhi is expanding its armed forces to upgrade its mostly Soviet-era weaponry and respond to what many in India see as a growing threat from neighboring China.

"India is now becoming a major maritime power of the world," Modi, wearing a naval baseball cap, said in a speech at the triple commissioning ceremony in Mumbai for a frigate, a guided missile destroyer and a submarine. "The commissioning of three frontline naval combatants will strengthen our efforts towards being a global leader in defense, and augment our quest towards self-reliance," he added.

India has rushed to rapidly expand its naval fleet, pouring efforts into building vessels within the country, with plans to expand the number of warships and submarines from around 150 to 170 over the next decade. "We're taking a big step towards getting the navy ready for this century," Modi said.

India and China, the world's two most populous nations, are competing for strategic influence across South Asia. In 2024, India spent an all-time high of some \$15 billion on domestic defense manufacturing, according to the defense ministry, an increase of some 17 percent on the previous year. But New



MUMBAI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh attend the tri-commissioning ceremony of the Indian Navy's INS Surat, INS Nilgiri and INS Vaghsheer ships on Jan 15, 2025. — AFP

Delhi remains one of the largest arms importers in the world, and Modi's Hindu-nationalist government has tried to reduce dependence on Russia, its primary military hardware supplier for decades.

New Delhi has also signed major arms purchasing deals — and approved India-based defence production ventures — with countries including the United States, the Zionist entity and Spain. India is also in talks with Paris for multibillion-dollar deals to purchase French-made Rafale fighter jets and Scorpene-class submarines.

Vincent Sharma, commander of the diesel-powered submarine INS Vaghsheer, said the triple com-

mission "speaks volumes" about the capability both of India's ship-building capabilities and its navy's "ability to operate" the vessels. "India is a maritime nation," Sharma added. "You require a strong navy, which can ensure that the maritime interests are always secured."

Sandeep Shorey, captain of the newly commissioned destroyer INS Surat — a 164-m-long vessel which the navy boasts as its "first AI-enabled warship" — said the show of force was a message about showing India's power. "If you want to be seen on the world stage... there is no other option but to show your presence at sea." — AFP

## Imran Khan defiant even as longer sentence looms

ISLAMABAD: Imran Khan, Pakistan's most popular politician, is facing a 14-year prison term this month in a case his party says is being used to pressure him into silence. The former prime minister, long a source of frustration for the powerful military, has been in custody since August 2023 and faces a slew of legal cases he says are politically motivated.

A looming verdict for graft linked to a welfare foundation he set up with his wife, the Al-Qadir Trust, is the longest-running of those cases, with a verdict postponed on Monday for a third time. "The Al-Qadir Trust case, like previous cases, is being dragged on only to pressure me," Khan said this month in one of his frequent statements railing against authorities and posted on social media by his team. "But I demand its immediate resolution."

Analysts say the military establishment is using the sentence as a bargaining chip with Khan, whose popularity undermines a shaky coalition government that kept his party from power in elections last year. "The establishment's deal is he comes out and stays quiet, stays decent, until the next election," said Ayesha Siddiqi, a London-based author and analyst on Pakistan's military.



Imran Khan

### 'Politically motivated'

Analysts say the military are Pakistan's kingmakers, although the generals deny interfering in politics. Khan said he had once been offered a three-year exile abroad and was also "indirectly approached" recently about the possibility of house arrest at his sprawling home on the outskirts of the capital. "We can assume from the delays that this is a politically motivated judgement. It is a Damocles sword over him," Khan's legal adviser Faisal Faeed Chaudhry told AFP. "The case has lost its credibility," he said, adding that Khan would not accept any deal to stay silent.

Khan has been convicted and sentenced four times in other cases. Two cases have been overturned by the Supreme Court, while judges have suspended the sentences from the other two. The specialist

during his inaugural speech that political dialogue was already under way and that "social harmony could not wait".

"We won't rest until we have a united and cohesive country on the road to building well-being for all of us," he said. "It won't be an easy journey, but we have to have full confidence in the strength of the Mozambican people, of our national unity." His vow came after Mondlane threatened on the eve of the inauguration to "paralyze" the new government with daily demonstrations.

Mondlane, 50, who is popular with the youth, accuses the Frelimo party of rigging the election. Frelimo has governed Mozambique since independence from Portugal in 1975. "This regime does not want peace," Mondlane said in an address on Facebook Tuesday, adding that his communications team was met with bullets on the streets this week. "We'll protest every single day. If it means paralyzing the country for the entire term, we will paralyze it for the entire term."

International observers have said the election was marred by irregularities. The EU mission condemned what it called the "unjustified alteration of election results". Neighboring South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa attended the inauguration, while Portugal sent Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel. Chapo, who is expected to announce his new government this week, could make concessions by appointing opposition members to ministerial posts to quell the

anti-graft "accountability court" is set to announce the verdict and sentence in the welfare foundation case on Friday, two days after government envoys are scheduled to meet leaders from Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party to ease tensions.

The PTI has previously sworn to refuse talks with a government its leaders claim is illegitimate, alleging the coalition seized power by rigging Feb 2024 polls. They say they will only take part if political prisoners are released and an independent inquiry is launched into allegations of a heavy-handed response by authorities to PTI protests.

Otherwise, Khan has threatened to pull his party from the negotiations and continue with a campaign of civil disobedience that has frequently brought Islamabad to a standstill. The most recent protests flared around Nov 26, when the PTI alleged at least 10 of their activists were shot dead. The government says five security force members were killed in the chaos.

"The government would like to appear legitimate, and for that they need PTI to sit down in talks with them," said Asma Faiz, associate professor of political science at Lahore University of Management Sciences. "Ideally, they would be looking to offer some relief to Imran Khan and his party to appease the domestic and international criticism," she told AFP.

For now, it appears to be a stalemate, said Michael Kugelmann, South Asia Institute director at The Wilson Center in Washington. "The army might be willing to give Khan a deal that gets him out of jail, but Khan wouldn't accept the likely conditions of his freedom," he told AFP. — AFP



MAPUTO: Daniel Chapo holds a copy of Mozambique's constitution as he takes oath of office to be sworn in as President during his inauguration at Independence Square on Jan 15, 2025. — AFP

unrest, said Eric Morier-Genoud, an African history professor at Queen's University Belfast.

In his inaugural speech, Chapo said he would make changes, creating an independent police watchdog with civilian oversight. "Its mission will be to investigate possible misconduct attributed to members of the police force," he said. Police and other security forces blocked traffic in the capital and around Independence Square, where the swearing-in was held. — AFP

### News in Brief

#### Mount Ibu erupts again

TERNATE, Indonesia: Thousands of islanders are set to be evacuated after a volcano erupted in eastern Indonesia, spewing a towering column of smoke and ash into the atmosphere, officials said Wednesday. Mount Ibu, located on the remote island of Halmahera, erupted for a fifth time this year on Wednesday, sending a column of smoke four kilometers into the sky. — AFP



#### 121 rescued after 6 days adrift

MANILA: The Philippine Navy rescued 121 people aboard a boat six days after it went adrift at sea, officials said Wednesday. The J Sayang 1 lost engine power, ran out of fuel and suffered communication equipment failure while on a domestic voyage in "adverse weather conditions" across the Sulu Sea on Jan 8, a navy statement said. A navy patrol boat found the missing boat off the coast of the Philippines' southern Tawi-Tawi archipelago on Tuesday, it added. — AFP

#### Tainted alcohol kills 19 in 48 hrs

ISTANBUL: Nineteen people who drank tainted alcohol in Istanbul have died in the past 48 hours, with dozens more being treated for poisoning, the Anadolu news agency reported Wednesday. It said another 43 people were being treated in hospital. Poisonings from adulterated alcohol are quite common in Turkey, where private production has shot up as authorities crank up taxes on alcoholic drinks. — AFP

#### Calls to probe Libya torture videos

TRIPOLI: The UN mission in Libya has called for an urgent investigation into reports of abuse and torture of inmates, following online footage said to be from a prison in the country's east. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) said in a statement late Tuesday that it was "alarmed by the disturbing footage circulating on social media, which shows brutal torture and ill-treatment of detainees at the Gernada detention facility in eastern Libya". The high-security Gernada prison is run by military personnel under the command of leader Khalifa Haftar, backer of Libya's eastern-based administration that rivals the UN-recognized government in Tripoli. — AFP

#### Marcos hopeful of strong US ties

MANILA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos is hopeful Manila and Washington will maintain their "strong and dynamic" relationship under the incoming US administration, a palace statement said Wednesday, less than a week before Donald Trump assumes office. Marcos "expressed optimism in maintaining the strong and dynamic relationship" between the two countries — particularly on economics, defense and security — during a phone call with outgoing Vice President Kamala Harris. — AFP

## Seven Mozambique protesters killed as president vows unity

MAPUTO: Fresh demonstrations in Mozambique on Wednesday left at least seven people dead, a local NGO said, as President Daniel Chapo was sworn in following fiercely disputed elections. The seven people were killed in the capital Maputo and the Nampula region, bringing the death toll since the Oct 9 election to 307, according to NGO Plataforma Decide

Chapo vowed to unite the country Wednesday upon taking the oath of office under heavy guard following weeks of deadly political unrest. Chapo, 48, who was previously a little-known provincial governor, extends his Frelimo party's 50-year rule of the gas-rich African nation after October's contested election. Supporters of opposition candidate Venancio Mondlane, who insists he won the vote, have protested for months, sometimes drawing a violent police response.

As he was sworn in, Chapo vowed "to devote all my energies to defending, promoting and consolidating national unity, human rights, democracy and the well-being of the Mozambican people". With the sound of helicopters overhead, Chapo said



THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, 2025

# From ban to buyout: What's next for TikTok in the US?

## TikTok plans total US shutdown as ban deadline looms: Report

WASHINGTON: TikTok faces an imminent shutdown in the United States after Congress passed a law last year forcing its Chinese owner ByteDance to either sell the platform or close it by Sunday. TikTok plans to completely shut down its operations in the United States this Sunday if a ban ordered by legislators goes through as planned, a report said.

The platform, which counts over 170 million American users, will implement an immediate blackout rather than allowing existing users continued access as had been expected, according to sources who spoke to The Information. The US Supreme Court is expected to rule this week on TikTok's challenge to the law. Following a hearing last Friday, expectations are high that the law will stand. Here is a review of what could happen next for TikTok in the United States.

### App store ban

Under a ban, the US government would first direct Apple and Google to remove TikTok from their app stores, preventing new downloads as early as Sunday, a day before President-elect Donald Trump takes office. However, the app would remain on the phones of the existing 170 million US users unless TikTok directly blocks their access.

Although TikTok lawyer Noel Francisco stated the site would "go dark" on Sunday if the justices fail to block the ban, many observers doubt ByteDance would unilaterally hit the off switch for American users.

TikTok indicated as much in a memo to staff, cited in the Verge on Tuesday. "Our offices will remain open" regardless of what happens on January 19th and employees will keep their jobs. "The bill is not written in a way that impacts the entities through which you are employed, only the US user experience," the memo said.

### Workarounds

But even if TikTok keeps its app accessible, US users would stop receiving security and software updates, leading to gradual deterioration in quality and increased vulnerabilities. As a workaround, users might turn to VPNs (virtual private networks) to mask their location by routing through countries where TikTok remains available.

Another possibility is that TikTok could update from non-US servers through partnerships with foreign, non-Chinese companies - though this would constitute direct defiance of US authorities and likely intensify scrutiny of ByteDance's US operations.

### Defiance?

Once Trump takes office, the law's implementation will fall to his attorney general, who could choose not to enforce it, or stall, defying Congress' overwhelming support for the legislation. The Trump administration might also approach the Republican majority in Congress to modify the law, potentially giving ByteDance more time to find a buyer or devise alternative solutions.

### Alternatives

Once banned, the assumption is that TikTok users will move to other apps, like Instagram Reels and YouTube shorts, TikTok copycats that have grown and will directly benefit from their rival's demise. Elon Musk's X could also benefit, and the tycoon has made it known that he wants his platform, formerly Twitter, to more closely resemble TikTok, with video content and shopping features.

Trump has expressed concern that a ban would primarily advantage Meta-owned Instagram, which may explain Mark Zuckerberg's recent public support for Trump. Some American content creators have already migrat-



WASHINGTON: A woman holds a sign that reads "Keep TikTok" as she and other content creators stand outside the US Supreme Court Building on January 10, 2025 in Washington, DC. — AFP

ed to Xiaohongshu (Red Note), another Chinese social media app that recently topped the Apple App Store downloads.

### Investor rescue?

Several potential buyers have emerged, including a group led by Frank McCourt, former owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers, even if ByteDance has ruled out a

sale for now. His partner in the bid, Canadian businessman Kevin O'Leary, recently golfed with Trump and reported the president-elect's desire to use the TikTok saga as leverage in US-China relations.

A report that the Chinese authorities would be open to a buyout by Musk was denied by TikTok. Former Activision Blizzard CEO Bobby Kotick also remains in-

terested in buying TikTok, according to the Information. For now, TikTok's fate rests with the Supreme Court, with the company lawyers asking the nine justices for a delay to any ban to provide "breathing space" for a solution. "Nobody knows what they can do and who's going to do it until they hear from the Supreme Court," Trump told Newsmax on Monday. — AFP

## Ahmad Al-Bahar appointed Gulf Bank's Chairman



Ahmad Mohammad Al-Bahar

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank's Board of Directors convened on Tuesday and unanimously approved the reformation of the Board. Ahmad Mohammad Al-Bahar has been appointed Chairman of the Board, with Ali Morad Yousuf Behbehani serving as Vice Chairman. The Board also includes Omar Hamad Yousuf Al-Essa Al-Qanai, Dr Fawaz Mohammad Ahmad Al-Awadhi, Abdullah Sayer Bader Al-Sayer, Barrak Abdulmohsen Ahmad Al-Asfour, Abdullateef Abdulazeez Abdullateef Al-Sharikh, Dr Abdulrahman Mohammad Al-Taweel, Talal Ali Nasser Al-Sayegh and Reem Abdullah Eissa Al-Saleh.

The Board of Directors expressed its gratitude to the former Chairman, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, for his dedication and efforts during his tenure as Chairman and member of the Board. The Board reaffirmed its commitment to continuing the implementation of the Bank's strategic plans aimed at enhancing financial and operational performance while delivering the highest standards of services and products to all customers.

Ahmad Mohammad Al-Bahar joined Gulf Bank's Board of Directors as an Independent Member in November 2020. Prior to his appointment as Chairman of the Board, he served as the Chairman of the Nomination and Remuneration Committee.

Al-Bahar brings extensive experience to his new role, having held several senior leadership positions in well-known organizations. His previous roles include CEO of Gulf Custody Company (Kuwait) and Chairman of Gulf Custody Company (Bahrain and Oman). He has also served as Partner-in-Charge of the Settlement Group at The International Investor, Senior Manager of the Settlement Department at Kuwait Foreign Trading Contracting and Investment Company (KFTCIC), and Manager of the Consumer Loans Department at Arab European Financial Management (AREF). Additionally, he was Chairman of Bahrain Real Estate Company and a Board Member of National Cleaning Company.

Al-Bahar holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Finance from Southern Oregon State University, USA.

## Beijing 'firmly opposes' US ban on smart cars with Chinese tech

BEIJING: Beijing on Wednesday said it "firmly opposes" a US move to effectively bar Chinese technology from smart cars in the American market, saying alleged risks to national security were "without any factual basis". "Such actions disrupt economic and commercial cooperation between enterprises... and represent typical protectionism and economic coercion," foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said, adding: "China firmly opposes this."

Tuesday's announcement in the United States, which also pertains to Russian technology, came as outgoing President Joe Biden wrapped up efforts to step up curbs on China, and after a months-long regulatory process. The rule follows an announcement this month that Washington is mulling new restrictions to address risks posed by drones with tech from adversaries such as China and Russia.

US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said that modern vehicles contain cameras, microphones, GPS tracking and other technologies connected to the internet. "Cars today aren't just steel on wheels - they're computers," she said.

"This is a targeted approach to ensure we keep PRC and Russian-manufactured technologies off American roads," she added, referring to the People's Republic of China. But Guo slammed the move, telling journalists in Beijing that China would "take necessary measures" to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests.

"What I want to say is that the US, citing so-called national security, has restricted the use of Chinese connected vehicle software, hardware, and entire vehicles in the United States without any factual basis," he told a regular press conference. "China urges the US to stop

## Renewed US trade war threatens China's 'lifeline'

BEIJING: China might not be able to rely on trade to steer it out of trouble as blistering tariffs being considered by US President-elect Donald Trump threaten an already struggling economy. Exports have historically represented a key engine in the world's number two economy, where authorities will release 2024 growth data on Friday that is expected to be among the lowest in decades.

Worse still, Trump's return to the White House three days later could mean that Beijing won't be able to rely on trade to drive activity in 2025. Exports "are likely to stay resilient in the near-term", wrote Zichun Huang of Capital Economics, noting that a recent surge was due in part to US importers stockpiling Chinese goods ahead of expected tariff hikes.

"But outbound shipments will weaken later this year



BEIJING: This photo taken on January 12, 2025 shows new energy cars waiting to be transported in a distribution center of Chinese state-owned automobile manufacturer Changan in southwest China's Chongqing municipality. — AFP

the erroneous practice of overgeneralizing national security and to stop its unreasonable suppression of Chinese companies."

### 'Trying to dominate'

The final US rule currently applies just to passenger vehicles under 10,000 pounds (about 4.5 tons), the Commerce Department said. It plans, however, to issue separate rulemaking aimed at tech in commercial vehicles like trucks and buses "in the near future".

For now, Chinese electric vehicle manufacturer BYD, for example, has a facility in California producing buses and other vehicles. National Economic Advisor Lael

if Trump follows through on his threat to impose 60 percent tariffs on all Chinese goods," she said. China's economy likely grew 4.9 percent last year, according to an AFP survey of experts, fractionally short of the government's five percent target and down from 5.2 percent in 2023.

The increase - already the lowest in decades, apart from the Covid-19 pandemic - was helped by a record-setting year for Chinese exports. Overseas shipments reached a historic high of nearly \$3.5 trillion in 2024, up 7.1 percent year-on-year, according to official statistics published on Monday.

Adjusted for inflation, China's trade surplus last year "outstripped any global surplus seen in the past century, overshadowing even the historical export powerhouses like Germany, Japan or the United States post-World War II", wrote Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management in a note.

The increase in China's trade surplus has contributed five to six points to the growth of the country's gross domestic product over the past three years, Francois Chimits of the Mercator Institute for China Studies told AFP. "The vitality of foreign trade has been one of the lifelines of the Chinese economy," he said.

Brainard added that "China is trying to dominate the future of the auto industry". But she said connected vehicles containing software and hardware systems linked to foreign rivals could result in misuse of sensitive data or interference.

Under the latest rule, even if a passenger car were US-made, manufacturers with "a sufficient nexus" to China or Russia would not be allowed to sell such new vehicles incorporating hardware and software for external connectivity and autonomous driving. This prohibition on sales takes effect for model year 2027, and also bans the import of the hardware and software if they are linked to Beijing or Moscow. — AFP

### Policy support

That pillar of growth could come under attack in 2025, as the United States and European countries retaliate against what they call unfair competition resulting from China's generous subsidies to its manufacturers.

The European Union imposed additional customs duties in October on electric vehicles imported from China, citing distortionary trade practices by Beijing. And Trump promised during his recent US presidential campaign to slap even heavier tariffs on Chinese goods than those implemented in his first term.

The specific trade imposts Trump intends to levy against China are not yet clear but the country's export surge last year "will ignite further fury among US trade hawks", Innes said. A potential 20 percent increase in US levies on Chinese goods would result in a 0.7-percentage-point hit to real GDP this year, according to a Goldman Sachs report.

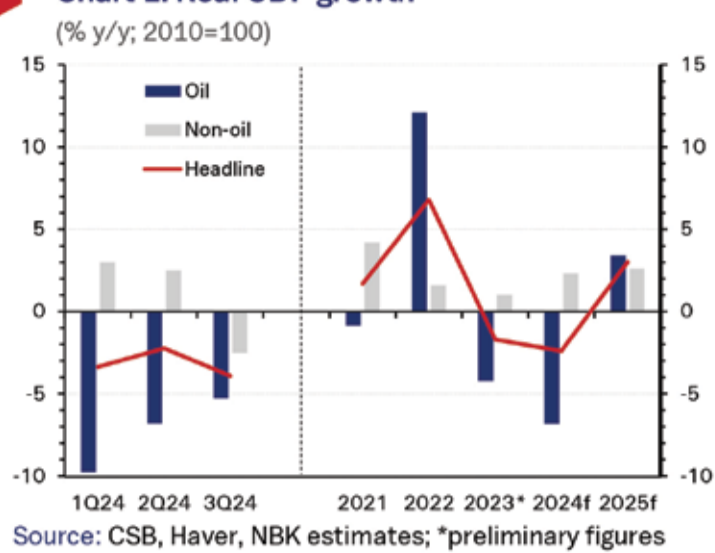
Beijing could allow the yuan to weaken in return, "pre-position" exports in third countries so that they can then be sent to the United States, or simply find new markets, Agatha Kratz of Rhodium Group told AFP. — AFP



## Business

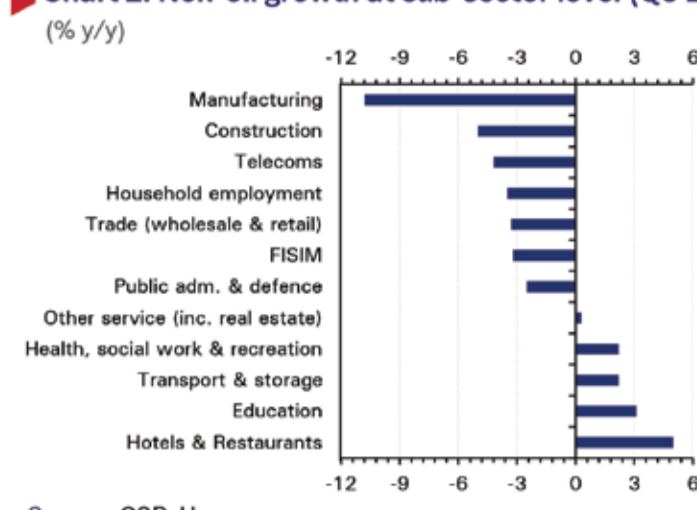
## NBK Economic Insight

Chart 1: Real GDP growth



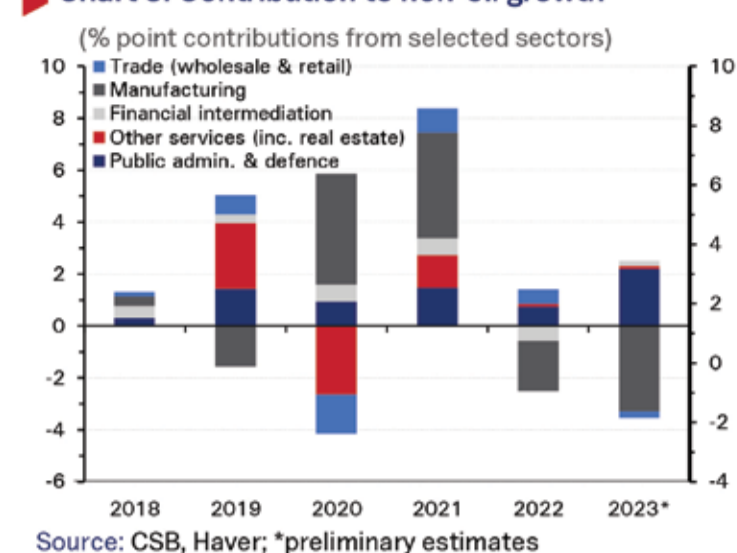
Source: CSB, Haver, NBK estimates; \*preliminary figures

Chart 2: Non-oil growth at sub-sector level (Q3 24)



Source: CSB, Haver

Chart 3: Contribution to non-oil growth



Source: CSB, Haver; \*preliminary estimates

# Preliminary data shows Kuwait GDP fell in Q3 2024, but historical figures revised stronger

## Oil, non-oil GDP fall; near-term outlook is more constructive

KUWAIT: Preliminary Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) estimates show non-oil GDP in Q3 2024 declined by 2.5 percent y/y after a solid H1 and driven by contractions in manufacturing and public administration and defense output. Oil GDP also fell, by 5.3 percent, constrained by OPEC-linked production cuts that were extended through the second half of the year. As a result of the above sector moves, total GDP fell 3.9 percent in Q3. The near-term outlook is more constructive, with crude output cuts set to be unwound in 2025, interest rates on a downward trajectory, project awards rising strongly of late and the government expected to accelerate implementation of its economic development plan.

### Non-oil sector contracts

The decline in non-oil GDP in Q3 represented a weakening versus the downwardly revised 2.5 percent y/y recorded in Q2 (previously 4.2 percent). The year-over-year contraction in non-oil activity was broad-based, with growth negative in most non-oil sub-components and particularly steep in the manufacturing

sector (-10.8 percent y/y), despite output gains in refined petroleum products from the Al-Zour refinery, according to official data submitted to the Joint Organizations Data Initiative. Meanwhile, the contraction in activity in other large economic sectors, including public administration and defense (-2.5 percent y/y), financial intermediation (-2.5 percent), and wholesale and retail trade (-3.3 percent) was less acute though still notable. Output gains in the hotels and restaurants (5 percent) and education (3.1 percent) segments as well as in the transport sector (2.2 percent) helped mitigate some of the contraction.

Looking forward, the non-oil economy should benefit in Q4 2024 from an influx of tourists linked to Kuwait's hosting of the Arabian Gulf Cup football tournament. Moreover, average non-oil private sector output for Q4, using the Purchasing Managers' Index survey readings, pointed to the strongest quarter of expansion (57.4) in the history of the series. For 2025, the growth outlook remains broadly constructive given the expected, albeit modest recovery in consumer spending, recent improvements in credit growth and

project awards, which hit a near 8-year high in Q4, potentially lower interest rates and a possible rise in public investment as the government advances the Vision 2035 economic agenda. We see non-oil GDP growth at around 2.6 percent this year, up from an estimated 2.0 percent in 2024.

### Oil sector output declines

The contraction in oil sector GDP continued for a sixth consecutive quarter in Q3 2024, albeit less negative than Q2's (-6.8 percent y/y), and output did improve on a quarter-on-quarter basis (1.0 percent). Since the start of 2024, Kuwait has kept its monthly crude production steady at 2.41 mb/d in accordance with its OPEC+ quota and voluntary production cut obligations, which in 2024 called for a further reduction of 135 kb/d at the outset. These cuts were scheduled to be unwound in H2 2024 but due to weaker-than-expected market fundamentals and prices were extended three times. On the basis of the December 2024 OPEC+ meeting, Kuwait's crude production will only start rising in April 2025, at the

rate of 7 kb/d per month until all 135 kb/d is restored and production reaches 2.548 mb/d by September 2026. On this schedule, which assumes no further extension of output cuts, oil GDP growth will turn positive in Q2 2025.

### Economy escaped recession

The latest release was once again accompanied by significant revisions to the historical series across several non-oil components, but especially public administration and defense, manufacturing and 'taxes less subsidies'. As a result, Kuwait's non-oil economy looks to have escaped recession in 2022 and 2023 amid significant upgrades to public administration and defense, electricity, gas and water, and construction. In 2022 and 2023, non-oil GDP growth was revised up to 1.6 percent (from -0.1 percent previously) and 1 percent (from -2.9 percent), respectively. In 2021, though, growth was downgraded to 4.2 percent from 5.4 percent previously. Similarly, the latest figures for Q3 2024 are preliminary and subject to revisions in future releases.

## UK inflation dips, easing some pressure on government

LONDON: Britain's annual inflation rate unexpectedly fell to 2.5 percent last month, official data on Wednesday showed, easing some pressure on the Labour government faced with economic unrest. Analysts had forecast no change in the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) from the 2.6 percent figure in November.

The latest reading from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) comes one day after finance minister Rachel Reeves was forced to defend the government's handling of the economy following a recent spike in state borrowing costs and a hefty drop in the pound. Reacting to the data, Reeves said "there is still work to be done to help families across the country with the cost of living". "I will fight every day to deliver that growth and improve living standards in every part of the UK," she added. Britons remain hampered by high interest rates and elevated energy bills despite the annual inflation rate retreating from a four-decade peak of above 11 percent in October 2022.

Last month, "inflation eased very slightly as hotel prices dipped" after rising in December 2023, noted chief ONS economist Grant Fitzner. "The cost of tobacco was another downward driver, as prices increased" less than a year earlier, he added. "This was partly offset by the cost of fuel and also second-hand cars, which saw their first annual growth since July 2023," Fitzner said. Wednesday's data also showed that on a monthly basis, CPI rose 0.3 percent in December, down from 0.4 percent a year earlier. The ONS added that core CPI - excluding energy, food, alcohol and tobacco - increased by 3.2 percent in the 12 months to December, down from 3.5 percent in November.

London's benchmark FTSE 100 index was up 0.7 percent following the data and the British pound eased versus the dollar and euro after initially rising, as analysts said that the update increased the chances of the Bank of England (BoE) cutting interest rates next month. Despite falling, Britain's annual inflation rate remains above the BoE's 2.0-percent target rate, slowing the pace of its interest-rate cuts. The central bank reduced borrowing costs in August for the first time since early 2020, from a 16-year high of 5.25 percent as UK inflation returned to normal levels. It cut those further in November, taking the rate down to 4.75 percent.

"Whilst at 2.5 percent, inflation is still stubbornly above the Bank of England's target, the fact headline CPI has... fallen a bit is cause for a degree of celebration," noted Danni Hewson, head of financial analysis at trading group AJ Bell. — AFP



LONDON: A sign displays the price in pound sterling for fruit and vegetables at a market in stall east London on March 31, 2023. — AFP



STUTTGART: This photograph taken on December 2, 2024, shows the building of the Stuttgart Stock Exchange in Stuttgart, southern Germany. — AFP

## German bourse banks on Trump-fueled crypto boom

STUTTGART: As Donald Trump's looming return to the White House promises to boost cryptocurrencies, a German stock exchange is on a mission to anchor them firmly in the staid world of traditional finance.

Boerse Stuttgart group CEO Matthias Voelkel said "the election of Donald Trump and his ambition to project the US as a 'Bitcoin nation' is expanding the market" - and that his group is seeking a bigger slice of the crypto pie. The cryptocurrency sector has had a questionable reputation in some quarters owing to the extreme price volatility and their use by cybercriminals. None of which has stopped the Boerse Stuttgart Group from using the past five years to build up what it says is the biggest crypto trading platform among Europe's stock exchanges.

While Voelkel won't reveal the exact value of cryptocurrencies traded at the Stuttgart Boerse, he told AFP that the amount tripled last year and represented around "25 percent of revenue". Bitcoin, the most important cryptocurrency globally, accounted for "almost 50 percent of this activity," he added.

The Boerse did divulge at the end of last year that the amount of cryptocurrency held at the exchange for clients had reached 4.3 billion euros. The original idea behind cryptocurrency was to bypass traditional financial institutions and facilitate direct transactions between individuals using decentralized blockchain technology. They are traded on large international platforms, such as Binance and San Francisco-based Coinbase. An earlier market, FTX, imploded in spectacular fashion and filed for bankruptcy in 2022. Some warier entrants to the emerging crypto market prefer to turn to banks or stock exchanges to act as middlemen. These are exactly the clients Boerse Stuttgart is after.

### Trump support

The exchange says it has managed to win more than a million clients in crypto trading, both professionals and private individuals, mostly in the German-speaking world. Voelkel told AFP he had also invested in Bitcoin, saying he was won over by the tamper-proof technology that underlies it.

Gilbert Fridgen, professor in digital financial services at the University of Luxembourg, said it is true that cryptocurrencies "do not have any inherent value". And yet "people are prepared to pay for them" because "they are confident that a Bitcoin which is worth something today will also be worth something tomorrow", he told AFP.

Indeed in early December Bitcoin capped a blistering rally since Trump's election by surging past \$100,000. "CONGRATULATIONS BITCOINERS!!! \$100,000!!! YOU'RE WELCOME!!!" the president-elect wrote in a characteristic social media post. "Together, we will Make America Great Again!" Voelkel thinks cryptocurrencies will only continue to gain in popularity, pointing for example to Bitcoin's "limited supply and growing demand from investors of all ages". Once skeptical of cryptocurrencies, traditional banks are also starting to warm to them. Professional and private investors are too. The European Central Bank estimates that 10 percent of them own digital assets.

### 'Positive dynamic'

Stuttgart Boerse is not alone in Germany in entering the cryptocurrency market. Last March the country's biggest stock exchange, Deutsche Boerse, also launched a trading platform dedicated to the sector.

For the moment the pan-European Euronext group is not planning a platform to trade cryptocurrencies directly but does allow investments in financial products linked to digital assets already listed on its markets. As more players of the traditional financial world venture into cryptocurrencies, Voelkel hopes that the Stuttgart Boerse can be a "partner for banks and European financial institutions offering crypto services to their clients".

In order to facilitate more crypto-related trade, the Stuttgart Boerse has been developing partnerships with liquidity providers and banks. Voelkel rejects the idea that the crypto deregulation promised by Trump will lead to more of the market relocating to America. "The market in Europe is benefiting from a positive dynamic," he told AFP. The cryptocurrency trade in the EU is governed by the MiCA regulation, adopted in 2023 as the world's first comprehensive rules governing the sector in order to protect investors against abuse and manipulation.

"We're right to continue to allow the cryptocurrency trade in a well-regulated environment," Fridgen said. He said that following this model will mean "clients will continue to want to invest in Europe, and for this, European platforms are necessary." — AFP

## Trump's policies won't push up inflation, economic advisor says

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's policies are not likely to cause inflation to reignite as many analysts fear, one of the president-elect's longtime economic advisors told AFP Tuesday, less than a week before Trump returns to the White House. Many economists have warned that Trump's campaign proposals, which included imposing sweeping import tariffs and overhauling the largest deportation in US history, could cause a spike in inflation, forcing the Federal Reserve to keep interest rates higher for longer.

In an interview, Stephen Moore, a longtime economic advisor to Trump, said that the full suite of policies the president-elect wants to push through, including deregulation and the extension of expiring tax cuts, should help keep price increases in check.

"You could point to some specific policies like tariffs that could be inflationary," said Moore, who is a senior visiting fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation. "But you have to remember that we're also going to be reducing other taxes." "Things that are made in the United States will have a lower tax, and things that are made in China will have a higher tax," he added. "So when you balance those out, you have, you may have relative price shifts, but not overall price increases."

### Across-the-board tariffs

Economists at some of the top US banks have noted that Trump's tariff and immigration policies are likely to put upward pressure on inflation and downward pressure on growth, although many expect the impact to be relatively muted as long as Trump does not follow through on his more aggressive policy proposals.

But if Trump goes ahead with across-the-board tariffs of as much as 20 percent - as he pledged to do on the campaign trail - that could complicate the Federal Reserve's job as it looks to return inflation to its long-term target of two percent. The US central bank has cut interest rates by a full percentage point since September in a bid to bolster the labor market. But a recent uptick in inflation has raised concerns that its inflation fight has stalled, putting pressure on Fed chair Jerome Powell to convince his colleagues to keep interest rates on hold. "I think that Trump does understand that inflation is the enemy of the people, and inflation is also the enemy of a presidential term," Moore said, alluding to the impact that inflation and the cost of living played in the most recent presidential race. — AFP



NEW YORK: A supporter of US President-elect Donald Trump stands outside of Manhattan Criminal Court ahead of a hearing in one of Trump's cases on January 10, 2025 in New York City. — AFP



## Business

# Starbucks shift on non-paying visitors stirs debate in US

## Company says new policy aims to 'prioritize' customers

**NEW YORK:** Starbucks has stirred the coffee pot by reversing a policy that allowed anyone to use its bathrooms, with the US public warned they'll need to buy something or get out. In a new code of conduct issued Monday, the hot drink behemoth that boasts 29,000 retail stores in 78 markets said it wanted "to ensure our spaces are prioritized for use by our customers."

That includes the chain's cafes, patios and restrooms, according to the policy, which Starbucks noted is something most retailers enforce. US retailers like Starbucks that bill themselves as a so-called "third space" -- a gathering place outside the home or office -- face a dilemma in a country where public restrooms are sparse.

The question of bathroom access has been a fraught one for Starbucks, with the issue thrust into the spotlight in 2018 when two Black men were refused access to a branch bathroom while they waited for a friend. When they sat in the Philadelphia location's seating area without ordering, staff called the police, sparking a PR disaster. The men were arrested but never charged.

Following the debacle, Starbucks adopted an "open bathroom" policy meaning its restrooms -- at the cafes that had them -- would be open to all. But in 2022 interim chief executive Howard Schultz said the policy might have to end, owing to safety issues from people with mental health problems.

### 'Harden our stores'

"We have to harden our stores and provide safety for our people," Schultz said at the time. "I don't know if we can keep our bathrooms open."

In one busy Manhattan location, where the policy was not yet displayed on the door as planned, a barista who declined to be named said "people are still gonna try and go in there -- the homeless of course -- that's for sure."

The Midtown branch was equipped with a single toilet, fitted with a numerical lock, with a steady stream of people using the facility after obtaining the code from staff. "But if people follow the rules it should be better," the barista added, suggesting the policy would make life easier for staff.

At another location a few blocks away, an employee said "it's fine" for non-paying visitors to use the restroom and the cafe seating area, apparently unaware of the new policy. Starbucks customer Noelle Devoe speculated on X that the policy would not be used against "college kids or professionals."

"It'll just be a way for them to kick out those they feel are undesirable," she said. Starbucks posted a 3 percent decline in global net revenue for the fourth quarter year-on-year, to \$9.1 billion, in October 2024.

The results showed that sales are continuing to fall, as the new CEO vowed a strategic overhaul to turn the company around. The caffeinated giant claims in its corporate motto to be "nurturing the human spirit... one neighborhood at a time." — AFP



**NEW YORK:** A person uses a laptop inside of a Starbucks on January 14, 2025 in the Brooklyn Borough of New York City. — AFP

## Musk, Bezos, Zuckerberg to attend Trump's inauguration: Report

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Billionaires Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg will attend Donald Trump's inauguration next week, NBC news reported Tuesday, further highlighting the tech moguls' efforts to develop closer ties with the incoming president.

The network, citing an unnamed official involved in planning the January 20 ceremony, said the three men will be seated together on the platform with prominent guests, including Trump cabinet nominees.

Musk -- the CEO of Tesla and SpaceX and the majority owner of X -- has become one of Trump's closest allies and his planned presence at the ceremony is not a surprise. Musk shares Trump's hard-right politics and put millions of dollars into supporting his presidential campaign.

Trump has tapped Musk to co-lead an advisory commission aiming to slash federal spending and bureaucracy, which while dubbed the Department

of Government Efficiency, or "DOGE," will not be an official US agency.

Bezos and Zuckerberg have less close ties with Trump, but both have made moves since the election viewed as seeking to curry favor with the president-elect, including meeting with him at his Mar-a-Lago resort.

Meta CEO Zuckerberg signaled a rightward political swerve last week when he announced Facebook and Instagram would scrap fact-checking in the United States, a response to what he characterized as censorship by governments and so-called legacy media.

The pivot to Trumpian talking points shocked some Meta watchers but was also in line past decisions by Zuckerberg aimed at preserving his dominance of social media. In the summer, Trump threatened to put Zuckerberg in prison over Facebook's decision to ban him from the platform in 2021.

Highlighting Zuckerberg's continued step into politics, he will be co-hosting a post-inauguration reception for Trump with several well-known Republican donors, according to an invitation obtained by the Puck news site Tuesday.

Bezos's relationship with Trump has also seen moments of significant friction. The founder of Amazon also owns The Washington Post, one of the many



**Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg**

newspapers Trump has rallied against for years. In a decision that shocked many in US media, The Post declined to endorse a presidential candidate ahead of the November election.

According to a report by the paper, Bezos intervened to block the board from publishing its editorial in favor of Vice President Kamala Harris. The paper's leadership denied that report. Bezos's aerospace company Blue Origin also competes for lucrative government contracts. — AFP

## Meta to lay off 3,600 employees in performance-based cuts

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Meta plans to dismiss approximately 3,600 employees identified as low performers and replace them with new hires, according to an internal memo reported by Bloomberg on Tuesday. The company, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, confirmed to AFP that CEO Mark Zuckerberg's decision will affect five percent of its workforce. Meta had approximately 72,400 employees as of September.

"I've decided to raise the bar on performance management and move out low-performers faster," Zuckerberg said. The CEO said the performance-based cuts are intended to ensure that the

company has the "strongest talent" and is able to "bring new people in." Performance-based dismissals are a common practice among major US corporations. Microsoft announced similar cuts last week affecting less than one percent of its workforce, Business Insider reported. The layoffs come amid broader changes at Meta, in advance of Donald Trump returning to the White House on January 20.

Zuckerberg has recently aligned more closely with conservative ideas and political figures, including having dinner meetings with Trump and nominating a Republican as Meta's head of public affairs.

Last week, Zuckerberg announced the end of the company's US fact-checking program that aimed to combat misinformation on its platforms. The program had faced criticism from conservative voices who viewed it as censorship.

Under the new system, users will be able to add context to posts, similar to features on X, formerly Twitter, and championed by Elon Musk, the platform's owner. The company has also scaled back its



**PARIS:** A logo of US company's Meta is displayed during the Vivattech technology startups and innovation fair, at the Porte de Versailles exhibition center in Paris, on May 22, 2024. — AFP

diversity initiatives and relaxed content moderation rules on Facebook and Instagram, particularly regarding certain forms of hostile speech. — AFP



**BANGKOK:** Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra gestures during a press conference after the royal endorsement ceremony on August 18, 2024. — AFP

## Thai PM says nearly fell for foreign leader phone scam

**BANGKOK:** Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra almost fell victim to a phone scam using AI to impersonate a foreign leader's voice, she said Wednesday. The PM, the youngest daughter of telecoms billionaire and ex-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, said she received a message in a voice sounding identical to a well-known leader, without identifying the person. "In the clip, he said he was looking forward to seeing me and working together," she said.

She missed a call from the same number during the night, before a second voice message the next day aroused her suspicions. "The voice said Thailand is the only ASEAN country which has not yet made a donation -- when I heard that, I thought 'this is not right!'" she said.

A text message asking for money to be sent to a bank account outside Thailand soon followed, confirming her doubts. "I knew it for sure when I saw that," she said. Paetongtarn did not say when she received the messages.

So-called "call center scams" are common in Thailand, in which fraudsters impersonate police, government officials or bank staff -- often using automated "robocalls" to make the first contact. Paetongtarn, 38, last week declared more than \$400 million in assets to Thailand's anti-corruption commission. Her father Thaksin -- who once owned Manchester City football club -- has a net worth of \$2.1 billion, according to Forbes, making him the 10th-richest person in Thailand. — AFP

## Boeing 2024 plane deliveries tumble on labor, safety woes

**NEW YORK:** Boeing delivered just 348 commercial planes in 2024 according to figures released Tuesday that showed the ugly effects from a year of labor disruption and safety setbacks. The annual figure was well below 2023 deliveries and less than half the 766 aircraft European rival Airbus brought to customers last year.

The figures cap a difficult year for the US aviation giant, kicked off by an emergency landing in January 2024 of a 737 MAX flown by Alaska Airlines after the plane suffered a mid-flight blowout on a window panel. That incident prompted heavy scrutiny on Capitol Hill and from the Federal Aviation Administration, leading to Boeing cutting output on the MAX while it intensified quality control efforts.

Boeing's operations were also hampered by a more than seven week labor strike in the fall that shuttered two major assembly facilities in the Seattle region. Production did not resume at the plants until mid-December.

Those difficulties meant that Boeing's gap with Airbus in terms of commercial jet deliveries widened in 2024 to the largest since 2020. The US company has lagged its European competitor since a pair of fatal MAX crashes in 2018 and 2019 plunged Boeing into crisis. Its last annual profit was in 2018.

Getting the company back on track will require Boeing to achieve consistent plane pro-

duction before ramping up. In 2025, "the number of planes they produce and deliver is the real thing to watch," said Morningstar analyst Nicolas Owens. "The hope is that the worst is behind them." Plane deliveries are tied to company revenues, making them a crucial benchmark for financial performance.

### Leadership shakeup

Heading into 2024, Boeing appeared to be poised for a financial comeback, with the MAX having returned to the air and flown for more than three years without significant incident. But the Alaska Airlines episode revived major questions about Boeing's operations, ultimately leading to a March announcement that David Calhoun would step down as CEO.

In late July, Boeing named as its new CEO former Rockwell Collins boss Kelly Ortberg, who in October unveiled a plan to cut 10 percent of Boeing's workforce. Ortberg has spoken of the need for a "fundamental culture change" at Boeing that includes resetting the company's difficult relationship with organized labor, as seen in the bruising Pacific Northwest strike of some 33,000 hourly workers.

After rejecting two earlier offers, workers with the Seattle-based International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) District 751 approved a new contract in early November that includes a 38 percent wage hike.

### Looking ahead

In the months to come, Ortberg's company expects to complete an acquisition of Spirit AeroSystems, a major supplier that builds fuselages and other parts for Boeing. The company will also submit a revised criminal settlement with the US Justice Department over the 737



**LOS ANGELES:** An ANA Airlines Boeing 777 sits at gate in Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), located in Southern California, on January 6, 2025. — AFP

MAX crashes after a federal judge in Texas rejected a prior proposal.

Boeing may also receive recommendations from the National Transportation Safety Board on lessons learned from the Alaska Airlines incident. Ortberg has discussed slimming down Boeing's scope as part of a turnaround to boost operations and improve financial performance.

Although he has not signaled plans to scale back Boeing's space program, Ortberg in October pointed to commercial planes and defense as "core" products that "will always stay with the Boeing company."

Investors would welcome efforts to simplify Boeing's mission, but trimming the company's portfolio is "not as needle-moving as getting the 737 assembly line back," said analyst Owens. Prior to the strike, Boeing was producing far fewer than the 38 MAX planes per month that were previously approved by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Restoring MAX output will be a priority for Boeing this year, along with clearing out built MAX and 787 Dreamliner planes in inventory that were not delivered, said Owens. Shares of Boeing fell 2.4 percent in afternoon trading. — AFP



THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, 2025



Britain's Catherine during her visit to the Royal Marsden Hospital in west London.



Britain's Catherine, Princess of Wales, talks with Rebecca Mendelshon during a visit to the Royal Marsden Hospital.



Britain's Catherine, Princess of Wales, talks with Katherine Field during a visit to the Royal Marsden Hospital.

## UK's Princess Catherine says she is in remission from cancer

Catherine, Princess of Wales, said on Tuesday she was "in remission" from cancer after she and husband Prince William visited the specialist London hospital where she was treated. "It is a relief to now be in remission and I remain focused on recovery," the princess posted on Instagram, alongside a picture of her visit to the Royal Marsden Hospital. The couple thanked staff and met patients at the specialist cancer center operating across three sites in the capital.

"I wanted to take the opportunity to say thank you to The Royal Marsden for looking after me so well during the past year," Catherine wrote on Instagram. "My heartfelt thanks goes to all those

who have quietly walked alongside William and me as we have navigated everything.

"We couldn't have asked for more. The care and advice we have received throughout my time as a patient has been exceptional," she added. The visit came as Kensington Palace announced that the couple had become the hospital's joint patrons. As patrons, members of the royal family support over 3,000 organizations such as charities and hospitals by highlighting their work through visits.

"In my new role as joint patron of The Royal Marsden, my hope is that by supporting groundbreaking research and clinical excellence, as well as promoting patient and family wellbeing, we might

save many more lives, and transform the experience of all those impacted by cancer," said the princess. The visit was said to be "incredibly poignant" for the princess, also known as Kate, who turned 43 last week. The future queen, whose popularity is seen as key to maintaining the royals' position in a changing Britain, revealed last March she had been diagnosed with an unspecified cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy.

### 'Much to look forward to'

"The princess wanted to make the journey to both show her gratitude to the incredible team, but also highlight the world leading care and treatment the Marsden provides," a Kensington Palace

spokesperson said. It is the first time the royal family has given any information about where Catherine was treated. She announced in September that she had completed a course of chemotherapy and was doing her best to remain "cancer free".

She reflected on her diagnosis in a video message at the same time that showed her relaxing in the countryside with William, who is heir to the throne, and her three children Prince George 11, Princess Charlotte, nine, and six-year-old Prince Louis.

"Life as you know it can change in an instant and we have had to find a way to navigate the stormy waters and road unknown," she said, adding the previous

nine months had been "incredibly tough". She wrote on Tuesday that "as anyone who has experienced a cancer diagnosis will know, it takes time to adjust to a new normal". "I am however looking forward to a fulfilling year ahead. There is much to look forward to."

Catherine's diagnosis came just weeks after the UK's head of state King Charles III revealed he too was receiving treatment for cancer. Both have since made a return to public life, although Catherine's has been more limited. The Royal Marsden opened its doors in 1851 as the world's first hospital dedicated to cancer treatment and research. — AFP

## Record 36.8 million tourists visited Japan in 2024

Record numbers of tourists flocked to Japan last year, figures showed Wednesday, as the weak yen bolstered the appeal of the "bucket list" destination despite overcrowding complaints in hotspots like Kyoto. The country logged more than 36.8 million tourist arrivals in 2024, topping 2019's record of nearly 32 million, according to estimates from the Japan National Tourism Organization. It marks a return to a boom that began over a decade ago before being interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with numbers up more than four-fold from 2012.



Tourists visit Sensoji Temple in Asakusa, Tokyo.

That is partly thanks to government policies to promote attractions from Mount Fuji's majestic slopes to shrines and sushi bars in more far-flung parts of the archipelago. Another factor is the cheap yen, which has plunged against other currencies over the past three years, making everything from a bowl of ramen to a handmade Japanese kitchen knife more affordable. Japan has long been a "bucket list" destination for many people, said Naomi Mano, president of hospitality and events company Luxurique. But it's "prime time because at the moment it's like Japan is on a 30 percent off sale", Mano told AFP.

### Double trouble?

The government has set an ambitious target of almost doubling tourist numbers to 60 million annually by 2030. Authorities say they want to spread sightseers more evenly around the country, and to avoid a bottleneck of visitors eager to snap spring cherry blossoms or vivid autumn colors. But as in other global tourist magnets like Venice in Italy, there has been growing push-back from residents in destinations such as the ancient capital of Kyoto.

The tradition-steeped city, just a couple of hours from Tokyo on the bullet train, is famed for its kimono-clad geisha performers and increasingly crowded Buddhist temples. Locals have complained of disrespectful tourists harassing the geisha in a frenzy for photos, as well as causing traffic congestion and littering. In a bid to improve the situation - and cash in - Kyoto on Tuesday announced plans to hike lodging taxes "to realize 'sustainable tourism' with a high level of satisfaction for citizens, tourists and businesses". "If there's a burden on the infrastructure, I do think taxing tourists is a good idea" but Kyoto must find the "right balance", Australian tourist Larry Cooke, 21, told AFP.

Several managers told AFP they are seeking cheaper alternatives, from Airbnb lets to Japan's famously claustrophobic capsule hotels. IT company chief Yoshiki Kojima told AFP that he had chosen one with slightly more comfortable bed-sized pods that his employees had liked. "It's clean, convenient and has a traditional shared bath house. My employees say it's fun," Kojima said.

### Capsule executives

Exasperated officials have also taken steps elsewhere, including introducing an entry fee and a daily cap on the number of hikers climbing Mount Fuji. Last year a barrier was briefly erected outside a convenience store to stop people standing in the road to photograph a view of the snow-capped volcano that had gone viral. Some Japanese companies say they can no longer afford hotels in Tokyo and other major cities, as the high demand from tourists pushes up prices.

Several managers told AFP they are seeking cheaper alternatives, from Airbnb lets to Japan's famously claustrophobic capsule hotels. IT company chief Yoshiki Kojima told AFP that he had chosen one with slightly more comfortable bed-sized pods that his employees had liked. "It's clean, convenient and has a traditional shared bath house. My employees say it's fun," Kojima said.

### Economy

The economic benefits are clear, however, with experts noting that tourism is now second only to vehicle exports in terms of earnings. Japan, population 124 million, still receives far fewer tourists than top destination France, which has a population of 68 million and welcomed 100 million visitors in 2023. So its overtourism woes are mainly because the influx "is centered around specific cities", Luxurique's Mano said.

For example, the number of foreign visitors to Tokyo has doubled since 2019, and was up 1.5 times in Osaka. But Mano thinks the government can take steps to change this by promoting other parts of Japan and "making it easier to access - having more information available, being able to book activities in other rural areas." — AFP



Tourists visit Sensoji Temple in Asakusa, Tokyo on January 14, 2025. - AFP photos



Tourists queue between the Royal Palace and the Almudena cathedral (left), in the centre of Madrid, on July 6, 2024.

## Spain hosted record 94 million foreign tourists in 2024

A record 94 million foreign tourists craving for sun, sand and culture flocked to Spain in 2024 as the sector drives the country's bullish economy, the tourism minister said on Wednesday. Tourism represents around 13 percent of the economy in the world's second most-visited country, which this year has sustained growth rates well above a mostly sluggish eurozone.

"In 2024, the forecast for international tourists is around 94 million, 10 percent more than 2023. Spain therefore continues to break records," Industry and Tourism Minister Jordi Hereu said in Madrid. The spend by

foreign tourists last year is estimated at around 126 billion euros (\$130 billion), a 16-percent increase on 2023, Hereu added.

But the boom has generated a backlash in tourist hotspots. Locals are complaining that surging visitor numbers are driving up rents and changing the fabric of their neighborhoods. Barcelona and the popular southern coastal city of Malaga have announced measures to clamp down on short-term tourist rentals in a bid to tame popular discontent at rampant housing prices. — AFP



Tourists visit Park Guell in Barcelona on October 11, 2024. - AFP photos



Tourists take pictures inside the Sagrada Familia basilica in Barcelona on September 19, 2024.



Passengers queue for checking in luggage at Terminal 4 of Adolfo Suarez Madrid-Barajas Airport in Madrid, on July 19, 2024.



# Benin's women, pillars of Voodoo celebrations



An Egungun dances in Ouidah.



An Egungun is seen in Ouidah.



An Egungun dances in Ouidah.



King Togbe Yedy, one of the heads of the convent of the Temple of Mami Wata, poses on the beach outside the Temple in Ouidah.



An Egungun dances in Ouidah.

**C**lad in white and pink, Deborah Bossou, 25, blends vibrant song with dance as she immerses herself with fellow practitioners in Vodun, traditional Voodoo celebrations in Benin. This weekend brought the traditional Vodun Days annual festival encompassing arts, culture and Voodoo spirituality to the southern town of Ouidah, center on the Sakpata Zoungbodji religious convent. "This religion, this culture -- Voodoo -- occupies a central role in my life. That's why it was important for me to be here," said the smiling young woman who has accessorized her festival barb with a long white pearl necklace and matching bracelets.

Women play a central role in this three-day festive celebration. They are cast in the role of guardians of spiritual transmission and preparation of rituals of Voodoo, an animist rite founded on the powers of nature and links back to one's ancestors. The Vodun Days rituals bring thousands of people from all corners of the globe to Ouidah, the cradle of Voodoo.

**'Secrets'**

"Without women both out there in the foreground and behind the scenes there would be no Vodun Days, nor Voodoo. They are essential pillars" of the festivities, Dah Adoko Gbediga, president of the Union of Associations and Organizations Endogenous Religions of Benin (UAOREB) told AFP. "We can understand this simply from observing what is happening right now all around us," said Gbediga, 68, from the comfort of his seat at the Python temple, where dozens of Voodoo worshippers have assembled. Pythons according to traditional legend protected Ouidah from outside aggressors. Tourists gather to admire dozens of Voodoo practitioners who go into a trance to incarnate Thron Kpeto Deka, a divine presence representing perfect happiness and riches. Others dance to the rhythms of drums played by men. "It is mainly women who choose the clothes which we shall wear for this type of event," said Gbediga. "They play a large role in the organization of the rites, particularly as they are responsible for teaching and transmitting Voodoo knowledge in the convents for young and old."



King Daagbo Hounon Tomadjlehoukpon II Houwamenou poses inside his Royal Palace in Ouidah.



An Egungun walks past a Voodoo convent in Ouidah.

An initiate practices Voodoo on the beach outside of the Temple of Mami Wata in Ouidah.



Lifestyle



A man rests on traditional outfits used by Kokou initiates, warrior gods in the traditional religion of Benin, in the sacred forest in Ouidah.



A Kokou initiate, a warrior god in the traditional religion of Benin, dances in the sacred forest in Ouidah.



A Voodoo initiate poses for a portrait at the Mami Wata Temple in Ouidah.



A Prince, a family member of King Kpodégbé Lanmanfan Toyi Djigla, the 16th king of the Fon State of Allada.

According to Benin's culture minister Jean-Michel Abimbola, missions imparted to women for the organization of Voodoo rites are "numerous and important". But the exact nature of some of these may not be revealed owing to rules of secrecy surrounding the rituals. "There are secrets known only to people such as me who have been initiated. But I can say that women do have a central place in Voodoo," Abimbola told AFP as the celebrations picked up the pace.

To be initiated, it is best advised to approach leaders of the followers, who attend Vodun Days in large numbers and who stand out in the crowd with their white scarves. "We can give thanks to the divinities for those who cannot, and we are also intermediaries between the followers and the Voodoo leaders," said one of their number, Tasssi Kpomegan Gabrielle, 70.

Female divinities

Some celebrations at the festival are dedicated specifically to female divinities such as Mami Watta and Sakpata, underlining the importance of women's role both in Voodoo and the collective cultural imagination. Some of those dedicated to Mami Watta, an aquatic deity representing a nourishing mother and the destructive power of the ocean, attracted hundreds of people to Ouidah beach. For local dignitary

Suzanne Celeste Delaunay Belleville, there can be no doubt as to the importance of women and their feminine deities in Voodoo ritual.



A Prince, a family member of King Kpodégbé Lanmanfan Toyi Djigla, the 16th king of the Fon State of Allada in central Benin, poses for a photo in Allada.

"Women are present at all stages. At the beginning, in the middle and at the end. Even in rites reserved for men, women are always there," she explained. That said, she deplors a lack of representation of women within senior Voodoo authorities. Citing few ranking female dignitaries she laments that "many have been brought up to remain in the shadows and this is something we still have to work upon". —AFP



Two Egungun leave a Voodoo convent in Ouidah.



A swirling Zangbeto performs in Ouidah.



Spectators observe wirling Zangbetos perform in Ouidah.



A Kokou initiate in Ouidah.



A dignitary of the Thron Kpeto Deka poses in Ouidah.



Dancers of the Thron Kpeto Deka walk in Ouidah.



A woman walks near the python temple in Ouidah.



Swirling Zangbetos perform in Ouidah.



An Egungun, a visible manifestation of the spirits of departed ancestors who periodically revisit the human community for remembrance, celebration, and blessings walks in Ouidah.



Voodoo initiates pose for a portrait at the Mami Wata Temple in Ouidah.



Hohovi Voodoo figurines that represent twins are seen on a chair inside King Daagbo Hounon Tomadjehoukpon II Houwame-nou Royal Palace in Ouidah.



Princes, family members of King Kpodégbé Lanmanfan Toyi Djigla, the 16th king of the Fon State of Allada in central Benin, walk inside the Royal Palace in Allada.



## Sports

# Avalanche rally late to sink New York Rangers in overtime

## Zach Werenski, Blue Jackets score shootout win over Flyers

**DENVER:** Devon Toews scored with 37 seconds left in overtime, and the Colorado Avalanche rallied to beat the New York Rangers 3-2 in Denver on Tuesday night. Artturi Lehkonen and Parker Kelly also scored. Nathan MacKinnon had two assists and Mackenzie Blackwood made 27 saves for Colorado. With the Avs trailing 2-1, Blackwood came off for an extra skater with 2:14 left, and Lehkonen tied it when he knocked in Mikko Rantanen's rebound at 18:47. Sam Carrick had a goal and an assist, Adam Edstrom had a goal and Igor Shesterkin turned away 23 shots for New York, which had its two-game winning streak stopped. The Rangers dominated the first part of overtime, including several chances on a power play, before the Avalanche capitalized in the final minute of overtime. Logan O'Connor passed it to MacKinnon above the left circle, MacKinnon sent a pass to Toews in the right circle, and he beat Shesterkin on the short side to win it for Colorado.

### Sharks 6, Red Wings 3

William Eklund and Tyler Toffoli each had a goal and two assists as visiting San Jose snapped Detroit's seven-game winning streak. Nico Sturm, Jan Rutta, Mikael Granlund and Mario Ferraro had the other goals for San Jose, which snapped a three-game losing streak. The Sharks won for just the fourth time in the last 18 games. Alexander Georgiev made 25 saves. Vladimir Tarasenko, who had gone without a goal since Dec 1, scored twice for Detroit. Lucas Raymond had the other goal, and netminder Ville Husso made 18 saves.

### Canadiens 5, Utah 3

Kirby Dach scored twice while Lane Hutson, who leads all rookies in points, recorded his first three-assist game to pace Montreal past Utah in Salt Lake City. Montreal's Cole Caufield and Mike Matheson both netted one goal and one assist, while Patrik Laine scored a goal to reach the 400-point plateau. Sam Montembeault made 22 saves for the Canadiens, who have won 10 of their last 13 games (10-2-1). Josh Doan, Nick Bjugstad and Logan Coolidge scored for Utah, which has only one win in the past five games (1-3-1) and is on a 2-7-2 skid. Karel Vejmelka stopped 21 shots.

### Capitals 3, Ducks 0

Logan Thompson made 19 saves as Washington shut out visiting Anaheim. It was his first shutout with the Capitals and the fifth of his five-year NHL career. Thompson stretched his point streak to eight games (7-0-1) and improved his season record to 19-2-3. Brandon Duhaime had a goal and an assist and John Carlson and Ethen Frank also scored for the Capitals, who extended their point streak to eight games (5-0-3). John Gibson made 22 saves for the Ducks, who have lost four of five (1-3-1). Anaheim was shut out for the second time in the past three games after not getting blanked in the first 41 games.

### Bruins 6, Lightning 2

David Pastrnak and Pavel Zacha each logged a goal and two assists and Jeremy Swayman tied his career-high mark with 43 saves as Boston beat visiting Tampa Bay. Andrew Peeke and Brad Marchand each had a goal and an assist, while Trent Frederic and Parker Wotherspoon (first NHL goal) also scored for the Bruins, who have followed up a season-worst 0-5-1 skid with consecutive victories. Victor Hedman had a goal and an assist and Connor Geekie also scored for the Lightning, who had won three of their previous four games (3-0-1). Andrei Vasilevskiy made 18 saves.

### Predators 5, Golden Knights 3

Steven Stamkos scored twice and also had an assist and Filip Forsberg added a goal and an assist as Nashville jumped out to a four-goal lead and then held on for a milestone victory over visiting Vegas. Justin Barron and Ryan O'Reilly also scored for Nashville, which earned the 1,000th win in franchise history (1,000-770-60-190). Justus Annunen made 19 saves for the Predators, who snapped a two-game losing streak. Vegas' Pavel Dorofeyev scored his first career hat trick, the fourth multi-goal game of his career and third of the season. Tomas Hertl and Victor Olofsson each had two assists for the Golden Knights, who lost for the third time in four games. Ilya Samsonov finished with 18 saves for the Golden Knights.

### Jets 6, Canucks 1

Kyle Connor scored a natural hat trick in the first period and went on to add an assist as Winnipeg crushed visiting Vancouver. Neal Pionk, Nino Niederreiter and Mark Scheifele each had a goal and an assist for Winnipeg. Gabriel Vilardi had three helpers, while Cole Perfetti had two assists. Nikolaj Ehlers and Rasmus Kupari also set up goals. Connor Hellebuyck made 23 stops. Nils Hoglander scored Vancouver's only goal, unassisted. Kevin Lankinen made 27 stops for the Canucks, who fell to 1-3-2 in their last six games.

### Blue Jackets 3, Flyers 2 (SO)

Kirill Marchenko scored the deciding goal of a shootout to give Columbus a win over the visiting Philadelphia. The Blue Jackets, who are 4-0 in shootouts this season, extended their winning streak to five games. Zach Werenski scored both Columbus goals in regulation time. Daniil Tarasov stopped 23 of 25 shots, and the Flyers were off target on both of their shootout attempts. Bobby Brink and Owen Tippett scored for the Flyers, who have earned at least a point in three straight games (2-0-1).

### Panthers 2, Devils 1 (SO)

Anton Lundell scored the deciding goal in the third round of a shootout to lift Florida to a win in Newark, N.J. Jesper Boqvist scored and Spencer Knight made 26 saves for the Panthers, who snapped



**DENVER:** Urho Vaakanainen #18 and goalie Igor Shesterkin #31 of the New York Rangers stop Ross Colton #20 against the Colorado Avalanche in the second period at Ball Arena on January 14, 2025 in Denver. — AFP

a two-game skid (0-1-1). Nico Hischier scored for the Devils, who are 2-0-2 after a four-game losing streak. Jacob Markstrom made 27 saves.

### Stars 4, Maple Leafs 1

Logan Stankoven had two goals to snap a 25-game scoring drought and visiting Dallas defeated Toronto. Matt Duchene added a goal and two assists for the Stars, who have won eight of their past nine games. Mavrik Bourque also scored a goal, Stankoven added an assist and Jake Oettinger stopped 27 shots as Dallas completed a 4-1-0 road trip. Toronto had won the seven previous games between the teams, most recently a 5-3 victory at Dallas on Dec 18. Auston Matthews scored and Joseph Woll made 19 saves for the Maple Leafs, who have lost three straight games in regulation for the first time this season.

### Kraken 4, Penguins 2

Jamie Oleksiak and Eeli Tolvanen scored 50 seconds apart midway through the third period as Seattle rallied for a victory at Pittsburgh. Chandler Stephenson and Kaapo Kakko also tallied for the Kraken, who won for just the second time since the start of the new year (2-4-1). Seattle's Adam Larsen had two assists, and goaltender Joey Daccord made 31 saves. Philip Tomasino and Bryan Rust tallied for the Penguins, who lost their third in a row and dropped to 1-4-3 over their past eight games. Tristan Jarry stopped 14 of 17 shots.

### Senators 2, Islanders 0

Leevi Merilainen authored his second shutout in three starts, recording 24 saves to lead visiting Ottawa to a win over New York in Elmont, N.Y. Ottawa has won three straight games—all started by Merilainen. Adam Gaudette scored in the second and Artem Zub had an empty-netter in the third for the Senators, who are one point out of the second wildcard playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. Goalie Marcus Hogberg, who made his second straight start with Ilya Sorokin sidelined by an illness, recorded 25 saves as the Islanders had their season-high three-game winning streak snapped. New York is in last place in the Metropolitan Division and in 15th place in the Eastern Conference.

### Blues 2, Flames 1

Radek Faksa scored the game-winning goal as the St. Louis Blues edged the visiting Calgary Flames 2-1 Tuesday night. Colton Parayko also scored for the Blues and Jordan Binnington made 26 saves. St. Louis has won two of its last three heading into Thursday's home rematch against Calgary. Kevin Bahl scored and Dan Vladar stopped 23 shots for the Flames, whose three-game winning streak came to an end. Faksa put the Blues up 2-1 with 8:49 to play by deflecting Tyler Tucker's shot from the right point. With Vladar pulled for an extra attacker, the Flames applied pressure playing 6-on-5 but failed to tie the game. — Reuters

## Benn and Eubank Jr boxing bout set in London in April

**LONDON:** The long-awaited grudge match between Conor Benn and Chris Eubank Jr is set to finally take place in London in April after a delay of several years, it was announced Wednesday. What should have been an initial bout between the two British boxers in October 2022 was called off when Benn failed a voluntary drug test in fight week. Benn's two-year battle to clear his name saw his suspension lifted in November. The 28-year-old took to Instagram on Wednesday to share photos of himself signing a contract with promoter Eddie Hearn and Saudi official Turki Alalshikh, along with the words: "Your Fate has been sealed! @chriseubankjr".

Eubank Jr, 35, responded by posting the picture on his Instagram feed, with the message: "@conorbennofficial just signed his own death sentence." Benn will reportedly have to move up from welterweight to fight Eubank Jr, who has a professional record of 34 wins and three defeats, in what was previously billed as a "catchweight" fight. — AFP

## Williams, Vine vie for season-opening Tour Down Under crown

**ADELAIDE:** Defending champion Stephen Williams, former winner Jay Vine and 2018 Tour de France victor Geraint Thomas headline the 25th staging of Australia's Tour Down Under this week, heralding the new UCI WorldTour season.

The men's six-stage event is preceded by the three-stage women's tour, starting in Adelaide on Friday. That race features last year's Olympic team pursuit gold medalist Chloe Dygert and reigning Tour de France queen of the mountain Justine Ghekiere.

Welshman Williams stormed to victory at Mount Lofty in the 2024 showdown, powering past his rivals in the final few hundred meters to hold on to the ochre jersey and top spot. It helped launch him into a successful season with victory at the Tour of Britain in September and a four-year contract extension with his powerful Israel-Premier team.

"Winning my first Tour Down Under was an unbelievable moment for me," Williams said ahead of the men's race from January 21-26. "It put into motion a terrific year for me. I'm chasing another strong

## Pakistan plot spin blitz as West Indies return after 19 years

**MULTAN:** Pakistan will look to formidable spin duo Noman Ali and Sajid Khan to torment the visitors when the West Indies play their first Test series in the country in 19 years from Friday. Pakistan capitalized on home advantage when England came in October, tailoring pitches for slow bowling to snap a painful winless streak with a 2-1 victory.

Noman and Sajid played starring roles and are joined in the squad by Abrar Ahmed, hinting at a three-pronged spin assault in the two-match series in Multan. The West Indies last toured Pakistan in 2006, before a militant attack on the visiting Sri Lanka team three years later scared off international sides.

Andre Coley is in charge of a West Indies team which has won only two of its last 13 Tests, before he hands over the reins to white-ball coach Daren Sammy in April. "It's a new series, a new opportunity," Coley told reporters as the team arrived last week. "When you talk about Test cricket, it's not only the opposition's skill that provides tests, but

the different conditions, different environments and different game situations."

### 'Land the first punch'

Pakistan selectors delivered victory against England by taking the bold decision to drop ace batsman Babar Azam and pace pair Shaheen Shah Afridi and Naseem Shah. Left-arm spinner Noman and off-spinner Sajid shared 39 of 40 England wickets on pitches baked with patio heaters and dried with fans, clinching the series after losing the first match.

"We bounced back well against England," said skipper Shan Masood of a series that salvaged his reputation after Pakistan lost their first six matches under his captaincy. "With backs against the wall we did well. We need to learn how to land the first punch," he said after his team suffered a 2-0 defeat in South Africa last week.

Azam has regained his place but Shaheen and Naseem remain out in a bid to manage their workloads. Opener Saim Ayub is suffering from a calf injury sustained in South Africa and his partner Abdullah Shafique is dropped because of poor form, leaving the door open for the return of experienced Imam-ul-Haq.

To match Pakistan's spin attack, the West Indies will deploy left-armers Gudakesh Motie and Jomel Warrican, as well as Kevin Sinclair. Kemar Roach will head the pace attack in the absence of Shamar

result to kickstart my 2025 season, and hopefully it will lead to another breakthrough year."

Israel-Premier are expected to be challenged in Adelaide by the UAE-Team Emirates line-up featuring 2023 TDU winner Vine and former INEOS Grenadiers rider Jhonatan Narvaez, who was the runner-up behind Williams last year.

"I'm really looking forward to the race," Vine said. "I had a really good summer of preparation in Australia and am excited to be in Adelaide for the Tour Down Under, a place where I have some amazing memories."

"We have a really strong team for the race and are aiming for some big results." Vine has bounced back from a horrific crash in last year's Tour of the Basque Country in April when he suffered spinal injuries. His neck was placed in a brace and he feared he would never walk again.

He recovered to win the king of the mountains classification at the Vuelta a Espana last September, before claiming gold for Australia in the UCI Road World Championships in the mixed team relay. Welshman Thomas, who will be competing in his 10th Tour Down Under for INEOS Grenadiers, said: "For me, it's the best place to start, you have a month or five weeks in Australia with consistent training and good weather—it's ideal."

The women's peloton also includes Ruby Roseman-Gannon (Liv-Alula-Jayco), Chloe Dygert



**ADELAIDE:** (FILES) The peloton rides across a bridge during the fourth stage of the Tour Down Under cycling race in Adelaide on January 19, 2024. — AFP

(Canyon-Sram), Amanda Spratt (Lidl-Trek), and Olympic silver medalist Ally Wollaston (FDJ-Suez). Ghekiere, who also won the mountains classification in last year's Giro d'Italia, is part of the AG Insurance-Soudal line-up. Last year's winner Sarah Gigante will not compete after undergoing surgery for a vascular condition. — AFP



**ISLAMABAD:** West Indies' Kemar Roach (C) attends a practice session ahead of his first Test cricket match against Pakistan, in Islamabad. — AFP

Joseph—out with a shin injury—and Alzarri Joseph who has opted to play T20 cricket in the UAE.

The second Test starts January 25, with the series deciding which team will finish bottom of the World Test Championship table. Pakistan currently rank eighth and the West Indies ninth and last. South Africa and Australia have already qualified for June's WTC final at Lord's despite Australia's shock loss to the West Indies in Brisbane last year. — AFP

## France name Jegou, Auradou in Six Nations squad

**PARIS:** Hugo Auradou and Oscar Jegou, who were investigated for rape in Argentina before the case was dismissed last month, were both named Wednesday in France's 42-man squad for the Six Nations. In December, the case against the pair, both 21, was dropped after the two forwards had been accused of rape in July after France had played Los Pumas on tour.

La Rochelle flanker Jegou and Pau lock Auradou insisted they had consensual sex with a 39-year-old woman after a night of drinking following their Test debuts. France coach Fabien Galthie insisted this week that "the case was dropped which is clear and obvious. From the moment the case was dropped, we consider them innocent".

"From the moment when a case is dropped, after a coherent procedure, they can be selected," the former France captain added. There is also a return, after 17 months on the sidelines with injuries, of Toulouse fly-half Romain Ntamack. — AFP



Sports

# Title chasers Atalanta held by Juventus, Milan hand Conceicao maiden Serie A win

## Milan moves up to seventh on 31 points, five behind fourth-placed Lazio

**MILAN:** Atalanta crept closer to Serie A leaders Napoli on Tuesday after drawing an entertaining match with Juventus 1-1 and moving to within four points of the summit, while AC Milan came from behind to beat Como. Mateo Retegui salvaged a point for Atalanta with a close-range header 12 minutes from time, not long after returning to action from the bench following four weeks on the sidelines with a hamstring injury.

The Italy striker's finish, which levelled Pierre Kalulu's 54th-minute opener for Juve, put him out on his own at the top of the Serie A scoring charts on 13 goals and pushed Atalanta to 43 points, ahead of table-topping Napoli's crucial trip to Bergamo this coming weekend.

Gian Piero Gasperini's side, who are bidding for their first league title after winning the Europa League last season, sit level on points with second-placed Inter Milan. However, champions Inter have two games in hand on both Atalanta and Napoli and play the first of those fixtures against Bologna at the San Siro on Wednesday.

"It was a great match tonight, and I'm very happy with the way my boys played," said Gasperini to Sky. "It was difficult going behind because we were hoping to go ahead but I think at the end of the day a draw is probably a fair result."

Tuesday's draw was Atalanta and Juve's rescheduled fixture due to their trip to Saudi Arabia to contest the Italian Super Cup earlier this month with Inter and winners AC Milan. Juve were again without a recognized striker due to an injury crisis which has left both Dusan Vlahovic and Arkadiusz Milik side-

lined but Thiago Motta's side were a constant threat.

Moments before his opener Kalulu watched on in frustration as his glancing header hit the inside of the post and was just scooped off the line by Atalanta goalkeeper Marco Carnesecchi. And Kenan Yildiz put wide a great chance to snatch a last-gasp win deep in stoppage time, shortly after substitute Nicolo Zaniolo slapped a golden opportunity for the hosts straight at Juve goalkeeper Michele Di Gregorio.

"To draw like that in the closing minutes hurts a bit. We played well and had the chances to win today," said Kalulu. Juve remain unbeaten but have now drawn 13 of their 20 league fixtures and sit fifth, 13 points behind Napoli.

### Conceicao success

Earlier, Theo Hernandez and Rafael Leao saved Milan from an embarrassing defeat at Como with the goals which gave Sergio Conceicao's new team a 2-1 win. Trailing to Assane Diao's fine low strike on the hour mark, star players Hernandez and Leao turned the match around by the 76th minute, handing Conceicao his first league win as Milan coach.

Tuesday's victory in one of their two games in hand moved Milan up to seventh on 31 points, five behind fourth-placed Lazio as Conceicao tries to reignite the Italian giants' bid for Champions League qualification.

"They (Como) are a good team with a good coach, it's not easy to play here," said Conceicao. "It was an even game but we can't concede as much as we did, we need to be more organized." Left flank pairing Hernandez and Leao had reportedly been at logger-



**BERGAMO:** Juventus' Italian defender #04 Federico Gatti (L) and Juventus' Dutch midfielder #08 Teun Koopmeiners saves the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Atalanta and Juventus at the Gewiss Stadium in Bergamo. — AFP

heads with Conceicao's predecessor Paulo Fonseca, who was sacked at the end of December following a dismal opening half of the season.

Both praised their new coach after he arrived just before the new year and immediately won the Super Cup for Milan, who came from two goals behind to beat Inter in Saudi Arabia earlier this month. Hernan-

dez levelled for Milan 11 minutes after Como new boy Diao's opener when his mishit volley sliced off his left boot and looped past goalkeeper Jean Butez.

Leao dinked home the decisive goal shortly afterwards, meeting substitute Tammy Abraham's excellent through ball before netting his seventh goal in all competitions. — AFP

## Maresca 'concerned' as Chelsea's winless run stretches to five games

**LONDON:** Chelsea boss Enzo Maresca expressed his concern at the Blues' reaction to conceding in a 2-2 draw at home to Bournemouth as their winless Premier League run stretched to five games on Tuesday. Maresca's men looked destined to end that slump with a dominant first-half display at Stamford Bridge.

But Cole Palmer's cool finish for his 14th Premier League goal of the season was all the home side had to show for it at the break. Bournemouth bounced back in the second half as Justin Kluivert levelled from the penalty spot before Antoine Semenyo blasted in at the near post to put the Cherries in front.

Chelsea captain Reece James came off the bench to salvage a point in stoppage time with a fine free-kick. But Chelsea could now drop out of the Premier League top four should in-form Newcastle beat Wolves on Wednesday.

"I think we deserved much more, especially in the first half," said Maresca. "The negative thing is that we changed how we played after conceding. We dropped back. The game was completely in our control and it's something we need to improve. I have concerns always, even when we are win-



**LONDON:** Bournemouth's Scottish midfielder #10 Ryan Christie (rear) tackles Chelsea's Belgian midfielder #45 Romeo Lavia (front) during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Bournemouth at Stamford Bridge in London. — AFP

ning matches. This is the Premier League, when you don't create chances and don't score then you have to be more concerned."

James has suffered another injury-plagued season that has restricted the 25-year-old to just four starts in all competitions. And he reveled in a moment to savor in stoppage time after such a long

The northern side, who go to Liverpool in the Champions League next week, have now set a new club record in going 20 games without defeat in all competitions as they advance to the last 16. Marseille, in contrast, have only Ligue 1 to focus on between now and the end of the season after being eliminated from the French Cup on penalties for the third year running.

They saw Mason Greenwood pass up a glorious chance to open the scoring in the first half when he broke through on goal but was denied by Mannone, the former Arsenal goalkeeper starting in place of usual first choice Lucas Chevalier.

The home side also had a Neal Maupay goal disallowed for handball before the break, while Lille's Mitchel Bakker had an effort ruled out for the same offence just after the restart. Icelandic international Hakon Haraldsson turned in a Jonathan David assist to put Lille ahead on 69 minutes, and it looked as if that would be enough to win the tie as Greenwood struck the post inside stoppage time. — AFP

time on the sidelines.

"There was a period where I was scoring quite frequently and I haven't had that feeling for quite a long time," said James. However, he echoed Maresca's words on Chelsea needing to be more ruthless to reach their target of a return to Champions League football next season. — AFP



**MARSEILLE:** Marseille's #19 Robinio Vaz (L) and Lille's French defender #02 Bafode Diakite (R) fight for the ball during the French Cup (Coupe de France) last 32 football match between Olympique de Marseille (OM) and Lille LOSC at the Stade Velodrome in Marseille. — AFP

## Leverkusen just one point behind Bayern, Kiel down Dortmund

**KIEL:** A second-half goal from Alex Grimaldo sent Bayer Leverkusen to a 1-0 home win over Mainz, closing the gap with league leaders Bayern Munich to one point. Borussia Dortmund's struggles in the league continued with a 4-2 loss at Holstein Kiel earlier on Tuesday, raising the heat on under-fire coach Nuri Sahin. In Leverkusen, Xabi Alonso's defending champions were dominant against an in-form Mainz but were held at bay until Grimaldo produced a stunning free-kick after 48 minutes.

The Spain defender lifted the shot over the Mainz wall and beyond the outstretched palm of Robin Zentner, his 12th goal on his 50th Bundesliga appearance. "He does that always, also in training—it wasn't a surprise," Leverkusen striker Patrik Schick said of Grimaldo's strike.

Florian Wirtz, who won the free-kick, along with Nathan Tella and Jeremie Frimpong all had late chances saved. Leverkusen's 10th straight win in all competitions moved them to 38 points and handed down the gauntlet to Bayern, who face Hoffenheim at home on Wednesday. Mainz, who lost coach Bo Henriksen to two successive yellow cards for backchat in stoppage time, stay in fifth despite the loss. Eintracht Frankfurt put on a second-half display to beat Freiburg 4-1 at home, with Omar Marmoush again getting on the scoresheet.

Marmoush, heavily linked with a winter move to Manchester City, scored Frankfurt's second, while Robin Koch, Hugo Ekitike and Nnamdi Collins all got on the scoresheet for the third-placed home side.

Dortmund were heavily favored against their promoted opponents, who sit second-last in the table, but were overrun as Kiel scored three goals in 22 first-half minutes. Shuto Machino, Phil Harres and Alexander Bernhardsson found the net to have Kiel up by three at half-time.

Dortmund's Gio Reyna and Jamie Gittens scored in the second half but the visitors could not pull off an unlikely comeback, with Jann-Fiete Arp scoring Kiel's fourth in stoppage time. Captain Emre Can said Dortmund's woes were "nothing to do with the coach—we as players are responsible". "With all due respect to Kiel, we can't play like that. It's a matter of honor," the 31-year-old added. Kiel have now won two of their last three to boost their chances of avoiding a direct relegation. — 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, **MOHAMMED JAFAR**, holder of Indian Passport No. M8395165 having permanent address "Iqbal Manzil", House No: #957, Makhdoom Colony, Bunder Road, Near Check Post, Bhatkal-581320, Karnataka, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) **Mohammed Jafar** and (surname) **Sayeddi**.  
(#6621) 16/01/2025

I, **RAHUL CHOUDHARY**, holder of Indian Passport No. T1338471 having permanent address: Ward No: 2, Mandawa, Jhunjhuno, Rajasthan-333704, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) **Mukesh** and (surname) **Kumar**.  
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## Liverpool frustrated by Forest, City blow late lead at Brentford

City remain down in sixth, 12 points off the top



NOTTINGHAM: Liverpool's Portuguese striker #20 Diogo Jota (C) scores the equalizing goal during the English Premier League football match between Nottingham Forest and Liverpool at The City Ground in Nottingham. — AFP

**LONDON:** Liverpool's charge towards the Premier League title was halted by stubborn Nottingham Forest in a 1-1 draw between the top two on Tuesday as Manchester City's resurgence came undone in a 2-2 draw at Brentford.

Chris Wood fired Forest in front early on at a raucous City Ground, but Liverpool dominated almost the entire 97 minutes and got back on level terms thanks to substitute Diogo Jota's goal with his first touch. Only a brilliant goalkeeping performance from Matz Sels denied the leaders victory, but the point maintained a six-point cushion over Forest for Arne Slot's men, who also have a game in hand.

Forest had won their last seven games in all competitions to raise the possibility of matching Leicester's incredible title win of 2015/16. The in-form Wood had the home fans believing after just eight minutes when he slotted in Anthony Elanga's pass.

Liverpool enjoyed over 70 percent possession and had 23 shots on goal but only posed a serious threat in front of

goal after the break. Jota had only been on the field a matter of seconds when he nodded in Kostas Tsimikas' corner.

Sels then made incredible saves to deny Jota, Mohamed Salah and Cody Gakpo a winner, while Salah also had a goalbound effort cleared off the line. "I could not have asked for more," said Slot. "Second half was outstanding."

"There are not many teams that can create so many chances against an opponent so defensively strong. Unfortunately we couldn't get a second." Liverpool's second consecutive league draw opens the door for Arsenal to cut the gap at the top to four points when they host Tottenham in the north London derby on Wednesday.

### Man City, Chelsea stumble

Any suggestion City could get themselves back in the title race was ended in a late collapse in west London as Brentford struck twice in the final 10 minutes for a deserved point. Phil Foden's double had City on course for a fourth consecutive

win after a run of just one victory in 13 games. However, the English champions' defending was not convincing all night and they were punished as Yoane Wissa and Christian Norgaard netted for the Bees. Foden's return to the form that saw him crowned Premier League player of the year last season was the one positive for City.

But Pep Guardiola will reflect on a missed opportunity to make up ground on the top four as City remain down in sixth, 12 points off the top. Foden produced a brilliant deft touch from Kevin De Bruyne's inviting delivery and then smashed in a rebound for his fourth goal in five league games.

Brentford wasted a host of chances before conceding but finally got some reward for their attacking endeavor when Wissa slotted in from Mads Roerslev's cross to become the club's all-time leading goalscorer in the Premier League. They completed the comeback in stoppage time when Norgaard's header had too much power for Stefan Ortega.

"We are not (at our best) and we didn't take the right decisions," said Guardiola. "It's fine, it's not a good place to come. Unfortunately, we couldn't win." Fourth-placed Chelsea's miserable run extended to five league games without a win but they were grateful for captain Reece James' stoppage-time equalizer salvaging a point in a 2-2 draw at home to Bournemouth.

Cole Palmer's cool finish from Nicolas Jackson's through ball had given Chelsea the perfect start. But Bournemouth hit back through Justin Kluivert's penalty, before Antoine Semenyo's blistering near-post effort put the visitors in front. James has endured another injury-hit season but showed his quality by curling home a free-kick at the death.

West Ham boss Graham Potter enjoyed a winning home debut as Fulham were beaten 3-2 at the London Stadium. Carlos Soler, Tomas Soucek and Lucas Paqueta were on target for the Hammers to take Potter's men above Manchester United and Tottenham into 12th. — AFP

## Djokovic creates slice of history, Zheng knocked out

**MELBOURNE:** Novak Djokovic celebrated a slice of Grand Slam history on his way into the Australian Open third round on Wednesday, but last year's women's finalist Zheng Qinwen was knocked out in the biggest shock so far.

Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka, in-form Coco Gauff, former Melbourne winner Naomi Osaka and a rampant Carlos Alcaraz were all victors on a rainy day four. Alexander Zverev also progressed but Norway's Casper Ruud went down in four sets to Czech teenager Jakub Mensik to become the highest men's seed to fall at six. Playing under the roof on Rod Laver Arena, Djokovic needed four sets for the second match in a row before defeating Portuguese qualifier Jaime Faria 6-1, 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 6-2. It was Djokovic's 430th singles match at a major to claim sole ownership of most ever played, men or women, in the Open Era ahead of Roger Federer (429) and Serena Williams (423).

The Serb is chasing a record-extending 11th Australian Open title and historic 25th Grand Slam crown. "Whether I win or lose, I will always leave my heart out on the court. I'm just blessed to be making another record," said Djokovic, 37, now coached by former rival Andy Murray. Djokovic faces Czech 26th seed Tomas Machac next and is drawn to meet Spain's Alcaraz in the last eight. Four-time Grand Slam winner Alcaraz dropped just five games in an ominous display to sprint into the third round.

The third seed showed no mercy to Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka in a 6-0, 6-1, 6-4 rout in 81 minutes. "The less time you spend on court in the Grand Slams, especially in the beginning, it is going to be better," said Alcaraz, who is yet to go beyond the quarter-finals in Melbourne. Second seed Zverev swept through with a straight-sets victory over Spain's Pedro Martinez. Heading home on Wednesday with Ruud was qualifier Hady Habib, who on Sunday became the first player from Lebanon to win a Grand Slam match. He exited in three sets to France's Ugo Humbert.

### 'Nothing more'

Olympic champion Zheng was sent packing 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 by world number 97 Laura Siegemund, the second-oldest player in the women's draw at age 36. "I knew I just had to play more than my best tennis. I had nothing to lose so I just told myself to swing free," said the German. "It's tennis. Nothing more," said China's Zheng, 22, who was given two time violations and lost her cool as her tilt at a maiden major crown evaporated in only the second round. Sabalenka dropped her serve three times and faced 11 break points before overcoming Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 6-3, 7-5, rattling off the last five games in a row.

"I have to fight. Today's match proved that. Girls can go there and just play without any fear, without anything to lose. They can put you in really uncomfortable positions," said Sabalenka, who beat Zheng in the 2024 final. — AFP

## Austria beat Kuwait in IHF World Men's Championship

**KUWAIT:** The 29th edition of the International Handball Federation (IHF) 2025 Men's World Championship kicked off Tuesday with Austria beating Kuwait 37-26, in the co-Sports hosted tournament by Croatia, Denmark and Norway, along 32 participating countries, lasting until February 2.

Despite its defeat, the Kuwaiti team did exceptionally well especially in the first half of the match, which ended 18-16 to Austria. On Thursday, Kuwait will face France, which already played their opening match against Qatar. France was able to defeat Qatar 37-19. — KUNA



POREC: Kuwait's left back #23 Saif Aldawani jumps to shoot in front of Austria's pivot #26 Lukas Herburger (R) during the Preliminary Round Group C match between Austria and Kuwait of the IHF Men's Handball World Championship at the Zatika Sport Centre in Porec. — AFP

## Mitchell leads Cavs over Pacers, Thunder beat 76ers

**LOS ANGELES:** The Cleveland Cavaliers, fueled by 35 points from Donovan Mitchell, beat the Indiana Pacers 127-117 on Tuesday, avenging a Sunday defeat and pushing their NBA-best record to 34-5.

Three days after the Pacers ended their 12-game winning streak — handing the Cavs just their second home loss of the season — Cleveland traveled to Indianapolis and halted the Pacers' six-game win streak.

Mitchell set an early tone, scoring 19 points in the first quarter. Indiana briefly grabbed a two-point lead

early in the second quarter and trailed by just one at halftime, but the Cavaliers outscored the Pacers 38-28 in the third to take control.

Pascal Siakam led the Pacers with 23 points. Benedict Mathurin added 19 before he was ejected late in the fourth quarter after receiving his second technical foul for bumping into an official as he disputed a call.

He received his first technical for hanging on the rim after a stunning dunk in the second quarter. Seven Pacers players scored in double figures, but with star Tyrese Haliburton sidelined by a groin injury, it wasn't enough. Cavaliers coach Kenny Atkinson said it was the response he was looking for after Sunday's defeat. "It was a play-off-type response," Atkinson said. "You get knocked in the teeth, punched in the mouth, and we responded."

"Really, Donovan set the tone. It was one of those nights where he wasn't going to let us lose." Cleveland's Evan Mobley scored 13 of his 22 points in the decisive third period and Darius Garland

added 24 for the Cavs, who will face the Thunder in Oklahoma City on Thursday in a clash of teams with the best records in the league.

Western Conference leaders Oklahoma City pushed their record to 33-6 with a 118-102 wire-to-wire victory over the injury-depleted 76ers in Philadelphia. Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, who endured a poor shooting night in Sunday's win over the lowly Washington Wizards, made all eight of his shot attempts in the first half and finished an efficient 12-of-15 from the floor on the way to 32 points.

Gilgeous-Alexander made seven of his eight free-throw attempts, grabbed three rebounds and handed out nine assists as the Thunder cruised past a Sixers team missing not only injured center Joel Embiid but also Paul George and Tyrese Maxey. "I just tried to be aggressive, tried to set the tone," Gilgeous-Alexander said after Oklahoma City notched their 18th win in their last 19 regular-season games. — AFP