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Amir wraps up visit to UK

Sheikh Meshal, King Charles exchange Kuwaiti bisht, Scottish kilt to celebrate ties



(Left) HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Britain's King Charles III exchange a Kuwaiti bisht and Scottish kilt at Dumfries House in Ayrshire, Scotland on Jan 15, 2025. (Right) HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal is greeted by Britain's Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis as he departs the UK for Kuwait on Jan 16, 2025. — Amiri Diwan photos

NEWS IN BRIEF

Kuwait welcomes Gaza ceasefire

KUWAIT: Kuwait welcomed Thursday the announcement of a ceasefire in Gaza, stressing the importance of this agreement contributing to ending the ongoing attacks against the brotherly Palestinian people. The foreign ministry lauded the intensive efforts made by the international community, especially Qatar, Egypt, US and all parties that contributed to the success of this agreement. The ministry also hoped that the agreement would put an end to the suffering of the Palestinians and allow humanitarian aid to be delivered to them immediately. — KUNA

5,838 stripped of Kuwaiti citizenship

KUWAIT: The Supreme Commission for Nationality said on Thursday it decided to revoke the citizenship of 5,838 people during a meeting chaired by Interior and Defense Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah. The commission recommended revoking the citizenship of 5,706 women who obtained nationality after marrying Kuwaiti men, four people for holding dual citizenship, and 128 others for obtaining nationality by cheating and providing false documents and information. The new batch of revocations is the largest since the drive began in May.

Biometrics only until 2 pm from Feb

KUWAIT: The interior ministry announced on Thursday that registration of biometric data will proceed throughout the week from 8 am until 8 pm until the end of January. From Feb 1, the submission of biometrics will be from 8 am until 2 pm. The Criminal Evidence Department operates some eight biometrics centers, capable of dealing with 10,000 clients daily. — KUNA

509 illegals arrested, 648 deported

KUWAIT: The interior ministry announced on Thursday it arrested 509 expats for violating residency and labor laws since the start of the year till Jan 13 during extensive search campaigns in all areas of Kuwait. During the same period, the ministry deported 648 expats for violating the same laws.

AYRSHIRE, Scotland: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation departed Scotland on Thursday after a visit at the personal invitation of King Charles III of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. HH the Amir was seen off by Kuwait Ambassador to the UK Bader Abdullah Al-Munayyeh and British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis.

Earlier, HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal and King Charles exchanged the Kuwaiti bisht and Scottish kilt at Dumfries House in Ayrshire, Scotland. The Scot-

tish kilt and Kuwaiti bisht were made with a special tartan design, which combines traditional textile materials, patterns, colors and techniques from both the United Kingdom and Kuwait, to celebrate the two countries' "125 Years of Partnership".

Lewis said HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal is keen on supporting educational initiatives by organizing mutual programs between Kuwait and the UK. This came in a statement by Ambassador Lewis to KUNA and Kuwait TV on the visit of HH the Amir and an official delegation to the headquarters of the King's Foundation in Dum-

fries House to view its educational activities and events.

The ambassador affirmed that many educational projects were initiated by King Charles III at Dumfries House. She noted Dumfries House was chosen for the visit because it provides opportunities to develop traditional and heritage skills and crafts among local residents and those from outside the UK. All the activities held are environmentally friendly, such as sustainable food production and the preservation of rare species of plants and fruits over vast areas in Scotland. — KUNA (See Page 3)

Zionists kill 81 in Gaza despite ceasefire deal

GAZA: Zionist airstrikes killed at least 81 people in Gaza overnight on Thursday, residents and authorities in the enclave said, hours after a ceasefire and hostage release deal was announced to bring an end to 15 months of war between the Zionist entity and Hamas. The complex ceasefire accord emerged on Wednesday after mediation by Qatar, Egypt and the US to stop the war that has devastated the coastal territory and inflamed the Middle East.

Hamas' armed wing warned on

Thursday that the Zionist entity's continuing air strikes and shelling in Gaza after the announcement of a ceasefire deal was risking hostages meant to be released. "Any aggression and shelling at this stage by the enemy could turn the freedom of a prisoner into a tragedy," the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades said on Telegram, referring to the dozens of Zionist captives held in Gaza.

Without offering details, Abu Obeida, spokesman for the armed wing, said a Zionist strike had hit a place where one of the women to be freed "in the first stage of the ceasefire deal was located". The deal, scheduled to be implemented from Sunday, outlines a six-week initial ceasefire with the gradual withdrawal of Zionist forces from the Gaza Strip, where tens

Continued on Page 6



GAZA: The bodies of people killed in Zionist strikes in Gaza City lie covered on the ground outside the morgue at Al-Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital on Jan 16, 2025. — AFP

Biden warns of Trump 'oligarchy' in dark farewell

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden urged Americans Wednesday to stand guard against a "dangerous" oligarchy forming under Donald Trump as he delivered a dark farewell address before stepping down next week. In a primetime speech from the Oval Office at the end of his single term in office, he warned of an ultra-wealthy "tech industrial complex" that he said could gain unchecked power over the American people.

"Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power and influence that literally threatens



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden delivers his farewell address to the nation from the Oval Office of the White House on Jan 15, 2025. — AFP

our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms," the 82-year-old Democrat said. Biden began his speech by touting the legacy of his four years in office, saying it may take time to feel the benefits but that the "seeds were planted" for Americans in the future.

Continued on Page 6

Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan stabbed in theft

MUMBAI: Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan was stabbed repeatedly by an intruder at his home in Mumbai on Thursday, but doctors treating him said he was out of danger after surgery. Khan, 54, was "on the path to complete recovery" after receiving thoracic stab wounds on his spine, neck and hand, the doctors told reporters.

"He sustained a major injury to the thoracic spinal cord due to a lodged knife in the spine. Surgery was performed to remove the knife and also repair the leaking spinal fluid," said Nitin Dange, one of the doctors oper-



Saif Ali Khan

ating on Khan. Khan was attacked just after midnight when he tried to stop the intruder, believed to be a burglar, from entering his apartment in the upscale neighborhood of Bandra, police and local media said. A female employee at the apartment was also attacked and was being treated, police said.

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Local

New exam protocols lead to 45% drop in disqualifications: Minister

Al-Tabtabaei highlights new national proctor system's role in fair exam process

KUWAIT: The first semester exams for the academic year 2024-2025 saw a notable 45.5 percent decrease in the number of student disqualifications compared to the previous year, Minister of Education Jalal Al-Tabtabaei said on Thursday. This decline, with a 33.5 percent drop in the scientific section and a 58.7 percent drop in the literary section, reflects the growing awareness among students about adhering to the rules and maintaining the integrity of the examination process.

In a statement released on the final day of exams, January 16, Al-Tabtabaei attributed this positive change to the implementation of new and strict procedures for securing the exams, including the introduction of the national proctor system. These measures ensured transparency, fairness, and equal opportunities for all students, contributing to a significant reduction in violations.

More than 40,000 Grade 12 students — in both the scientific and literary streams — began their first-semester final exams for the 2024-2025 academic year on Sunday, January 5. The minister expressed his congratulations to the 12th-grade students for completing their exams. He wished them continued success in their studies and encouraged them to strive for excellence in achieving their future goals.

Fair correction process

A key part of ensuring fairness during the exams was the rigorous correction process. Al-Tabtabaei

noted that the correction process was conducted daily at the central control for both the scientific and literary sections. The Ministry took special care to handle all observations and disqualification cases with transparency and objectivity. Each student's answers were carefully reviewed to guarantee that they received a fair and accurate evaluation, ensuring that no student was overlooked. Al-Tabtabaei praised the collaboration of school administrations, teachers, and staff in creating a conducive environment for the exams, ensuring that students had a smooth and fair testing experience.

In preparation for the exam season, the Ministry of Education introduced new measures to uphold exam integrity, following a series of cheating scandals and exam leaks that plagued the 2024 exam periods. These steps aim to restore trust in the examination process and ensure a fair environment for all students. Following an internal investigation, the ministry dismissed several high school exam printing press employees for conflict of interest and replaced them with new staff who meet strict criteria and adhere to exam regulations.

The Ministry of Education has also introduced a new national proctor system to enhance the integrity and transparency of exams. Proctors, who come from experienced ministry staff, are responsible for ensuring compliance with exam regulations, monitoring exam committees, and supervising secure printing facilities. National proctors were obliged to sign



KUWAIT: Minister of Education Jalal Al-Tabtabaei pats a grade 12 student on the back as an exam proctor looks on during the minister's tour of exam halls on January 5, 2025. — KUNA

a pledge of neutrality and avoid conflicts of interest. Al-Tabtabaei highlighted the critical role of national proctors in overseeing the exams, ensuring the proper application of procedures, and preventing potential violations. This system played a key role in guarantee-

ing that all students were treated fairly and equally. The results of the exams will be published on the ministry's official website and mobile applications once the verification process is completed, ensuring that all students' answers are reviewed thoroughly. — Agencies

In my view

The power of patience



Abdellatif Sharaa

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Arriving at Miami International Airport after a long, tiring, and somewhat unpleasant journey, I wasn't in the best shape. My usual optimism had taken a hit, especially when I saw the long line of passengers at passport control, with only three officers processing entries. I braced myself for a long wait and expected frustration.

To my surprise, the process was remarkably smooth. It took less than eight minutes for my turn to come. A single question, a picture, and I was ready to meet my son, who had come to welcome me. The officer, by the way, was all smiles throughout the entire process and ended with a warm "Welcome home!"

I share this story to highlight how situations can yield vastly different outcomes despite seemingly identical circumstances. As humans, we must resist the temptation to pre-judge situations or people based on their color, ethnicity, or origin.

Patience, though challenging at times, is key. When faced with a moment of frustration, taking a deep breath and calming the mind can shift your perspective. It's essential to focus on the bigger picture and remember that there are always factors beyond our control.

The benefits of patience are undeniable. It helps reduce stress, improves decision-making, and fosters better relationships because we are less likely to act impulsively. It also allows us to stay calm and think clearly, even in difficult situations.

While many would agree that this is common sense, it's something we often forget when emotions run high. Trust me, patience is not just a virtue—it is the essence of navigating life's challenges with grace and peace.

Zain's Generation Z graduate program marks 10th year

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading provider of ICT innovative technologies and digital lifestyle communications operating in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announced the selection of seven talented Kuwaiti nationals to undertake the milestone 10th cycle of the highly sought-after Generation Z (Gen Z) graduate training program.

Over the past nine years, Gen Z has so far developed over 45 graduates with the traits, skills, and cultural awareness, which apart from shaping and enhancing their individual and professional characters, has contributed Zain's prosperity and the economic and social prosperity of the region. Today, many of the graduates have key managerial positions across Zain Group, Kuwait and Bahrain as well having secondments in other Zain operations.

The seven selected motivated graduates will undergo a 12-month rigorous development cycle that includes guided training by Zain's talented workforce, affiliates

- Bader Al-Kharafi: "The achievements and contributions of the graduate program's alumni has immensely contributed to Zain's success story over the last decade"

- First introduced in 2016 as Zainers 2.0, the graduate program has mirrored the strategic priorities of the Group as it transformed from a digital lifestyle provider to a TechCo

and partners as well as participating in real-world projects across Zain's footprint and beyond. Throughout the year, the Gen Z program will emphasize skills in leadership; digital delivery; innovation; growth, agile, and scrum mindsets; UI/UX design; product and project management; and corporate excellence.

The training will also align and prepare them to support Zain's recently launched 4WARD-Progress with Purpose strategy, which focuses on continuity, acceleration, collaboration and digital innovation. 4WARD is designed to foster value creation by fast-tracking the company's evolution from a predominantly mobile-centric operator into a purpose driven TechCo entity.

Furthermore, the graduates will be trained by and prepared to bolster Zain Kuwait's Digital Factory, the recently established operational model to centralize and accelerate the creation and managing of customer appealing digital products and services.

Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO commented, "The achievements and contributions of the graduate program's alumni have immensely contributed to Zain's success story over the last decade. Recruiting the

Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.

The minister emphasized that the decision to update these lists is part of the ministry's commitment to ensuring the quality of education provided to students. By offering a strong academic environment that aligns with the needs of both local and international labor markets, the update aims to contribute to the development of a skilled national workforce in various fields.

The updated lists are based on a thorough evaluation of the institutions by the National Bureau for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education, which adheres to global standards for scientific and research excellence.

Minister Al-Jallal also advised students interested in studying at distinguished institutions to regularly check the updated lists before enrolling, ensuring they are pursuing high-quality education that meets the demands of the rapidly advancing fields of science and technology. He reaffirmed the ministry's commitment to supporting students and providing guidance throughout their academic journey, stressing that investment in higher education is crucial to building a knowledge-based society and strengthening Kuwait's position on the global education map.

Dr Jasm Al-Ali, Director General of the National Bureau for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education, encouraged students, parents, and relevant entities to visit the official website of the bureau for the latest updates and to ensure compliance with the accreditation standards.



KUWAIT: Participants in the 10th cycle of Zain Group's Generation Z (Gen Z) graduate training program pose for a photo.

Generation Z: A decade of developing future leaders within Zain

Zainers 2.0, 2016	Generation Z, 2017	Generation Z, 2018	Generation Z, 2019	Generation Z, 2020
Focused on a rotation in different departments throughout Zain Group with an emphasis on conducting research on various digital verticals	Centered on establishing a business, gaining entrepreneurial skills, and studying innovative trends in the market	Enhancing digital skills such as coding and agile project management in addition to a focus on self-growth and development	Enhancing corporate culture and teamwork when managing projects were the main focus of this edition	This cycle incorporated three themes: corporate culture, leadership styles, and future trends
CODE7, 2021	ZTwenty Two, 2022	GenZ, 2023	GenZ, 2024	GenZ, 2025
Focused on developing digital skills for future data analysts. Addressed the topics of big data, artificial intelligence, and sustainable innovation	Geared towards cultivating internal entrepreneurs, innovators, and new thinkers who already possess a mindset capable of supporting Zain's strategic goals	Focused on cultivating entrepreneurial mindset that supports Zain's 4Sight strategy	Focused on supercharging leadership skills and training based on 4 modules: Speak Up and Pitch Up; Strategic Innovation; Green Skills; and Digital World.	Focus will be on leadership skills; digital delivery & innovation; UI/UX design; product & project management; & corporate excellence to support Zain's 4WARD-Progress with Purpose' strategy.

right talent and succession planning is the lifeblood of any progressive company, and this program is a direct effort to continue to inject the best and most capable young minds into the organization, for them to develop into the leaders of the future. I'm very proud of the accomplishments of the Gen Z initiative over the years and I congratulate our new participants for their selection and wish them a motivating and rewarding year ahead."

Competition for the seven places in the 2025 program was fierce, with over 450 applicants to the program, of which 17 were invited to individual interviews, with the last seven selected following a grueling week-long job assessment engagement. The seven selected Kuwait na-

tional for 2025 Gen Z program are: Ayah Al-Bahar, Dalal Al-Ajmi, Noura Al-Ayoub, Rawan Jeraq, Sama Arrar, Sami Al-Qaddoumi, and Sarah Al-Awwad.

The decade long evolution of Zain's graduate program has reflected the company's transformation from a digital lifestyle provider to a TechCo, delivering the participants an array of hard and soft skills, as well as technical and commercial development. The Generation Z 2025 graduate program remit falls under the "Build the Youth of the Future" pillar of Zain's Corporate Sustainability strategy and the Inclusion, Diversity & Equity strategic pillar of "Zain Youth" (ZY), which fosters the growth of youth employees.

value of tangible assets at both the start and end of the tax period, which should be between 5 percent and 7.6 percent of the book value of those assets. Additionally, the law includes provisions like safe harbor regulations and simplified calculations to reduce the administrative burden on businesses.

Penalties starting October

Compliance with the new regulations will begin in 2024, with penalties set to take effect in October 2025. Businesses will also be required to submit specific tax declarations by the first quarter of 2027. The Ministry of Finance plans to provide new registration forms and declaration templates once the regulations are finalized, helping businesses adapt to the updated requirements.

Al-Fassam emphasized that the government, under the leadership of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, is committed to enacting reforms that will drive economic diversification and ensure financial sustainability. The multinational entities tax law marks the first phase of these tax system changes, aligning Kuwait with international standards without negatively affecting businesses. Al-Fassam said the Ministry of Finance will finalize the executive regulations for this law within six months of its publication in the official gazette.



Noura Al-Fassam

Kuwait updates lists of accredited higher education institutions

KUWAIT: The Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Dr Nader Al-Jallal, announced on Thursday the updated lists of distinguished higher education institutions that have been approved for the United States, the United Kingdom, and several European countries.

In a press statement published by Kuwait News Agency, Minister Al-Jallal explained that the updated lists include distinguished institutions for both undergraduate and graduate programs in the US, as well as specialized programs in the UK and various European countries. These institutions are accredited by the Ministry for Kuwaiti students' scholarship programs and for those choosing to study abroad independently.

The European countries whose lists were updated include Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany,



Dr Nader Al-Jallal

Local

Kuwait Amir, UK King exchange Kuwaiti bisht and Scottish kilt



AYRSHIRE, Scotland: HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Britain's King Charles III exchange a Kuwaiti bisht and Scottish kilt at Dumfries House on Jan 15, 2025. — Amiri Diwan photos

AYRSHIRE, Scotland: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Majesty King Charles III of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland exchanged a Kuwaiti bisht and Scottish kilt at Dumfries House in Ayrshire, Scotland. The Scottish kilt and Kuwaiti bisht are made with a special tartan design, which combines traditional textile materials, patterns, colors and techniques from both the United Kingdom and Kuwait, to celebrate the two countries' "125 Years of Partnership". HH the Amir earlier toured Dumfries House and got acquainted with its educational and cultural activities and events. — KUNA



Meningitis vaccine required for umrah in 2025

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health has announced new health requirements for travelers planning to perform umrah or visit the Prophet's Mosque in 2025 (1446 AH), following guidance from Saudi Arabian authorities.

In a press statement issued this week, the ministry stated that all adults and children aged one year or older must receive the quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine (ACYW-135) and present a vaccination certificate confirming they were vaccinated at least 10 days before their arrival in Saudi Arabia.

To understand the significance of these measures, Kuwait Times interviewed a public health specialist in preventive medicine and infectious diseases at a public hospital. The specialist stressed the importance of vaccination in preventing meningitis, a serious condition caused by inflammation of the protective membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord. Symptoms include high fever, neck stiffness, seizures, and skin rash, said the specialist. He noted that while fatalities are relatively rare, the disease can cause severe complications, including paralysis.

The meningococcal ACWY vaccine protects against meningococcal disease caused by serogroups A, C, W, and Y. There is also a separate meningococcal vaccine available to protect against serogroup B. Both vaccines work by prompting the body to produce antibodies to protect against the disease.

The specialist highlighted that vaccination is particularly vital during high-risk periods, such as large gatherings, where the potential for outbreaks — defined as



MAKKAH: Muslim worshippers pray around the Kaaba, Islam's holiest shrine, at the Sacred Mosque in Saudi Arabia's holy city of Makkah. — AFP

faster or more widespread transmission — is elevated. Crowded settings like umrah significantly increase this risk of catching the disease, transmitted through droplets released from the nose and mouth.

He also explained that the antibodies against the meningococcal bacteria take between 10 to 15 days to develop after vaccination. Traveling before this period has passed poses a risk, as the person may still be susceptible to contracting the disease.

Regarding vaccine side effects, the specialist noted that they are generally mild, including localized redness or soreness at the injection site and, occasionally, minor body aches. Additionally, he recommended wearing masks in crowded areas and practicing good hygiene to further reduce the risk of infection.

The ministry clarified that vaccination certificates are valid for three years when the polysaccharide vaccine is used and five years for the conjugate vaccine, reflecting the respective durations of protection provided by each vaccine, as the specialist confirmed. Vaccines are readily available at all preventive health centers and traveler clinics in Kuwait during official working hours to facilitate access for travelers.

A look at Kuwait's efforts to protect innovation

KUWAIT: An official is calling on innovators to register their patents and trademarks to protect their ideas from exploitation. In an exclusive interview with KUNA, Rashid Al-Owaihan, Supervisor of Trademarks and Patents at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, provides insights into how the department supports Kuwait's economy by safeguarding intellectual property (IP) and encouraging innovation. Al-Owaihan explains the department's role in protecting both industrial and literary intellectual property, and how these efforts are helping shape a more competitive market in Kuwait.

Kuwait's Trade Mark and Patent Department plays a vital role in supporting the national economy by safeguarding intellectual property (IP) for innovators and businesses. Operating under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the department is crucial in protecting both industrial and literary intellectual property.

Streamlined registration

Traditionally, trademark registration used to be a long process, sometimes taking up to two years. However, in 2018, the department introduced an electronic registration system, significantly improving the efficiency of the process. Now, registering a trademark only takes about two months, including a mandatory 60-day publication period. This change has led to a surge in trademark registrations — from around 600 per month to more than 1,100.

This shift has not only made the process more accessible but also boosted government revenue. Monthly income from registration fees now ranges between KD 500,000 and KD 550,000, and the department is aiming to reach KD 1 million in monthly revenue through further improvements.



Rashid Al-Owaihan

Encouraging innovation

In addition to trademarks, the department also manages the registration of patents. Each year, around 800 patents are registered, with 50 of those originating from Kuwaiti inventors. The majority of patents come from outside Kuwait. This system ensures that innovations are legally protected, giving inventors the confidence to bring their ideas to market without the fear of infringement.

Challenges for innovators

One major challenge for innovators is raising awareness about the importance of IP protection in Kuwait. Many local creators fail to register their patents or trademarks, leaving their ideas vulnerable to exploitation. The department encourages all innovators to secure their rights early to avoid losing out on the protection that registration provides.

The protection of trademarks and patents is not just a legal formality; it's a critical component of a healthy, competitive market. Without proper IP protection, businesses would be vulnerable to copycats, and the market would become chaotic. Trademark protection ensures that companies can defend their brands, encouraging investment and business expansion.

The department is also working towards joining the Madrid Agreement, which will allow Kuwaiti companies to register their trademarks internationally.

Local

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P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.comKISR's 7th science
exhibition for children
promotes creativity

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), in collaboration with the American University of the Middle East, launched the 7th children science exhibition on Thursday at Assima Mall. This annual event reflects KISR's commitment to fostering scientific creativity and research skills among young people, preparing them to face future challenges.

Dr Faisal Al-Humaidan, Acting Director-General of KISR, highlighted that the exhibition is part of the institute's broader effort to nurture scientific talent from an early age. The exhibition features a range of hands-on activities and experiments designed to engage children and help develop their intellectual and creative abilities.

"With this exhibition, we aim to build a generation that is scientifically aware and capable of overcoming future challenges," said Dr Al-Humaidan. He also pointed out that the exhibition coincides with Kuwait's recognition as the "Capital of Arab Culture," which further underscores the nation's commitment to advancing both cultural and scientific knowledge.

Abdul Mohsen Al-Haroun, an executive at KISR, emphasized the importance of investing in children to cultivate the scientists of tomorrow. "The rapid advancements in technology and knowledge require us to focus on developing children's scientific skills to support societal progress," he said.

For the second year in a row, the American University of the Middle East has participated in the exhibition, presenting eight innovative scientific experiments. These are in addition to research activities from KISR's various centers, covering fields such as energy, life sciences and environmental sciences. The experiments cover diverse fields, including the effects of dust, desert reclamation, soil types, and studies on desert flora and fauna.

Since its inception in 2018, the exhibition has attracted over 5,087 children, with each edition offering a unique blend of learning and entertainment. The event continues to serve as a platform to inspire young minds, enhance their scientific knowledge, and encourage creative thinking. This year's exhibition runs until January 18 and promises to be an exciting and educational experience for children and families alike.



KUWAIT: Officials and participating children observe a scientific experiment conducted at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research's (KISR) 7th science exhibition for children. — KUNA

Kuwait Dive Team
makes strides in marine
protection in 2024

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Dive Team, part of the Environmental Voluntary Foundation has celebrated a year of significant environmental achievements in 2024, playing a pivotal role in marine conservation and awareness. Through its "Our Sea" initiative, the team successfully led major projects to preserve Kuwait's coastal and marine ecosystems, partnering with government and community organizations to promote a cleaner, safer environment.

Team leader Walid Al-Fadhil shared with the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the team's efforts in 2024 were diverse and impactful, contributing to significant milestones in environmental protection. "Our work last year was truly rewarding, and we are proud to have been recognized with the prestigious Global

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Flamingoes feed at a beach in Kuwait City, with their figures reflected on Kuwait Bay's clear waters on January 13, 2025. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait's sand cat population
thrives in Al-Salmi area

Recent sighting highlights Kuwait desert's rich biodiversity

KUWAIT: The sand cat, a well-documented species in Kuwait, has been observed again in the Al-Salmi area, underscoring the region's rich biodiversity and the crucial role of this species in maintaining the ecological balance, according to the Kuwait Environment Public Authority.

Dr Abdullah Al-Zaidan, Deputy Director General for Technical Affairs at the Environment Public Authority, confirmed the recent sighting of the sand cat in the Al-Salmi area. This species, which has established a presence in Kuwait's desert regions, is known to inhabit burrows in the wild and utilize quarries for shelter. "The sand cat is commonly found in Kuwait's northern and eastern desert areas, particularly in regions with sparse vegetation and rocky terrain," Dr Al-Zaidan explained. "These areas, along with Kuwait's natural reserves, provide suitable habitats for the species."

The sand cat is typically found in three major regions worldwide: the Sahara Desert in Africa, parts of the Arabian Peninsula, and areas in Central Asia. In Kuwait, the species thrives in harsh desert environments where surface temperatures can exceed 50°C during the day and drop below freezing at night. The sand cat's thick fur-covered paws help it cope with extreme heat, particularly on the hot desert sands, which can reach up to 80°C.

Nocturnal by nature, the sand cat hunts primarily at night, feeding on a variety of prey such as small rodents, birds, reptiles, and insects. This carnivorous diet enables it to survive without the need for direct access to water, as it obtains hydration from its prey.

Dr Al-Zaidan also noted that the sand cat faces several environmental threats, including habitat deg-

radation and the impact of human activities, such as desertification and unregulated land development. These challenges contribute to the species' vulnerability, despite its ability to adapt to harsh desert conditions.

Despite these threats, the sand cat continues to reproduce successfully in Kuwait's less disturbed desert regions. Sightings of the species with its young suggest a stable population in remote areas, away from human settlements and activities.

Kuwait's natural reserves, such as the Sabah Al-Ahmad Reserve, as well as the mountainous and quarry areas in the northern regions, play a critical role in protecting the sand cat's habitat and ensuring its ongoing presence. These protected areas help

maintain a balanced ecosystem, where the sand cat contributes to controlling populations of smaller animals like rodents and insects.

The sand cat's unique characteristics and its role in the local ecosystem make it an important species for wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists. It is also an attractive subject for wildlife photographers who document its behavior and breeding in Kuwait and the broader Gulf region.

The sand cat is currently listed as "Least Concern" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List, reflecting its stable status in many parts of its range, though local conservation efforts remain essential to ensuring its continued presence in Kuwait's desert landscapes. — KUNA



KUWAIT: A sand cat is seen in Kuwait's Salmi desert. — KUNA

Energy Foundation Award, which highlights our dedication to preserving the environment," Al-Fadhil said.

Key accomplishments include the monitoring and cleaning of coral reefs, the removal of tons of waste, and the recovery of sunken ships and boats. The team also contributed to securing maritime navigation routes and conducted ongoing coastal cleaning campaigns across Kuwait's shores and islands. Additionally, the team completed comprehensive maintenance of marine moorings in various coral reef areas, undertaking a total of 130 environmental tasks.

In one of the year's most notable achievements, the team successfully recovered 10 sunken vessels, including ships, boats, and marine equipment, weighing a combined total of 51 tons. These operations, spread across multiple locations, helped protect marine life and ensure safe navigation for the region's maritime

traffic. Furthermore, the team removed over 100 tons of abandoned fishing nets and harmful waste from more than 30 coastal and marine sites.

Al-Fadhil emphasized that the team's work wasn't limited to large-scale projects. The team also carried out smaller-scale but equally important initiatives, such as cleaning Fahaheel Bay and removing discarded fishing nets from Kuwait Bay. In collaboration with the Indian Muslim community, the team also cleaned up waste from the Kuwait Towers coast, reflecting the collaborative spirit of their environmental efforts.

The team continued its commitment to coral reef preservation through its marine mooring maintenance program, completing routine repairs and upkeep for 107 moorings. This project is vital to protecting the health of Kuwait's coral ecosystems, ensuring the long-term sustainability of marine life.

Al-Fadhil also highlighted the team's role in global and regional environmental initiatives. The team collaborated with the United Nations Environment Program's regional office for West Asia on joint awareness campaigns under the "Clean Seas" initiative. Launched by the United Nations, this global campaign aims to reduce marine waste, protect marine ecosystems, and

prevent pollution from threatening marine species.

Moreover, the team actively participated in numerous waste removal operations, working alongside volunteers and various organizations to enhance marine and coastal health. The team's involvement in the National Project for the Protection of Kuwait's Marine Environment further underscored its dedication to safeguarding the country's marine resources.

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GAZA: Mourners pray over the bodies of loved ones killed in Zionist strikes in Gaza City the previous night, at Al-Ahli Arab hospital, also known as the Baptist hospital, on January 16, 2025, as the war between the Zionist entity and the Palestinian Hamas movement continues. — AFP

Gaza air strikes crush joy of truce

'Suddenly... we received the news of the martyrdom of 40 people'

Netanyahu bets on political survival with Gaza ceasefire

JERUSALEM: The Zionist entity's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has faced pressure for months from political allies and the families of hostages and soldiers to end the Gaza war, but analysts say he now hopes the ceasefire will help him stay in power. The ceasefire and hostage release deal announced by mediators Qatar and the United States on Wednesday represents a pivotal moment for the Zionist leader.

Since the war on Gaza Netanyahu has faced sharp public criticism for not securing the release of hostages sooner. Parents of soldiers fighting in Gaza have accused Netanyahu of derailing months-long efforts to end the fighting for political gain, as he battles corruption charges in a lengthy trial. Some 800 parents of soldiers earlier this month sent him a letter saying they could no longer "allow you to continue sacrificing our children as cannon fodder".

More than 400 troops have been killed in the Palestinian territory since the start of the war. But far-right members of Netanyahu's coalition have threatened to quit his administration over any ceasefire deal and pushed for an even harder response in Gaza. Despite the conflicting pressures, analysts say that the obstacles clouding his mandate in recent months are unlikely to bring down the leader long seen as a political survivor. While Hamas has not been defeated, the Zionist entity has decimated its leadership and its military structure. It has also massively weakened its Lebanese foe Hezbollah in a parallel war to the north that took out the Iran-backed group's longtime leader Hassan Nasrallah and a string of other commanders.

Netanyahu could now seek a way to use the ceasefire agreement to his advantage, potentially by pivoting away from the far-right coalition partners he has relied on since 2022. The deal could even pave the way to a long-sought normalization deal with Saudi Arabia, backed by incoming US president Donald Trump. "The key is not the situation but how you play the game, and the bottom line is that (Netanyahu) is the best player of the game there is," said Jonathan Rynhold, head of the political studies department at Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv.

Before the Hamas attack, Zionist ally the United States was close to clinching a normalization deal between Saudi Arabia and the Zionist entity.

"The question is what is Netanyahu getting out of the deal beyond the hostage release and the ceasefire and that is where we get into the Saudi question," said Anshel Pfeffer, a journalist and author of a

GAZA: After news of a ceasefire agreement sparked mass rejoicing in Gaza, residents woke up Thursday to columns of smoke, rubble and more deaths following new Zionist air strikes. "We were waiting for the truce and were happy. It was the happiest night since October 7," said Gaza resident Saeed Alloush. "Suddenly... we received the news of the martyrdom of 40 people," including his uncle, Alloush said. "The whole area's joy turned to sadness, as if an earthquake struck."

The latest strikes came after Qatar and the United States announced a fragile ceasefire deal that should take effect on Sunday. AFP has contacted the Zionist entity military for comment. Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for Gaza's civil defense agency, told AFP on Thursday that at least 73 people had been killed in a Zionist air strikes since the announcement on Wednesday. Among them were 20 children and 25 women, he said, with around 200 others wounded.

As day broke, crowds gathered to inspect and clear the remains of a building reduced to rubble, where chunks of concrete lay interspersed with rebar and personal items scattered across the site. The scenes mirrored those in other parts of the densely populated territory of 2.4 million people, most of whom have been displaced at least once since war

World leaders urge aid, war's end after Gaza deal

PARIS: World figures hailed the announcement of a ceasefire and hostage-prisoner exchange agreement between the Zionist entity and Hamas, urging them to stick to it and hurry aid to Gaza civilians. Here is a roundup of reactions from official statements, broadcast remarks and online messages.

UN: Urgent aid

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said it was "imperative that this ceasefire removes the significant security and political obstacles to delivering aid across Gaza so that we can support a major increase in urgent life-saving humanitarian support".

Biden: 'Thrilled'

US President Joe Biden said he was "thrilled" that hostages would be freed and "confident" the deal would hold. "I'm deeply satisfied this day has... finally come," he said in a televised statement.

Trump: No terrorist 'haven'

Incoming US president Donald Trump vowed to "work closely with (the Zionist entity) and our Allies to make sure Gaza NEVER again becomes a terrorist safe haven".

EU: 'Fully implement'

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen

broke out in October 2023.

At Nasser Hospital, the main medical facility of the southern city of Khan Yunis, AFP journalists saw stained metal mortuary stretchers stained in red as staff drained them of the blood of the dead in a strike. In Gaza City's Al-Ahli hospital, where several strike casualties were taken, grieving families knelt by the white shrouds enveloping their loved ones' bodies.

Rescuer Ibrahim Abu al-Rish told AFP that "after the ceasefire was announced and people were happy and joyful, a five-storey building was targeted, with more than 50 people inside".

Wearing headlamps, first responders and local residents searched through the rubble late at night in the devastated streets of Gaza City. Abu Al-Rish, an ambulance driver for Gaza's civil defense agency, said Thursday that "shelling is still continuing, targeting one house after another".

'Very bloody night'

In the Al-Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza, resident Mahmud Al-Qarnawi told AFP that until the agreement takes hold, Gazans would remain vulnerable. "The shooting has not stopped, the planes are still in the air and the situation is difficult," he

said "both parties must fully implement this agreement, as a stepping stone toward lasting stability in the region".

Turkey: Lasting stability

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hoped the agreement "will be beneficial for our region and for all humanity, particularly for our Palestinian brothers, and that it will open the way to lasting peace and stability".

Saudi Arabia: End '(Zionist) aggression'

Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry stressed "the need to adhere to the agreement and stop the (Zionist) aggression on Gaza," calling for "the complete withdrawal of the (Zionist) occupation forces from the (Gaza) Strip and all other Palestinian and Arab territories and the return of the displaced to their areas".

Brazil: Permanent end

Brazil's foreign ministry called on the parties to "respect the terms of the accord, to guarantee a permanent end to hostilities, the freeing of all hostages and the free entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza".

China: Opportunity

China's foreign ministry spokesman said Beijing hoped "that relevant parties will take the ceasefire in Gaza as an opportunity to promote the easing of regional tensions".

Egypt: Aid call

The president of neighboring Egypt, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, called for "the entry of urgent humanitarian aid" into Gaza. He said the deal followed "strenuous efforts" by Egypt, Qatar and the United States.

Jordan: Swift aid

Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi called on

said. As a result, Qarnawi and others AFP spoke to in the nearby city of Nuseirat said they were worried about what could happen next.

"We must remain cautious. And for the next three days, we are afraid of a (possible) bloodbath (worse) than before," Motaz Baker, a displaced Gazan, said from the market at Nuseirat. International medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said no one could yet feel safe in Gaza.

"Last night it was a lot of cheering for 20 minutes, and then it was a very bloody night," MSF's emergency coordinator Amande Bazerolle told AFP by phone from the territory, rounds of shelling audible in the background. The Zionist entity cabinet is expected to approve the Gaza deal later Thursday, though Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office accused Hamas of backtracking on elements of the agreement. Key mediators Qatar and the United States said Wednesday that the Zionist entity and Hamas had agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza starting on Sunday, along with a hostage and prisoner exchange. If the fragile agreement is approved, 33 hostages should be released in a first phase, Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani said. — AFP

world powers to ensure the "sufficient and durable" delivery of aid to Gaza.

Iraq: Immediate aid

Iraq's foreign ministry stressed the "need to immediately allow humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian territories" and "intensify international efforts to rebuild" areas damaged during the Zionist entity's Gaza offensive.

Iran: 'Retreat'

"Today, the world realized that the patience of the people of Gaza and the steadfastness of the Palestinian resistance forced the Zionist regime to retreat," Iran supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said, adding that the Zionist entity was "defeated".

France: Political solution

France's President Emmanuel Macron said the agreement must be "respected" and followed by a "political solution".

Germany: Permanent end

Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the deal "opens the door to a permanent end to the war and to the improvement of the poor humanitarian situation in Gaza" and must be "implemented to the letter".

Britain: 'Overdue'

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer called it "the long overdue news that the (Zionist) and Palestinian people have desperately been waiting for". He urged steps for a "permanently better future... grounded in a two-state solution". — AFP

International

Blue Origin's New Glenn rocket blasts into orbit for first time

'LIFTOFF! New Glenn is beginning its first ever ascent toward the stars'

CAPE CANAVERAL: Blue Origin, the space company founded by billionaire Jeff Bezos, launched its massive New Glenn rocket into orbit for the first time early Thursday, marking a new step in the commercial space race. The rocket, whose inaugural mission had been delayed by several years, blasted off at 2:03 am (0703 GMT) from the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in the US state of Florida, a live webcast showed. The mission is seen as critical to Blue Origin's efforts to compete with Elon Musk's SpaceX, which dominates the commercial space industry.

"LIFTOFF! New Glenn is beginning its first ever ascent toward the stars," Blue Origin said on social media platform X. "New Glenn has passed the Karmann line, the internationally recognized boundary of space!" the firm posted just a few minutes later. Blue Origin said in a statement that the second-stage engine had reached "its final orbit", adding that the Blue Ring advanced spaceship prototype that was along for the ride was "receiving data and performing well."

The first-stage booster, which was meant to be reusable, was lost during descent, it added. "I'm incredibly proud New Glenn achieved orbit on its first attempt," said the company's CEO, Dave Limp, in the statement. "We knew landing our booster... on the first try was an ambitious goal. We'll learn a lot from today and try again at our next launch this spring." Blue Origin had intended to land the booster — powered by liquid methane and designed for up to 25 flights — on a drone ship stationed about 620 miles (1,000 kilometers) downrange in the Atlantic Ocean.

Rival SpaceX has made such landings now routine, but this would have been Blue Origin's first shot at the feat. Fellow billionaire Musk commended Bezos on New Glenn's inaugural launch, offering congratulations "on reaching orbit on the first attempt" in a post on his X platform. Upping the

high-stakes rivalry, SpaceX is planning another orbital test later Thursday of Starship — its gargantuan new-generation rocket.

Repeated delays

An initial test launch of the towering 320-foot (98-meter) rocket, dubbed New Glenn in honor of American astronaut John Glenn, had been scrubbed early Monday after repeated halts during the countdown. The company later said it had discovered an icing issue on a purge line and postponed the launch. With the latest mission, dubbed NG-1, Amazon founder Bezos was taking aim at the only man in the world wealthier than him: fellow tech innovator Musk. Musk's SpaceX dominates the orbital launch market through its prolific Falcon 9 rockets, which have become vital for the commercial sector, Pentagon and NASA.

"SpaceX has for the past several years been pretty much the only game in town, and so having a competitor... this is great," G. Scott Hubbard, a retired senior NASA official, earlier told AFP, expecting the competition to drive down costs.

Blue Ring

Aboard the New Glenn test flight and now in orbit is a Defense Department-funded prototype of an advanced spaceship called Blue Ring, which could one day journey through the solar system. Physically, the gleaming white New Glenn rocket dwarfs SpaceX's 230-foot Falcon 9 and is designed for heavier payloads. It slots between Falcon 9 and its big sibling, Falcon Heavy, in terms of mass capacity but holds an edge with its wider payload fairing, capable of carrying the equivalent of 20 trucks.

Blue Origin has already secured a NASA contract to launch two Mars probes aboard New Glenn. The rock-



CAPE CANAVERAL: A Blue Origin New Glenn rocket lifts off from Space Launch Complex 36 from the Kennedy Space Center on its maiden flight, at Cape Canaveral, Florida on January 16, 2025. — AFP

et will also support the deployment of Project Kuiper, a satellite internet constellation designed to compete with Starlink. For now, however, SpaceX maintains a commanding lead, while other rivals — United Launch Alliance, Arianespace, and Rocket Lab — trail far behind.

Like Musk, Bezos has a lifelong passion for space. But where Musk dreams of colonizing Mars, Bezos envisions shifting heavy industry off-planet onto floating space platforms in order to preserve Earth, "humanity's blue origin." — AFP

Indian space agency achieves satellite docking milestone

BENGALURU: India became the world's fourth nation on Thursday to achieve the feat of space docking, a technological milestone that underscores its ambitions to expand its share of a rapidly growing \$400-billion global space market. Target and Chaser, two satellites of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) that are each roughly the size of a large refrigerator, successfully latched onto each other at about 9 a.m. (0330 GMT), an agency spokesperson said. The indigenous technology, crucial for satellite servicing, space station operations, and interplanetary missions, positions India for a key role in commercial and exploratory space efforts.

"India has ambitious missions planned and to achieve those, this is an important technology," astrophysicist Jayant Murthy said. "Various missions, like building a space station, need assembly in space, which is not possible without space docking." ISRO said the two satellites participating in its Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX), will now be controlled as a single object, with power transfer checks made in the next few days.

The mission had been postponed twice, first because the docking process needed further validation through ground simulations, and then to resolve an issue stemming from excess drift between the satellites. SpaDeX, launched

on Dec. 30 from India's main spaceport, deployed the satellites in orbit with an Indian-made rocket.

Among 24 payloads and experiments were eight cowpea seeds, sent to space to study plant growth in microgravity conditions, which germinated within four days of the mission's launch. Scientists say this is a critical step demonstrating that food can eventually be grown in space during long missions. The mission will also demonstrate the transfer of electric power between docked spacecraft, key to applications such as in-space robotics, composite spacecraft control and payload operations after undocking. Such techniques are essential for missions requiring multiple rocket launches.

Space exploration and commercialization is a key part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to position India as a global superpower. The successful SpaDeX mission "is a significant stepping stone for India's ambitious space missions in the years to come," Modi said on X.

On Thursday, India approved the setting-up of a third launch pad in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, to be completed in four years at a cost of 39.85 billion rupees (\$461 million), giving a further boost to its space plans. ISRO is focused on deep-space exploration and enabling private companies to commercialize the sector, with projects ranging from solar studies to orbital astronaut missions and planetary defense, in collaboration with NASA. With the global commercial space market expected to reach \$1 trillion by 2030, India aims to grow its share to \$44 billion by 2040, up from \$8 billion, or a slice of just 2%, now. — AFP

snag in the ceasefire deal on Thursday, Jonathan Finer, the deputy national security adviser, said in an interview with CNN: "We fully expect the deal to be implemented as described by the president and by the mediators — Egypt and Qatar — yesterday and on the timeline that was described. What we're doing now is working through details of implementation."

For some Palestinians, the deal could not come soon enough. "We lose homes every hour. We demand for this joy not to go away, the joy that was drawn on our faces — don't waste it by delaying the implementation of the truce until Sunday," Gazan man Mahmoud Abu Wardeh said. The accord requires 600 truckloads of humanitarian aid to be allowed into Gaza every day of the ceasefire, with 50 carrying fuel. The first phase of the agreement will also see the Zionist entity releasing more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners, including many long-serving inmates.

While people celebrated the pact in Gaza and the Zionist entity, the Zionist military conducted more attacks, the civil emergency service and residents said. Gaza's health ministry said at least 81 people had been killed over the past 24 hours and about 188 injured. The Palestinian Civil Emergency Service said at least 77 of those were killed since the ceasefire announcement.

If successful, the ceasefire will halt fighting that has razed much of heavily urbanized Gaza, killed over 46,000 people, and displaced most of the tiny enclave's pre-war population of 2.3 million, according to Gaza authorities. That in turn could defuse tensions across the wider Middle East. With 98 foreign and Zionist captives remaining in Gaza, phase one of the deal entails the release of 33 of them, including all women, children and men over 50.

Global reaction to the ceasefire was enthusiastic. Negotiations on implementing the second phase of the deal will begin by the 16th day of phase one, and this stage was expected to include the release of all remaining hostages, a permanent ceasefire and the complete withdrawal of Zionist forces from Gaza. The third stage is to address the return of all remaining dead bodies and the start of Gaza's reconstruction supervised by Egypt, Qatar and the United Nations. — Agencies

Spain raises flag at Damascus embassy after 12-year closure

DAMASCUS: Spain raised its flag at Madrid's Damascus embassy Thursday, in the presence of its top diplomat more than a decade after suspending activity and as Western countries resume ties following Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad's ouster. Spain closed the mission in March 2012, a year after Assad began brutal repression of anti-government protests, triggering more than 13 years of war.

"It is an honor for me to be here in person," Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said at the embassy, where the Spanish national anthem was played, an AFP correspondent reported. "Raising the Spanish flag again is a sign of the hope we have for Syria's future, of the commitment we convey to the Syrian people for a better future." A statement from the foreign ministry ahead of the visit said Albares would meet representatives of Syria's new administration and of civil society.

The trip comes more than a month after rebels led by Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) ousted Assad. Top European officials, including foreign ministers from France and Germany, have made a series of visits to meet with the country's new rulers.

A transitional administration has been appointed until March and HTS, which has roots in the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, has sought to reassure minorities that they will not be harmed and the rule of law will be respected. Albares told public broadcaster



DAMASCUS: A handshake picture released by Syria's transitional government shows the country's new leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa (right) welcoming Spain's Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares at the presidential palace in Damascus on January 16, 2025. — AFP

TVE ahead of the visit that "the message that I want to send is a message of support to Syria." "But we also have red lines. Syria must be peaceful. Syria must be inclusive, and the rights of all must be respected, including those of women, and ethnic and religious minorities," he added. "This will be my first official trip this year", Albares told TVE, adding he "wanted to start with one of the regions where Spanish foreign policy is most influential and where we work hardest to achieve peace". Albares' trip to Syria followed a visit to neighboring Lebanon on Wednesday, where he announced a 10 million euro (\$10.3 million) aid package for the country's army, nearly two months into a ceasefire between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah group. — AFP

Zionists kill 81 in Gaza despite...

Continued from Page 1

of thousands have been killed. Captives taken by Hamas, which controls the enclave, would be freed in exchange for Palestinian prisoners detained in the Zionist entity.

The deal also paves the way for a surge in humanitarian aid for Gaza, where the majority of the population has been displaced and is facing acute food shortages, food security experts warned late last year. Rows of aid trucks were lined up in the Egyptian border town of El-Arish waiting to cross into Gaza, once the border is reopened.

The Zionist entity's acceptance of the deal will not be official until it is approved by the country's security cabinet and government, and a vote was slated for Thursday, a Zionist official said. However, Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has delayed the meeting, accusing Hamas of making last-minute demands and going back on agreements. "The (Zionist) cabinet will not convene until the mediators notify (the Zionist entity) that Hamas has accepted all elements of the agreement," a statement from Netanyahu's office said.

Hamas senior official Izzat el-Reshiq said on Thursday the group is committed to the ceasefire agreement announced by mediators on Wednesday. Hamas political bureau member Sami Abu Zuhri also said there was "no basis" for the Zionist entity's accusations.

Hardliners in Netanyahu's government were still hoping to stop the deal, though a majority of ministers were expected to back it. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich's Religious Zionism Party said in a statement that its condition for remaining in the government would be a return to fighting at the end of the first phase of the deal, in order to destroy Hamas and bring all the captives back. Far-right police minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has also threatened to quit the government if the ceasefire is approved.

The White House also downplayed reports of a

Biden warns of Trump 'oligarchy'...

Continued from Page 1

But he soon turned to painting a series of dangers that he said were facing the United States, which clearly referred to billionaire Trump's close ties to the world's richest man, Elon Musk, and other tech tycoons. Biden warned there was a "dangerous concentration of power in the hands of a very few ultra-wealthy people" with "dangerous consequences if their abuse of power is left unchecked."

He then lashed out at social media firms, with Musk having turned X into a right-wing megaphone and Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg ending fact-checking operations in the US as he courts Trump. "Americans are being buried under an avalanche of misinformation and disinformation," said Biden. "The free press is crumbling. Editors are disappearing. Social media is giving up on fact checking. The truth is smothered by lies told for power and for profit."

He recalled a stark warning issued by president Dwight Eisenhower in his own farewell address in 1961 about the dangers of an out-of-control military industri-

Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan...

Continued from Page 1

Among the country's most bankable stars, Khan, 54, is the son of India's former cricket captain Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi and actress Sharmila Tagore. He is married to actor Kareena Kapoor, and his daughter from a previous marriage, Sara, is also a Bollywood actor. Police had identified the perpetrator and had launched a search for him, senior police official Dikshit Gedam told reporters. "The accused attempted to enter through a fire escape. It appears to be a robbery attempt," he said.

Khan, who has featured in more than 70 films and television series, is a regular on the red carpet. He and

al complex. "I'm equally concerned about the potential rise of a tech industrial complex," he said. With Trump planning to roll back US commitments to reduce global warming, Biden further warned that "powerful forces" threatened his climate achievements. He also cautioned over the rise of AI, saying that America must take the lead over China on the transformative technology.

Biden finished by sounding a valedictory tone at the end of a 50-year political career that has seen the former senator mount several failed presidential bids before becoming Barack Obama's vice president, and finally rising to the top himself. "It's been the highest honor of my life to lead you as commander in chief," said Biden. Signing off as Trump returns for a second term on Monday, Biden told Americans: "Now it's your turn to stand guard."

In emotional scenes, First Lady Jill Biden, son Hunter and Vice President Kamala Harris were in the Oval Office as Biden delivered his political swansong. After the speech, Biden kissed and hugged family members including his young grandson Beau. But the dark address was a stunning shift in tone from Biden, who had largely toned down his criticisms of his rival after the election in pursuit of what he called a smooth transition. Instead, America's oldest ever president has spent much of his final months in office trying to burnish his legacy before he is replaced by the man he beat in the 2020 election — a result Trump still disputes. — AFP

Kapoor have two young sons and are one of Bollywood's most well-known couples. Khan has acted in several notable films and series, including the 2001 hit Dil Chahta Hai, and Sacred Games, Netflix's first Indian production, which released in 2018.

Film stars and opposition leaders called for police to beef up security measures in the city. "If such high-profile people with ... security can be attacked in their homes, what could happen to common citizens?" Clyde Crasto, spokesperson of the Nationalist Congress Party, asked on X. India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies won November elections in the western state of Maharashtra, the capital of which is Mumbai.

Actor and filmmaker Pooja Bhatt also called for a greater police presence in the suburb home to many in the film industry. "The city, and especially the queen of the suburbs, have never felt so unsafe before," she said on X, using a popular description for the trendy Bandra area. — Agencies

International

Blasts in Kyiv as UK's Starmer visits to ink '100-year' accord

Starmer signs historic Ukraine accord as tensions rise ahead of Trump's return

UKRAINE: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived in Kyiv on Thursday on an unannounced visit to sign a "100-year accord" and shore up support for Ukraine before Donald Trump's return to the White House. Loud blasts and air raid sirens rang out over Kyiv hours after Starmer's arrival as air defense systems in central Kyiv repelled a Russian drone attack, officials and AFP journalists reported.

It is Starmer's first official visit to Kyiv since taking office last July, and comes as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky holds a flurry of meetings with his country's allies before Trump's return next week. The prime minister was due to sign a "landmark 100-year partnership to deepen security ties" between the UK and Ukraine and meet Zelensky, Downing Street said in a statement.

"Putin's ambition to wrench Ukraine away from its closest partners has been a monumental strategic failure," Starmer said, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine nearly three years ago.

"Instead, we are closer than ever, and this partnership will take that friendship to the next level," he said of the accord. The deal commits the two sides to cooperate on defense and battlefield technology, such as drones, while implementing a system to help locate grain exported by Russia from occupied parts of Ukraine. "This is not just about the here and now, it is also about an investment in our two countries for the next century," added Starmer.

He was also expected to announce an extra £40 million to aid Ukraine's post-war economic recovery. Starmer kicked off the visit by laying wreaths with Zelensky to commemorate killed Ukrainian soldiers and

visited a burns hospital treating wounded servicemen.

Russian advances

Zelensky earlier said that he and Starmer would discuss the possibility of having Western troops stationed in Ukraine to oversee any ceasefire agreement, a divisive proposal initially put forward by French President Emmanuel Macron.

The UK has been one of Ukraine's biggest military backers, pledging £12.8 billion (\$16 billion) in military and civilian aid since Russia invaded three years ago. The United States remains by far Ukraine's biggest financial backer but that looks set to change when Trump arrives.

His nominee for secretary of state, Marco Rubio, said Wednesday that the new administration would instead seek "bold diplomacy" to end the war. "There will have to be concessions made by the Russian Federation but also by the Ukrainians," he said.

Trump has previously vowed to end the war within a day, with his aides speaking of leveraging US assistance to Ukraine to force it into territorial concessions. As part of Ukraine's whirlwind diplomatic program, Italy defense minister Guido Crosetto announced on Thursday that he had also arrived in Kyiv on an official visit for a "series of institutional meetings". The visits come at a precarious moment for Ukraine on the battlefield.

Fighting has escalated before Trump's inauguration on Monday, as both sides seek to gain the upper hand in anticipation of potential negotiations aimed at settling the war launched by Russia in February 2022. At several key points in the northern Kharkiv and eastern Donetsk regions, Russian forces have



UKRAINE: Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer (left) and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky listen to a journalist's question as they deliver a press conference following their meeting in Kyiv, on January 16, 2025, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

been able to steadily advance by exploiting their advantages in manpower and resources.

In the southern Kherson region, which is partially occupied by Russian forces, Ukrainian officials said one person had been killed overnight by a drone strike. The governor separately said

that a 92-year-old woman had been wounded and sought medical help in the frontline village of Yantarne. The Ukrainian airforce meanwhile said its air defense systems had shot down 34 Russian drones, including the Iranian-designed Shahed type, over 11 regions of the country. — AFP

UN agencies tremble as Trump term nears

SWITZERLAND: With just days to go before Donald Trump again enters the White House, anxiety is rising across UN agencies fearful he could wreak even more havoc than last time. During Trump's first term in office, Washington slashed its contributions to United Nations operations and agencies, stormed out of the UN Human Rights Council, exited the Paris climate accord and the education agency UNESCO, and began withdrawing from the World Health Organization. But while Trump's first administration did not get to the harshest measures until later in the term, experts warn things could move faster this time. "I don't think Trump is going to hang about so long this time," Richard Gowan of the International Crisis Group told AFP.

"He's likely to walk away from those UN mechanisms and arrangements that he boycotted before without much ceremony," The United States remains the largest donor to the UN, which is already facing significant budget pressures, spurring palpable anxiety over the prospect of funding cuts.

UN officials have scrambled to emphasize the value of US partnership. "The cooperation between the United States and the United Nations is a critical pillar of international relations, and the UN system," Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN chief Antonio Guterres, told AFP. But the love is not always mutual. Republican Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, whom Trump has tapped to become his UN ambassador, has described the organization as "a corrupt, defunct and paralyzed institution". And fears abound that Republicans in Congress could push ahead with a bill calling to defund the organization completely.

Total exit 'unlikely'

Jussi Hanhimaki, an international history professor at the Geneva Graduate Institute, played down that threat. "The total exit is unlikely," he told AFP, suggesting that Washington would not want to cede the leverage it has within the UN system. "The best argument against the US wholesale withdrawal is (that) China will... become more and more influential," he said.

During Trump's first term, China and its allies clearly expanded their influence in the bodies he left in Geneva, like the Human Rights Council. Outgoing US ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Sheba Crocker, highlighted that "some of our strategic rivals are heavily invested in promoting their interests in Geneva". That, she told AFP in an email, "is why I believe the United States will remain engaged, and why I believe it is in our interest to do so".

The exiting administration of Joe Biden has protected against another high-profile walk-out from the Human Rights Council, by opting not to re-apply for membership. Hanhimaki suggested that the World Trade Organization might face "the most challenging times" to start with, pointing to Trump's focus on imposing tariffs on traditional foes and allies alike.

There is particular concern about funding for reproductive rights-linked programs. During Trump's first term, Washington cut funding to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which works to improve reproductive and maternal health worldwide. "We're very worried," said Rachel Moynihan, deputy director of UNFPAs Washington office.

But the agency, which says US contributions allowed it to prevent 3,800 likely deaths during pregnancy in 2023 alone, is accustomed to seeing its funding cut during Republican administrations. "We are a resilient agency," Moynihan told AFP. Other agencies may be less prepared, with UN Women expected to be in the firing line, as was the UN rights office. — AFP

Yoon avoids fresh questioning after dramatic arrest

SEOUL: South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol refused to appear for fresh questioning by investigators Thursday, a day after his dramatic arrest over an ill-fated martial law declaration. The Constitutional Court also opened its second hearing in a trial that will decide whether to uphold Yoon's impeachment, following the dawn raid that made him the country's first-ever sitting president to be detained.

The former star prosecutor — who faces charges of insurrection — was questioned for hours Wednesday but exercised his right to remain silent before being moved to a detention centre. Investigators from the Corruption Investigation Office (CIO) wanted to resume Yoon's questioning on Thursday afternoon, but his team told them he would not attend.

"President Yoon Suk Yeol's representatives informed the CIO through his legal counsel around 1:50 pm that there is 'no change in his position', indicating his intent not to appear," the CIO said in a statement. Lawyers confirmed to AFP the embattled leader would not attend, without specifying the reason, but told Yonhap news agency it was for health reasons.

"President Yoon is not well and fully explained his position yesterday so there is nothing more to be interrogated about," lawyer Yoon Kab-keun told Yonhap. Wednesday's dramatic arrest saw a hundreds-strong force of police and investigators bypass bus barricades, cut barbed wire and scale ladders to get inside the compound where Yoon was

Patients dying in corridors as UK hospitals 'collapse'

LONDON: UK patients are "coming to harm" with hospitals so overwhelmed people are dying in corridors awaiting treatment amid a "collapse in care standards", a report said Thursday. In the latest indictment of Britain's beleaguered state-funded National Health Service, nine in 10 NHS nurses surveyed by the country's nurses union said "patient safety is being compromised". Nearly seven in 10 (66.8 percent) said they were delivering care in "overcrowded or unsuitable places" on a "daily basis", including in corridors, converted cupboards, car parks and even bereavement rooms.

"The experiences of over 5,000 nursing staff across the UK highlight a devastating collapse in care standards, with patients routinely coming to harm," said the Royal College of Nursing (RCN). The report condemned the "normalization" of so-called "corridor care", with nurses unable to access life-saving equipment in cramped spaces. One nurse in east England said corridor care in their

82% probability of 'megaquake' in Japan: Panel

TOKYO: The probability of a "megaquake" in Japan in the next 30 years has marginally increased, a government panel said Thursday, with a 75-82 percent chance of it happening. Such a jolt could potentially have a devastating 8-9 magnitude, trigger colossal tsunamis, kill several hundred thousand people, and cause billions of dollars in damage, experts say. The Earthquake Research Committee said it has increased its estimate of the probability to between 75 and 82 percent from between 74 and 81 percent previously.

It concerns what is known as a subduction megathrust quake along the Nankai Trough, an 800-kilometre (500-mile) undersea gully run-



SEOUL: A photo of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol arriving at the Corruption Investigation Office a few hours earlier is shown during a news broadcast on a television screen seen at a bus station in Seoul on January 15, 2025. — AFP

surrounded by hundreds of guards.

Yoon said he complied with investigators to avoid "bloodshed" but did not accept the legality of the investigation. Meanwhile, officials were trying to secure a new warrant that could hold him for longer than 48 hours.

If investigators successfully obtain that warrant, they are expected to be given a 20-day extension to the leader's detention to allow time to formalize an indictment against him. A hearing to review the legality of Yoon's arrest was set for 5 pm (0800 GMT) at a Seoul court Thursday, after a request by his lawyers. Experts say Yoon's legal team appeared to be trying to drag out the arrest process to his benefit. "It appears that every legal tactic is being employed by Yoon's team to prolong the situation," Lee Jong-soo, a law professor at Yonsei University, told AFP.

Yoon shocked the nation on December 3 when

hospital trust was "not an exception, it's the rule".

Last month, some 54,000 patients in emergency departments in England had to wait over 12 hours until a hospital bed was available, up 23 percent from December 2023. The report is a result of a Royal College of Nursing request at the end of December, asking members to fill out a short survey. The report includes "the raw, unedited and often heart-breaking comments" of the thousands of nursing staff working across the UK who responded, the RCN said.

The report comes as NHS figures released separately Thursday revealed that last week was the busiest yet for the health service this winter, with hospitals "jammed" with patients. Some 96 percent of all hospital beds were full, said Julian Redhead, NHS national clinical director for urgent and emergency care, warning that despite a drop in flu numbers "winter viruses are much higher than usual for this time of year". The RCN report included testimonies from nurses treating up to 40 patients waiting in a corridor, as well as reports of pregnant women miscarrying in corridors.

Some said the overcrowding in corridors impeded them from giving life-saving resuscitation (CPR). One nurse recalled a patient dying after a cardiac arrest "by the male toilet". Another alleged having to treat cardiac arrests "with no crash bell, crash trolley, oxygen, defibril-

ling parallel to Japan's Pacific coast. The trench is where the Philippine Sea oceanic tectonic plate is "subducting" — or slowly slipping — underneath the continental plate that Japan sits atop. The plates become stuck as they move, storing up vast amounts of energy that is released when they break free, causing potentially massive earthquakes.

Over the past 1,400 years, megaquakes in the Nankai Trough have occurred every 100 to 200 years, according to the government's Headquarters for Earthquake Research Promotion. The last one happened in 1946. "It's been 79 years since the last quake, and the possibility of another quake occurring is rising every year at a pace of by about one percent," an official of the Earthquake Research Committee's secretariat told AFP.

According to government estimates in 2012, smaller islands off the main coasts could be swamped by a tsunami over 30 meters (100 feet) high. Densely populated areas on the main islands of Honshu and Shikoku could be hit by huge waves within a few minutes. One estimate by the Nikkei

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 but lawmakers defied them and voted down the move. Yoon revoked martial law after just six hours and was later impeached by parliament. The 64-year-old suspended leader then evaded arrest for weeks by remaining in his residential compound, protected by loyal members of the Presidential Security Service (PSS).

Shortly after he was taken to the CIO offices, investigators began questioning Yoon, but they said later he exercised "his right to remain silent". The CIO confirmed they were addressing him as "Mr President" during questioning. On Thursday, about a hundred of Yoon's supporters gathered in front of the CIO building. They carried South Korean and American flags, and a large banner that read: "We cannot trust human justices. Let's introduce AI justices," an AFP reporter saw.

They also chanted: "blow up the CIO!" and "We will protect our President". In a parallel probe, the Constitutional Court is deciding whether to uphold Yoon's impeachment.

If that happens, Yoon would lose the presidency and fresh elections would have to be held within 60 days. He did not attend Thursday's hearing in person and his lawyers instead requested a postponement that the court "decided not to accept", spokesperson Cheon Jae-hyun told reporters.

The trial is continuing in Yoon's absence, though proceedings could last for months. However, the National Assembly's legal team told reporters before the hearing began that Yoon's arrest had "created the conditions to swiftly resolve the constitutional crisis through procedures outlined by the Constitution and the law". — AFP

lators... straddling a patient doing CPR while everyone watches on". "This devastating testimony from frontline nursing staff shows patients are coming to harm every day", said RCN General Secretary Nicola Ranger.

"Vulnerable people are being stripped of their dignity and nursing staff are being denied access to vital lifesaving equipment. We can now categorically say patients are dying in this situation," Ranger added. In June 2024, the RCN declared a "national emergency" over hospital overcrowding and care being delivered in unsuitable places.

Health Foundation charity's assistant director of policy Tim Gardner said record delays in emergency care "were a rarity before the pandemic, but are now the worst we have seen since records began in 2011". There are some 7.5 million people on the NHS waiting list, with more than three million having faced delays longer than 18 weeks for treatment. Labor Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who was elected in July on a ticket which included fixing the NHS, rolled out a plan at the start of the year which included expanding community health centers to reduce pressure on hospitals. Health Secretary Wes Streeting on Wednesday said corridor care was "unsafe" and "undignified" but it would "take time to undo the damage" to the NHS. — AFP

business daily says around 530,000 people could be left shelterless in the event of a megaquake along the Nankai Trough.

That is out of up to 9.5 million people that the government estimates could be displaced by the disaster. Last August the Japan Meteorological Association (JMA) issued its first megaquake advisory under rules drawn up after the devastating Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of 2011.

It said that the likelihood of a new major earthquake along the Nankai Trough was higher than normal after a magnitude 7.1 jolt that injured 15 people. The advisory was lifted again after a week but caused shortages of rice and other staples as people stocked their emergency stores.

In 1707, all segments of the Nankai Trough ruptured at once, unleashing an earthquake that remains the nation's second-most powerful on record. That quake — which also triggered the last eruption of Mount Fuji — was followed by two powerful Nankai megathrusts in 1854, and then two in 1944 and 1946. — AFP

FRIDAY, JANUARY 17, 2025

Nintendo hopes to reprise blockbuster Switch console with 2025 successor

PARIS: Nintendo is betting on the 2025 release of a bigger, better version of its blockbuster Switch console to keep up the success of the third best-selling games machine of all time. But the Japanese giant is keeping players waiting for full details of the successor model, showing off the console's appearance in a slick video Thursday but delaying any detailed information until an April 2 livestream.

In the just over two-minute video, Nintendo shows off a console that looks similar to the original hybrid Switch, which can be handheld or connected to a TV screen. The Switch 2 boasts a larger central tablet-like screen with a kickstand and a similar layout to its predecessor, with paired "joy-con" controllers that clip to its sides with magnets.

During the video, the console also shows off a new version of the long-running Mario Kart series both on its built-in screen and on a TV, after the latest instalment, "Mario Kart 8", sold more than 64 million copies.

The company said in a statement Thursday that the new machine "plays Nintendo Switch 2 exclusive games, as well as both physical and digital Nintendo Switch games" -- which would fulfil a promise on backwards compatibility with the old console that it made in November. But it added that "certain Nintendo Switch games may not be supported on or fully compatible with Nintendo Switch 2" -- adding that further details would come "at a later date".

'Just what folks wanted'

Nintendo's announcement was "just what was ex-

pected and what folks wanted. A bigger, more powerful Switch," Mat Piscatella, an analyst at market research firm Circana, posted on Bluesky. "It should sell very well, and be a big boost to the existing market, but (I) don't see expanded reach," he added.

Nintendo also said that several "Nintendo Switch 2 Experience" events would be held in major cities around the world starting April 4 to give gamers an opportunity to test the new console. Players have long been hungry for news on a follow-up to the original Switch, which has sold more than 146 million units worldwide since hitting shelves in 2017.

That makes the Switch the third-best-selling console ever after Sony's PlayStation 2 and Nintendo's DS. Mounting speculation had been stoked in recent weeks by leaks about some technical details. Nintendo estimates it has sold 1.3 billion copies of Switch titles, including "Animal Crossing: New Horizons", which became a must-play among all age groups during COVID-19 lockdowns.

'Well-loved franchises'

With sales of the original Switch falling, Nintendo had promised to unveil the new console by the end of March this year. At the same time, the Kyoto-based company has been diversifying into theme parks around the world and funding films based on its games and characters, like 2023's global second-place box office performer "The Super Mario Bros. Movie".

However, Nintendo still generates approximately 91 percent of its revenue from its Nintendo Switch business, which shows the importance of the Switch



TOKYO: A man walks past shelves in the gaming section of Nintendo Switch products at a shop in Tokyo on January 16, 2025. — AFP

2," said Darang Candra, an analyst with games market research firm Niko Partners.

Candra said the long life of the first Switch was Nintendo's attempt to create a precedent, getting out of the rat-race of rapid updates to hardware. "Development costs and timelines have increased significantly in recent years in a way that may not be sustainable, particularly as the games industry sees a

downturn in the last year," he added. That appears to be in line with expectations from some lovers of Nintendo's games.

"The fans of Nintendo love what Nintendo does at its core -- which is creating new content for existing and well-loved franchises that players have played since they were kids," said LottieRoseGames, a 29-year-old streamer specializing in "Animal Crossing". — AFP

Burgan Bank names Omar Khalifouh as Deputy GM of Digital Transformation

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced the appointment of Omar Khalifouh as Deputy General Manager of Digital Transformation, after obtaining all necessary approvals from the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK). This appointment echoes Burgan's unwavering commitment to investing in Kuwait's talented calibers as part of its holistic human capital investment strategy, in turn supporting the nationwide Kuwaitization efforts. It also marks a significant step in advancing the Bank's digital transformation journey and driving innovation across its operations.



Omar Khalifouh

Commenting on this announcement, Fadel Mahmoud Abdullah, CEO of Burgan Bank -- Kuwait, said: "On behalf of the Board and Executive Management, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to Khalifouh on his new role. This step underscores our commitment to Burgan's expansive

digital transformation and human capital development strategies as we strive to become the most modern and progressive bank in Kuwait."

He added: "Accelerating digital evolution is a pivotal element in strengthening Burgan Bank's position within the Kuwaiti banking sector. It enables us to fortify our digital infrastructure, modernize our core systems, and leverage advanced technologies to deliver modern solutions tailored to our customers' needs and the market's modern expectations. Our digital transformation efforts demand experienced professionals like Khalifouh with business acumen, nimble problem-solving skills, and an agile approach. We are confident that his expertise will play a key role in enabling us to achieve new milestones on the digital front and drive Burgan's overall growth, success, and continued innovation."

Khalifouh has nearly two decades of expansive experience in the fields of digital banking transformation and financial services innovation. Prior to joining Burgan Bank in 2024 as Acting Deputy General Manager -- Digital Transformation, he built a reputation for being a forward-thinking leader in financial technology and digital solutions, which was evident in his roles and achievements at Kuwait and Middle East Financial Investment Company (KMEFIC), Kuwait International Bank (KIB), and Warba Bank. At Burgan, he stood out for his vital role in propelling the Bank's digital transformation strategy and overseeing crucial departments, including Product Management, Design and User Experience, Business Intelligence, and Innovation.

In addition, Khalifouh offers Burgan Bank and his new role valuable insights, organizational oversight, and strategic decision-making garnered from his rich executive experience, which includes serving as Chairman of Al-Awsat AlOula Holding and Board Member of Middle East Financial Brokerage Co.

Khalifouh's academic qualifications include a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Accounting from Kuwait University, in addition to completing several prestigious executive programs at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Chicago Booth, and Harvard Kennedy School. He is a Certified Agile Leader and has extensive expertise in full-stack development and various modern development frameworks.

Apple loses top spot in China smartphone sales to local rivals

BEIJING: Apple lost its status as the best selling smartphone brand in the crucial Chinese market last year, new data showed Thursday, with a pair of local rivals surpassing it with surging shipments.

The California-based tech giant claimed a market share of 15 percent in the world's number two economy, behind Huawei's 16 percent and top-ranking Vivo's 17 percent, according to industry data provider Canalsy.

Also coming in at 15 percent, with total smartphone sales narrowly behind Apple's, were Chinese brands

Oppo and Honor, the data showed. Apple's performance in the country is suffering from a slump in iPhone sales, which dropped to 42.9 million in 2024, compared to a market-leading 51.8 million the previous year.

"Intense competition has led to a constantly shifting landscape," said Amber Liu, Research Manager at Canalsy, adding that Apple "faced growing competitive pressure from domestic flagship devices".

Top-ranked Vivo showed "strong momentum" last year, Liu said, noting that the firm's strategy was helping "solidify its position in entry-level to mid-to-high-end segments". Meanwhile, Huawei, a Shenzhen-based tech giant that was once the target of tough sanctions from Washington due to national security concerns, continued a resurgence in its home market in 2024.

The firm achieved a 37 percent year-on-year jump in total smartphone shipments last year, the Canalsy data showed. Apple's iPhone remains popular in China,

but many consumers in the vast market have switched to domestic alternatives in recent years as sector competition intensifies. Firm CEO Tim Cook visited China multiple times last year, as the US tech giant sought to shore up slumping sales in the country. Apple's fourth-quarter smartphone shipments plunged 25 percent, according to Canalsy data. The mainland Chinese smartphone market as a whole expanded five percent year-on-year in the fourth quarter, the report added, with total shipments reaching 77.4 million units. And in a further positive signal for the sector, Beijing last week announced that it would roll out subsidies for individual purchases of certain smartphones, part of a discount scheme it hopes will boost spending as the economy wavers. The latest policy "has laid the foundation for this year's market growth", said Lucas Zhong, Research Analyst at Canalsy, adding that "vendors have already begun preparations for channels and supply". — AFP



HONG KONG: Customers visit the Apple store in the Central district in Hong Kong on November 8, 2024. — AFP

AFP strikes deal for France's Mistral AI to use news articles

PARIS: Global news agency Agence France-Presse (AFP) and French artificial intelligence company Mistral AI have signed a deal for the start-up's chatbot to use news agency reports to respond to users' requests, executives from the two organizations said Thursday.

The parties did not reveal the value of the "multi-year" contract nor its precise duration. It was the first such deal struck by AFP and for Mistral AI, a European

competitor to American giants like ChatGPT creator OpenAI. Also Thursday, Google said it had agreed with America's Associated Press (AP) that its Gemini AI could use the news agency's current affairs content, without disclosing a start date or the contract's financial terms. There has been a recent flurry of tie-ups between news organizations and AI developers that had long remained relatively rare. OpenAI has struck the most deals, including with British business daily the Financial Times, French center-left paper Le Monde and Germany's Axel Springer group, which publishes conservative broadsheet Die Welt and tabloid-style Bild.

"This is the first deal between two players with global ambitions, indeed a global footprint as far as AFP is concerned, but with well-anchored European roots," the agency's chief executive Fabrice Fries told

AFP journalists in an interview. He added that the contract would offer the agency "a new revenue stream". On Mistral's side, "AFP brings a verified, journalistic source that we think is very important," founder Arthur Mensch said.

Verified information

AFP articles in six languages -- French, English, Spanish, Arabic, German and Portuguese -- will be available to Mistral's Le Chat chatbot from Thursday. The product works similarly to ChatGPT, the first such tool to reach a broad audience: users type in a question and receive a response within seconds.

Le Chat will answer questions about current events using AFP articles -- the text news the agency typically sends to its subscription-paying clients in the media, government and other institutions, and businesses.

The AFP integration will undergo a test period during which it will be available only to a segment of Mistral users. Le Chat can draw on the agency's text archives going back to 1983, but has no access to AFP's photo, video or infographics production.

The records amount to around 38 million articles, Fries said, adding that the agency publishes a further 2,300 every day. Access via Mistral's Le Chat could be useful to "professionals or managers in large businesses" for "writing memos" or other documents related to current affairs, Fries suggested. Among the broader public, many people are using generative AI tools in different ways. Some ask questions about daily life, receiving answers the bots have plucked from the internet. The two user styles are "complementary", Mistral boss Mensch said. Where users' questions "require verified information, AFP will provide" the inputs. — AFP



PARIS: Employees work at the Mistral AI headquarters, an artificial intelligence start-up, in Paris, on January 15, 2025. — AFP

UK economy rebounds but headwinds remain for govt

Gross domestic product expanded 0.1 percent in one month

LONDON: Britain's economic growth rebounded less than expected in November, official data showed Thursday, dealing a fresh blow to a Labour government that is battling headwinds. Gross domestic product expanded 0.1 percent in the month after GDP contracted 0.1 percent in October, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

Analysts' consensus forecast had been for growth of 0.2 percent in November. The data offsets a slight reprieve for Prime Minister Keir Starmer and his finance minister Rachel Reeves on Wednesday when official data revealed an unexpected fall to UK inflation in December. Britain's economy has stagnated since Labour won a general election in July, which saw the party end 14 years of rule by the Conservatives having pledged to drive growth. But Reeves has faced calls from the main opposition Conservatives to resign following a recent spike in state borrowing costs and a hefty drop in the pound.

"I am determined to go further and faster to kickstart economic growth, which is the number one priority in our plan for change," Reeves said in a statement following the latest GDP data. "That means generating investment, driving reform and a relentless commitment to root out waste in public spending." She added: "I will fight every day to deliver that growth and put more money into working people's pockets."

'Gloomy business mood'

The finance minister's maiden budget in October included tax rises for businesses -- a decision blamed for Britain struggling to grow its economy in recent months. Reeves defended her brief record during a heated exchange in parliament on Tuesday, while Starmer on Wednesday insisted she would remain chancellor of the exchequer "for many, many years".

Following the growth data, yields on UK government bonds steadied after having cooled significantly Wednesday. The London stock market was up 0.6 percent in early trading and the pound slid against the dollar and euro, as traders reacted also to movements in the wider global economy.

"With inflation easing and sluggish economic growth, a 25 basis points rate cut by the Bank of England in February seems increasingly likely," noted Matt Britzman, senior equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. "UK government bond yields have felt an immediate impact, pulling back yesterday from multi-decade highs, offering some relief to risk-on

investors and borrowers alike."

Some analysts warned, however, that the UK economy may have contracted overall in the fourth quarter of last year. Looking at 2025, "tighter financial conditions and a gloomy business mood on the back of higher taxes and a potential escalation in trade conflicts could set back business investment", forecast Yael Selfin, chief economist at KPMG UK.



LONDON: A handout photograph released by the UK Parliament shows Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves delivering a statement to Members of Parliament (MEP) about the country finances and her latest visit to China, in the House of Commons, in London, on January 14, 2025. - AFP

Services boost

The ONS said growth to services resulted in the UK economy expanding slightly in November. Production output dropped 0.4 percent but construction rebounded 0.4 percent in the month.

"Services grew a little, with wholesaling, pubs and restaurants and IT companies all doing well, partially offset by falls in accountancy and business rental and leasing," noted ONS director of economic statistics, Liz McKeown. She added that production declined further, with "falls across a range of manufacturing industries and oil and gas extraction companies". - AFP

US consumer inflation rises in December but underlying pressures ease

WASHINGTON: US consumer inflation rose for a third straight month in December as energy prices jumped but a widely watched measure eased slightly, raising hopes that underlying inflation may be moderating. The consumer price index (CPI) accelerated to 2.9 percent last month from a year ago, up from 2.7 percent in November, the Labor Department said in a statement on Wednesday. This was in line with the median forecast of economists surveyed by Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal.

Stocks jumped on the news, with all three major indices on Wall Street closing sharply higher. On a monthly basis, inflation rose by 0.4 percent, slightly faster than expected. One of the biggest drivers of inflation in December was the energy index, which jumped by 2.6 percent, accounting for "over" 40 percent of the monthly increase, according to the Labor Department. In some good news for the Federal Reserve, annual inflation excluding volatile food and energy costs came in at a lower-than-expected 3.2 percent, marking a slight decline from the month earlier.

Focus on the core

The so-called "core" measure of inflation increased by 0.2 percent, also slightly below expectations. "The focus is really on the core reading, and the core reading did come in better than the consensus expectations," Nationwide chief economist Kathy Bostjancic told AFP.

The US central bank has cut rates by a full percentage point since September as it looks to bolster the labor market. The recent uptick in inflation adds to expectations that it will remain firmly on pause at its next rate decision later this month.

However, higher prices could complicate President-elect Donald Trump's economic plans as he prepares to return to office on Monday. Trump has floated several policies, from tariffs to deportation, that many economists say could have an inflationary impact. The Republican and his supporters have disputed this characterization, claiming that many of his

proposals aimed at deregulation and boosting energy production should help keep prices in check.

Bond yields drop

US bonds rallied as investors reacted to signs of slowing core inflation, pushing down yields, which move inversely to prices. "The softer core reading is really what the markets are focusing on right now, and that's why you're seeing a big rally in the bond market," said Bostjancic from Nationwide.



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) on January 15, 2025 in New York City. — AFP

Lower yields on US Treasuries -- especially the popular 10-year note -- would be good news for consumers, since they are referenced by businesses when they price mortgages and car loans. Wednesday's data release is nevertheless expected to fuel expectations that the Fed will pause rate cuts later this month, as headline inflation appears to be moving away from its long-term goal of two percent.

The Fed uses a different inflation measure to set interest rates, known as the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index. That index has also been rising in recent months. Futures traders see a roughly 97 percent chance that Fed policymakers will vote to hold interest rates between 4.25 and 4.50 percent at the next rate meeting on January 28 and 29, according to data from CME Group. "The pace of inflation is still elevated," said Bostjancic. — AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 16 JANUARY 2025

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No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	925	930	932	906	26	22,135,866	5	0.54%	3.79%	926	940	13.7	1.75	3.6%	1.04
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	312	300	314	298	16	99,259,273	-11	-3.54%	-7.98%	298	303	19.9	1.39	3.8%	1.25
104	Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait	Banking	279	276	281	269	12	14,546,974	-2	-0.72%	6.15%	273	279	13.4	0.98	3.1%	1.05
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	198	201	205	196	9	48,235,133	4	2.03%	9.84%	197	203	13.9	0.72	2.4%	1.12
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	194	196	198	192	6	30,080,021	1	0.51%	11.36%	191	197	19.2	0.69	2.9%	1.38
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	757	757	760	751	9	39,502,046	0	0.00%	1.47%	756	769	20.6	2.18	2.5%	1.08
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	597	604	618	589	29	28,525,351	8	1.34%	7.66%	593	608	29.4	2.45	1.2%	1.15
201	Kuwait Investment	Financial Services	178	174	179	172	7	8,659,547	-3	-1.69%	0.58%	168	178	7.8	0.78	5.8%	2.03
204	National Investments	Financial Services	251	250	256	248	8	12,534,095	-2	-0.79%	-1.57%	248	257	16.9	1.06	6.0%	2.05
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	95.1	95.5	99	94.6	4.4	47,404,176	0.4	0.42%	0.53%	95	96.5	NM	0.54	0.0%	0.98
212	Arzan Financial Group	Financial Services	273	277	285	259	26	87,948,690	4	1.47%	4.53%	274	281	17.4	1.45	0.7%	1.34
222	Aayan Leasing and Investment	Financial Services	156	156	159	154	5	23,569,280	-1	-0.64%	-0.64%	155	158	9.6	1.02	4.8%	1.78
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	66.0	60.8	66.0	59.2	6.8	7,746,001	-4.6	-7.03%	-2.41%	60.1	62.0	NM	0.43	0.0%	1.38
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	269	284	287	264	23	60,243,179	14	5.19%	10.94%	281	287	21.4	1.56	1.4%	1.17
404	Salhia Real Estate	Real Estate	410	405	412	404	8	3,807,493	-2	-0.49%	1.50%	398	406	20.1	1.29	3.5%	0.50
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	786	783	791	778	13	4,881,878	-3	-0.38%	2.76%	778	799	16.4	1.68	1.7%	0.91
418	The Commercial Real Estate	Real Estate	149	153	165	147	18	20,162,027	5	3.38%	3.38%	150	156	14.8	0.93	2.5%	0.71
501	National Industries	Financial Services	251	251	252	247	5	17,902,383	0	0.00%	1.21%	246	252	12.5	1.13	1.9%	1.62
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	1,855	1,760	1,855	1,707	148	934,951	-55	-3.03%	-2.22%	1,730	1,771	18.5	1.42	3.7%	1.17
506	HEISCO	Industrials	813	822	822	811	11	2,088,362	8	0.98%	-2.03%	815	832	17.9	2.00	3.7%	0.96
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	671	672	674	664	10	2,613,886	2	0.30%	3.38%	655	677	12.6	1.45	8.9%	0.99
603	Agility	Industrials	257	248	258	248	10	29,834,744	-9	-3.50%	0.40%	241	253	10.5	0.66	8.0%	1.60
605	Zain	Telecommunications	462	455	467	451	16	13,892,678	-7	-1.52%	-2.99%	455	459	11.0	1.71	7.7%	0.53
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	2,668	2,600	2,670	2,578	92	461,102	-68	-2.55%	-4.41%	2,583	2,628	8.6	3.14	12.8%	0.64
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	570	582	582	560	22	1,137,527	10	1.75%	2.11%	575	582	3.0	0.96	209.4%	1.24
654	JAZEERA	Consumer Discretionary	1,021	1,028	1,039	1,006	33	1,636,141	8	0.78%	1.98%	1,021	1,050	31.2	5.71	2.7%	1.40
813	GFH Financial Group	Financial Services	97.1	94	98	93.9	4.1	29,465,423	-3.7	-3.79%	-4.08%	93.0	95	10.2	1.17	5.1%	1.36
821	Warba Bank	Banking	242	222	254	218	36	188,871,960	-10	-4.31%	15.63%	221	229	27.9	1.16	0.0%	1.13
822	Kuwait Telecommunications	Telecommunications	542	535	542	534	8	1,872,188	-6	-1.11%	-0.56%	530	537	16.2	2.30	6.5%	0.70
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	949	902	949	890	59	1,987,410	-3	-0.33%	0.22%	879	979	19.6	2.43	2.2%	0.52
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	482	471	491	471	20	3,986,689	-15	-3.09%	2.39%	464	485	22.1	1.94	4.2%	0.69
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,440	2,405	2,443	2,380	63	758,751	-6	-0.25%	4.57%	2,350	2,439	27.5	7.61	3.1%	1.36
830	AL GHANIM	Consumer Discretionary	1,021	1,015	1,021	1,012	9	1,915,990	-7	-0.68%	-1.46%	1,010	1,033	9.6	3.42	6.9%	0.78
831	Beyout Investment	Financial Services	407	406	416	405	11	4,434,604	-1	-0.25%	-1.46%	400	410	14.8	2.23	0.0%	0.26

* As of end of week closing

Inflation forces Nigeriens to adapt what they eat

Niger's inflation expected to remain high through 2026

NIAMEY: At a Niamey market, mother of five Rakia Abdou haggles hard for a sack of rice, a staple out of reach for many in Niger due to record inflation. "The prices of local food are falling but those for imported products are still high," she said at the Wadata market, lightly coated in dust carried by the wind of west Africa's Harmattan dry season.

It is almost a year since the lifting of heavy sanctions on Niger imposed by regional West African bloc ECOWAS to protest the overthrow of civilian president Mohamed Bazoum in 2023. But constantly changing prices mean that many of Niger's 26 million inhabitants face the grim daily choice of having to adapt or even go without.

Four days after military officers seized power, the Economic Community of West African States slapped tough economic and financial measures on landlocked Niger, one of the world's poorest countries. Economist Abdallah Souleymane said the sanctions "completely disrupted the supply chains" and resulted in "difficulties with imports". There were "repercussions on the cost of many products, particularly food", he added in an interview on national television.

Inflation in Niger peaked at a record high of 15.5 percent in June last year before falling towards the end of the year, data from the National Statistics Institute showed. For 2025 to 2026, it is expected to remain high at 5.4 percent, according to World Bank projections.

Border closed, long detour

Trade unions say the main factor driving costs higher is the closure of the border with Benin, which has the closest port through which 80 percent of Niger's freight transited. Niger, which is battling jihadist violence, refuses to open its border with Benin, accusing it of harboring jihadist training camps - an accusation Porto Novo denies.

Niamey has found a workaround via the port of

Lome in Togo. But this forces thousands of trucks to make a long detour and cross eastern Burkina Faso, running through a region also plagued by deadly jihadist attacks.

The new routes entail higher costs that are passed on to customers in the prices of essential necessities. "It takes two to three months to get to Niamey, we have a lot of costs and there is the risk of attacks despite the military escorts," Ghanaian driver Idrissou Issoufou told AFP.

He is a regular among the truck convoys and describes the journey as nothing short of an "ordeal". Another possibility for bringing in goods is by river. While the land border with Benin is officially closed, some merchandise still crosses the Niger River separating the two countries - although it is not an ideal solution. "From Benin, we bring products into Niger on the river, but it costs us a lot of money," Salamataou Gna, a Beninese trader in Niamey, grumbled.

Changing habits

Previously, "with 10,000 CFA francs (\$15.4, 15 euros) you could fill up your shopping basket. Today with the same amount, the basket is half empty," Hadja Hadjara said at another market. "It's no longer a question of preparing two large meals a day," she said. Mahaman Nouri, of the Association of Consumers' Rights, said that many Nigeriens had been forced to change how they lived. "To adapt, Nigeriens have completely changed their eating habits and are consuming (more) traditional dishes," he added.

"I know many people who didn't need to eat cornmeal but they have adapted. We used to return to local products," he said. To help ease the burden, Niger's military-led government introduced measures including an unprecedented 50-percent cut in the cost of medical consultations and medical care for everyone.

Petrol, diesel and cement prices were also slashed as were customs duties. Authorities organized the free



NIAMEY: A street vendor stands at his stall at a cart at the Dar-es-salam market in Niamey on January 9, 2025. — AFP

distribution of food to the most vulnerable and special cut-price sales of grains. In addition, the military rulers - who say restoring Niger's national sovereignty is a priority - have banned the export of cereals notably to neighbor Nigeria to prevent shortages.

"Niger's economy has shown resilience due in part to proactive measures taken by the authorities," Han Fracters, the World Bank's country manager for Niger, said. The measures have enabled public sec-

tor salaries to continue to be paid, he added.

Despite the difficult climate, the World Bank, which has resumed aid to Niger, forecasts that gross domestic product will expand by 6.5 percent on average in 2025 to 2026, largely due to agriculture and oil exports. But, if inflation remains stubbornly high, nearly half of the population could be forced into extreme poverty by next year, the global lender warned. — AFP

NBK launches real estate financing services in Germany

KUWAIT: In a strategic move to strengthen its presence in international markets and elevate its global banking offerings, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has unveiled its mortgage services in Germany. This initiative enables NBK customers to access bespoke mortgage solutions and premium services tailored to meet their investment aspirations in key global real estate markets, including the UK, France, Spain, Portugal, Germany and UAE.

This initiative aligns with the Group's ongoing efforts to bolster its presence in real estate financing services on both regional and global fronts. Leveraging its extensive network of international branches, its prominent position in some of the world's most sought-after real estate markets, and the unparalleled trust it commands in Kuwait, the region, and beyond, NBK continues to strengthen its role as a leading financial institution in this dynamic sector.

NBK's international mortgage services offer unparalleled convenience and efficiency, allowing customers to finalize purchases, investments, and all related transactions locally in Kuwait without the need for travel. These services are facilitated through the International Mortgage Loan Center at NBK's headquarters — the first of its kind in Kuwait — along with dedicated support at the Ras Al-Salmiya, and Surra branches.

China to probe US chips over dumping, subsidies

BEIJING: China said Thursday it would launch a probe into US exports of chips used in everything from cars to home appliances over concerns about alleged dumping and subsidies. Washington has expanded its efforts in recent years to curb exports of state-of-the-art chips to China, concerned that these can be used to advance Beijing's military systems and other tech capabilities.

Beijing has accused Washington of protectionism, vowing to defend its interests and urging Washington to halt its "wrong practices". And on Thursday China's commerce ministry said domestic firms had accused the US administration of President Joe Biden of having "provided substantial subsidies to the chip sector". This, they said, gave "US companies an unfair competitive advantage".

"Companies have been exporting related mature-process chip products to

China at low prices, harming the legitimate interests of the domestic industry," a ministry spokesperson said. "The concerns of China's domestic industry are reasonable, and they have the right to request a trade remedy investigation," they said. Beijing did not say when the probe would be launched, nor how long it would take.

Chip for tat

But its launch comes a day after the United States unveiled further export controls on advanced computing semiconductors, increasing due diligence requirements for businesses as it seeks to prevent diversion of tech to China despite existing restrictions.

The move also followed US officials announcing fresh curbs on AI chip exports, seeking to make it harder for Beijing to access the advanced technology. With the new rules, foundries and packaging companies that want to export certain advanced chips face broader license requirements unless they meet several conditions.

The rules also aim to enhance reporting for transactions involving newer customers "who may pose a heightened



BEIJING: Semiconductor chips are seen under process at a factory in Binzhou, in eastern China's Shandong province on January 15, 2025. — AFP

risk of diversion," said the US commerce department. Thursday's probe focuses on US subsidies of "mature" semiconductors, also known as "legacy" chips.

While cutting-edge chips are typically

used in critical technologies with sensitive military and defense uses, "legacy" chips are used in household items like broadband and medical devices, according to the CSIS think tank. — AFP



CULVER CITY: The TikTok logo is displayed outside TikTok social media app company offices in Culver City, California. — AFP

Chinese apps including TikTok hit by privacy complaints in Europe

VIENNA: Online privacy campaigners said Thursday they had filed complaints in several European countries against six Chinese companies including TikTok, accusing them of "unlawfully" sending Europeans' personal data to China.

Prominent Austria-based privacy campaign group NOYB (None of Your Business) said it has lodged six complaints against TikTok, AliExpress, SHEIN, Temu, WeChat and Xiaomi - in its first such action against Chinese companies. The complaints were filed in Austria, Belgium, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands.

Noyb has launched several legal cases against US technology giants such as Meta and Google, often prompting action from regulatory authorities over violations of the EU's landmark General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The GDPR aims to make it easier for people to control how companies use their personal information. "Given that China is an authoritarian surveillance state, it is crystal clear that China doesn't offer the same level of data protection as the EU," said NOYB data protection lawyer Kleanthi Sardeli.

"Transferring Europeans' personal data is clearly unlawful - and must be terminated immediately," Sardeli said according to a statement. According to the privacy group, AliExpress, SHEIN, TikTok and Xiaomi "transfer data to China", while Temu and WeChat mention transfers to "third countries".

"As none of the companies responded adequately to the complainants' access requests, we have to assume that this includes China," the statement added. Noyb believes that "the rise of Chinese apps opens (up) a new front" for EU data protection law. TikTok declined to comment when contacted by AFP.

Noyb said it is seeking administrative fines of up to four percent of the companies' global sales, which could amount to 1.35 billion euros (\$1.39 billion) for Temu. The group began working in 2018 with the advent of the GDPR. — AFP

India's IT giant Infosys hikes revenue forecast as demand slowly recovers

BENGALURU: Indian tech giant Infosys hiked its annual sale forecast Thursday and posted an 11.4 percent on-year rise in profit for the December quarter, signaling a gradual revival in client spending. India's second-largest software services exporter earns more than 80 percent of its revenue from Western markets.

It raised its constant-currency revenue guidance for the current financial year to 4.5-5.0 percent, up

from an earlier forecast of 3.75-4.5 percent. Net profit rose 11.4 percent year-on-year to 68.06 billion rupees (\$785.9 million) for the December quarter, beating analyst estimates of 67.7 billion rupees on average.

Revenue was up 7.6 percent to 417.64 billion rupees for the same period, helped by strong demand from its European market and growth in its financial services, manufacturing and energy markets.

"We continue to strengthen our enterprise AI capabilities, particularly focusing on generative AI, which is witnessing increasing client traction," Infosys CEO Salil Parekh said. "This has led to another quarter of strong, large deal wins", he added.

Part of India's \$254-billion IT sector, Infosys grappled with a growth slowdown over the last year as customers curtailed tech spending due to high

inflation and global geopolitical uncertainty. But the Bengaluru-headquartered firm has seen demand slowly pick up as inflation cooled off, sparking interest rate cuts and boosting the willingness of clients to spend on technology.

The slowdown hurt the job prospects of thousands of young Indian engineering graduates who depend on the industry, although in recent quarters some firms including Infosys have resumed adding employees to their headcount.

Infosys's headcount increased by 5,591 employees in the December quarter, when compared to the September quarter, according to the company's quarterly filings. Shares in Infosys ended 1.09 percent lower at the close of trading in Mumbai on Thursday ahead of the earnings announcement. — AFP



BENGALURU: Salil Parekh, CEO and Managing Director of Infosys (left), speaks as Chief Financial Officer of Infosys Jayesh Sanghrajka looks on during a press conference held to announce the company's third quarter results in Bengaluru on January 16, 2025. — AFP

Weekender



From 'Sarat' to stardom, Daffy shakes up Kuwaiti hip hop scene

Pioneering Kuwaiti artiste has collaborated with global artistes, blending Arab heritage with international sounds



By Sahar Moussa

A humble Kuwaiti kid with a deep love for music, Daffy – known by many names such as Daff, King Daff, Dee, Dafyan, Bo ElDafya, King, Mr11 and Bo Khaloda – has become a pioneering figure in Arabic rap and hip hop. His journey from a passionate music lover to a leading force in the industry is truly inspiring. In an interview with Kuwait Times, Daffy shares insights into his unique style, the meaning behind his iconic phrase “Sarat” and his role in shaping the Arab music scene.

Kuwait Times: What does “Sarat” mean, and where did the idea or inspiration for it come from?

Daffy: “Sarat” means “it’s about to go down, it’s happening, let’s go!” It represents my style in music, and what I call “My Music Vibe”. That’s why you hear me saying it every time. So when you hear “SARAT” (Devil - GOAT & Fire) is here.

KT: How do you feel about being recognized as a pioneer in Arabic rap and hip hop in Kuwait?

Daffy: I feel blessed and proud to be recognized by my country. What I’ve put my heart and soul into, with hard work, has paid off.

KT: Can you share your thoughts on how your work has inspired young artistes in Kuwait and the region to follow in your footsteps?

Daffy: I feel humbled and honored to see people following

in my footsteps. It’s always great to open doors for those who come after you. I just want to leave a legacy in art. I feel truly blessed.

KT: How have you influenced Arabic rap music, particularly with your efforts to make it more family-friendly?

Daffy: Hip hop music shouldn’t only be seen as street music; it should be celebrated among families and friends. Rap can really express feelings, and that’s the best way to touch people’s hearts.

KT: What makes your music and style unique, especially with your blend of Arabic and English?

Daffy: I think the fusion of pushing Arab heritage and mixing it with English vibes makes my style unique. It’s not just English; the secret of my style is combining Arabic music with international sounds, making it different and able to travel, because music

is a universal language.

KT: You’ve collaborated with more artistes than anyone else in the Arabic rap scene. What drives your passion for collaboration, and what do you learn from working with other artistes? Can you name the collaborators?

Daffy: I love collaborations because they always challenge me. It’s a team process, and sometimes it takes me out of my comfort zone, which brings out the best in me. What you learn from that is priceless. I’ve collaborated with artistes like Shaggy, The Game, Carole Samaha, Miami Kuwait Band, Guitara Band, Dalia Mubarak, Fatman Scoop, Lartiste, Mohammed Salim, DJ Neptune, Joeboy, Mr Eazi and many more.

KT: Can you share a memorable experience from one of your collaborations and what made it stand out? Why?

Daffy: Collaborating with Miami Kuwait Band is definitely memorable. Why? Because it’s Miami (smiles). Also, Guitara Band gave me my first official track, and my time on stage with them was unforgettable.

KT: In addition to being an artiste, you’re a producer, choreographer and involved in commercials. How do you manage to balance all these roles, and how do they influence your music?

Daffy: I love what I do, and I do it with passion. That love influences me to do more so that people can feel the love in my work.

KT: What do you think sets you apart as an artiste in the Arabic hip hop and rap world?

Daffy: I believe my performance, my style and the different things I can do both on stage and off stage set me apart in the game.

KT: Are there any dream collaborations or projects you’re looking forward to pursuing?

Daffy: The sky is the limit.



Daffy during making of the “Hala Walla” video clip with American rapper and singer-songwriter will.i.am.



Daffy poses with Miami band.



A day in the life

Stitching against the odds



By Passant Hisham

In a quiet tailoring shop nestled within the old souq of Salmiya, the soft hum of a sewing machine mingles with the broken Arabic of a customer trying to communicate with the tailor – a shared language bridging the gap between Asians and Arabs in Kuwait. Raju, 51, pauses mid-task to pour hot water into his teacup. Setting the kettle aside, he greets Kuwait Times with a warm smile. “Yes, I speak a little English,” he says, opening the door to his story.



Tailors make dishdashas at a shop in Kuwait City. - Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

A tailor for 19 years, Raju's workday begins at 9:00 am and stretches late into the evening. “I like tailoring. It's something I chose, not something my family did,” he shares while trimming a piece of fabric. His assistant, Jeevan, 29, interrupts to ask for guidance on a project. Jeevan, a Sri Lankan tailor since the age of 17, joined the shop a year ago. Together, they tackle alterations and custom pieces with quiet precision.

However, tailoring isn't what it used to be. “Five or six years ago, there were so many customers,” Raju recalls wistfully. “Now, it's slower. Some days, no one comes.” Jeevan echoes this sentiment, noting that even on a good day, they serve a maximum of 10



Raju and his assistant Jeevan discuss details about a piece of fabric in the shop.



A tailor carefully stitches fabric with precision using a sewing machine.

Amid dwindling demand and fast fashion, Raju and his assistant Jeevan keep their craft alive, serving a loyal, diverse clientele with quiet determination



Tailors work at a dishdasha tailoring shop in Kuwait City.

customers, mostly Filipinos. The rise of ready-made clothes and fast fashion has significantly impacted their trade.

Despite the challenges, the shop remains a lifeline for a loyal clientele from diverse backgrounds. “I meet people from everywhere,” Raju says, his tone softening. It's a small joy in an otherwise demanding job.

One such customer is Rudina Ghanem, an Egyptian doctor, who frequently visits the shop for custom stitching and alterations, especially her profession's scrubs. “I'd go crazy if tailors didn't exist to bring my creative visions to life,” she said, emphasizing her love for fashion and personalizing her clothing to match Pinterest-inspired styles. The financial strain of running the

shop is constant. “Sometimes, after rent, there's not much left,” Raju admits, though he chooses not to dwell on it. Instead, he focuses on the work, navigating long hours with quiet determination, eating quick meals to make the most of the day. Jeevan, too, finds the hours grueling but familiar. “I start at nine and finish after 10 at night. It's just tailoring, all day.”

In the modest shop, every stitch, every rack of neatly hung clothes tell a story of perseverance. Though the well-worn sewing machine's hum may have grown quieter over the years, Raju and Jeevan's dedication remains steadfast, keeping the shop alive despite the odds.



Raju pours hot water into his teacup.



Inside a tailoring shop in Salmiya, two tailors at work surrounded by colorful threads and tools of the trade.



Mounmita Bhattacharya

Crafting success

Three expat women turn their passions into thriving jewelry businesses

By Alena Ann Vinod

In recent years, Kuwait has seen a remarkable shift in its business landscape, with small businesses at the forefront of this change. Among the trailblazers are three expat women – Mounmita Bhattacharya, Hema Aakute and Aaliya Sageer – who have built successful jewelry-making businesses in Kuwait with family and community support.

The loss of a source of income and her affinity for jewelry inspired Bhattacharya to start a small business. Despite caring for a newborn and her ailing father, she pressed on and overcame 14 years of obstacles, becoming a connoisseur of artificial jewelry.

The 46-year-old MBA Marketing graduate has created jewelry for major shows in Kuwait, participating in over 50 exhibitions organized by the Indian Embassy. With a particular focus on German silver and recyclable materials, she merges her passion for jewelry with environmental consciousness. "Every woman should follow their passions and do something for themselves," she said.

Aakute, a teacher, began creating jewelry as a hobby, intending to gift her creations to students and loved ones. When people offered to pay for her work, she decided to turn her hobby into a business. Aakute's journey is guided by a spiritual calling to bring joy to others and help the less fortunate through donations to orphanages and charities.

"Giving is such a big part: it can be anything – you give a smile, and you get that smile back, the happiness back,"



Aaliya Sageer

said Aakute, a mother of two. Her efforts have expanded to the point where stores now ask to sell her jewelry, and she is developing a website to reach customers across Kuwait.

Sageer's journey began during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. With her family's encouragement, the 21-year-old student started selling clay jewelry, inspired by anime, bakeries and fruit baskets. She noticed that aesthetically pleasing designs sold best and consistently improved her craft. "I've always been quick on my feet so I knew I could handle problems as they came," said Sageer.

Her father actively supported her by delivering products across Kuwait. "My dad would drive all over Kuwait on the weekends, helping me deliver the products. He got a commission for doing this, but he was happy to drive me around for free since he wanted to support me," she shared.

Family support played a vital role in the success of all three women. Bhattacharya's friends and family were her driving force during her 14-year journey, especially after becoming a mother and losing her father. Her business name commemorates her late father. Similarly, Sageer relied on her father's support in her early business days. For Aakute, her business allowed her to bond with her daughter, Grace, who photographs the jewelry and manages Instagram orders while her mother creates the pieces.

The three entrepreneurs emphasize that self-employment comes with its challenges. Bhattacharya highlighted the importance of perseverance, advising others to "always give your hundred percent!"

Bhattacharya, Aakute and Sageer shared their expertise with Kuwait Times, offering valuable insights into starting a small jewelry business.

To successfully launch such a venture, the initial investment can range from KD 50 to KD 350, depending on factors like materials, delivery methods, profit margins and packaging requirements. A home-based business can be effectively promoted through social media, particularly when offering personalized items that reflect individuality and originality.

The trio emphasized that a business can stem from any skill or passion, such as baking, drawing or other unique talents, as customers are drawn to authenticity and creativity. Establishing a business may take anywhere from a few months to several years, with word of mouth and social media promotions playing a pivotal role. They credit their success to the unwavering support of their loved ones.

Once the business is established, Bhattacharya, Aakute and Sageer advise focusing on attracting the target audience by staying updated with emerging jewelry designs and social media trends. Persistence is key, as business owners must experiment with strategies and products to find what resonates with customers. Offering bundle deals and discounts can also boost sales.

The trio agreed that networking and building strong connections are essential for business growth. Above all, they highlighted the importance of hard work, dedication and faith as the foundation for long-term success.



Hema Aakute

WHAT'S ON IN KUWAIT

Event: Ramadan Expo
Location: Arena - 360 Mall
Date: January 15-18, 2025



Event: TK Market
Location: Murouj
Date: January 16-18, 2025



Event: Deerah on the Roof
Location: Al-Assima Mall
Date: January 16-18, 2025
Time: 12:00 pm - 10:00 pm

Event: Adoption Day
Location: Petzone
Date: January 17, 2025
Time: 5 pm to 7 pm

Event: Charity Reading Marathon
Location: CAP Theater
Date: January 17-18, 2025
Time: 10 am

Event: Children's Planting Workshop
Location: Sadeer Farm
Date: January 17, 2025
Time: 2 pm



Event: Kids Club
Location: Art N Dine
Date: January 17-18, 2025
Time: 2 pm to 4 pm

Event: Eco Warrior beach clean up
Location: Abu Halifa Beach
Date: January 17, 2025
Time: 7 am

Event: Saad Al-Oud Musical Night
Location: City Steps - Al-Shaheed Park
Date: January 17, 2025
Time: 8:30 pm

Event: Flamenco show
Location: Fiesta City
Date: January 17-18, 2025



Event: Shakshuka Market
Location: Andalus Mall
Date: January 18, 2025
Time: 2 pm to 8 pm

Sports

Raptors upset Celtics, Rockets rout Nuggets

New York Knicks edge past 76ers 125-119 in an OT thriller

LOS ANGELES: R.J. Barrett scored 22 points as the lowly Toronto Raptors turned the tables on the Boston Celtics with a dominant 110-97 victory over the reigning NBA champions on Wednesday. The Raptors, who are languishing three places off the bottom of the Eastern Conference, grabbed only their 10th win of the season after stifling Boston's offense at the Scotiabank Arena.

Barrett spearheaded a balanced offensive display by Toronto, spreading the ball deftly as all five Raptors starters finished in double figures. The win came as sweet revenge for Toronto, who had been on the receiving end of a brutal 125-71 mauling by the Celtics in Boston on December 31.

"It was a tough loss for us in Boston," Raptors head coach Darko Rajakovic said afterwards. "This group is very connected and is a very prideful group—so we really wanted to go out there and compete at the highest level. Everybody contributed tonight."

Barrett, who also had 10 rebounds and eight assists, was given scoring support from Scottie Barnes with 18 points, while Jakob Poeltl finished with 16 points and 11 rebounds. The Raptors defense meanwhile kept Boston star Jayson Tatum quiet, restricting the Celtics ace to just 16 points from 5-of-15 shooting. Toronto improved to 10-31 in the Eastern Conference standings, while Boston dropped to 28-12 to fall 6.5 games behind leaders Cleveland (34-5) at the top of the table.

Nuggets struggle

Elsewhere Wednesday, the Denver Nuggets were humbled 128-108 at home by the high-flying Houston Rockets in a lopsided Western Conference duel. The Nuggets suffered a blow before tip-off when three-time NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic was ruled out with an elbow injury during the warm-up.

With Aaron Gordon (call) also missing, Houston rammed home their advantage to score a wire-to-wire victory. Jalen Green led the Rockets scoring with 34 points including six three-pointers. Houston's fifth straight win leaves them in second place in the West on 27-12.

Denver coach Michael Malone said his team had failed to rise to the challenge following the injury absences of Jokic and Gordon. "When you're without your starting power forward and center, against a team sitting No.2 in the Western Conference, you've got to play damn near perfect," Malone said. "And we were definitely far from that tonight. Just a disappointing night overall."

In other games on Wednesday, Stephen Curry drained seven three-pointers in a 31-point performance to help the Golden State Warriors grind out a 116-115 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves in Minneapolis. In Philadelphia, Jalen Brunson's 38-point masterpiece helped the New York Knicks edge past the 76ers 125-119 in an overtime thriller at the Wells Fargo Center.

Mikal Bridges added 23 points while Josh Hart delivered a triple double comprised of 10 points, 17 rebounds and 12 assists, with four steals thrown in for good measure. The Knicks improved to 27-15 to remain third in the East while the Sixers, missing the injured Joel Embiid once again, fell to 15-24, just outside the playoff berths.

In San Antonio, Victor Wembanyama produced a monster defensive performance but it was not enough to prevent the Spurs suffering a 129-115 defeat to the Memphis Grizzlies. French star Wembanyama made eight blocks and hauled down 12 rebounds in vain as the Grizzlies remained in third place in the Western Conference on 26-15, eight games adrift of leaders Oklahoma City (33-6).

Ja Morant was the Grizzlies' talisman, finishing with 21 points, 12 assists and four rebounds.



DENVER: Jalen Green #4 of the Houston Rockets drives against DeAndre Jordan #6 of the Denver Nuggets in the third quarter at Ball Arena in Denver, Colorado. — AFP

Desmond Bane also had 21 points for the visitors. In New Orleans, Dejounte Murray's 30 points propelled the Pelicans to a 119-116 win over the depleted Dallas Mavericks, who remain without injured stars Kyrie Irving and Luka Doncic. The Milwaukee Bucks cruised past the Orlando Magic 122-93 to maintain their impressive recent run of form, Damian Lillard scoring 30 points and Gi-

annis Antetokounmpo 26.

In Los Angeles, there were contrasting victories for the Clippers and Lakers over the Brooklyn Nets and Miami Heat respectively. The Clippers crushed the Nets 126-67 while the Lakers rallied from a 14-point first-half deficit to score a 117-108 win, with LeBron James and Anthony Davis bagging 22 points apiece. — AFP

Blackhawks, facing Predators, pursue rare road win

CHICAGO: As the losses pile up, frustration continues to consume the Chicago Blackhawks. Meanwhile, the Nashville Predators still are trying to find ways to win games consistently. The Blackhawks look to avoid a fourth consecutive overall defeat—and seventh straight on the road—when they face the Predators on Thursday.

Owner of a league-low 30 points, Chicago has dropped nine of the past 11 games, and even young star Connor Bedard has not been able to spark the rebuilding squad. Bedard scored to record his 100th career point Monday against the Calgary Flames, but the Blackhawks took a 5-2 home defeat.

Chicago has allowed 14 goals during its current three-game skid. The Blackhawks' 28 regulation losses are the most in the league. "It's been hard," said Bedard, who has five goals and eight assists in the past 11 games. "It's been a lot of games to lose. It weighs on you."

Bedard, who owns team-leading totals of assists (27) and points (39), is not ready to start placing blame on his teammates. "We're all in this as one, and we've got a lot of work to do, obviously," Bedard added.

Bedard gave the Blackhawks a 2-0 lead with his second-period goal against visiting Nashville on Oct. 25. However, the Predators followed with three unanswered goals for a 3-2 victory. That triumph came in the middle of Nashville's season-high three-game winning streak. The Predators, five points ahead of Chicago, are 7-6-1 since a devastating 0-5-3 slide, but only twice have they strung together back-to-back wins during the current positive stretch.

They will have a chance to do it again on Thursday, two nights after earning a 5-3 victory over the visiting Vegas Golden Knights. Steven Stamkos scored twice and added an assist for Nashville, which matched its season high for goals while also recording the franchise's 1,000th all-time victory.

"There's definitely a belief that when we do the things we're capable of doing and we stay connected, we can play with anybody," Predators coach Andrew Brunette said. Even with the offensive breakout on Tuesday, Nashville ranks next to last in the league with an average of 2.47 goals, better than only the Anaheim Ducks (2.41). Right ahead of the Predators are the Blackhawks (2.55).

Stamkos, sitting on 99 career multi-goal games, is now tied with Jonathan Marchessault for the team lead with 14 goals apiece. Nashville backup goalie Justus Annunen (2.88 goals-against average) stopped 19 of 22 shots vs. Vegas. Juuse Saros could be back in Nashville's net to face the Blackhawks even though he has allowed 15 goals while losing four of his last five games.

Meanwhile, Chicago's Petr Mrazek (3.25 GAA) has yielded at least four goals in seven of his past eight starts. Backup Arvid Soderblom has allowed a total of 10 while losing each of his past two starts. Chicago's netminders continue to be plagued by poor defense in front of them.

The club concedes 3.45 goals per contest, which ranks 30th in the NHL. Embattled veteran defenseman Seth Jones was a minus-4 against Calgary. Nashville star Filip Forsberg has scored a goal in three straight games, and he has seven points in the past five contests. He scored against the Blackhawks in October. — Reuters

Olympic push for kho kho, India's ancient tag sport

NEW DELHI: The ancient game of kho kho is enjoying a resurgence in India, with organizers of the first international tournament hoping their efforts will secure the sport's place in the Olympics.

Kho kho, a catch-me-if-you-can tag sport, has been played for more than 2,000 years across southern Asia but only saw its rules formalized in the early 20th century. It was played as a demonstration sport at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin but did not gather enough support to be included in the Summer Games and since then has been largely eclipsed by India's ferocious love of cricket.

Nearly a century later, enthusiasts have sought to raise its profile with the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup featuring teams from 23 nations competing in India's capital New Delhi. The tournament's opening ceremony saw a gala of song, dance and an Olympic-style team parade, reflecting the aspirations of organizers and athletes to take the sport global.

"My elder sister played the sport, but was not able to pursue her dreams," Indian women's team player Nasreen Shaikh, 26, told AFP. "We have crossed the first barrier of playing in a World Cup. The next big step would be an entry in the Olympics." Kho kho is traditionally played outside on a rectangular court, divided in two by a line that connects two poles at either end of the field. Teams switch between attack and defence, with the former chasing and tagging defending players around the field.

Only one player can give chase at a time and attacking players can only move in one direction around the court, forcing them to tag in team-mates crouched on the center line to take over pursuit. The match is won by whichever team can gain the most points, primarily by tagging defenders faster than the opposing team.

'Mud to mat'

The franchise-based Ultimate Kho Kho League, founded in 2022, brought the sport off grassy fields and onto indoor mats, also boosting its profile with a television audience. Since then the league has become the third most-watched non-cricket sports tournament in the world's most populous country after the Pro Kabaddi

Pakistan, Windies seek to improve from Test Championship lows

MULTAN: Pakistan and West Indies vowed a strong finish when they meet in the first Test in Multan on Friday despite dragging up the rear of the World Test Championship. Pakistan are currently eighth in the 2023-25 cycle of the WTC, with their rivals in last place far behind finalists Australia and South Africa.

Skipper Shan Masood said the two-test series was significant for Pakistan, who finished sixth and seventh in the first two WTC cycles. "This cycle is finishing so this series is significant for us as we want to become a better team by being unbeaten in home conditions," he told reporters on Thursday.

Pakistan ended a winless stretch of 11 home Tests by beating England 2-1 in October and Masood wants his team to keep winning at home despite a 2-0 defeat in South Africa this month. "We won against England so it will be important we keep that momentum against the West Indies," Masood said.

West Indies finished eighth in both previous WTCs and skipper Kraigg Brathwaite wants to end on a positive note this time. "I think this series is very important with two Tests left in this cycle... so we want to start the year strong and that is our focus," Brathwaite said.

He said his players are ready for Pakistan's spin assault led by Noman Ali and Sajid Khan, who took 39 wickets between them against England. "We have played in spin conditions in Bangladesh and these conditions are similar, so you have to be disciplined



NEW DELHI: In this photograph taken on January 8, 2025, Pratik Waikar (C), captain of India's men's kho kho team, takes part in selection trials ahead of the upcoming Kho Kho World Cup in New Delhi. The ancient game of kho kho is enjoying a resurgence in India, with organizers of the first international tournament hoping their efforts will secure the sport's place in the Olympics. — AFP

League—another ancient Indian tag sport—and the Indian Super League football competition. "The turning point was when it transitioned from mud to mat. It made it into a global game," Kho Kho Federation of India president Sudhanshu Mittal told AFP.

"Today we are in 55 countries... Native players in countries like Germany, Brazil, and Kenya are embracing the game because of its speed, agility and minimal equipment required," Mittal said he expected the sport to gain a foothold in dozens more countries by the end of the year, giving it a strong claim to be featured in the Olympics in the coming decade. That would coincide with India's audacious bid to host the 2036 Games in the city of Ahmedabad, 100 years after kho kho last appeared at the Olympics. The United

League, England and Australia are among the nations competing in this week's World Cup in New Delhi, with expatriate Indians heavily represented after taking the game to foreign shores. But Pakistan is a glaring omission from the competition despite the sport being popular there—a reflection of the deep animosity between the nuclear-armed archrivals.

World Cup organizers have refused to comment on the absence, which has failed to dim the sense of optimism at this week's competition that the sport is destined to thrive. "There has been a sea change in the sport," Indian men's team captain Pratik Waikar, 32, told AFP. "Cricket has a rich history and they developed it well by going live on TV, and now our sport has also gone live," he said. "In the next five years it will be on another level." — AFP

Norman replaced as CEO of LIV Golf

MIAMI: Australian Greg Norman has been replaced as chief executive of LIV Golf, the Saudi-backed league announced on Wednesday. LIV announced that experienced sports executive Scott O'Neil was taking over from former British Open winner Norman in the role.

"O'Neil will drive the strategic vision, business operations, and global growth for the league, its 13 teams and roster of world-class golfers, and its efforts to drive positive impact," LIV Golf said in a statement. "Greg Norman, who has been instrumental to the launch of LIV Golf as its first CEO and Commissioner, will hand off day-to-day management, but will remain involved with LIV Golf," the league added.

Norman, 69, has been a polarizing figure in the rift between the established PGA Tour and the start-up LIV Golf which is owned by the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF). Leading PGA Tour player Rory McIlroy had said in 2022 that Norman "needs to go" if there was to be a reunification of the sport.

A controversial framework merger agreement was announced in June 2023 by US PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan but despite an easing of tensions between the warring factions no deal has been finalized with the PIF headed by Yasir Al-Rumayyan.

O'Neil, 54, has been working as CEO of Merlin Entertainments and previously was CEO for Harris Blitzer Sports & Entertainment. "On behalf of the Board of Directors, we welcome Scott to the LIV Golf family, knowing he will capitalize on everything that has been accomplished over the past three years," said LIV Golf Board Chairman Al-Rumayyan. — AFP



MULTAN: West Indies' captain Kraigg Brathwaite (R) and his Pakistani counterpart Shan Masood pose with the Test series trophy at the Multan Cricket Stadium in Multan on January 16, 2025, on the eve of their first Test cricket match. — AFP

and be brave against any bowler," Brathwaite said. Pakistan deployed industrial fans and patio heaters to dry out the Multan pitch and secure their series win against England after heavy rain. They are ready to use the same tactic again if needed, with the second Test also to be played in Multan from January 25.

The tourists had a taste of those conditions in their drawn three-day practice game in Islamabad, where Alick Athanaze hit half centuries in both innings and newcomer Amir Jangoo scored an unbeaten 63.

West Indies used a three-prong spin attack of Kevin Sinclair, Jomel Warrican and Gudakesh Motie in that match but will be without pace spearhead Kemar Roach, who is unwell. Wicketkeeper-batter Joshua Da Silva was overlooked. — AFP

Sports

Yamal drives dominant Barca past Betis into Copa del Rey quarters

Atletico Madrid win their 15th consecutive match across all competitions

BARCELONA: Lamine Yamal put on a spectacular show as Barcelona sailed into the Copa del Rey quarter-finals with a dazzling 5-1 victory over Real Betis on Wednesday. Atletico Madrid joined them in the last eight with a 4-0 win at second division Elche, their 15th consecutive triumph across all competitions. Barca's 17-year-old starlet Yamal scored and helped create two more goals as Hansi Flick's side ran riot at the Olympic Stadium.

Gavi sent Barcelona ahead early on, with Jules Kounde, Raphinha, Ferran Torres and Yamal helping the Catalans rack up an impressive win. After winning the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia last weekend by thrashing Real Madrid, Barca came into the cup clash with restored confidence, having stuttered in the final weeks of 2024.

"We have to continue like this," said Barca defender Pau Cubarsi, also 17, who came through the club's youth academy with Yamal. "I've been enjoying watching him for many years, now the whole world is, and he deserves it all."

Barca dominated from the off against Betis, despite the coach resting a couple of key players including striker Robert Lewandowski. Dani Olmo, whom Barcelona controversially obtained a temporary playing license for last week, started at false nine in place of the Polish veteran.

The Spaniard helped create the opening goal at the sharp end of a neat team move, with Gavi tucking home in the second minute. Olmo fired over and hit the post during a particularly busy opening period for the former RB Leipzig playmaker.

Kounde smashed in Barcelona's second after the sublime Yamal dinked a ball through to him on the right of the box. It was an area the Catalans exploited time after time, with Kounde's second goal from a similar position disallowed for a marginal offside. At

the other end goalkeeper Inaki Pena made a fine save to deny Vitor Roque, on loan at Betis from Barcelona.

Gavi 'big talent'

Early in the second half Yamal, who taunted Betis' defence throughout, finished clinically after Frenkie De Jong lobbed the ball through to him on the right of the box, but it was disallowed for an offside in the build-up.

Minutes later Barcelona scored their third anyway, with Yamal's surging run from deep in his own half ending up with his deflected effort falling to Raphinha, who struck. Barcelona netted their fourth when, again exploiting the same part of Betis' area, Olmo chipped a pass to substitute Ferran Torres to finish emphatically.

Yamal finally got on the scoresheet himself after breaking in from the right wing and finishing at the near post. Roque pulled one back from the penalty spot in the final stages for Betis after Kounde stood on Jesus Rodriguez's foot in the penalty area.

Gavi said after the game Yamal was the best player in the world after former Barca forward Lionel Messi, and Flick also praised the winger. "Gavi's very emotional, so I say also yes (he's the best)," joked Flick. "You can see it, in great matches you see big talent and he showed it many many times, he's on a good (path)." Yamal, who shone for Spain as they won Euro 2024 last summer, has nine goals and 13 assists across all competitions for Barcelona this season.

Atletico coach Diego Simeone rested some of his regular starters, including Antoine Griezmann, as his team ran out comfortable winners at Elche to continue their winning streak. Alexander Sorloth struck twice for the Rojiblancos in the first half, and the visitors were further bolstered when Elche's Nico Fer-



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Spanish forward #07 Ferran Torres (2R) scores his team's fourth goal during the Spanish Copa del Rey (King's Cup) last 16 first leg football match between FC Barcelona and Real Betis at the Estadi Olímpic Lluís Companys in Barcelona on January 15, 2025. — AFP

nandez was sent off early in the second half.

Rodrigo Riquelme extended Atletico's lead with a fine strike from distance and Julian Alvarez rounded

off the rout. On Thursday Spanish champions Real Madrid host Celta Vigo and cup holders Athletic Bilbao welcome Osasuna. — AFP

Red-hot Omar Marmoush has Frankfurt flying

BERLIN: With half a season played, red-hot Omar Marmoush has put Eintracht Frankfurt on course for a first top-four finish in over 30 years and placed Europe's elite clubs on high alert. The Egyptian's stunning 2024-25 -- he sits one behind top scorer Harry Kane in the Bundesliga with 15 goals, along with 10 assists, in 17 league games—has led to speculation of a winter move to faltering English champions Manchester City.

In Europe's top-five leagues, his 25 goal contributions rank second only behind countryman Mohamed Salah, who has 31, having played three games more. Third-placed Frankfurt host Borussia Dortmund on Friday and sit eight points ahead of last season's Champions League finalists.

Frankfurt last finished in the top four in 1992-93 and risk being a victim of Marmoush's success should the 25-year-old move on. While Marmoush has been in Germany since 2017, there is no question he has had a move to one of Europe's big guns on his mind.

Marmoush 'thriving'

Born in Cairo in 1999, Marmoush stood out early in the academy of club Wadi Degla. At just 17, he was promoted to the first team and joined Wolfsburg's reserves a year later. At Wolfsburg, Marmoush initially struggled for consistency and game time, resulting in loans to St Pauli and Stuttgart.

He also struggled to adapt to life in Germany. Unable to speak German, Marmoush recalls standing near the counter at coffee shops and waiting until he saw the order he wanted, before pointing and telling the waiter he wanted the same.

Marmoush's agent told AFP these initial struggles laid a foundation for his achievements. "Marmoush's command of German, French and English has greatly contributed to his success. He is thriving at Eintracht Frankfurt," said Ahmed Abdoun. "The Bundesliga has always been a stepping stone to the big leagues like the Premier League or La Liga. If



FRANKFURT: Frankfurt's Egyptian forward #07 Omar Marmoush (L) vies with Freiburg's Austrian defender #03 Philipp Lienhart during the German first division Bundesliga football match between Eintracht Frankfurt and SC Freiburg in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

there are any offers, we will discuss them with the club and make the best decision."

No 'new Salah'

In 2021, the same year he made his Wolfsburg first team debut, Marmoush—who was also eligible to play for Canada through his father—received his first Egypt call up. Making his international debut alongside Liverpool superstar Salah, Marmoush scored the winning goal against Libya in AFCON qualifying.

After moving to Frankfurt on a free transfer ahead of the 2023-24 season, Marmoush scored 12 goals in 29 league games. He continued to improve this season. After scoring the equaliser in a 3-3 home draw with Bayern Munich in October, visiting coach Vincent Kompany praised the forward.

There was no such reprieve for Lyon, however, who were sent crashing out when they were beaten 4-2 on penalties by another fifth-tier team Bourgoin-Jallieu. With Espaly moving the game to the Stade Marcel-Michelin in Clermont-Ferrand, home of the far more famous rugby team, PSG struggled from the start, conceding a goal in the third minute to Kevis Gjeci.

The Parisians levelled through Warren Zaire-Emery eight minutes before half time before Desire Doue put the champions in front in the 67th minute. That should have been it but Maxence Fournel equalized for the part-timers four minutes later, rais-

ing the prospect of a penalty shootout lottery. Barcola, however, broke Espaly hearts, when he put PSG ahead in the 88th minute with Ramos sealing their passage four minutes later from the penalty spot. PSG coach Luis Enrique congratulated his opposite number Lionel Vaillant and his team but criticized the quality of the pitch.

"I'm not looking for excuses but we played on a rugby pitch, with the ball bouncing all over the place," he said. "We need to be able to play everywhere and we're delighted that this competition exists, but for everyone's sake, the conditions need to be better." — AFP

Atalanta's title challenge at crossroads

MILAN: Atalanta's bid for a first Serie A title will come in for a huge test on Saturday when the plucky provincial upstarts host league leaders Napoli, while Inter Milan lurk in an intriguing three-way Scudetto battle. Gian Piero Gasperini's side are unbeaten in 15 league matches but three consecutive draws have left the ambitious outfit from Bergamo four points behind Napoli ahead of this weekend's big match at the Gewiss Stadium.

Napoli's visit comes after Atalanta were held to a 1-1 draw by Juventus on Tuesday night, a brilliant match but disappointing result which leaves an unprecedented challenge for a league crown somewhat in the balance.

Gasperini admitted after the Juve draw that Atalanta's Scudetto hopes had reached a "crossroads", as defeat on Saturday night would leave Atalanta some way off the pace. "We're also at a crossroads in the Champions League, so if we're going to aim for anything then let's aim for that," said Gasperini, whose team also face Sturm Graz and Barcelona in consecutive weeks.

A boost for Atalanta comes in the shape of Mateo Retegui who was back with a bang on Tuesday night, nodding home a classic poacher's goal shortly after returning as a substitute from a hamstring injury. The 25-year-old may start on the bench on Saturday but will be key for Atalanta as they try to both stay in touch with Napoli and get direct qualification to the last 16 of the Champions League. Napoli meanwhile are on a run of five straight wins coming into the weekend, and Antonio Conte's rebuild job has benefitted from his team having no midweek European football due to the disastrous nature of their title defence last season.

Conte has already mentally said goodbye to wing wizard and the star of Napoli's historic third title Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, who is set to move to Paris Saint-Germain in the January transfer window. With Scudetto-winning coach Luciano Spalletti, Kim Min-jae, Victor Osimhen (albeit for now on loan), Piotr Zielinski and now Kvaratskhelia out of the picture, a new era has officially begun at Napoli.

Possibly the biggest threat to Conte winning Serie A with a third team is his former club Inter, although the reigning champions' 2-2 draw with Bologna on Wednesday left them three points off the pace with a game in hand. Inter have France striker Marcus Thuram back from injury for Sunday's home clash with Empoli but will still be without midfield lynchpin Hakan Calhanoglu, whose absence was keenly felt both against Bologna and in last weekend's narrow win at Venezia. — 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
Cher Hospital	24849700
Farwanaya 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) **Sayeedi**.
(#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**.
(#6622) 16/01/2025

Arsenal reignite Premier League title charge as Isak stars again

Arsenal's victory at Emirates lifts them four points behind Liverpool



LONDON: Arsenal's Belgian midfielder #19 Leandro Trossard (R) fights for the ball with Tottenham Hotspur's teammates during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur at the Emirates Stadium in London. — AFP

LONDON: Arsenal came from behind to beat Tottenham 2-1 and reignite their Premier League title challenge on Wednesday as Alexander Isak fired Newcastle into the top four. Elsewhere, David Moyes endured a miserable return to the Everton dugout, watching his toothless side lose 1-0 to Aston Villa at Goodison Park.

Arsenal's victory at the Emirates lifts them four points behind Liverpool, who drew 1-1 with Nottingham Forest on Tuesday, and ends a winless run of three matches in all competitions. Son Heung-min gave Tottenham the lead in the 25th minute but the home side were level 15 minutes later when Gabriel's header from a corner rebounded off Dominic Solanke for an own goal.

The turnaround was complete just before half-time when Leandro Trossard blasted home across new Spurs goalkeeper Antonin Kinsky. Arsenal squandered a series of chances to increase their lead and breathed a sigh of relief when Pedro Porro hit the post deep into stoppage time.

Mikel Arteta's team are now on 43

points after 21 matches, four points behind Liverpool, who have a game in hand. The Arsenal boss his team were "outstanding". "We had some big chances and big situations. At the end we had to suffer more than we wanted," he told the BBC.

"When you have opportunities (to close the gap) you have to take them. We are on a really consistent run in the Premier League. It's about recovery tomorrow and Aston Villa on Saturday, going and going." But defeat is another bitter blow for injury-ravaged Tottenham, who have now taken just five points from a possible 27 over their past nine Premier League games and have slumped to 13th in the table. "Nowhere near good enough, especially in the first half. We were too passive," said Tottenham boss Ange Postecoglou.

Record-chasing Isak

Red-hot Isak found the net for the eighth league match in a row in a 3-0 win over Wolves as Newcastle leapfrogged faltering Chelsea into fourth spot in the table. The

Swedish international put the home side ahead in the 34th minute when his shot took a huge deflection off Wolves defender Rayan Ait-Nouri, leaving Jose Sa wrong-footed.

Isak doubled Newcastle's lead shortly before the hour mark, controlling Bruno Guimarães' pass before firing home for his 15th league goal of the season and Anthony Gordon added a third. "I feel amazing," said Isak, who has Jamie Vardy's record of scoring in 11 straight Premier League games in his sights.

"Individually I feel free and confident but looking at the team we are doing so well as well, defending and with threats going forward. It is a team and I have to keep contributing with goals." Aston Villa's Ollie Watkins broke the deadlock at Goodison Park in the 51st minute, slotting past England teammate Jordan Pickford after he was sent clear by Morgan Rogers. Everton huffed and puffed but showed a lack of creativity—unsurprising for a team who have scored just 15 league goals in their 20 matches this season.

The result lifts Unai Emery's Villa to seventh in the table but Everton remain in deep

trouble, just one point above the relegation zone in 16th spot. The Liverpool club's new owners, the American-based Friedkin Group, sacked Sean Dyche last week and brought back 61-year-old Moyes, who enjoyed success during an 11-year stint at Goodison Park from 2002 to 2013.

But the Toffees, ever-present in the top flight since 1954, have battled relegation for the past three seasons and are once again in deep trouble. "Obviously it's been a bit of a whirlwind," Moyes said. "Sean Dyche left a group of players that have great character and a great attitude."

"I'm really pleased to take over that. What I need to do is add quality and find a way of getting results but you can't change the whole thing around straight away." Ruud van Nistelrooy's Leicester suffered their sixth straight league defeat, losing 2-0 to Crystal Palace to leave the Foxes second from bottom. Jean-Philippe Mateta put the visitors ahead early in the second half and Marc Guehi made the points safe with a late second. — AFP

Inter's title defence slowed by draw with spirited Bologna

MILAN: Inter Milan missed the chance to take charge of the Serie A title race on Wednesday after being held to a 2-2 home draw by Bologna.

A win would have moved reigning champions Inter one point behind league leaders Napoli with a game in hand, and they looked to be doing so when Lautaro Martinez fired the hosts ahead on the stroke of half-time from Federico Dimarco's perfect low cross

But Emil Holm's wildly deflected finish in the 64th minute gave Bologna—who also took a 15th-minute lead through Santiago Castro but were quickly pegged back by Denzel Dumfries—a fully deserved draw at the San Siro and left Inter three points behind Napoli.

"We played well... their equalizer came from a big deflection and we had chances to win it. We're disappointed to not get the three points but you can only respect our opposition tonight," said Inter coach Simone Inzaghi.

Inter still have a game in hand, their match with Fiorentina which was stopped for Edoardo Bove's on-pitch heart attack and is yet to be rescheduled. But Wednesday night's fixture was a perfect opportunity to pile pressure on both Napoli and third-placed Atalanta, who face off in Bergamo on Saturday.

Atalanta are a point behind Inter and under pres-



MILAN: Bologna's Polish goalkeeper #01 Lukasz Skorupski saves a goal chance by Inter Milan's French forward #09 Marcus Thuram (L) during the Italian Serie A football match between Inter Milan and Bologna at the San Siro Stadium in Milan. — AFP

sure to beat Napoli following three straight draws, while Inter host Empoli on Sunday. Bologna meanwhile are firmly in the race for Champions League qualification as Vincenzo Italiano continues to get good performances out of his new team.

"It's a good point after a really good display, it's a real point of pride to leave the San Siro without defeat," said Italiano to DAZN. "We leave here with our heads held high because we managed to put out on the pitch what we'd planned."

Bologna, who reached Europe's elite club competition under Thiago Motta last season, are six points behind fourth-placed Lazio but with a game in hand against AC Milan still to play. — AFP

Sinner roars back in Melbourne

MELBOURNE: World number one and defending champion Jannik Sinner roared back to surge into the Australian Open third round on Thursday as Iga Swiatek set up a showdown with Emma Raducanu.

Taylor Fritz was an emphatic winner in his pursuit of a maiden major title but exciting 18-year-old Joao Fonseca was edged out in a five-set thriller. Daniil Medvedev, beaten in the Melbourne final last year by Sinner, faces Learner Tien, 19, of the United States in a later match.

Sinner dropped a set for the first time in 14 matches when he lost the opener to Australian wildcard Tristan Schoolkate. But he wrested back control after a slow start to go through 4-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-3 against the world number 173 at a cool and breezy Rod Laver Arena. It was Sinner's 16th consecutive victory in an ominous sign for next opponent Marcos Giron. "It's always tough to play against someone I don't know very well. He was playing much better than I was at the beginning," said the Italian, 23, who also won the US Open last year.

"I have to be very happy with my performance and never take things for granted. Very glad to be in the next round. "I can improve, yes, but I'll take it." Fritz swept through to a third-round clash against Gael Monfils with a brutal display of power hitting and has dropped just eight games in the tournament so far. The American fourth seed was untouchable on Margaret Court Arena, swatting aside Chilean qualifier Cristian Garin 6-2, 6-1, 6-0 in 82 minutes. Fritz only gave up five games to blitz past Jenson Brooksby in the first round and has spent barely three hours on court. — AFP

Kuwait Archery Club holds annual contest for late Sheikh Ali

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Archery Club organized on Thursday the annual championship of the late Sheikh Ali Al-Sabah for the season (2024-2025) at the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Ranges Complex, with the participation of archers from Kuwait.



Duajj Al-Otaibi

Club President Duajj Al-Otaibi said in a press statement on this occasion that the tournament includes six competitions in (lead and (bow and arrow) shooting for men, women, junior and junior categories.

He added that the competitions will be (pistol air pressure 10 meters), (rifle air pressure 10 meters), (pistol 25 meters), (rifle 50 meters), (Olympic bow and arrow) and (compound bow and arrow), explaining that the opening day will be for official training, and the finals will be held tomorrow, and on Saturday.

He pointed out that the technical and administrative bodies at the club started preparing early to organize this major event by setting the timetables for training and competitions, in addition to preparing the club's ranges and providing special supplies for archers and shooters.

Al-Otaibi pointed out that the tournament is an important station for the shooters of the Kuwaiti national team in these disciplines to be fully prepared and ready for the upcoming international competitions, expressing his hope that all participating shooters will present distinguished levels in the tournament.

He stated that this tournament has a special place in the Kuwaiti shooting family because of the deceased's distinguished contributions to the development of Kuwaiti shooting sports, thanking the family of the deceased for their keenness to hold the tournament annually. — KUNA