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TRUMP BACK IN CHARGE

Republican pledges 'golden age' • Amir sends congratulations • Biden pardons dozens

KUWAIT MAKES HUGE HYDROCARBONS FIND



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace on Monday Oil Minister Tareq Al-Roumi, Chief Executive Officer Kuwait Petroleum Corporation Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah and the CEO of Kuwait Oil Company Ahmad Jaber Al-Eidan. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Company announced on Monday the discovery of commercial volumes of hydrocarbons in the maritime Al-Julaia field, located within Kuwait's territorial waters. KOC said in a statement to KUNA that the discovery is the latest of a series of continuous discoveries, solidifying Kuwait's status as a major producer of oil and gas in the region, in implementation of the exploration strategy in Kuwait's maritime region. It added that tests at Al-Zubair geological trap (from the Cretaceous period) at the well Julaia-2 forecast feasible productivity. Stretching across a 74-sq-km plot of land, it harbors 800 million barrels of medium-density oil free from hydrogen sulfur gas with low proportion of carbon dioxide, in addition to 600 billion standard cubic feet of associate gas, equivalent to some 950 million barrels of oil. The discovery is a significant addition to hydrocarbons in Kuwait, the statement said, indicating that it would boost forecasts of more discoveries dating back to the same period, noting that the Al-Julaia field is the second in the current exploration plan after the discovery of the Al-Nokhaza maritime field in July 2024. — KUNA



WASHINGTON: Donald Trump is sworn in as the 47th US President in the US Capitol Rotunda on Jan 20, 2025. — AFP

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump pronounced the start of a "golden age" in the United States after taking the oath for a historic second term as president on Monday, using his inaugural speech to lash out at what he described as a "broken" society that he would rescue. "The golden age of America begins right now. From this day forward our country will flourish and be respected again all over the world," Trump said in the US Capitol, where his inauguration was held indoors due to chilly weather. While promising renewal, Trump's tone was characteristically dark, denouncing what he said had been a "betrayal" of Americans by a "radical and corrupt establishment". "For many years, a radical and corrupt establishment has extracted power and wealth from our citizens, while the pillars of our society lay broken and seemingly in complete disrepair," he said. "From this moment on, America's decline is over." HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Monday a cable of congratulations to Trump on assuming power. In the cable, HH the Amir expressed sincere congratulations to Trump on his inauguration as US leader, commending the historic deep-rooted ties between Kuwait and the United States. HH the Amir affirmed that he looks forward to enhancing friendship bonds and cooperation in all fields between the two friendly countries to serve their nations in light of the strategic partnership. HH the Amir wished Trump everlasting well-being and success, and further progress and prosperity to the US. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent congratulatory cables to Trump. The Republican — at 78 now the oldest person ever to take the presidential oath — was set to kickstart his new term with a blitz of immediate orders on immigration and the US culture wars. **Continued on Page 6**

Tech billionaires take center stage at inauguration

WASHINGTON: US tech multibillionaires — including Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos — were given prime positions at Donald Trump's inauguration on Monday, in an unprecedented demonstration of their power and influence in the White House. The tech tycoons, whose companies are among the world's most valuable, have spent the ten weeks since the election courting favor with Trump, marking a dramatic shift from Silicon Valley's more hostile response to his first term four years ago. Attendees also included Apple CEO Tim Cook and Google CEO Sundar Pichai, along with the search engine's founder Sergey Brin. TikTok CEO Shou Chew sat in the back row of the stage, even as his platform's future remains uncertain. TikTok on Sunday credited Trump for promising an executive order to save the app from a US ban, though its fate in the United States remains unclear while under Chinese company ByteDance's ownership, in defiance of a US law. **Continued on Page 6**



(Left) Palestinian prisoner Baraa Fuqaha (right), is welcomed by relatives upon the arrival of some 90 prisoners set free by the Zionist entity in the early hours of Jan 20, 2025 in the occupied West Bank town of Beitunia on the outskirts of Ramallah. (Right) A man carries a ladder while walking on a building's rubble in a ruined neighbourhood of Gaza's southern city of Rafah on Jan 20, 2025, as residents return following a ceasefire deal. — AFP photos



Hamas vows Gaza will rise; truce holds; martyrs top 47,000

GAZA: A fragile ceasefire in the Zionist-Hamas war was holding Monday, following the exchange of three Zionist captives for 90 Palestinian prisoners in an agreement aimed at ending more than 15 months of war in Gaza. At least 47,035 Palestinians have been killed and 111,091 injured in the Zionist military offensive on Gaza since Oct 7, 2023, the Gaza health ministry said on Monday. The ministry added that in the past 24 hours, 60 people were

killed and another 62 bodies were recovered. The war has devastated much of the Palestinian territory and displaced the vast majority of its population of 2.4 million, but Hamas on Monday vowed that Gaza and its people would "rise again". "Gaza, with its great people and its resilience, will rise again to rebuild what the occupation has destroyed," Hamas said in a statement. The three Zionist captives released Sunday, all women, were reunited with their families and taken to hospital, where a doctor said they were in stable condition. Hours later in the Zionist-occupied West Bank, Palestinian prisoners released by the Zionist entity left Ofer prison on buses, with jubilant crowds celebrating their arrival. As the ceasefire took effect, thousands of displaced, war-weary Palestinians set off across the devastated Gaza Strip to return home. If all goes according to plan, the first phase of the truce would last six weeks during which the parties would negotiate a permanent ceasefire, which has not been agreed yet. Despite the risks, hundreds of Palestinians were streaming through an apocalyptic landscape in Jabalia in northern Gaza, one of the worst-hit areas in the war. "We are finally in our home. There is no home left, just rubble, but it's our home," said Rana Mohsen, 43. The initial 42-day truce was brokered by mediators Qatar, the United States and Egypt. It should enable a surge of sorely needed humanitarian aid into Gaza, as more Zionist captives are released in exchange for Palestinians in Zionist custody and Zionist forces leave some areas. During the initial phase of the truce, 33 Zionist hostages **Continued on Page 6**

Kuwait, Canada mark 60 years of diplomatic relations

Officials highlight strong ties, emphasizing cooperation in healthcare, education

In my view

Mel Gibson and cancer

Dr Khalid A Al-Saleh

local@kuwaittimes.com

Health and illness are central to human life. Health signifies strength and hope, while illness represents weakness and challenges. To preserve health and combat disease, billions of dollars are invested in medical science and research, with millions of professionals dedicating their lives to this field. It's no surprise that a universal greeting often includes inquiries about health.

A few days ago, I watched a video that garnered over six million views worldwide in just four days. This video, circulating on YouTube, featured a lengthy interview conducted by comedian and podcast host Joe Rogan with American actor Mel Gibson. The interview spanned two hours and 20 minutes, during which Gibson shared his life philosophy and delved into metaphysics — the study of the supernatural.

In the 95th minute, Gibson shifted the conversation to health and illness, focusing on cancer, a chronic and well-known disease. To spark interest and provoke discussion, he claimed that several acquaintances in the advanced fourth stage of cancer had allegedly recovered by using ivermectin and albendazole — medications traditionally used to treat parasites, with ivermectin also being controversially linked to COVID-19 treatment. He also mentioned methylene blue, a drug typically employed as a dye to track cancer cells or treat high levels of methemoglobin in the blood, rather than as a direct treatment for cancer.

Such statements should not be taken seriously, as Gibson is not a medical professional. Cancer patients following his claims could potentially face harm or even hold him legally accountable. It's especially concerning when such unverified claims come from a prominent figure who may influence others.

Rogan, in turn, expanded on Gibson's comments by discussing the connection between methylene blue and mitochondria — the cellular organelles responsible for generating energy. Research in this area focuses on neurodegenerative diseases and metabolic improvement. The interview also touched on the longstanding debate about the pharmaceutical industry's financial motives, particularly its role in prioritizing profit over affordable treatments. This controversial topic often raises questions about whether companies avoid developing low-cost medications for diseases like cancer.

While the interview was rich with provocative topics, much of the information about cancer was not grounded in evidence-based science. Listeners should approach such claims with caution, especially regarding unapproved drugs for cancer treatment.

Health is humanity's most valuable asset, making it essential to prioritize affordable and effective treatments. Public discussions, especially those led by influential figures, should serve as reminders to advocate for accessible healthcare and highlight the urgent need to address the rising cost of medicine.



HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the then Prime Minister, meets Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during his visit to Kuwait in February



Canadian Ambassador Aliya Mawani and Assistant Foreign Minister Nawaf Al-Ahmed plant the Canada-Kuwait Tree at the garden of National Library of Kuwait during the celebration of 60 years of ties. - Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A rare Kuwaiti stamp commemorating Canada's participation in the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.



Former Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdul-lah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah shakes hands with his Canadian counterpart Melanie Jolie after signing a landmark agreement to develop relations in this 2023 photo.



Kuwait and Canada face off in a historic American football match in this archival photo provided by the Canadian Embassy in Kuwait.

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for the Americas, Nawaf Al-Ahmed, emphasized Kuwait's dedication to enhancing bilateral relations with Canada during the celebration of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties on Monday.

He reiterated the government's commitment to elevating these relations to new heights through high-level visits and political consultations. These efforts, he said, aim to expand cooperation across key sectors, including trade, investment, food security, defense, energy, healthcare, education and technology.

Healthcare has long been a cornerstone of collaboration between the two nations. Speaking to Kuwait Times at the event, Canadian Ambassador Aliya Mawani highlighted the significant contributions of Kuwaiti doctors trained in Canada.

"Every year, hundreds of Kuwaiti doctors receive training in Canada and return to assume leadership roles in Kuwait's healthcare institutions. They play a vital role in bridging the medical cultures of both countries, from patient care to hospital management. We're incredibly proud of that tradition," she said. The ambassador also pointed to education as another promising area for growth, particularly in emerging fields like artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. She underscored Canada's leadership in these sectors and its po-



Officials visit a photo exhibition at Kuwait National Library highlighting key milestones in Kuwait-Canada relations.

tential to share expertise with Kuwait.

Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, Dr Mohammed Al-Jassar, echoed the importance of education in his remarks, emphasizing its role in strengthening bilateral ties. "Education has been a distinguished field of cooperation between Kuwait and Canada. Many Kuwaiti students have benefited from the high-quality academic programs offered by Canada's prestigious universities. This cultural exchange has nurtured a new generation of Kuwaitis equipped to contribute to their country's development," he said.

The event took place at the Kuwait National Library, a venue chosen to reflect Kuwait's dedication to knowledge

and cultural dialogue. Describing the library as "a civilizational beacon and cultural hub," Dr Al-Jassar praised its role in celebrating this landmark occasion, symbolizing the shared aspirations of Kuwait and Canada for a future built on mutual respect and collaboration.

Dr Al-Jassar further underscored Canada and Kuwait's mutual commitment to promoting diversity, understanding and coexistence. "These values are realized through joint cultural and artistic events that deepen the bonds between the two nations and strengthen human connections," he noted.

The celebration also highlighted the historic friendship and fruitful cooperation between Kuwait and Canada in fields such as trade and defense. Al-

Ahmed praised the shared commitment of both countries to international principles, including respect for the United Nations Charter, international law and human rights.

Building on this foundation, Ambassador Mawani stressed the growing importance of such partnerships in addressing ongoing global challenges. "Together, we can advance international law, humanitarianism, climate action, and other pressing global issues," she noted.

Al-Ahmed also expressed Kuwait's gratitude for Canada's unwavering support during the Iraqi invasion, which he described as a testament to Canada's dedication to freedom and justice. Beyond official relations, he underscored the vibrant cultural and tourism exchanges between the two nations, noting the growing number of Kuwaiti tourists visiting Canada as a reflection of the strong bonds between their people.

Ambassador Mawani emphasized the importance of person-to-person connections. "Ultimately, it all comes down to people. When you like each other and have a strong relationship, you naturally want to work and build together," she said.

She added that professional exchanges, such as professors collaborating on research and doctors performing surgeries side by side, go beyond government initiatives. "These daily interactions foster genuine connections and pave the way for greater collaboration."

Jazeera Airways to launch 2 weekly flights to Budapest

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low-cost carrier, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Budapest Airport, to launch direct flight services between Kuwait and Budapest beginning in the summer of 2025. The signing ceremony took place on Tuesday in the presence of the Ambassador of Hungary to Kuwait András Szabó. Jazeera is also partnering with Visit Hungary to help promote tourism into the country. The agreement strengthens the long-standing ties between Kuwait and Hungary, which have spanned over 60 years since Kuwait became the first Gulf state to establish diplomatic relations with Hungary.

Speaking at a press conference announcing the collaboration, Ambassador Szabó, expressed his support for the new initiative, saying: "This is a momentous occasion for both our countries. The launch of direct flights between Kuwait and Budapest will open new horizons for tourism, trade, and people-to-people relations. It is a testament to the growing relationship between Hungary and Kuwait, and we are confident that this development will pave the way for even more collaborative opportunities."

This new route is scheduled to operate twice weekly. Set to enhance travel connectivity, fostering closer economic, cultural, and tourism exchanges between the two countries, the move is expected to cater to increasing demand for direct air travel and provide Kuwaiti travelers with greater access to Budapest's rich historical, cultural, wellness, and commercial offerings.

Barathan Pasupathi, CEO of Jazeera Airways, em-



KUWAIT: CEO of Jazeera Airways Barathan Pasupathi poses for a photo with Ambassador of Hungary to Kuwait András Szabó.

phasized the importance of the new route, stating: "We are excited to announce our collaboration with Budapest Airport and visit Hungary to commence direct flights from Kuwait to Budapest. This MoU signifies a significant milestone in our expansion strategy, providing our passengers with seamless connectivity to one of Europe's most beautiful cities. We believe this route will not only enhance tourism and business travel between Kuwait and Hungary but also create new opportunities for collaboration in multiple sectors."

Jazeera's Budapest flights are scheduled to begin in the summer months and will be open for booking shortly. Both Jazeera Airways and Budapest Airport

are committed to ensuring a smooth and efficient travel experience for passengers with the MoU helping establish a robust airlift that will benefit both leisure and business travelers.

Jazeera Airways will also launch other summer destinations by the end of this month. To book exciting holidays for summer 2025, travelers can visit the Jazeera Airways website — www.jazeeraairways.com or mobile application.

Jazeera Airways currently offers a network of more than 60 destinations across the Middle East, South and Central Asia, Europe and Africa, providing a convenient and affordable choice for business and leisure travel or religious journeys.

Kuwait sends 10 tons of aid to Syria in latest airlift

DAMASCUS: The eighth humanitarian flight of the Kuwaiti air bridge landed Monday at Damascus International Airport, delivering 10 tons of aid. The shipment includes food supplies and winter essentials such as blankets, winter clothing, and more, as part of the "Kuwait by Your Side" campaign organized by Al-Salam Association for Humanitarian and Charitable Works.

Hamad Al-Aoun, Director-General of the Al-Salam Society, said, "The society will continue its humanitarian and charitable support to the Syrian people in line with the directives of His Highness the Amir and in response to the urgent need for all forms of basic aid there."

Kuwaiti charitable organizations have been delivering aid to Syria on a regular basis, coordinated through the Abdullah Mubarak Air Base, in cooperation with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Social Affairs, and Defense, with the support of the Kuwait Air Force.

Since the campaign's launch on December 30, 2024, Kuwait has sent 200 tons of aid to Syria, including food, medicines, and critical winter supplies. Al-Aoun emphasized, "The society, in collaboration with the country's official authorities, is working to send more humanitarian aid to Syria, especially with the increasing demands due to the lack of infrastructure and the urgent need for basic materials such as food, medicine, shelter, and supplies to cope with the cold."

These efforts are prioritized in coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to meet the urgent needs of the most vulnerable populations. "A plane carrying additional tons of aid will be departing next Thursday as part of the Kuwaiti airlift to Syria, in coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, to receive and distribute the aid," Al-Aoun added. — KUNA

Amendments to Kuwait's traffic law spark debate

Changes include stricter penalties for various road violations, with fines up to KD 600

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: A decree was issued on Sunday amending parts of the traffic law, outlining penalties for various violations, reaching up to KD 600 and imprisonment of up to three years for some infractions. While some praised the stricter penalties as a necessary step to curb accidents and reckless behavior on the roads, others expressed concerns about the severity and practicality of some regulations.

Laila Dawood criticized the KD 600 fine for speeding, saying it is excessive and equates speeding with reckless driving, which endangers lives. She hopes the concerned authority will re-evaluate speed limits instead. Meanwhile, Abu Mohammed commented: "The amended laws repeatedly mention imprisonment, but humans make mistakes. Destroying someone's future over minor violations like not following road markings is unreasonable. I support strict penalties for violations that endanger lives, but the laws should be studied carefully."

Others argued that certain penalties need to be harsher. Wael Hisham suggested that the penalty for reckless weaving between cars is insufficient, as it poses a danger to others. On the other hand, he highlighted the importance of improving road conditions. "The government shouldn't enforce strict penalties where it's not suitable. They should fix the problems first and provide better infrastructure, clear markings, countdown timers on traffic lights and fix potholes that force drivers onto road shoulders. Only then should stricter enforcement be applied."

Regarding mobile phone use, Dalia Alkhuzam

pointed out the necessity of occasionally using navigation apps like Google Maps. "How can we use them without holding the phone?" she asked. She also emphasized the need to focus on drivers using blinding beams, which are widespread and dangerous, and are sold by car accessory businesses.

Ghalia Bu Abbas criticized the lack of parking spaces in ministries, where spots are often reserved for managers and department heads. She noted that the random paving and poorly planned road markings by the ministry of public works make it difficult to follow the ground markings, which will make it hard to enforce such penalties. She deemed the penalties for decals on vehicles excessive. "The fines are unreasonable and beyond the financial capacity of many people, especially given the sudden and significant increase in penalties."

The decree will take effect three months after the announcement. The penalty for driving inattentively, violating public decency in vehicles, driving on the shoulder of the road, using a phone while driving, or fleeing the scene of an accident is up to three months' imprisonment and a minimum fine of KD 150.

Offenses punishable by up to three years' imprisonment and a minimum fine of KD 600 include running red lights, reckless driving and street racing, exceeding the speed limit, driving against traffic or parking in spaces designated for people with disabilities.

Offenses punishable by up to two months' imprisonment and a minimum fine of KD 100 include causing property damage in an accident, having a child under 10 years old in the front seat, failing to com-



KUWAIT: Vehicles travel on a highway in Kuwait in this file photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

ply with road markings or signs, tinting vehicle windows above the legal limit or placing stickers on the vehicle. Offenses punishable by up to one month's imprisonment and a minimum fine of KD 50 include

parking or driving on sidewalks, using high lights that impair vision, driving below the minimum speed limit, failing to wear a seatbelt or driving recklessly between vehicles.

Kuwait launches online platform for urban development ideas

KUWAIT: The Governor of Ahmadi and Chairman of the Urban Development Initiatives Committee, Sheikh Humoud Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, announced that the committee began receiving initiatives for decorative planting along main roads, park development, monument creation, bridge painting, and murals through its official website starting Sunday, January 19.

In August 2024, Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, Dr. Mahmoud Boushehri, issued Ministerial Decision 56/2024 regarding the formation of the committee, with the Governor of Ahmadi as its chairman.

In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the occasion of launching the committee's website (<https://gudi.gov.kw>), Sheikh Humoud highlighted that the committee is part of the government's ongoing efforts to achieve sustainable development aligned with Kuwait's future vision.

He emphasized that the goal is to encourage individuals, companies, and cooperative societies to contribute to enhancing decorative planting in public squares, main roads, and parks, as well as to the creation of monuments, bridge painting, and murals.

He noted that the committee has established criteria and regulations for executing various types of initiatives to ensure that each one complies with the conditions set by the relevant government bodies. The committee has also identified locations for these initiatives, determined the necessary permits



KUWAIT: Officers plant saplings during a "Greening Day" event as part of a government initiative to beautify roads in Al-Ahmadi in this file photo. — KUNA

for each, and developed templates for the procedures that must be followed with the relevant government authorities.

Sheikh Humoud pointed out that the decorative initiatives include planting trees and plants along main roads to improve aesthetic appearances and create a greener, healthier environment that helps

reduce pollution and improve the quality of life. Regarding public park development, he mentioned that initiatives should include adding new facilities such as walking paths, seating areas, and new tree and plant plantings.

Concerning monument creation, he explained that the initiative must involve the construction of a memorial to commemorate a significant event, and its design should reflect the historical or cultural value of the event. For bridge painting, the initiative should involve the use of weather-resistant paints to ensure long-lasting quality.

On December 31, the Cabinet was briefed during its weekly meeting on a presentation by the Governor of Ahmadi and several committee members regarding initiatives and donations from individuals, companies, and cooperative societies related to decorative planting and enhancing the country's aesthetic aspects. The Cabinet expressed its appreciation for these valuable initiatives.

The committee includes the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, the Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, the Secretary-General of the Union of Investment Companies, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works, the Director-General of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare, the Director-General of the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport, the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture at Kuwait University, and the Assistant Undersecretary for Water Operations and Maintenance at the Ministry of Electricity. The committee also includes other key officials from various government departments, as well as representatives from the Kuwait Banking Association, the Volunteer Work Center and the Kuwait Municipality. — KUNA



KUWAIT: A student plants seeds as part of a campaign to beautify roads in Al-Ahmadi in this file photo. — KUNA

How to contribute to Kuwait's public space enhancement initiative

KUWAIT: The Urban Development Initiatives Committee in Kuwait has launched a new platform for the public to submit ideas aimed at enhancing the aesthetics of the country's public spaces. The initiative aligns with Kuwait's long-term vision for sustainable development and aims to improve the country's visual appeal while promoting environmental sustainability.

Criteria and regulations

The committee is now accepting initiatives through its official website: <https://gudi.gov.kw>

The committee has set clear criteria and regulations to ensure that all initiatives meet government standards and contribute to the intended aesthetic improvements. Detailed information about the guidelines are available on the initiative's website. The committee invites individuals, companies, and cooperative societies to submit ideas that will enhance the aesthetics of public squares, main roads, parks, and more.

Types of Initiatives

Decorative planting: Encouraging planting trees and shrubs along main roads to enhance the aesthetic appeal and reduce pollution. **Park development:** Initiatives to add walking paths, seating areas, and new plants to public parks, improving both functionality and beauty. **Monument creation:** Proposals to create monuments that commemorate significant events and reflect cultural or historical values. **Bridge painting:** Submissions to paint bridges using weather-resistant materials, ensuring long-lasting, durable improvements. **Murals:** Artistic projects designed to enhance public spaces, making them more vibrant and engaging.

Authorities arrest 2 for human trafficking, 1 for forging official stamps

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior, through the General Department of Residency, announced the arrest of two expatriates involved in human trafficking operations and another individual charged with forging government electronic payment system stamps. In a statement released by the General Directorate of Security Relations and Media, the ministry stressed that these arrests were part of ongoing efforts to enhance public safety and combat various forms of fraud, forgery, and illegal activities. According to the statement, the two human traffickers were found to have been facilitating the illegal entry of workers into the country in exchange for amounts ranging from KD 1,700 to KD 1,900 per transaction.

The third suspect was apprehended following a reliable tip-off from confidential sources, which led to a targeted operation. The individual was caught in possession of a large quantity of counterfeit stamps intended for use in the government's electronic payment system. The Ministry of Interior confirmed that all suspects have been referred to the competent authorities, and appropriate legal actions are being taken. The ministry reiterated its commitment to taking strong action against any individuals seeking to undermine the country's security or violate its laws. — KUNA



US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Hideko Sasahara

Yarmouk Cultural Center, US Embassy host jazz performance

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Yarmouk Cultural Center hosted Jazz Music Night on Sunday in collaboration with the US Embassy in Kuwait. In her opening remarks, US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Hideko Sasahara



KUWAIT: The Aurora Healy Jazz Quintet perform at the Jazz Music Night hosted by Yarmouk Cultural Center on Sunday, January 20, 2025 in collaboration with the US Embassy.

ra welcomed guests and celebrated the power of music in strengthening cultural ties between the United States and Kuwait.

"We are honored to host the Aurora Healy Jazz Quintet, who has traveled all the way from New Orleans to share their incredible music with us here in Kuwait," the ambassador said, expressing her appreciation for the performers. Highlighting the universal nature of music, Sasahara emphasized its role in cultural diplomacy. "Music has a profound ability to transcend borders, connect hearts, and bring people together. It speaks a universal language that resonates deeply with all of us," she noted.

terrorism financing.

In a press statement, the Ministry of Social Affairs noted that the meeting centered on strengthening collaboration and exchanging expertise between the two entities. The goal is to improve procedures within the Ministry of Social Affairs and ensure alignment with international standards in the field.

Al-Huwailah commended the efforts of her ministry's team, emphasizing the importance of utilizing both national expertise and international best practices to strengthen compliance with the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). She further highlighted the leadership's commitment

to supporting the National Committee for Combating Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing, reinforcing the highest standards of integrity, and safeguarding the country's financial system.

The minister reiterated that these ongoing efforts reflect Kuwait's dedication to implementing high-level directives and enhancing its international reputation in the fight against financial crimes and terrorism financing.

The meeting was attended by KWFU Deputy Chairman Yousef Al-Omar, National Committee Secretary Maryam Al-Essa, and several officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs. — KUNA

Social affairs minister committed to combating financial crimes

KUWAIT: Dr. Amthel Al-Huwailah, Minister of Social Affairs and Family and Childhood Affairs, met on Monday with Dr. Hamad Al-Mukrad, Chairman of the Kuwait Financial Intelligence Unit (KWFU), to discuss ways to enhance joint cooperation in supporting Kuwait's efforts to combat money laundering and

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
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to showcase youth
innovations in oil sector

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Oil will host the awards ceremony for the third edition of the "Oil Innovates 3" competition in early February, an initiative aimed at encouraging young Kuwaitis to develop innovative solutions to address the challenges facing the oil industry. The event, to be held at the Oil Complex Auditorium in Shuwaikh, underscores the Ministry's continued efforts to foster creativity, support scientific research, and empower youth to shape the future of the sector.

"Through this award, we aim to create an environment that stimulates creativity while enhancing the capabilities of youth to develop practical, innovative solutions for the industry's evolving needs," said Sheikhha Tamader Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Director of Public Relations and Media at the Ministry, in an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA).

This year's competition saw submissions from 23 teams, including 10 male teams and 13 female teams, each consisting of three members. This strong participation highlights the enthusiasm of the younger generation to contribute to the advancement of Kuwait's oil sector through innovative projects.

The awards ceremony, set for February, will be attended by key figures from the Ministry of Oil, including Sheikh Dr Nimr Fahad Al-Malik Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry, and Neda Al-Daihani, Director-General of the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity. The event will feature presentations of the winning projects, selected by a panel of judges based on criteria such as innovation, quality, and feasibility. The top three winning teams will be awarded certificates of appreciation in recognition of their outstanding contributions. — KUNA

Sheikhha Tamader Khaled
Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber
Al-Sabah

Participants in the conference on optimizing heart failure management pose for a group photo.

30% of heart failure patients
in Kuwait are under 45: Study

Study highlights increasing burden of heart failure in region

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: A large-scale study on acute coronary syndromes, conducted over 18 months at several hospitals in Kuwait, has revealed important insights into the growing prevalence of heart failure. Dr Mohamed Zubaid, Professor of Cardiology at the Faculty of Medicine, Head of the Cardiology Unit at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital, and board member of the Kuwait Heart Association, shared preliminary results showing that 30 percent of heart failure patients are under the age of 45, 60 percent have diabetes, and 1 percent of postpartum women are at risk of developing heart failure. The results were announced at a recent conference organized by Roche in cooperation with Kuwait Heart Association. It gathered 130 specialists from Kuwait, the Gulf region, and the United Kingdom to discuss the latest developments in the field.

With approximately 10,000 patients involved, the study underscores the increasing burden of heart failure diseases in the region. Dr Zubaid emphasized that these findings will play a crucial role in improving patient care, helping to optimize treatment strategies and enhance the overall quality of life for those affected.

Global trend

Heart failure is a major clinical and public health challenge, affecting approximately 64.3 million people worldwide in 2017. While heart failure is commonly associated with aging, with the median age of HF patients in western countries exceeding 70 years, recent studies in the west indicate an increasing burden of the



KUWAIT: Health professionals sit on a panel at the conference, Optimizing Heart Failure Management: A focus on STRONG-HF and early detection, organized by Roche and Kuwait Heart Association.

disease among younger populations (defined as those under 50).

Heart failure mortality rates are also rising among younger adults, linked to factors like obesity, diabetes, and limited healthcare access, with the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbating this trend. Research in the United States has shown that, since 2012, heart failure-related deaths have steadily increased, reversing the previous decline in mortality rates. The growing prevalence of childhood obesity, poor diet, and a lack of exercise are contributing to this troubling trend, particularly affecting millennials and Gen Z, who are experiencing heart failure at higher rates than earlier generations. Additionally, disruptions in healthcare access during the pandemic have delayed the timely diagnosis and treatment of heart conditions, further

driving the rise in deaths.

According to a 2023 study published in the European Heart Journal, data from the Swedish Hospital Discharge Registry and the Framingham Heart Study suggest that this rise in heart failure among younger people may be due to the increased prevalence of metabolic risk factors such as obesity and diabetes, with these factors having a more significant impact on younger populations.

The Kuwaiti study's full results are scheduled for release in the next few months, providing valuable data that will guide future heart failure management. This research is part of the Kuwait Heart Association's broader efforts, including the STRONG-HF initiative, aimed at improving heart failure care through more effective diagnosis, treatment, and prevention.

From motocross to showjumping:
A girl's journey as an athlete in Kuwait

By Alena Vinod

The term "hobby" is often associated with leisure activities, yet for some individuals, their passions lead to an extraordinary array of pursuits. Katelyn Raymond, an eighth-grade student at a private Indian school in Kuwait, exemplifies this. By day, she is a diligent student, but by night, she transforms into a motocross racer. "For me, it's more than just a sport; it's a challenge I take on to push my limits and improve every time I get on the track," she said of motocross.

Katelyn was first inspired to pursue motocross when she was just nine years old after seeing her grandfather, father, and brother practice the sport. Her passion for motocross racing is fueled by the thrill of racing across treacherous terrains, the adren-



KUWAIT: Katelyn Raymond and her horse participate in a showjumping competition.

In addition to motocross and equestrian sports, Katelyn is also an accomplished swimmer, having secured numerous accolades in the pool. A true triple treat, she balances these diverse passions with remarkable focus and commitment.

Engaging in hobbies has a profound impact on mental health by stimulating brain activity and improving overall well-being. History is filled with examples of great minds that pursued hobbies to enhance their lives, from Albert Einstein, who played the violin, to Marie Curie, who cycled for leisure. Countless studies have shown that a wide range of hobbies offer physical and mental health benefits to participants.

When asked about the emotions she experiences during her performances, Katelyn described the exhilaration of forming a bond with her bike, her horse, or the water. "Whether it's motocross or horse riding, there's a synchronization — a connection that heightens the experience. When I'm competing, it's not just about winning but about giving my best and enjoying the journey." She acknowledges her parents as her biggest supporters, though they understandably worry about her safety during competitions. Despite their concerns, they believe in her capabilities and dedication. "My ultimate goal is to become a world champion. Right now, I'm just crossing the small hurdles on my way to that destination," said the 13-year-old.

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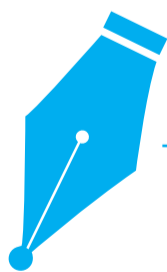
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Katelyn showcases her motocross prowess in mid-jump.



Katelyn holds two first-place trophies while posing on her motocross bike.



Students'

Corner

line of high speeds, and the precision required for sharp turns and jumps. She has competed in numerous races in Kuwait, earning several podium finishes. Competing in motocross in Kuwait comes with its challenges, as she often races against boys on more powerful motorcycles. Yet, her determination and resilience showcase the strength of a young girl in a traditionally male-dominated sport. Starting with a Chinese Stomp Pit Bike, she gradually progressed to various Kawasaki models, including the Kawasaki 65, Kawasaki 85, and currently, the Kawasaki 112.

Katelyn's talents don't stop at motocross. At age 11, she ventured into horse riding, a pursuit that combines strength, trust, and harmony with the animal. "Riding a horse requires not only physical strength but also a deep connection with the animal. It's about communication, trust, and respect, which has taught me patience and understanding," she explained. Inspired by her brother's photography of horses, she began training for the sport and has since excelled in showjumping, winning multiple rounds in competitions across Kuwait.



UK teen admits to girls' murders that led to riots

Kolkata rapist murderer of doctor sentenced to life in prison

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BEITUNIA: (Left) Freed Palestinian prisoners wave to the crowd from a Red Cross bus that drove them out of the Zionist Ofer military prison in the occupied West Bank, as they arrive on the outskirts of Ramallah, in the early hours of Jan 20, 2025. (Right) A Palestinian prisoner is welcomed by a relative. — AFP photos

Tears and hugs for freed Palestinians

Crowds waving Palestinian and Hamas flags and chanting slogans fill the streets

BEITUNIA: Two buses carrying Palestinian prisoners released in the Gaza ceasefire deal had to inch through a thick crowd when they at last arrived in the West Bank at 2 am Monday. After the doors opened, women hugged their relatives and cried tears of joy while throngs of people chanted, waved flags and climbed atop the vehicles. Others lit fireworks in the normally quiet suburb of Beitunia.

Bushra Al-Tawil, a Palestinian journalist jailed in the Zionist entity in March 2024, was among the first batch of prisoners to be released in the truce. Over the next 42 days, around 1,900 Palestinians are due to be freed in exchange for 33 Zionist hostages held by Hamas in Gaza. Tawil began her journey at 3 am the day before, when she was taken from her prison to another nearer the separation wall. There, she was grouped with other inmates awaiting movement.

"The wait was extremely hard. But thank God, we were certain that at any moment we would be released," she said. Tawil had only learned she would be freed from other inmates who had attended a hearing. "The lawyers told them the (ceasefire) deal had been announced and was in the implementation phase," said Tawil, whose father is also in a Zionist jail. "I was worried about him. He is still a prisoner, but I just received good news that he will be released as part of this deal."

A crowd of hundreds of Palestinians pressed around Tawil and the 89 other prisoners released in exchange for three Zionist hostages held in Gaza since Oct 7, 2023. Many in the crowd had gathered earlier on a hill in Beitunia for a view of the Zionist Ofer prison, from where the prisoners were being released. "We came here to witness it and feel the emotions,

just like the families of the prisoners who are being released today," said Amanda Abu Sharkh, 23, from the nearby city of Ramallah.

'They feel like family'

"All the prisoners being released today feel like family to us. They are part of us, even if they're not blood relatives," she told AFP. As night fell and the wait continued in the cold, dozens of small fires illuminated the stony hill. Excitement grew when news broke that the three Zionist hostages had been released.

Muhammad, 20, said he had come from Ramallah with his friends as soon as he heard the development. Recently released from Ofer prison himself, he expressed "great joy" at the thought of families being reunited. "I know a lot of people in prison, there are innocent people, children and women," he said.

The prisoners set to be released during the initial 42-day ceasefire period include many held under administrative detention, which does not require formal charges. Others are serving life sentences. Farther in Beitunia, even bigger crowds gathered at the roundabout where the prisoners were eventually dropped off, waving Palestinian and Hamas flags, chanting slogans and filling the streets in anticipation.

'There will be lots of crying'

An 18-year-old woman could barely contain her joy as she awaited her mother's release. "I'll hug her right away — of course, I'll hug her. At first, it'll just be tears of joy," she said. "After that, she'll tell us about her time in prison, and we'll tell her about our lives without her. I'm sure there will be a lot of crying," she said as she stood by her brother, sister and aunt.

Her mother, a doctor, had been arrested in January 2024 in the north of the occupied West Bank for social media activity, she said. "They accused her of incitement because of posts she wrote on Facebook," she said, calling the charges "ridiculous" for a middle-aged nurse and trained midwife.

Nearby, Oday waited with his family. Though he had been freed after being arrested with his son at the start of the war, his son remains detained and is not on the initial release list. Oday, who preferred not to give his last name for fear of jeopardizing his son's release, said his son had been arrested for social media activity. But he said he wanted to celebrate all the releases on Sunday night because he knows what captivity is like. "You can't think for yourself and for your son only," he said, adding he was happy hostages were being released from Gaza as well. — AFP

Gazans savor truce's first night

GAZA: For the first time in more than a year, war-displaced Gazan Ammar Barbakh awoke on Monday feeling refreshed after a night spent in a tent, but free of Zionist attacks. "This is the first time I sleep comfortably and I'm not afraid," Barbakh, 35, told AFP a day after a fragile truce in the Zionist-Hamas war took hold. "We didn't hear any shelling, and we weren't afraid," he said.

Barbakh, from Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, pitched a tent on the rubble of his former home. Despite the destruction, he was thrilled to have had a peaceful sleep. "It's a beautiful feeling, and I hope the ceasefire continues", said Barbakh. Thousands of displaced Palestinians like him have headed back to their home areas across the Gaza Strip since the ceasefire came into effect on Sunday.

For Samer Daloul, "it was the first night we slept in peace" since the war's first truce, a one-week pause in November 2023 about two months after fighting erupted. "The sound of fighter jets and drones was present all night, but the air strikes stopped," said Daloul. The newfound calm has given him a chance to reflect on the grave losses he suffered during the war, including the deaths of 32 of his relatives, he said. "I'm happy and sad at the same time," said Daloul, expressing his hope that the initial 42-truce would hold and give way to a permanent ceasefire.

In the tiny coastal territory, practically everyone knows at least one person from the tens of thousands killed in the war, or at the very least someone who lost a loved one. And nearly all of the besieged territory's 2.4 million resi-

dents have been displaced at least once during the war, according to UN figures. Many have nowhere to return to with more than 60 percent of buildings across Gaza damaged by fighting, shelling or air strikes.

Rebuilding

Daloul has been sheltering in a school building along with 12 family members, five of them children. Other displaced Gazans have built makeshift shelters or erected tents with whatever material they could find amid severe shortages. In central Gaza, pedestrians and drivers moved around freely on Monday along the main coastal road that hugs the Mediterranean Sea, a semblance of normal life save for the rows of hundreds of tents housing displaced families.

Even those with a house — or mere walls — to return to must still guarantee basic conditions before proper rebuilding can begin. Still, some took to repainting a wall still standing, or searched through the rubble for any belongings they could still salvage.

Noha Abed, 28, has returned with her husband and three children to the family's home in the southern city of Rafah, which now has only one livable room. "Our house was beautiful, a one-storey building with three rooms. We lost everything," she told AFP. But after cleaning it and putting their belongings in what is left of the house, Abed said the family "want to live in it until the rebuilding happens".

For now, her focus is on securing "food, water, electricity, beddings and blankets" for the family, who had been sleeping in a tent further north for about 10 months, said Abed. Despite the difficult conditions, she said that this was "the first night I sleep without being afraid for my children". Looking ahead, Abed said, "the most important thing is that the war does not resume." — AFP



GAZA: The body of a person is transported on a donkey-drawn cart near the rubble of collapsed buildings in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip on Jan 20, 2025 a day after a ceasefire deal. — AFP

Gazans search for people under rubble on day two of truce

GAZA: Palestinians began searching on Monday for thousands of Gazans believed still buried under rubble, as residents expressed shock at the devastation wrought by 15 months of war on the enclave on the second day of a ceasefire between the Zionist entity and Hamas. The truce in the 15-month-old conflict, which has laid waste to the Gaza Strip and inflamed the Middle East, took effect on Sunday with the release of the first three hostages held by Hamas and 90 Palestinians freed from Zionist jails.

Now attention is starting to shift to the rebuilding of the coastal enclave which the Zionist military has demolished. "We are searching for 10,000 martyrs whose bodies remain under the rubble," said Mahmoud Basal, spokesperson of the Palestinian Civil Emergency Services. At least 2,840 bodies were melted and there were no traces of them, he said.

Displaced Gazan Mohamed Gomaa lost his brother and nephew in the war. "It was a big shock, and the amount (of people) feeling shocked is countless because of what happened to their homes - it's destruction, total destruction. It's not like an earthquake or a flood, no, what happened is a war of extermination," he said.

With a growing flow of aid into the Palestinian enclave, residents flocked into markets, with some expressing happiness at the lower prices and the presence of new food items like imported chocolates. "The prices have gone down, the war is over and the crossing is open to more goods," said Aya Mohammad-Zaki, a displaced woman from Gaza City, who has been sheltering in Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza Strip.

The deal requires 600 truckloads of aid to be allowed into Gaza every day of the initial six-week ceasefire, including 50 carrying fuel. Half of the aid trucks would be delivered to the north, where experts have warned famine is imminent.

Warning shots

Residents and medics in Gaza said that for the most part the ceasefire appeared to be holding, although there were isolated incidents. Medics said eight people had been hit by Zionist fire since Monday morning in the southern city of Rafah, without giving details of their condition. The Zionist military said it fired warning shots against people who approached troops deployed according to the ceasefire agreement.

In the Zionist-occupied West Bank, where most of the freed Palestinian detainees returned, Nidaa Zaghebi was finally able to embrace her three children who she had left behind after her arrest by Zionist forces. Zaghebi's daughters Sadan and Cilla were in tears as they hugged their mother when she arrived at their home, wearing a crown of flowers and wrapped in a traditional Palestinian scarf. "I used to dream of them every night, and imagine what they were doing. I know the family here were very supportive and took good care of them, but motherhood overcomes all other feelings," she told Reuters.

Billions of dollars will be needed to rebuild Gaza after the war. A UN damage assessment released this month showed that clearing over 50 million tons of rubble left in the aftermath of the Zionist entity's bombardment could take 21 years and cost up to \$1.2 billion. A UN report from last year, said rebuilding Gaza's shattered homes could take at least until 2040, but could drag on for many decades. The debris is believed to be contaminated with asbestos, with some refugee camps struck during the war known to have been built with the material. A UN Development Program official said on Sunday that development in Gaza has been set back by 69 years as a result of the conflict. — Reuters



GAZA: A Palestinian man drinks a beverage on a mattress set on building rubble in a ruined house in Gaza's southern city of Rafah on Jan 20, 2025, as residents return following a ceasefire deal. (Right) A Palestinian woman sits on belongings by a destroyed house in Rafah. — AFP photos

International

Biden to Americans: Keep the faith

US leader visits South Carolina on last full day as president

UK teen admits to girls' murders that led to riots

LIVERPOOL: A teenager on Monday pleaded guilty to killing three young girls in a stabbing spree last year that sparked the UK's most violent riots in a decade. On what was set to be the opening day of his trial, Axel Rudakubana, 18, admitted murdering the three girls at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in Southport, northwest England. The July stabbings sent shockwaves across the UK, triggering unrest and riots in more than a dozen English and Northern Irish towns and cities, including in Southport and Liverpool.

Authorities blamed far-right agitators for fueling violence, including by sharing misinformation claiming the alleged attacker was a Muslim asylum seeker. Bebe King, six, Elsie Dot Stancombe, seven, and Alice da Silva Aguiar, nine, were killed in the attack in the seaside resort near Liverpool on July 29, 2024. Ten others were wounded, including eight children, in one of the country's worst mass stabbings in years.

British-born Rudakubana admitted a total of 16 charges, including the three counts of murder, 10 counts of attempted murder and one count of possessing a blade. He also admitted production of a biological toxin, ricin, as well as possessing an Al-Qaeda training manual, although the attack has not been treated as a terror incident. Wearing a grey tracksuit and a surgical mask, the teenager refused to stand in court and did not speak except to say the word "guilty" when the charges were put to him. The judge ruled that he would be sentenced on Thursday.



Axel Rudakubana

Concerns over violence

In December, not guilty pleas had been entered on Rudakubana's behalf when he remained silent in the court, and the case had been set for a four-week trial. At all of his earlier court appearances, Rudakubana also held his sweatshirt over his face. The unrest linked to the killings lasted several days, and saw far-right rioters attack police, shops, hotels housing asylum seekers as well as mosques, with hundreds arrested and charged.

Adjourning the case for sentencing, the judge warned Rudakubana that he faced a long custodial sentence. Britain's domestic Press Association news agency reported that although neighbors described him and his family as unremarkable, teachers had had concerns about his behavior. The teenager, who has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, was previously excluded from his school for an incident involving a hockey stick, it said.

After he was moved to a specialist school, teachers there also grew concerned at his behavior and violence towards others, the agency added. Rudakubana was born in Cardiff, Wales to parents of Rwandan origin, and lived in Banks, a village northeast of Southport. Despite being aged 17 at the time, restrictions on reporting Rudakubana's name were lifted in August due to concerns over the spread of misinformation.

The Guardian reported that Rudakubana, the son of devout Christians who had moved to Britain from Rwanda, had been referred three times to Prevent, the government scheme that aims to counter radicalization. The first occasion was because of concerns he was looking at online material about US school massacres, and then because he was looking at information about past terrorist attacks. But it was assessed that, while his behavior was a concern, he was not judged to be a terrorism risk, the paper said. — Agencies

Trump back in charge...

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"I will declare a national emergency at our southern border" with Mexico, Trump said to loud cheers from supporters inside the ornate Rotunda hall, vowing to deport "millions and millions" of illegal immigrants.

Trump took the oath with one hand raised in the air, using a Bible given to him by his mother, and became the 47th president. He had traveled to the Capitol with outgoing Democratic president Joe Biden, who followed tradition by offering his successor tea at the White House. "Welcome home," Biden had said to Trump as he and First Lady Jill Biden greeted the incoming president and his wife Melania at the White House.

Trump was a political outsider at his first inauguration in 2017 as the 45th president, but this time around he is surrounded by America's wealthy and powerful. The world's richest man, Elon Musk, Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg, Amazon chief Jeff Bezos and Google CEO Sundar Pichai all had prime seats in the Capitol alongside Trump's family and cabinet members. Musk, who bankrolled Trump's election campaign to the tune of a quarter of a billion dollars and promotes far-right policies on the X social network, will lead a cost-cutting drive in the new administration.

While Trump refused to attend Biden's 2021 inauguration after falsely claiming electoral fraud, this time Biden has been keen to restore the sense of tradition. Biden joined former presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton at the Capitol. Former first ladies Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush were there but ex-first lady Michelle Obama pointedly stayed away. Unusually for an inauguration where foreign leaders are normally not invited, Argentina's hard-right president Javier Milei was attending, along with Italy's far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

The bitter cold weather has forced Trump's inauguration indoors for the first time since Ronald Reagan's

NORTH CHARLESTON: Joe Biden traveled to South Carolina on Sunday, his last full day as US president, where he urged Americans to "keep the faith in a better day to come" as he marked the national holiday honoring civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr. A scant day before turning the White House over to Donald Trump, Biden attended services at Royal Missionary Baptist Church, a historically black church in North Charleston.

Promising that he is "not going anywhere," Biden told the congregants that America "must stay engaged, we must always keep the faith in a better day to come." He also spoke about the continued fight to make King's dream of a color-blind nation "a reality". Racial progress has never moved in a smooth arc in the United States, and some have described the election of Trump — who in 2015 insisted that Barack Obama was not an American — as a step backward.

But Biden told the congregants that "every time I spend time in a black church I think of one thing: the word 'hope'". Monday is a US national holiday honoring King, the Nobel Peace Prize winner who advocated for non-violent resistance in the fight for equal rights for Black Americans. He was assassinated in 1968.

'What this country needed'

South Carolina was pivotal in Biden's path to securing the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 2020 — which paved the way for his defeat that year of then-incumbent Donald Trump — and Biden on Sunday thanked South Carolina Representative Jim Clyburn for his key endorsement that year. "I would not be standing — that's not hyperbole — here at this pulpit were it not for Jim Clyburn," the president said.

Clyburn, who is black, later choked up when returning the favor. "Joe Biden has been what this country needed," he said. "People don't always appreciate it." Biden won a mostly favorable but slightly mixed reception during his South Carolina visit on Sunday. While crowds waved at his passing motorcade and people held signs saying "Thank You Joe," one small group chanted "Biden is a war criminal," blaming him for the high death toll in the fighting in Gaza.

Weary LA firefighters brace for 'last' dangerous winds

LOS ANGELES: Exhausted Los Angeles firefighters on Sunday braced for the return of yet more dangerously strong gusts, as California's governor slammed "hurricane-force winds of misinformation" surrounding blazes that have killed 27 people. The two largest fires, which have obliterated almost 40,000 acres and razed entire neighborhoods of the second biggest US city, were both now more than half contained, officials announced.

But the National Weather Service warned that powerful winds and very low humidity would again bring "dangerous high-end red flag fire weather conditions" from Monday, with potential gusts up to 130 km per hour. "This is the last... we hope, of the extreme" wind events, said Governor Gavin Newsom. It will be "the fourth major wind event just in the last three months — we only had two in the prior four years," he told MSNBC's "Inside with Jen Psaki."

Officials were accused of being unprepared at the outbreak of fires this month. Now, 135 fire engines and their crews are prepositioned to tackle new flames, along with helicopters and bulldozers, said Newsom. Firefighters said the largest conflagration, the Palisades Fire, was 52 percent contained. It has killed at least 10 people.

Evacuation orders were lifted this weekend for dozens of neighborhoods

in upscale western Los Angeles. "Our focus is on repopulation this week, and we're moving quickly to finish urban search-and-rescue-work so that utilities can safely be restored where possible," said Los Angeles County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath.

With reports of looting rife, a man and woman were arrested Saturday while driving "a vehicle that looked like a fire engine, going through a checkpoint," said Los Angeles County sheriff department commander Minh Dinh. The pair "purchased the vehicle through an auction" and "have been in the area for about a couple of days".

Further east, the Eaton Fire, which killed at least 17 in the Altadena suburbs, was 81 percent contained. Several evacuees reunited with missing pets they had feared were dead. Serena Null told AFP of her joy at finding her cat Domino, after having to leave him behind as flames devoured her family home in Altadena. The pair were reunited at NGO Pasadena Humane, where Domino — suffering singed paws, a burnt nose and a high level of stress — was taken after being rescued. "I just was so relieved and just so happy that he was here," a tearful Null told AFP.

As Los Angeles learns the true scale of the devastation, political bickering has intensified. Donald Trump, set to be sworn in as US president on Monday,



CHARLESTON: US President Joe Biden addresses attendees at the International African-American Museum on Jan 19, 2025. — AFP

He also spoke briefly about the landmark ceasefire agreement for Gaza that took force earlier Sunday, saying, "The road to this deal has not been easy at all." In brief remarks Sunday about the Mideast, Biden told reporters that the incipient Gaza ceasefire offered hope, but that its continuing success "will depend on the next administration". He added that the Zionist entity's crushing attacks on militants in southern Lebanon meant that that country now faced "an opportunity for a future free from the grip of Hezbollah."

Charleston is home to the historic Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, where a white shooter killed nine black worship-

pers in 2015. While Biden, just before Christmas, commuted the death penalties of 37 people in federal prisons, he made two exceptions: Those of Djokhar Tsarnaev, involved in the 2013 bombing of the Boston Marathon, and Dylann Roof, the man behind the Emanuel AME shooting.

Early Sunday, the White House announced that, in one of his final official acts, Biden had pardoned Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican-born writer and orator who advocated for a return to Africa. Garvey had been convicted of mail fraud and sentenced to prison, but the sentence was commuted in 1927 by President Calvin Coolidge. Biden's pardon expunges Garvey's conviction from the record. — AFP



ALTADENA, California: Firefighters with the Middleton Star Fire District work to clear hotspots on Jan 19, 2025. — AFP

has sharply criticized California officials. He falsely claimed that Newsom had blocked the diversion of "excess rain and snow melt from the North." Los Angeles's water supplies are mainly fed via aqueducts and canals originating from entirely separate river basins further east. "What's not helpful or beneficial... is these wild-eyed fantasies... that somehow there's a magical spigot in northern California that just can be turned on, all of a sudden there will be rain or water flowing everywhere," said Newsom.

The governor blamed Elon Musk — the Tesla and SpaceX owner poised to play a key role advising the incoming administration — "and others" for "hur-

ricane-force winds of mis- and dis-information that can divide a country". Trump told a rally Sunday that he plans to visit the region on Friday. Well into its typical rainy season, Los Angeles has had almost no rain since May.

Though rain is not expected imminently, Newsom warned of the need to prepare "for potential flooding in the next week or two," as rain, when it comes, pours down hillsides denuded by the fires. "I prepositioned 2,500 National Guard. We're going to start some sandbagging operations," he said. "We're dealing with extremes that we have never dealt with in the past" due to changing climate, said the governor. — AFP

Hamas vows Gaza will rise; truce...

Continued from Page 1

are due to be returned from Gaza in exchange for around 1,900 Palestinians. The first three released hostages, Emily Damari, Romi Gonen and Doron Steinbrecher, returned to the Zionist entity after Hamas fighters handed them over to the Red Cross in a bustling square in Gaza City, surrounded by gunmen in fatigues and balaclavas. On Monday, however, there was anxiety in the Zionist entity over the next phases of the truce, with columnist Sima Kadmon warning in the Yedioth Ahronoth daily that the coming hostage releases may be more painful.

"Some of them will arrive on gurneys and wheelchairs. Others will arrive in coffins. Some will arrive wounded and injured, in dire emotional condition," she wrote. Journalist Avi Issacharoff, one of the creators of hit series Fauda, lashed out against the Zionist government for what he said was its failure "to engage in any way on the 'day after' the war".

Following the return of the three hostages, the Zionist

Tech billionaires take center stage...

Continued from Page 1

Despite highly limited seating after the ceremony moved indoors due to bad weather, Meta CEO Zuckerberg attended with his wife Priscilla Chan, while Amazon executive Bezos was accompanied by his fiancée, Lauren Sanchez. Their prominent positions on the inauguration stage — more visible than many cabinet members — was particularly notable for Zuckerberg, whom Trump had threatened with life imprisonment just months ago. Zuckerberg recently made headlines

Prison Service confirmed the release of 90 Palestinian prisoners early Monday. In the West Bank town of Beitunia, near Ofer prison, Palestinians cheered and chanted as buses carrying prisoners arrived, with some climbing atop and unfurling a Hamas flag. "All the prisoners being released today feel like family to us. They are part of us, even if they're not blood relatives," Amanda Abu Sharkh, 23, told AFP.

One freed detainee, Abdul Aziz Muhammad Atawneh, described prison as "hell, hell, hell". The next hostage-prisoner swap should take place on Saturday, a senior Hamas official told AFP. International Committee of the Red Cross president Mirjana Spoljaric called on all sides to "adhere to their commitments to ensure the next operations can take place safely".

UN relief chief Tom Fletcher said 630 trucks carrying desperately needed aid had entered into Gaza in the hours after the start of the truce, with 300 of them headed to the north of the territory. Qatar said that 12.5 million liters of fuel would enter Gaza over the first 10 days of the truce. The World Food Program said it was moving full throttle to get food to as many Gazans as possible.

"We're trying to reach a million people within the shortest possible time," said the agency's deputy executive director, Carl Skau. — Agencies

by brashly aligning his company's policies with Trump's worldview, notably by eliminating fact-checking in the United States and relaxing hate speech restrictions on Facebook and Instagram. Musk has shown the strongest support for Trump, contributing \$277 million to the president's campaign and transforming his X platform into an amplifier for pro-Trump voices.

Bezos, like Zuckerberg and his peers, has visited Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida leading up to the inauguration, with favorable treatment, government contracts and reduced regulatory scrutiny for Amazon in the balance. As owner of The Washington Post, Bezos sparked controversy by blocking the newspaper's planned endorsement of Vice President Kamala Harris for the 2024 presidential election, triggering newsroom protests and subscriber cancellations. — AFP

International

Kolkata rapist killer sentenced to life

Judge rejects death penalty, does not consider it 'rarest-of-rare' crime

KOLKATA: An Indian court handed down a life sentence on Monday to a police volunteer convicted of the rape and murder of a junior doctor at a hospital in the eastern city of Kolkata, rejecting demands for the death penalty saying it was not a rare crime. The woman's body was found in a classroom at the state-run R G Kar Medical College and Hospital, where she worked, on Aug 9. Other doctors stayed off work for weeks to demand justice for her and better security at public hospitals, as the crime sparked national outrage over a lack of safety for women.

Sanjay Roy, the police volunteer, was convicted on Saturday by judge Anirban Das, who said circumstantial evidence had proved the charges against Roy. On Monday, Roy, who denied the charges, said he had been framed and sought clemency. The federal police, who investigated the case, said the crime belonged to the "rarest-of-rare" category and Roy, therefore, deserved the death penalty.

But the judge disagreed, saying that he had come to the conclusion after considering all the evidence and the circumstances linked to it. "I do not consider it as a 'rarest-of-rare' crime," Judge Das said as he sentenced Roy to life in jail on both the counts of rape and murder. "Life imprisonment, meaning imprisonment until death."

Senjuti Chakrabarty, a lawyer for Roy, said the defense would appeal to a higher court and seek Roy's acquittal. The sentence was announced in a packed courtroom as the judge allowed the public to witness proceedings. The speedy trial in the court had not been open to the public. The parents of the junior doctor were among those in court. Security was stepped up with dozens of police personnel deployed at the court complex.

Junior doctors protest

The victim's mother and father, who were seat-

ed close to Roy in court on Monday, have said they wanted Roy to be executed. "We are shocked by the verdict", the victim's father told AFP, tears running down his face. "We will continue our fight, and won't let investigations stop... Come what may, we will fight for justice." The parents had earlier said that they were not satisfied with the probe and suspected more people were involved in the crime.

Their lawyer, Amartya Dey, told Reuters that they had sought the death penalty for Roy and also demanded that those involved in what they called the "larger conspiracy" be brought to book. "The appeal court is open for us ... let us get a copy of the judgment, we can then discuss it further," Rajdeep Haldar, another lawyer for the parents, said.

A group of junior doctors and others demonstrated outside the court, demanding a harsher sentence for Roy. "We want justice. We want to know the other conspirators," they said. Police stopped several processions from reaching the court, but thousands gathered nearby with many chanting: "Hang him, hang him." Aniket Mahato, a medic and spokesman for the junior doctors who carried out weeks of strikes last year demanding better security for healthcare workers, said that he felt the "justice was not delivered".

Rimjihim Sinha, 34, who helped organize multiple mass rallies demanding justice and better protection for women before the trial, said she was "profoundly disappointed" at the sentence. "It was a diabolical crime, an extreme case of depravity", Sinha said, part of the "Reclaim the Night" movement. "It is high time that India stem the ever-swelling tide of rape and murder".

Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of West Bengal of which Kolkata is the capital, said the state government run by the regional Trinamool Congress party was "not happy" with the sentence as it had



KOLKATA: People shout slogans during a protest on Jan 20, 2025, as the prime accused is sentenced by the court in the rape and murder case of a trainee doctor at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital. — AFP

demanded the death penalty. "Life imprisonment ... is a travesty of justice," said Amit Malviya, a senior member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party that rules at the federal level. "The verdict must be appealed. Justice must not only be done but must also be seen to be done," he posted on X.

India's federal police cited 128 witnesses in its investigation, of whom 51 were examined during

the fast-tracked trial that began in November. Police had also charged the officer heading the local police station and the head of the college at the time of the crime with destruction of the crime scene and tampering with evidence. The police officer is out on bail while the former head of the hospital remains in detention in connection with separate allegations of financial irregularities at the hospital. — Agencies

China executes man who killed 35 in car rampage

BEIJING: China on Monday executed a man who killed 35 people in a car rampage in the southern city of Zhuhai in November, in the country's deadliest mass attack in years. On November 11, Fan Weiqiu, 62, deliberately drove a small SUV through crowds of people exercising outside a sports complex, also injuring 45 in China's worst such crime since 2014. He was sentenced to death last month, with a court saying his motives "were extremely vile, (and) the nature of the crime extremely egregious".

State broadcaster CCTV said Monday a Zhuhai court "executed Fan Weiqiu in accordance with the execution order issued by the Supreme People's Court". The municipal public prosecutor "sent personnel to supervise (the execution) in accordance with the law", CCTV reported. Fan's attack sparked widespread public shock and soul-searching in China about the state of society. He was detained at the scene with self-inflicted knife wounds and fell into a coma, police said at the time.

At his trial last month, Fan pleaded guilty in front of some of the victims' families, officials and members of the public, state media said. The court found he "decided to vent his anger" over "a broken marriage, personal frustrations, and dissatisfaction with the division of property after divorce". It concluded that the methods he used were "particularly cruel, and the consequences particularly severe, posing significant harm to society".

Second execution

Violent crime is generally rarer in China than many Western countries, but the country saw a string of mass casualty events last year. Stabbings and car attacks challenged the ruling Communist Party's reputation for strict public security and crime prevention. They also carried a shock factor that led some to question perceived social ills such as frustration with a slowing economy, high unemployment and diminishing social mobility. CCTV reported Monday that a separate court in eastern Jiangsu province had carried out the death penalty on a man who killed eight people and wounded 17 in a mass stabbing in November. Xu Jiajin, a 21-year-old former student who attacked a vocational school in the city of Wuxi, was executed "in accordance with the law", CCTV reported. He too had been sentenced to death in December, with the court concluding that his crime was "extraordinarily serious", CCTV said. Xu was permitted to "meet with his close relatives" before his execution, the broadcaster added. — AFP

India's 'digital arrest' scammers stealing savings

BENGALURU: Within five hours while sitting at home in India, retired professor Kamta Prasad Singh handed over his hard-earned savings to online fraudsters impersonating police. The cybercrime known as "digital arrest" — where fraudsters pose online as law enforcement officials and order people to transfer huge amounts of money — has become so rampant that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has issued warnings.

Singh told AFP that money was his life savings. "Over the years, I have skipped having tea outside, walked to avoid spending on public transport," the 62-year-old said, his voice breaking. "Only I know how I saved my money." Police say scammers have exploited the vast gap between the breakneck speed of India's data digitalization, from personal details to online banking, and the lagging awareness of many of basic Internet safety.

Fraudsters are using technology for data breaches, targeting information their victims believe is only



SEOUL: A policeman stands guard next to damaged wall tiles at the Seoul Western District Court on Jan 20, 2025. — AFP

Mugshot, solitary cell for S Korean President Yoon

SEOUL: South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol had his mugshot taken and underwent a physical check before spending his first night in jail as a criminal suspect, a prison officer said Monday. Yoon was arrested in a dawn raid last week, becoming the first sitting South Korean head of state to be detained in a criminal probe on insurrection charges over his botched declaration of martial law.

A court approved his formal arrest warrant Sunday, citing concerns he would destroy evidence, and Yoon went from being a temporary detainee to a criminal suspect facing an indictment and trial. Yoon was given a 12-sq-m cell at Seoul Detention Center in Uiwang on Sunday, according to Shin Yong-hae, commissioner general of the Korea Correctional Service. He was "assigned to one of the standard rooms used by regular inmates," Shin told lawmakers during a parliamentary session.

Yoon's cell — which typically would hold five or six people, Yonhap reported — is similar in size to those where past presidents have been detained, Shin said. The suspended leader, whose powers have been transferred to an acting president but who remains sitting head of state, also had his mug shot taken and underwent physical examination like his fellow inmates, Shin said. "The individual cooperated well with the procedures without any particular issues," Shin said.

According to prison regulations, Yoon will have

available to government authorities, and making otherwise unlikely demands appear credible. Indians have emptied their bank accounts "out of sheer fear", Modi said in an October radio broadcast, adding fraudsters "create so much psychological pressure on the victim".

'Ruined'

Mobile phones, and especially video calling, have allowed fraudsters to reach straight into people's homes. India runs the world's largest biometric digital identity program — called "Aadhaar", or foundation in Hindi — a unique card issued to India's more than one billion people, and increasingly required for financial transactions. Scammers often claim they are police investigating questionable payments, quoting their target's Aadhaar number to appear genuine.

They then request their victim make a "temporary" bank transfer to validate their accounts, before stealing the cash. Singh, from India's eastern state of Bihar, said the web of lies began when he received a call in December, seemingly from the telecom regulatory authority. "They said... police were on their way to arrest me," Singh said.

The fraudsters told Singh that his Aadhaar ID was being misused for illegal payments. Terrified, Singh agreed to prove he had control of his bank account, and after spiraling threats, transferred over \$16,100.

to change from his normal clothes into a khaki prison uniform, and he will also have been assigned an inmate number. Prison officials have said his cell includes a small table to use for eating and studying, a small shelf, a sink and a toilet. It also includes a television, but viewing time is strictly restricted. Inmates are allowed to go out for an hour every day for exercise, and shower once a week, but local media have reported that authorities will attempt to prevent him coming into contact with other inmates. His personal security detail will accompany him whenever he leaves his cell, reports say.

Court attack

Yoon plunged South Korea into political chaos with his Dec 3 martial law declaration, which lasted just six hours before lawmakers voted it down. They later impeached him, stripping him of duties. He faces a Constitutional Court case deciding whether to uphold his impeachment, and also a criminal investigation on insurrection charges, over which he has been detained.

Yoon has claimed the probe is illegal, and resisted arrest for weeks, vowing to "fight to the end". His die-hard supporters attacked the court building Sunday after it extended Yoon's detention. Dozens of people, including YouTube streamers, have been arrested over a riot at a Seoul court, police said Monday, and 51 police officers were injured in the attack, including some with head injuries and fractures.

Up to 35,000 of his supporters were outside the court Saturday, according to a police document seen by AFP. After the formal arrest warrant was issued early Sunday, some 300 people gathered near the rear entrance and began "throwing objects such as glass bottles, rocks, and chairs into the court grounds," according to the police report. — AFP

"I have lost sleep, don't feel like eating," he said. "I have been ruined."

The surge of online scams is worrying because of "how valid they make it look and sound", said police officer Sushil Kumar, who handled cybercrimes for half a decade. The perpetrators range from school dropouts to highly educated individuals. "They know what to search for on the Internet to find out basic details of how government agencies work," Kumar added. India registered 17,470 cybercrimes in 2022, including 6,491 cases of online bank fraud, according to the latest government data.

Tricks vary. Kaveri, 71, told AFP her story on condition her name was changed. She said fraudsters posed as officials from the US courier FedEx, claiming she had sent a package containing drugs, passports and credit cards. They offered her full name and Aadhaar ID details as "proof", followed by well-forged letters from the Central Bank of India and Central Bureau of Investigation, the country's top investigative agency. "They wanted me to send money, which would be returned in 30 minutes," she said, adding she was convinced when they sent a "properly signed letter". She transferred savings from a house sale totaling around \$120,000 in four installments over six days before the fraudsters vanished. Kaveri says those days felt "like a tunnel". — AFP

News in Brief

8 killed in Belgrade blaze

BELGRADE: A fire broke out early Monday at a retirement home on the outskirts of the Serbian capital Belgrade, killing eight people and injuring seven others. Luka Causic, a police officer overseeing the emergency response, said there were around 30 people inside when the fire broke out at 3:30 am (02:30 GMT). Causic said initial findings suggested that a resident may have started the fire. Fire crews and emergency responders combed the area in the wake of the blaze, with a large portion of the facility's roof visibly charred, according to an AFP reporter. — AFP

81% approve of Prabowo

JAKARTA: Nearly 81 percent of Indonesians approve of President Prabowo Subianto after 100 days in office, a poll showed on Monday, attributing the high rating to his early delivery on campaign promises. The Jan 4-10 survey by the research unit of newspaper Kompas, showed 80.9 percent of the 1,000 respondents were satisfied because of his people-oriented leadership and that he had made a start on most of his campaign platforms. Prabowo also had a good image as a president, 94.1 percent of respondents said. — Reuters

Philippines arrests Chinese 'spy'

MANILA: Philippine security officials said on Monday they had arrested a Chinese software engineer suspected of spying on Filipino military and police camps. The Chinese software engineer, identified as Deng Yuanqing, and his two Filipino drivers were arrested last week as part of counter-espionage operations that began last month. National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) chief Jaime Santiago told a news conference. He alleged that Deng was affiliated with a Chinese university controlled by the People's Liberation Army and was part of a team sent to "conduct espionage in our territory". — AFP

Cambodia govt denies killing foe

PHNOM PENH: Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet denied on Monday his government and father, former leader Hun Sen, were involved in the killing of an opposition politician in downtown Bangkok this month. Lim Kimya, a former lawmaker for the dissolved Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), was shot dead on Jan 7 by a motorcyclist as he arrived in Bangkok by bus from Cambodia with his French wife. Thai national Ekkalak Paenoi was arrested in Cambodia a day later and handed over to Thai authorities. Hun Manet "condemned the killing" and denied the government or his father were behind the murder. — AFP

Marcos slams 'woke' sex ed bill

MANILA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos denounced on Monday a proposed law to make sex education mandatory in schools in the conservative mainly Catholic nation, alleging it would teach four-year-olds to pleasure themselves. Marcos vowed to veto the bill in the event it hurdles Congress, blaming people with a "woke" mentality for what he said was an "abhorrent" and "ridiculous" idea. Legislators backing the "Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy" bill said making it a mandatory subject in schools would help address a high rate of teen pregnancies, as well as sexual assault of minors. — AFP

TUESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2025

Bitcoin hits record above \$109,000 awaiting Trump

World's biggest cryptocurrency raised 60% since Trump's win

LONDON: Bitcoin hit a record high above \$109,000 on Monday as Donald Trump, who plans to deregulate the cryptocurrency sector and has launched his own "meme coin", prepares to be sworn in as US president. Bitcoin surged to an all-time peak of \$109,241 ahead of Trump's inauguration ceremony, before falling back to around \$107,000.

The world's biggest cryptocurrency has soared nearly 60 percent in value since Trump won the presidential election in early November, which saw it surpass \$100,000 for the first time at the start of December. It came after he nominated cryptocurrency backer Paul Atkins to head the US securities regulator, reinforcing optimism that the new president will deregulate the sector.

Despite having once branded cryptocurrencies a "scam", Trump changed his stance and was a major advocate of them during his election campaign. When bitcoin reached the landmark \$100,000 level, Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform: "CONGRATULATIONS BITCOINERS!!! \$100,000!!! YOU'RE WELCOME!!! Together, we will Make America Great Again!!!"

STRUMP

Over the weekend, Trump launched his own cryptocurrency, a so-called meme coin appropriately called \$TRUMP, sparking feverish buying that sent its market capitalization soaring to several billion dollars. First lady Melania Trump also issued her own cryptocurrency, \$MELANIA.

The \$TRUMP meme coin, which is designed to

capitalize on the popularity of a personality, movement or viral internet trend, was unveiled by the president-elect in a post on Truth Social and X - owned by fellow crypto enthusiast Elon Musk.

"Beyond that optimism, Trump policies are expected to be a double-edged sword," Ipek Ozkardeska, senior analyst at Swissquote Bank, said on Monday. "His pro-growth policies and deregulation are expected to benefit the US economy but his tariff policies will certainly lead inflation higher."

Cryptocurrencies have made headlines since their creation, from their extreme volatility to the collapse of several industry giants, foremost among them the FTX exchange platform. Bitcoin was conceived in 2008 by a person or group writing under the name Satoshi Nakamoto. It was pitched as a way to break free of mainstream financial institutions by establishing a decentralized platform for transactions.

With Trump in the White House, "there are expectations that crypto will be brought more into the financial mainstream, with clearer rules about how individuals and firms can trade such assets", Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown, said Monday. Trump has vowed to make the United States the "bitcoin and cryptocurrency capital of the world".

The digital currency is created - or "mined" - as a reward when powerful computers solve complex problems to validate transactions made on a middle-proof register known as the blockchain.

Bitcoin has long been criticized for being the currency of choice for making untraceable payments on



BRUSSELS: This illustration photograph shows a bitcoin cryptocurrency coin picture displayed on a smartphone beside a screen showing a trading chart in Brussels. — AFP

the so-called dark web, a hidden part of the internet used for criminal activities. The asset has also come under attack for facilitating money laundering and al-

lowing extortion through ransomware attacks. Its carbon footprint is also under scrutiny since mining cryptocurrencies requires huge amounts of energy. — AFP

Gulf Bank unveils exclusive new services for private banking clients

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has introduced a new brand identity for its Private Banking Services, marking a major milestone in enhancing the customer experience and offering exceptional banking solutions. This initiative highlights the Bank's dedication to re-shaping Private Banking and providing tailored services designed for affluent clients.

Sattam Al-Marzouq, Assistant General Manager of Consumer Banking - Wealth Management, said: "Our clients drive us to continually raise the bar in service excellence. This new identity reflects their ambitions and reinforces our commitment to delivering outstanding services and innovative products. We remain dedicated to offering tailored support and expert investment advisory services that address their distinct needs."

He added, "Our focus is on protecting and growing our clients' wealth today, tomorrow, and for generations to come. With a dedicated team of experienced professionals, we ensure their financial ambitions are met through exclusive benefits, promising investment opportunities and seamless banking experiences."

Gulf Bank's Wealth Management strategy is built on three core pillars: fostering long-term wealth growth, safeguarding assets and ensuring financial security, and facilitating seamless wealth transfer in line with clients' personal goals. The Bank provides a comprehensive suite of services, including family



Sattam Al-Marzouq

wealth planning, liquidity and financing solutions, global asset management, and customized offerings designed to meet the unique needs of its clients.

Gulf Bank has introduced innovative financing solutions to meet real estate and investment needs, offering securities-backed loans and access to diverse, high-potential investment opportunities.

These solutions are crafted to deliver exceptional financial flexibility, reflecting the unique goals and distinguished status of the Bank's clients.

Al-Marzouq highlighted: "Whether you aspire to acquire your dream property, grow your investments, or strategically leverage your assets, we are committed to supporting you at every stage with exceptional banking services."

Private Banking clients receive the dedicated support of a relationship manager who handles all their banking requirements, providing tailored financial and investment solutions to protect and grow their wealth. Additionally, clients enjoy exclusive benefits, including debit cards with airport lounge access, travel and hotel discounts, and premium credit cards such as Visa Infinite or Mastercard World. These cards offer comprehensive travel and accident insurance, concierge services, and access to Gulf Bank's Points and Discounts Program.

Recently, Gulf Bank received the Best Next-Generation Offering award at the 2024 Private Banker



International Global Wealth Awards in Singapore. This recognition highlights the bank's success in expanding its offerings and effectively attracting the next generation of affluent clients.

Gulf Bank aims to be Kuwait's leading bank, fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace to deliver exceptional customer service while contributing sustainably to the community. Through its extensive branch network and innovative digital services, the bank empowers customers to conduct banking transactions conveniently and efficiently, ensuring a seamless experience.

In alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," and its commitment to fostering collaborative partnerships, Gulf Bank is dedicated to driving robust sustainability initiatives across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions. The bank is committed to implementing strategically selected and diverse sustainability programs both internally and externally.

EU launches new WTO case against China high-tech patent rules

BRUSSELS: The European Union launched a new challenge at the World Trade Organization (WTO) on Monday against China's rules on royalty rates for high-tech patents, amid escalating trade tensions between Beijing and Brussels.

The European Commission accused China of pressuring innovative European high-tech companies into lowering their fees by allowing its courts to set binding worldwide royalty rates. "The EU's vibrant high-tech industries must be allowed to compete fairly and on a level playing field," said Maros Sefcovic, the EU's trade



BRUSSELS: The Chinese flag is draped beside the European Union (EU) flag during an EU-China Summit at European Union Commission headquarters in Brussels on June 29, 2015. — AFP

commissioner. "Where this is not the case, the Commission takes decisive action to protect their rights".

The action comes as trade tensions are soaring worldwide, with tariff-loving Donald Trump set to be inaugurated as US President. It adds to a longer-running spat between Beijing and Brussels, which has seen the pair accuse each other of unfair practices and take a series of tit-for-tat measures.

The EU slapped hefty tariffs on electric cars made in China last year. In turn, Beijing targeted European brands and launched probes into EU subsidies of some dairy and pork products. The latest challenge revolves around "standard essential patents" protecting technologies enabling the manufacturing of goods to meet a certain standard.

European companies hold many such patents, notably in the telecom sector, according to the EU. By letting its courts set worldwide royalty rates, China was forcing EU companies to give its firms cheaper access to those technologies, the 27-nation bloc alleged. The practice also unduly interfered with the competence of EU courts for European patent issues, according to the commission. Brussels said it requested consultations at the WTO - the first step of the international body's dispute settlement procedure - because "no satisfactory negotiated solution has been forthcoming from China".

Under WTO rules, the two parties have 60 days to settle the matter before the claimant can request that a panel be set up to rule on it. Beijing said on Monday it "regrets" the EU's decision to launch this new challenge at the WTO. "China strictly adheres to WTO rules and its accession commitments, continuously improving intellectual property rights protection legislation and enforcement," Beijing's Commerce Ministry said in a statement. "China will...firmly safeguard its legitimate rights and interests," it said.

The case is related to another challenge launched in 2022 where Brussels accused Beijing of barring EU owners of high-tech patents from turning to European courts to protect their intellectual property. China is the EU's second-largest trading partner for goods after the United States. Bilateral trade reached €739 billion (\$762 billion) in 2023, according to the commission. — AFP



KUALA LUMPUR: A general view of Kuah town on Malaysia's resort island of Langkawi on January 17, 2025. — AFP

EU reopens trade deal talks with Malaysia as Trump threat looms

BRUSSELS: The European Union and Malaysia announced Monday that they were restarting negotiations for a free trade deal, with the bloc looking to strengthen trade ties around the world as US President-elect Donald Trump assumes office.

Trump's threats of high tariffs on imports have rattled EU leaders anxious about the economic fallout, while competition with China has also prompted a race to seek more trade with other partners.

"This excellent news comes at a critical time. Geopolitical tensions are escalating, and the risk of instability is growing," EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement. "While some turn inwards towards isolation and fragmentation, Europe and Malaysia are choosing a different path," she said.

Brussels and Kuala Lumpur launched talks for a trade deal back in 2010, but negotiations were suspended in 2012. Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who was wrapping up a two-day working visit to Brussels on Monday, called the renewed engagement "a significant milestone" in strengthening economic ties with the EU.

In a statement, Ibrahim said the hoped-for trade deal could "unlock immense benefits across multiple sectors of Malaysia's economy while strengthening the global supply chain in critical sectors."

He predicted it would boost Malaysian exports including of electrical and electronic products, scientific equipment and palm oil, while spurring investments from the EU in green energy and advanced manufacturing.

Von der Leyen said that "a free trade agreement between Europe and Malaysia would take our trade relationship to the next level". "With trade between us already worth €45 billion annually, we will unlock even greater benefits for businesses and consumers, especially for industrial products."

EU officials say they are pushing to bolster economic ties across the globe in the face of Trump's threats of punishing trade tariffs as part of his America-first agenda. The EU announced Friday an agreement with Mexico to strengthen their trade relations ahead of Trump's inauguration on Monday. — AFP

Syria phone shops free from Assad-linked monopoly

'Before, selling phones was like committing some big crime'

DAMASCUS: Syrian phone shop owner Abdel Razzaq Hamra was thrilled to finally be working in peace after years of being harassed and detained by security personnel enforcing an Assad-linked company's monopoly. Before president Bashar Al-Assad was ousted last month, his security forces would raid the central Damascus district where dozens of mobile stores operate in search of phones without the Emmatel company logo. "If they would find one device without an Emmatel sticker, they would confiscate everything," said Hamra, 33.

Shuddering from fear as he recounted the story, he said he had been detained three times since 2020, lost \$10,000 worth of confiscated goods and been beaten in jail. "They accused me of not working with Emmatel... so they put me in a jail cell for 101 days," he told AFP. War profiteers connected to the Assad clan have long dominated the country's economy, monopolizing entire sectors, stifling competition and terrorizing businesses.

Created in 2019, Emmatel is owned by Syrian businessman Khodr Taher, also known as Abu Ali Khodr. The US Treasury Department has accused him of supplying the Syrian army's notorious Fourth Division - headed by Assad's brother Maher - including through the creation of a private security firm that acted as its "informal executive arm". Assad's wife Asma is also allegedly linked to the company, the Treasury has said.

Emmatel was a distributor of telephones and IT products, including a slew of mobile phone brands. Both Taher and Emmatel have been under US sanctions since 2020 for their links to the Assad government. At least one Emmatel store was looted after Assad's fall, videos circulating online show, and its other branches are no longer operational.

'Kiss your family goodbye'

Several small phone shops told AFP they had gone bankrupt from the repeated raids and extortion under Assad's rule. Mustafa Khalayli said he was now out of work after closing down his mobile phone shop, which had employed five people. He had been detained for a year and lost \$40,000 in confiscated merchandise to successive raids. "Every day you would go into work and kiss your family goodbye like it was the last time," Khalayli said. "We were at risk of getting arrested at any moment over a mobile phone."

Khalayli said two officers and about 20 security personnel combed his shop for three hours in search of any phones he had not bought from Emmatel. But when they found nothing, they brought him in anyway, later accusing him of bogus charges and confiscating the phones, he said. "They just wanted to take away my merchandise," he said. "It's pure theft". Bigger phone companies had also been forced to close or downsize, shopkeepers told AFP.

Branch 215

Taher had influence in the country's security apparatus, benefitting from close ties to the Assads but also Ali Mamlouk, head of the national security bureau - according to economic publication The Syria Report. Phone shop owners said security forces linked to Branch 215 of the Military Intelligence would raid their shops, while Shabiha - pro-Assad militiamen - also stalked the stores.

"There was no basis for these raids other than the fact that Emmatel was owned by Abu Ali Khodr (Taher), who used to terrorise us with Branch 215," said phone shop owner Wissam, who did not want to give his family name for fear of reprisals.



DAMASCUS: Customers browse mobile phones kept on display at a shop in the Damascus Tower market, which specializes in the smart phone business, in the Syrian capital on January 12, 2025. - AFP

Shopkeeper Mohamed al-Mahas said "Branch 215 was more of a gang than anything else". "One officer searched all my devices for an hour and a half," he said, standing in his small store. "He told me: 'Consider this a friendly visit. Only Emmatel is allowed,'" he said.

Shopkeepers told AFP that those who were able to pay off security forces who raided their stores could avoid detention, but many did not have the means to do so. Mohammad Gemmo, 25, said constant harass-

ment and extortion forced him to close his shop and sell phones in a makeshift stall on the street.

He was arrested and asked to pay thousands of dollars to get out. "But I couldn't afford it," he said, so he spent five months in detention. "Before, selling phones was like committing some big crime," Gemmo said. "No one dared to buy anything that did not have the Emmatel stamp," he added. "Now, thank God, it's over." - AFP



WASHINGTON: Telsa, SpaceX and X CEO Elon Musk arrives to the inauguration of US President-elect Donald Trump in the Rotunda of the US Capitol on January 20, 2025 in Washington, DC. - AFP

Top Beijing official urges Musk to deepen ties with China

BEIJING: Chinese Vice President Han Zheng met with tech tycoon Elon Musk and urged US firms to "seize the opportunity" to deepen economic ties with China, Beijing's state media said Monday. Han - who attended the inauguration of US President-elect Donald Trump on Monday - met with Musk and other American business representatives on Sunday, Xinhua said.

The world's richest person, Tesla and SpaceX CEO and majority owner of X has become one of Trump's closest allies, sharing his hard-right politics and putting millions of dollars into supporting his presidential campaign.

Musk also enjoys a cult following in China, a major market for Tesla, where the company has one of its so-called gigafactories and is trying to compete with fast-growing home-grown manufacturers.

Speaking to Musk on Sunday, Han urged Tesla and other US firms to "seize the opportunity and share in the fruits of China's development, and make new and greater contributions to promoting China-US economic and trade relations", according to Xinhua. Musk, in turn, said Tesla was keen "to deepen investment cooperation with China" as well as play an "active role" in trade between the two countries, Xinhua reported.

Trump in his election campaign threatened China and other US trading partners with new tariffs, but he has also said he is open to talks with President Xi Jinping, a leader he has long openly admired. The two spoke by phone on Friday, with both leaders vowing to improve ties between the rival countries. Han also met Sunday with Vice President-elect JD Vance, Xinhua said. - AFP

South Korea's central bank slashes forecasts over political crisis

SEOUL: South Korea's central bank on Monday slashed its 2025 growth forecast because of the political crisis triggered by President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law last month. The move came as the government unveiled a \$250 billion support package for exporters amid worries of possible tariffs by Donald Trump as he prepares to return to the White House.

Yoon briefly suspended civilian rule on December 3, sending soldiers to parliament, but lawmakers voted the measure down and later impeached the president, who is now being held for a criminal probe on insurrection charges. He initially resisted arrest and has refused to cooperate with investigators. When his detention was extended, his die-hard supporters attacked a court building on Sunday. "The unexpected declaration of martial law in early December, coupled with the ongoing political turmoil and the Jeju Air passenger plane disaster, significantly dampened economic sentiment," the Bank of Korea (BOK) said in a statement. A Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 crashed on December 29 in southwestern Muan airport, killing 179 people in the worst ever aviation disaster on South Korean soil.

The political turmoil and crash "led to contractions in domestic consumption and construction investment, likely causing the fourth-quarter growth rate to fall well below the November projection", the bank said. "Consumption, which had shown improvement in the third quarter, appeared to weaken again in the fourth quarter," it said.

As a result, the bank's Monetary Policy Committee revised down its estimate for the last quarter of 2024, from 2.2 percent to a range of 2.0-2.1 percent. It had projected 1.9 percent growth for 2025, but "the forecast has been revised downward to 1.6-1.7 percent", it said.

"This adjustment is primarily attributed to the impact of political uncertainty triggered by the declaration of martial law last December, which has dampened economic sentiment," it said. "This is estimated to reduce this year's growth rate by approximately 0.2 percentage points, particularly affecting domestic consumption and other areas of domestic demand," it added.

HSBC economist Jin Choi said: "It is rare for the bank to release its interim growth forecast... it reflects the BOK's ongoing efforts to provide support for a normal functioning by the government." At a meeting with state think tanks, acting President Choi Sang-mok said that with the new US administration, South Korea is at a "critical turning point" where "uncertainty based on campaign promises" transitions into "practical policy risks". State think tanks expressed their concern over the inauguration of the new US administration, citing a "sluggish domestic recovery in sectors like construction, partly due to weakened economic sentiment stemming from domestic political situations". - AFP

The video games bedeviling Elon Musk

SAN FRANCISCO: Skepticism rages about whether Elon Musk actually put in the hours to become a top player of video games "Diablo IV" and "Path of Exile 2." The fourth main installment in the Blizzard Entertainment series "Diablo" came out in 2023 and a "Vessel of Hatred" expansion pack was released late last year.

Role-playing title "Path of Exile 2," available to those who pay for early access, is expected to be free-to-play when it is officially released this year by Grinding Gear Games. Early talk among gamers is that "Path of Exile 2" is similar enough to "Diablo" to be considered a "clone". Versions of both games are designed to be played on Xbox and PlayStation consoles and on personal computers running the Windows operating system.

Dungeon crawling

"Diablo" is considered a "dungeon crawler," a genre in which a player's character fights monsters, avoids traps, and solves puzzles to progress. Gameplay, not surprisingly, often takes place in fantasy-like dungeons or chambers, with adversaries becoming increasingly difficult. Victories earn rewards that players can use to ramp up their character's abilities.

Gaming industry analyst Mat Piscatella described "Diablo" as "a fantasy action role-playing game whose primary hook for players is the never-ending search for better weapons, armor and items in order to progress in the game to go find even more better weapons, armor and items." "There's a story, of course, but really, it's all about the loot," he said.

Grinding

Using a tactic called "grinding," players repeat simple tasks to beat low-level enemies and amass loot. "Basically, clicking on enemies a lot," Piscatella said. Players can spend hours grinding, prompting doubt that Musk had that kind of time to fritter while running Tesla, SpaceX, Neuralink, The Boring Company, and X, formerly known as Twitter.

The main story in "Diablo IV" can be finished in about 30 hours, with the time commitment multiplying if a player tackles all side missions. The game also has an online multiplayer component. According to industry watcher Circana's Player Engagement Tracker, the average "Diablo IV" player in the United States now plays between 10 and 35 hours per month.

The average per-player time spent in "Path of Exile 2" in the United States since early access became an option in December ranged from 37 hours to 50.7 hours depending on whether they were using consoles or personal computers, Circana determined.

"Diablo IV" players get to choose from six classes of characters: barbarian, druid, necromancer, rogue, sorcerer or spiritborn - each with its own strengths. Players battle their way through dungeons in an open world, building up their characters as they advance through quests and the story. There are also options for players to battle one another online. - AFP



JAKARTA: Head of the Fiscal Policy Agency Febrio Nathan Kararibu, President Director of the Indonesia Stock Exchange Iman Rachman, Minister of Forestry Raja Juli Antoni, Minister of the Ministry of Environment Hanif Faisol Nurofiq, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of the Financial Services Authority Mahendra Siregar, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Environment Diaz Hendropriyono, and Chief Executive of Capital Market, Financial Derivatives, and Carbon Exchange Supervision at the Financial Services Authority Inarno Djajadi inaugurate the launch of international carbon trading at the Indonesia Stock Exchange in Jakarta on January 20, 2025. - AFP

Indonesia launches international carbon exchange

JAKARTA: Indonesia opened its carbon exchange to international buyers on Monday, aiming to raise funds to help meet ambitious domestic climate goals. The move opens the way for foreign investors to enter a market launched in September 2023 for domestic players. Carbon credits are generated by activities that avoid or reduce emissions of carbon dioxide - a potent greenhouse gas. They can be purchased by companies seeking to "offset" or cancel out some of their own emissions, either to comply with regulations or bolster their "green" credentials.

Indonesia is one of the world's biggest polluters and is heavily reliant on coal to fuel its growing economy. It has made little progress on a multi-billion-dollar investment plan agreed with the United States and European nations in 2022 to wean its power grid off coal.

New President Prabowo Subianto last year brought forward the country's timeline for carbon neutrality by a decade to 2050, and pledged to close hundreds of coal and fossil-fuel power plants by 2040.

The government says it wants to build over 75 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity by 2040 but so far has laid out little detail on how it hopes to achieve that. It hopes that funds raised by carbon credits sales on the exchange will finance some of the green transition.

The launch is an "important milestone in our collective journey towards a sustainable future", Environment Minister Hanif Faisol Nurofiq said. The move comes after new guidelines on country-level trade in carbon credits were agreed at COP29 last year. But carbon credits have come under fire in recent years over revelations of shoddy accounting and even outright fraud in projects. Hanif said the government would guarantee every credit issued on the exchange, with scrutiny to ensure emissions could not be double counted. Some experts expressed skepticism about the exchange however, noting the domestic market had attracted relatively little interest.

"If domestic demand was high, we wouldn't need to open it to foreign entities," Fabby Tumiwa, executive director of the Institute for Essential Services Reform, told AFP. He said the domestic exchange had not been designed to align with Indonesia's emissions reduction strategy and he had concerns about the "additionality" of projects on the market.

Carbon credit programs must show that emission reductions or avoidance would not have happened without the credits, and are "additional". This often requires trying to prove a counterfactual - what would have happened in the absence of the carbon credits - and has been a key problem for the sector.

Fabby warned it was not immediately clear if the credits available on the exchange were compatible with standards set by other countries. Still, at least nine transactions took place at the start of Monday trade, accounting for more than 41,000 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, according to a board at the stock exchange. - AFP



SEOUL: A pedestrian walks on a main road outside the Seoul Western District Court in Seoul on January 19, 2025. - AFP

Business

Introducing NBK Aura credit & prepaid cards: A first-of-its-kind partnership

NBK and Alshaya Group launch exclusive collaboration with Mastercard



KUWAIT: (From left) John Hadden, CEO of Alshaya Group, Jihad Khalil, Mastercard's General Manager for MENA East Custer and Mohammed Al-Othman, Chief Executive Officer of Consumer and Digital Banking at NBK unveil the new card.



Officials attend the ceremony.



Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO of NBK Kuwait



John Hadden, CEO of Alshaya Group



John Hadden, CEO of Alshaya Group (right) and Mohammed Al-Othman, Chief Executive Officer of Consumer and Digital Banking at NBK.

KUWAIT: In a groundbreaking collaboration with Alshaya Group, a global leader in retail brand management and operations, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) proudly unveiled the NBK Aura World Mastercard Credit Card and the NBK Aura Platinum Mastercard Prepaid Card.

The announcement was made during a special event at NBK's headquarters, attended by Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO of NBK Kuwait, Mohammed Al-Othman, Chief Executive Officer of Consumer and Digital Banking at NBK, John Hadden, CEO of Alshaya Group and Jihad Khalil, Mastercard's General Manager for MENA East Custer. The event also saw the presence of senior executives from NBK, Alshaya and Mastercard.

The launch of these cards follows NBK's recent exclusive partnership agreement with Alshaya Group, reaffirming the bank's commitment to

delivering exceptional benefits to its customers. This initiative underscores NBK's leadership and dedication to introducing innovative and distinctive offerings.

The two new cards enable NBK customers to earn up to 8% in Aura points on their purchases, offering a seamless experience for redeeming rewards through the customer's Aura application account. These points can be redeemed at over 50 iconic brands across fashion, beauty, dining, and more, such as H&M, Bath&Body Works, Footlocker, Shake Shack, Raisin Cane's, Charlotte Tilbury and Harvey Nichols. The application provides customers with the flexibility to manage and redeem their points, enabling them to shop and pay directly at participating stores using their earned rewards. This exclusive program includes a wide array

of globally recognized brands managed and operated by Alshaya Group, ensuring unparalleled value and choice.

Both cards also grant holders exclusive Mastercard benefits, including complimentary access to numerous airport lounges worldwide, free travel insurance, travel discounts and a host of additional perks.

Reflecting on this collaboration, Mohammed Al-Othman, CEO, Consumer and Digital Banking Group at NBK remarked, "We are thrilled to see the result of 18 months of dedicated collaboration with our partners at Alshaya Group. Our goal was to create a groundbreaking product that delivers maximum value to both NBK and Alshaya Group's customers, in partnership with Mastercard."

Al-Othman also emphasized that the launch of these cards marks the first collaboration between NBK and Alshaya

Group following their recent exclusive partnership agreement. He further highlighted that NBK consistently seeks to forge strategic partnerships with leading companies across various sectors, aiming to provide its customers with exceptional offers and benefits that not only meet their needs but also exceed their expectations, enhancing their overall banking experience with NBK.

Meanwhile, John Hadden, CEO at Alshaya Group said, "We are excited to announce this new partnership today with NBK, has a trusted and strong partner of Alshaya throughout our 40-year journey of growth."

This announcement marks the next evolution in this longstanding relationship with NBK, as well as the beginning of a new collaboration with Mastercard, with a shared focus on enhancing cus-

tomers experience and financial services. We are particularly proud that Kuwait is the first country to launch this innovative collaboration, built upon Alshaya's Aura loyalty program, which already has 8.5 million members, with 1.6 million of those members based in Kuwait alone."

NBK is committed to offering rewarding deals and exclusive value-added benefits to customers across all segments, reinforcing its leading position in both the local and regional banking sectors. Meanwhile, Alshaya Group manages a vast portfolio of renowned brands across the Middle East, North Africa, Turkey, and Europe, providing customers with access to some of the world's most famous brands through a network of thousands of stores, restaurants, cafes, entertainment venues, and more than 125 e-commerce and digital platforms.



Alshaya Group's team is honored during the event.



(From left) John Hadden, CEO of Alshaya Group, Mohammed Al-Othman, Chief Executive Officer of Consumer and Digital Banking at NBK and Jihad Khalil, Mastercard's General Manager for MENA East Custer.

Weyay Bank unveils Weyay Aura prepaid card

KUWAIT: Weyay Bank announces the launch of the new Weyay Aura card in collaboration with Alshaya Group, a leading international brand franchise operator, offering an unparalleled choice of well-known brands to customers. The Bank aims to help Weyay customers using the Aura Loyalty Program by Alshaya Group maximize their points with every spend they make with the new card.

The Weyay Aura card was launched in a special event attended by the executive management of the Bank, represented by the Chief Executive Officer of the National Bank of Kuwait, Salah Al-Fulaij, the Chief Executive Officer of Consumer and Digital Banking, Mohammed Al-Othman as well as the Head of Weyay Bank, Amal Al-Duwaisan, the Chief Executive Officer of Alshaya Group, John Hayden, and the Division President of East Arabia at Mastercard, J. K. Khalil.

As Kuwait's first digital bank, Weyay aims to provide an innovative digital experience allowing Weyay customers to use the Weyay Aura card for purchases both locally and internationally, earning more Aura points that can be redeemed for a variety of benefits within the Aura Loyalty Program.

Key features of the Weyay Aura prepaid card:

- A rewarding experience by getting more Aura points



KUWAIT: Officials attend the event for the launch of the new Weyay Aura card in collaboration with Alshaya Group.

with every transaction.

- Up to 30 points for every 1 KD spent at stores participating in the Aura Loyalty Program.
- 10 points for every 1 KD spent at any store at The Avenues that is not part of the Aura Loyalty Program.
- 2 points for every 1 KD spent at any other location inside and outside Kuwait.
- Easy digital card creation via the Weyay app: Weyay

customers can easily get their Weyay Aura card instantly through the app and start using it for both online and in-store purchases. As a completely digital card, customers can add their card to e-wallets like Apple Pay, enabling them to make fast and secure payments. This digital card also ensures customers can increase the value of their rewards anytime and anywhere.

- Points added automatically to Aura account: Once

the card is created within the Weyay app, it is fully integrated with Aura's app, ensuring that points are automatically added to the Aura account of the customer with every purchase. This eliminates the need to separately redeem points after payment, providing a seamless and hassle-free experience.

On this occasion, Naser Al-Duwaisan, Product Manager at Weyay Bank, said: "We are excited to launch the Weyay Aura prepaid card and offer a unique, enriching experience to our customers. Our partnership with Alshaya Group reflects our commitment to innovation and our shared vision to enhance the digital experience, focusing on customer needs. This also highlights the growing demand for digital banking solutions in the region."

"Our collaboration with Weyay Bank is a transformative opportunity for our customers. By merging our extensive retail network with their cutting-edge digital banking solutions, we're creating a seamless and rewarding experience that prioritizes customer needs. We're excited to collaborate and deliver groundbreaking services to the market," said Francois Orhan, Vice President of Loyalty, Payments, and Data at Alshaya Group.

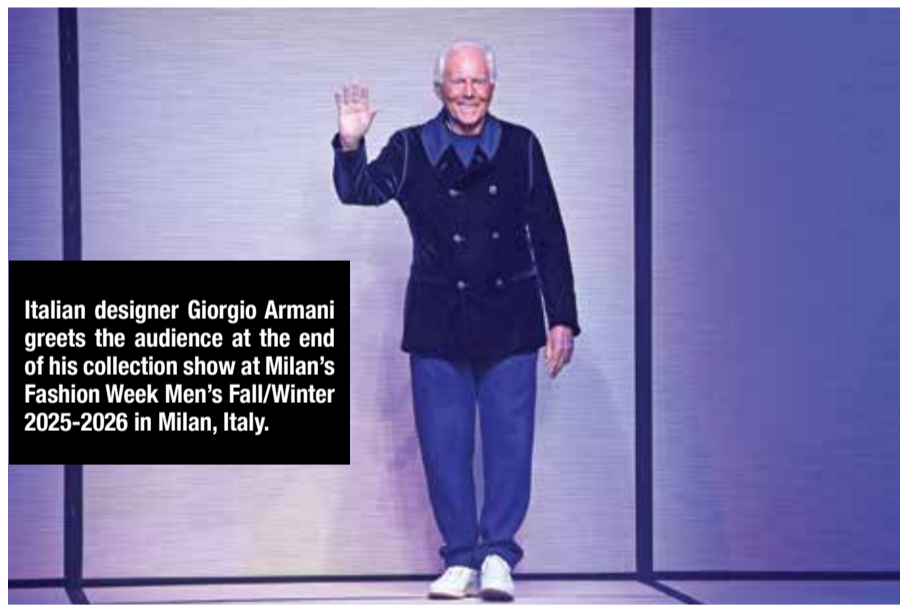
All information about the Weyay Aura card can be found on its website www.weyaybank.com or in the Weyay app that can be downloaded from the App Store or Google Play Store.

Weyay Bank is Kuwait's first digital bank, providing innovative banking solutions designed to keep up with the digital age we live in. Weyay offers a wide range of digital services and benefits via its easy-to-use app, focusing on speed, flexibility and security.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2025



EMPORIO ARMANI COLLECTION AT MILAN FASHION WEEK



Italian designer Giorgio Armani greets the audience at the end of his collection show at Milan's Fashion Week Men's Fall/Winter 2025-2026 in Milan, Italy.



Models walk the runway during the Giorgio Armani collection show at Milan's Fashion Week Men's Fall/Winter 2025-2026 in Milan, Italy, on January 20, 2025. — AFP photos



Lifestyle



Shoppers queue at the pop-up store King Colis, a French start-up that organizes sales of lost parcels from e-commerce platforms like Amazon, at the Roma Est shopping center. - AFP photos



Shoppers queue at the pop-up store King Colis.

Rome shoppers take pot luck in 'blind sale' of unclaimed packages



Shoppers unbox the secret packs they purchased during "blind sales" at the pop-up store King Colis.



A woman holds secret packs during "blind sales" at the pop-up store King Colis.

Benedetta slid a manicured nail through the sellotape of a mystery package to unwrap a garden hoe and earbuds. Her friend discovered she had bought some sort of harness. The Italian students are among hundreds of people at this "blind sale" of unclaimed packages, where boxes large and small are paid for according to their weight at a Rome shopping center. "Many people might say this is a good surprise," Benedetta told AFP, holding up the wireless earphones in one hand. "But in my opinion, it's this. It's a hoe."

"I live in the countryside. I always have to plant flowers and I use a soup spoon to dig. I would never have bought a hoe of my own volition," she said. Organized by French startup King Colis, the event aims to reduce waste and promote sustainability. It is the company's first event in Italy and is proving so popular that King Colis CEO Killian Denis predicts they could sell 10 tons of packages in six days, with an average of 800 buyers and 3,000 visitors per day.

Denis said he came up with the idea during the Covid lockdown, after several things he ordered online to entertain his young daughters got lost in the post. "Each time I was reimbursed... but I started to wonder what happened to the lost, undeliverable packages," Denis told AFP. "I discovered that they were destroyed by the logistics companies in charge of their delivery, since they're of no use to them and the suppliers refuse to take them back because of the transport costs." That is when he and a childhood friend decided to become "parcel rescuers", he said.

'Only one rule'
Antoine Ulry manages the pop-up



Shoppers queue at the pop-up store King Colis.

stand in the shopping center, where people get 10 minutes to "take as many items as you like from the bins". People dug through the piles, holding packages up to their ears and shaking them. The queue to join them snaked through the center. "The only rule you have to follow is not to open the parcels before you buy them," Ulry said. Some shoppers immediately tore into their purchases the moment the cash was handed over. As one customer wheeled away a shopping trolley overflowing with boxes, road maintenance worker Giuseppe Arancio discovered the packages he paid 123 euros (\$126) for include a stone cooking pot.

"The pot is valuable and I got other little things I needed. Out of the uncertainty came useful things", he said with a smile. After the initial pop-up sales in France, the company has organized blind sales in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Portugal, Spain and

Sweden are to follow soon. It also sells bundles of mystery parcels online. One third of the packages sold come from European logistics giants, while the other two thirds come from Amazon resellers. Most of the latter are lost parcels, while the remainder are returned and unsold things.

Such is the appetite for the blind sales that King Colis is currently out of e-commerce packages to sell, beyond the three pop-up events it has planned in January. Its website says it hopes to replenish stocks soon. An Amazon spokesperson told AFP: "We do not work with 'mystery box'/'secret package' retailers." The company does "not send unopened or undeliverable customer returns to liquidators" but does use liquidations to give some returned products "a second life". — AFP

Brands pull ads from Japan's Fuji TV over allegations against host

A growing number of top brands are pulling adverts from major Japanese broadcaster Fuji Television over sexual misconduct allegations against a host and former J-Pop star. Masahiro Nakai, one of Japan's biggest boy band stars and a celebrity television host, lost several of his shows on Japanese TV this month following media reports he had paid a large financial settlement to an alleged victim. Toyota, McDonald's and Seven and i Holdings, which owns the 7-Eleven convenience store chain, all told AFP on Monday they were withdrawing their commercials from the network.

The Nikkei business daily said more than 20 companies, from insurers to railway operators, had done the same. Earlier this month, Fuji Television suspended a weekly show hosted by Nakai after media reports said he had paid a woman a lump sum of 90 million yen (\$575,000). The reports said the woman had accused Nakai, 52, of sexual misconduct, with one tabloid claiming it had involved a closed-door setting and a "sexual act against her will". Tabloid reports also alleged that a Fuji Television executive had arranged a meal where Nakai, a member of the J-Pop sensation SMAP, met the woman in 2023.

The network denied those allegations but said last week it was probing the matter after a US activist investor said it was "outraged" by the company's lack of transparency. Fuji's president Koichi Minato held a press conference on Friday but declined to discuss details of the allegation. He instead cited a fresh internal investigation to be carried out by a committee that will be formed soon. The scandal comes after now-defunct talent agency Johnny & Associates - of which SMAP was long the face - admitted in 2023 to sexual abuse allegations by its late founder.



This undated photo released by Jiji Press on January 20, 2025 shows Masahiro Nakai, a former member of the J-Pop boy band sensation SMAP and a celebrity television host, in Tokyo. - AFP

Last week, US fund Dalton Investments' affiliate Rising Sun Management, a shareholder in Fuji Television's parent company, called on Fuji to "clarify the facts". "The lack of consistency and, importantly, transparency in both reporting the facts and the subsequent unforgivable shortcomings in your response merit serious condemnation that serves not only to undermine viewer trust, but also leads directly to erode shareholder value," Rising Sun said. "As one of your largest shareholders, controlling over seven percent of the company's stock, we are outraged!" Fuji Media shares fell more than 15 percent after the allegations came to light but have since staged a recovery. — AFP



Shoppers choose secret packages during "blind sales" at the pop-up store King Colis.



A man leaves with secret packages he purchased at the pop-up store King Colis.

Iran court sentences pop singer Tataloo to death

An Iranian court has sentenced popular singer Amir Hossein Maghsoudloo, known as Tataloo, to death on appeal after he was convicted of blasphemy, local media reported on Sunday. "The Supreme Court accepted the prosecutor's objection" to a previous five-year jail term on offences including blasphemy, reformist newspaper Etemad reported online. It said "the case was reopened, and this time the defendant was sentenced to death for insulting the prophet", referring to Islam's Prophet Mohammed (PBUH).

The report added that the verdict

was not final and can still be appealed. The 37-year-old underground musician had been living in Istanbul since 2018 before Turkish police handed him over to Iran in December 2023. He has been in detention in Iran since then.

Tataloo had also been sentenced to 10 years for promoting "prostitution" and in other cases was charged with disseminating "propaganda" against the Islamic republic and publishing "obscene content". The heavily tattooed singer, known for combining rap, pop and R&B, was previously courted by conservative politicians as a way of reaching out to young, liberal-minded Iranians. Tataloo even held an awkward televised meeting in 2017 with ultra-conservative Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi, who later died in a helicopter crash. In 2015, Tataloo published a song in support of Iran's nuclear program that later unraveled in 2018 during the first US presidency of Donald Trump. — AFP



Blue Ivy Carter attends the world premiere of Disney's Mufasa: The Lion King at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California on December 09, 2024. - AFP

'Mufasa' claws its way back atop North America box office

Disney's "Mufasa: The Lion King" topped the North American box office on a long holiday weekend after ceding the top spot a week earlier, analysts said Sunday. The animated film earned an estimated \$15.5 million for the period from Friday to Monday, which is Martin Luther King Jr. Day, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said. Two new releases - Sony's "One of Them Days" and Universal's "Wolf Man" - took over the second and third spots.

Analyst David A. Gross predicted a "very profitable run" for "One of Them Days, which stars Keke Palmer and singer/songwriter SZA as roommates scrambling to pay rent or face eviction after a boyfriend spends their money. The film earned an estimated \$14 million over the holiday weekend. "This is an excellent opening for an original black American

comedy," he said, boosted by "sensational critics reviews and an excellent audience score." Horror film "Wolf Man," starring Christopher Abbott and Julia Garner, came in below analysts' expectations, with \$12 million over four days.

As the start of a new horror series and as a remake of the 1941 classic starring Bela Lugosi, gross called the box office take "weak." In fourth spot, down one spot from last weekend, was Paramount's animated "Sonic the Hedgehog 3" at \$10.3 million. And in fifth, hanging strong in its eighth weekend out, was "Moana 2" at \$8.4 million. Those numbers propelled the Disney blockbuster past the \$1 billion mark globally. It is the studio's third 2024 release to hit the billion-dollar club after "Deadpool and Wolverine" and "Inside Out 2." Rounding out the top 10 were:



Riders from the Lisbon School of Equestrian Art perform with a Lusitano horse during a show at Lisbon School of Equestrian Art in Belem, Lisbon.



A Lusitano horse from the Lisbon School of Equestrian Art is prepared prior to a dressage show.



Riders from the Lisbon School of Equestrian Art perform with a Lusitano horse during a show. — AFP photos



PORTUGAL SCHOOL KEEPS UNESCO-LISTED EQUESTRIAN ART ALIVE

Stable hand Catarina Cabaca carefully braided the mane of a Lusitano thoroughbred in the distinctive Portuguese style that's just been added to UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage. She was weaving the mane at the prestigious Portuguese School of Equestrian Art in Lisbon, where dressage is taught as it was practiced at the Portuguese royal court in the 18th century. "We prepare them just like in the old days", she told the AFP while crafting a traditional three-strand plait, ahead of a dressage performance at the school.

UNESCO, which added Portuguese traditional dressage to its list in December, called the practice a "source of collective identity" characterized by the rider's traditional outfit and position on the saddle. One of the bastions of this practice is the school in Lisbon, where equestrians ride on chamois or tapir skin saddles while dressed in burgundy velvet coats, high leather boots and black tricorne hats. They perform



A braided Lusitano horse is pictured before a dressage show at Lisbon School of Equestrian Art in Belem, Lisbon.

'Collective identity'
The harmony between the rider and animal is key, but so is the Lusitano horse, a long-standing thoroughbred originating from Portugal, widely admired for its strength and agile gait, but also its docility and obedience. "It's a unique horse, different from all the other races. I see it as a Portuguese product of excellence, like olive oil, wine or cork," said Joao Pedro Rodrigues, squire at the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art.

choreographed exercises in the tradition of Portugal's centuries-old equestrian art. "We are the guardians of this national art," said Luis Calaim, the administrator of Parques de Sintra, the public entity that runs the equestrian school. For 46-year-old rider Carlos Tomas, who has been with the school for nearly two decades, the recognition is "a responsibility" as "we play an important role in (this art's) preservation and transmission."

Aside from the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art, this art continues to be practiced thanks to the work of numerous breeders, artisans and riders in Portugal and abroad. With its addition to the UNESCO list, Portuguese equestrian art joins other traditions of the Iberian country, such as fado, popular traditional songs imbued with melancholy, recognized in 2011. — AFP



Stable hands prepare horse saddles before a dressage show at Lisbon School of Equestrian Art in Belem, Lisbon.



A stable hand braids a Lusitano horse before a dressage show at Lisbon School of Equestrian Art in Belem, Lisbon.



A rider from the Lisbon School of Equestrian Art prepares a Lusitano horse before a dressage show.



Riders from the Lisbon School of Equestrian Art warm up on Lusitano horses before a dressage show.



Riders from the Lisbon School of Equestrian Art perform with Lusitano horses during a show.

Sports

Straka shakes off nerves to win US PGA American Express

Jason Day dropped out of a tie with Thomas with a bogey at 18

LOS ANGELES: Austrian Sepp Straka conquered his nerves to capture his third US PGA Tour title in convincing style Sunday, firing a two-under-par 70 to win the American Express in La Quinta, California, by two strokes.

Straka started the day with a four-shot lead over a trio of players and led by the same margin after his fourth birdie of the day at the par-three 13th—the toughest hole on the Stadium Course.

But it wouldn't be a smooth march to the finish. Straka's lead dwindled to three strokes after his first bogey of the week at the par-five 16th, where his second shot from the fairway drifted right and his 15-foot putt to save par slipped past the hole.

He would bogey the 18th as well, but his 25-under-par total put him two clear of former world number one Justin Thomas, who carded a six-under-par 66 for 265.

Another former world number one, Australian Jason Day, dropped out of a tie with Thomas with a bogey at 18, finishing with a three-under-par 69 that left him tied for third with American

Justin Lower, who also posted a 69.

Despite his big lead to start the day Straka said it was "nerves, complete nerves" coming down the stretch. "Stomach in a knot the whole nine," said the 31-year-old, although he gave none of that away with his outwardly unruffled demeanor. Straka launched his round with an 11-foot birdie at the first and added birdies at the fourth and seventh.

Charlie Hoffman, the 36-hole co-leader who started the day tied for second with Lower and Day, made four birdies on the front nine to slice a shot off Straka's lead.

But the 48-year-old saw his chances of a fifth career title — and his first since 2016 — disappear for good with a triple-bogey six at the 13th, where he was in the water twice. Hoffman finished with a one-under-par 71 that left him tied for fifth with Patrick Cantlay, who posted a 70.

"This golf course, you can't really let up," Straka said. "I think that was the biggest challenge today was keeping

aggressive on my targets. "I had a lot of chances for bogeys out there, but the putter saved me a lot of times."

Thomas rally stalls

Thomas, who won the most recent of his 15 titles at the 2022 PGA Championship, got off to a strong start in his bid to erase a six-shot deficit.

The American had five birdies on the front nine, rolling in 16-foot birdie putts at the second and ninth. He added another at the 11th before the birdies dried up in the balmy California desert near Palm Springs.

"I played well, I had a chance," Thomas said. "I did what I needed to do on the front nine today (to) at least be making some noise and moving up the leaderboard."

"It was unfortunate to kind of stall there after 11," he said. "(I) really, really played some great golf today, hit some really good shots, made some great putts and hit some great putts, too, that didn't go in." — AFP



LA QUINTA: Sepp Straka of Austria poses with the trophy after putting in to win on the 18th green during the final round of The American Express 2025 at Pete Dye Stadium Course on January 19, 2025 in La Quinta, California. — AFP

Penaud scores six, Dupont shines as French clubs dominate

PARIS: Damian Penaud scored a tournament record six tries as Bordeaux-Begles hammered the Sharks, while Antoine Dupont shone as Toulouse thrashed Leicester in Champions Cup action on Sunday.

Wales coach Warren Gatland will no doubt have been interested, if slightly apprehensive, spectator as the two French teams — packed with the core of the France team — were ruthless in the two matches that came just 12 days before Les Bleus open their Six Nations campaign against the stuttering Welsh in Paris.

Penaud's hatful of tries in the 66-12 victory saw Bordeaux secure top spot in Pool 1 with 20 points from a maximum of 20, and home advantage in the next round in April. Dupont's France back-up Maxime Lucu, Ugo Boniface, Yoram Moefana and Jacques Nguimbou all added tries for Bordeaux, with Matthieu Jalibert hitting eight conversions.

"The first part of the path has been very well managed," said Bordeaux coach Yannick Bru. "We were drawn in Toulouse's pool, so the slightest mistake would cost us an away match in the knock-out phase." One blow for Bordeaux was the absence of winger Louis Bielle-Biarrey, who withdrew from the match with vertigo and will miss the first get-together of the France team ahead of the Six Nations.

The heavy defeat for the Durban-based Sharks meant Ulster — who beat Exeter 52-24 on Friday — leapfrogged them into fourth place with a better points difference of -61 compared with the South Africans' -87.

Ulster will now be away from home for their last-16 Champions Cup tie as the Sharks drop into the second-tier Challenge Cup. Six-time champions Toulouse finished second to Bordeaux in the same Pool 1, on 19 points, but their 80-12 victory over Leicester was similarly impressive, with them running in a dozen tries in a masterful display.

"Today's match was close to perfection," acknowledged Dupont. Not to be outdone, there was also a famous 32-24 away victory for Castres over English giants and three-time champions Saracens. The win snapped a run of 21 straight defeats away from home in Champions Cup action for the French club.

Castres captain Adrien Seguret scored the deci-



TOULOUSE: Leicester's English fly half Jamie Shillcock is tackled during the European Rugby Champions Cup rugby union match between Stade Toulousain and Leicester Tigers at the Ernest-Wallon stadium in Toulouse, south-western France, on January 19, 2025. — AFP

sive try to ensure the shock win that saw the Top 14 team take second place in Pool 3, which is topped by Northampton. Saracens, with new England skipper Maro Itoje in the second row, finished fourth behind Munster and miss out on a home tie.

Bonus point in 21 minutes

Star scrum-half Dupont, an Olympic sevens gold medalist at last year's Paris Games, opened the scoring against the Michael Cheika-coached Tigers. Dimitri Delibes and Emmanuel Meafou both then crossing as the home side showcased their fine offloading game.

Italy back Ange Capuozzo dived in at the corner to hand Toulouse an attacking bonus point in just the 21st minute. Hooker Julien Marchand was next over the whitewash and Meafou bagged a second. With Thomas Ramos booting all six conversions, Toulouse were a barely believable 42-0 up at half-time.

England scrum-half Jack van Poortvliet jinked over to finally get Leicester on the scoreboard early in the second period, but Toulouse hit straight back with a five-pointer from man-of-the-match Thibaud Flament.

from international shooting federations who are qualified and experienced Class A able to teach in English, where only four judges were able to pass the technical test of the course.

Al-Osaimi explained that Al-Jrayed will start his first international courses as an international lecturer accredited by the International Shooting Federation during his participation in two electronic target courses during the period from February 24 to March 9, 2025 in India.

Al-Osaimi added that the Kuwait Shooting Club/Federation is proud of the national cadres of Kuwaiti referees, as the club has a number of highly qualified Kuwaiti international referees who have obtained the International Shooting Federation (ISSF) International Referee License, and no less than 75 international referees are involved in judging shooting competitions during the current local season in pistol and rifle, shotgun, and Olympic bow and arrow shooting.

At the end of his statement, Al-Osaimi wished all national cadres, including referees, administrators, technical and administrative staff, success in

know for 270 million rupees (\$3.2 million) in the auction in November.

Pant, a flamboyant left-handed batsman, returned as captain of Delhi Capitals last season after 14 months away from elite cricket following a car crash. But he parted ways with Delhi Capitals, who ended sixth in the 10-team table of the 2024 season.

"I see a born leader in Rishabh Pant. From my point of view he will be probably the best captain IPL has seen," Sanjiv Goenka, owner of Lucknow, said in a special TV broadcast. "Surely Rishabh Pant will play for at least 14-15 years for us, we

A smart turnover by Jack Willis released Capuozzo and the Italian showed a clean pair of heels to sprint in for his second to take the six-time Cup champions past the 50-point mark. Leicester notched up two more tries through Solomone Kata and Will Hurd, matched by Ramos and Flament, with his second, before Dupont — now playing in the centre — and Matthis Lebel had the final word.

So all in all, 146 points and 22 tries for the two French teams, more than enough material for Gatland and his Wales coaching staff to mull over before their daunting Friday night trip to the Stade de France. France coach Fabien Galthie, however, will be rubbing his hands at getting access to his in-form raft of players shining at both Top 14 and Champions Cup level.

"There was a lot of pleasure, it was a great team effort," said Flament of Toulouse's victory before turning to heading to France duty. "There's a lot of excitement and I hope pleasure to come," he said. "The job is done, we can carry on in peace." In the late game, Sale thrashed Pool 4 winners Toulon 33-7 to secure a last-16 tie against Toulouse. The result saw Racing 92 miss out on the knock-out phase. — AFP



Obaid Manahi Al-Osaimi

achieving more successes and raising the flag of our dear country Kuwait in all international forums.

It is noteworthy that the international shooting referee Khalid Al-Jrayed participated in judging the shooting competitions during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, as well as the international shooting referee Hamad Al-Ruwaisan, which confirms the competence of Kuwaiti referees and their ability to achieve success and excellence.

hope at least five IPL titles in these years."

Pant has played 150 internationals for India across three formats, scoring 5,028 runs, including seven centuries. The 18th edition of the tournament will begin on March 21 with Kolkata hosting the opener and the final on May 25, according to reports in Indian media.

The IPL is a huge earner for Indian cricket and the tournament makes more than \$11 billion for the economy each year. The pioneering IPL helped make T20 cricket hugely popular, spawning copy-cat events worldwide. — AFP

Marquez eyeing seventh MotoGP crown in Ducati

MILAN: Marc Marquez is aiming to draw level with his great MotoGP rival Valentino Rossi by winning a seventh world title after making a Ducati dream team with Francesco Bagnaia for the upcoming 2025 season.

Six-time world champion Marquez was unveiled by Ducati on Monday as the Italian manufacturer's factory racing team revealed its new Desmosedici GP25 bike. Bedecked in red, the 31-year-old made no secret of his intention to win more titles after last year's impressive performances for Ducati satellite outfit Gresini.

Marquez finished third behind eventual winner Jorge Martin, now with Aprilia, and two-time champion Bagnaia and won three Grands Prix, his first in three years as an injury nightmare which started with a fractured arm in 2020 was finally put behind him.

"I've fought many battles against Ducati in the past but, after getting my smile back last season, I'm here this year and it's a real privilege," said Marquez who signed a two-season deal with Ducati in June. "It's great to come to such a big MotoGP team, a team which in the last four or five years in particular has been hugely important. We want to win the riders', constructors' and teams' world titles."

"We need to work together as a team so that if I don't win Pecco (Bagnaia) wins and vice-versa. I think it's going to be a great season and I hope to bring home plenty of points and wins — let's see where we finish at the end of the season."

Bagnaia's partnership with Marquez is an interesting prospect given his mentor and Italian motorcycle icon Rossi's difficult history with the Spaniard. The 28-year-old Bagnaia opted to say nothing when Rossi said in a podcast interview in September that Marquez was a "dirty" rider who actively worked to stop him from winning the 2015 title.

Jorge Lorenzo won the world crown by five points that year but his overall victory hinged on Marquez and Rossi colliding in the penultimate Malaysian MotoGP. Rossi was penalised for that incident and had to start the year's final GP in Valencia in last place, virtually guaranteeing Lorenzo the title before the race was run. — AFP

Murphy downs Wilson to win second Masters

LONDON: Shaun Murphy defeated world snooker champion Kyren Wilson 10-7 to claim a second Masters title after a thrilling final on Sunday. Wilson had fought back from a four-frame deficit to trail 8-7 in the best-of-19 frame showpiece before Murphy triumphed.

"When I lost to Mark Selby in 2021 (in the world championship final), I thought my days in the business end of these events had gone," world number seven Murphy told the BBC. "I must pay tribute to Kyren - he is a great world champion. He really took it to me and there was a stage a few frames ago when it was panic stations."

The 42-year-old Murphy won his first Masters in 2015, 10 years after his maiden world title. He had been in great form all week at the Alexandra Palace venue in London, hitting only the sixth maximum break of 147 in tournament history in his semi-final win over Mark Allen. — AFP

Al-Jrayed, first Kuwaiti referee to obtain int'l license

KUWAIT: Secretary General of the Kuwaiti and Arab Shooting Federations Obaid Manahi Al-Osaimi, praised the success achieved by the international referee for bullet weapons shooting, Khalid Abdullah Al-Jrayed, in obtaining an international license from the International Shooting Federation as an international lecturer for electronic target registration courses (EST), making Al-Jrayed the first Kuwaiti and Arab lecturer to obtain this international license.

Al-Osaimi pointed out that this came after Al-Jrayed passed the International Shooting Target Lecturer Course, which was organized by the International Shooting Federation in France recently with the participation of 12 participants

Rishabh Pant named Lucknow captain

NEW DELHI: Record-breaking wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant has been named captain of Indian Premier League team Lucknow Super Giants for the upcoming edition of the lucrative T20 tournament, the franchise said Monday. The 27-year-old set a new IPL record when he went to Luc-

Sports

Manchester City are back says Guardiola after Ipswich rout

Guardiola will settle for restoring City's pride this term

IPSWICH: Pep Guardiola claimed Manchester City are back to their best after Phil Foden starred in a 6-0 rout of struggling Ipswich on Sunday.

Foden netted either side of Mateo Kovacic's eye-catching goal as City blew Ipswich away with three first-half goals at Portman Road.

Jeremy Doku, Erling Haaland and James McAtee scored after the interval to give fourth-placed City their biggest league win this season. Guardiola's side have won three of their last four league games as they begin the long climb back to respectability after a dismal start to the season.

"We are really pleased, we are back in many things that have defined this team in the last decade, the last years," Guardiola said. "Really pleased for the players, they deserved it a lot. We recovered some identities that we lost in this path."

"Really pleased for the three points and to climb a little bit because qualification for the Champions League next season will be really tough." Sterner tests lie in wait for City, including a vital Champions League trip to Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday and looming Premier League clashes with Chelsea and Arsenal.

But this was the kind of confident display City used to make look routine during their march to four successive English titles. Winning is almost certain to prove beyond them as they trail leaders Liverpool by 12 points.

Guardiola will settle for restoring City's pride this term as he rebuilds a team that suddenly grew old and inconsistent before his eyes. "The most



IPSWICH: Manchester City's Belgian midfielder #17 Kevin De Bruyne (L) sets up Manchester City's English midfielder #47 Phil Foden (R) for their third goal during the English Premier League football match between Ipswich Town and Manchester City. — AFP

important thing is that the players, they saw themselves recognize what we are, so that is the best thing I can say," he said.

Haaland, who has scored 112 goals in just 127 appearances for City, this week committed himself to the club until 2034 when he signed a new nine-and-

a-half year deal. But Kyle Walker was again absent from the City side amid reports that AC Milan are ready to bid for the unsettled England right-back.

In City's first visit to Portman Road for 23 years, the champions emphasized how powerful they can still be at peak form.

Ruthless City

Haaland scored a hat-trick when City beat Ipswich 4-1 in August and he threatened to net in the opening moments in Suffolk. Kovacic's pass split the Ipswich defence and sent Haaland clean through on goal, but the Norway striker's shot was pushed away by Christian Walton. Omari Hutchinson almost put Ipswich ahead against the run of play with a stinging strike from just inside the area that hit Haaland and flashed just over. But City's pressure was rewarded in the 27th minute when Doku and Kevin De Bruyne combined to set up Foden for a clinical close-range finish.

Foden turned provider as ruthless City doubled their lead three minutes later. Kovacic strode onto Foden's pass on the edge of the area and smashed a superb low strike past the flat-footed Walton for his first goal since October. Guardiola's men were rampant and they struck again three minutes before half-time. Set free by Doku, De Bruyne raced into the area and cut the ball back for Foden, whose shot from five yards evaded Walton's weak attempted save. The England forward's fifth goal in his last four games maintained his recent improvement.

City have scored 25 first-half goals in 22 games, more than any other team in the Premier League this season. Ipswich were powerless to stem the tide. Doku danced through their defence to score City's fourth with a low shot that hit Dara O'Shea on its way past Walton in the 49th minute. City showed no mercy and Haaland joined the party in the 57th minute. — AFP

Champions League giants scrap for knockout spots

PARIS: A year of unprecedented pressures on the global football calendar begins with a Champions League first, as two rounds of matches in Europe's elite club competition take place in January and some of the continent's biggest names face a scrap to avoid a humiliating exit.

There is no bigger game this week than Paris Saint-Germain against Manchester City, with two clubs who have transformed the face of football over the last 15 years at risk of early elimination. Qatar-owned PSG and Abu Dhabi-backed City, the latter winners of the Champions League two years ago, have stumbled their way through this first season since the tournament's expansion.

City have taken just one point from their last three Champions League games and lie 22nd in the 36-team standings. PSG, semi-finalists last season, are a point behind City in 25th place, and therefore in greater danger of going out given that only the top 24 advance to the knockout phase. That would be deeply embarrassing for them, and particularly humiliating for Nasser al-Khelaifi, PSG's Qatari president.

He was instrumental in driving the changes to the Champions League as chairman of the influential European Club Association and a member of UEFA's Executive Committee. "It is even stronger and that is what we like about it," Khelaifi said after the draw

Inter beat Empoli to keep pressure on Serie A leaders Napoli

MILAN: Inter Milan kept in touch with Napoli after seeing off struggling Empoli 3-1 on Sunday and going three points behind the Serie A leaders.

Goals in the second half from Lautaro Martinez, Denzel Dumfries and Marcus Thuram ensured a hard-fought win for champions Inter at the San Siro without their suspended coach Simone Inzaghi. Napoli have become the team to beat thanks to their thrilling 3-2 win at Atalanta, who are seven points off the pace in third, on Saturday but Inter also have a game in hand.

However, Inter have a packed schedule due to their Champions League commitments while Napoli have no European football after their disastrous title defence last season. As well as their final two league



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's players take part in a training session at the team's training ground in Liverpool, northwest England, on January 20, 2025, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League football match against Lille. — AFP

phase fixtures in the Champions League — against Sparta Prague and Monaco in consecutive weeks — Simone Inzaghi's team have the Milan derby and trips to Juventus, Napoli and Atalanta between now and mid-March.

"We barely have time to think because we're always playing," said Inzaghi's assistant Massimiliano Farris to DAZN. "We've won 12 times and drawn three in our last 15 league matches and we're in with a great chance of getting to the last 16 of the Champions League without having to go through the play-offs." Captain Martinez's distance effort in the 55th minute took his league total to eight goals from 18 appearances, some way off the 24 he racked up on the way to guiding Inter to their 20th league title last term.

The Argentina striker hadn't scored at home since early November before Wednesday's 2-2 draw with Bologna but his goal against Empoli was his second in as many matches at the San Siro. Dumfries' thumping header, from Kristjan Asllani's 79th-minute corner, was key as Inter were far from their best and once Inter loanee Sebastiano Esposito halved the

deficit for 14th-placed Empoli in the 83rd minute a wave of worry swept the stadium.

Fans breathed a collective sign of relief six minutes later when Thuram swept in his 13th league goal of the campaign to seal the points and keep Inter's title defence rolling on.

Lazio stay fourth

Earlier, Lazio stayed in Serie A's Champions League places after thumping struggling Verona 3-0. Marco Baroni's Lazio went ahead with just a minute on the clock through Samuel Gigot, and further strikes from Boulaye Dia and captain Mattia Zaccagni put them fourth, two points above Juventus who beat AC Milan on Saturday.

Sunday's success ended a three-match winless streak for Lazio, which included derby defeat to rivals Roma, and left Verona in the relegation zone.

Verona slumped to their 14th defeat in 21 league fixtures in front of new chairman Italo Zanzi following the club's acquisition by American private equity firm Presidio Investors on Wednesday. — AFP



MADRID: Real Madrid's Brazilian forward #16 Endrick fights for the ball with Las Palmas' Scottish defender #15 Scott McKenna during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and UD Las Palmas at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on January 19, 2025. — AFP

Real thrash Las Palmas to claim La Liga lead

MADRID: Kylian Mbappe struck twice and produced a brilliant performance to power Real Madrid to a 4-1 win over Las Palmas and take the reigning champions top of La Liga on Sunday. Los Blancos enjoyed a perfect weekend, overtaking Atletico Madrid by two points after their neighbours slipped up with a shock defeat at Leganes on Saturday, while Barcelona, third, could only draw at Getafe.

Mbappe has hit top form in recent weeks after an inconsistent start to life at Real Madrid following his dream switch from Paris Saint-Germain last summer. The 26-year-old reached 12 league goals with his brace, becoming the Spanish league's second top-scorer behind Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski, with Brahim Diaz and Rodrygo Goes also on target.

"It was a very important game because we knew what had happened yesterday, with Atletico and Barca, we wanted to win and we did," Mbappe told Real Madrid TV. "We started badly, letting in a goal (so early)... but the reaction was top."

"We got the ball forward, quickly, attacking the spaces and with quality, we scored a lot of goals... we're happy because we're leaders." Mbappe has 18 goals for the season in 30 appearances across all competitions, and is looking increasingly crucial for his side in attack. With Vinicius Junior suspended, the spotlight was on the French forward at the Santiago Bernabeu and he delivered with a sparkling performance. — AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

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

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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, NASEEM AHMAD, holder of Indian Passport No. N8640434 having permanent address: Vill Post Pariyawan, Police station Nawabgang, Tehsil Kunda, Dist Pratapgarh, UP, Pin code - 229408 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Naseem Ahmad Idrisi and (surname) Nazir Idrisi. **#6623 (21/01/2025)**

I, RAJAK ABDUL SAMAD, holder of Indian Passport No. X2879201 having permanent address Dx-17, Irani Wadi, Opp Sqarters Cly Chincholu Gate, Malad East, Mumbai, PO: Malad East, DIST: Mumbai Suburban, Maharashtra- 400097 Residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that Henceforth my name will be read as under: RAJAK ABDUL SAMAD (given name) SAYYED (Surname) **#6624 (20/01/2025)**

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Djokovic in row as 'dizzy' Sinner reaches Australian Open quarters

Tien's fairytale run over in a four-set defeat to Italy's Lorenzo



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a return against Czech Republic's Jiri Lehecka during their men's singles match on day eight of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic was at the centre of another Australian Open row on Monday while Jannik Sinner needed medical attention in fierce heat to battle into the quarter-finals and Iga Swiatek won easily.

But American teenage qualifier Learner Tien's fairytale run is over after he suffered a thigh problem in a four-set defeat to Italy's Lorenzo Sonego in Melbourne. Five-time major champion Swiatek torpedoed another feel-good story as she thrashed "lucky loser" Eva Lys 6-0, 6-1 to set up a meeting with eighth seed Emma Navarro.

Poland's Swiatek, who accepted a one-month doping ban late last year, then learnt that the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) will not appeal in the case. She called it "closure". The 23-year-old has denied knowingly doping, saying non-prescription medication was contaminated.

With temperatures rising above 30 Celsius (86 Fahrenheit) for a second successive

day, Ukraine's Elina Svitolina beat Veronika Kudermetova — then declined to shake the Russian's hand. But Svitolina's husband, the 38-year-old Frenchman Gael Monfils, retired from his match in the last 16.

'Insulting'

The 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic wasn't in action—he plays Carlos Alcaraz in a quarter-final blockbuster on Tuesday — but he was the story. On Sunday he refused to do a routine on-court interview, his hasty exit drawing boos from the Rod Laver Arena crowd.

Afterwards he said it was in protest at Tony Jones, a top sports presenter with host broadcaster Channel Nine, who he accused of "insulting and offensive comments" towards him and Serbian fans. Jones on Friday labelled Djokovic a "has-been", among other things, and said: "Kick him out."

Djokovic said he would boycott interviews with the TV station until he got an

apology. He later released a short video on X to explain his stance and it has been viewed more than 60 million times, and caught the attention of the site's owner Elon Musk.

"It's way better just to talk to the public directly than go through the negativity filter of legacy media," Musk posted in response, with Djokovic replying: "Indeed." Tennis stars past and present and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese all waded into the row.

Jones apologized on air Monday and hours later organizers Tennis Australia said: "Novak acknowledges the apology has been given in public as requested, and is now moving on and focusing on his next match."

Djokovic has been at the centre of controversy before at the Australian Open, notably in 2022 when he was deported on the eve of the tournament over his refusal to be vaccinated against COVID. He

claimed ahead of this year's tournament that he was "poisoned" by lead and mercury in his food while held in a hotel before being deported.

'Light for Ukraine'

Back on the tennis court, world number one and defending champion Sinner needed medical attention and overcame a long interruption when he broke the net with a thunderous serve to reach the last eight. He came home 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 against Danish 13th seed Holger Rune on Rod Laver Arena.

Sinner struggled in the hot conditions, his hand visibly shaking and his heart rate taken in the third set before he left court for a medical timeout. Sinner said afterwards he had suffered with dizzy spells.

He next faces home hope Alex de Minaur, the eighth seed who beat unseeded Alex Michelsen of the US in straight sets. Svitolina, the 28th seed, defeated Russia's

unseeded Kudermetova 6-4, 6-1.

Svitolina refused to shake her opponent's hand afterwards, as is the case for all Ukrainian players facing Russians because of the war. "For me to find a way to win matches, to find a way to bring a little light, a little win for the Ukrainian people is something that I feel I am responsible for," said the 30-year-old from Odesa.

Svitolina faces American 19th seed Madison Keys after she beat former finalist Elena Rybakina in three sets. An exhausted Monfils was unable to make it a double celebration however when he called it quits with American 21st seed Ben Shelton leading two sets to one and a game up in the fourth.

Shelton faces Sonego after the Italian beat the 19-year-old Tien 6-3, 6-2, 3-6, 6-1. Tien had shocked Daniil Medvedev in a late-night five-set thriller in the second round to announce himself on the world stage. — AFP



KUWAIT: Kuwait's artistic gymnastics team with officials before their departure to Baku.

Kuwait's artistic gymnastics team head to Baku

BAKU: The Kuwaiti Youth Artistic Gymnastics Team will organize a training camp in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, starting Tuesday as part of a long preparation plan for the 2026 Youth Olympic Games to be held in the Senegalese capital, Dakar.

The team's delegation left the country Monday afternoon for Baku, and the delegation includes team administrator Khalid Al-Madhan, Ukrainian coach Vitaly Arsenyev, and players Abdullah Behbahani, Mousa Al-Sahaf and Saud Al-Rudaini. The 10-day

camp comes as part of the plan set by the Kuwait Olympic Committee in co-operation with the Gymnastics Federation, which aims to prepare the players in the best way for the Olympics.

In this context, President of the Gymnastics Federation Fahad Al-Soula thanked the President of the Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Al-Nasser, the Acting Director of the Public Authority for Sport Bashar Abdullah, and the head of the Women's Sports Committee in the Olympic Committee Fatima Hayat for their interest in the sport of gymnastics and their support for this game that has imposed itself strongly in international championships, stressing that the Federation continues to develop the game in its technical and rhythmic sections to be one of the most prominent games that make achievements in the name of Kuwait.

Thunder bounce back to down struggling Nets

LOS ANGELES: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the scoring with 27 points as the Oklahoma City Thunder got back to winning ways with a 127-101 defeat of the struggling Brooklyn Nets on Sunday.

Gilgeous-Alexander — who missed Friday's defeat to Dallas with a wrist injury — added 10 assists and four steals to his points tally in a wire-to-wire home victory for the Western Conference leaders. The Thunder seized control of the contest in a rampant first quarter, outscoring Brooklyn 39-19 and opening up a 29-point lead late in the game before strolling to victory.

The win extended the Thunder's lead at the top of the Western Conference to 6.5 games from second-placed Houston. Oklahoma City lead the conference with a 35-7 record. The Denver Nuggets meanwhile stayed amongst OKC's chasing pack with a 113-100 defeat of the Orlando Magic in Florida. Denver star Nikola Jokic bagged his 18th triple-double of the season in the win, finishing with 20 points, 14 rebounds, 10 assists, three steals and three blocks.

The Nuggets trailed by 10 points midway through the second quarter but Denver took control in the third, outscoring Orlando 39-25 before stretching their lead to 24 points in the fourth quarter. The win extended Denver's winning streak on the road to six games. The Nuggets are now 26-16 and stand in fourth place in the West. In Milwaukee meanwhile,



OKLAHOMA CITY: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander #2 of the Oklahoma City Thunder handles the ball during the game against the Brooklyn Nets on January 19, 2025 at Paycom Center in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. — AFP

Giannis Antetokounmpo delivered a 30-point game for the third time in his past four outings, scoring 34 points in a 123-109 win over the injury-hit Philadelphia 76ers.

Damian Lillard finished with 25 points, 16 of them coming in a flurry of fourth quarter scoring as Milwaukee closed out victory. The Sixers' Tyrese Maxey led the game scoring with 37 points but it was not enough to stop Philadelphia sliding to their sixth straight loss, with star forward Joel Embiid among those missing with injury.

"They had so many guys out injured — give them credit, they hung in there," Milwaukee coach Doc Rivers said of the Sixers. Milwaukee improved to 24-17 with Sunday's victory and are fourth in the Eastern Conference table, 11 games off leaders Cleveland (35-6). In Miami meanwhile, the Heat improved 21-20 for the season with a 128-107 rout of the

San Antonio Spurs. Kel'el Ware led the Miami scoring with 25 points from the bench, while guard Duncan Robinson provided offensive support with 21 points.

But it was another disappointing outing from Miami's unsettled star Jimmy Butler. Butler, who was handed a seven-game suspension earlier this month for indicating that he wanted to leave the franchise, finished with just eight points from 3-of-7 shooting.

In Los Angeles, Norman Powell scored 22 points and James Harden and Ivica Zubac added 21 points apiece as the Clippers overpowered the Los Angeles Lakers 116-102.

The 40-year-old LeBron James led the Lakers with 25 points but the Clippers were always in control after taking the lead in the first quarter and holding a comfortable double-digit advantage for most of the game. — AFP