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Oil remains key energy resource

Kuwait oil output over 3m bpd • Kuwait to purchase 1 GW of electricity from Gulf grid

Amir receives Prince Hassan bin Talal



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Tuesday Prince Hassan bin Talal on the occasion of his visit to the country. The meeting was attended by senior state officials. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwait boosted its crude oil production capacity to "over 3 million barrels per day by the end of last year" CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corp (KPC) Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah said on Tuesday. He affirmed oil will remain an irreplaceable energy resource for the foreseeable future, with no significant changes expected for decades.

Sheikh Nawaf made these remarks while speaking to journalists during the three-day Regional Clean Sea Organization (RECSO) Oil Spills Conference, themed "Sustainably Clean Seas". He emphasized the conference's importance in preserving the marine environment and combating oil spills, recalling Kuwait's environmental catastrophe 34 years ago when oil wells were set ablaze during the Iraqi invasion.

Sheikh Nawaf said that KPC is working to increase the country's crude oil production capacity to around 4 million barrels per day by 2035 based on its strategic plan. A part of the production comes from Kuwait's share of the Neutral Zone with Saudi Arabia, estimated at around 500,000 bpd. Kuwait has been vying to raise its output capacity to beyond 4 million barrels per day for the past few decades. Kuwait's production quota as per OPEC+ agreement is around 2.7 million bpd, but it is exporting lower than this to account for domestic consumption of around 400,000 bpd.

Kuwait on Monday announced the second oil and gas offshore discovery in a few months in Al-Julaia. The reserves are estimated at 800 million



KUWAIT: CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corp (KPC) Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah addresses a press conference on Jan 21, 2025. KUNA

barrels of crude oil and 600 million cubic feet of natural gas. Sheikh Nawaf revealed that he, along with Minister of Oil Tareq Al-Roumi and Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) CEO Ahmad Al-Eidan, informed Kuwait's political leadership about the new oil discovery. This field, only the second to be drilled in Kuwaiti waters, shows promising signs of additional large oil traps, Sheikh Nawaf said, highlighting its significance 80 years after petroleum production began on land. The discovery will further bolster Kuwait's global standing in the energy sector. KOC CEO Al-Eidan elaborated on the marine exploration strategy, which identified 17 promising oil-rich locations, excluding Kuwait Bay.

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NEWS IN BRIEF



WASHINGTON: Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk gestures during the inaugural parade at the Capitol One Arena on Jan 20, 2025. — AFP

Musk in 'Nazi' salute row

WASHINGTON: Billionaire tech mogul Elon Musk said Tuesday his critics needed "better dirty tricks" after a row erupted over a gesture he made at an inauguration event for US President Donald Trump that some likened to a "siege heil" or Nazi salute. Upon thanking the crowd for returning Trump to the White House, Musk tapped the left side of his chest with his right hand and then extended his arm with his palm open, repeating the gesture for the crowd seated behind him. Musk later posted on X that his opponents needed "better dirty tricks". "The 'everyone is Hitler' attack is sooo tired," he said. — AFP

Zionist military chief resigns

JERUSALEM: The head of the Zionist military, Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi, resigned on Tuesday over his responsibility for its "failure" during Hamas' attack on Oct 7, 2023. In his resignation letter, Halevi said he was leaving "due to my acknowledgment of responsibility for the (military's) failure on October 7", admitting "not all" of the Zionist entity's war goals had been met. Major General Yaron Finkelman, the head of the Zionist entity's southern military command, which is responsible for Gaza, also resigned. — AFP

Turkey ski resort inferno kills 66; Amir condolences

ISTANBUL: At least 66 people were killed when a huge fire ripped through a hotel at a popular ski resort in north-western Turkey that was packed with people enjoying the winter holidays, among them families. The blaze at the Grand Kartal Hotel in Kartalkaya broke out around 3:30 am (0030 GMT), sending huge clouds of smoke into the night air and sparking panic among the guests.

HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday addressed a cable of condolences to

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. HH the Amir prayed for the souls of the victims and wished the injured quick recovery. 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 cables of condolences to Erdogan.

Survivors and eyewitnesses spoke of scenes of desperation as people tried to flee the burning building with some leaping out of the windows or using bedsheets as a makeshift rope. "People on the upper floors were screaming. They threw bedsheets out of the windows, some tried to jump," Atakan Yelkovan, who escaped from the third floor with his wife, told IHA news agency. "It was like the apocalypse. The flames engulfed the

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BOLU, Turkey: An aerial picture of a fire that gutted a 11-storey hotel in Kartalkaya on Jan 21, 2025. — AFP

Zionists kill 9 in Jenin after Trump absolves settlers

JENIN: Zionist security forces backed by helicopters raided the volatile West Bank city of Jenin on Tuesday, killing at least nine Palestinians in what Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called a "large-scale and significant military operation". The action, launched a day after US President Donald Trump declared he was lifting sanctions on ultranationalist Zionist settlers who attacked Palestinian villages, was announced by Netanyahu as a new offensive against fighters.

The move into Jenin, where the Zionist army has carried out multiple raids and large-scale incursions over recent years, comes only two days after the start of a ceasefire in Gaza and underscores the threat of more violence in the West Bank. The military said soldiers, police and intelligence services had begun a counterterrorism operation in Jenin. It follows a weeks-long operation by Palestinian security forces in self-rule areas of the West Bank to reassert control in the adjacent refugee camp, a major center of armed groups including Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Gaza-based Hamas, which has expanded its reach in the West Bank over recent years, called on Palestinians in the territory to escalate fighting against



SEBASTIA: The mother of Palestinian teenager Ahmad Rushdi, who was killed during a Zionist military operation, leads pallbearers carrying his body during his funeral in the West Bank on Jan 20, 2025. — AFP

the Zionist entity. As the operation began, Palestinian security forces withdrew from the refugee camp and the sound of heavy gunfire could be heard in mobile phone footage shared on social media. The spokesman for the Palestinian security forces, Anwar Rajab, said in a statement Zionist forces had "opened fire on civilians and security forces, resulting in injuries to several civilians and a number of security personnel, one of whom is in critical condition".

Palestinian health services said at least nine Palestinians were killed and 35 wounded as the Zionist raid began, a week after a Zionist air strike in the

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Trump fires foes after executive order blizzard



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump signs executive orders during his inaugural parade at Capital One Arena on Jan 20, 2025. — AFP

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump announced plans to weed out some 1,000 opponents from the US government Tuesday on his first full day in power after taking office with a shock-and-awe blitz of executive orders.

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Local

MENA on verge of water crisis

Experts urge updating policies to ensure sustainable water management



KUWAIT: Senior officials participate in discussions on regional development and cooperation on water management at the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development forum.



Experts and policy makers urge updating water management regulations during a panel discussion. — KUNA photos

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region faces a looming water crisis, with less than 1 percent of global renewable freshwater resources available for over six percent of the world's population, according to Bader Al-Saad, Director General and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD). Speaking at the Water Development Financing Forum on Tuesday, Al-Saad highlighted the urgent need for innovation, investment, and sustainable strategies to address this growing challenge.

"By 2050, water availability in MENA may decline by 20 percent, while demand could surge by 50 percent. Agriculture, which consumes 85 percent of the region's water, faces escalating risks, and urban areas are already struggling with shortages," Al-Saad warned.

Al-Saad identified advancements in desalination and wastewater reuse as promising solutions. However, significant obstacles persist. Developing cost-effective and environmentally sustainable desalination technologies is imperative, as is expanding wastewater recycling and its regional adoption. Fi-



Bader Al-Saad



Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan



Ousmane Dione

finance, and mechanisms like carbon markets and the Green Climate Fund to drive sustainable investments.

Beyond technical solutions, Al-Saad highlighted the broader implications of water security. He linked it directly to economic development, social stability, and human dignity, calling for inclusive solutions that leave no one behind. He urged collective regional and global efforts to secure MENA's water future, stressing that collaboration, innovation, and equity are crucial for overcoming the region's challenges.

Ousmane Dione, World Bank Vice President for MENA, echoed these concerns, describing the region as "the most water-scarce in the world, where droughts and desertification are becoming increasingly severe." He warned that climate change is amplifying these pressures, posing existential risks that could make parts of MENA uninhabitable.

Dione cited startling statistics: Citizens in MENA have access to just 480 cubic meters of water annually, compared to a global average of 5,500 cubic meters. With 60 percent of the population relying on surface water and 24 percent on groundwater, climate disruptions are intensifying these vulnerabilities. Despite these challenges, Dione highlighted the region's legacy of resilience and ingenuity, from ancient water systems like Morocco's Qatana and Oman's Faraj to cutting-edge desalination technologies pioneered by GCC countries. "MENA's history reminds us that water scarcity has never defined its destiny," he said.

However, both speakers cautioned that innovation alone will not suffice. Dione referenced the World Bank's Country Climate Development Report (CCDR), which outlines the severe economic and

social impacts of water scarcity. "Water is central to these challenges and must be central to our solutions," he stated, calling for cross-border cooperation and integrated strategies. He praised partnerships like that of the Arab Fund and the World Bank, which blend regional expertise with global resources, as pivotal for progress.

"This partnership matters," Dione emphasized. "Together, we can ensure that the people of MENA not only survive but thrive, creating a future marked by development, prosperity, and peace."

Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, a long-standing advocate for regional cooperation and water sustainability, stressed the need for a comprehensive, human-centered approach. He pointed out that the water crisis is not merely a technical issue but one deeply intertwined with human dignity, social stability, and economic development.

He posed a poignant question: "Are we investing in our true capital — human capital — or are we prioritizing material exploitation at the expense of the region's people?"

Prince Hassan proposed a blue-green initiative during a recent meeting in Amman with Muslim and Arab ambassadors and ministers. This initiative would address water in the context of peace, align resource management with human dignity, and promote sustainable greening for the benefit of all citizens. While acknowledging the political complexities of the region, he expressed hope for collaboration. "If all countries in the region recognize that this is about building peace and take the necessary steps, then the potential for participation is limitless," he concluded.

Suggested solutions from the water development forum

- **Advancements in desalination:** Development of cost-effective and sustainable desalination technologies to address water scarcity.
- **Expansion of wastewater recycling:** Increased adoption of wastewater reuse as a vital strategy for augmenting available water resources.
- **Public-private partnerships:** Mobilizing both public and private sectors to pool resources, expertise, and financial support for water-related solutions.
- **Green finance initiatives:** Utilizing green bonds, climate finance, carbon markets, and the Green Climate Fund to drive sustainable water investments.
- **Inclusive solutions for water security:** Integrating water management strategies with broader goals of economic development, social stability, and human dignity.
- **Cross-border cooperation:** Collaborative, integrated approaches between nations in the region to manage water resources more effectively.

By the numbers: The MENA water crisis

- Less than 1% of global renewable freshwater resources are available for over 6% of the world's population in the MENA region.
- By 2050, water availability in MENA may decline by 20%, while demand could surge by 50%.
- Citizens in MENA have access to just 480 cubic meters of water annually, compared to the global average of 5,500 cubic meters.
- 60% of MENA's population relies on surface water, and 24% on groundwater.

financial constraints further complicate these efforts, with many utilities hindered by low tariffs, heavy subsidies, and escalating operational costs.

The forum also provided a platform to explore pathways toward addressing the crisis. Al-Saad emphasized the importance of public-private partnerships to mobilize both resources and expertise. He advocated for leveraging green bonds, climate



Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Tuesday the World Bank's Vice President for MENA Ousmane Dione. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Sheikh Jarrah meets with the Director of Multilateral and Strategic Partnerships at the World Food Program (WFP) Stanlake Samkange.

Kuwait discusses cooperation with World Bank and WFP

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Tuesday the World Bank's Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Ousmane Dione.

During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relations and means of enhancing cooperation between the two sides on a number of issues and projects, especially in the Middle East

region, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Sheikh Jarrah also met with the Director of Multilateral and Strategic Partnerships at the World Food Program (WFP) Stanlake Samkange.

During the meeting, they discussed means of cooperation and coordination between the two sides, especially the role of the World Food Program in the Middle East region, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. — KUNA



KUWAIT: A delegation from the International Women's Group (IWG) explores the Kuwait Times archive room. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



The IWG members pose for a photo with Alnaqeeb and Al-Watheq Bellah Darwish, head of the printing press at Kuwait Times.

IWG visits Kuwait Times, Kuwait News

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait Times and Kuwait News welcomed a delegation from the International Women's Group (IWG) on Tuesday, comprising several ambassa-

dors' wives who visited to learn about the newspapers' operations and editorial processes. The delegation included Polina Dlamini, President of the IWG and wife of the ambassador of Eswatini, Laura Duclaud Vilares, wife of the ambassador of Mexico and Baigalmaa Bayantsagaan, wife of the ambassador of Mongolia.

During the visit, the group toured various departments, including the newsroom, studio, printing press and warehouse. They were briefed on the news-gathering process and the Kuwait Times' role in covering local and international news.

The ambassadors' wives also participated in an interactive studio session, creating a video highlighting their countries' unique traditions. They shared insights about traditional cuisine, language and cultural heritage, offering a glimpse into the rich diversity of their nations. The International Women's Group (IWG) is a non-profit organization in Kuwait established in 1989 by Hanneke Velling, wife of the Dutch ambassador to Kuwait. The group's mission is to promote culture, tradition and knowledge-sharing among female ambassadors and ambassadors' wives of all nationalities accredited to Kuwait.



Jana Alnaqeeb, Public Relations and CSR Manager, at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, sits with IWG members, President of the IWG and wife of the ambassador of Eswatini, Laura Duclaud Vilares, wife of the ambassador of Mexico and Baigalmaa Bayantsagaan, wife of the ambassador of Mongolia.



The visitors examine a print edition of Kuwait Times.

Local

Kuwait inaugurates first sustainable wool factory to promote heritage and innovation

Initiative by Al Sadu Society, supported by KFAS and hosted by Al-Mawashi



This photo shows part of Kuwait's first sustainable wool factory, "Soof".



Textile weaving machines are seen at the factory.



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah listens to a member of the "Soof" team as she explains some of the features of the factory.



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah listens to an explanation of how wool is colored.



HH Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah is seen with officials, diplomats and ambassadors at the opening ceremony of Kuwait's first sustainable wool factory, "Soof".

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait's first sustainable wool factory, "Soof", was inaugurated on Monday at Al-Mawashi, under the patronage and presence of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) said the factory is a result of an initiative by Al Sadu Society, supported by KFAS and hosted by Al-Mawashi. This strategic partnership aims to develop the local wool industry, add value to Kuwait's natural resources and promote sustainability in national projects.

KFAS explained that the project began with the Al Sadu Society's proposal to explore the feasibility of producing sustainable yarns from local wool. KFAS funded a research initiative in collaboration

with the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) and the Al Sadu Society, focusing on improving wool quality from Naecmi sheep, known for their high-quality fibers, for use in traditional crafts. The findings demonstrated the potential for economic and industrial development, leading to the recommendation to establish the factory as a model for successful partnerships supported by KFAS.

The Al Sadu Society emphasized the factory's role in promoting sustainability by responsibly utilizing natural resources and producing wool threads for artisanal crafts. This initiative preserves cultural heritage, enhances traditional weaving skills and improves artisanal production quality.

The factory incorporates eco-friendly technologies aligned with Kuwait's vision for sustainability. Solar photovoltaic panels installed on the factory's

rooftops generate approximately 25,000 kWh of electricity annually, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 15 tons per year. Additionally, advanced water treatment systems recycle 70,000 cubic meters of water annually for irrigation.

Al-Mawashi, the Livestock Transport and Trading Company, played a key role by providing factory space and sheep wool, supporting the local economy and traditional crafts. The company emphasized the project's importance in encouraging youth to acquire new skills, integrating traditional crafts with modern technologies, and promoting innovation. This initiative positions Kuwait as a leader in industrial innovation and heritage preservation while showcasing the value of collaboration between national institutions and the private sector in achieving sustainable development.



A traditional loom used to weave wool is displayed at the opening event of the "Soof" factory.

CAN signs agreement with sports authority to combat smoking

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: In an effort to promote public health and encourage a healthy lifestyle, the Kuwait Society for Combating Smoking and Cancer, through its National Cancer Awareness Campaign "CAN," has signed a cooperation agreement with the Public Authority for Sport. This agreement is part of ongoing efforts aimed at reducing the spread of smoking and raising awareness about cancer, with a particular emphasis on the role of sports and physical activity in prevention and treatment.

Dr. Hussa Majid Al-Shaheen, Treasurer of the Kuwait Society for Combating Smoking and Cancer and a member of the Executive Committee of the National Cancer Awareness Campaign, underscored the importance of sports in promoting both physical and psychological health. She highlighted that the agreement reflects the society's steadfast commitment to combating smoking, supporting cancer patients, and raising awareness through physical activity. "This agreement reflects our continued commitment to fighting smoking, providing psychological support to cancer patients, and motivating cancer awareness, as sports is an effective way to promote physical and psychological health," she said.

Bashar Abdullah, Acting Director of the Public Authority for Sport, further emphasized the significance of the partnership, noting how it combines sports with humanitarian and health efforts. He shared that through this collaboration, the Public



KUWAIT: Officials from the Kuwait Society for Combating Smoking and Cancer and the Public Authority for Sport sign an agreement to raise cancer awareness and fight smoking.

Authority aims to encourage community members to adopt healthier lifestyles and reduce health risks, aligning with the overarching goal of the agreement.

Looking ahead, Nayef Sharar, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Society for Combating Smoking and Cancer, discussed several initiatives planned under the agreement. These include marathons and sports events designed to raise awareness about cancer and smoking, seminars on the effects of passive smoking, and the establishment of dedicated training centers to aid cancer patients' recovery.

Haya Al-Daham, Deputy Director General of the Sports for All Sector at the Public Authority for Sport,

emphasized that this new collaboration builds on years of joint efforts between the two organizations. This ongoing relationship strengthens the foundation for long-term community health initiatives.

Concluding the discussions, Dr. Al-Shaheen reaffirmed that the agreement represents a message of hope. It exemplifies the cooperation between civil society and government agencies to promote better community health and fight harmful habits like smoking. She expressed confidence that this collaboration would contribute significantly to Kuwait's ongoing commitment to supporting cancer patients and implementing preventive measures for chronic diseases.

Traffic Council discusses improving public transportation

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior's Supreme Traffic Council, led by Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, has prioritized improvements to public transport, particularly buses, as part of ongoing efforts to enhance road safety. During the 23rd meeting of the council, officials reviewed strategies to improve transportation infrastructure and reduce traffic congestion. Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf has also directed an increase in efforts to intensify awareness campaigns and enhance coordination between relevant authorities before the new traffic law is implemented.

The directive was issued following the 23rd meeting of the Supreme Traffic Council, chaired by Sheikh

Salem. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministries of Education, Public Works, and Information, as well as the Kuwait Municipality and the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport.

Sheikh Salem emphasized the importance of joint cooperation between government agencies and civil society to achieve the national road safety goals.

During the meeting, participants discussed ways to improve public transport services, particularly buses, and reviewed the latest statistics on traffic safety. Plans for future initiatives were also considered, including the development of road infrastructure to reduce accidents.

The council members commended the Civil Service Commission's recent decision to trial evening shifts for civil servants. They encouraged government entities to increase the number of employees during these hours, aiming to improve service efficiency and reduce congestion. The General Traffic Department was tasked with studying the outcomes of this initiative after its



KUWAIT: A man waits at a bus stop as a bus approaches in this file photo.

implementation over the next three months.

The Supreme Traffic Council's continued efforts focus on enhancing Kuwait's traffic safety, improving infrastructure, and fostering greater collaboration among government entities to ensure the successful implementation of the new traffic law. — KUNA

Al-Fassam discusses Kuwait's economic diversification at Davos

DAVOS: Kuwait's Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Noura Al-Fassam, represented His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland.

This participation is aligned with Kuwait's ongoing efforts, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to enhance international economic cooperation and elevate the country's standing in global forums. Al-Fassam's attendance also continues the work initiated by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to build strategic partnerships with global institutions and investment companies.

Al-Fassam emphasized that Kuwait's engagement at the WEF provides a significant opportunity to bolster its global economic position and forge new avenues for cooperation. Her participation reflects Kuwait's commitment to accelerating its economic development and deepening its connections with local, Gulf, and international markets.

Throughout the forum, Al-Fassam is set to engage in high-level discussions with global leaders on critical issues, such as strengthening international partnerships, attracting foreign investments, and addressing ongoing economic challenges. Additionally, she will hold bilateral meetings with key officials from both the public and private sectors to explore collaboration opportunities in building a diversified and sustainable economy.

Al-Fassam will also participate in two key panel discussions: one focusing on the long-term economic growth prospects for the Middle East and North Africa, and the other on the importance of economic diversification in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, with a particular emphasis on sustainability and their role in global economic development. Through this participation, Kuwait underscores its commitment to global economic cooperation and its ongoing efforts to support sustainable development both regionally and internationally. — KUNA



Noura Al-Fassam

Local

Kuwait Times

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Awqaf funds project with KD 300,000 to assist needy patients

KUWAIT: The General Secretariat of Awqaf has announced the allocation of KD 300,000 (approximately \$972,800) to support the "Rahmaa" project, which provides treatment for needy patients. This initiative, implemented by the "Balad Al-Khair" Association in cooperation with Dar Al-Shifa Hospital, will continue for one year. So far, around 250 patients from various nationalities have benefited from the project.

In a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) today, following an inspection visit to Dar Al-Shifa Hospital to monitor the project, the Director of the Awqaf Endowment Funds Department, Maarib Al-Yaqoub, emphasized the importance of such partnerships between governmental, private, and charitable sectors in assisting community members by providing necessary medicines, treatments, and examinations for those unable to afford them. Al-Yaqoub added that the General Secretariat of Awqaf will continue to offer grants and support humanitarian initiatives and volunteer charitable efforts that contribute to helping those in need in Kuwait.

Acting Director of the Humanitarian Projects Department and the Director of the "Balad Al-Khair" Association, Ali Shaddad, also praised the significant support provided by the General Secretariat of Awqaf to serve the community and assist charitable associations in offering public welfare services, particularly in caring for patients.

Shaddad stated that the "Rahmaa" project is one of the pioneering charitable initiatives that reflects the commitment of the secretariat in supporting the poor and needy. It serves as a vital source of aid for patients struggling to bear the cost of medical treatment. He explained that the project provides comprehensive medical services to underprivileged patients and improves their health conditions.

He also praised the strategic partnership with Dar Al-Shifa Hospital in delivering high-quality health-care services, highlighting the ongoing collaboration with the Ministry of Health through the Kuwait Cancer Treatment Center to provide medical services for cancer patients.

Dr Mohammad Jassim, Head of the Medical Department at Dar Al-Shifa Hospital, also spoke to KUNA, emphasizing the hospital's strategy in providing community medical services, especially for financially struggling patients, and reaffirmed the continuity of such services while maintaining the confidentiality of treatment. He emphasized that Dar Al-Shifa always strives to offer high-quality initiatives that enhance the Ministry of Health's role in providing exceptional medical services to patients, driven by a strong sense of social responsibility and a commitment to meeting the medical needs of the community.

The "Balad Al-Khair" project aims to achieve social solidarity and alleviate the financial and health suffering of patients. It includes various services such as dialysis sessions, physical therapy, advanced medical tests, and the assessment of the social and medical conditions of beneficiaries to ensure that support reaches the most deserving groups. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Officials meet to discuss the allocation of KD 300,000 to support the "Rahmaa" project, which provides treatment for needy patients. — KUNA

Al-Najat Charity helps 380,000 people in Yemen

ADEN: The Kuwaiti Al-Najat Charity confirmed Tuesday, that more than 380,000 individuals benefited from its humanitarian and development projects in Yemen during 2024. These projects are part of a campaign which is celebrating its tenth consecutive year. In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Abdullah Al-Shihab, Head of the Charity's Programs and Projects Sector, said that the organization has placed great emphasis on development projects that contribute to improving the lives of beneficiaries.

He added that some of the major projects includ-

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A stack of Kuwait Times newspapers shows the publication's front page at a newsstand in Kuwait City on January 21, 2025, with a picture from the inauguration ceremony of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait committed to fighting money laundering: Official

Leadership keen on moving Kuwait out of FATF monitoring list

By Faten Omar and KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for Development and International Cooperation, Ambassador Hamad Al-Mashaan, has emphasized the country's leadership's strong commitment to ensuring that all relevant authorities in Kuwait work hard and efficiently to move the country out of a "follow-up phase" in the evaluation process of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

Currently, Kuwait is undergoing a mutual evaluation by FATF, which assesses the country's efforts in combating money laundering and financing terrorism. The "follow-up phase" typically refers to a period during which a country is being closely monitored to ensure it is making sufficient progress in addressing any shortcomings identified during FATF's evaluation. The country's leadership is focused on meeting FATF's standards and moving out of this phase, said Al-Mashaan.

As part of these efforts, the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, in collaboration with Kuwait's ministry of foreign affairs, held online sessions on Tuesday focusing on targeted financial sanctions, asset recovery and mutual legal assistance.

The workshop aims to train and qualify the national workforce in strategies to combat terrorism and its financing. Al-Mashaan pointed out the committee's keenness to develop the competencies and human cadres in Kuwait to implement the international obligations stipulated in the Security Council resolutions issued under Chapter VII and translate them by taking precautionary measures to combat the financing of terrorism and prevent terrorist organizations from exploiting the financial system.

Discussions covered asset recovery and judicial cooperation, with participation from international and local entities, including the Central Bank of Kuwait, banks, exchange companies and real estate firms. Al-Mashaan noted the strong attendance, emphasizing the sessions' role in updating participants on global developments in combating money laundering and sanctions targeting terrorism financiers. "These sessions are part of a series of workshops organized by the Security Council Resolutions Implementation Committee to align with international financial standards," he said.

Regarding the ministry of foreign affairs' mechanisms to monitor financial transfers and counter money laundering, Al-Mashaan explained that the Security Council Resolutions Implementation Committee oversees requests from the UN Security Council. The committee, comprising representatives from the Central Bank, financial intelligence unit, public prosecu-

ed the construction of seven residential villages, drilling 52 wells, building eight bakeries, establishing five new schools, sponsoring 210 students, and organizing 19 Quran memorization classes.

Al-Shihab also noted that the charity had built a medical center, held eye camps, and provided assistance to approximately 5,700 patients. Furthermore, around 120,000 people benefited from food aid and relief projects across various Yemeni governorates.

He explained that these efforts are part of the charity's broader aim to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people and enhance living standards in the most needy areas.

Al-Shihab concluded by thanking the Kuwaiti Ministries of Social Affairs and Foreign Affairs for their ongoing support of Kuwaiti charitable work, and expressed deep appreciation for the generous donors and supporters in Kuwait for their continued help in aiding those in need in Yemen and elsewhere. — KUNA



Assistant Foreign Minister for Development and International Cooperation, Ambassador Hamad Al-Mashaan

tion, state security, ministry of defense and ministry of justice, evaluates and acts on cases involving individuals or entities. He also highlighted Kuwait's active role in the Riyadh-based Terrorist Financing Targeting Center, a Gulf-American initiative addressing terrorism financing through regular meetings.

On Kuwait's humanitarian efforts, Al-Mashaan detailed ongoing aid initiatives for Syria, Gaza and Lebanon. He noted Kuwait's commitment to supporting Syria through an air bridge managed by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, involving 20 military aircraft delivering humanitarian aid. Aid is coordinated with the Syrian Red Crescent, Kuwaiti charities and international organizations, utilizing multiple delivery channels, including military aircraft, international collaboration and truck shipments to the Syrian border.

For Gaza, Kuwait coordinates aid delivery with Egypt, storing and transferring supplies through the Egyptian Red Crescent in Al-Arish, and has also established a second route through Jordan. Similarly, Kuwait has previously provided extensive humanitarian aid to Lebanon, including multiple aid shipments.

The sessions also addressed the Mutual Evaluation Report of the FATF for the Middle East and North Africa on Kuwait, published in Oct 2024. Discussions, opened by Reinhard Uhrig, Director of the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, and Al-Mashaan, emphasized the need for stronger laws criminalizing terrorism financing, asset recovery, freezing and confiscation.

The sessions underscored Kuwait's dedication to global cooperation on combating financial crimes and advancing its humanitarian efforts in the region. Since joining the Malta-based International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law in 2018, Kuwait has remained committed to promoting justice and the rule of law.

Why is Kuwait being monitored?

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an intergovernmental organization established in 1989 by the G7 countries to develop and promote policies aimed at combating money laundering, terrorist financing, and other threats to the international financial system. The FATF conducts mutual evaluations of its member countries to assess how well they are implementing its standards. Countries that fail to comply with FATF's recommendations may be placed on a "grey list" or "black list," which can affect their international financial reputation and relationships with other countries and institutions.

An FATF report released in November 2024 has found that Kuwait has a legal and supervisory framework in place to combat illicit finance, but faces significant challenges in effectively addressing money laundering and terrorist financing.

Few convictions: Kuwait has increased its money laundering investigations, but securing convictions remains challenging due to difficulties in proving the underlying predicate offence. Most of the cases prosecuted involve basic instances of self-laundering.

When it comes to terrorist financing, investigations and prosecutions are limited, and many cases fail to reach a conviction. Kuwait does have a legal framework in place for targeted financial sanctions related to terrorist financing and the financing of weapons of mass destruction. However, the necessary actions to freeze assets linked to terrorism or proliferation are not adequately supported by the domestic legal framework, making such actions unenforceable.

Non-profit sector: While Kuwait has conducted a risk assessment of the non-profit sector, more efforts are needed to protect it from terrorist financing abuse without hindering legitimate activities.

Foreign intelligence: The country's financial intelligence unit is active, but most terrorist financing investigations are based on foreign intelligence. Kuwait is focused on confiscating proceeds of crime, including assets located abroad.



KUWAIT: Officials and beneficiaries pose for a photo next to the foundation stone of a village built by Al-Najat Charity in Yemen. — KUNA



Afghanistan Taliban government announces prisoner swap with US

UK PM vows to fight new 'terrorism' threat after girls' murders

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WASHINGTON: (Left) US President Donald Trump reviews the troops during his inauguration ceremony in Emancipation Hall of the US Capitol on Jan 20, 2025. (Right) Trump holds former president Joe Biden's letter in the Oval Office of the White House on Jan 20, 2025. — AFP photos

Upbeat Trump returns to White House

Back in Oval Office, US president gushes 'What a great feeling!'

WASHINGTON: There's no place like home. And for Donald Trump, home is back in the White House after four tumultuous years. "What a great feeling," Trump told reporters when asked how it felt to be back in the Oval Office on Monday. "One of the better feelings I've ever had." Trump acted as if he'd never left. Nor was there any mention of how he had left in disgrace after his supporters attacked the US Capitol in January 2021 trying to overturn his election defeat to Joe Biden.

Instead, the 78-year-old launched straight into an impromptu, 50-minute press conference in the symbolic heart of the US presidency. But if it all felt familiar to the Republican billionaire, that was largely thanks to the work of an army of White House staff. They had only around five hours to erase every trace of his Democratic predecessor and create Trump's Oval Office 2.0.

Trump wouldn't confirm reports of the return of the famed "Diet Coke button" — a button on the

desk that he would press during his first term to summon a glass of his favorite drink on a silver tray. But signs of other changes were all around.

'Extraordinary decorators'

A portrait of George Washington hung over the fireplace as it did four years ago — replacing Franklin D. Roosevelt who had occupied the spot under Biden — along with one of the third US president, Thomas Jefferson. A bust of British wartime leader Winston Churchill had also reportedly returned to its spot in the Oval, as it was in the first term.

The aim, as ever with the presidency, is to portray an image of might and dignity, and Trump seemed to think his staff had done just right. "I just got here. My people came in, they have extraordinary decorators," said Trump, who has spent much of the last four years at his luxury Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida and arrived in a freezing Washington on Saturday. Pointing to the pictures of his predecessors, the 47th president said,

"I can live with George Washington, I can live with Thomas Jefferson — they took a very safe route."

However, Trump did have one surprise, underscoring just how quickly holders of the world's most powerful job pass the torch. Asked if Biden had left him a traditional handover letter, Trump replied that he didn't know and checked inside the drawer of the historic Resolute Desk. "Ooh!" Trump said, extracting a white envelope with the numbers "47" in Biden's handwriting. "It could have been years before we got it."

'Welcome home'

Despite Biden's gesture, Trump could not help lambasting his political rival as he kept talking. "Does Biden ever do news conferences like this?" said the Republican, no doubt knowing full well that Biden was often shielded by White House staff and would only take a handful of questions. For Biden and his staff, the day was a harsh reminder of the

transitory nature of power.

Before he had even left, photos on the walls of the West Wing had been removed and moving trucks were in the driveway. Officials from the Biden and Trump teams had awkward interactions on campus, like it was the first day of school. Social media accounts, websites and even email fonts all changed along with the new administration.

Trump's return was above all a bitter pill to swallow for the man who had branded him a threat to democracy, and was forced to bow out of their 2024 rematch after a humiliating debate performance against his rival sparked concerns about his age. Biden spent his last hours showing just what he thought of Trump, issuing pardons to aides and family members he feared would be prosecuted by the Republican. But as Trump and his wife Melania arrived for a pre-inauguration cup of tea with Biden and his wife Jill, the 82-year-old did his best to hide his feelings. "Welcome home," he said. — AFP

From the border to 'woke', Trump signs raft of orders

WASHINGTON: On the first day of his new term, President Donald Trump signed orders ranging from climate to immigration, along with sweeping pardons for nearly all of those charged with storming the capital on Jan 6, 2021. Some of his orders delivered on promises he made during the 2024 campaign. Others, like a withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO), had not been expected. Here is a summary of the orders Trump signed at a Washington arena packed with supporters, and later at the White House, after he was sworn in as president.



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump signs executive orders in the Oval Office of the White House on Jan 20, 2025. — AFP

automatic US citizenship to people born in the country is enshrined in the constitution, and Trump's action is certain to face a legal challenge.

January 6 rioters

Trump signed pardons for more than 1,500 people charged in the Jan 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol by his supporters trying to overturn the 2020 election. He again referred to those who were convicted or pleaded guilty over the riots as "hostages".

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

Trump repealed various executive orders promoting diversity programs and

LGBTQ equality, in line with his promised attack on "woke" culture. He overturned decrees promoting diversity and equality in the government, businesses and healthcare, as well as the rights of LGBTQ Americans. Trump said that moving forward the US government will only recognize "two genders, male and female".

Paris climate accord

The president immediately withdrew the United States from the Paris climate accord, repeating an action he took during his first term. The order extends Trump's defiant rejection of global efforts to combat planetary warming as catastrophic weather events intensify worldwide. It would take a year to leave the agreement after submitting a formal notice to the United Nations framework that underpins global climate negotiations.

Oil drilling

Trump signed an order declaring a "national energy emergency" aimed at significantly expanding drilling in the world's top oil and gas producer. "We will drill, baby, drill," Trump said in his inaugural address.

Work from home

Another order requires federal workers to return to the office full-time, with Trump seeking to undo most of the work-from-home allowances that flourished during the

Antony Herrera arrived at the border with his wife and three children after a long journey from their native Venezuela only to discover that their appointment had been canceled. "We don't know what is going to happen," said the 31-year-old, one of millions of people who have left crisis-hit Venezuela, where President Nicolas Maduro was inaugurated this month for a third term after a disputed election victory.

During his first term in the White House from 2017 to 2021, Trump put heavy pressure on Mexico to turn back a tide of migrants from Central America. On Monday, he quickly moved to reinstate the "Remain in Mexico" policy that prevailed under his last administration. Under that rule, people who applied to enter the United States at the Mexican border were not allowed to enter the country until their application had been decided.

Mexico agreed during Trump's first term to receive deportees from other countries in exchange for the Republican withdrawing his tariff threats. It is unclear if the current Mexican government would do the same this time round. President Claudia Sheinbaum said on Monday that Mexico would receive its own deported nationals, without mentioning how it would proceed with other foreigners expelled from the United States. — AFP

'Please let us in': Crackdown leaves migrants in tears

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico: Margelis Tinoco broke down in tears after her asylum appointment was canceled as part of a sweeping immigration crackdown announced by US President Donald Trump on his first day in office. "I don't know what will become of my life anymore," said the 48-year-old Colombian, who made the long and dangerous journey from South America with her husband and son.

Trump began his second term in office with a series of announcements intended to drastically reduce the number of migrants entering the United States. He vowed to declare a national emergency at the border with Mexico, immediately halt "all illegal entry" and begin the process of deporting "millions and millions of criminal aliens". Minutes after he was sworn in, an app introduced by his predecessor Joe Biden to help process claims for entering the United States went offline.

"Look what it says," Tinoco said, point-



TIJUANA: An asylum seeker reacts while waiting for news on her CBP One appointments with US authorities before crossing through El Chaparral port on Jan 20, 2025. — AFP

ing to a message on her cellphone screen informing users of CBP One that existing appointments had been canceled. "Have compassion and let us cross," she pleaded, saying that she had endured "six months of suffering" after leaving Venezuela where she had been living with her family. Yaime Perez, a 27-year-old Cuban, also made an emotional appeal to Trump. "Since we are here, please let us in, please, after all the work we have put in to get here, let us enter your country, so that we can better ourselves in life and be somebody," she said.

COVID-19 pandemic.

Leaving WHO

Trump signed an order for the United States to exit the World Health Organization, insisting Washington was unfairly paying more than China into the UN body.

TikTok

The president ordered a 75-day pause on enforcing a law that would effectively ban TikTok. His action delayed implementation of an act that came into effect this week, prohibiting the distribution and updating of TikTok in the United States. Trump has said the app's Chinese parent company must

agree to sell a 50 percent share to the United States.

West Bank settlers

Trump revoked sanctions against violent Zionist settlers in the occupied West Bank accused of abuses against Palestinians, undoing an unprecedented action taken by Joe Biden's administration.

Cuba

Undoing another one of Biden's more recent moves, Trump reversed the removal of Cuba from a blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism. Biden had removed Cuba from the list only days earlier as part of a deal to free prisoners. — AFP



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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2025

EU, China warn against trade friction after Trump's return

Chinese vice premier says 'no winner' in trade war

DAVOS: EU, German and Chinese leaders took turns defending global cooperation in Davos on Tuesday as the spectre of new trade wars looms following Donald Trump's return to the White House.

Trump will make an online appearance at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland this week, but he has been the elephant in the room for the executives and leaders hobnobbing at the annual conference in the Swiss Alps.

In their speeches, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz offered visions of the world that are mirror opposites to those of the self-professed tariff-loving Trump. "Protectionism leads nowhere and there are no winners in a trade war," Ding said, without mentioning Trump directly.

Trump threatened Monday to impose tariffs if Beijing rejected his proposal to keep Chinese-owned app TikTok online on condition that half of it is sold off. Beijing, which is taking a cautious approach to Trump, said after the TikTok threat that it hoped the United States would provide a fair business environment for Chinese firms.

Meanwhile, von der Leyen took a conciliatory tone, saying the EU's "first

priority will be to engage early, discuss common interests and be ready to negotiate" with Trump. "We will be pragmatic but we will always stand by our principles, to protect our interests and uphold our values," she said.

The European Commission president also said that Europe "must engage constructively with China — to find solutions in our mutual interest" despite escalating trade tensions between the two. Brussels has provoked Beijing's ire with a raft of probes targeting state subsidies in the green tech sector, as well as imposing tariffs on Chinese electric cars. In a veiled reference to the European Union measures, Ding warned against "erecting green barriers that could disrupt normal economic and trade cooperation".

More trade deals

On the campaign trail, Trump said he would impose extra customs duties on allies including the EU, as well as on China. After his inauguration, Trump raised the possibility of imposing 25 percent tariffs on Canada and Mexico.

Von der Leyen reiterated her commitment to free trade during her speech, pointing to recent EU deals with Switzerland, Mexico and the South American bloc Mercosur. She also said she and



DAVOS: World Economic Forum founder and chairman Klaus Schwab (L) and China's Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang reach out to shake hands during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on January 21, 2025. — AFP

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wanted to "upgrade" their partnership. Scholz vowed to "defend free trade" with other partners, warning that "isolation comes at the expense of prosperity".

"President Trump says 'America First'

and he means it. There is nothing wrong with keeping your own country's interests in mind," Scholz said. "It's just that cooperation and understanding with others are usually in your own interest as well."

It was probably Scholz's last speech

in Davos as chancellor ahead of German elections next month. Scholz used his speech to take another shot at Tesla and X owner Elon Musk, who has angered the chancellor with his support of Germany's far-right AfD party. "We have freedom of speech in Europe and in Germany," Scholz said. "Everyone can say what he wants even if he is a billionaire. What we do not accept is if this is supporting extreme right positions." Conservative leader Friedrich Merz, the favorite to become Germany's next chancellor, is due to address the forum later Tuesday.

War and climate change

Aside from tariffs, Trump has also rattled the world with his decision to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement. Von der Leyen defended the climate pact as the "best hope for all humanity" and vowed that "Europe will stay the course".

Ukraine is also keeping a very close eye on what Trump's second term will involve. Speaking in Davos, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky questioned whether Trump was committed to NATO and European security. "Will President Trump even notice Europe? Does he see NATO as necessary? And will he respect EU institutions?" he said. — AFP

Gulf Bank announces completing sustainability governance infrastructure

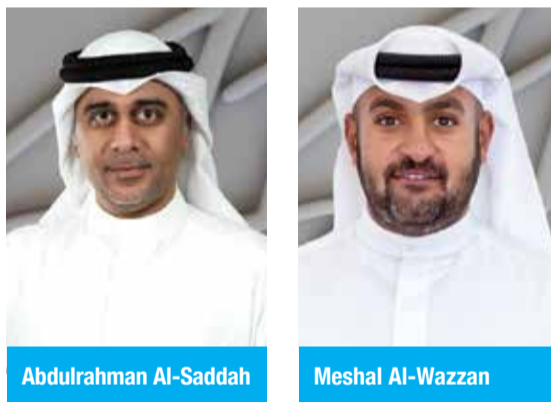
KUWAIT: In line with its strong commitment to promoting sustainability and driving sustainable development on both environmental and societal levels, Gulf Bank has announced the completion of its sustainability governance infrastructure. This milestone includes the establishment of frameworks for "Sustainable Finance" and "Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Risk Management." Additionally, the bank has implemented an internal policy to document its sustainability commitments and introduced transparent standards for classifying and evaluating sustainability-related initiatives.

Abdulrahman Al-Saddah, Chief Risk Officer at Gulf Bank, commented on this achievement, saying: "The completion of our sustainability governance infrastructure represents a key milestone in reinforcing the bank's commitment to achieving sustainable development goals. It highlights our ongoing efforts to refine our strategies and fully integrate sustainability standards into all future operations and activities."

Sustainable finance framework

The newly established Sustainable Finance Framework aligns with the requirements and guidelines of the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Capital Markets Authority, which prioritize the integration of sustainability principles into financial products, governance, and risk management practices. This framework provides clear directives for issuing green loans and bonds, along with comprehensive procedures to guide issuers, investors, and stakeholders in understanding Gulf Bank's sustainable financing solutions.

Additionally, the framework implements strict criteria for project selection, ensuring that funding is



Abdulrahman Al-Saddah

Meshal Al-Wazzan

allocated to initiatives with meaningful environmental or social impact. By doing so, it promotes greater transparency and accountability in investment decisions, further solidifying Gulf Bank's role in advancing both local and global sustainability goals, including those outlined in Kuwait Vision 2035.

ESG risk management

Gulf Bank's ESG Risk Management Framework integrates climate-related risks into its internal capital adequacy evaluations and decision-making processes. This approach allows the Bank to assess the impact of these risks on its financial resilience and long-term stability, embedding sustainability as a fundamental aspect of its operations.

Internal policies and code of conduct

Meshal Al-Wazzan, Chief Strategy Officer at Gulf Bank, emphasized: "The Bank has developed an internal policy to document its commitments to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards. This policy provides a clear framework to ensure all departments align with the Gulf Bank Sustainability Strategy 2024-2030, outlining governance structures, roles, responsibilities, and the ethical practices required to achieve our sustainability objectives."

Financial markets crave details as Trump hits the ground running

LONDON/SINGAPORE/NEW YORK: Donald Trump wasted no time in issuing policy announcements after his inauguration, leaving financial markets to catch up as he went easier than expected on China for now but warned Mexico and Canada could face 25 percent tariffs from next month.

China's currency was relieved as Beijing avoided an instant blizzard of executive orders but Mexico's peso and Canada's dollar weren't so lucky as some off-the-cuff talk about tariffs there from February ensured they took a tumble. Trump also floated the idea of universal tariffs, but said the US was not ready for that yet.

The dollar didn't seem to know quite which way to turn. Having drooped during the inauguration, it turned on the tariff talk to hit a five-year high against its Canadian counterpart, a rebound that also pushed the euro and pound down in Europe.

Trump also said he wanted to reverse the US trade deficit with the European Union, either with tariffs or more energy exports. Mexico and Canada are the most exposed though. The United States imported around \$475 billion worth of goods from the former and \$418 billion from the latter last year. Nigel Green, CEO of the deVere financial advisory group, said that was 30 percent of all US imports, meaning the consequences of 25 percent tariffs "could be seismic".

Wall Street's reaction was still to come. It was closed on Monday for a public holiday but fu-



FRANKFURT: A broker is seen working while the digital display in the background shows the graph of the German stock market index DAX above 21,000 points at the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, operated by Deutsche Boerse AG, in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, on January 20, 2025. — AFP

tures markets pointed to a modestly positive start when traders get their first chance to react later on Tuesday.

Asian investors had seen China's yuan and Hong Kong shares push higher overnight. Battery and wind energy stocks dropped though due to confirmation Trump was reversing green policies and would pull the US out of the Paris climate change accord. Trading was also a reminder of both the rollercoaster that markets rode through Trump's first term and how investors feel more sanguine about the risks in his second term in the White House.

An aggressive round of tariffs - where they exceed current assumptions - could drive swathes of economies from Canada to Europe into recession. The unpredictability of US policies, however, is not deterring all investors. "We are active managers so for us this is a great environment, we like uncertainty

Key ESG Performance Highlights in 2023



Transparent standards for classifying initiatives

To enhance its sustainability strategy, Gulf Bank has implemented clear criteria for assessing and classifying ESG-related initiatives. These criteria emphasize the impact and value of each initiative, allowing for informed decisions on resource allocation. This ensures alignment with the Bank's short, medium, and long-term sustainability goals, as detailed in its 2024-2030 strategy. The strategy outlines clear targets, timelines, and performance metrics, aiming to deliver measurable progress over the next six years.

Sustainability report

Gulf Bank has recently released its fourth annual Sustainability Report for 2023, highlighting the significant progress made across multiple sustainability areas. The report demonstrates the bank's strong commitment to ESG principles and features impactful initiatives that have improved its services, operations, and community-driven projects.

and we like volatility as it gives us opportunities," Konstantin Veit, a European portfolio manager at bond giant PIMCO, said.

Overhang

Trump had vowed to immediately impose steep tariffs of 10 percent to 20 percent on global imports into the US and 60 percent on goods from China, but a memo he issued after taking office only directed agencies to research and investigate the US trade deficits.

The dollar hit a five-year high of 1.452 Canadian dollars before steadying around C\$1.44. It rose but stayed below last month's highs on the Mexican peso and volatility gauges for both stocks and the most directly impacted currencies remained well below their November US election levels. Treasuries rallied, S&P 500 futures EScl rose 0.5 percent and MSCI's 46-country main world share index looked set to push back into positive territory later.

"Prepared remarks (from Trump) and what's off the cuff - both of them will move markets," Tai Hui, chief market strategist in Asia at J.P. Morgan Asset Management, told a briefing in Singapore. "Rather than basing all our investment decisions on what is announced... we just have to maybe take a step back and just absorb."

Trump enters office with an ambitious agenda spanning trade, immigration, tax cuts and deregulation which has the potential to boost US corporate profits. But it could also fan inflation and force the Fed into a rethink on US interest rates.

In his inaugural speech, Trump pledged to bolster the US oil, gas and power industries and to crack down on immigration. He pardoned supporters who attacked the Capitol four years ago and declared an emergency to clear the way for more oil and gas production. — Reuters

KIPCO appoints Ghada Khalaf as CEO of United Education Company

KUWAIT: KIPCO – Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) – is pleased to announce the appointment of Ghada Khalaf as the new Chief Executive Officer of United Education Company (UEC), a subsidiary of KIPCO. Khalaf brings a wealth of experience in both the education and corporate sectors. She has held senior positions in leading local organizations across various industries, where she has been instrumental in driving excellence and strategic growth. Her operational expertise and her deep understanding of the education sector make her the ideal candidate to lead UEC.

On this occasion, Sheikha Dana Naser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, KIPCO's Group Chief Executive Officer and the Chairperson of UEC, said: "We would like to thank Mishal Ali for his exceptional service to UEC in his role as CEO. His leadership has played a vital role in the company's achievements and growth. As we look to the future, we are confident that Ghada Khalaf, with her extensive experience and vision, will continue to build upon UEC's successes and drive innovation and excellence in the education sector."

In her new role, Khalaf will focus on advancing UEC's mission to provide high-quality education, fostering innovation and enhancing the student experience across the company's network of K-12 schools and its university. She will also spearhead UEC's strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing operational efficiencies.

On her part, Ghada Khalaf, UEC's Chief Executive Officer, said: "I look forward to continuing to work with the talented team at UEC to strengthen its position as a leading provider of quality education in the region. Our focus will be on driving strategic growth, innovation and excellence to ensure that UEC continues to provide transformative educational methods that meet the evolving needs of students and educators alike."

Khalaf joined KIPCO in 2023, serving as Group Senior Vice President – Investment, overseeing portfolio performance and identifying new investment opportunities. She has extensive experience in various financial and investment sectors. Khalaf started her career as a chemical engineer and holds a Masters in Chemical Engineering from Imperial College London, and an MBA from the Tepper School of Business at Carnegie Mellon University in the USA.

Founded in 2003, UEC is a prominent educational group based in Kuwait. It owns, develops, manages, and operates K-12 and higher education institutes in Kuwait. UEC launched its operations in 2004 with the establishment of the American University of Kuwait. In 2012, it established the American United School and acquired Al Rayan Holding Company with its six schools. Spanning across Kuwait, UEC provides quality education to almost 20,000 students, offering different curricula to cater to the local market's diverse demographic composition.



Ghada Khalaf



Sheikha Dana Naser Al-Sabah

Trump's Paris climate exit will hit harder than in 2017

Overshooting 1.5C degrees becoming 'very, very likely'

BRUSSELS/LONDON: A second US withdrawal from the world's primary climate pact will have a bigger impact - in the US and globally - than the country's first retreat in 2017, analysts and diplomats told Reuters. One of President Donald Trump's first acts on returning to office on Monday was to quit the Paris Agreement as part of his plans to halt US climate action. The impact will be to increase the chance of global warming escalating, to slow US climate funding internationally, and leave investors struggling to navigate the divergence between European and US green rules.

This US withdrawal will take effect in one year, faster than the 3.5-year exit period when Trump first quit the Paris accord in 2017. Since then, climate change has become more extreme. Last year was the planet's hottest on record, and the first in which the average global temperature exceeded 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming - the limit the Paris Agreement commits countries to trying to stay below. "We are looking at overshooting 1.5C degrees - that is becoming very, very likely," said law professor Christina Voigt at the University of Oslo. "Which, of course, brings to the forefront that much more ambitious global action on climate change is needed," she said.

Paris pact plans

Today's climate, measured over decades, is 1.3C warmer than in pre-industrial times, and on track for at least 2.7C of warming this century. While perilous, that is less severe than the 4C projected before countries negotiated the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Each country's pledge toward the Paris goal is voluntary. Nevertheless, Trump is expected to scrap the US national emissions-cutting plan and potentially also Biden-era tax credits for CO2-cutting projects. All of this will "further jeopardize the achievement of the Paris Agreement's temperature goals," Michael Gerrard, a legal professor at Columbia Law School, said. "That has obviously an impact on others. I mean, why should others continue to pick up the pieces if one of the key players once again leaves the room?"

said Paul Watkinson, a former French climate negotiator who worked on the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Some US states have said they will continue climate action. Regardless of politics, favorable economics drove a clean energy boom during Trump's first term - with Republican stronghold Texas leading record-high US solar and wind energy expansion in 2020, US government data show.

But Trump has already taken steps to try to prevent a repeat of that, on Monday suspending offshore wind leases and revoking Biden's electric vehicle targets. The US produces around 13 percent of global CO2 emissions today but is responsible for most of the CO2 released into the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution.

Climate cash halt

As part of the Paris Agreement exit, Trump on Monday ordered an immediate cessation of all US funding pledged under UN climate talks. That will cost poorer nations at least \$11 billion - the US government's record-high financial contribution delivered in 2024 to help them cope with climate change.

Together, all rich countries' governments combined contributed \$116 billion in climate funding for developing nations in 2022, the latest available OECD data show. That does not include the huge climate-friendly government funding Biden rolled out domestically, whose future under Trump is uncertain. Total US climate spending - counting domestic and international, from private and public sources - jumped to \$175 billion annually over 2021-2022, boosted massively by the 2022 Biden-era Inflation Reduction Act, according to non-profit research group the Climate Policy Initiative. The US is also responsible for funding around 21 percent of the core budget for the UN climate secretariat - the body that runs the world's climate change negotiations, which faces a funding shortfall.

Missed opportunities

The We Mean Business Coalition, which is backed by Amazon and Meta, said Trump's disruption of the



LONDON: A woman looks on as climate activists unveil a giant banner reading "Trump : Climate Genocide" on the Southbank opposite to the Houses of Parliament, in central London, on January 20, 2025. — AFP

US business environment could drive green investment elsewhere. It could "open the door for other major economies to attract greater investment and talent," the non-profit group said.

Three investors told Reuters the transition to green energy, including in the US, will move forward regardless. One impact of the Paris exit will be to prevent US businesses from selling carbon credits into a UN-backed carbon market that could be valued at more than \$10 billion by 2030, according to financial information provider MSCI.

While no longer able to make money from selling any surplus credits, US companies would be able to buy them on a voluntary basis. US airlines, for instance, could still buy them to meet UN aviation climate targets, said Owen Hewlett, Chief Technical Officer at carbon market standard setter Gold Standard.

The Paris withdrawal is also an issue for banks and money managers caught between the US climate retreat and pressure from Europe to deliver faster on climate goals there. "US-based asset managers with European clients will need to be like a two-headed Janus," Mark Campanale, founder of the non-profit Carbon Tracker Initiative, said. "Will they risk losing European clients to keep US politicians happy? I doubt it." Already, US banks have left a banking sector climate coalition following Republican criticism. That does not absolve them and other multinational companies from needing to comply with strict upcoming European rules for sustainability reporting. Given the patchwork of global climate policies, companies are likely to keep up their climate efforts - but to adopt green hushing tactics, he said. That means, Campanale said: "Do it, but don't publicize it." — Reuters



BEIJING: People queue to board trains as they return to their hometowns for the Chinese Lunar New Year reunions at a train station in Beijing on January 20, 2025. — AFP

Trump's climate retreat shines light on green leaders

PARIS: The United States withdrawing from the Paris Agreement is a blow to global cooperation on climate change, but other countries are marching ahead and stepping up leadership on the issue. China is dominating the clean energy race, Brazil will be steering global climate negotiations, Denmark has approved a world-first tax on livestock emissions and Colombia is saying farewell to fossil fuels.

There are fears the US retreat, announced by President Donald Trump on Monday, will hinder global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But some observers also see a chance for more ambitious countries to forge new alliances, set the agenda and champion a climate deal endorsed by nearly all nations. "It's a bigger pact than just the United States," said Frances Colon, a senior fellow from the Center for American Progress, a Washington-based policy institute.

Emerging players

One of these emerging leaders is Brazil, which this year is hosting one of the most important UN climate summits since the Paris accord was adopted in 2015. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has positioned himself as a global flag-bearer for the environment, and since taking office deforestation in the Amazon has fallen impressively.

But he also wants to expand Brazil's oil exploration, complicating its image as COP30 host. Along with South Africa, which is hosting the G20 this year, Brazil is expected to shape a global reform agenda that demands climate and development goals go hand in glove. "This could be a year for Global South leadership," said Tim Sahay, co-director of the Net Zero Industrial Policy Lab at Johns Hopkins University. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December boasted of his country's "leadership" rolling out solar and wind energy. "India is setting global standards in climate action," he said on X.

Renewable power

China's economic contribution to reducing global emissions - the chief purpose of the Paris Agreement - is already unrivalled. The country produces more than half the world's electric vehicles, about 70 percent of its wind turbines, and 80 percent of solar panels, helping drastically cut the cost of low-carbon technologies.

On Tuesday, China announced it had installed a re-

cord amount of renewable energy in 2024 and vowed to "work with all parties to actively address the challenges of climate change". As political headwinds frustrate global climate action, "China's performance in advancing and deploying green technologies might become the saving grace", said Li Shuo, director of the China climate hub at the Asia Society Policy Institute.

China already flexes considerable diplomatic muscle in global climate negotiations, informally leading a major developing country bloc. At the same time, China is responsible for the overwhelming majority of the growth in planet-warming emissions since the Paris Agreement was inked. It will soon overtake the European Union as the second-largest historic polluter, behind the United States, and could feel less pressure under Trump to take more ambitious action.

Old guard

The EU has a long history of climate leadership and slashed its emissions 7.5 percent between 2022 and 2023 - streets ahead of any other nation or bloc. The 27-nation bloc is also the largest contributor of climate finance to poorer countries, outspending all other wealthy nations. "The Paris agreement continues to be the best hope of all humanity. So Europe will stay the course, and keep working with all nations that want to protect nature and stop global warming," EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said on Tuesday.

During the last Trump presidency, the EU and China launched a climate dialogue with Canada to ensure unwavering high-level support for the Paris Agreement while the United States was outside the process.

Strong leadership will again be needed to rally momentum, said Alex Scott, a senior associate at Italian climate think tank ECCO. "The EU and China could collaboratively provide that geopolitical pole," she told AFP. But the EU is preoccupied with its own domestic problems, including political swings to anti-climate parties, while Beijing is locked in a trade spat with Brussels over its tax on carbon-intensive imports.

Green agenda

A slew of other countries, from economic giants to tiny Caribbean islands, are eager to broadcast their climate bona fides. The UK - where Energy Secretary Ed Miliband promised in November to "make Britain a climate leader again" - produced its cleanest electricity on record in 2024.

Denmark has approved a tax on agricultural emissions, Barbados and Kenya are pushing for global financial reforms to drive investment in developing countries, and Colombia has vowed to stop extracting fossil fuels - its largest export earner. Scott said "countries who've made a bet on investing in the economy of the future with green tech and green jobs will continue to make that bet because it's in their best interests". — AFP

EV sales slip in Europe in 2024 in overall stable car market

PARIS: Sales of electric cars slid last year in Europe in an otherwise stable market, data from carmakers showed Tuesday. A total of 1.99 million battery electric vehicles were sold in Europe last year, a drop of 1.3 percent from 2023, according to data from the European Automobile Manufacturers Association (ACEA).

The figures represent a stall after several years of strong growth for electric vehicles (EVs) in Europe, and raise questions about the transition away from internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles.

According to data published last week by the Rho Motion consultancy, EV sales rose 25 percent globally last year thanks to a surge in China. According to ACEA data, overall car sales edged 0.9 percent higher in Europe - including Britain, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland, to just shy of 13 million. "Battery-electric cars remained the third-most-popular choice for buyers in 2024," the ACEA said in its monthly report on sales figures.

Cars with petrol engines accounted for one in three new cars sold last year, followed closely by simple hybrids with 30.9 percent market share. Plug-in hybrids accounted for another 7.1 percent of sales. Fully battery-electric vehicles accounted for 13.6 percent of total sales in 2024, a drop from 14.6 percent market share in 2023.

Sales of EVs, which are more expensive than ICE vehicles, are still highly dependent upon incentives. EV sales plunged by 27.4 percent in Germany last year as government incentives ended at the end of 2023. But they jumped by 21.4 percent in Britain last year to make it Europe's top EV market by volume, with just under 382,000 sold last year, thanks in part to sales targets on automakers.

Norway continued to have the highest EV market share, accounting for nearly nine out of 10 new vehicles sold last year, ahead of a goal of zero sales of ICE vehicles that entered into force in 2025. But the uptake of EVs in Norway was also aided by high taxes on ICE vehicles, which often made them less expensive for consumers. The European Union is set to ban the sale of new ICE vehicles in 2035. — AFP



MANILA: Electric vehicles (EVs) charge at the Tesla center in Manila on January 20, 2025. — AFP



NEW DELHI: BMW cars are displayed at the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025, in New Delhi on January 21, 2025. — AFP

German carmakers say Trump tariffs would hurt US consumers, industry

LONDON: US President Donald Trump's tariff plans would mean higher car prices for US consumers and hit global automakers, Germany's powerful car industry warned on Tuesday, as auto stocks fell on the prospect of higher US import duties.

Hildegard Mueller, the president of Germany's VDA auto association, told an annual press conference that Trump's threatened tariffs would drive up US inflation. "Donald Trump promised in his election campaign to reduce inflation," she said. "In this respect, we are hoping for further discussions on this topic."

Trump, who took office on Monday, did not immediately implement the wide range of tariffs he had promised, but said they were still an option and indicated that tariffs of 25 percent on Canada and Mexico could be imposed as early as February 1. In the past, Trump has used the threat of tariffs to push automakers to move more production to the United States.

Global automakers make cars in Mexico for sale in the United States, and the Central American country is an integral part of the supply chain for US auto production. Major suppliers like Bosch and Continental have been working on ways to move some production and mitigate the impact, but US tariffs on Mexican auto imports would hurt US, European, Japanese and South Korean automakers and suppliers alike.

In Asia, the continued threat of US tariffs hit shares of Honda, Mazda, Hyundai and Kia, which all produce vehicles in Mexico. In Europe, Volkswagen and Stellantis, which would be particularly vulnerable to tariffs on Mexican production, were down 0.8% and 1.3% respectively. Volkswagen, the world's second-largest automaker, said it was "concerned about the harmful economic impact that proposed tariffs by the US administration will have on American consumers and the international automotive industry".

The company highlighted planned investments exceeding \$10 billion in the US, split between its Chattanooga plant and a joint venture with Rivian. Automakers have been negotiating with Trump's team ahead of his inauguration, hoping to prevent the imposition of tariffs. Stellantis Chairman John Elkann has spent four days in Washington meeting with Trump and top administration officials, according to a company source. Elkann, who is currently steering Chrysler and Jeep parent Stellantis while it seeks a new CEO, was among global executives attending celebrations for Trump's inauguration on Monday. — Reuters

Business

NBK secured leading presence in global markets driven by forward-thinking vision: Al-Hamad

NBK Group's Chief Wealth Officer addresses Tamkeen Program

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing panel discussions with NBK's executive management, the Tamakan Program welcomed Faisal Al-Hamad, Chief Executive Officer of NBK Wealth. Leveraging his extensive experience in the banking sector, Al-Hamad engaged the program's youth participants in an insightful and interactive session, sharing valuable industry knowledge and addressing their questions with clarity and depth.

NBK's sponsorship of the sixth edition of the "Tamakan" Program, organized by Creative Confidence, underscores its dedication to empowering Kuwaiti university graduates. This program provides an immersive, hands-on training experience, designed to equip emerging national talents with the essential skills and practical knowledge necessary for a seamless transition into a dynamic, high-performing workforce.

Overcoming challenges

At the outset of the panel discussion, Al-Hamad reflected on his academic journey and the obstacles he encountered early in his career. He shared: "After graduating from university in the United States, I began my professional journey with a company where my work took me between America and London for four years. Following that, I pursued a master's degree in business administration before deciding to return to Kuwait to continue my career."

"I joined NBK Capital in 2007, driven by a passion for development, continuous learning, and gaining in-depth knowledge of all aspects of this field to enhance my expertise," Al-Hamad added, emphasizing that the work environment is one of NBK's defining features, highlighting the bank's commitment to training and development as a fundamental pathway for all employees. This reflects NBK's belief that its human capital is its most valuable asset and that delivering exceptional services necessitates a highly skilled and well-trained workforce.

He emphasized that every journey is bound to encounter obstacles and challenges, regardless of the field. However, what truly matters is having the desire and ambition to succeed, coupled with a commitment to self-improvement. He highlighted the importance of developing skills, leveraging experiences within the workplace, and contributing innovative ideas and solutions to enhance operations. Taking on greater responsibilities and delivering added value to the organization, he noted, are key drivers of personal and professional growth.

Al-Hamad emphasized the importance of patience and long-term vision in career growth. He stated, "It is essential not to rush for promotions, as many individuals leave leading institutions simply in pursuit of a higher job title or larger salary, without considering the invaluable added value the institution can provide. The experiences gained over time lay a solid foundation, equipping individuals with the skills and expertise necessary to tackle future challenges and navigate changes in the labor market with confidence."

Al-Hamad encouraged young people to seize the opportunities available to them to enhance their skills and gain valuable experiences through training courses, workshops, events, and seminars. He stressed the importance of expanding knowledge, exchanging



KUWAIT: Faisal Al-Hamad, Chief Executive Officer of NBK Wealth, speaks during the "Tamakan" Program.

ideas, and benefiting from the expertise within their teams. Additionally, he emphasized the need to learn from past mistakes, avoid repeating them, and constantly seek innovative solutions that contribute to the development of the work system.

Success requires perseverance

In response to a question from a participant in the "Tamakan" Program regarding how to achieve success in their career, Al-Hamad explained, "A successful journey demands perseverance, resilience, and responsibility. This is particularly true in the face of increasing competition in the labor market and the rapid technological advancements occurring in the banking sector, which require talented individuals and teams to adapt and stay ahead of these changes."

Al-Hamad encouraged the program participants to seize the educational and training opportunities that arise at the outset of their careers. He highlighted that the "Tamakan" Program stands out as one of the most valuable opportunities, as it plays a crucial role in enhancing the skills needed to successfully enter the labor market.

He explained that "Tamakan" has successfully provided the labor market with numerous exceptional talents over the years. He emphasized the importance for every participant to make the most of this opportunity, as it serves as a crucial starting point for building a promising career future.

Al-Hamad highlighted that one of the key features of the Tamakan Program is the panel discussions and open dialogues it organizes, where participants have the opportunity to engage with NBK leaders who possess decades of experience in the banking industry. These interactions provide young people with valuable insights that can help them achieve their future ambitions.

Work environment

In response to a question about the work environment, Al-Hamad stated, "Anyone with passion, ambition, and the desire to take on leadership roles should seek a work environment that offers added value and enhances their experiences and skills through training programs and workshops. This will help them grow and prepare for leadership positions in the future."

He noted that the work environment at NBK is exemplary, as it continuously supports employees in developing their skills by offering educational programs tailored to each individual's needs. These programs, in collaboration with renowned educational institutions, aim to enhance employees' skills across various domains.

Furthermore, Al-Hamad emphasized that competition within the banking sector is intense, with organizations vying to attract top talent and competencies that can drive performance and innovation. He highlighted that NBK stands out by consistently empowering its team to contribute innovative ideas and solutions, which play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of the bank's products and services for its customers.

NBK Wealth

In his speech, Al-Hamad addressed the recent changes and the launch of the "NBK Wealth" brand, stating, "We fully recognize that change is a constant in the market, and customer needs are continually evolving. To stay aligned with these shifts and our future vision, which is grounded in scientific principles, we introduced the NBK Wealth brand. This move is aimed at establishing the largest wealth management entity locally and positioning us as one of the largest regional groups in the field of comprehensive wealth management."

Al-Hamad further emphasized, "Our proactive vision allows us to differentiate ourselves from our compet-

itors," elaborating that NBK Wealth Group now encompasses a diverse range of entities, including Watani Investment Company, Watani Wealth Management Company (Saudi Arabia), NBK Banque Privée (Suisse) SA, National Bank Of Kuwait (International) PLC, and Watani Financial Brokerage Company (WFBC).

Moreover, he pointed out that NBK Wealth aims to attract new customer segments and investors, noting that the group's brand has gained significant recognition across global markets, leading to an increasingly wider presence.

Al-Hamad highlighted that the Group is focused on strengthening its position as the leading and trusted partner in wealth management through a global network of integrated operations. Additionally, the group has formed strategic partnerships with leading international institutions, which will enhance various aspects of its services, including advisory support and the development of innovative investment solutions. Furthermore, NBK Wealth continues to offer unique services, including asset management, trading, lending, deposits, and other tailored solutions for high-net-worth individuals.

In response to a question from a participant in the Tamakan Program regarding the specialized services offered by NBK Wealth, Al-Hamad explained: "At NBK Wealth, we provide a broad array of comprehensive solutions in private banking, wealth management, financial planning, investment management, and advisory services. These services are delivered through our extensive global network of integrated operations, ensuring we meet the diverse needs of our clients, while aligning with their individual risk tolerance levels."

Al-Hamad further emphasized: "Drawing on our extensive experience, we possess a deep understanding of our clients' needs and are equipped to exceed their expectations. Over the decades, we have continuously elevated our services and developed tailored wealth management solutions that cater to the diverse needs of individuals, families, and institutions, all aimed at building a prosperous and sustainable future."

"We have established strong bridges of trust and long-term relationships with our customers, built on the strength of our brand and our extensive experience in the banking industry. Our core philosophy revolves around understanding each customer's unique financial needs and goals, and crafting customized solutions to meet those needs," Al-Hamad added.

He emphasized NBK Wealth's commitment to creating lasting value and building a generational legacy for its clients through tailored investment strategies, diversified financial portfolios, and expert advice rooted in comprehensive economic analysis and future projections. He also highlighted the importance of adapting to clients' evolving needs and offering innovative investment solutions that align with their long-term aspirations.

It is worth noting that Tamakan was honored with "The Social Work Pioneer Project Award" by the GCC Council of Ministers of Social Affairs and Labor. This prestigious accolade recognizes Tamakan as a trailblazing training initiative for Kuwaiti fresh graduates, fostering professional self-development and empowering them to emerge as a dynamic and effective workforce in the region.



WASHINGTON: Elon Musk (center) gestures during the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th president of the United States inside the Capitol building in Washington, DC, on Monday. — AFP

Federal employee union sues Trump over Musk's DOGE

WASHINGTON: The largest union of US federal government employees filed suit on Monday against President Donald Trump over his plans to create a cost-cutting "Department of Government Efficiency" headed by billionaire Elon Musk. The suit was filed in a district court in Washington by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and non-profit Public Citizen just minutes after Trump was sworn in as the 47th US president.

Trump has tasked Musk, the world's richest man, with slashing billions of dollars in federal government spending. Trump and Musk have claimed that \$2 trillion could potentially be saved, but most experts believe that is not realistic without deep cuts to crucial social services or benefits.

In its suit, the AFGE, which represents some 800,000 federal workers, said it wanted to ensure that DOGE complies with the requirements for federal advisory committees. "The advice and guidance that Mr Trump has charged DOGE with producing is sweeping and consequential," the complaint said. "DOGE - the members of which currently do not represent the interests of everyday Americans - will be recommending cuts to government agencies and programs that protect health, benefits, consumer finance, and product safety," it added. The AFGE said federal regulations authorize an administration "to establish and use commissions or task forces to obtain advice and recommendations from the private sector on a variety of topics."

But the regulations impose "various guardrails to prevent them from turning into vehicles for advancing private interests in the federal decision-making process," it said. "Those guardrails include the requirements that advisory committees have a fair balance in viewpoints represented, that they do not meet in secret, and that their records and work product be made available for public inspection."

The AFGE urged the court to prevent DOGE from acting as an advisory committee until it complies with federal regulations. In addition to the AFGE, several other watchdog and public interest groups filed suit against Trump over DOGE on Monday. — AFP

Global tourism recovered to pre-pandemic levels in 2024: UN

MADRID: Global tourism fully recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2024 with 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals recorded worldwide due to "robust" demand from key markets, UN Tourism said Monday.

"A majority of destinations welcomed more international tourists in 2024 than they did before the pandemic, while visitor spending also continued to grow strongly," the Madrid-based body said in a statement.

The number of international tourist arrivals last year was 11 percent higher than the 1.3 billion recorded in 2023, reaching the level seen in 2019, the year before the pandemic paralyzed travel. A "robust performance from large source markets and the ongoing recovery of destinations in Asia" drove the results, UN Tourism added.

Receipts from global tourism reached \$1.6 trillion in 2024, about 3.0 percent more than the previous year and 4.0 percent more than in 2019 when inflation and currency fluctuations are taken into account.

"In 2024, global tourism completed its recovery from the pandemic and, in many places, tourist arrival and especially earnings are already higher than in 2019," UN Tourism secretary general Zurab Pololikashvili said.

"Growth is expected to continue throughout 2025,

'Too hard': Vietnam's factory workers return to country life

HO CHI MINH CITY: Treading a familiar path for women in rural Vietnam, Nguyen Thi Hiep found a factory job in dynamic Ho Chi Minh City and spent 16 years helping make shoes for Western brands such as Adidas and Nike.

Vietnam is among the world's largest exporters of clothing, footwear and furniture and Ho Chi Minh City and its hundreds of thousands of migrant workers have for decades helped power its manufacturing boom.

The southern metropolis offered stable jobs with decent pay, and young women in particular flocked to garment and shoe factories, where the workforce is three-quarters female. But as living costs surge, Hiep is joining a wave of workers rejecting the commercial hub for a quieter life back home - leaving city businesses struggling to fill their ranks.

"I have stayed in this city long enough," Hiep, 42, told AFP after her shift at a factory owned by Taiwan's Pou Chen, one of the biggest and best-paying

driven by strong demand contributing to the socio-economic development of both mature and emerging destinations," he added. "This recalls our immense responsibility as a sector to accelerate transformation, placing people and planet at the center of the development of tourism."

The surge in visitor numbers has sparked a backlash in many tourism hotspots, prompting the authorities to take steps to ease the pressure on bursting beaches and gridlocked streets. Venice, one of the world's top tourist destinations, is trying to limit the influx of tourists into its historic center by charging day trippers for entry. Japan has introduced a daily cap on hiker numbers at Mount Fuji while Amsterdam and other port cities have reduced the number of cruise ships allowed to dock.

Concerns over conflicts

Europe, the world's most popular destination region, recorded 747 million international arrivals in 2024, a five-percent increase over the previous year and one percent above 2019 levels. All European regions surpassed pre-pandemic levels except Central and Eastern Europe "where many destinations are still suffering from the lingering effects of the Russian aggression on Ukraine", the statement said.

While international arrivals grew by 33 percent in Asia and the Pacific to reach 316 million in 2024, that represented just 87 percent of pre-pandemic levels. The Middle East posted the strongest rebound since 2019 with 95 million arrivals last year, a 32-percent jump over pre-pandemic levels but just one percent higher than 2023.

Many countries such as Japan and Morocco have



HO CHI MINH CITY: This photo taken on December 23, 2024 shows workers' relatives waiting to pick them up after their workday outside the Pouyuen Vietnam factory, owned by Taiwanese shoemaker Pou Chen, in Ho Chi Minh City. — AFP

shoe manufacturers in the country. "I work all day long, starting at sunrise and ending when it's dark," she said. "But I still struggle to pay my rent."

Despite earning 10 million dong (\$400) a month, a third more than the national average, Hiep lives in a 10-square-metre, one-room apartment with her husband and eight-year-old daughter, buying the cheapest food she can find and saving nothing.



KUALA LUMPUR: Visitors rent jet skis at Pantai Cenang in Malaysia's Langkawi Island on January 19, 2025. — AFP

set new tourism records following the pandemic and several destinations reported double-digit growth in international arrivals when compared to 2019. El Salvador, which has successfully cracked down on violent crime, posted an 81-percent increase in foreign arrivals on 2019 levels. Saudi Arabia, which only fully opened to tourism in 2019, recorded a 69-percent jump.

The UN body predicts international arrivals will grow three to five percent in 2025 when compared to last year if the rebound in travel in Asia continues, inflation keeps receding and "geopolitical conflicts do not escalate". High transportation and accommodation costs, volatile oil prices and staff shortages are among the other key challenges the tourism sector will face this year, it added. — AFP

Housing, utility, healthcare and education costs are rising across the country, and workers in Ho Chi Minh City say their salaries can no longer meet their needs. So Hiep and her husband, a motorbike taxi driver, have decided to leave.

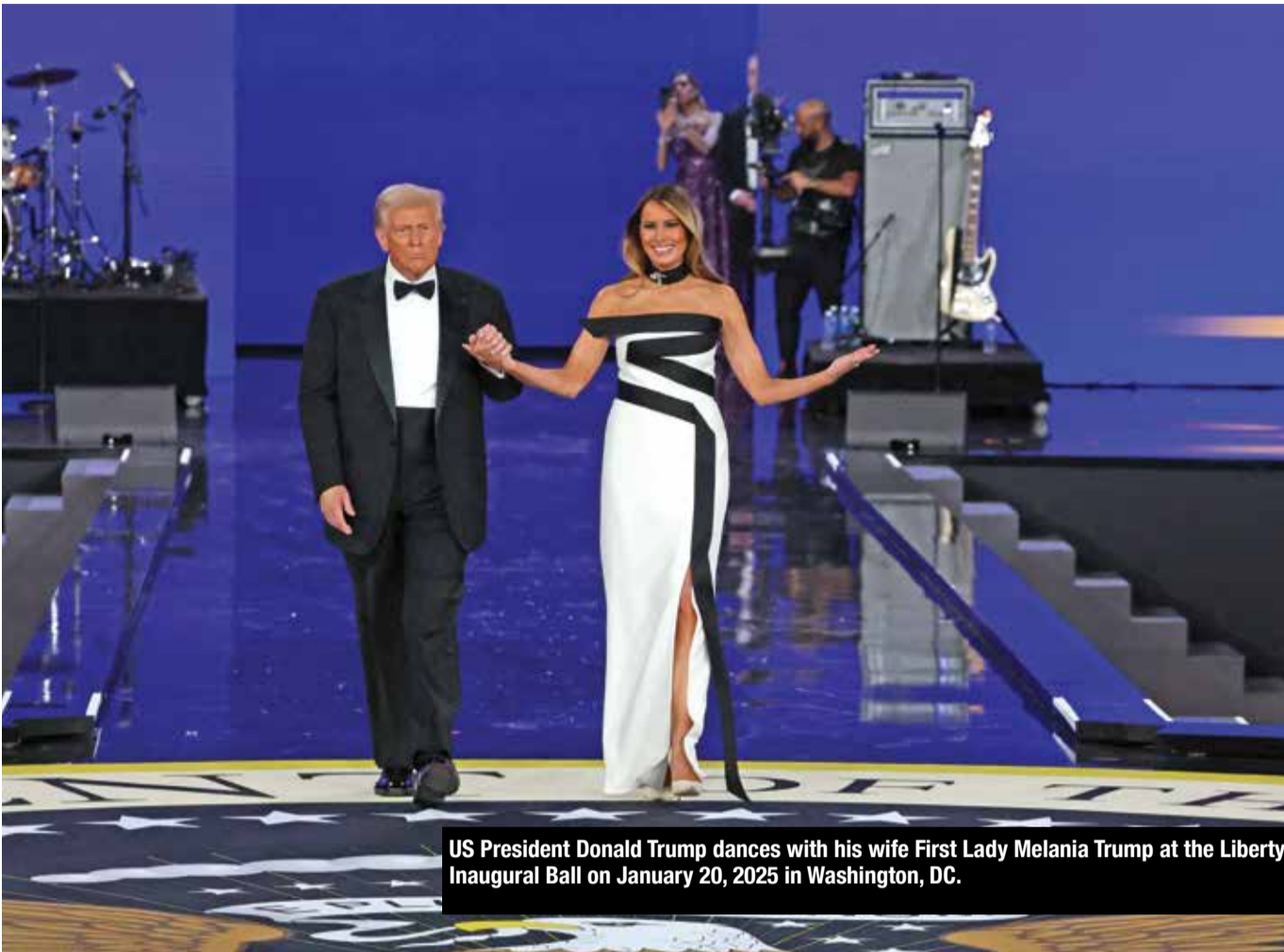
This week, ahead of the Tet festival when Vietnam celebrates the lunar new year, the family will make the 1,000-kilometre (621-mile) journey home to a remote corner of mountainous Quang Binh province, 24 hours and a world away from the traffic and pollution of Ho Chi Minh City and its 10 million people. They have no plans to return.

Rapid departure

In the decades since Vietnam's post-war "doi moi" economic transformation, Ho Chi Minh City and the capital Hanoi have been at the heart of the "from farm to factory" trend, said professor Pham Van Dai of the country's Fulbright University. It is a pattern that has played out in many developing countries across the world.

But when the COVID-19 pandemic forced people out of factories and back to their homes, many found rural areas had developed, offering more opportunities than a decade earlier and a higher quality of life. "The number of migrant workers (moving out) rose rapidly," Dai told AFP. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2025



US President Donald Trump dances with his wife First Lady Melania Trump at the Liberty Inaugural Ball on January 20, 2025 in Washington, DC.



US First Lady Melania Trump looks on as President Donald Trump reviews the troops in Emancipation Hall, following his inauguration ceremony at the US Capitol on January 20, 2025, in Washington, DC.



First Lady Melania Trump at the Commander-in-Chief Ball on January 20, 2025 in Washington, DC. President Trump attends some of the inaugural balls after taking the oath as the 47th president.

MELANIA TRUMP BRINGS STEELY FASHION GAME BACK TO WASHINGTON

Where in the world is Melania Trump? She made her return to Washington in a sharply tailored outfit exuding international woman of mystery, as her husband once again became president of the United States. Her long navy coat and matching wide-brimmed hat -- which shielded her eyes in most photos and hindered her commander-in-chief husband's attempts to give her a peck before his swearing-in -- drew snark comments on social media and a flurry of comparisons to a 1980s video game character.

"Where in the world is Carmen Sandiego?" quipped the internet, referring to the franchise that spun off into a popular 1990s geography game show for kids, and featured a criminal mastermind dressed in a long, carmine trench coat and eye-obscuring fedora. Melania Trump's silk-wool coat and skirt were Adam Lippes, an independent American designer based in New York, an



US First Lady Melania Trump attends a luncheon in honor of President Donald Trump following the inauguration ceremony, in Statuary Hall at the US Capitol in Washington, DC. --AFP photos

ensemble paired with an ivory blouse tightly wrapped at the Slovenian-born former model's neck.

"The tradition of the presidential inauguration embodies the beauty of American democracy and today we had the honor to dress our first lady, Mrs.

Melania Trump," said Lippes in a statement that emphasized American manufacturing over political ideology. "Mrs. Trump's outfit was created by some of America's finest craftsmen and I take great pride in showing such work to the world." The hat was by New York milliner Eric Javits. "She cut the figure of a mafia widow or high-ranking member of an obscure religious order, and a bit of 'My Fair Lady,'" wrote Rachel Tashjian, style critic for The Washington Post.

'Armor'

American first ladies don't get much of a voice -- but their sartorial choices are scrutinized for subtext. The late Rosalynn Carter, for example, drew strong reactions by wearing a dress she had already worn -- gasp! -- when her husband Jimmy was inaugurated in 1977. The point was to show empathy for the economic struggles of Americans, but sometimes what the people really want

is aspirational glamour.

In recent years, several first ladies have turned to independent designers for inaugural events: in 2021, Jill Biden wore a sparkling blue coat-and-dress combo by Markarian, a small brand in New York. Michelle Obama made waves in 2009 in a lemon-colored outfit by Isabel Toledo, wearing Thom Browne at her husband's second swearing-in. She donned gowns by Jason Wu to both series of inaugural balls. Melania Trump channeled Jackie Kennedy to kick off her first turn in the White House, sporting Ralph Lauren -- a heritage-brand favorite on both sides of the political aisle -- to the daytime events in 2017.

She swapped her powder-blue cashmere dress and matching asymmetrical bolero jacket with opera gloves for a silk crepe gown by Herve Pierre that year, both looks that signaled a sense of buoyancy as she began her new role as a political wife. Her shad-

owy-chic ensemble on Monday marked a sharp departure as she entered tenure two. Her evening outfit -- once again by Herve Pierre, who is her stylist -- was less severe but kept an edge.

The first lady wore a white column gown featuring sculptural, serpentine black ribbon detailing with a thick black bejeweled choker to match as she attended the traditional series of inaugural balls. "For her second round as first lady, the fashion game -- the tool she brandishes most often and most forcefully, even if the public sometimes struggles to divine her sartorial messages -- is likely to be one of steely, precise armor, of clothes with brash and exacting tailoring," wrote the Post's Tashjian. "For the past year, she has worn a wardrobe of mostly black, but this does not seem intended to make her disappear into the background." --AFP



A model walks the runway during the Prada collection show at Milan's Fashion Week Men's Fall / Winter 2025-2026 in Milan, Italy.



Italian designer Giorgio Armani (center) poses with guests at the end of the Giorgio Armani collection show.



A model walks the runway during the Prada collection show

ARMANI EYES 'BEAUTIFUL COMFORT' AT MILAN FASHION WEEK

With soft fabrics, jeweled hues and fluid shapes, Giorgio Armani's men's show in Milan on Monday was an ode to elegance and freedom of movement. The legendary Italian designer, now 90, presented a fall-winter 2025-26 collection comprising belted baggy trousers and layered loose jackets, knits and scarves. A seasonal palette of greys and browns was punctuated with sumptuous velvets, wools and silks in ruby red, emerald green and royal blue.

"The catwalk for me is a proposal, my vision of the current moment, which this season is particularly free from constraints and conventions," Armani said. "I like to imagine the clothes that enter the wardrobes and lives of men of different ages and attitudes, and that are interpreted by each according to

their own personality.

"Making fashion, for me, means creating tools that accompany life, making it ideally more beautiful and comfortable." Actors Adrien Brody and Matt Smith were in the audience for the show, a highlight of five days of fashion in the northern Italian city.

Sharp-suited snappers

"Wild elegance" had been the theme at Prada on Sunday, with Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons offering up sheepskins worn over bare chests, straight-cut cigarette pants and colored or patterned cowboy boots. There were knitted sweaters, fitted leather jackets, nylon bomber jackets and tartan coats, a clash of styles shown off on a catwalk spread over three floors built out of scaffolding in the huge hall of the Prada

Foundation.

In a world dominated by artificial intelligence, "the idea is to save the human instinct to liberate creativity and spontaneity", Miuccia Prada said backstage afterwards. On Saturday, meanwhile, Dolce and Gabbana drew inspiration from the glamorous films of Italian director Federico Fellini for their show at the Metropole, the brand's headquarters and a former cinema. In a nod to "La Dolce Vita" character Paparazzo, who gave his name to pushy photographers worldwide, models dressed as sharp-suited snappers crowded the entrance to the runway.

Lightbulbs popped as models walked the red-carpet in the imagined style of off-duty actors, a mix of jeans, trainers and luxurious coats. Day segued to night with cropped jackets styled

with caps and bags giving way to tailored, loose-legged three-piece suits and finally, sharp and sexy evening wear.

Set to a soundtrack drawn from Fellini's films, there were tuxedos, bow-ties and silk shirts, waistcoats worn with nothing underneath and long scarves thrown over one shoulder. The palette was mostly black and grey, but with flashes of brilliance from glittering, oversized brooches, fastenings or necklaces. Focusing on clean lines and luxury materials, the show was a confirmation of a return to basics begun in early 2023 by the Italian designers, after a brief foray into more flashy street-wear aimed at younger buyers. --AFP



A model walks the runway during the Prada collection show.

Lifestyle



This photograph shows the painting "The Beatles" by Albanian artist Avni Delvina during the exhibition "Triumph".



Albanian artist Avni Delvina poses for a photo among his paintings during the exhibition "Triumph" in Tirana. — AFP photos

Trump 'triumphs' in Albanian art exhibition



Visitors look at the painting "The Party Crasher" by Albanian artist Avni Delvina.

In a former memorial to Albania's Communist dictator, an art exhibition is celebrating Donald Trump's return as US president with works portraying him as Prometheus, Caesar and the Wall Street bull. Artist Avni Delvina says Trump - his "idol" - is the inspiration for the pieces in "The Triumph", which include depictions of the US Republican in a range of historical and fictional scenes. "It's a work of four years, born of strong indignation at the attacks on a free spirit like Trump," the 69-year-old artist told AFP.

Another shows smiling European leaders on a lifeboat wearing orange

life jackets, while a tuxedo-clad Trump plays a violin.

Most of the works were crafted together with the use of digital images that re-imagine iconic works of art and other notable scenes from history and pop culture. Italian tourist Laura Brivio, who attended the opening of the exhibition, praised the show as "a very interesting vision of the real world and art which is thought-provoking - whether or not you support (Trump)". "Delvina is a committed artist who has chosen to present his (visions of the) truth with rich and dynamic artistic language, provocative subjects and biting irony,"

said curator Manjola Xhavora.

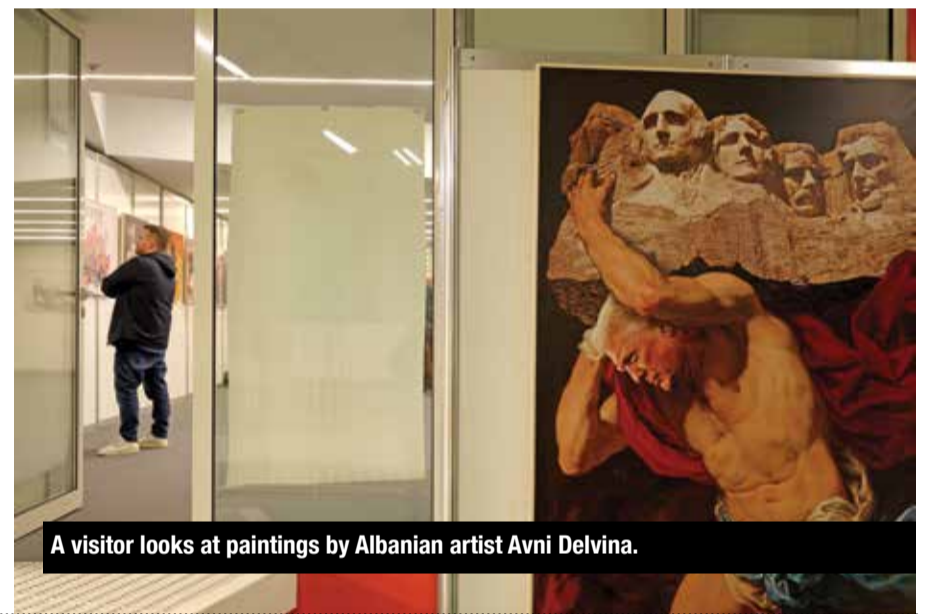
The exhibition is housed in a brutalist pyramid in the capital Tirana that was once dedicated to former dictator Enver Hoxha. In recent years, the building has been renovated and is now home to office space for the country's embryonic tech sector and art galleries. Pro-US sentiment remains relatively strong in Albania, where American flags are a common sight in some areas. After Trump's first electoral victory in 2016, a town in central Albania renamed one of its streets in his honor. — AFP



The painting "I Want You to Make America Great Again" by Albanian artist Avni Delvina.



Albanian artist Avni Delvina poses for a photo among his paintings during the exhibition "Triumph".



A visitor looks at paintings by Albanian artist Avni Delvina.

Starry Sundance fest moves ahead in wake of LA fires

The US film industry's first big gathering since fires devastated Los Angeles will begin Thursday at the Sundance festival, where highlights include a glitzy new Jennifer Lopez musical and a dark Benedict Cumberbatch drama. Hollywood's annual pilgrimage to the Rocky Mountains to premiere the coming year's most-anticipated indie films is taking place in somber circumstances, after the blazes that killed at least 27 people and brought the entertainment capital to a halt.



An evening view of the Egyptian Theatre marquee during the 2024 Sundance Film Festival on January 18, 2024 in Park City, Utah. — AFP

Festival chiefs held lengthy talks with filmmakers, including those "who lost homes or were displaced" by the blazes, before deciding to press ahead, said Sundance director Eugene Hernandez. Organizers heard "harrowing stories of people running out of their homes, evacuating... with their hard drives under their arms" to ensure their films survived, he told AFP. "Everybody to a person just wants to look forward and wants to look ahead... it'll be a nice moment of reunion and community."

Among the 88 features being screened in Utah's Park City is "Rebuilding," about a rancher who loses everything in a wildfire. "It takes on an added poignance, for those who will watch it next week," said Hernandez.

Josh O'Connor, known for "The Crown" and "Challengers," plays the lead role. "It's an incredible film, and one that

we felt was important to show, based on that spirit of resilience," said Sundance programming director Kim Yutani. "I think it will be a particularly moving one for people to see."

J-Lo, Cumberbatch

A-lister Lopez brings her first film to Sundance, with "Kiss of the Spider Woman." From "Dreamgirls" director Bill Condon, the film is based on the Broadway adaptation of Argentine author Manuel Puig's famous novel. Lopez plays Aurora, a silver-screen diva whose life and roles are discussed by two mismatched prisoners as they form an unlikely bond in their grim cell.

While harking back to grand Golden Age Hollywood musicals with its fabulous costumes and Lopez's "knockout musical performance," the film is a more dramatic and independent take on the genre, said Hernandez. Cumberbatch stars in another literary adaptation, "The Thing With Feathers," based on Max Porter's experimental and poetic novel about a grieving husband and two young sons. "It's one of these juicy roles that big actors relish taking a bite out of," said Yutani. Family tragedy and fatherhood are also the themes of "Omaha," with John Magaro ("Past Lives") delivering "an emotional gut punch of a role" that could spell awards, according to Yutani.

Elsewhere, Olivia Colman plays a mother taking her non-binary teen to visit their gay grandfather (John Lithgow) in "Jimpa." Rapper A\$AP Rocky and late-night host Conan O'Brien make up the eclectic cast of mystery "If I Had Legs I'd Kick You." And "The Bear" star Ayo Edebiri teams up with John Malkovich for thriller "Opus," about a young writer investigating the mysterious disappearance of a legendary pop star.

Music is also a prominent theme of Sundance's documentary selection, which has launched several of the most recent Oscar-winning non-fiction films. A new "must-see" Jeff Buckley documentary features never-before-seen footage from "three very important women in his life, including his mother," said Yutani.

Elegance Bratton explores the Chicago roots of house music with "Move Ya Body: The Birth of House," while Oscar-winning director Questlove examines funk pioneer Sly Stone in "Sly Lives! (aka The Burden of Black Genius)." Politics will again be prominent. Former New Zealand leader Jacinda Ardern is expected in town to promote behind-the-scenes documentary "Prime Minister." — AFP

France's arch film provocateur Blier dies at 85

Veteran French film provocateur Bertrand Blier, who has died aged 85, made some of the country's biggest arthouse hits of the 1970s and 1980s, but is perhaps best known for unleashing the Gallic megastar Gerard Depardieu on the world. Blier shocked France and launched Depardieu's career in 1974 with "Les Valseuses", a subversive tale about a pair of joyriding young thugs on a sex and crime spree across the country. The title, which means testicles in French slang, was rather primly translated as "Going Places" for its American release.

Based on Blier's own novel, it became a cult classic and was the first of his nine movies with Depardieu, whom Blier later described as "my pet actor, my cinema brother, my alter-ego". Its success also brought Blier out of the shadow of his father, the postwar acting great Bernard Blier. A parable of male unease at women's liberation, many at the time found "Les Valseuses" morally ambiguous and its sex scenes brutal and vulgar, but its theme would dominate almost all of his later work. The director died peacefully at home Monday night in Paris, surrounded by his wife and children, his son Leonard Blier told AFP.

Wounded machismo

The same wounded machismo ran through his biggest international hit, "Trop belle pour toi" ("Too Beautiful For You") in 1989, with Depardieu playing a man who

grows bored by his beautiful wife and falls for his much plainer secretary. Regarded as something of a modern classic, the New York Times called it an "exceptionally rich romantic comedy". It also won Blier the jury prize at the Cannes film festival and five Cesars - or French Oscars - including best actress for Depardieu's then real-life partner, Carole Bouquet, who played the wife.

"What intrigues me again and again is how male friendships are relatively unproblematic, and yet when men approach what they passionately desire, then their problems begin," he said. Blier burst onto the scene at a time when France's New Wave directors were running out of steam, with his black comedies peopled with marginal figures, villains, rogue policemen and prostitutes, seen as unique and unclassifiable. He said he found modern cinema "irritating", though many found echos of in his work of the great Spanish surrealist director Luis Bunuel.

Proud contrarian

Blier had a close professional relationship with his father, but they differed sharply on politics with the younger Blier complaining bitterly that the actor had slid from the left to the right - a journey he himself would follow, in gender politics at any rate. Balding, bearded and proudly contrary, with a pipe often hanging from the side of his mouth, Blier was born just before the outbreak of World War II in 1939 in the Paris suburb of Boulogne-Bil-

lancourt. He followed in his father's footsteps, starting in cinema as an assistant director. In 1963, he directed his father, in his first feature, "If I Were A Spy". But it would be another decade before he made his name with "Les Valseuses", which paired Depardieu with another of Blier's favorite bad boy actors, Patrick Dewaere.

Oscar success

Five years later he won the best foreign film Oscar with the menage-a-trois comedy "Get Out Your Handkerchiefs", again featuring the Depardieu-Dewaere duo. In 1980 he won a Cesar, a French Oscar, for "Buffet Froid" (Cold Cuts), a mixture of absurd and realism, in which he directed his father for the last time, inevitably alongside Depardieu. A born iconoclast, he was never happier than when poking fun at social mores, and had another hit with the provocative "Tenue de Soiree" (Evening Wear) in 1986, took on homosexuality and sex triangles. But he could be gentle too like with "Beau Pere" (Stepfather) in 1982, his tale of troubled family relations. But by the 1990s and 2000s after a string of commercial flops, Blier was having trouble securing funding for his films. In 2010 he returned to surrealism with the "Clink of Ice" which broached cancer, with an alcoholic writer played by Jean Dujardin talking about his illness, which takes the form of a man played by Albert Dupontel. — AFP



(From left to right) French actress Josiane Balasko, French director Bertrand Blier and French actors Carole Bouquet and Gerard Depardieu are photographed on May 12, 1989 in Cannes, during the 42nd film festival, after the screening of the film "Trop belle pour toi", presented in the French selection.



(From left to right) French actor Patrick Dewaere, actress Ariel Besse and film director Bertrand Blier pose during the 34th Cannes Film Festival, in Cannes, south-eastern France, on May 21, 1981.

Young Chinese turn to AI PETS for emotional relief

AI pet dogs are seen on display at a store of technology company Weilan in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jiangsu province. Weilan's AI dog, called "BabyAlpha", sells for up to 26,000 yuan, and the company says 70 percent of buyers are families with young children.--AFP photos



Zhang Yachun talking to her AI-powered robot named Aluo at a shopping center in Beijing.



Zhang Yachun (left) and her mother putting clothes on her AI-powered robot named Aluo.



A pet owner holding a dog in front of an AI pet dog outside a store of technology company Weilan in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jiangsu province.



A woman checking an AI pet dog at a store of technology company Weilan in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jiangsu province.

At a shopping mall in Beijing, Zhang Yachun murmurs quietly to her closest confidant, a fluffy AI-powered robot whose soothing chirps remind her that she is not alone. Zhang, 19, has long battled anxiety over school and work, and has struggled to form deep friendships with other people. But since buying a BooBoo, a "smart pet" that uses artificial intelligence to interact with humans, she says life has become easier. "I feel like I now have someone to share the happy times with," Zhang told AFP in the apartment she shares with her parents and a real pet duck.

Across China, a growing number of people are turning to AI to combat social isolation as the technology becomes more mature and widely accepted. Wiggly, furry and resembling a guinea pig, BooBoo is produced by Hangzhou Genmoor Technology and retails for up to 1,400 yuan (\$190). Developed with children's social needs in mind, it has sold about 1,000 units since May, according to the company's product manager Adam Duan.

On an outing this month, Zhang ferried her companion, which she named "Aluo", in a cross-body carrier, whispering to the rugby ball-sized creature as it nodded and squeaked. At a pet shop, she pressed the beige bundle up against the window to admire a ginger cat before buying Aluo a tiny winter coat designed for a dog. She said the robot plays the same role as human friends, adding: "(It) makes you feel you are someone who is needed."

Robot boom

The global market for "social robots" like BooBoo is expected to grow by a factor of seven to \$42.5 billion by 2033, according to consulting firm IMARC Group, with Asia already dominating the sector. For Guo Zichen, 33, a smart pet could help when he is unable to play with his child. "Right now, family members are spending less time with the children", Guo said as he examined a robotic dog on sale at the flagship store of tech company Weilan in the eastern city of Nanjing. "Buying one for my kid can help them with studying and other things," he mused.

Weilan's AI dog, called "BabyAlpha", sells for between 8,000 (\$1,090) and 26,000 yuan (\$3,500), and the company says 70 percent of buyers are families with young children. But Guo said he was skeptical the electronic pup could

bring as much joy as an actual canine. "The biggest difference is that dogs have souls, while (BabyAlpha) looks different in an indescribable way", he said. "On the whole, you feel like it's not the same as the real thing."

years are now in their 40s and facing an economy burdened with soaring home prices, higher living costs and increased work stress, stretching their ability to focus on their own children

That, in turn, "leaves little room for

"When we were young, we didn't lack friends. We had loads as soon as we stepped out of the door", the 51-year-old told AFP. "Now, children in cities seem to be under a lot more pressure, so they may lack friends." Zhang, an only child,



Zhang Yachun (right) talking to her AI-powered robot named Aluo at a cafe in Beijing.



Children interacting with an AI pet dog at a store of technology company Weilan in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jiangsu province.



Zhang Yachun (right) carrying her AI-powered robot named Aluo.

Shifting society

While the 1990s introduced electronic pets to the world like Japan's digital Tamagotchis and American-made Furbies that could mimic speech, computerized companions are becoming more functional with AI. A growing number of AI products in China cater to people's emotional needs, from conversational chatbots to lifelike avatars of the deceased. Social shifts like the impact of the government's decades-long one-child policy are helping drive market growth, according to experts. People born in the policy's early

personal interactions, prompting people to seek alternative ways to meet their emotional needs", said Wu Haiyan, a professor specializing in AI and psychology at the University of Macau. AI companions provide cognitive stimulation, "enhancing the well-being of... individuals who may otherwise feel isolated", Wu said. In some cases, she added, people show more trust in AI than humans.

Same on the inside

Zhang's father Peng said he understood his daughter's bond with Aluo.

said she has become more willing to share her worries with her parents since she bought Aluo. Opening up about her troubles at school has meant that "there aren't as many things piled up in my heart", she said.

People of her generation often struggle to communicate face to face, Zhang said, adding that "they might be afraid" to express who they are. "But what they feel inside has not changed", she added, cradling Aluo in her lap. —AFP



People visiting a store of technology company Weilan in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jiangsu province.



Zhang Yachun (center), her father Zhang Peng (right) and her mother posing with her AI-powered robot named Aluo at home in Beijing.



Zhang Yachun playing with her AI-powered robot named Aluo and pet duck Nana at her home in Beijing.



People checking an AI pet dog at a store of technology company Weilan in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jiangsu province.

Sports

Mbappe dispels doubts before crucial Real Madrid Champions League clash

Mbappe's skill and speed have made him unstoppable in recent weeks

MADRID: Just when it seemed the pressure of a lifelong dream switch to Real Madrid might prove too great for Kylian Mbappe to overcome, the French superstar silenced his doubters.

After a troubled start to life at Madrid, Mbappe finally seems at home and ready to wreak havoc both in Spain and in Europe. Mbappe's rediscovered elan comes at the perfect time for Real Madrid with two crucial Champions League matches ahead, starting with RB Salzburg's visit to the Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday.

Madrid then face Brest on the road next week, aiming to secure progress to the next phase of the competition. It would be unthinkable for the holders and record 15-time European champions to suffer an early knock-out, but after a poor start they are presently 20th in the 36-team group, with the bottom 12 teams eliminated.

Madrid lost at Liverpool, with Mbappe missing a penalty, as well as against AC Milan at home and away at Lille. Shortly after the defeat at Anfield, Mbappe missed another spot kick in a La Liga defeat by Athletic Bilbao and it proved a turning point for the France captain.

"A big mistake in a match where every detail counts, I take full responsibility for it," said Mbappe

in a post on social media platform Instagram. "It's the best time to change this situation and show who I am." Since pledging to turn things around, Mbappe has scored eight goals in 10 games for Madrid across all competitions, including a stunning solo effort against Barcelona in the Spanish Super Cup final.

Mbappe also struck as Madrid won the Intercontinental Cup against Pachuca in December, but beyond the goals, he now looks every part the devastating, world-beating talent president Florentino Perez hoped for.

Moves only he can make

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti has been patient with Mbappe, often defending the forward and insisting he needed time to adapt to life in the Spanish capital and gel with his new team-mates. The Italian also stuck by his guns with regards to Mbappe's positioning, insisting from the start of the season the French hitman should play down the middle, leaving Vinicius Junior to stay on the left flank in his preferred role.

Mbappe and Vinicius struggled to gel, at times occupying the same spaces on the pitch. The team's 4-0 Clasico humbling by bitter rivals Barcelona in October was a particularly disappointing moment



Kylian Mbappe

for Mbappe, who was caught offside numerous times in the match by the Catalans' high defensive line.

Left out of the national team squads for Nations League matches at the time by coach Didier Deschamps and battling with former employers Paris Saint-Germain over unpaid income, Mbappe seemed weighed down and overwhelmed.

Ancelotti persisted with the striker and said at the end of December Mbappe had bedded in and, after

a thigh injury, was now ready to perform at his best. "His (adaptation) period, which he obviously needed, because everyone needs it, is over," said the coach.

"Where does Mbappe have to improve? Just in consistency... trying to make the moves that only he can make, as often as possible." Perhaps unsurprisingly, Ancelotti, a record five-time European Cup winner as a coach, was right.

Mbappe's skill and speed have made him unstoppable in recent weeks and the 26-year-old looks increasingly confident in himself with every passing match. "The Bilbao game was good for me, I hit the bottom... and it was a moment to realize that I have to give everything for this shirt and show my personality," said Mbappe at the end of 2024.

Mbappe produced arguably his finest display for Madrid as he netted a brace against Las Palmas on Sunday to help take Real top of La Liga. "I have adapted to the team and I can play how I want, with my team-mates, with personality," he said after the game.

Vinicius was suspended against Las Palmas but will return in the Champions League, and he and Mbappe must continue developing their partnership. If Madrid's dynamic duo can find the same wave-length they will be ready to defend their status as the kings of Europe. — AFP

Conceicao demands more hunger as AC Milan eye top eight

MILAN: Sergio Conceicao has been in charge of AC Milan for less than a month but has already diagnosed a lack of hunger as the source of his new team's woes, as the seven-time kings of Europe host Girona on Wednesday with the last 16 of the Champions League firmly in their sights.

Milan could yet obtain direct qualification as they sit a point away from the top eight positions and have two winnable final fixtures in the league phase, first their lowly Spanish opponents at the San Siro and then at Dinamo Zagreb next week.

But Saturday's 2-0 defeat at Juventus highlighted the same issues of quality and character that have become increasingly evident with each season that has passed since their dramatic league title win in 2022. Milan are a whopping 19 points behind Serie A leaders Napoli but more importantly sit eight points from Italy's top four, making the club's minimum requirement of qualification for next season's edition of Europe's elite competition a difficult task.

"The first step to winning a match is wanting to win it," said Conceicao after his team's fully deserved loss in Turin. "I don't want to hear anything about tiredness or lack of energy, it's only January for goodness sake. The players have everything they need to recover in time to play every three days. What we need is an empty fridge at home, more hunger."

Charismatic Conceicao was hired to shake up a Milan team long been considered to be lacking fight, and the Portuguese was visibly displeased at his players after they crumbled to their first defeat since he replaced Paulo Fonseca in the dugout last month.

The 50-year-old had already publicly blasted his team when he described Milan's first-half display against relegation-threatened Cagliari, a match which finished 1-1, the worst he'd ever



GIRONA: Girona's Spanish coach Michel (C) attends a training session on the eve of the UEFA Champions League football match between AC Milan and Girona FC at the Puma Academy training ground in Girona on January 21, 2025. — AFP

seen as a coach. But the vehemence with which he called out his players for lacking guts was surprising even if it earned him praise from pundits and disgruntled fans alike.

"I started coaching 13 years ago I was in charge of smaller teams, teams that in terms of talent weren't all that but had an incredible level of desire," said Conceicao. "In life you need to grow, have goals, even more so when you play for Milan. You have to maintain that hunger, that desire and maintain your own personal goals as a player so that when you get to the end of your career you're proud of what you've done."

"What I'm seeing here isn't new to me, I've

another opportunity for Nunez to finally prove his worth, starting with Tuesday's Champions League tie against French team Lille at Anfield. Nunez has struggled to win over both Slot and his predecessor Jurgen Klopp since signing from Benfica for a fee rising to a potential £85 million (\$104 million) in 2022.

The 25-year-old gave a glimpse of his potency with the stoppage-time double that fired Liverpool to a dramatic 2-0 win at Brentford in the Premier League on Saturday. But those were his first top-flight goals since November and he has scored only six times in all competitions this term.

"I don't think it's the first time Darwin has been in this situation when Jota has been out," Slot told reporters on Monday. "But he is in a good place be-

cause he scored two against Brentford. We have four strikers who are fit to start and Darwin is one of them. "Of course, it increases the chance for Darwin to get more playing time if one is injured and especially if it's a number nine." Slot admitted recently that he has found it hard to get the best out of a player heralded as one of the world's brightest young talents when he was at Benfica.

Urging Nunez to show he was worthy of that hype, Slot added: "The most difficult in football is to find consistency, as a team and an individual. Only a few players are able to be at the same level every few days. "Then there is a big group of players who can play well but not every time. He is in that group. We have one or two who are in the group of the highest standard. That is a nice challenge for him." — AFP

Revitalized Man City confident for PSG 'final': Guardiola

LONDON: Pep Guardiola insists Manchester City will rise to the occasion in their crucial Champions League showdown against Paris Saint-Germain after rebuilding their shattered morale with a 6-0 demolition of Ipswich.

Guardiola's side are languishing in 22nd place in the 36-team Champions League table with two games left. PSG are in even worse shape, one point behind City in 25th place. With the top 24 clubs going through to the knockout stages — the first eight automatically reach the last 16 and the sides from ninth to 24th face a play-off — the stakes could not be higher when City travel to Paris on Wednesday.

Fortunately for City, they were able to warm up for the blockbuster clash by recording their biggest Premier League win since thrashing Nottingham Forest by the same scoreline in 2022. Phil Foden scored twice, while Mateo Kovacic, Erling Haaland, Jeremy Doku and James McAtee were also on target at Portman Road on Sunday.

Such was their dominance, Guardiola was able to replace Foden, Haaland, Kovacic, Kevin De Bruyne and Manuel Akanji in the second half to keep them fresh for the PSG game. "After four or five nil I had my eye on Paris," Guardiola said.

"We have two finals left, by winning two we qualify, winning one there's a big possibility. "We have to get the points because we created problems ourselves, especially with Feyenoord, even the game we lost in Lisbon.

"But in that moment we had a lot of problems. We could not compete the way we want for many reasons. Hopefully we can continue in Paris for the next game." After winning the Champions League for the first time in 2023, City bowed out in the quarter-finals on penalties against Real Madrid last season. In keeping with a turbulent season that sees them trailing 12 points behind Premier League leaders Liverpool, Guardiola's men have endured another roller-coaster ride in Europe this term. — AFP



Luis Enrique

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 Pratappgarh, 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 Sarters 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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Details may be seen at the Embassy's website: <https://indembkwt.gov.in/index.php>.

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Chelsea beat Wolves to return to Premier League top four

Chelsea overcomes a howler from Sanchez to beat relegation-threatened Wolves



LONDON: Chelsea's English midfielder #20 Cole Palmer (C) runs with the ball during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Wolverhampton Wanderers at Stamford Bridge in London. — AFP

LONDON: Chelsea overcame a howler from goalkeeper Robert Sanchez to beat relegation-threatened Wolves 3-1 on Monday, ending a five-game winless run to climb back into the Premier League's top four.

Enzo Maresca's team were just two points behind leaders Liverpool in mid-December, raising hopes of an unlikely title challenge before losing their way. Now they are back on track to qualify for next season's Champions League after second-half goals from Marc Cucurella and Noni Madueke spared Sanchez's blushes.

The Spanish goalkeeper had dropped the ball moments before half-time, allowing Matt Doherty to cancel out Tosin Adarabioyo's opener. Maresca said Chelsea had dominated the first 40 minutes before problems that have haunted them in recent weeks returned. "We lost a little bit of confidence, we conceded a goal and we started to struggle a little bit

and then the second half I think we started quite well and then after the second and third goals the game was in control," he told Sky Sports.

He added: "In the past five games we didn't win but I said many times that the performance was there. We created many chances, we didn't score and tonight finally we scored three goals." Chelsea's top-scorer Cole Palmer, a doubt before the game, was fit to start as Maresca made five changes from last week's draw against Bournemouth including bringing in center-back Trevoh Chalobah, recalled from his loan spell at Crystal Palace.

The home side dominated possession in the early stages and Palmer had a couple of early efforts, curling one wide and forcing Jose Sa into a diving save. The home side were rewarded for their dominance midway through the first half when Adarabioyo fired home for his first Premier League goal for the club.

The defender controlled the ball well after it was

deflected into his path from Reece James's shot from the edge of the box. A number of Chelsea players were in offside positions in a crowded penalty area and the flag was raised but the on-field decision was overturned after a VAR check.

Sanchez blunder

Wolves, anaemic in attack for most of the first half, came back into the game as half-time approached, scoring with their first shot on target thanks to Sanchez's error. The visitors won a corner and the goalkeeper dropped the inswinging delivery from Matheus Cunha under intense pressure when he could have punched clear, with Doherty poking home.

The home side started the second half brightly and were back in front on the hour mark when Cucurella hooked home on the stretch after Madueke's cross was flicked on by Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall. Five minutes later Chelsea had a two-

goal cushion when Madueke scored his fourth goal of the season against Wolves, heading home Chalobah's goal-bound effort.

Sanchez palmed a Cunha shot behind with 10 minutes to go but Chelsea were largely comfortable despite the occasional minor scare and leapfrogged Newcastle and Manchester City, whom they face next. Former Leicester boss Maresca, in his first season in charge at Stamford Bridge, stubbornly insisted his team were not in the title race even when they were flying high after five straight wins from late November.

Starting with a 0-0 draw at Everton just before Christmas, they took just three points from five games before returning to winning ways on Monday. Wolves, who have conceded a league-high 51 goals, are outside the relegation zone on goal difference alone after three straight defeats following a bright start for new manager Vitor Pereira. — AFP

Djokovic quells Alcaraz challenge to reach semis

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic beat young rival Carlos Alcaraz 4-6 6-4 6-3 6-4 in a gladiatorial battle worthy of a title clash to charge into the Australian Open semi-finals on Tuesday and remain in the hunt for a record 25th Grand Slam title.

In the latest chapter of a generational rivalry that has played out on the biggest stages, including last year's Paris Olympics gold medal match-up, it was the 37-year-old Djokovic who maintained his hardcourt dominance over Alcaraz.

Defeat was a blow for the 21-year-old Spaniard as the French Open and Wimbledon champion's bid to become the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam went up in flames, and he was left to digest his third loss to Djokovic on the surface.

Some loose shots at the start of the match put Alcaraz on the backfoot but he fired a magnificent backhand winner to pull back a break and was rock solid from there, vaulting to a 5-4 lead in a physical opening set after Djokovic made an error.

Having dropped his serve for a second time, Djokovic took an off-court medical timeout and returned with his left thigh taped up, but the seventh-seeded Serb could not prevent Alcaraz from holding to love with a big ace at the end to clinch the set.

Djokovic was far more aggressive in the second and made several forays towards the net to reel off the first three games before producing a spectacular backhand overhead smash assisted by the net cord at



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic falls on the court as he hits a return against Spain's Carlos Alcaraz during their men's singles quarterfinal match on day ten of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne. — AFP

one point, but Alcaraz pulled level at 3-3.

The momentum shifted again as Djokovic heaped the pressure on the third-seeded Spaniard with heavy ball-striking to claim the second set and drew massive cheers from the Rod Laver Arena crowd when he broke for a 4-2 and then 5-3 lead in the third.

Playing like a much younger version of himself, 10-times Melbourne Park champion Djokovic showed surgical precision to claim the set before breaking early in the next one to tighten his grip on the match. Alcaraz won a 33-shot rally to rescue a break point while down 4-2 in the fourth set and smiled as he gasped for air but Djokovic used all his experience to seal the victory and set up a meeting with second-seeded German Alexander Zverev. — Reuters

Celtics crush Warriors, Cavs cruise past Suns

LOS ANGELES: The NBA champion Boston Celtics crushed the Golden State Warriors 125-85 on Monday as current league leaders Cleveland romped past the Phoenix Suns. Jayson Tatum scored 22 points with nine rebounds and seven assists before sitting out the entire fourth quarter for the Celtics, who handed the Warriors their worst home defeat since a 149-104 loss to Dallas in 1985.

Kristaps Porzingis added 18 points and Jaylen Brown chipped in 17 for Boston, who took full advantage of the absence of Draymond Green, the latest Warriors injury victim after he strained his left calf on Saturday. "Those are some of the tricky games in the NBA, when (teams) have some star players out, other guys get a different role," Tatum said. "We fell victim to that a couple of times this year, so (we were) just trying to lock in from the beginning." Up by 15 at halftime, the Celtics erupted for 43 points in the third quarter.

Stephen Curry scored 18 points to lead the Warriors and Moses Moody added 13 off the bench—the only Golden State players to score in double figures. "We've got to flush this one down the toilet," head coach Steve Kerr said, calling the blowout "demoralizing". It was just one of the lopsided results as the NBA marked the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday with a day-long slate of games. Donovan Mitchell scored 33 points to fuel the Cavaliers in a 118-92 victory over the Phoenix Suns.

Injury absences of Evan Mobley, Isaac Okoro and

Caris LeVert did nothing to slow the Cavs, who led by as many as 32 on the way to boosting their league-best record to 36-6. Kevin Durant scored 33 points with seven rebounds to lead the Suns, but Devin Booker—who had scored at least 30 points in the Suns' last five games—was held to 15 points on six-of-14 shooting.

Pelicans rally

In New Orleans, the Pelicans authored the biggest comeback in franchise history, erasing a 25-point deficit to beat the Utah Jazz 123-119 in overtime. CJ McCollum scored 24 of his 45 points in the fourth quarter and overtime, and Dejounte Murray added 26 points and 11 assists for the Pelicans.

They notched their fifth win in their last six games despite the absence of ailing star Zion Williamson. In Memphis, Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 24 points and grabbed 11 rebounds to help the Grizzlies fight back from a 16-point deficit to beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 108-106. Desmond Bane added 22 points and Ja Morant scored 19 for Memphis, who took their first lead of the second half on Bane's floater in the lane with 3:21 remaining. "It was ugly from the start, but we kept competing and found a way down the stretch," Bane said.

Anthony Edwards scored 32 points to lead the Timberwolves, but missed a potential game-winning three-pointer as time expired. New York's Jalen Brunson scored 34 points to propel the Knicks to a 119-110 victory over the Atlanta Hawks. Trae Young scored 27 points, leading seven Hawks players to score in double figures, but Atlanta saw their three-game winning streak end. The Detroit Pistons shook off back-to-back home losses with a 107-96 victory over the Rockets in Houston. Cade Cunningham scored 32 points with nine rebounds and seven assists and Jalen Duren added a double-double of 16 points and 14 rebounds with four steals and two blocked shots. — AFP