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West Bank faces Zionist carnage

Gunfire, explosions rock Jenin • Defiant Hamas back on Gaza streets

NEWS IN BRIEF

284 traffic fatalities in 2024

KUWAIT: Kuwait recorded 65,991 traffic accidents and 284 fatalities in 2024, with 90 percent of incidents caused by distraction and 10 percent by vehicle malfunctions. Traffic violations included 1.9 million speeding cases, 174,793 red light offenses, 152,367 seatbelt violations and 79,519 instances of mobile phone use while driving. Brigadier Mohammad Al-Subhan of the interior ministry stressed the need for stricter penalties to curb these rising offenses during the Gulf Traffic Week seminar themed "Driving Without the Phone". — KUNA (See Page 2)

Armed robbers arrested

KUWAIT: The interior ministry arrested two suspects involved in an armed robbery at a currency exchange office in Mahboula, stealing KD 4,600. The two Africans had premeditated the crime, surveilling the office from rooftops and concealing car plates. Detectives apprehended one suspect, who led them to his partner in Aswaf Al-Qurain. Stolen money and methamphetamine were found at their residence. Both suspects were referred to the public prosecution. — KUNA

Govt may use 'force' against SDF

DAMASCUS: Syria's defense minister said Wednesday that Damascus was open to talks with Kurdish-led forces on their integration into the national army but stood ready to use force should negotiations fail. "The door to negotiation with the (Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces) is currently open," Murhaf Abu Qasra told reporters. "If we have to use force, we will be ready." The US-backed SDF controls much of the oil-producing northeast, where it has enjoyed de facto autonomy for more than a decade. "They offered us oil, but we don't want oil, we want the institutions and the borders," Abu Qasra said. — AFP

Houthis free detained ship's crew

SANAA: Yemen's Houthi rebels said on Wednesday they had released the detained crew of the ship *Galaxy Leader*, held since Nov 2023, after the Zionist-Hamas ceasefire came into effect. At the start of their anti-shipping campaign, helicopter-borne rebels stormed the *Galaxy Leader*, a vehicle carrier, and detained its 25 international crewmembers, 17 of whom are from the Philippines. Saba news agency said the crew were released "in coordination with Hamas" and with the help of Oman. The Bahamas-flagged, British-owned *Galaxy Leader* is operated by a Japanese firm but has links to Zionist businessman Abraham "Rami" Ungar. — AFP

Trump pardons drug kingpin

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Tuesday said he had pardoned Ross Ulbricht, the man behind the "Silk Road" online marketplace that facilitated millions of dollars of drug sales. In 2015, Ulbricht was sentenced to life in prison after being convicted of masterminding the "dark web" platform, on which some \$200 million in narcotics were sold to customers across the world. Ulbricht, who ran Silk Road under the alias "Dread Pirate Roberts" and who had also been accused of commissioning five murders, was sentenced to two life sentences for narcotics distribution and criminal enterprise. — AFP



MUQEIBILA: Zionist soldiers transfer Palestinian men arrested during a military raid on Jenin near this crossing on the border with the occupied-West Bank on Jan 22, 2025. — AFP

JENIN: Gunfire and explosions rocked the Jenin area of the occupied West Bank on Wednesday as the Zionist military kept up a large-scale raid for a second day. The operation, launched just days after a ceasefire paused more than a year of fighting in Gaza, has left at least 10 Palestinians dead, according to Palestinian health authorities.

"The situation is very difficult," Jenin governor Kamal Abu al-Rub told AFP. "The occupation army has bulldozed all the roads leading to Jenin camp and to the Jenin government hospital... There is shooting and explosions," he added, referring to the Zionist military. Zionist forces have detained around 20 people from villages around Jenin since the operation began on Tuesday, the official said.

An AFP correspondent reported hearing gunfire and explosions from the northern city's refugee camp. In December, Jenin area fighters also clashed with the security forces of the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority. The Zionist military said it was continuing with the operation, dubbed "Iron Wall".

Islamic Jihad, one of the factions present in Jenin, condemned what it called "the systematic displacement, destruction and killing carried out by the occupation army against Jenin refugee camp". The Palestinian Authority's foreign ministry accused the Zionist entity of "collective punishment" and said the raid was part of a Zionist plan aimed at "gradually annexing the occupied West Bank".

Continued on Page 6

Trump places DEI workers on leave, calls bishop 'nasty'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump ordered federal employees of diversity offices to be put on paid leave by Wednesday night, and called a Washington bishop "nasty" after she asked him to "have mercy" for migrants. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt confirmed that US government workers in diversity offices must be put on paid leave by 5:00 pm Wednesday as the new administration

moved from day one to shutter programs intended to bolster minority groups. While campaigning, Trump had vilified diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies in the federal government and corporate world, saying they discriminated against white people — men in particular. He also has demonized any recognition of gender diversity, attacking transgender people — notably transgender women in sports — and gender-affirming care for children.

"President Trump campaigned on ending the scourge of DEI from our federal government and returning America to a merit-based society where people are hired based on their skills, not for the color of their skin," Leavitt said in a statement published by NBC News.

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WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump attends the National Prayer Service at the Washington National Cathedral on Jan 21, 2025. — AFP

Harry settles lawsuit against Murdoch papers

LONDON: Prince Harry settled Wednesday his long-running lawsuit against Rupert Murdoch's UK tabloid publisher, which agreed to pay him "substantial damages" after admitting intruding into his private life, including by hacking his phone. Murdoch's News Group Newspapers (NGN) issued a wide-ranging

apology and admission of wrongdoing, in what Harry's lawyer David Sherborne called "a monumental victory" that underlined the need for further probes.

The publisher apologized to him for the impact of the "serious intrusion" into the private life of his late mother Diana, Princess of Wales, particularly when he was younger. The settlement won by King Charles's youngest son concludes a years-long legal battle over claims of unlawful practices by two of Murdoch's newspapers — The Sun and now-shuttered News of the World. It also avoids a High Court trial in the public spotlight, which had been due to begin Tuesday and last up to eight weeks.

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Prince Harry

Rare snow in New Orleans as Arctic blast chills US

WASHINGTON: Bitter Arctic air plunged more than half the United States into a deep freeze Tuesday, including New Orleans, where the heaviest snow in decades brought dangerous conditions to the famously festive Gulf Coast city. Temperatures dropped more than 17 degrees Celsius below average across large swaths of the country, causing airports, schools and health clinics to shutter and major roadways to close due to ice and freezing rain.

Over 170 million Americans were enduring an especially frigid Arctic front that has already impacted scores of communities, including the US capital Washington, where President Donald Trump's inauguration on Monday

was moved indoors due to the weather. "Dangerous cold weather for most of the country," blared the latest National Weather Service (NWS) report on Tuesday. The agency has issued storm warnings across parts of eight states in the US Southeast and said the region could see record cold temperatures.

Extreme cold was also threatening states in the Plains and the Upper Midwest, where life-threatening wind chills down to 50 degrees below zero were possible, according to the NWS. Across the US South — especially the Gulf Coast, which is far more accustomed to temperate or tropical weather than dangerously low

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NEW ORLEANS: People walk under oak trees in City Park during a snowstorm on Jan 21, 2025. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's traffic department issues 1.9m speeding tickets in 2024

90% of 65,991 accidents recorded in 2024 linked to distractions: Official



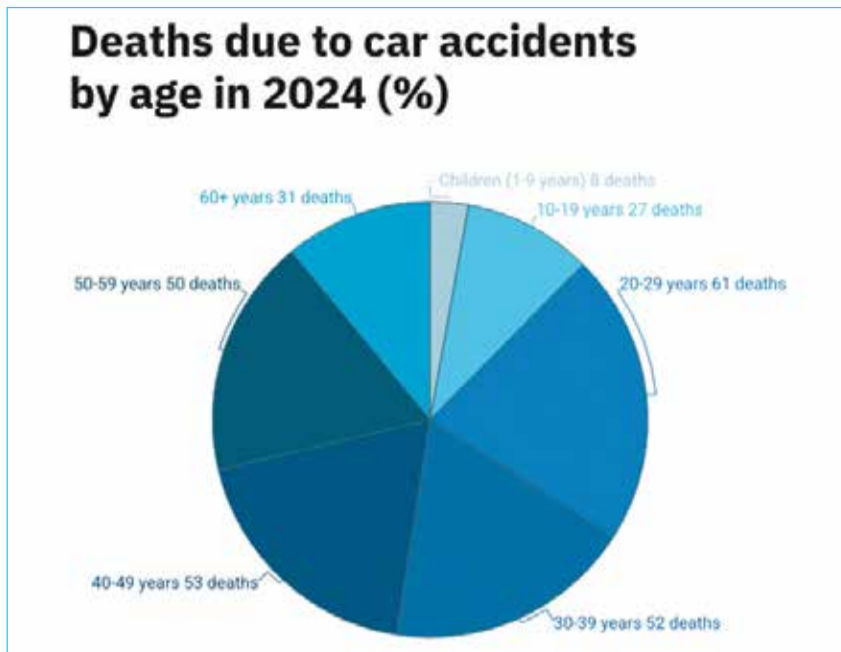
Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah Buhassan.

KUWAIT: Brigadier General Mohammad Al-Subhan, Director of Coordination and Follow-up at the Ministry of Interior's Traffic Sector, revealed that 61,553 traffic violations were recorded in the final quarter of 2024 for failure to wear seatbelts and for using mobile phones while driving.

Al-Subhan made this announcement during a lecture organized by the Gulf Traffic Week Organizing Committee at the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA). The lecture, which highlighted the committee's activities for the 38th Gulf Traffic Week, is being held under the slogan "Driving Without a Phone."

He also shared that the total number of traffic accidents in Kuwait in 2024 reached 65,991, resulting in 284 fatalities. Notably, 90 percent of these accidents were attributed to inattention and distractions, while the remaining 10 percent were caused by vehicle malfunctions or poor road conditions.

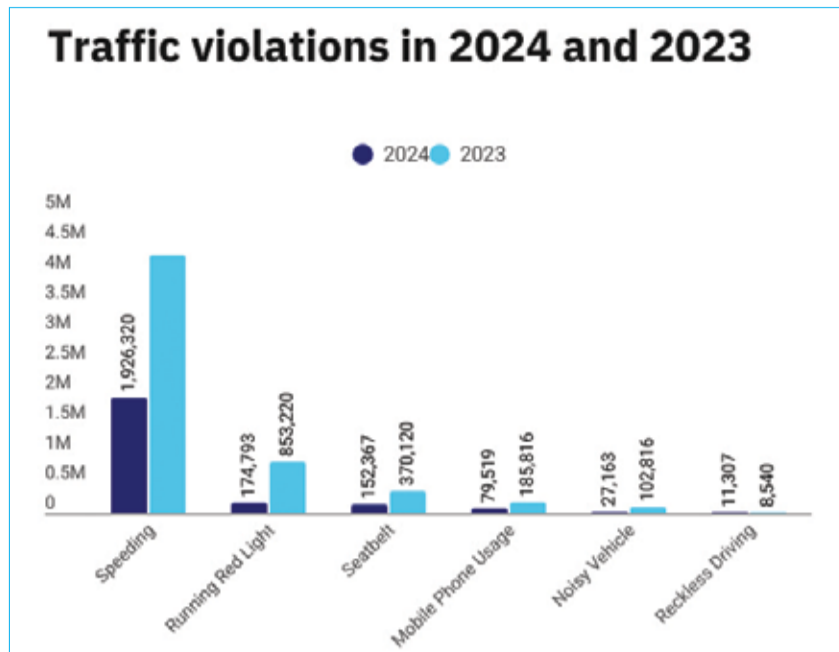
Fatality statistics revealed that children aged 1-9 years accounted for 8 deaths, while those in the 10-19 age range suffered 27 fatalities. The 20-29 age



group recorded 61 deaths, followed by 52 fatalities in the 30-39 age group, 53 in the 40-49 group, 50 in the 50-59 range, and 31 deaths in the 60+ group.

Al-Subhan emphasized the rising trend in traffic violations and accidents in recent years, fueled by increasing reckless behavior. He highlighted the urgent need for stricter penalties to reduce violations and preserve lives.

Further, Al-Subhan reported that 1,926,320 speeding violations were recorded in 2024, along with 174,793 violations for running red lights. Other offenses included 152,367 instances of not wearing seatbelts, 79,519 cases of using mobile



phones while driving, 27,163 for noisy vehicles, and 11,307 for reckless driving. A total of 8,455 vehicles and 4,027 motorcycles were impounded during the year.

He also discussed recent amendments to the traffic law, which now includes higher financial fines to deter lawbreakers.

Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah Buhassan, Assistant Director of Traffic Awareness and member of the Gulf Traffic Week Committee, presented details on the various traffic monitoring systems in place, such as fixed and mobile cameras, surveillance cameras, and point-to-point systems that monitor seatbelt use

and mobile phone violations.

Buhassan further explained that the new law imposes a KD 50 fine for allowing a child under 10 to sit in the front seat or fail to secure them properly in the back seat, up from the previous fine of KD 5. The session also included video clips illustrating common traffic accidents, their primary causes, and the role of the Central Control Room in monitoring traffic, adjusting intersection timings, tracking violators, and issuing indirect violations. The seminar also covered traffic accident management and recent changes to traffic laws and procedures. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi launches the second phase of the ministry's TV archiving project. — KUNA

Kuwait TV archiving project continues a decade after its launch

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Information launched on Wednesday the second phase of its TV archiving project, aimed at preserving the content produced by the country's national television network.

The project, which began its first phase nearly 10 years ago in 2016, involves the restoration, copying, cataloging, and archiving of old cinematic films and magnetic television tapes. The Kuwait Television Library houses films of significant cultural, historical, and educational value that must be properly preserved for future generations. By offering a comprehensive solution for storing and accessing these films, the project plays a crucial role in safeguarding Kuwait's cultural heritage.

Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Minister of Information, Culture, and State Minister for Youth Affairs, highlighted that the archiving project represents a critical step in advancing Kuwait's media infrastructure. He noted that the first phase successfully laid the groundwork for the initiative, focusing on documenting and preserving Kuwait's rich media heritage.

Looking ahead to the second phase, Al-Mutairi expressed optimism about the transformation of TV content preservation. He emphasized that the new phase would streamline digital search and retrieval processes, ensuring the protection of valuable media assets and facilitating innovation in the media sector. Additionally, this phase will make Kuwait's history more accessible to researchers and those interested in the country's cultural legacy.

The project aims to digitize at least 220,000 hours of archival television content, with efforts focused on classification and description. Al-Mutairi pointed out that one of the key advantages of this initiative is the ability to reinvest the archived content in new, innovative ways, thus enhancing its media and cultural value. It also opens up new opportunities for use in the educational, cultural, and artistic sectors.

This archiving initiative aligns with the ministry's broader vision of achieving full digital transformation, utilizing modern technology to efficiently manage media assets and improve operational capabilities.

Al-Mutairi reaffirmed the ministry's commitment to enhancing its technical and human resources, stressing the importance of investing in qualified national staff and adopting international best practices in digital archiving and media preservation to ensure the delivery of high-quality services that align with Kuwait's developmental goals.

He also expressed his gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of this project, including the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science, specialized working teams, private sector partners, and all supporting entities that played a vital role in the project's progress. — KUNA

Kuwait to directly contract Chinese firm for Mubarak Port

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Cabinet authorized direct contracting with China Communications Construction Company Limited, a state-owned enterprise, to implement, manage, and operate the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port. This decision was made following the Cabinet's weekly meeting on Tuesday, 21 Jan 2025, at Bayan Palace, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The Cabinet's decision came after reviewing a presentation from key officials, including Minister of Public Works Dr Noura Al-Mashaan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, the Head of the Fatwa and Legislation Department Counselor Salah Ateq Al-Majid, and Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Asian Affairs Ambassador Samih Jowhar Hayat. The presentation covered the latest updates on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government of Kuwait and the People's Republic of China concerning cooperation on the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port Project, located on Boubyan Island. The project is set to be completed in three phases.

The Cabinet emphasized the significance of this development as a key regional transport hub. The port is expected to contribute to the northern region's growth as an integrated economic and urban

Burgan Bank, Tadwire launch responsible waste management initiative

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced launching a waste management and recycling initiative at its head office in collaboration with Tadwire, the first recycling facility of its kind in Kuwait. This initiative reinforces the bank's dedication to upholding the highest environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards in the banking sector. It is the latest in a long series of dedicated efforts to reduce its carbon footprint across all operations, cementing Burgan's role as a leader in corporate responsibility and supporter of the New Kuwait 2035 Vision.

"Environmental sustainability has become an indispensable pillar for the success of businesses and projects, which is why we consistently evaluate the impact of our business choices on the environment and our community," said Saud Al-Hadbah, Deputy General Manager for General Services Administrations. "We integrate ESG considerations into our core operations, from the design of new products and services to our energy consumption habits, as well as the management of our regular and electronic waste. Partnering with Tadwire to manage Burgan's recycling and waste management underscores our commitment to environmental sus-

MoH, Abdullah Al-Salem University partner for new medical college

KUWAIT: Abdullah Al-Salem University and the Ministry of Health signed an agreement to establish the new College of Medicine and Health Sciences for the 2026-2027 academic year. The signing ceremony was attended by Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi, Minister of Higher Education Dr Nader Al-Jallal, and Dr Moudhi Al-Humoud, Chairwoman of the University's Founding Council.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's weekly meeting on Jan 21, 2025. — KUNA

system, enhancing the nation's efforts to diversify and increase its gross domestic product.

Following the presentation, the Cabinet approved the nomination put forward by the Chinese government in line with the MoU, confirming their cooperation on the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port Project.

In a separate decision, the Cabinet also approved recommendations from the Ministerial Committee for Public Services regarding two significant donations. The first donation, worth KD 15 million, comes

from Kuwait Finance House to build and equip a heart disease and research center. The second, valued at KD 4.5 million, was made by the heirs of the late Khaled Zaid Al-Khaled to fund the construction of a health and dialysis center in Hawally.

The Cabinet expressed its deep gratitude for these generous donations, which reflect the donors' commitment to supporting the development of Kuwait's healthcare system and embody the spirit of community responsibility. — KUNA



Saud Al-Hadbah

tainability and support for impactful local businesses." Waleed Esbaitah, Managing Partner at Tadwire commended Burgan Bank for their long-standing commitment as a partner. "At Tadwire, we recognize that while meaningful progress has been made, there is still much more to be done to advance sustainability efforts in Kuwait," he said. "We commend

Burgan Bank for their long-standing commitment as a partner in this journey. Over the years, their support has been instrumental in enabling initiatives that address critical waste management challenges and pave the way for a greener future. This collaboration reflects the potential for businesses to come together and make a real impact for the environment and the community alike."

By collaborating with Tadwire, Burgan Bank aims to enhance environmental awareness at its head office, with plans to expand these efforts to include the entire Burgan network of branches. This partnership enables Burgan Bank to adopt best practices in responsible waste management across multiple areas, including collecting, recycling, up-cycling, and repurposing different materials and types of waste, including cardboard, paper, plastic,



KUWAIT: Saud Al-Hadbah and Waleed Esbaitah during the signing ceremony.

and wood, as well as electronic waste.

As a committed environmental and social sustainability champion, Burgan Bank has launched numerous green initiatives that aim to inspire positive change within the organization and the community. Among the bank's most notable environmental sustainability efforts is the eco-friendly refurbishment design applied at its head office, which earned the bank the prestigious Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design – LEED v4.1 O+M: EB (Operations and Maintenance - Existing Buildings) Gold Certification by the US Green Building Council (USGBC).



KUWAIT: (From left) Dr Moudhi Al-Humoud, Dr Nader Al-Jallal and Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi are seen during the signing of an agreement to establish a new medical college at Abdullah Al-Salem University. — KUNA

In statements to the press following the agreement signing on Wednesday, Dr Al-Awadhi described the college as a pioneering step to strengthen academic and scientific fields in Kuwait, emphasizing integration between health and education sectors through shared resources and expertise. Dr Al-Jallal highlighted the agreement's role in advancing the country's development goals and reaffirmed the ministry's support for the university.

Dr Al-Humoud considered the agreement a vital move to improve medical services, support research, and align with the national vision. She reaffirmed the university's commitment to establishing the college as planned for the 2026-2027 academic year, focusing on human resource development, particularly among youth. — KUNA

Local

Zain empowers Kuwaiti entrepreneurs to showcase their digital startups to investors

10 local startups participate in Zain Great Idea Demo Day



KUWAIT: Nawaf Al-Gharabally and Zain officials pose for a photo with the entrepreneurs participating in the program.



Haya Al-Mana announces the program's regional expansion in the upcoming season.



One of the participants presents her startup to investors.



One of the participants shares his company's strategic vision with the audience.



One of the female entrepreneurs speaks during the event.

KUWAIT: After six months of continuous development, extensive training, and gaining local and international experiences, Kuwaiti entrepreneurs participated in the ZGI Demo Day, the culminating and most significant stage of Zain's innovative and award-winning Zain Great Idea (ZGI) accelerator. During the event, participants presented their strategic visions and plans to overcome challenges in an era of rapid technological evolution. The event was attended by representatives of investment firms, partners, and the local entrepreneurship community.

Held at the Four Seasons Hotel, Kuwait, the event was attended by Nawaf Al-Gharabally, CEO of Zain Kuwait; Malek Hammoud, Chief Investment and Digital Transformation Officer of Zain Group; Hamad Al-Marzouq, Chief Enterprise Business Officer of Zain Kuwait; Andrew Hanna, CEO of ZainTECH; Waleed Al-Khashti, Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer of Zain Kuwait; Dakheel Al-Dakheel, CEO of Rasameel Investment; and Abdullah Al-Sulaitien, Technical Director of Architech; alongside Zain executives, representatives from investment companies, government officials, ambassadors and diplomats, and entrepreneurs.

Demo Day provided the finalists an opportunity to present their startups to the local investment community through interactive pitches. In addition, each startup had a dedicated booth to showcase their services and introduce their founders and teams to the attendees. Entrepreneurs shared their strategic visions, expansion plans for local and regional markets, and approaches to utilizing advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence to address challenges facing startups. The event also facilitated direct networking between participants and representatives of investment funds and partners, enabling entrepreneurs to share their company stories and strategies for building profitable, sustainable businesses to meet local and regional market needs.

Nawaf Al-Gharabally shared his thoughts as Zain celebrated the 15th anniversary of its flagship tech startup accelerator program, Zain Great Idea. Reflecting on its inception in 2010, he noted that back then, discussions about entrepreneurship, empowering entrepreneurs, and accelerating startups were not as widespread as they are today. At the time, business accelerators were also much less common in the market.

"This fills me with pride, both personally and for Zain as a leading national organization. Just as Zain has always been at the forefront of technology and digital innovation, we've also led in community devel-

Nawaf Al-Gharabally:

- ZGI accelerator has elevated the entrepreneurial ecosystem locally and regionally for 15 years
- Zain Ventures is constantly looking for new opportunities in Kuwait and beyond
- Event brought together Zain executives, representatives from the investment community, key partners and members of the entrepreneurial ecosystem

opment and fostering creativity," Al-Gharabally said.

While ZGI began as a modest initiative, he highlighted that its mission has always remained people focused. "Zain has always been a human-centric organization, and our purpose of creating 'Better Lives and Lasting Connections' is deeply rooted in our belief that true investment lies in human talent. It is this talent that fosters innovation and drives technological advancement, strengthening the economy," he said.

Al-Gharabally emphasized that over the years, the program has evolved into a comprehensive platform which has accelerated hundreds of tech startups and empowered thousands of entrepreneurs. Many of these entrepreneurs have achieved sustainable success, attracting hundreds of millions of dollars in investments.

He went on to praise ZGI's legacy, calling it a trailblazer in the region. "Zain Great Idea has consistently set new benchmarks since its inception. By bridging gaps and laying foundations for entrepreneurship, we've significantly contributed to advancing the ecosystem both locally and regionally, a feat made possible by our outstanding team and exceptional partners," said Al-Gharabally.

He then took the opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to the program's success, especially Zain Ventures. He described Zain Ventures as a key driver of Zain Group's strategy, noting that it continues to pursue investment opportunities in ven-



Professor Paris de L'Etraz from Spain's IE Business School delivers a speech at the event.

ture capital, fintech, and digital innovations.

"Zain Ventures is actively investing in the startup ecosystem in Kuwait and the region, and is constantly looking for new opportunities, including in ZGI startups. Its active engagement in the program has added significant value and reflects its commitment to supporting the local entrepreneurial ecosystem," he said.

Al-Gharabally also expressed gratitude to ZGI partners, including Rasameel Investment, Architech, current and past members of judges panels, mentors, experts, and speakers from Kuwait and around the world, the Zain team, and all the talented entrepreneurs and idea owners who have been a part of the program for 15 years. He concluded by saying: "As we say every year, we do not consider Demo Day to be the final stop for ZGI but rather the first milestone on the journey toward growth and development in the market. We wish our exceptional entrepreneurs all the best and look forward to the significant successes this program will achieve in the future."

At the event, Zain Kuwait Innovation and Entrepreneurship Expert Haya Al-Mana announced that the next edition of the program would expand to include participants not only from Kuwait but also from across the Middle East for the first time in its history. This initiative will bring together participants from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and experiences, introducing fresh perspectives and valuable regional insights. The expansion solidifies ZGI's position as a leading business accelerator in the region. In addition, ZGI's global acceleration program, which takes place in leading innovation hubs like Silicon Valley, will now accommodate participants from various regional markets, further enhancing

their experiences and opportunities for growth.

At Demo Day, founders of 10 Kuwaiti startups presented pitches to investors: Lama Aloraiman and Ksenia Ozkok from BLU DOT— a platform promising to transform access to space, Dalal Thani from Akrem— an app that enables secure and easy tipping to service providers, Raghad Al-Zamel from MAWADA — a gifting platform promising the ultimate experience, Hamad Althunayan, Nasser Al-Qimlas, and Ryan Dougherty from DAWRATY— an education platform, and Abdulrahman Al-Hamdan from Nextbite— a platform promising to revolutionize the dining and hospitality experiences.

The event also featured Faisal Tawfiqi, Fahad Alzuabi, and Maxime Rousselet from USim— an app designed to offer seamless internet roaming, Eissa Alloughani from STAX— an app that offers access the best gyms in Kuwait with a single membership, Abdullah Albusairi from EYON— an Arab live streaming platform, Abdullah Shaban from Mawqif — a parking app, and Talal Alzafiri from Q8MAPS— an e-mapping and GIS solutions app. The event also featured a distinguished speech by Professor Paris de L'Etraz from Spain's renowned IE Business School. As one of the global experts involved in delivering the intensive training programs within ZGI, he shared his extensive experience with the program over the years. Professor de L'Etraz also offered valuable advice to the entrepreneurs as they prepared to present their startup pitches to investors.

ZGI kicked-off last year in strategic partnership with Zain Ventures and Rasameel Investment, continuing its decade-long mission to open sustainable growth and investment doors for entrepreneurs and startups in Kuwait. For 15 years, Zain Great Idea has been a unique success story, establishing itself as one of the most impactful business accelerators locally and regionally. It has provided numerous opportunities for hundreds of ambitious entrepreneurs and startups, connecting many with leading tech companies and organizations in places like Silicon Valley, to gain first-hand experience.

Through this program, Zain aims to empower Kuwait's tech startup ecosystem and foster an innovation-driven environment that creates tangible economic and social impact. This step also translates the company's strategic plans as a business that seeks promising opportunities for diversification and sustainable growth in a highly competitive market. Additionally, Zain may acquire shares in the ZGI startups to boost their potential and commercialization drive.



Nawaf Al-Gharabally is flanked by Zain officials and partners.



Guests attend the ZGI Demo Day, the culminating and most significant stage of Zain's Zain Great Idea (ZGI) accelerator.

Kuwait Times
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KUWAIT: The executive management team poses for a group photo with officials from the Turkish Company Limak Group, which is overseeing the project's implementation.

NBK executive management tours new T2 airport terminal

NBK plays crucial role in supporting Kuwait's national development projects

KUWAIT: The executive management of the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) conducted a site visit to the new Kuwait Airport terminal project (T2), where they were provided with an in-depth briefing on the latest advancements in the implementation of its phases.

The visit was attended by Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group CEO of NBK; Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy Group CEO of NBK; Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO of NBK-Kuwait; Sulaiman Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO, NBK-Kuwait; Faisal Al-Hamad, CEO - NBK Wealth; Pradeep Handa, General Manager - Foreign Corporate, Oil and Trade Finance Group; and Ezzat Hallal, General Manager & Chief Engineer, along with the management of the Turkish Company Limak Group, which is overseeing the project's implementation.

The visit underscores NBK's commitment to

supporting national projects that drive economic growth and development in Kuwait. During the tour of the project facilities, the bank's executive management received a detailed briefing from project officials on the various stages of implementation.

The new T2 terminal stands as an iconic project among global airport developments. It is a key national initiative aimed at modernizing and enhancing the country's infrastructure, improving Kuwait's connectivity with global destinations, and supporting the nation's economic diversification efforts. This aligns with the vision of a New Kuwait 2035, seeking to transform the country into a regional and global financial and commercial hub that attracts investment.

NBK is a pivotal partner in driving Kuwait's achievements and successes by financing the

country's major infrastructure projects. This includes the New Kuwait Airport project, which will serve as a state-of-the-art transit gateway with a capacity of 25 million passengers annually and a vast area of 708,000 square meters.

The bank maintains a strong and strategic partnership with both the Kuwaiti government and the private sector, actively contributing to the country's development agenda. With an established history of supporting large-scale infrastructure projects that stimulate economic growth, it plays a central role in financing these initiatives. Additionally, the bank offers expert advisory services and champions community engagement to empower projects that shape Kuwait's future. This reinforces its leadership as the primary development bank and the preferred financial partner for institutions and major companies within the local market.



NBK officials reviewing the progress of operations in the T2 terminal.



NBK executives inspect the project's site.



The executive management team of the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) conduct a site visit to the new Kuwait Airport terminal project (T2).

Kuwaiti Boom.Diwan mesmerizes Global FEST 2025 audience

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ghazi Faisal Al-Mulaifi and Boom.Diwan transported music lovers to the Arabian Gulf coasts at this year's Global FEST at Lincoln Center in New York City. In a collaboration with pianist Arturo O'Farrill, this unique act blended Kuwait's traditional pearl-diving music with Afro-Latin jazz, creating an unforgettable fusion of two rich musical traditions.

Al-Mulaifi, the visionary behind Boom.Diwan, is a musician, composer, and applied ethnomusicologist with a PhD in music from New York University. Currently a professor at NYU Abu Dhabi, Al-Mulaifi is known for his work in reviving and reimagining Kuwaiti bahri (sea) music by incorporating global jazz influences. Founded in 2017, Boom.Diwan serves as both a metaphorical "boom" (the essential ship used in Kuwait for pearl diving and trade) and a "diwan" (a gathering space for sharing and preserving traditional music).

The performance at Global FEST 2025 showcased Al-Mulaifi's mission of dialogue and cultural exchange. In an interview, he explained that the shared rhythms and roots of both musical traditions unite them in a powerful way. The collaboration with O'Farrill, who leads New York's Afro-Latin Jazz Ensemble, added an exciting layer to the performance,

merging intricate jazz compositions with the evocative rhythms of Kuwaiti seafaring music.

This performance followed the success of the Cuban Khaleeji Project, which saw three sold-out concerts in New York. The project was supported by the NYUAD Division of Arts & Humanities and co-commissioned by The Arts Center.

Through their seamless fusion of two rich musical traditions, Ghazi Al-Mulaifi and Boom.Diwan demonstrated the universal language of music, leaving audiences at Lincoln Center mesmerized and inspired. This unique performance not only honored the past but also reimagined it for a global stage.

Al-Mulaifi, alongside fellow Kuwaiti musician Amin Abdal, made history as the first musicians from Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf to be nominated for a Grammy in the Best Latin Jazz Album category.

Kuwait's Informatics Award honors Dr Taher Elgamal

KUWAIT: The Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Award presented its 18th Informatics Medal to Dr Taher Elgamal, an Egyptian-American cryptographer and entrepreneur, in recognition of his distinguished contributions to global network and e-commerce security. This honor was awarded during the 18th edition of the award's 24th cycle.

In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Wednesday, the Chairwoman of the Award's Board of Trustees, Sheikha Aida Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, emphasized that Dr Elgamal's award reflects Kuwait's commitment to honoring scientists and innovators. She noted that the award has grown into a global platform for recognizing exceptional technological achievements.

Sheikha Aida praised Dr Elgamal's groundbreaking work in the fields of encryption and electronic signatures, highlighting his pivotal role in enabling secure electronic transactions worldwide. She also announced that Dr Elgamal will be formally presented with the medal at the annual ceremony, which will take place under the patronage of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, at Bayan Palace.

The Chairwoman further noted that the Informatics Medal has become a significant milestone in the award's journey, which began in 2001. She emphasized its global reach and recognition as one of the leading non-profit entities acknowledging technological achievements and pioneering innovations.

Dr Elgamal holds a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Cairo University, followed by a master's and PhD from Stanford University. Widely regarded as a leader in information security, Dr Elgamal is best known for developing the ElGamal Encryption Algorithm for encryption and digital signatures, which has been adopted as an international standard. - KUNA



Dr Taher Elgamal



NEW YORK: The Kuwaiti percussion ensemble Boom.Diwan, led by composer Ghazi Al-Mulaifi, perform at Global FEST 2025 at Lincoln Center in New York City.



Trump pardons of Capitol rioters spark jubilation, outrage

Quad FMs meet in signal of Trump's China focus

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GAZA: (Left) An officer from the Palestinian security forces loyal to Hamas speaks during a press conference in Gaza City on January 22, 2025. (Right) Palestinian civil defence search for bodies amidst the rubble of buildings in a ruined neighborhood of Gaza's southern city of Rafah on Jan 22, 2025. — AFP photos

Hamas retains tight grip on Gaza

Zionist entity faces dilemma with group's entrenched power in enclave

GAZA: In neighborhoods leveled by 15 months of war with the Zionist entity, Hamas officials are overseeing the clearance of rubble in the wake of Sunday's ceasefire. The group's gunmen are guarding aid convoys on Gaza's dusty roads, and its blue-uniformed police once again patrol city streets, sending a clear message: Hamas remains in charge.

Zionist officials have described a parade of jubilant Hamas fighters that celebrated the ceasefire on Sunday in front of cheering crowds as a carefully orchestrated attempt to exaggerate the Palestinian militant group's strength. But, in the days since the ceasefire took effect, Gaza's Hamas-run administration has moved quickly to reimpose security, to curb looting, and to start restoring basic services to parts of the enclave, swathes of which have been reduced to wasteland by the Zionist offensive.

Reuters spoke to more than a dozen residents, officials, regional diplomats and security experts who said that, despite the Zionist entity's vow to destroy it, Hamas remains deeply entrenched in Gaza and its hold on power represents a challenge to implementing a permanent ceasefire. The Islamist group not only controls Gaza's security forces, but its administrators run ministries and government agencies, paying salaries for employees and coordinating with international NGOs, they said.

On Tuesday, its police and gunmen — who for months were kept off the streets by Zionist airstrikes — were stationed in neighborhoods through the Strip. "We want to prevent any kind of security vacuum," said Ismail Al-Thawabta, director of the Hamas-run Gaza gov-

ernment media office. He said that some 700 police were protecting aid convoys and not a single truck had been looted since Sunday — a contrast to the massive theft of food by criminal gangs during the conflict. A spokesperson for the United Nations in Geneva confirmed on Tuesday there had been no reports of looting or attacks on aid workers since the ceasefire took effect.

In recent weeks, Zionist airstrikes have targeted lower-ranking administrators in Gaza, in an apparent bid to break Hamas' grip on government. Despite the losses, Al-Thawabta said the Hamas-run administration continued to function. "Currently, we have 18,000 employees working daily to provide services to citizens," he said.

The Hamas-run municipalities had begun on Sunday clearing the rubble from some roads to allow vehicles to pass, while workers repaired pipes and infrastructure to restore running water to neighborhoods. On Tuesday, dozens of heavy trucks ferried debris from destroyed buildings along the enclave's dusty main arteries.

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not articulated a vision for Gaza's postwar future beyond insisting the Islamist group can play no role and stating that the Palestinian Authority — a body set up under the Oslo peace accords three decades ago that partially administers the occupied West Bank — also cannot be trusted under its current leadership.

Joost Hiltermann, of the International Crisis Group, said Hamas' firm grip on Gaza presented the Zionist entity with a dilemma. "(The Zionist entity) has a choice, to continue fighting in the future and killing people - and

that hasn't worked in the past 15 months - or it can allow an arrangement where the Palestinian Authority takes control with Hamas' acquiescence," Hiltermann said.

Hamas' military capability is hard to assess because its rocket arsenal remains hidden and many of its best trained fighters may have been killed, Hiltermann said, but it remains by far the dominant armed group in Gaza: "Nobody is talking about the PA taking over Gaza without Hamas' consent." While senior Hamas officials have expressed support for a unity government, Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority and a longtime adversary of Hamas, has not given his assent.

Fresh negotiations

Under the terms of the ceasefire, the Zionist entity must withdraw its troops from central Gaza and permit the return of Palestinians to the north during an initial six-week phase, in which some hostages will be released. Starting from the 16th day of the ceasefire, the two sides should negotiate a second phase, expected to include a permanent ceasefire and the complete withdrawal of Zionist troops. Reconstruction, expected to cost billions of dollars and last for years, would only begin in a third and final phase.

The deal has divided opinion in the Zionist entity. While there was widespread celebration of the return of the first three hostages on Sunday, many Zionists want to see Hamas destroyed for its Oct 7, 2023 attack. Even before the ceasefire took effect, members of Netanyahu's cabinet said they favored returning to war to remove Hamas

from power, once hostages have returned home. Three far-right ministers resigned.

"There is no future of peace, stability and security for both sides if Hamas stays in power in the Gaza Strip," Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said on Sunday. A spokesman for Hamas' armed wing, Abu Ubaida, told Reuters the militant group would honor the terms of the ceasefire and urged the Zionist entity to do the same.

Fifteen months of war have left Gaza a wasteland of rubble, bombed-out buildings and makeshift encampments, with hundreds of thousands of desperate people sheltering from the winter cold and living on whatever aid can reach them. More than 47,000 people have been killed, according to Palestinian health authorities.

The ceasefire deal calls for 600 trucks of aid per day to reach Gaza. Al-Thawabta, the spokesman for the Hamas-run administration, said it was liaising with UN bodies and international relief organizations about security for aid routes and warehouses, but the agencies were handling the distribution of aid. A UN damage assessment released this month showed that just clearing away the more than 50 million tons of rubble left in the aftermath of the Zionist entity's bombardment could take 21 years and cost up to \$1.2 billion.

On Sunday, as Hamas' security forces paraded on the streets, some residents had expressed pride that it had survived the onslaught. "Name me one country that could withstand (the Zionist entity's) war-machine for 15 months," said Salah Abu Rezik, a 58-year-old factory worker. He praised

Hamas for helping to distribute aid to hungry Gazans during the conflict and trying to enforce a measure of security. "Hamas is an idea and you can't kill an idea," Abu Rezik said, predicting the group would rebuild.

No rivals

While the Palestinian Authority says it is the only authority with the legitimacy to govern post-war Gaza, it has no presence in the enclave and little popular support, polls show. The Zionist entity floated tentative ideas for post-war Gaza, including co-opting local clan leaders or using members of Gazan civil society with no militant ties to run the enclave. But none has gained any traction.

Key donors, including the United Arab Emirates and US President Donald Trump's new administration, have stressed that Hamas cannot remain in power in Gaza after the war. Diplomats have been discussing models involving international peacekeepers, including one that would see the United Arab Emirates and the United States, along with other nations, temporarily overseeing governance, security and reconstruction of Gaza until a reformed Palestinian Authority is able to take charge.

Another model, supported by Egypt, would see a joint committee made up of both Fatah and Hamas run Gaza under the supervision of the Palestinian Authority. On Monday, shortly after taking office, Trump expressed skepticism about the Gaza ceasefire deal, when asked if he was confident that all three phases of the agreement would be implemented. — Reuters



BOLU, Turkey: Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attends the funeral of eight victims who died in a huge fire at Kartalkaya ski resort on Jan 22, 2025. — AFP

Anger as Turkey buries victims of ski hotel fire

KARTALKAYA, Turkey: Anger was growing in Turkey on Thursday as allegations piled up that negligence played a role in the deaths of 76 people who perished when a huge fire swept through a luxury ski resort hotel in northern Turkey. With the nation observing a day of mourning, grieving families began burying their dead as questions multiplied about fire safety measures at the 12-storey Grand Kartal Hotel perched on a mountaintop in the Kartalkaya resort.

Front pages, including those of the pro-government dailies, were plastered with allegations of negligence which they pointed to as responsible for the shocking death toll. On a freezing foggy morning, with flags flying at half-mast, more than 30 of the 51 injured were still in hospital, including one in intensive care.

"There is no excuse for such a high number of deaths in 2025," Ozgur

Ozel, leader of the main opposition CHP party, said outside the blackened facade of the hotel where rescuers were combing through the ruins on Wednesday. The fire, which began in the dead of night, struck at peak season for the hotel with 238 guests staying for the winter school holidays which began Friday. At a funeral in the nearby town of Bolu for eight members of the same family who died in the blaze, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan could be seen wiping away tears, his head bowed.

"When I got to the hotel, there were flames everywhere and we could hear screams," said Cevdet Can, who runs a nearby ski school. "I saw one person jump out of the window" to her death, told AFP, saying it was seeing children trapped "that upset me most". Another ski instructor who escaped the hotel unharmed said he was unable to rescue his pupils, the youngest of whom was six. "I lost five of my students who were staying on the 6th and 7th floors," 58-year-old Necmi Kepcetutan told AFP, saying another colleague had jumped to her death. — AFP

Inmates tortured, not treated at Syria hospital

DAMASCUS: Former Syrian detainee Mohammed Najib has suffered for years from torture-induced back pain. Yet he dreaded being taken by his jailers to a military hospital, where he received beatings instead of treatment. The prison guards forbade him from revealing his condition, only sending him to hospital for his likely tuberculosis symptoms — widespread in the notorious Saydnaya prison where he was detained.

Doctors at Tishreen Hospital, the largest military health facility in Damascus, never inquired about the hunch on his back — the result of sustained abuse. Freed just hours after the fall of Bashar Al-Assad, Najib has a tennis ball-sized bulge on his lower back. The 31-year-old can barely walk, and the pain is unbearable. But he insisted on showing AFP around a jail in the military hospital compound.

"I hated being brought here," Najib said as he returned with two friends who had shared the same cell with him after they were accused of ties to the armed rebellion that sought Assad's overthrow. "They hit us all the time, and because I couldn't walk easily, they hit me" even more, he said, referring to the guards. Because he was never allowed to say he had anything more than the tuberculosis symptoms of "diarrhea and fever", he never received proper treatment. "I went back and forth for nothing," he said.

Assad fled Syria last month after Islamist-led rebels wrested city after city from his control until Damascus fell, ending his family's five-decade rule. The Assads left behind a harrowing legacy of abuse at detention facilities that were sites of extrajudicial executions, torture and forced disappearances. Hours after Assad fled, Syrian rebels broke into the notorious Saydnaya prison, freeing thousands, some there since the 1980s. Since then, Tishreen Hospital has been out of service pending an investigation.

'Assisting torture'

Human rights advocates say Syria's military hospitals, most notably Tishreen, have a record of neglect and ill-treatment. "Some medical practitioners that were in some of these military hospitals (were) assisting... interrogations and torture, and maybe even withholding treatments to detainees," Hanny Megally of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria told AFP. Former Saydnaya detainees told AFP about the ordeals they went through after they got sick. It would begin with a routine examination by two of the jail's military doctors. One of them used to beat prisoners, sometimes to death, four ex-detainees said. Guards relentlessly beat them from the moment they were pulled from their cells to the hospital jail, then to its main building to meet the doctors, and finally escorted back to prison. At the hospital's jail, those who were too ill were left to die or even killed, several former detainees said.

Three years ago, Najib and other inmates were tortured using the "tyre" method inside Saydnaya for merely talking to each other. They were forced into vehicle tyres and beaten with their foreheads against their knees or ankles. After a first check-up by a military doctor at Saydnaya, Najib was prescribed painkillers for his back pain.

The doctor eventually accepted to transfer him to Tishreen Hospital for tuberculosis symptoms. Former prisoners said guards looking to minimize their workload would order them to say they suffered from "diarrhea and fever" so they could transfer everyone to the same department.

'Clean him'

When Omar Al-Masri, 39, was taken to the hospital with a torture-induced leg injury, he too told a doctor he had an upset stomach and a fever. While he was awaiting treatment, a guard ordered him to "clean" a very sick inmate. Masri wiped the prisoner's face and body, yet when the guard returned, he angrily repeated the same order: "Clean him". As Masri repeated the task, the sick prisoner soon took his last breath. An agitated Masri called out to the guard who gave him a chilling response: "Well done." "That is when I learnt that by 'clean him', he meant 'kill him'," he said.

According to a 2023 report by the Associ-



DAMASCUS: Former detainees in Saydnaya (from left) Omar Al-Masri, Mohammed Najib and Osama Abdul Latif pose for a picture in front of Tishreen Military Hospital, currently out of service, on Jan 10, 2025. — AFP

ation of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison, security forces at the hospital jail and even medical and administrative staff inflicted physical and psychological violence on detainees. A civilian doctor told AFP she and other medical staff at Tishreen were under strict orders to keep conversations with prisoners to a minimum. "We weren't allowed to ask what the prisoner's name was or learn anything about them," she said, requesting anonymity for fear of reprisals. She said that despite reports about ill treatment at the hospital, she had not witnessed it herself. But even if a doctor was courageous enough to ask about a prisoner's name, the scared detainee would only give the number assigned to him by the guards. "They weren't allowed to speak," she said.

After a beating in his Saydnaya cell, Osama Abdul Latif's ribs were broken, but the prison doctors only transferred him to the hospital four months later with a large protrusion on his side. Abdul Latif and other detainees had to stack the bodies of three fellow inmates into the transfer vehicle and unloaded them at Tishreen hospital. "I was jailed for five years," Abdul Latif said. But "250 years wouldn't be enough to talk about all the suffering" he endured. — AFP

International

Quad meets with China in focus

Nations reaffirm commitment to Free and Open Indo-Pacific

WASHINGTON: The United States, Australia, India and Japan recommitted to working together on Tuesday, after the first meeting of the China-focused "Quad" grouping's top diplomats since President Donald Trump returned to the White House. In a joint statement after the talks in Washington, hosted by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on his first day in the job, the four nations said officials would meet regularly to prepare for an upcoming leaders' summit in India, expected this year.

The four countries share concerns about China's growing power and analysts said the meeting was designed to signal that countering Beijing is a top priority for Trump, who began his second term in office on Monday. Rubio earlier said he said would stress the importance of working with allies "on the things that are important to America and Americans" during the meeting.

He posed with Australia's Penny Wong, India's Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Japan's Takeshi Iwaya in front of the flags of their countries before the meeting at the State Department, but did not respond to questions from reporters. "Significant that the Quad (foreign ministers' meeting) took place within hours of the inauguration of the Trump Administration," Jaishankar said on X after the meeting. "This underlines the priority it has in the foreign policy of its member states."

The four nations restated their "shared commitment to strengthening a Free and Open Indo-Pacific where the rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are upheld and defended," the joint statement said. "We also strongly oppose any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion," it said, an apparent reference to the threat that China will act on its claim to sovereignty over democratically governed Taiwan.

That includes in the East China Sea, where Japan is locked in a territorial dispute with China, and in the contested South China Sea, Japan's government

said in a later statement. Iwaya also raised concerns about North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile development at the gathering and asked for help to resolve a dispute with Pyongyang over the past abductions of Japanese by North Korea, it said.

In separate bilateral meeting Iwaya told Rubio and Trump's national security adviser, Mike Waltz, that Japan had no choice but to continue strengthening its defense capabilities given the security situation in East Asia. Japanese Foreign Ministry Press Secretary Toshihiro Kitamura told a news conference. Japan is undertaking its biggest military buildup since World War Two with a plan to doubled defence spending by 2027. The return of Trump has prompted expectations Washington may put more pressure on allies to further step up defence spending.

Iwaya also asked Rubio to create an environment where Japanese businesses can invest without concerns, he added. Former US President Joe Biden this month blocked Nippon Steel's proposed \$14.9 billion purchase of US Steel, citing national security concerns, prompting concern from Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and other officials who said it was regrettable and raised concerns about future investment in the US.

Japan hopes to arrange a face-to-face meeting between Trump and Ishiba some time in February or March, Kitamura said. Rubio also met separately with Wong and Jaishankar. A key aim for Australia was to secure assurances from Washington about the massive AUKUS defense project, designed to allow Australia to acquire nuclear-powered attack submarines and other advanced weapons such as hypersonic missiles, which Trump has not commented on publicly.

Australia's Foreign Minister Wong told a news conference in Washington she had a "very positive discussion" with Rubio on AUKUS. Wong and Rubio discussed efforts to continue bilateral defense cooperation, AUKUS, as well as critical minerals and global supply chain security, State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement after the meeting.



WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stands alongside Indo-Pacific Quad ministers, Japanese Foreign Minister Iwaya Takeshi, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong at the State Department on Jan 21, 2025. — AFP

"The Secretary and the Foreign Minister hailed the longstanding US-Australia Alliance as foundational to international security and prosperity, and to a secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region free from coercion," she said. Wong added that there was "a great deal of optimism and confidence about the opportunities ahead".

China has denounced the Quad as a Cold War construct and says the AUKUS alliance would intensify a regional arms race. Trump officials were working on scheduling another gathering of the for-

ign ministers at the White House as well, a person involved in planning meetings said.

The Quad grouping met many times during the administration of former President Joe Biden, with a focus on Beijing's military and economic activities in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea where US allies have pushed back against Beijing's territorial claims. The grouping has also pledged to advance cooperation in cybersecurity to protect supply chains and critical infrastructure, including undersea cables. — Reuters

NEWS IN BRIEF

Man found with wife's body in bag

NAIROBI: Police in Kenya arrested Wednesday a man found carrying the mutilated corpse of his wife in a backpack, the latest case of gender-based violence to appall the country. A murder investigation has been launched after John Kiama Wambua, 29, was detained by Nairobi police at around 5:00 am (0200 GMT), when a routine patrol examined his bag. Police said Wambua was "unperturbed" by the discovery of the body parts, which he said during an interrogation were of his 19-year-old wife, Joy Fridah Munani. He led officers to the couple's home, where police found a "horrendous" scene with a bloody floor, blood-stained clothes and the murder weapon — "a sharp knife". — AFP

11 run over by train in India

NEW DELHI: Eleven people were killed Wednesday after rumors of a fire on their train caused them to jump off and were crushed to death by another incoming train, officials said. "People were run over by a train," said Ayush Prasad, a top official of Jalgaon district where the accident occurred, some 400 km from the country's financial hub of Mumbai. "11 people have died and about five are undergoing treatment." A spokesperson for Indian Railways was quoted by local media as having said that someone had pulled the "alarm chain" on a Mumbai-bound train, following which "a few passengers got down from the train". — AFP

Bangladesh scraps 'reporting' order

DHAKA: A Bangladeshi education ministry order demanding officers report institutions and pupils involved in anti-government "provocative activities" was withdrawn Wednesday after criticism it undermined the spirit of last year's student-led revolution. The order, signed by the ministry's director of its "monitoring and evaluation" for secondary education, Abed Nomani, was issued on Jan 2 — but shot to attention after it circulated on social media and in newspapers. — AFP

Thai PM makes AI video appeal

BANGKOK: Thailand on Wednesday posted an AI-generated video of its prime minister speaking in Mandarin encouraging Chinese tourists to visit the kingdom despite reports of kidnappings on the Thai-Myanmar border. In the clip made by generative artificial intelligence posted to the government's Facebook page, a likeness of Paetongtarn Shinawatra appears speaking in fluent Mandarin, a language she does not speak in real life. — AFP

'Love for humanity': Low-crime Japan's unpaid parole officers

TOKYO: Teruko Nakazawa once intervened in a knife fight between an ex-offender and their mother — all in a day's unpaid work for Japan's army of volunteer probation officers. The 83-year-old, who jokes she is a "punk" as she puffs on a cigarette, devoted decades to supervising and helping rehabilitate convicted criminals on parole. But she did not take a single yen for her hard work under a long-running but little-known state scheme that some say contributes to the nation's famously low crime rate.

Around 47,000 citizen volunteers known as "hogoshi" far outnumber the 1,000 salaried probation officers in Japan. "I never wanted to be thanked or rewarded," said Nakazawa, recalling once going to save a boy "surrounded by 30, 40 bad guys". "I did what I did because I wanted to," she told AFP. "You can't help but try to put out a fire when you spot one, right?"

Clash of handouts as BJP seeks to reclaim Delhi after decades

NEW DELHI: Having unexpectedly won two Indian state votes late last year, in big part due to a slew of handouts, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party is deploying the same playbook in a bid to wrest back Delhi for the first time in nearly three decades next month. Standing in the way of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a smaller but bitter rival that has ruled the national capital for a decade through largesse such as free water and power for the poor — its main voter base.

Governing the historic city of 20 million is considered prestigious, though, unlike full-fledged states, it is called the national capital territory where police and many other senior officials are directly or indirectly controlled by the federal government. The BJP and Delhi's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have often been at loggerheads over how to run the city. In a bid to capture power there, the BJP is now trying to beat the AAP at its own game, although both Modi and the central bank have warned against fiscally damaging freebies.

The BJP's promises announced last week and this week include monthly payments of 2,500 rupees (\$29) to all poor women, 21,000 rupees once to each pregnant woman, subsidized cooking gas, a monthly pension of 2,500 rupees for the elderly,

15,000 rupees for the young to prepare for competitive exams, and a monthly stipend of 1,000 rupees to students from underprivileged castes studying technical and vocational courses. "Our manifesto has unsettled our opponents," BJP lawmaker Anurag Thakur told reporters. "They are scared that we are giving cash to women, subsidized cooking gas, free food and so on."

The Aam Aadmi (Common Man) Party said the BJP was copying its formula of directly helping the poor. India's main opposition party, Congress, meanwhile said it was the better alternative because, beyond handouts like 2,500 rupees for women a month, it was also focusing on issues like Delhi's abysmal air and water.

The AAP's pledges include a monthly payment of 2,100 to all women voters not working for the government or getting any other pension, 18,000 rupees a month to all Hindu priests and ceremonial readers of the Sikh holy book, financing foreign education of students from underprivileged castes, and payments for uniforms for autorickshaw taxis and money for the weddings of their daughters.

Delhi votes on Feb 5 and results will be out on Feb 8. Opinion polls, which have often proved wrong, expect the BJP to trail the AAP. Yashwant Deshmukh, founder of polling agency CVoter, said the AAP had an edge, especially among women voters. About half of the nearly 3,200 people it surveyed said they did not want to change the government. "AAP has a good track record on delivering freebies in Delhi," he said.

For the current fiscal year ending March 31, the Delhi government has budgeted spending nearly 63

Indonesia rescuers search for survivors as landslide kills 19

PEKALONGAN, Indonesia: Hundreds of rescuers were searching through thick mud and debris to find survivors Wednesday after a rain-triggered landslide in Indonesia killed at least 19 people and left seven missing. Intense rainfall in a mountainous area near Pekalongan city in Central Java province sparked the landslide on Monday, collapsing bridges and burying cars and houses.

The worst hit area was Kasimpar village according to a local official, with survivors recounting the horror of the landslide crashing into a coffee shop where people were sheltering from the rain. "Suddenly there was a sound of an explosion from inside the cafe. So the land exploded. Suddenly it all destroyed, everything in the cafe was rolled up," Nasiri, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, told AFP while lying on a stretcher at a health center. "When I woke up, I was around 200 meters from the place, rolled up with rock, soil, water."

Rescuers found two bodies Wednesday morning, raising the toll to 19, said Abdul Muhari, a spokesman for the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPBB). Search and rescue agency Basarnas said in a statement that 13 people were also injured. Heavy machinery was deployed to clear road access for search teams and around 200 rescue personnel have been sent to help the rescue effort, local official Mohammad Yulian Akbar said. "The focus is to search for the victims," he said, adding that the local government had declared an emergency in the district for two weeks.

Police, soldiers and volunteers have joined the search alongside rescue workers, which is taking place around 90 km west of the city of Semarang. But efforts were intermittently suspended Tuesday as heavy rain continued to pound the area. The weather forecast for the next three days suggests moderate rain that could "cause floods, flash floods and



KASIMPBAR, Indonesia: Rescue teams, army, police and volunteers use high-pressure water to search for victims of a landslide triggered by heavy rain on Jan 22, 2025. — AFP

landslides", warned Muhari on Tuesday.

Indonesia is prone to landslides during the rainy season, typically between November and April. In November, flooding triggered by intense rains in western Indonesia killed 27 people. But some disasters caused by adverse weather have taken place outside that season in recent

years. Climate change has also increased the intensity of storms, leading to heavier rains, flash floods and stronger gusts. In May, at least 67 people died after heavy rains caused flash floods in West Sumatra, pushing a mixture of ash, sand, and pebbles from the eruption of Mount Marapi into residential areas. — AFP



TOKYO: This picture taken on Dec 14, 2024 shows retired unpaid parole officer Teruko Nakazawa talking with her former parolee in the smoking room of a cafe. — AFP

But the altruistic program faces an uncertain future, with around 80 percent of hogoshi aged 60 or over. The recent murder of a hogoshi by a parolee has also rattled the trust in ex-offenders' good nature underlying the system.

For one of Nakazawa's former charges, "she was like a grandma". "I wouldn't dare do anything bad on her watch," he said, declining to be named because he hides

his criminal past. "I was scared of ever feeling guilty that I had betrayed her." The 34-year-old said Nakazawa "helped me a great deal" — especially to apologize to his victims.

A 60-year-old hogoshi was fatally stabbed in Otsu, near Kyoto, by a man under his supervision in May. The incident raised fears that potential hogoshi — who may already be wary of parolees whose crimes include theft, sex offences and sometimes murder — could be scared away. Hogoshi have historically rejected proposals to be paid a regular wage. This is because their activity is "a symbol of senselessness" rooted in "love for humanity", legal experts said in an October report.

Only some of their expenses are covered, and they must pay a yearly registration fee — another factor blamed for the struggle to attract younger volunteers. Still, Japan "would be a different country without hogoshi", said Carol Lawson, a comparative criminal justice professor at the University of Tokyo, citing the nation's "extraordinary lack of post-war crime".

The system's high "tolerance of risk" is unusual, she said. Hogoshi often invite parolees to their homes to develop a warm, familiar relationship. Countries such as the Philippines, Thailand and Kenya have made use of Japan's expertise to introduce similar systems.

But "it's hard to even imagine the hogoshi system gaining any traction" in Anglo-American jurisdictions with a more "retributive" mindset, Lawson told AFP.

Nakazawa said her daughter used to worry about her safety and would have urged her to quit had the Otsu homicide occurred before her retirement in 2018. But if society shuns ex-offenders, "they will only proliferate and commit even more heinous crimes," she said. "We have to root for them so they won't reoffend." Hogoshi often recruit other hogoshi based on criteria such as reputation, stable income and sufficient free time.

Mieko Kami, a 74-year-old Tokyo flower arrangement teacher, had no experience with criminals before joining the scheme. When first approached, "I thought, 'there's no way I can do this'", Kami told AFP. But after three years she changed her mind and was soon sipping tea with a yakuzas gangster, helping a young man in a squalid apartment and hurrying at night to a blood-soaked suicide attempt.

"Learning about their upbringing sometimes makes me think it's inevitable they turned out this way," Kami said. "I feel they want to be assured it's OK to exist," she said, describing herself as "sometimes being their mother". "So I praise, acknowledge them... I feel fond of them." — AFP

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2025

Trump touts \$500 billion AI project from Softbank, Oracle, OpenAI

Stargate a 'declaration of confidence in America's potential'

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Tuesday announced a major investment to build infrastructure for artificial intelligence led by Japanese giant Softbank, cloud giant Oracle and ChatGPT-maker OpenAI.

The venture, called Stargate, "will invest \$500 billion, at least, in AI infrastructure in the United States," Trump said in remarks at the White House. "This monumental undertaking is a resounding declaration of confidence in America's potential," he said, a day after his swearing in for a second term.

OpenAI's chief executive Sam Altman, SoftBank's chief Masayoshi Son and Oracle founder Larry Ellison attended the announcement. Their project is committed to invest an initial \$100 billion and up to \$500 billion over the next four years in the project, according to Son.

The venture comes as big tech players are scrambling to meet AI's voracious computing needs, as well as find the electric power necessary to expand the new technology. Trump said Stargate will be building the physical and virtual infrastructure to power the next generation of advancements in AI, including the construction of "colossal data centers."

OpenAI later said in an X post that the project "will not only support the re-industrialization of the United States but also provide a strategic capability to protect the national security of America and its allies."

It added that SoftBank and OpenAI were the lead partners for Stargate, with SoftBank having financial

responsibility and OpenAI having operational responsibility. The post also said that MGX, a technology fund from the United Arab Emirates, was a fourth investor, while "Arm, Microsoft, NVIDIA, Oracle, and OpenAI are the key initial technology partners."

"Buildout is currently underway, starting in Texas, and we are evaluating potential sites across the country for more campuses as we finalize definitive agreements," it added. Texas is fast becoming an alternative to California for US big tech investments. In turn, the three bosses thanked Trump. "We couldn't have done this without you," said Altman.

Ellison, in brief remarks at the White House, underlined the medical innovations promised by AI such as "early cancer detection with a blood test." SoftBank shares soared more than eight percent in Tokyo after the announcement.

News of the project comes a day after Trump's inauguration ceremony was attended by prominent tech chiefs, including Apple CEO Tim Cook, Google CEO Sundar Pichai, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Amazon leader Jeff Bezos.

Later on Monday, Trump rescinded an executive order from his predecessor Joe Biden that established oversight measures for companies developing powerful AI models. Its repeal leaves the United States, home to most of the world's most impactful AI technology, without nationwide AI development guidelines, even if individual states are pursuing their own measures. — AFP



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump speaks in the Roosevelt Room flanked by Masayoshi Son (2R), Chairman and CEO of SoftBank Group Corp, Larry Ellison (2L), Executive Chairman Oracle and Sam Altman (R), CEO of Open AI at the White House on January 21, 2025, in Washington, DC. — AFP



KUWAIT: Salma Al-Hajjaj, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, in a group photo with representatives of the American Business Council (ABCK) - AmCham Kuwait and the Kuwait Women's Economic Empowerment Platform (KWEEP).

Gulf Bank joins Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Matrix

KUWAIT: In a groundbreaking move toward fostering an inclusive and diverse workplace, Gulf Bank has joined the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Matrix, an initiative by the American Business Council (ABCK) - AmCham Kuwait, in collaboration with the Kuwait Women's Economic Empowerment Platform (KWEEP). The announcement took place during a signing ceremony at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, attended by prominent figures from both the public and private sectors.

The DEI Matrix is an innovative framework designed to help organizations integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion practices into their operations. By joining the matrix, participating companies commit to creating an inclusive work environment that upholds the fundamental values of equality and equal opportunity for all employees. Moreover, they are dedicated to achieving key performance indicators (KPIs) for the matrix, with a target of at least 85 percent by the end of 2025. Companies that surpass this benchmark will earn the DEI badge, issued by AmCham Kuwait and KWEEP, valid for the next two years.

Following the signing of the initiative, Salma

Al-Hajjaj, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, remarked: "We are proud to be part of this pivotal initiative, which aligns with our core values of fostering a fair and diverse workplace." She added, "Our commitment to the DEI Matrix marks a major milestone in our efforts to promote inclusivity and ensure equal opportunities for all our employees and clients."

She further emphasized: "Starting today, we view this initiative as an integral part of Gulf Bank's strategy to cultivate an institutional culture that fosters innovation and diversity. This will not only enhance the work environment but also enable us to deliver the best banking solutions for our customers. It reflects our strong commitment to our leadership in corporate social responsibility and our significant contributions to building a sustainable economic community."

In a related note, Al-Hajjaj highlighted Gulf Bank's receipt of several prestigious awards in 2024, underscoring the bank's commitment to sustainability, diversity, and inclusion. Notably, Gulf Bank was honored with the "Best in Sustainable Development in the Workplace" award at the Gulf International CSR Conference in Bahrain. Additionally, the bank received the "Best in Kuwait for Social Responsibility" award from Euromoney magazine, recognizing its outstanding commitment to social sustainability and empowerment initiatives. Furthermore, Gulf Bank was acknowledged for its leadership in implementing impactful diversity and inclusion initiatives, earning the "Best Diversity and



HONG KONG: An aerial view shows a container ship docked at the Kwai Chung container terminal in Hong Kong on January 22, 2025. — AFP

could impose 25 percent tariffs on Canada and Mexico, having accused them of failing to stop illegal immigration and fentanyl trafficking into the United States. Mexico, Canada and China are leading sources of US imports, according to official trade data.

Beijing on Wednesday vowed to defend its "national interests" in response to Trump's threats. "We have always believed that there are no winners in a trade war or a tariff war," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said.

She added that Beijing was "willing to maintain



Salma Al-Hajjaj signs the agreement to join the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Matrix.

Inclusion Initiative in MENA" award from MEED.

These awards reinforce Gulf Bank's dedication to promoting sustainability principles and fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace that ensures equal opportunities for all. She also emphasized Gulf Bank's success over the past decade in increasing the number of female leaders within the Bank from 10 percent to 30 percent, with women now comprising 42 percent of the Bank's total workforce. Furthermore, Gulf Bank is the first Kuwaiti bank to eliminate all forms of discrimination between male and female employees, ensuring full equality in employee benefits. The bank is also one of the first signatories of the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles in Kuwait.

communication with the US, properly handle differences, expand mutually beneficial cooperation, and promote the stable, healthy, and sustainable development of China-US relations".

'Common interests'

The Trump White House imposed tariffs on imports from China during his first term, citing alleged unfair practices by Beijing. His successor Joe Biden kept up the pressure with sweeping rules aimed at restricting Chinese access to high-tech chips.

Trump threatened to go even further during his election campaign, vowing even higher tariffs if he won another term in office. China's economy remains heavily reliant on exports to drive growth despite official efforts to raise domestic consumption.

The EU's economy commissioner also vowed this week that the bloc stood ready to defend its interests. Speaking at an annual economic gathering in Davos, Switzerland, EU chief Ursula von der Leyen declared that Europe was ready to negotiate with Trump, while maintaining that Washington remained an important partner.

The EU's "first priority will be to engage early, discuss common interests, and be ready to negotiate" with the president, she said. "We will be pragmatic, but we will always stand by our principles, to protect our interests and uphold our values." Trump on Monday vowed an immediate overhaul of the US trade system -- promising to "tariff and tax foreign countries to enrich our citizens". — AFP

Stock markets push higher as they track Trump plans, earnings

LONDON: US and European stock markets pushed higher Wednesday as investors tracked earnings and President Donald Trump's policy plans that are starting to impact the global economy. However, Hong Kong and Shanghai indices fell Wednesday after Trump warned China could be included in a list of countries to be hit with tariffs on February 1.

Meanwhile, the dollar "struggled to find a clear direction and traded in a narrow range as market participants sought clarity on Trump's trade policies", noted Joseph Dabrhieh, analyst at traders Tickmill. The latest batch of corporate earnings helped boost sentiment on Wall Street, with the S&P 500 near a record high.

Shares in Netflix soared more than 12 percent after it reported adding almost 19 million subscribers during the holiday season to finish out last year with more than 300 million globally. And while the inflationary impact of Trump's tariff plans gave investors cold sweats in December, they are proving more sanguine this week.

"Thus far, the stock market has not found reason to fear the tariff approach for a variety of reasons: it isn't as onerous as expected at this stage; there hasn't been a retaliatory tit-for-tat; and there is a belief it is more of a negotiating tactic than an official policy," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare. A retreat in US government bond yields after last week's spike has also reassured equities investors.

In Europe, the London and Frankfurt stock markets continued to hit record highs, helped by currency movements. London's FTSE 100 index was supported by "a weak pound that allows investors to buy UK companies with international businesses at cheaper prices", noted Swissquote Bank senior analyst Ipek Ozkardeskaya.

Plans by the European Central Bank to keep cutting interest rates in the eurozone has weighed on the euro—although both the single currency and pound won back some support Wednesday. Oil prices slid further after having tumbled Tuesday in reaction to Trump's announcement of a "national energy emergency" to ramp up drilling in the United States.

Traders have been bracing for Trump 2.0 since his re-election in November, with an initial rally—fueled by hopes for market-boosting measures—giving way to worries he would resume his trade war with Beijing and also target others.

There had been optimism that Beijing would avoid being targeted in an early flurry of duties by the White House after Trump said Monday he would first hit Canada and Mexico. But he broadened his targets Tuesday to include China and the European Union. There is also a concern that Trump's plans to slash taxes, immigration and regulations will reignite inflation and crimp the Federal Reserve's ability to cut interest rates. — AFP



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange during morning trading on January 22, 2025 in New York City. — AFP

China vows to defend 'interests' against Trump tariff threats

BEIJING: China on Wednesday vowed to defend its "national interests" against tariff threats from US President Donald Trump after warned he could impose a 10 percent duty on imports from the country by the end of next week.

Trump, speaking to reporters at the White House a day after his inauguration, also warned the European Union it could face stiff levies, while taking aim once again at Beijing over fentanyl trafficking. "They treat us very, very badly. So they're going to be in for tariffs," Trump said of the EU. "You can't get fairness unless you do that."

A day earlier, the new president accused the bloc of not importing enough American products, saying he would "straighten that out" by imposing tariffs or by urging for more oil and gas purchases.

On China, Trump reiterated his threat Tuesday to impose a 10 percent duty, saying it was "based on the fact that they're sending fentanyl to Mexico and Canada". When asked how soon they could be put in place, he said: "Probably February 1st is the date we're looking at."

That is the same date he had previously said he

As Trump takes aim at EVs, how far will rollback go?

EV makers' shares fell sharply after Trump's inauguration

NEW YORK: As part of his flurry of first-day actions, US President Donald Trump took aim at electric vehicles, a cornerstone of the Biden administration's climate change agenda. Trump's executive order on "Unleashing American Energy" on Monday included steps to ensure a "level" playing field for gasoline-powered motors and halt federal funding to build new EV charging stations.

The executive order also appeared to presage other reversals, referencing the possible elimination of a federal tax credit for EV purchases and the renouncement of a US waiver that allows California to set stricter requirements on cars. During his inaugural address, Trump said the moves would "end" the "Green New Deal," ridiculing Biden-backed incentives for EV sales. While Trump harshly criticized EVs during the presidential campaign, policy experts have been skeptical Trump will junk all the Biden-era EV programs, in part because significant federal funding has gone toward projects in Republican congressional districts, where thousands of jobs are expected to be created.

Shares of EV makers like Rivian and EV charging companies such as EVgo fell sharply Tuesday. Tesla, which is led by close Trump ally Elon Musk, also fell. Kathy Harris, director for clean vehicles of the Natural Resources Defense Council, called Trump's policy a sop for "fat-cat oil executives," noting that EVs are better for the environment and can save consumers money on gasoline. Many of Trump's executive orders are expected to face legal challenges, a possible outcome for the EV measures. "This is not the end of this story," Harris said. "If the administration tries to cut corners or ignore the law, they will end up in court."

The Alliance for Automotive Innovation, which has previously endorsed the need for stable auto rules, reiterated its criticism of California's car regulations in a statement that did not address other elements in

Trump's executive order. "The country should have a single, national standard to reduce carbon in transportation," said the group's president, John Bozzella. "We can't have regulations that push the industry too far ahead of the customer."

90-day review

The new policy comes as automakers pause some EV investments due to slowing growth, even as sales of emission-free vehicles climb to new levels in the United States. In 2024, EV sales in the country reached 1.3 million, up 7.3 percent from the prior year, according to Cox Automotive's Kelley Blue Book, which pointed to a meaningful rise in EVs at different price levels.

But GM, Ford and other automakers have scaled back some EV investments in recent months, pointing to slowing demand growth. A Ford executive warned in November that a glut of EVs across showrooms will lead to "incredible pressure" on prices in 2025.

The broadside against EVs followed Trump's targeting of the vehicles during the presidential campaign, when he claimed Democrat Kamala Harris wanted to force EVs on consumers. Harris said that she favored consumer choice.

The Biden administration's fuel economy rules required automakers to market fleets with sharply lower carbon dioxide emissions in a bid to address climate change, while laws such as the \$400 billion Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 included a slew of lending and tax credit programs to boost EVs.

Programs under the IRA and the 2021 infrastructure law are in various stages of implementation. Monday's executive order directs officials implementing the IRA to undertake a 90-day review to ensure that spending does not unfairly favor EVs "by rendering other types of vehicles unaffordable."

Policy experts see no meaningful chance that the new administration will try to claw back US funds



BEIJING: This photo taken on January 12, 2025 shows electric (EVs) and hybrid vehicles waiting to be transported to a distribution center in southwest China's Chongqing municipality. — AFP

that have already been spent. But whether Trump will seek to block other projects that are still moving through the pipeline is less clear. Nearly half of the \$5 billion set aside for new EV chargers has been allocated to states under the infrastructure law, according to a memo from NRDC.

The 2021 infrastructure law's "embedded safeguards... should ensure continuity for infrastructure investments," the NRDC said. "Of course, the incoming administration could try drastic measures, but those will face real-world and legal hurdles."

In November, the Energy Department advanced projects to provide Rivian a \$6.6 billion federal loan to build an EV manufacturing facility in Stanton Springs North, Georgia, and a \$7.5 billion loan to StarPlus Energy to finance lithium-ion battery cell manufacturing plants in Kokomo, Indiana, under a Stellantis-Samsung joint venture. Construction on the Georgia plant is expected to begin in 2026, according to Rivian. Neither Rivian nor Stellantis responded to AFP queries on the implications of the new Trump policy for their projects. — AFP



PORT SUDAN: People protest calling upon the army-backed Sudanese government to extend the deadline to exchange Sudanese pound banknotes after authorities reportedly changed two of the notes in circulation, invalidating the old ones, in the northeastern Red Sea city of Port Sudan on December 31, 2024. — AFP

Sudan 'political' banknote switch causes cash crunch

CAIRO: Sudan's army-aligned government has issued new banknotes in areas it controls, reportedly aimed at undermining its paramilitary rivals but causing long queues at banks, disrupting trade and entrenching division. In a country already grappling with war and famine, the swap replaced 500 and 1,000 Sudanese pound banknotes (worth around \$0.25 and \$0.50 respectively) with new ones in seven states. The government justified the move as necessary to "protect the national economy and combat criminal counterfeiters". But for many Sudanese it just caused problems. In Port Sudan, now the de facto capital, frustration boiled over as banks failed to provide enough new notes.

One 37-year-old woman spent days unsuccessfully trying to get the new money. "I've been going to the bank four or five times a week to get the new currency. But there is none," she told AFP, requesting anonymity for fear of reprisals.

Grocers, rickshaw drivers, petrol stations and small shop owners are refusing to accept the old currency, preventing many transactions in a country reliant on cash. "We cannot buy small things from street vendors any more or transport around the city because they refuse the old currency," the woman said.

The currency shift comes 21 months into a war that has devastated the northeast African country's economy and infrastructure, caused famine in some areas, uprooted millions of people and seen the Sudanese pound plunge. From 500 pounds to the US dollar in April 2023, it now oscillates between 2,000 and 2,500.

The upper hand

Finance Minister Gibril Ibrahim defended the switch, saying it aims to "move money into the banking system, ensure the monetary mass enters formal channels as well as prevent counterfeiting and looted funds".

But analysts say it is less about economics and more about gaining the upper hand in the war between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who leads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). "The army is trying to weaken the RSF by having a more dominant currency," Matthew Sterling Benson at the London School of

Economics and Political Science told AFP. After the RSF looted banks, the army "wants to control the flow of money" and deprive them of resources, he said. Sudanese researcher and political analyst Hamid Khalafalla said the army also wants to bolster its war chest. He said the funds "will definitely be used by the army to finance the ongoing war, including paying soldiers and procuring arms from various countries".

The RSF has banned the new notes in areas it controls, and accused the army of orchestrating a "conspiracy to divide the country". Kholood Khair, founder of think tank Confluence Advisory, believes that this financial squeeze may accelerate RSF plans to establish a rival currency and administration.

"The move has catalyzed the already existing trajectory towards a split," she told AFP. Sudan is already fragmented: the army holds the north and east and the RSF dominates in the western Darfur region and parts of the south and center. Greater Khartoum is carved up between them.

No-win situation

For Sudan's population, the move has only compounded their suffering. Activist Nazik Kabalo, who has coordinated aid in several areas, said supply chains have been severely disrupted. Farmers, traders and food suppliers rely entirely on cash. "And if you do not have cash, you cannot buy supplies, needed for aid or for anything else," Kabalo told AFP.

The government has promoted digital banking apps such as Bankak, but many Sudanese cannot access them because of widespread telecommunications outages. The RSF could be left virtually unscathed, as it deals mostly in foreign currency and has a transnational support network spanning Libya, Chad and the Sahel.

In RSF-held areas, civilians could become further isolated economically, struggling to trade with regions under army control. "And this is a bad situation when people are at risk of famine, and you need to be able to buy food," Benson said.

Last month, the UN-backed Integrated Food Security Phase Classification review said famine has gripped five areas in Darfur, mostly controlled by the RSF, and parts of the Nuba Mountains in the south. For Khair, the army and RSF are just trading blows "to score political points". "It's about creating a governance crisis for the RSF, starving people of currency and services so they turn against their rulers," she said. "The army introduces a currency and blocks people in RSF areas from services. In response, the RSF talks about creating their own." — AFP

UK boots out antitrust boss for failing to back growth agenda

LONDON: Britain forced out the chair of its antitrust regulator after he failed to prioritize its growth agenda, replacing him with a former Amazon boss, in a sign the UK's attempt to rein in big tech could be over. Marcus Bokkerink was replaced at the Competition and Markets Authority late on Tuesday by Amazon's former boss in Britain, Doug Gurr, the government said. Finance minister Rachel Reeves said she needed someone aligned with her "strategic direction".

"He recognized it was time for him to move on and make way for somebody who does share the mission and the strategic direction that this government are taking," she told a Bloomberg event at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos.

Bokkerink's removal came a day after Donald Trump returned to the White House, vowing to cut regulation on sectors including tech as it races to develop Artificial Intelligence. Some criticized the move as a shift to a lighter touch in Britain, where regulators have traditionally been unafraid to take on big companies to protect the interests of smaller firms and consumers.

"Now is the time to file your mergers with the CMA," said Tom Smith, competition lawyer at Geradin Partners and a former legal director at the regulator. "The government is sending a clear signal that it wants the CMA to go easy on dealmakers."

Britain's Labour government, under pressure to reignite the economy after years of sluggish output, has said it wants regulators to "tear down the barriers hindering businesses" and focus on growth. But some have questioned whether an easing of competition rules would promote growth. After he was ousted, Bokkerink said on LinkedIn that markets should not be held back "by a few powerful incumbents setting the rules for everyone else". The CMA's last clash with a U.S. tech giant was over Microsoft's \$69 billion acquisition of "Call of



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

Duty" maker Activision Blizzard in 2023, and the regulator came off worse. It blocked the deal but then tore up its own rule book to approve the case following a furious reaction from Microsoft bosses who lobbied the government at the highest level. It did not block a single deal in 2024, and allowed two of Britain's four mobile networks to merge.

After being singled out by Prime Minister Keir Starmer for holding back growth, the CMA said in November that it would focus on "truly problematic mergers" and rethink its approach to allow more deals to go ahead. An executive at a major British tech and media company said Bokkerink had been leading the growth charge. The person, who asked not to be named, said there was real surprise over the choice of his replacement, raising the question of how much big tech had lobbied the government. CMA chief executive Sarah Cardell said Bokkerink had "tirelessly championed consumers, competition and a level playing field for business". Competition lawyer Ian Giles at Norton Rose Fulbright said the CMA's mantra, echoed by government previously, had been that competition was good for growth and for business — and rules need to be enforced to support this objective. — Reuters

Deliveroo Restaurant Awards announces fourth round of winners

KUWAIT: Deliveroo has unveiled the winners of the final quarter of the 2024 Deliveroo Restaurant Awards, celebrating the best in Kuwait's dining scene. For Q4 2024, four exceptional restaurants have taken center stage. The 'Most Loved Local Restaurant' award goes to Pick, beloved for its healthy dishes and delicious frozen yogurt. Deboned has earned the title of 'Most Loved Chicken Restaurant,' delighting food lovers with their innovative approach to chicken dishes. SimSim is crowned 'Most Loved Bakery', known for its fresh and irresistible baked goods, while Arabica claimed the 'Best Service' award, celebrated for its outstanding customer experience and handcrafted coffee.

To commemorate this milestone, Deliveroo has joined forces with the winners to provide an exceptional experience for customers. Arabica and Pick are offering free delivery, while SimSim and Deboned are treating their loyal patrons to exclusive vouchers. For further details, visit Deliveroo's Instagram page. The Deliveroo Restaurant Awards honors exceptional restaurants and culinary pioneers redefining the dining landscape in Kuwait. Held quarterly during 2024, the awards recognize winners across diverse categories, including 'Most Loved,' highlighting customer favorites across cuisines, 'Best Service,' celebrating excellence in customer experience, and 'Top Newcomer,' spotlighting impactful new additions to Deliveroo. Discover more about the Deliveroo Restaurant Awards and experience the Q4 winners' culinary delights by downloading the Deliveroo App today.



No home, no insurance: The double hit from Los Angeles fires

‘I knew it was risky, but I had no choice’

MALIBU: As he looks at the ruins of his home razed when deadly fires tore through the Los Angeles area, Sebastian Harrison knows it will never be the same again, because he was not insured. “I knew it was risky, but I had no choice,” he told AFP.

Harrison is one of tens of thousands of Californians forced in recent years to live without a safety net, either because their insurance company dropped them, or because the premiums just got too high.

Some of them are now counting the crippling cost, after enormous blazes ripped through America's second largest city, killing more than two dozen people and levelling 12,000 structures, Harrison's home among them.

His own slice of what he called “paradise” stood on a mountainside overlooking the Pacific Ocean, where Malibu runs into the badly hit Pacific Palisades neighborhood. The three-acre plot, which contained his home and a few other buildings, was always costly to insure, and in 2010 was already \$8,000 a year.

When the bill hit \$40,000 in the aftermath of the pandemic, he decided he simply couldn't afford it. “It's not like I bought myself a fancy car instead of getting insurance,” the 59-year-old said. “It's just that food for myself and my family was more important.”

For Harrison, a former actor, the emotional strain of losing the home he had lived in for 14 years was magnified by the knowledge that without a handout from the state or the national government, he has lost everything - he even still has mortgage payments to make. “I'm very worried, because this property is everything I had,” he said.

Climate costs

Insuring property in California has become increasingly difficult. Well-intentioned legislation that prevents insurance companies from hiking prices unfairly has collided with growing risks from a chang-

ing climate in a part of the world that now regularly sees devastating wildfires near populated areas.

Faced with burgeoning claims - more damage, and higher repair costs because of the soaring price of labor and materials - insurance companies turned tail and left the state en masse, dropping existing clients and refusing to write new policies.

Even enormous names in the market, like State Farm and Allstate, have pulled back. Officials in state capital Sacramento have been worried for a while. Last year Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara introduced reforms aimed at encouraging companies to return, including allowing them more leeway to increase their premiums to better match their costs.

But huge and inevitably very expensive fires erupting in what is supposed to be California's rainy season - it hasn't rained for eight months around Los Angeles - have reinforced the idea that the state is becoming uninsurable.

“I don't know now, because... my greatest fear was that we were going to have a catastrophe of this nature,” Lara told the San Francisco Chronicle at the weekend. Even the state-mandated insurer of last resort, a scheme designed to provide bare-bones coverage for those locked out of the private sector, could be struggling.

The California FAIR Plan was created in 1968 and is underpinned by every insurance company that operates in the state, as a requirement of their license to operate. But the number of people now resorting to the scheme means its \$200 million reserves are dwarfed by its liabilities.

‘They’re going to drop me’

With the enormous losses expected from the Palisades and Eaton fires set to test the insurance sector even further, California has issued an edict preventing companies from dropping customers or refusing



MALIBU: Sebastian Harrison poses for a photo as he surveys the charred ruins of his home and annexes overlooking the Pacific Ocean after the Palisades fire in Malibu, California, on January 21, 2025. — AFP

to renew them in certain affected areas, for one year.

That's scant consolation for Gabrielle Gottlieb, whose house in Pacific Palisades survived the flames. “My insurer dropped a lot of friends of mine... and I'm concerned that they're going to drop me as well eventually,” he told AFP. “They're basically already putting it out there that ‘lots of luck after a year!’”

Even in a best case scenario, home insurance

looks set to be a lot more expensive in California, as state reforms filter through allowing increased prices in places more susceptible to wildfire. “Real estate and taxes are already very high in California,” said Robert Spoeri, a Pacific Palisades homeowner who was dropped by his insurer last year. “If the insurance gets even higher, who is going to want to live in this state?” — AFP

LA wildfires spark interest in natural building materials

ALTADENA: Marialyce Pedersen stood in a white Tyvek suit on her Altadena, California, lot leveled by this month's wildfires. Her house was reduced to ash that spilled into the pool, turning the water a toxic black. But along one wall, a sculpted pink bench and outdoor kitchen looked only slightly worse for wear. Pedersen built the bench and kitchen using cob, an adobe-like mix of decomposed granite or sand, clay and natural fiber, an ancient technique she says points to the future for her house and community. “That is going to be the start of my rebuilding efforts. It is one little bright spot,” she said.

Los Angeles area fires have killed 27 people and destroyed more than 15,000 homes and structures this month. They are still burning, and former homeowners are starting to think about rebuilding. Those determined to stay want houses that the next fire will not burn easily and that, if burnt, will not turn the soil, water and air into a toxic hazard.

Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone has been telling residents to prepare for the next time. “We must manage the wildfire ecosystem,” he said at a recent community meeting, “but we really need to start with structure hardening,” the process of building resilient homes.

Fans of “natural building” techniques, like the cob used by Pedersen, see need and opportunity. Adobe bricks made of clay, sand and straw, similar to cob, have long been used in the Southwest. More recently, hay bale houses have been constructed with walls made of insulating straw and a coating of fire-resistant plaster. Pedersen was one of about 40 people who joined a recent workshop on the eastern side of Los Angeles to brainstorm a way forward with so-called natural building techniques.

On the west side, near the Palisades fire, herbalist Marysia Miernowska, 41, started a petition that has received nearly 2,000 signatures calling for adoption of natural building techniques by government officials. “A lot of people just feel it's inherently insane to just rebuild the same way,” said Miernowska. Toxins released in the fires are everywhere.

She wants to change the idea of a beautiful home from exotic woods and materials to affordable and made from earth. But she also sees natural building techniques as working for people who want modern-looking homes. “It doesn't have to be a hippy hobbit house” she said.

The perils of South Africa's illegal mining sector

JOHANNESBURG: The derelict Stilfontein shaft, which became a hell hole for hundreds of trapped miners, is just one of 6,000 that have been abandoned by South Africa's gold extraction companies. The vast Witwatersrand goldfield, where the Stilfontein mine is located, was the focus of a heady gold rush in the 19th century. But the once-flourishing commercial gold mining industry has gone.

Now the disused underground galleries attract clandestine workers from across southern Africa, who risk their lives to scrape the last meagre flakes of gold from the walls with hand tools. Many of the undocumented workers who eke out a living in these perilous conditions are from Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Some are from gangs in Lesotho.

In 2015, there were about 30,000, according to a report by the authorities. While artisanal miners are common across Africa, South Africa's case is unique in that they work illegally in industrial-scale commercial mine shafts that have been deserted for lack of profitability.

Until 2007, South Africa was the world's leading pro-



LOS ANGELES: A tree burned by the Palisades Fire stands above the rubble of a house in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, on January 15, 2025. — AFP

Land of quakes, firestorms

Los Angeles County has a reputation among natural builders of being cautious, given the risks of a region plagued by earthquakes as well as firestorms. But some officials discussing the rebuilding effort have signaled openness to change. County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, who represents Altadena, said “Everything is going to be looked at,” when asked after a community meeting about building materials such as adobe.

Los Angeles County Public Works Director Mark Pestrella, one of the officials coordinating site cleanup and construction permitting, told Reuters that groups should come to his department to discuss new materials. Bring along designers and engineers to strike agreements on what works, he said.

“We have plenty of adobe structures that have been built in LA County up in some of these fire areas,” Pestrella said. LA has a process for accepting alternative building materials. “It's just a matter of ‘Is it in the code or do we have to go through an alternate means of review?’ We have the capacity.”

That is encouraging to Ben Loescher, an architect who is a longtime advocate of adobe, in particular. “The State of California has not taken this seriously and they really need to. I think it's obvious to everyone that business as usual is not working.”

One major question for builders is whether earthen materials are appropriate for earthquake country. Sasha Rabin, who advocates for and builds cob structures, said that in LA the technique might be more appropriate for walls that replace combustible fences or fire-proof outbuildings. Loescher said that New Zealand, which is also a center for earthquakes, had adopted rules for buildings made from earth.

“Physics and earthquakes are not that different around the world,” he said wryly. “In California, all masonry structures are required to be reinforced,” he added. “The same thing can be done with earthen materials, whether it's cob or adobe, compressed earth block, or rammed earth.” Natural building is one solution of many, he adds. Natural builder Chris Martinez, 34, helped Pedersen build her outdoor kitchen. His nearby house was destroyed, except for a cob bench. He notes there are questions such as how to finance new buildings and how to get insurance - problems that may slow conventional builders as well after the fires.

He aims to push forward with like-minded homeowners who could lobby and work together. “This is like a pivotal point of our community,” he said. “It gives us the option to either learn from our mistakes or we could continue doing the same thing over and over again.” — Reuters

have brought nearly 2,000 clandestine miners out of the disused shaft near Stilfontein, southwest of Johannesburg. Of those, 87 were dead. Another miner lifted from the pit died in hospital last week.

Of the frail, emaciated men evacuated from Stilfontein, nearly 60 percent were Mozambican. Many others came from Zimbabwe. “Most South Africans either are employed or have government subsidies... They don't need to work in informal mining,” explained Robert Thornton, professor of anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The gold deposits in the Witwatersrand basin are now so depleted that mining is back-breaking work. “You're getting seven to 15 grammes of gold per ton of processed rock,” said Thornton, who has written studies on the clandestine miners.

Thornton said that, in general, artisanal miners usually stayed underground for around a fortnight. Stilfontein's notorious shaft number 11, where the latest mining tragedy took place, was different. The shaft is 2.6 kilometres (1.6 miles) deep. Such is the difficulty of accessing the galleries at the bottom that many workers stayed underground for “up to a year”, according to Ayanda Ndabeni, a miner who resurfaced in November. They can only obtain food and water if it is sent down to them, often through ventilation shafts, said South African journalist Kimon de Greef. — AFP



STILFONTEIN: Metalliferous Mobile Rescue Winder operators look on as a cage is lifted from an abandoned gold shaft in Stilfontein on January 16, 2025. — AFP

ducer of gold. By 2022, it had dropped to 11th place, according to the US Geological Survey. Mining accounted for 21 percent of South Africa's GDP in 1980, according to the national statistics department. By 2023, that had dropped to just 6.2 percent.

Months underground

Since August, police and rescue services



LABREA: Aerial view of an area of Amazon rainforest deforested by illegal fire in the municipality of Labrea, Amazonas State, Brazil, taken on August 20, 2024. — AFP

Brazil saw 79% jump in area burned by fires in 2024

RIO DE JANEIRO: Wildfires in Brazil last year consumed a total area larger than all of Italy, a monitor reported Wednesday, as the country continues to battle blazes often set by farmers and ranchers illegally expanding their territory.

Some 30.8 million hectares (119,000 square miles) of vegetation were burned in Brazil in 2024, a 79 percent increase from 2023, monitoring platform MapBiomass reported. Fires in the Amazon, a crucial carbon sink for the rest of the world as well as a global hotspot of biodiversity, accounted for 58 percent of the damage.

The figures are discouraging news for the government of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who in November will host the UN COP30 climate conference in the Amazonian city of Belem. The 2024 figures represent the largest area burned since 2019.

Some 8.5 million hectares of forest burned in 2024, compared to 2.2 million in 2023, and in the Amazon, fires took out more forest than grassland for the first time, according to the data. “This is a terrible indicator, because, once forests are burned, they become more susceptible to future fires,” said Ane Alencar, of MapBiomass.

Climate change makes vegetation drier and thus more prone to burning. But in Brazil, the main driver of the fires are ranchers and farmers who clear land for pasture and agriculture - a crime the government struggles to contain.

Lula has made preserving the Amazon a priority of his government, following lax protections against human expansion into the territory under his predecessor Jair Bolsonaro. But in September, Lula admitted that the country was not “100 percent prepared” to face a wave of forest fires that his government attributed to “climate terrorism.”

The Brazilian Amazon saw its highest number of fires in 17 years in 2024, government data published earlier this month showed, after the vast biome suffered months of a lengthy drought. There were 140,328 fires detected by satellite imaging over the year, according to the National Institute for Space Research (INPE). That was 42 percent more than the 98,634 fires recorded in 2023 - and the most since 2007, when 186,463 forest fires were seen.

Those figures, as well as Wednesday's, come after some hope last year when the INPE said that deforestation in the region had fallen by more than 30 percent in the 12-month period to August 2024. Scientists warn that continued deforestation will put the Amazon on track to reach a point where it will emit more carbon than it absorbs, accelerating climate change. — AFP

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2025



A visitor (right) posing for a photo with light installations marking the coming Lunar New Year of 2025.—AFP photos

LANTERNS LIGHT UP SOUTHERN CHINESE CITY AHEAD OF LUNAR NEW YEAR



A man posing for a photo with light installations marking the coming Lunar New Year of 2025 in Huaian, east China's Anhui province.



A woman looks at decorations for Lunar New Year at a stall.



A visitor posing with light installations marking the coming Lunar New Year of 2025.

Dozens of giant lanterns in the shape of mythical creatures, flowers and legendary characters light up the night sky in southern China -- a dreamlike spectacle to mark the upcoming Lunar New Year holidays. As night falls in the southern Chinese city of Fuzhou, lanterns -- some of them 10 meters high -- transform Hongguang Lake Park into a fantastical land of orange dragons, majestic sailboats, fish with sparkling turquoise scales and goddesses with angelic faces.



People walk past a light installation ahead of the Lunar New Year of the Snake.

"Aren't these lanterns cool?" Lei Haixin, a 17-year-old tourist wrapped up in a parka due to the cool weather, said. "Super beautiful, right? We found the place thanks to Douyin," he explained, referring to China's version of TikTok. "Usually, when we spot something interesting via the app, we try to go there," he explained.



A visitor walking past light installations marking the coming Lunar New Year of 2025 in Huaian.

Fuzhou is the capital of Fujian province, known throughout China for keeping many traditional New Year events alive. Many lanterns are drawn from traditional folklore -- one features the likeness of Mazu, a sea deity popular across southern China, Taiwan and among the diaspora across Southeast Asia.

"This lantern is exquisitely made and looks even better than in the pictures," tourist Luo Meiling told AFP. Also making an appearance is the mythical Monkey King, Sun Wukong, from the Chinese literary classic "Journey to the West". Lanterns date back to a thousand-year-old tradition in China and are a common sight in the country, especially around the Lunar New Year, when millions flock to

public spaces to take in their bright lights and vivid colors.

And with Chinese people around the world set to herald in the Year of the Snake on January 29, artistic lantern displays in all shapes and sizes have sprung up in towns and cities across the vast nation. "We feel more of the New Year atmosphere in recent years," Qi, a 42-year-old resident of Fuzhou, who visited the park with her young son, told AFP.

"Mentalities are changing and people are making their children do more outdoor activities now," she explained. "Many families come here to enjoy the fireworks and the entertainment." — AFP



People walk past a tree decorated with lanterns ahead of the Lunar New Year of the Snake, at a new year lantern fair in Fuzhou.



A woman poses for photos under a monkey king installation ahead of the Lunar New Year of the Snake, at a new year lantern fair in Fuzhou.

Austria back in Michelin Guide after 16 years



This photograph taken on February 15, 2024 shows a plaque displaying the three stars of the Michelin guide, the highest award of the French gastronomy, on the door of Alexandre Mazzia's AM restaurant. — AFP

France's Michelin Guide on Tuesday unveiled its first nationwide list of Austria's best restaurants since 2009, awarding two establishments with its top three-star ranking. "Our inspectors were quite impressed by chefs who are firmly rooted in their traditions, while at the same time being very creative," said Gwendal Poullennec, international director of the Michelin Guides. In all, 62 restaurants across Austria received one Michelin star, and 18 were awarded with two stars.

Two restaurants in Vienna -- Amador

and Steirereck im Stadtpark -- secured the top three-star ranking. Well-known eateries in Alpine resorts such as Lech and Sankt-Anton were also singled out. According to the Michelin Guide, "Austria has clearly established itself as a must-visit destination worldwide over the last few years" due to the "expansion of its range of products and services". Since 2010, the Michelin guide had only covered Austrian restaurants

in the cities of Vienna and Salzburg.

But last year, Michelin's anonymous reviewers once again fanned out to the country's more remote corners. As the prestigious star rating allows for international comparison, Austrian chefs feel like they have been invited to "take part in the Olympic Games," said Michael Feiertag, head of the Styrian regional tourist office.

Austria's cuisine has been shaped by many influences -- from Central and Eastern Europe to the Alps -- accumulated over centuries. With about a fourth of all agricultural land certified as organic in Austria, the Alpine country of nine million people is also regarded as the European Union's organic farming leader. In recent years, Michelin says it has noted the "increasing potential of the gastronomic offer in Central and Eastern Europe". Created in 1900 by tyre manufacturers Andre and Edouard Michelin as a guide for motorists, it now has editions across Europe, Asia, North and South America. — AFP

Japan Post to stop delivery of live reptiles

Japan Post will not deliver live reptiles starting from April on animal welfare grounds, a company spokeswoman said Wednesday. Customers had raised concerns and animal rights activists had criticized the

service online, the spokeswoman for the nationwide postal service told AFP.

"After consulting with the government... we came to realize that shipping animals in an environment where temperature control and food are unavailable can amount to animal abuse," she said. From April 1, Japan Post -- which already does not allow mammals or birds to be sent by mail -- will not deliver reptiles through any parcel or other postal services, the spokeswoman added. — AFP



An iguana populates a tree at the Wakodahatchee Wetlands on November 19, 2024 in Delray Beach, Florida. — AFP

Lifestyle

Ancient statue found dumped
'near dustbins': Greek police

Police in Greece said Wednesday they were investigating how an ancient Greek statue came to be dumped in a black plastic bag near dustbins in the northern city of Thessaloniki. The organized crime unit said it was investigating "after a 32-year-old man went to the police to drop off a statue he had apparently found inside a black bag near dustbins".

According to the first assessment by the archaeology service, the head-

less statue is from the Hellenistic period (between 323 and 31 BC), said the police statement. It measures 80 by 25 centimeters (32 by 10 inches). It will be transferred to the crime investigation team in northern Greece for lab tests, then to the antiquities service for evaluation and conservation, the statement added.

Police have long had to contend with the illegal traffic in antiquities because of the number of artefacts in

sites across the country that date back to ancient Greece. Road and construction work across Greece still turns up new finds from that era on a regular basis.--AFP

This handout photograph released by Greek Police shows an ancient statue after it was "spotted by a citizen in a black plastic bag near garbage cans" on a street in Thessaloniki.--AFP

Indian elephants on epic
journey to tycoon's giant zoo

A jumbo operation is moving 20 elephants across the breadth of India to the mammoth private zoo set up by the son of Asia's richest man, adjoining a sprawling oil refinery. The elephants have been "freed from the exploitative logging industry", according to the Vantara Animal Rescue Centre, run by Anant Ambani, son of the billionaire head of Reliance Industries Mukesh Ambani, a close ally of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The sheer scale of the self-declared "world's biggest wild animal rescue center" has raised eyebrows -- including more than 50 bears, 160 tigers, 200 lions, 250 leopards and 900 crocodiles, according to the inventory from India's Central Zoo Authority. The elephants are being transported the entire width of India, around 3,200 kilometers (1,990 miles) by road, from the misty forests of the northeast Himalayan state of Arunachal Pradesh to Jamnagar on the baking flatlands of Gujarat in the west.

It is a staggering journey, about the distance from Paris to Cairo, even for a zoo that has flown in animals from across the world. The elephants include captive-born animals, some that had with deep wounds from chains used by their handlers to control them and for dragging timber. They are being transported in "elephant ambulances" -- specially adapted trucks -- accompanied by a team of over 200 staff, including vets.

Photographs taken on their journey published by local media show the waving trunks of the elephants out the top of the slow-moving trucks. The animals will eventually be housed alongside around 200 elephants already at the pet project of 29-year-old Anant, a vast operation that includes more than 2,000 animals

from 43 species across a 3,000-acre (1,214-hectare) site.

'Significant mental suffering'

"They will live chain-free and will never be forced into labor", a statement from Vantara read, meaning "Star of the Forest" in Hindi. Those are housed in a site alongside the Reliance Jamnagar Refinery Complex, which the conglomerate also says is the world's largest crude oil refinery. Summer temperatures there can soar above 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit).

Indian social media has both posts praising the move -- and those concerned that the endangered animals will be held in a private facility and not returned to the wild. Two other elephants, from a Hindu temple complex in Mayapur in West Bengal state where they performed temple rituals, are also being brought to the zoo on a 2,300-kilometre journey.

One of those elephants killed her keeper last year. Vantara said that "living in captivity causes significant mental suffering", and insisted that their facility will now support the elephants' "emotional recovery". Around 2,100 staff look after the animals at the zoo, according to Vantara.

The zoo was also among the many venues for Anant's lavish multi-day wedding celebrations in 2024, parties that set a new benchmark in matrimonial extravagance -- including private performances by R&B star Rihanna, Justin Bieber, Katy Perry, The Backstreet Boys and Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli. Anant's father Mukesh is chairman of Reliance Industries, a family-founded conglomerate that has grown into India's biggest company by market cap. --AFP

Sad clown: 'Joker 2,' Phoenix and
Gaga nominated for Razzies

"Joker: Folie à Deux" was nominated for seven Razzies on Tuesday, leaving the sad clown atop the annual tongue-in-cheek list of the worst movies of the year. The flop musical follow-up to 2019's billion-dollar-grossing "Joker" picked up unwanted nods such as worst picture and worst sequel. Joaquin Phoenix -- who won best actor at the Oscars in the first "Joker" film -- is nominated for worst actor, alongside Lady Gaga for worst actress.

The film took in \$200 million -- around one-fifth of its predecessor's box office, despite being far more expensive to make -- and was savaged by critics. In a year of several high-profile expensive flops, the parody prizes awarded six nods to Francis Ford Cop-

pola's confusing epic "Megalopolis," and Dakota Johnson's much-mocked superhero spin-off "Madame Web." Fawning presidential biopic "Reagan" and video game adaptation "Borderlands" equally incurred the wrath of Razzie voters with six.

Jerry Seinfeld's "Unfrosted," a somewhat surreal original story for Pop-Tarts pastries, earned four. Voted for by some 1,200 members of an irreverent group that any film fan can join, the Razzies -- or Golden Raspberries -- were created as an antidote to the movie industry's self-obsessed series of glitzy award shows. Nominations for this year's Academy Awards will be announced Thursday.--AFP



Lady Gaga performs during the filming of the movie "Joker: Folie à Deux" in New York on March 25, 2023.--AFP

Rare wildlife species found in
Cambodian national park

A years-long survey of a Cambodian national park has revealed endangered species never before recorded in the country, highlighting the need for greater conservation efforts, environmentalists said Wednesday. The complex survey work uncovered fauna ranging from pangolins to critically endangered large-antlered muntjacs inside Virachey National Park, a relatively untouched haven for biodiversity.

The more than 405,000-hectare park stretches across Cambodia's northeastern region, bordering Laos and Vietnam. More than 150 cameras were deployed during the survey, which also enlisted the help of local communities to document animals and plants in the protected area.

A total of 89 species were detected, including 20 globally threatened species like the red-shanked douc langur, Sunda pangolin, clouded leopard, dhole and sun bear, according to the survey lead conservation organization Fauna & Flora. It also found nine spe-



This undated handout photo shows common jay butterflies in Cambodia's Virachey National Park.

cies that have never been recorded in Cambodia before, including the critically endangered large-antlered muntjac, Sokolov's glass lizard and the Vietnamese leaf-toed gecko.

The findings "reaffirm the park's importance as a biodiversity stronghold and provide compelling evidence to



This undated handout photo from the conservation group Fauna and Flora shows an Annam wart frog in Cambodia's Virachey National Park.--AFP photos

galvanize increased conservation efforts," Pablo Sinovas, country director of Fauna & Flora's Cambodia program, told AFP. The park, which forms part of one of the largest forest landscapes in mainland Southeast Asia, is "a biodiversity hotspot, a vital carbon sink, and home to a rich diversity of indigenous

communities", he added.

However he warned that the region "faces mounting pressures" from destruction of natural habitats, often for agriculture, infrastructure, or other land uses. Snaring is another critical issue that has in places led to the "empty forest syndrome" where wildlife, particularly medium- and large-sized mammals, are driven to local extinction, Sinovas added.

Elsewhere in the country, environmentalists have warned that the more than 500 species in the biodiverse Central Cardamoms region face a number of threats, ranging from illegal logging and poaching to sand dredging. The government has been criticized for allowing companies to clear hundreds of thousands of hectares of forested land in Cambodia -- including in protected zones -- for projects ranging from rubber and sugar cane plantations to hydropower dams.--AFP



This undated handout photo shows an Indochinese water dragon in Cambodia's Virachey National Park.



This undated handout photo shows a camera trap image of a giant muntjac in Cambodia's Virachey National Park.

Netflix reports
surge in
subscribers,
new price hikes

Netflix on Tuesday said it added nearly 19 million subscribers during the holiday season to finish out last year with more than 300 million subscribers. Company executives credited steady investments in shows and films with helping power growth at the streaming behemoth, while announcing it is increasing prices in Argentina, Canada, Portugal and the United States.

"As we continue to invest in programming and deliver more value for our members, we will occasionally ask our members to pay a little more so that we can re-invest to further improve Netflix," the company said in a letter to investors. Premium and standard memberships in the United States will cost \$2 more per month, \$25 and \$18 respectively, while a standard ad-supported tier will be \$8 in an increase of one dollar monthly, according to the company.



In the final quarter of 2024, the streaming juggernaut said it logged profit of \$1.87 billion on revenue of \$10.25 billion that grew double digits from the same period the prior year. Netflix shares jumped more than 14 percent to top \$993 in after-market trades. "We enter 2025 with strong momentum, coming off a year with record net additions -- 41 million -- and having re-accelerated growth," Netflix executives told investors.

They added that Netflix is in a "leadership position" when it comes to engagement, with about two hours daily per paid member. "Our business remains intensely competitive with many formidable competitors across traditional entertainment and big tech," Netflix executives said.

"We have to continue to improve all aspects of Netflix -- more series and films our members love, a great product experience, increased sophistication in our plans and pricing strategy including more advertising capabilities -- and grow into new areas like live programming and games."

'Squid Game'

Netflix ended last year with a strong lineup that included a second season of the global hit "Squid Game." The dystopian Korean horror tale about a fictional, deadly game remains by far the most-watched Netflix TV series ever. "Squid Game", an ultra-violent tale exploring themes of division and inequality, is considered to be one of the most significant works in solidifying South Korea's status as a global cultural powerhouse, alongside the Oscar-winning film "Parasite" and K-pop megastars BTS.

The streamer said that its ad-supported plans accounted for more than 55 percent of signups in countries where they are offered, growing nearly 30 percent overall from the prior quarter. Growing its ad business is a top priority for this year, according to Netflix. In a bid to boost sputtering growth, the company launched an ad-subsidized offering in late 2023 around the same time as a crackdown on sharing passwords. Looking ahead, Netflix forecasts 2025 revenue between \$43.5-44.5 billion and is targeting a healthy 29 percent operating margin.

The streaming service highlighted upcoming content, including new seasons of hit shows "Wednesday," and "Stranger Things". The United States will see 52 weeks of WWE professional wrestling programming and the return of NFL games on Christmas Day. In the US, the company has begun to offer some users combined packages with its one-time rivals, making itself available through joint subscriptions with Peacock and Apple TV.

Netflix is seen as reigning supreme over the video content market, with Disney+ still struggling after a launch in November of 2019 that featured a slew of new content from its blockbuster Marvel and Star Wars universes. Netflix shares have gained 80 percent over the past year, significantly outperforming both the S&P 500 and NASDAQ indices.--AFP



Louis Vuitton's Men's Creative Director Pharell Williams (center) acknowledges the audience at the end of the Louis Vuitton Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2025/2026 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris on January 21, 2025. - AFP photos

PHARRELL KICKS OFF PARIS FASHION WEEK WITH LOUVRE SHOW



French basketball player Victor Wembanyama

Louis Vuitton artistic director Pharell Williams kicked off Paris Men's Fashion Week on Tuesday with a VIP-studded event at the Louvre museum. French NBA basketball star Victor Wembanyama was given the spot of honor next to Vuitton owner and luxury tycoon Bernard Arnault in a front row also featuring actors Bradley Cooper and Omar Sy.

Arnault, one of the world's richest men, dashed home after attending the inauguration of Donald Trump in Washington on Monday where he was placed prominently behind outgoing president Joe Biden. Pharell's fifth collection for Louis Vuitton saw models walk a circular runway in the rear courtyard of the Louvre, continuing the US hip hop artist and singer's habit of using Paris landmarks as a backdrop for his clothes.

The Autumn-Winter 2025-2026 collection featured on-trend browns and tweeds heavily, as well as flashes of bubble-gum pink. Baseball jackets were mixed up with long shorts and trench coats in designs that Pharell worked on in collaboration with fellow designer Nigo, the artistic director at Kenzo. For his debut Louis Vuitton show in 2023, Pharell turned the Pont Neuf, the oldest bridge in the capital, into a giant runway, even painting its paving stones gold. A historic theme park, the Jardin d'Acclimatation, hosted his show last January while in June he sent models down a lawn catwalk built on the rooftop of the modernist headquarters of UN agency UNESCO.

'Workwear'

The opening day of Men's Fashion Week, which runs until Sunday, also featured an afternoon show by Japanese brand Auralee, as well as an unusual mixed martial arts-themed event by mystery French label Coucou Bebe 75018. "It's intended to be performance art," the self-taught designer behind the brand, who goes by the name Kanoush, told AFP of the show in a mock fighting ring.

Always photographed with his face hidden, Kanoush also refuses to reveal his identity. Coucou Bebe 75018 - which is a combination of a greeting used by prostitutes and the postcode of Kanoush's Pigalle area in northern Paris



French judoka Teddy Riner (right) and French actor Omar Sy arrive ahead of the Louis Vuitton Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2025/2026 collection.

- has earned a growing following thanks to its collage-laden jackets with references to French politics. Ahead of Fashion Week, experts had said that the aesthetic dominance of streetwear was fading, with designers increasingly focused on "casual tailoring", emphasizing suits and structured pieces with a relaxed twist.

A major trend from the Spring-Summer 2025 collections was dubbed "work-

wear", featuring trench coats, Barbour-style jackets, duffle coats and loafers. "There's a classic, slightly dandy but chic, elegant, and casual silhouette emerging," Alice Feillard, men's buying director at luxury Paris emporium Galeries Lafayette, told AFP. Browns have dominated for two seasons, and insiders expect them to remain among the key shades at the end of the year.

A number of top labels are luring new designers or looking for fresh inspiration in the increasingly tough luxury market. Larvin is set to return after a two-year hiatus, presenting Peter Copping's debut collection as the artistic director of France's oldest couture house. After completing his first show in September, Valentino's new artistic director, Alessandro Michele, will return for haute couture week, which follows immediately after the menswear week.

One of the most anticipated shows will be on Sunday by in-vogue French designer Simon Porte Jacquemus, whose Jacquemus brand is making its return to the official calendar after a five-year absence. Notably absences include Givenchy, whose new chief designer Sarah Burton has reserved her first collection for the women's Fashion Week in March, as well as Loewe, whose artistic director Jonathan Anderson is rumored to be on the way out. Hedi Slimane left his role as artistic director at Celine in October, John Galliano quit Maison Margiela in December, and Chanel unveiled their new creative director, Matthieu Blazy, only a month ago. — AFP



US actor Adrien Brody poses during a photocall ahead of the Louis Vuitton Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2025/2026 collection.



Louis Vuitton's Men's Creative Director Pharell Williams (right) and designer Nigo acknowledge the audience at the end of the Louis Vuitton Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2025/2026 collection.



Sports

Capitals edge Oilers for 5th straight win

Jesperi Kotkaniemi scores pair as Hurricanes nip Stars

WASHINGTON: Pierre-Luc Dubois had a goal and an assist and the visiting Washington Capitals won their fifth straight game, 3-2 over the Edmonton Oilers on Tuesday night. Tom Wilson and Matt Roy also scored for the Capitals, who extended their point streak to 11 games (8-0-3). Logan Thompson, the reigning NHL first star of the week, made 30 saves and picked up his first assist of the season. Leon Draisaitl scored his NHL-leading 34th goal and added an assist to extend his point streak to seven games for the Oilers, who have lost two straight after winning four in a row. Corey Perry also tallied, and Stuart Skinner allowed three goals on 14 shots. Edmonton played without Connor McDavid, who served the first game of a three-game suspension for cross-checking Vancouver Canucks forward Conor Garland late in the game Saturday.

Flyers 2, Red Wings 1 (OT)

Rasmus Ristolainen scored with 26 seconds left in overtime as Philadelphia nipped visiting Detroit. Joel Farabee had a goal and an assist for Philadelphia, which improved to 5-0-1 over its past six games. Samuel Ersson made 27 saves for the hosts. Ben Chiarot scored the only goal for Detroit, which has lost four of its past five games (1-3-1). Alex Lyon stopped 24 shots against his former team.

Predators 7, Sharks 5

Nick Blankenburg scored the eventual game-winner as Nashville erased a four-goal deficit to defeat visiting San Jose. Jonathan Marchessault scored and added three assists, and Tommy Novak and Filip Forsberg each tallied a goal and two assists for the Predators, who have won four straight. Fedor Svechikov, Justin Barron and Roman Josi also scored for Nashville, which improved to 10-6-1 over the last 17. Mikael Granlund scored twice, and Macklin Celebrini, Luke Kunin and Jake Walman also scored for San Jose, which has lost four in a row and seven of eight. Cody Ceci and William Eklund had two assists each.

Rangers 5, Senators 0

Igor Shesterkin recorded his second straight shutout, making 20 saves as host New York rolled to a win over Ottawa. The shutout was Shesterkin's third of the season and the 18th of his career. Alexis Lafreniere scored in the first period, Arthur Kaliyev had a goal in the second and Matt Rempe, Artemi Panarin and Will Cuyille added insurance goals in the third for the Rangers, who extended their point streak to nine games (6-0-3). Leevi Merilainen was pulled after allowing two goals on 16 shots before Anton Forsberg made 10 saves in relief for the Senators, who had their six-game point streak (5-0-1) end.

Canadiens 3, Lightning 2

Jake Evans scored the go-ahead goal with 2:15 left in regulation, rookie Lane Hutson matched an NHL record and Montreal topped visiting Tampa Bay. Hutson had an assist to match Shayne Gostisbehere (2015-16 Philadelphia Flyers) for the longest point streak by a rookie defenseman. Alex Newhook and Juraj Slafkovsky, Patrik Laine posted two assists and Sam Montembeault stopped 33 shots for the Canadiens. Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov tallied to move his points streak to 10 games, the longest active run in the NHL. Jake Guentzel also potted one for the Lightning, and Andrei Vasilevskiy turned aside 19 shots.

Hurricanes 2, Stars 1

Jesperi Kotkaniemi scored his second goal of the game just 24 seconds after host Dallas tied it in the third period, lifting Carolina to a victory. The winning goal was fortunate for the Hurricanes as the puck went off Kotkaniemi's skate with 9:25 to play as the center skated into the crease. Carolina's Pyyotr Kochetkov made 22 saves, including 11 in the third period. Martin Necas assisted on both Hurricanes goals. Thomas Harley had the Dallas goal, and Jake Oettinger stopped 17 shots.



NEW YORK: Nikolas Matinpalo #33 of the Ottawa Senators looks to get the puck past Chris Kreider #20 of the New York Rangers during the second period at Madison Square Garden on January 21, 2025 in New York City. — AFP

Panthers 5, Ducks 2

Carter Verhaeghe had a goal and an assist as Florida opened a four-game western road trip with a victory over Anaheim to complete a sweep of a home-and-away back-to-back. Sam Reinhart, Evan Rodrigues, Sam Bennett and Uvis Balinskis also scored goals and Mackie Samoskevich and Tomas Nosek each added two assists for the Panthers. Sergei Bobrovsky made 28 saves for Florida, which extended its point streak against the Ducks to 10 games (9-0-1). Frank Vatrano and Mason McTavish scored for the Ducks, who lost their fourth straight

game (0-3-1). Lukas Dostal finished with 24 saves.

Sabres 3, Canucks 2

Jiri Kulich had a goal and two assists to help visiting Buffalo rally for a win against Vancouver. JJ Peterka added a goal and an assist, Tage Thompson also scored and Rasmus Dahlin had two assists for the Sabres, who had lost three of their previous four games. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 32 saves for the win. Phillip Di Giuseppe and Elias Pettersson scored, and Thatcher Demko stopped 23 shots for the Canucks, who are 2-5-2 in their past nine games. — Reuters

Inoue focused on Korean with lights of Vegas on horizon

YOKOHAMA: Japan's unbeaten Naoya Inoue said Wednesday he wants to lay down a marker in his world title bout against South Korean rank-outsider Kim Ye-joon before taking his prodigious talents to Las Vegas and Saudi Arabia later this year.

Undisputed super-bantamweight world champion Inoue defends his titles in Tokyo on Friday against Kim, who stepped in just two weeks before the fight to replace the injured Australian Sam Goodman.

Inoue signed a sponsorship deal with Saudi Arabia's Riyadh Season last year and is expected to fight in Las Vegas in April, with a potential bout in Saudi Arabia later in the year. Inoue, nicknamed "Monster", knows that he will have to beat Kim first to make a splash outside of Japan.

"This year I will have fights in the US and then Saudi Arabia so this fight in two days' time is very important for me," said Inoue, who has a 28-0 record with 25 knockouts. "I hope that my contract with Riyadh will accelerate my boxing career. Even if my opponent changes, what I need to do doesn't change. I just need to get a result."

The 31-year-old Inoue has not fought outside Japan since he beat Michael Dasmurinas in Las Vegas in June 2021. Promoter Bob Arum said discussions were under way for Inoue to fight at "a big venue in Las Vegas" this year.

"Naoya is the face of boxing, so when you can bring the face of boxing to your country, it's a big, big thing," said Arum. "Everybody in the United States, everyone who is interested in boxing, is interested in Inoue coming to the United States to fight."

Concentration

Inoue was originally scheduled to face Goodman in Tokyo on December 24 but the fight was postponed when the Australian suffered a cut above his eye in training. Goodman then pulled out again with a recurrence of the injury and Kim was brought in as a last-minute replacement. Inoue said the disruptions had not affected his concentration. "Maybe some boxers can't properly deal with their opponent changing at the last minute, but for me, whoever I am facing I know I have a wide range of skills." The 32-year-old Kim has a 21-2-2 record with 13 knockouts and is ranked No. 11 by the WBO in the super-bantamweight division.

He has the chance to become South Korea's first world champion in over 15 years. "It's an honor for any boxer to face Inoue, and it's a great chance for me," said Kim, who grew up in an orphanage and did not take up boxing until he was 20. "I definitely won't make it easy for him and I want to show what I'm made of until the end." — AFP



YOKOHAMA: South Korea's Kim Ye-joon (R) and Japan's Naoya Inoue (L) attend a photo call following a press conference ahead of their world super-bantamweight title boxing bout in Yokohama on January 22, 2025. — AFP

Kuwait beat Guinea in handball World Cup



Kuwait handball team

KUWAIT: The "blues" dominated the pitch throughout the encounter by beating Guinea, held in Croatia, ending the first half ahead of the foes, 11-

15. The Kuwaiti team is due to play against Poland on Thursday, then faces Algeria on Saturday for the final classification of all 32 participating teams. The

tournament that kicked off on January 14 will proceed until February 2. The matches are held in Croatia, Norway and Denmark. — KUNA

Al-Duaij continues to support and sponsor equestrianism

KUWAIT: Al-Zoubi Stable, led by trainer Khalid Al-Suhail and groom Luciano, was crowned with the Cup of the late Sheikh Khalid Duaij Al-Salman Al-Sabah in the fourth mixed division over a distance of 1,600 m, with a time of 1:42.52 minutes, during the 12th meeting of the horse racing at the Hunting and Equestrian Club.

In the fifth round, (Handicap 40-75 C4), the distance: 2,400 m, the horse "The Godfather" of Al-Zamil and Abujhum Stable, led by trainer Mubarak Al-Ajami and groom Ali Al-Farmawi, won the Sheikh Duaij Al-Salman Cup, with a time of 2:40.50 minutes, and Sheikh Duaij Khalid Al-Duaij Al-Salman Al-Sabah crowned the champions and handed the trophy to the winners, and the Director General of Racing at the Hunting and Equestrian Club Ali Al-Fahad presented a commemorative shield to Sheikh Duaij Khalid for his support and care for Kuwaiti equestrianism.

Sheikh Duaij Khalid Al-Duaij Al-Salman Al-Sabah, Dean of Al-Masayel Stable, emphasized the continuation of support and care for Kuwaiti equestrian sport and horse racing, pointing out that horse people and lovers of this strong competitive hobby need more support and care to continue this beautiful sport.

Ichiro becomes first Japanese elected to MLB Hall of Fame

LOS ANGELES: Global baseball's hit king Ichiro Suzuki became the first Japanese-born player elected to Major League baseball's Hall of Fame on Tuesday, just one vote shy of unanimous selection. The Seattle Mariners star headlines the 2025 Hall of Fame class to be enshrined at Cooperstown, New York, which also includes pitcher CC Sabathia and relief pitcher Billy Wagner. In



KUWAIT: Sheikh Duaij Khalid Al-Duaij handing over the trophy to the winners.

He pointed out that the late Sheikh Khalid Duaij Al-Salman Al-Sabah was one of the founders of Kuwaiti equestrianism, and Al-Masayel Stable is one of the oldest horse stables in Kuwait.

It is noteworthy that Sheikh Duaij Khalid Al-Duaij Al-Sabah is always keen to support horse races at the Hunting and Equestrian Club to commemorate the memory of his father Sheikh Khalid Al-Duaij Al-Salman Al-Sabah and his grandfather, the late

Sheikh Duaij Al-Salman Al-Sabah.

In the rest of results, the horse "Sabr" of Ghalifas Al Dosari Stable won the Hunting and Equestrian Club Cup in the sixth round, and the Secretary General Sheikh Sabah Fahad Al-Nasser crowned the champions and handed over the championship cup to the deans of Ghalifas Al-Dosari Stable. "Al Ghalifa Mounia", "Murtajeh" and "Mujtah Al Bahar" won first place in the first to third rounds, respectively.

his first year of eligibility, the 51-year-old Ichiro was chosen in balloting by the Baseball Writers Association of America—but Yankees pitching great Mariano Rivera remains the only unanimously elected Hall of Famer.

At a press conference at the Mariners' ballpark, Ichiro said he was still absorbing the news after getting the official Hall of Fame call. "Happiness and all the joy will probably come later," he said. "At that time, it was just a relief."

The call to Cooperstown was something he hadn't imagined even as he rose to stardom in his homeland. "There was a time that I didn't even know if I'd get the chance to play in the MLB. So what an honor it is for me to be here and to be a Hall of Famer. It's a special day." — AFP



SEATTLE: Former Seattle Mariners player Ichiro Suzuki reacts as he is elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame. — AFP

Sports

Troubled Dortmund's slump continues at Bologna in CL

Struggling Dortmund sack coach Sahin after four-game losing run in 2025

BOLOGNA: Borussia Dortmund's woes continued on Tuesday after the troubled Bundesliga outfit fell to a 2-1 defeat at Bologna which dented their hopes of direct qualification for the last 16 of the Champions League.

Goals in a matter of seconds in the second half from substitutes Thijs Dallinga and Samuel Iling-Junior gave Bologna their first ever win in the modern version of Europe's elite club competition and handed Dortmund their fourth straight defeat in all competitions.

Last season's finalists Dortmund, who opened the scoring in the 15th minute through Serhou Guirassy's classy chipped penalty, are 13th on 12 points, one point from the top eight with other teams set to complete the penultimate round of league phase matches on Wednesday.

Tuesday's defeat piled more pressure on under-fire coach Nuri Sahin even though his players showed their support by joining him in a group hug after Guirassy netted his seventh goal in as many Champions League matches this season.

But today Borussia Dortmund fired coach Nuri Sahin, the German soccer club said on Wednesday, after Tuesday's shock 2-1 loss to Bologna in the Champions League that stretched their losing run to four games across all competitions.

"Borussia Dortmund have released head coach Nuri Sahin with immediate effect following an internal analysis of recent sporting developments," said the club in a statement. The Ruhr valley club, last year's Champions League finalists, conceded two goals in two minutes in the second half against the Italians after taking a 15th minute lead.

They have also lost all three league matches in 2025, dropping down to 10th place in the Bundesliga and putting their participation next season in Europe's premier club competition at risk. "After four defeats in a row and only one win from the last nine games ... we have unfortunately lost faith in being able to achieve our sporting goals in the current constellation," Dortmund managing director Lars Ricken said in the statement. "This decision also hurts me personally, but it was no longer avoidable after the game in Bologna." Bologna are 27th on only five points but it would have been difficult to tell judging by the celebrations of the players, coach Vincenzo Italiano and 30,000 fans at a jumping Stadio Renato Dall'Ara.

Bologna 'dream' realized

The seven-time Italian champions won a preliminary round match against Anderlecht in the old European Cup in 1964, but were eliminated by the Belgians and didn't return to the top level of continental competition until this season. "We're going out but for me today it's as if we'd won a quarter-final or semi-final, I'm just so pleased," said Italiano to Sky. "There's so much joy for our first win in the Champions League, it's a dream come true for me."

Bologna were furious with the spot-kick, for a soft foul on Waldemar Anton, with which Guirassy gave Dortmund the lead. The hosts were even angrier when referee Serdar Gozubuyuk refused to give them a penalty of their own for a similar shirt tug on Dan Ndoye just as the Swiss looked set to score from a Riccardo Orsolini cross.

That incident, in the 19th minute, seemed to wake



BOLOGNA: Dortmund's Guinean forward #09 Serhou Guirassy (C) tries to score against Bologna's Swedish midfielder #02 Emil Holm and Bologna's Polish goalkeeper #01 Lukasz Skorupski during the UEFA Champions League football match between Bologna and Borussia Dortmund at the Renato Dall'Ara stadium in Bologna. — AFP

up a previously timid Bologna who then dominated, with Orsolini, twice, and Santiago Castro going close to netting their first Champions League goals.

But Italy international Orsolini, who has scored

eight times this season, left the field with his head in his shirt 10 minutes before the break after being forced off with what looked like a hamstring injury and replaced by Iling-Junior. — AFP

Monaco down Villa to boost Champions League qualification hopes

MONACO: Monaco ground out a 1-0 home win against Aston Villa in the Champions League on Tuesday, denying the Premier League side the chance to all but book their spot in the round of 16.

Wilfried Singo's early header was the difference between the teams as Villa tasted defeat for the first time in six outings in all competitions. Monaco had only won two of their last 11 matches, including back-to-back defeats in the Champions League, but now have their eyes on securing progress to the knock-outs. The defeat dropped Villa from fifth to seventh provisionally. They can qualify automatically for the last-16 with a top-eight finish.

"We started the Champions League not being favorites to finish in the top eight, and we still aren't. Tonight we are disappointed," said Villa manager Unai Emery. Emery's side host 21st-placed Celtic in their final league phase match next week.

Villa and Monaco are among nine teams on 13 points, ahead of the rest of this week's matches, a pack headed by Arsenal in fourth place in the table



MONACO: Monaco's Swiss forward #36 Breel Embolo (C) fights for the ball with Aston Villa's English defender #04 Ezri Konsa (R) during the UEFA Champions League football match between AS Monaco and Aston Villa at the Louis II Stadium (Stade Louis II) in the Principality of Monaco. — AFP

with Monaco in ninth Monaco conclude their league phase campaign with a visit to Italian champions Inter Milan — also on 13 points ahead of a visit to Prague on Wednesday — knowing nothing but a win will do to avoid a play-off spot.

"We have one match remaining which will be very

difficult. We are going to go to Milan next week with a lot of ambition and to win," said Singo. Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez's every touch was booed by the home support in the early stages — the crowd had not forgotten his role in Argentina's 2022 World Cup final victory over France.

To the delight of their fans, Monaco's opener came after the Argentinian parried Thilo Kehrer's header from a corner up into the air. Singo pounced to nod home from close range on eight minutes. Martinez showed his class with a sprawling dive to claw away Maghnes Aklouché's whipped effort shortly afterwards. Villa came within inches of levelling in first-half added time following excellent build-up play by Emiliano Buendia, but Radoslaw Majecki got down quickly to deny Ollie Watkins. At the start of the second period, Morgan Rogers flashed a strike narrowly wide, before Aklouché had a strike disallowed for offside.

Emery turned to Jhon Durán from the bench to give his side a spark, sending on the Colombian 11 minutes after the interval in place of winger Bailey. With Watkins and Durán on the pitch together, Villa boasted a striking duo with 22 goals between in all competitions this term. Rogers and Matty Cash combined to create Villa's next chance, the right-back dragging his effort across goal and wide on 69 minutes. — AFP

Juventus held to goalless draw at Brugge

BRUGES: Juventus had to settle for a 0-0 draw at Belgian champions Club Brugge in a lacklustre Champions League clash on Tuesday. Juve, who have now drawn more than half of their 30 games in all competitions this season, are 14th in the table on 12 points.

Brugge are 17th on 11, with places from nine to 24 booking a spot in the knockout phase playoffs. The Belgian side travel to Manchester City in their final league phase game on Jan. 29, when Juventus host Benfica. "All the teams that have played here have had difficulties, they defend very well," Juve coach Thiago Motta told Sky Sport.

"We could have done better, respecting the opponent and not taking away their credit because they have caused many difficulties. We have suffered very little but not created enough to win." The two sides started off cautiously and had only one attempt each in a dull first half, both off target.

The tempo increased slightly after the restart, when Brugge produced their best chance to break the deadlock through forward Ferran Jutgla, who nutmegged defender Pierre Kalulu before his low attempt flew just wide of the left post.

Motta introduced fresh legs in the 66th minute, replacing forwards Timothy Weah and Samuel Mbangula with Francisco Conceicao and Kenan Yildiz. But little changed in terms of overall play and, while Juventus had more possession, chances were few and far between.

Brugge goalkeeper Simon Mignolet stretched to deny midfielder Manuel Locatelli from distance late on, saving the only goal-bound effort in the match. "Difficult match, they prepared it very well. They were closed but they pressed well," Locatelli said. "We could have done more."

Juve had won three of four previous meetings between the sides, including the two most recent in the 2005-06 group stage. The 19-times Belgian champions Brugge are unbeaten in all competitions since a 3-1 loss at AC Milan in late October. — AFP

Pavon back to defend historic Farmers win

LA JOLLA: Matthieu Pavon knocked in an 8-foot birdie putt on the 72nd hole of the Farmers Insurance Open last January and made PGA Tour history for his native France. Pavon became the first Frenchman to win an official tour event and returns to San Diego this week to defend his title, with the tournament teeing off Wednesday at Torrey Pines Golf Course.

The Farmers Insurance Open utilizes both courses at Torrey Pines in the neighborhood of La Jolla. Every player in the field will play a round at both the North Course and the South Course; after the 36-hole cut, the famed South Course will be the setting for the weekend rounds.

The PGA Tour is also keeping the tournament as a Wednesday through Saturday affair to aim for some Saturday primetime fireworks for the final round — while avoiding a matchup against the AFC and NFC championship games on Sunday. Pavon, 32, shot a 13-under-par 275 here last year, beating Denmark's Nicolai Hojgaard by a single shot.

"No offense to easier golf course, but I'm not like a huge fan when a course gets between 20 and 30 under," Pavon said Tuesday. "I think it relates too much to the putter. Here it's really a ball-striking golf course and I like to see how intense and well-committed to the shots you have to be if you want to play great. I think this is why I kind of fell in love with Torrey the first time I played it."

Pavon had played mostly on the DP World Tour before earning a card in the States for the first time. After his maiden victory, he was in contention the very next week at the AT&T Peb-



LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA: Koa Ochi walks to the fourth tee box of the South Course during a Pro-Am round prior to the Farmers Insurance Open 2025 at Torrey Pines Golf Course in La Jolla, California. — AFP

ble Beach Pro-Am and finished third in a rain-shortened event. He added a fifth-place finish at the US Open.

"I think the second year is always kind of the confirmation year," Pavon said. "That was a great rookie one,

but now it's time to confirm, it's time to show up again and try to win tournaments. It's a pretty big year for me because it's also a Ryder Cup year. This is one of my goals I've been chasing since I'm a kid." — Reuters

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| Kaizen center | 25716707 |
| Rawda | 22517733 |
| Adaliya | 22517144 |
| Khalidiya | 24848075 |
| Kaifan | 24849807 |
| Shamiya | 24848913 |
| Shuwaikh | 24814507 |
| Abdullah Salem | 22549134 |
| Nuzha | 22526804 |
| Industrial Shuwaikh | 24814764 |
| Qadsia | 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, Bongisetty Narasimhulu (old name), holder of Indian Passport No. P1094505 having permanent address: R/o Battavandlapalli, Nuthana Kalva (village) K.V Palli (Mandal), Chittoor dist. AP, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that my name changed as **Bommisetty Narasimhulu** (new name).
#6625 (23/01/2025)

I, Shaik Masood Ameen, father of Mohammed Masood (Minor), aged 8 years, residing at 6/158 Burhanuddin Street, Mochampet, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh, have changed my son's name from Mohammed Masood to (given name) Mohammed Masood and (surname) Shaik. He holds Passport No. T8765258, DOB 17/05/2016.
#6626 (23/01/2025)

I, Shaik Masood Ameen, father of Abdulaziz (Minor), aged 6 years, residing at 6/158 Burhanuddin Street, Mochampet, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh, have changed my son's name from Abdulaziz to (given name) Abdulaziz and (surname) Shaik. He holds Passport No. T8765704, DOB 30/10/2018.
#6626 (23/01/2025)

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

Liverpool clinch Champions League last-16 berth, Barcelona win epic

Atalanta guarantee at least a play-off place after crushing Sturm Graz



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Dutch defender #04 Virgil van Dijk (L), Lille's Brazilian defender #04 Alexandro (C) and Liverpool's English defender #78 Jarell Quansah (rear C) fight for the ball during the UEFA Champions League football match between Liverpool and Lille LOSC at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England. — AFP

PARIS: Liverpool beat Lille 2-1 on Tuesday to maintain their perfect record in this season's Champions League and clinch qualification for the last 16, while Barcelona produced a stunning comeback to beat Benfica 5-4 in a classic to secure their own place.

The Anfield side are the only team with a maximum 21 points from seven matches in this new, expanded Champions League and they now know they will skip next month's play-offs and head straight to the last 16 in March.

Mohamed Salah ran clear to give Liverpool the lead at home to a Lille team who have also impressed this season, and the visitors appeared in trouble when they had Aissa Mandi sent off just before the hour mark.

Jonathan David swept in an equalizer for Lille, but Harvey Elliott's shot took a wicked deflection on its way in to give Liverpool the points. "We're happy that we are top eight. That's the only thing that tells me something, because this league table doesn't tell you anything," said Slot when asked about being through to the last 16.

The biggest drama on the night, how-

ever, came in the rain in Lisbon, where Barcelona trailed 4-2 with 12 minutes of the 90 remaining, but somehow recovered to win 5-4. Greek striker Vangelis Pavlidis scored a hat-trick in the first half-hour for Benfica, including a penalty, while Robert Lewandowski netted from the spot for Barca, who were 3-1 down at the interval.

Raphinha pulled it back to 3-2 when a clearance by the goalkeeper ricocheted back off the Brazilian's head and in, but a Ronald Araujo own goal midway through the second half appeared to have secured the win for the Portuguese side.

However, another Lewandowski penalty on 78 minutes gave Barcelona renewed hope, and Eric Garcia headed in the equalizer on 86 minutes, before Raphinha ran away to settle an incredible game.

"The mentality of the team, they always believe in themselves and this was unbelievable to see," said Barcelona coach Hansi Flick. The Catalans are second with six wins out of seven, and will finish in the top eight to go straight to the last 16. Benfica, with 10 points, must still sweat to reach the play-off round.

Alvarez gives Atletico victory

Elsewhere, Atletico Madrid are third on 15 points and certain to at least be in the play-offs after a Julian Alvarez brace secured a 2-1 home victory over Bayer Leverkusen in a game both teams finished with 10 men.

Atletico had Pablo Barrios sent off midway through the first half, and Piero Hincapie then put Leverkusen ahead just before the break. Argentina star Alvarez levelled seven minutes into the second half, and Hincapie was sent off for the Germans before another Alvarez goal won it for the home side in the last minute as they climbed above Leverkusen.

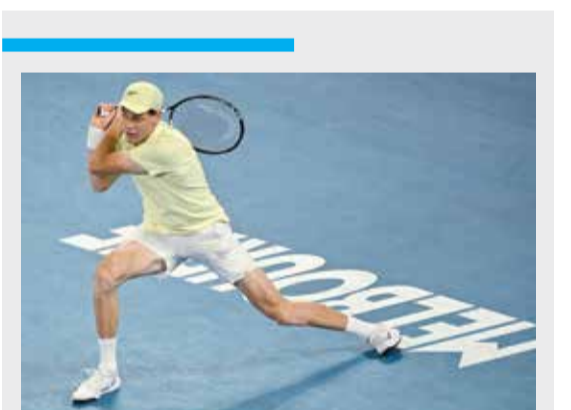
Last season's Europa League winners Atalanta are also guaranteed at least a play-off place after crushing Sturm Graz of Austria 5-0. Mateo Retegui, Mario Pasalic, Charles De Ketelaere, Ademola Lookman and Marco Brescianini all scored for the Italians.

Monaco got back to winning ways after some disappointing results had seen their campaign stall, as Wilfried Singo's early goal proved enough for them to beat Aston Villa 1-0. Both

teams are set to progress to the knockout phase and both could still finish in the top eight. Last season's runners-up Borussia Dortmund should also be fine despite a 2-1 defeat away to Bologna, as substitutes Thijs Dallinga and Samuel Iling-Junior scored a minute apart in the second half after Serhou Guirassy's early penalty had put the Germans in front.

Club Brugge held Juventus to a 0-0 draw in Belgium as that duo both look set to go through to the play-offs at least, while PSV Eindhoven are poised to advance following a 3-2 win at Red Star Belgrade. PSV led 3-0 at the break thanks to a Luuk de Jong double and a Ryan Flamingo strike, but the latter was sent off early in the second half and Red Star pulled goals back courtesy of Cherif Ndiaye and Nasser Djiga.

VfB Stuttgart maintained their hopes of reaching the play-offs with a 3-1 win away to Slovan Bratislava, who have lost every game. Jamie Leweling bagged a brace for Stuttgart and Fabian Rieder sealed their victory after Idjessi Metsoko had pulled one back. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Italy's Jannik Sinner hits a return against Australia's Alex De Minaur during their men's singles quarter-final match on day eleven of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on January 22, 2025. — AFP

Sinner races into semis as Swiatek closes on first Melbourne crown

MELBOURNE: Defending champion Jannik Sinner raced into the Australian Open semi-finals on Wednesday in imperious fashion after Iga Swiatek was equally ruthless to close on a first Melbourne crown.

Italian world number one Sinner swept aside an out-classed home hope Alex de Minaur 6-3, 6-2, 6-1 to silence Rod Laver Arena and set up a meeting with 21st seed Ben Shelton. The other semi-final is between 10-time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic and world number two Alexander Zverev, with both taking place on Friday.

Sinner had dizzy spells in the scorching heat of the afternoon during his four-set win against Holger Rune on Monday. But in much cooler evening conditions the 23-year-old was back to his brilliant best against eighth seed De Minaur, who has still never beaten Sinner in 10 matches.

"Today I felt like I was feeling everything," said Sinner. "Days like this and you break quite early in each set, it's a little bit easier." Sinner is bidding to defend a Grand Slam title for the first time after beating Daniil Medvedev in the final last year. He also won the US Open last year.

De Minaur admitted he had no answers on the night, saying: "He was bloody good tonight." The 22-year-old American Shelton booked his place in the semi-finals in Melbourne for the first time with a battling 6-4, 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (7/4) win over unseeded Italian Lorenzo Sonego.

Left-hander Shelton put in an all-action display to match his best performance at a major, having reached the US Open semi-finals in 2023. Shelton unleashed the joint-fastest serve of the tournament, a monster ace clocked at 232kph (144mph), and afterwards turned his fire on the post-match televised interviews that the winners do on court. — AFP

Triple-doubles for Jokic and James fuel lopsided NBA wins

LOS ANGELES: Nikola Jokic delivered his fourth straight triple-double on Tuesday, a league-leading 19th of the season, to propel the Denver Nuggets to a 144-109 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers. The Serbian star, who claimed a third NBA Most Valuable Player award last season, again made it look effortless, scoring 27 points with 13 rebounds and 10 assists. He then sat out all of the fourth quarter, his 13th triple-double of the season achieved through three quarters only.

"I feel I'm playing the best basketball of my life," Jokic told broadcaster TNT, although he admitted the Nuggets team he led to the title in 2023 has work to do. "We're not where we're supposed to be," he said. "We're trying to find the rhythm." He was encouraged by Tuesday's result against a 76ers team struggling with injuries, most notably to former MVP Joel Embiid.

Six Denver players scored in double figures. That included Julian Strawther's 23 points off the bench, and 19 points from Aaron Gordon. "Tonight we took care of business," Jokic said. The Los Angeles Lakers also won big as LeBron James's ninth triple-double of the season fueled a 111-88 victory over the woeful Washington Wizards.

James scored 21 points with 10 rebounds and 13 assists and Anthony Davis scored 29 points with 16 rebounds as the Lakers hammered the league's worst team. James, who turned 40 on December 30, became just the second player 40 or older to post a triple-double, after Karl Malone in 2003.



OS ANGELES: Anthony Davis #3 of the Los Angeles Lakers drives to the basket during the game against the Washington Wizards at Crypto.Com Arena in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Knicks hang on

The New York Knicks held off the Nets in Brooklyn, surrendering a 10-point fourth-quarter lead before pulling away late to win the cross-town clash 99-95. Karl-Anthony Towns scored 25 points and pulled down 16 rebounds. OG Anunoby added 20 points and Jalen Brunson struggled early but scored eight of his 17 points with less than three minutes to play to help the Knicks escape.

The Knicks led 75-85 with 10:10 left in the fourth quarter but the Nets—led by 23 points from D'Angelo Russell—had grabbed a 90-89 lead with 2:35 remaining. Brunson's pullup shot restored the Knicks' lead and he followed with a layup and a jumper before Anunoby threw down a dunk, Brunson finally capping the scoring with a pair of free throws. "We know how special he is," Towns said of Brunson. "He lives for those moments." — AFP