



Our journey to safety continues..
Visit us at the **NEW Volvo Showroom in Shuwaikh.**

volvocars.com

3 Zain announces its strategic partnership with Kuwait CyberChamps Competition



6 Five people wounded in Sweden school shooting



8 China hits back with tariffs on US firms as Trade tensions escalate



16 Chelsea hit back to ruin West Ham's boss revenge mission



New Minister of Defense takes constitutional oath

Cabinet declares 25, 26 and 27 holidays



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in attendance of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received Tuesday His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who presented the newly-appointed Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. The ceremony was attended by several state officials.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in attendance of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received Tuesday His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who presented the newly-appointed Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. The ceremony was attended by several state officials.

In another development, the Cabinet decided in its weekly meeting, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, on Tuesday to suspend work in all ministries, government agencies and public institutions on Tuesday and Wednesday, February 25 and 26, as official holidays on the occasion of the National Day and Liberation Day and Thursday, February 27, as a day of rest. Official work will resume on Sunday, March 2. As for agencies with a special nature of work, their holidays will be determined by the competent authorities, taking into account the public interest. — KUNA

Air pollution fuels lung cancer among non-smokers: Study

PARIS: Air pollution is fuelling a rise in the commonest form of lung cancer among non-smokers, hitting women and people in southeast Asia particularly hard, according to a study published on Tuesday. Lung cancer is the commonest form of the disease, with 2.5 million people diagnosed in 2022, said the study, published in the *Lancet Respiratory Medicine* journal on World Cancer Day. Most of them were men but there was a growing share of nearly a million cases among women.

One key subtype of lung cancer—adenocarcinoma—has become predominant among women in 185 countries, the authors wrote in the Chinese-funded study. "Air pollution can be considered an important factor that partly explains the emerging predominance of adenocarcinoma that accounts for 53-70 percent of cases of lung cancer among people who have never smoked worldwide," the study said.

They found it grew among both men and women from 2020 to 2022, with the highest level among women, where it accounted for around six in 10 cases. "As smoking prevalence continues to decline in many countries worldwide, the proportion of lung cancer in people who have never smoked has increased," the researchers added. "Lung cancer in people who have never smoked is estimated to be the fifth leading cause of cancer-related mortality worldwide, occurring almost exclusively as adenocarcinoma and most commonly in women and Asian populations."

The study presented statistical research based on data from monitors including the World Health Organization. The researchers said the highest levels of adenocarcinoma linked to air pollution were detected in east Asia, particularly China.

"Exposure to household burning of solid fuels for heating and cooking could be a causal factor of lung cancer" among Chinese women non-smokers, they added. — AFP

Kuwait leads regional efforts in cancer treatment, awareness

KUWAIT: As the world marks World Cancer Day on Monday, Kuwait reaffirms its commitment to raising awareness, supporting cancer patients and providing the latest medical treatments to combat the disease. Every year (on February 4), countries intensify their efforts to show solidarity with cancer patients and improve access to treatment, recalling the World

'We will not leave,' say Gazans; Trump, Netanyahu meet

GAZA: Like most Palestinians, Hatem Azzam, a resident of the southern Gaza city of Rafah, was incensed by US President Donald Trump's remarks suggesting Gazans should relocate to Egypt or Jordan. "Trump thinks Gaza is a pile of garbage—absolutely not," the 34-year-old said, attacking Trump's choice of words when he told reporters last week of his plan to "clean out the whole thing". Calling him

Extreme heat will reach dangerous levels: Scientists

PARIS: Extreme heat will reach dangerous levels—even for younger people—across an area equivalent to the size of the United States if Earth's global warming hits two degrees Celsius, scientists warned on Tuesday. Climate change is driving an increasing number of deadly heatwaves across the world, exposing a growing number of people to conditions that test the limits of human endurance. Last year, more than 1,300 people died at the hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia where temperatures hit 51.8C (125 degrees Fahrenheit).

For this study, published in the journal *Nature Reviews Earth and Environment*, researchers looked at

Summit Against Cancer, held in Paris on February 4, 2000, which led to the adoption of the Paris Charter.

This charter established World Cancer Day to promote research, prevention and treatment efforts globally. Since then, the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), the largest global organization dedicated to cancer prevention, has been coordinating international efforts to mark this day. Kuwait remains dedicated to enhancing awareness and delivering high-quality healthcare services to combat cancer and support those affected.

In line with this commitment, Kuwait established the Kuwait Cancer Control Center (KCCC) in 1968, a leading facility that provides specialized care to over 2,000

"delusional", Azzam said that Trump "wants to force Egypt and Jordan to take in migrants, as if they were his personal farm".

Both Egypt and Jordan have flatly rejected Trump's idea, as have Gazans and other neighboring countries. Azzam's outrage comes as Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met in Washington on Tuesday and discussed plans for the Palestinian territory ravaged by more than 15 months of war. "Trump and Netanyahu must understand the reality of the Palestinian people and the people of Gaza. This is a people deeply rooted in their land—we will not leave," Azzam told AFP.

Ihab Ahmed, another Rafah resident, deplored that Trump and Netanyahu "still don't understand

global warming and the effects of searing heat on the human body. They found a significant increase in the area of the world potentially exposed to unsafe temperatures, with people in North Africa and South Asia most at risk. They considered both dangerous and unsurvivable heat levels—where the body's core temperature increases to 42C within six hours.

The study concluded that between 1994 and 2023, heat and humidity reached unsafe levels for people aged under 60 in areas equivalent to about two percent of global land area. For more vulnerable older people, that rose to about 20 percent of land area. Lead author Tom Matthews said the research highlights the "potentially deadly consequences" of the Earth's average temperature rising 2C above pre-industrial levels. The Paris climate agreement, an internationally binding treaty, aims to limit warming to "well below" 2C and preferably to 1.5C. Last year was the first to exceed 1.5C on average.

With warming of 2C, researchers found the amount

of landmass that would become unsafe for younger adults would triple, to about six percent. Over 60s would be at risk in about a third of the planet's landmass. Unsurvivable thresholds, so far only exceeded briefly for over 60s in the hottest regions on the planet, could also affect younger people in hot regions with very high levels of global warming.

"In such conditions, prolonged outdoor exposure—even for those in the shade, subject to a strong breeze and well hydrated—would be expected to cause lethal heatstroke," said Matthews, Senior Lecturer in Environmental Geography at King's College London. Heat stress occurs when the body's natural cooling systems are overwhelmed, causing symptoms ranging from dizziness and headaches to organ failure and death. Even lower temperatures can be lethal when combined with humidity, as sweat cannot evaporate off the skin. Europe has so far recorded the highest number of deaths from heatwaves, with more than 70,000 deaths in 2003, 60,000 in 2022 and more than 47,000 in 2023. — AFP



GAZA: A Palestinian man sits in front of a destroyed building in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip on February 4, 2025. — AFP



Local

Over 100K likely affected by Kuwait's plan to terminate expats in govt sector

23% of public sector employees are expatriates: PACI

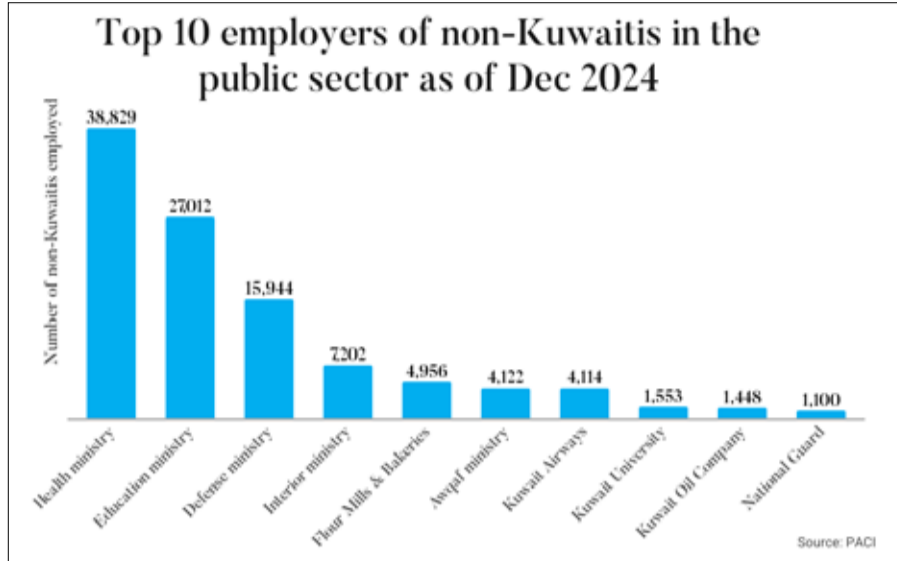
By Passant Hisham and Nebal Snan

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing Kuwaitization efforts, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) announced that the contracts of expatriates in the public sector will not be renewed after March 31, 2025. The policy is intended to increase local employment and reduce the country's dependence on foreign labor. While exceptions will be made for children of Kuwaiti women and expatriates in roles where qualified Kuwaitis are not available, this transition is set to impact many government ministries and institutions.

According to statistics from the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), as of the end of December 2024, 120,502 non-Kuwaitis work in the government sector, in comparison to 401,215 Kuwaitis. This means that 23 percent of public sector employees are expatriates.

A few ministries and institutions in Kuwait employ the bulk of these expatriates, and these are the sectors that will likely be most affected by the new rule. The Ministry of Health currently employs the highest number of expatriates at 38,829 workers. The Ministry of Education follows closely with 27,012 expatriates, and the Ministry of Defense with 15,944 non-Kuwaitis. Two other ministries, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Awqaf & Islamic Affairs, employ nearly 11,500 non-Kuwaitis.

Together, the five ministries directly employ 77.3 percent of non-Kuwaitis working in the public sector. The remaining work in other major government institutions. Kuwait Airways, Kuwait University, Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), and Kuwait National Guard employ nearly seven percent of the expat workforce in the public sector. For instance, 4,114 non-Kuwaitis work at Kuwait Airways, while 1,553 work at Kuwait University. KOC and the National Guard employ 1,448 and 1,100 non-Kuwaitis, respectively.



Kuwaitization rates

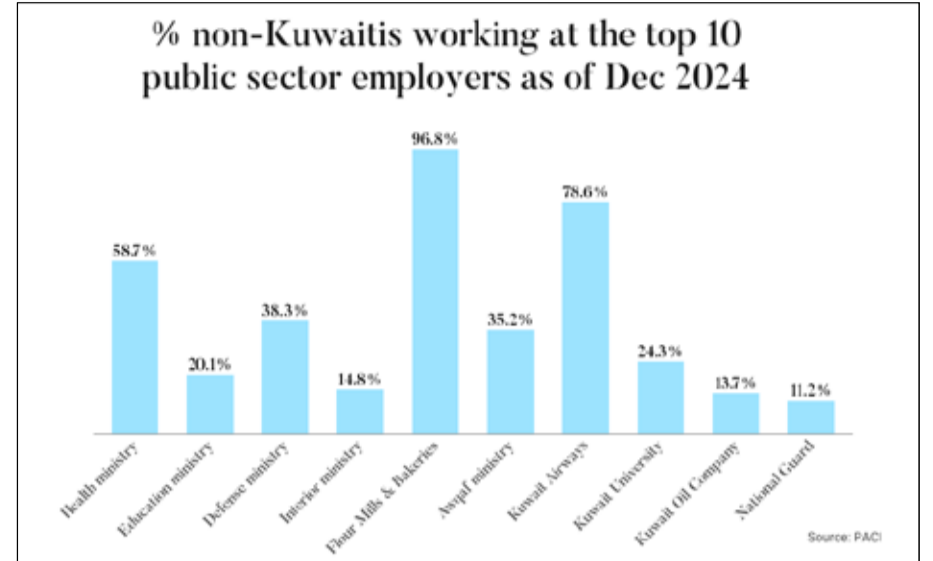
Kuwaitization, which refers to the government's policy of prioritizing Kuwaiti citizens for job opportunities, has been a top government priority for nearly a decade. In the public sector, the Kuwaitization policy aims to ensure that the workforce consists entirely of Kuwaiti citizens. This includes government departments and state-run organizations, where efforts are made to replace expatriates with qualified Kuwaitis in all roles. There are several government entities which achieved high rates of Kuwaitization, almost exclusively hiring Kuwaitis.

The Public Authority for Industry, for example, only employs 14 expats, making up 1.6 percent of its total workforce. Out of more than 7,500 employees at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, only 60 are expats, which puts them at 0.8 percent of the directorate's employees.

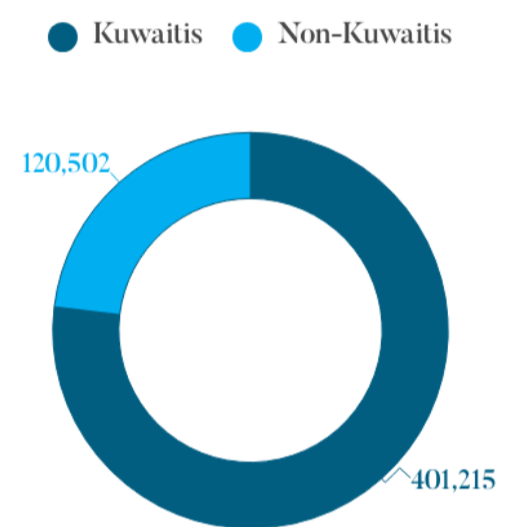
On the other hand, some entities rely overwhelmingly on foreign labor. For instance, Kuwait Flour Mills & Bakeries Company employees are 96.7 percent expatriates. Similarly, 78.6 percent of Kuwait Airways employees are not Kuwaitis.

Non-Kuwaitis also have strong representation in critical sectors, such as education, research, and healthcare. At the Ministry of Health, 58.7 percent of employees are expatriates. At Kuwait University and the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, expatriates make up 24 and 47 percent of the workforce, respectively.

In a previous interview with Kuwait Times, Saqr Al-Ghelani, a Kuwaiti HR professional, described the Kuwaitization initiative as a "noble endeavor" but noted several challenges in its current implementation. He explained that certain jobs, especially physically demanding roles, remain unfilled by Kuwaitis due to low pay and the availability of better educational opportunities in other fields. Additionally, he argued that highly skilled positions require a diverse, multicultural work experience, which many Kuwaitis lack, as they often restrict their professional experience to Kuwait. The expert recommended a long-term, gradual approach to Kuwaitization, spanning five to 10 years, and emphasized the importance of training programs for Kuwaitis before expatriates leave.



How many non-Kuwaitis are directly employed in the public sector?



Source: PACI

In my view

Exploring fear through art: A review of Hajah Takhawif



By Dr Nermin Alhouti

During my time in the land of Mahrousa (Egypt), I was eager to attend the play Hajah Takhawif, having read numerous reviews from intellectuals and critics in the theater world. Their praise heightened my anticipation to experience the show firsthand. I was fortunate enough to receive a kind invitation from my colleague and brother, the director of the play, "Maestro" Khaled Galal, to attend. I went to enjoy over two hours of the play Hajah Takhawif, and it did not disappoint.

Hajah Takhawif is a production with over fifty actors, each performing their roles with excellence. Their dedication and talent truly impressed me, and I find myself tipping my hat to them for their outstanding performances. The show weaves together a variety of life stories, each "sketch" presenting a dramatic plot that explores significant human suffering. These narratives reflect many philosophical ideas, prompting a series of questions in the viewer's mind. Why do we fear? Is fear rooted in what we perceive, or is it a reflection of the darker impulses that lie within us? These questions linger as the play takes the audience through an emotional "cleansing" process.

The production was visually and intellectually illuminating, brimming with excellent theatrical elements. However, one particular aspect of the show stood out to me: the costumes, designed by Mohamed Nadim and Heba Kamel. What caught my attention was the simplicity and theatrical significance of the costumes. Few costume designers manage to crystallize the idea of a play so effectively, but Nadim and Kamel succeeded. Their thoughtful choice of fabrics, colors, and the ease of costume changes – particularly given the multiple stories within the show – were vital in conveying the play's thematic depth. Chapeau to them.

In conclusion, the need to confront fear is, in itself, a purifying experience. It allows the viewer to gain the courage to face their mistakes and, ultimately, to remove the word "fear" from their personal lexicon. Through every graduation of the Technical Creativity Center, new stars and talents are born in every aspect of theater. Under the guidance of Maestro Khaled Galal, this center remains a nucleus of theater and the arts, nurturing creativity for over twenty years.

Kuwait Flour Mills expands with new boutique in Dubai

DUBAI: The CEO of Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company, Mutlaq Al-Zayed, announced on Tuesday, that the company plans to open a new branch in Dubai in the form of a boutique as part of its ambitious expansion plan locally, regionally and across the Gulf.

Al-Zayed emphasized in a statement to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), during the company's participation in the ongoing Kuwaiti-Emirati Week in Dubai, that the company is committed to ensuring that its boutique branch maintains the highest level of quality, offering fresh products similar to those provided in Kuwait.

He noted that the company currently operates six branches in Saudi Arabia and has been present in the UAE market "commercially" for 15 years. Al-Zayed pointed out that the relationship between Kuwait and its Gulf neighbors should continuously evolve to enhance mutual interests and regional integration.

Regarding the company's participation in the Gulf Food Exhibition (Gulfood) in Dubai on February 17, he confirmed that the company is eager to be part of the world's third-largest exhibition of its kind, alongside 6,000 other companies. He also mentioned that the company's participation will be in one of the most important halls at the exhibition, showcasing both its existing and new products.

Kuwait Airways expands flights to London to 16 a week

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways announced an increase in the number of weekly flights between Kuwait and London to 16, offering more flexibility and convenience for travelers between the two countries, in collaboration with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation.

Captain Abdulmohsen Salem Alfagaan, Chairman of Kuwait Airways, stated in a press release on Tuesday that the company is committed to providing a comprehensive travel experience for its customers, continuously enhancing its services, and offering innovative solutions based on customer needs.

Alfagaan praised the continuous support from the political leadership, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, and all relevant authorities, as well as the UK Embassy in Kuwait for their effective cooperation and contributions to the increase in flights.

Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Al-Hamoud Al-Sabah, Director General of the directorate, said the increase in flights to and from London is of paramount importance due to the growing demand from travelers. Sheikh Humoud Al-Sabah explained that this increase came through coordination and cooperation with the civil aviation authorities at London Heathrow Airport, which facilitated the necessary procedures. He emphasized the directorate's commitment to providing full support to the national carrier and opening new avenues for cooperation between Kuwait and other countries in the global aviation sector.



CEO of Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company Mutlaq Al-Zayed.

On the company's local expansion plans, Al-Zayed announced the intention to open a boutique in the Mubarakiya area this month, which will offer fresh products and coffee.

He explained that the opening aims to keep pace with developments in marketing, production, and target demographics, particularly the youth.

Al-Zayed also mentioned a forthcoming collaboration with both public and private sector entities, including Kuwait Airways, to organize an event at the Kuwait International Fairgrounds in Mishref to highlight the importance of food security in supporting the national economy.

Regarding the Kuwaiti-Emirati Week, Al-Zayed emphasized its significance as an important platform for exchanging ideas, sharing experiences, and presenting ongoing projects between the two countries, with the aim of developing or launching new initiatives that will benefit their shared interests within the Gulf framework. — KUNA

FACT BOX

- **New branch in Dubai:** Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company plans to open a boutique branch in Dubai as part of its expansion in the Gulf and regionally. The Dubai branch will maintain high-quality standards and offer fresh products similar to those in Kuwait.
- **Gulfood Exhibition participation:** The company will participate in the Gulfood exhibition in Dubai on February 17, showcasing existing and new products at one of the event's most prominent halls.
- **Local expansion plans:** A boutique offering fresh products and coffee will open in Mubarakiya this month, targeting the youth demographic.
- **Collaboration for food security:** The company plans to collaborate with both public and private sectors, including Kuwait Airways, to organize an event at the Kuwait International Fairgrounds focused on food security and supporting the national economy.



KUWAIT: Dr Dina Musaad Al-Mailam (center) poses for a photo with officials after beginning her duties as the Director of Kuwait University at Sabah Al-Salem University City.

Dr Dina Al-Mailam takes helm at Kuwait University

KUWAIT: Dr Dina Musaad Al-Mailam officially began her duties as the Director of Kuwait University at Sabah Al-Salem University City. Dr Al-Mailam was appointed to the position for a period of four years on Sunday, following an Amiri decree. She was welcomed by a group of university affiliates, including academic staff and administrators. Dr Al-Mailam's appointment is significant as several directors over the past few years held the position on interim basis.

Dr Al-Mailam expressed her gratitude for the

trust bestowed upon her by the political leadership, particularly His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. She looks forward to using her tenure as a new starting point for achieving the strategic goals of Kuwait University and further strengthening its status as a leading academic institution in Kuwait, under the guidance of the wise leadership.

She stressed the importance of fostering a spirit of collaboration and teamwork among all members of the university community. Her aim is to create a distinguished educational environment that encourages innovation and addresses the needs of both students and society, in alignment with Kuwait's development plan. Dr Al-Mailam emphasized her commitment to improving communication between the administration and students, with their opinions and suggestions being a central focus of her administration's efforts.

Oman's Sultan receives Kuwait's First Deputy PM

Sheikh Fahad makes stop in Oman as part of regional tour

MUSCAT: Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq received Tuesday Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, on the occasion of his visit to the Sultanate. In a statement, the Interior ministry said that Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef conveyed during the meeting the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, to Sultan Haitham and for the brotherly Omani people further progress and prosperity. During the meeting, both sides touched on the solid fraternal relations between Kuwait and Oman, as well as ways to enhance them in various fields, especially in the military and security aspects, in a way that serves the interests of the two countries. The meeting was attended by the Ambassador of Kuwait to the Sultanate Dr Mohammad Nasser Al-Hajri.

Regional tour

Sheikh Fahad visited Oman as part of a regional tour that included stops in Egypt, where he met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, and Jordan where he met with Jordan's King Abdullah II. While in Amman, Sheikh Fahad also met with the Ambassador of Kuwait to Jordan Hamed Al-Murri, and members of the Kuwaiti Embassy. Sheikh Fahad praised the efforts of the Kuwaiti diplomatic mission in strengthening the relations between the two brotherly countries, according to a statement by Kuwait's defense ministry. The First Deputy Prime Minister also met with Kuwaiti officers studying at Jordanian military colleges, commending their dedication and hard work in acquiring military and academic knowledge that contributes to preparing them to serve their country.



MUSCAT: Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq receives Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos

Exchange of expertise

Separately, a delegation from the Ali Al-Sabah Military College, the Military Education Authority, and the Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences in Kuwait visited the Women's Police Leadership at the Jordanian Public Security Directorate to enhance and exchange expertise in education and security training for female personnel. This visit came as part of Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef's official visit to Jordan.

The Kuwaiti delegation was received by the Assistant Director of Public Security, Brigadier General Dr Ali Al-Zaabi, who provided them with a detailed explanation of the training programs and curricula in use. The delegation also toured the facilities to examine the equipment used in training female police officers, as well as learning about the registration and admission system and the educational and training processes for women in the police force.

Colonel Fawaz Al-Meslem, Commander of the Ali Al-Sabah Military College, expressed his gratitude to the Assistant Director of Public Security and the Women's Police Leadership for their warm reception and for providing the opportunity to learn about the Jordanian experience in preparing and training female security personnel. He commended the advanced level that the women's police force in Jordan has achieved. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Waleed Al-Khashti, Ali Al-Jassem, Dr Muna Al-Salem and Saleh Bourizq pose for a photo.

Zain Strategic partner of Kuwait CyberChamps competition

KUWAIT: Zain has announced its strategic partnership with the Kuwait CyberChamps Competition, organized by IDRAC Training and Consultancy in collaboration with the Public Education Sector of the Ministry of Education, represented by the General Supervisory of Computing, and with the support of the National Cybersecurity Center. The competition aims to enhance the technological skills of middle and high school students, empowering them to tackle the challenges of the digital future.

The partnership was announced at Zain's headquarters in Shuwaikh, attended by Waleed Al-Khashti, Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer at Zain Kuwait; Ali Al-Jassem, Board Member of IDRAC Training and Consultancy; Dr Muna

Al-Salem, Director of the Information Systems Department at the Ministry of Education; and Saleh Bourizq, Director of Training at the National Cybersecurity Center.

This strategic partnership falls under Zain's Innovation Nation initiative, which encompasses all the company's efforts dedicated to fostering creativity, enhancing technical and digital skills, and empowering entrepreneurship within the community. It particularly focuses on STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), which have become essential for modern job markets, aiming to develop a generation of skilled youth capable of leading Kuwait's digital future with confidence.

The competition is designed to foster a sustainable cybersecurity culture, raising awareness among passionate middle and high school students about the risks of fraud and cybercrime. It also aims to develop their skills across a wide range of technical disciplines, integrating education, competition, and innovation to create a launchpad for Kuwait's future cybersecurity experts.

Through a series of interactive activities, educational events, and training camps, participating students will be equipped with the tools and opportunities needed to nurture their digital talents. The competition also provides them with the chance to engage with industry experts from various fields, guiding them toward potential careers in cybersecurity. The competition will culminate in a hackathon and team pitches, followed by an awards ceremony to honor the winners.

Zain's numerous initiatives are centered on youth and education, aligning with the rapid shift of both the economy and education sector towards digital fields. The company has made the development of digital and programming skills among youth a top priority.

By supporting a wide range of programs and initiatives, Zain is committed to equipping the next generation of local talents with the skills demanded by modern job markets, such as programming, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and digital transformation applications, among others.

Kuwait's Cabinet welcomes new defense minister's appointment



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting on Tuesday. — KUNA

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet welcomed the Amiri decree amending the appointment of Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah as First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, and appointing Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as Minister of Defense. During its weekly meeting Tuesday chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the Cabinet wished the newly-sworn minister the best in performing his duties under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. The aforementioned statement was made by Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, and acting interior minister Shareeda Al-Maousherji after the meeting at Bayan Palace.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs Noura Al-Fassam gave a presentation on the financial balance needed to implement structural reforms in a bid to sustain stability of the Kuwaiti economy. The Cabinet tasked Al-Fassam to provide a follow-up report every three months on the matter. The Cabinet declared February 25, 26 and 27 a public holiday on the occasion of the National and Liberation Days. Regular working schedule is to resume on Sunday March 2. The public holiday is for government bodies, authorities, and institutions, but entities with singular working hours are to decide their own schedules. — KUNA

Kuwait-UAE Week opens new horizons for partnership

DUBAI: In a scene reflecting the deep historical ties and strong cooperation between Kuwait and the UAE, the presence of Kuwaiti government entities at the exhibition accompanying the events of the Kuwait-UAE Week in Dubai highlighted an important window for bilateral cooperation, opening new horizons for future partnership.

The Kuwait-UAE Week was officially launched on Monday, Feb 3, and will continue until next Tuesday. It features the participation of more than 25 entities representing leading companies and small and medium enterprises. It also showcases cultural and traditional exhibitions, including arts and crafts that reflect the rich cultural heritage of both countries.

Speaking at the opening of the Kuwait-UAE Week on Monday, Kuwaiti Commerce and Industry Undersecretary Ziad Al-Najem highlighted that the UAE is one of Kuwait's largest global trading partners and the biggest among Arab countries, with trade exchanges between the two nations witnessing significant growth in recent years.

Al-Najem added that the Kuwaiti private sector has sought to capitalize on emerging opportunities in the UAE market, particularly in real estate, services, financial investments, and tourism. He also highlighted the role of UAE investments in support-



DUBAI: Visitors browse the exhibition accompanying the events of the Kuwait-UAE Week in Dubai. — KUNA

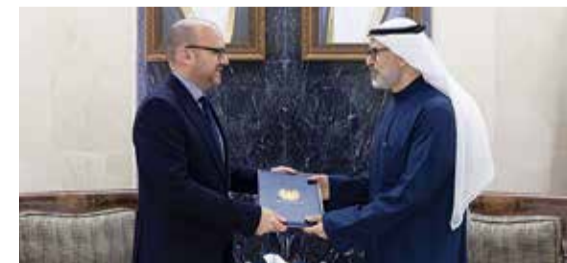
ing economic growth in Kuwait, particularly in maritime and air transport sectors.

Over the past decade, trade between the two countries has grown significantly, with total trade reaching approximately KD 26.7 billion between 2013 and 2022. In 2023, non-oil trade between the two nations reached approximately KD 3.8 billion, compared to KD 3.7 billion in 2022.

Al-Najem expressed confidence that the future

of economic relations between Kuwait and the UAE holds promising prospects that will ensure prosperity and growth for both nations within the Gulf region.

The exhibition has so far seen a notable presence of various Kuwaiti government entities, which not only showcased their role in enhancing the national economy and their potential in development but also emphasized their commitment to being active partners in a brighter future for Kuwaiti-UAE cooperation. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Sabah (right) receives the letter from French Ambassador to Kuwait Olivier Gauvin. — KUNA

French Ambassador delivers letter from Macron to Amir

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a letter from French President Emmanuel Macron regarding bilateral relations and means to strengthen them. It also included an invitation to His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince to visit France, Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Sabah, received the letter on Tuesday, during his reception of French Ambassador to Kuwait Olivier Gauvin. — KUNA

Kuwait Times
Established 1961THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYANEditor-in-Chief
DR. M. ZIAD AL-ALYANEDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24833199 Extn. 359
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 361
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.com

Kuwait's 30th Qurain Cultural Festival spotlights national heritage

Festival to continue until Feb 12 featuring various cultural, musical and literary events



Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi

KUWAIT: The Qurain Cultural Festival officially opened its 30th edition on Monday night with a musical performance titled "From Kuwait". The representative of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Minister of Information and Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and Chairman of the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi inaugurated the highly renowned festival at the Drama Theater at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center, with a speech. He said the Qurain Festival is a rich cultural event and a landmark on the map of Arab culture. It reflects Kuwait's deep commitment to supporting the arts and literature while enhancing its cultural identity.

He emphasized that since its independence, Kuwait has been pioneering in establishing a comprehensive cultural vision, supporting cultural initiatives, and launching leading institutions and creative projects, which have strengthened its position both regionally and internationally. This role has manifested in distinguished publications, such as Al-Arabi, and in Kuwaiti journalism, which continues to serve as a platform for thought and creativity.

He also highlighted that this year's Qurain Festival coincides with national celebrations and the commencement of activities for Kuwait, Capital of Arab Culture and Media 2025. This alignment underlines Kuwait's leadership in supporting Arab culture and developing its pathways, stemming from its firm belief that culture and the arts are the foundational pillars for building and advancing society.

Minister Al-Mutairi reaffirmed the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters' commitment to supporting



A performer performs the tanbura at the Qurain Cultural Festival opening night. The dance is of African origins and became part of Kuwaiti heritage through migrants more than 150 years ago.

thought, creativity, and cultural exchange between nations through numerous activities such as art exhibitions, intellectual seminars, theatrical and musical performances, and heritage activities that shed light on Kuwait's rich cultural history and national identity.

He further noted, "Through this festival, we are working to implement the strategy of the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters to enhance partnerships and collaboration between government institutions, civil society, and the private sector to achieve sustainable cultural development."

Minister Al-Mutairi pointed out that since its independence, Kuwait has followed a cultural policy based on openness and communication with other cultures, a policy underpinned by a strategic vision that aims to establish culture as a bridge



Senior officials watch a performance at the opening of the Qurain Cultural Festival on Feb 3, 2025.

for dialogue and mutual understanding.

He added: "Today, we are required to continue working on protecting our national heritage, strengthening our cultural identity, and passing this legacy to future generations with sincerity and responsibility, by adopting modern policies that benefit from advanced technologies to enhance cultural production."

The Minister expressed his sincere thanks and deep gratitude to everyone who contributed to organizing this important event, praying for divine blessings and success in all efforts aimed at serving the nation under the wise leadership. He wished the Qurain Cultural Festival continued success and excellence.

The opening ceremony, hosted by media personality Hashim Asad, included a musical performance titled "From Kuwait", which combined traditional Kuwaiti music

with contemporary Arab art, conducted by Kuwaiti maestro Dr Ayoub Khoder, accompanied by 50 musicians from Kuwait and the Arab world. The performance featured Kuwaiti artists Jassim Bin Thani, Abdulaziz Al-Misbah, and Abdullah Mubarak.

The ceremony also included a mini opera, a patriotic song by the esteemed artist Sanaa Al-Kharraz, with a Dazza rhythm, accompanied by a group of young girls performing a traditional dance. Additionally, the festival featured a Tanbura performance, and a set of songs by the beloved artist Abdullah Al-Ruwaisid, performed by a choir.

The festival will continue until February 12 and will feature various cultural, musical, and literary events as well as intellectual seminars. The festival will also honor Dr Al-Ghathami, a Saudi personality, as this year's honored guest.— KUNA



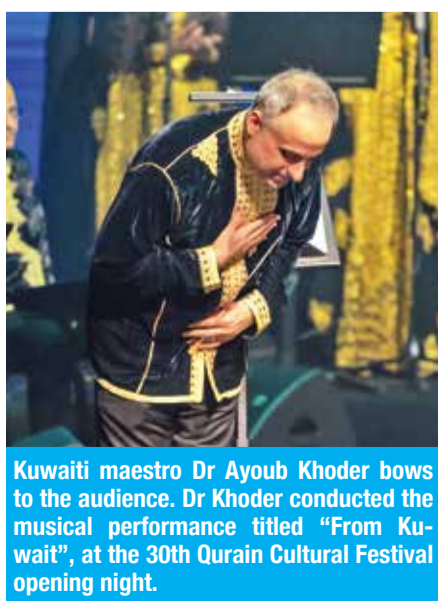
Kuwaiti musician Abdulaziz Al-Misbah performs at the opening of the Qurain Cultural Festival.



A group of girls perform a traditional Kuwaiti dance to the rhythm of a patriotic song by the esteemed artist Sanaa Al-Kharraz, with a Dazza rhythm at the Qurain Festival. —KUNA photos



Kuwaiti musician Abdullah Mubarak performs at the festival.



Kuwaiti maestro Dr Ayoub Khoder bows to the audience. Dr Khoder conducted the musical performance titled "From Kuwait", at the 30th Qurain Cultural Festival opening night.



Performers showcase Kuwait's cultural heritage during the opening of the Qurain Cultural Festival.



Thousands leave as fresh tremors shake Greece's Santorini

Silencing science: How Trump is reshaping US public health

Page 6

Page 6

Essential vocabulary to understand emergence of artificial intelligence

AGI, the holy grail of the whole AI field

PARIS: With global leaders set to attend a summit on artificial intelligence (AI) in Paris on February 10-11, here are some of the key concepts in the field:

Artificial intelligence

Asked what artificial intelligence is, the AI-powered ChatGPT system responds that the term "refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think, learn and make decisions". AI's fundamental characteristic is ingesting vast quantities of data that are then processed using methods from statistical mechanics. Its capabilities can range across fields including computing, maths, linguistics, psychology, neuroscience or philosophy. At present, the technology is used in applications ranging from investigating tumors to facial recognition, chatbots, translation of human languages, forecasting breakdowns in machine tools and self-driving cars.

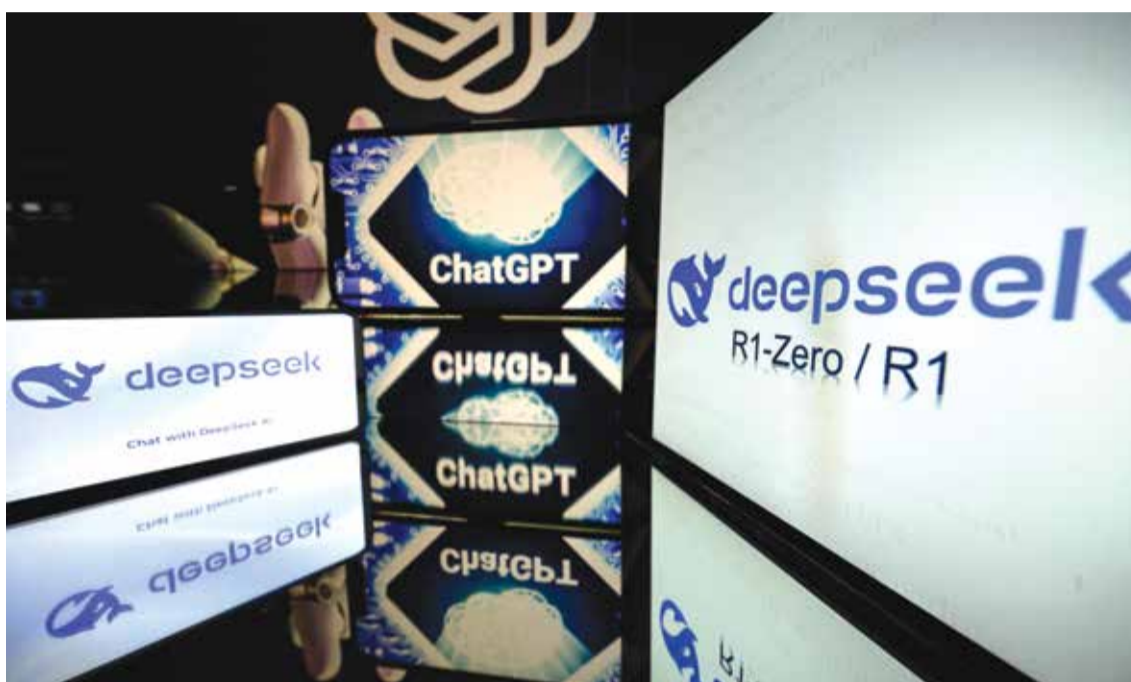
Algorithm

At the heart of all computer operations, an algorithm is a series of steps or instructions followed by a computer program to achieve a given result. Algorithms can specify rules for an AI's behavior, helping it to achieve its developers' objectives. Unlike a simple computer program, AI algorithms allow the system to learn for itself.

Machine Learning

Machine learning is one approach that researchers have used in their quest to produce artificial intelligence. It allows computers to learn from data without being explicitly programmed on how to respond. In recent years, the field of neural networks - inspired by the functioning of the human brain - has proven particularly fruitful. In a neural network, connections between some nodes are strengthened and others weakened as the system learns.

Learning can be "supervised", in which the system learns to classify new data based on a model - for instance, to identify spam in an email or other



TOULOUSE: This photograph shows screens displaying the logo of DeepSeek, a Chinese artificial intelligence company which develops open-source large language models, and the logo of OpenAI's artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT in Toulouse. — AFP

messaging applications. "Unsupervised" learning allows the system to independently discover patterns or categories in the available data that might not have been immediately apparent. An example application would be allowing an online store to identify buying trends in sales data. "Reinforcement" learning adds a process of repeated trial-and-error in which the system is penalized or rewarded based on its outcomes, allowing it to learn and improve. One example might be a self-driving vehicle whose objective is to reach its destination as fast as possible - but in safety. That would lead it to learn to stop at red lights, even if that costs it time.

Deep learning

A sub-field of AI, deep learning owes its name to its use of multiple layers of neural networks. Raw data is analyzed by each layer in turn at growing levels of abstraction. Deep learning was conceived by 2024 physics Nobel winner Geoffrey Hinton, who was awarded the prize alongside 1980s neural-network pioneer John Hopfield. "The more layers you have, the more complex behavior can become, and the more complex the behavior can be, the easier it is to learn a desired behavior efficiently," said Francis Bach, head of France's SIERRA statistical learning laboratory. Discoveries

about deep learning have since the 2010s allowed for a leap forward in computers' processing power and an abundance of data to train AI models. The technique may help unlock major new scientific advances. Also in 2024, the chemistry Nobel was awarded to researchers using deep learning to create and predict protein structures.

Language models

Large language models are the most visible example of so-called generative AI, powering tools like OpenAI's ChatGPT or Google's Gemini. Such systems are capable of writing a dissertation, answering legal questions or producing a cake recipe based on their statistical models. But the technology is far from infallible, suffering from "hallucinations". Chatbots or conversational assistants can also be found in many everyday applications, such as answering queries from visitors to a company's website. On major streaming platforms, recommendation engines will suggest content like films or music to users based on how their tastes overlap with other subscribers. Elsewhere in daily life, AI helps power navigation software or tools to help with spelling, grammar and style in text.

Artificial general intelligence

Artificial general intelligence (AGI) is the holy grail of the whole AI field, denoting an as-yet unrealized dream of a machine capable of reproducing all human cognitive abilities. Its promoters, including OpenAI chief Sam Altman and his rivals at Anthropic, see such a system as within reach - using oceans of data and gargantuan processing power to train ever more powerful LLMs. Sceptics insist that LLM technology has important limits, including on its ability to reason. "LLMs do not work like human beings", as flesh-and-blood intelligences are "sense-making machines" with fundamentally different abilities to today's computer systems, Maxime Amblard, computing professor at France's University of Lorraine, told AFP last year. — AFP

Egyptian political figures call for activist's release

CAIRO: A group of Egyptian politicians, activists, lawyers and journalists called for the release of British-Egyptian activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, warning that his mother is in a critical health condition after more than four months on hunger strike. The renowned activist was due to complete his prison sentence last September, but his family has charged that the Egyptian authorities began counting his prison time from the day of his sentencing rather than his arrest, in contravention of the law.

According to a readout provided to AFP by the family on Tuesday, the figures urged Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to take an "urgent humanitarian decision" to free Abdel Fattah. They cited the deteriorating health condition of his mother, prominent academic Laila Soueif who has refused food for 128 days, vowing not to eat until her son is freed.

The statement, read out by human rights lawyer Khaled Ali at the family's home in Cairo on Monday, was signed by several politicians, including former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahi, head of the Al-Dostour Party Gamela Ismail and head of the Reform and Development Party Mohamed Anwar Al-Sadat. While some of them are longtime opposition leaders, others have engaged with Sisi's administration in recent years to push for political reforms. The statement warned that Soueif's "medical reports indicate she is on the verge of danger and death".

According to her doctor at Britain's National Health Service, 68-year-old Soueif is starting to "develop heart failure". "She has lost 21kg and perhaps more, this is a huge amount and dangerous," the doctor said in a letter shared with AFP. Abdel Fattah, 43, was a leading voice in Egypt's 2011 uprising that toppled former president Hosni Mubarak. He was sentenced to five years in prison in 2019 for "spreading false news" after posting on Facebook about alleged torture in Egyptian jails. In 2022, Abdel Fattah was naturalized as British through Soueif, who held the citizenship from her time living there.

Soueif has repeatedly called on the British government to intervene and press local officials in Egypt to release Abdel Fattah. During a recent visit by British Foreign Secretary David Lammy to Egypt, Soueif urged him to "bring Alaa back with him on the plane". "I am tired of being on hunger strike and I am tired of sitting outside Downing Street waiting to die," she said. Since taking office in 2014, Sisi's government has faced criticism over a sweeping crackdown on dissent that has targeted activists, journalists and opposition figures. — AFP

Musk's US 'govt takeover' sounds alarm bells

WASHINGTON: Elon Musk has begun swinging his wrecking ball at the US government, with concerns growing over the unprecedented power that President Donald Trump has handed to the world's richest man. The South African born billionaire has taken control over the US Treasury's payments system that manages trillions of dollars. He single-handedly announced the demise of the USAID humanitarian agency. He has helped drive out top officials.

For a man who likes to rail against unelected bureaucrats, the unelected Space X and Tesla tycoon has been subject to little accountability as he pushes Trump's drive to shrink the US government. Trump sought to play down the issue Monday when asked about it in the Oval Office, saying "Elon can't do and won't do anything without our approval." "We'll give him the approval where appropriate, where not appropriate we won't. But he reports in," insisted Trump. "It's something that he feels very strongly about and I'm impressed."

Musk's powers have seemed almost unbounded, leading to accusations by

Democrats of an unconstitutional power grab by both him and his fellow business mogul Trump. So far Musk has been registered as neither a federal employee nor a government official - although US media reported Monday that he had now been registered as a "special government employee." Critics point to the fact that Musk was the biggest donor to Trump's victorious election campaign, to the tune of a quarter of a billion dollars. Then there is the fact that his companies also have huge US government contracts.

'DOGE kids'

And while a cute cartoon dog initially adorned the website of Musk's "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE), its later replacement by a dollar sign in a gold circle underscored what the focus would be. His young team of so-called "Doge Kids," drawn from his own companies, dramatically seized control of the US Treasury Department's payments system and took key government positions.

They have helped push a drive to get federal employees to take severance payments and quit, with an email that closely resembles a message sent to Twitter employees when Musk took over and later renamed the social network X. Musk personally announced that the massive USAID humanitarian agency would be "shutting down" - during a live chat on X - and branded



WASHINGTON: US Senator Patty Murray (2nd right), Democrat of Washington, speaks alongside US Senator Elizabeth Warren (left), Democrat of Massachusetts, US Senator Brian Schatz (2nd left), Democrat of Hawaii and US Senator Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon, about Elon Musk and DOGE accessing government agencies' computers and data during a press conference at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, February 3, 2025. — AFP

it a "criminal organization." Their no-holds barred style has raised eyebrows.

A dramatic stand-off reportedly ensued when Musk's aides demanded access to a secure room at USAID where classified information was held. There was a similar situation when a career Treasury official was reportedly put on administrative leave after refusing such access to aides. And the head

of the Federal Aviation Administration stepped down on Inauguration Day after Musk had criticized the agency's oversight of rocket launches. Days later Trump had to rush to appoint a new head after a deadly passenger jet crash in Washington. A controversy over a raised-arm salute by Musk on the day of Trump's inauguration only added to the controversy. — AFP

Sudan's RSF falters amid blunders and supply shortfalls

PORT SUDAN: Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces are losing ground to the army due to strategic blunders, internal rifts and dwindling supplies, analysts say. The regular army has made major gains, seeming to reverse the tide of a nearly two-year war that has killed tens of thousands of people and uprooted more than 12 million. Last month, the army surged through central Sudan, reclaiming the Al-Jazira state capital of Wad Madani before setting its sights on Khartoum. Within two weeks, it shattered RSF sieges on key Khartoum military bases, including the General Command headquarters, and overran the Al-Jaili oil refinery, the country's biggest, just north of the capital.

Cameron Hudson, a senior fellow at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies' Africa program, said while "the RSF outperformed at the start of the war because it was more prepared", its weaknesses were now showing. After nearly two years of fighting, the RSF's supplies have dwindled and its recruitment efforts have faltered. Many of its members lack formal military training, making them increasingly vulnerable in prolonged combat, Hud-



GEDAREF, Sudan: People displaced by the ongoing war in Sudan wait to board buses taking them home to their city of Wad Madani in the Jazira state after it was retaken by the Sudanese army from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitaries. — AFP

son said. The army, which "was caught off guard" at the start of the war, has "had time to rebuild, recruit and rearm", he added.

According to a former general in the Sudanese military, the army has broadened its fighter base, mobilizing volunteers, allied militias and other branches of the security apparatus. One "critical" addition to the army's operations has been reinstating the Special Operations Forces, part of state intelligence, the

former general told AFP on condition of anonymity. The special forces, who are trained in urban warfare according to the former general, have helped reverse what Rift Valley Institute fellow Eric Reeves called the army's "cowardly willingness to engage only in 'stand-off tactics', namely artillery and aircraft strikes", particularly in the capital. The RSF meanwhile has over-stretched its resources and exposed vulnerabilities in its military strategy, analysts say. — AFP

International

Silencing science: How Trump is reshaping US public health

Doctors blindsided by sudden removal of CDC app

WASHINGTON: Medical researchers forced to compile national data by hand, silence on a major tuberculosis outbreak, and the erasure of gender references: the Trump administration has pushed the US public health system into uncharted territory. Here's a look at some of the biggest impacts.

Key medical journal goes silent

Days after President Donald Trump took office, the Department of Health and Human Services imposed an indefinite "pause" on communications, silencing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) for the first time in its 60 years of existence. The journal, which once documented the first AIDS cases, has missed two editions with no return date. MMWR "is really important for states to read to have a more in-depth understanding of what might be going on and what to do about it," Jennifer Nuzzo, director of the Pandemic Center at Brown University, told AFP, calling the pause a "radical departure" from norms. The overall communications freeze has also prevented federal officials from updating the public or even state and local officials on bird flu, which has so far killed one person and sickened dozens, said Nuzzo.

Meanwhile, CDC scientists have been instructed to retract or revise all papers submitted to external journals to remove language deemed offensive - including the word "gender," Jeremy Faust, a physician and Harvard instructor who runs the Inside Medicine Substack, was the first to report. Nuzzo stressed that gender identity, not just biological sex, is crucial in targeting interventions, as seen with mpox, which disproportionately affects men who have sex with men and transgender women.

Doctors were blindsided by the sudden removal

of a CDC app that assessed contraceptive suitability based on medical history - for example, progestin-only pills are advised for patients with liver disease. Also deleted: CDC pages containing clinical guidance for PrEP (a critical HIV-prevention tool), resources on intimate partner violence, guidelines on LGBTQ behavioral health, and more. "I'm really not sure what is so radically leftist about treating gonorrhea," Natalie DiCenzo, an obstetrician-gynecologist and member of Physicians for Reproductive Health, told AFP, on the removal of STI guidelines. Some pages have since been restored but now carry an ominous disclaimer: "CDC's website is being modified to comply with President Trump's Executive Orders."

Jessica Valenti, a feminist author and founder of the Abortion, Every Day Substack, has been archiving deleted materials on CDCguidelines.com to preserve their original, inclusive versions. "The hope is to have it be a resource for the people who need it," she told AFP, adding that even if documents are later restored, words like "trans" may be scrubbed from them. "Deleting data of groups of people who are clearly not prioritized by this administration is essentially erasing them," Angela Rasmussen, a prominent US virologist told AFP. "It's going to cause people to suffer, and die."

Infectious outbreaks unreported

As medical associations sound the alarm over the lack of federal health communication, outbreaks are slipping under the radar. In Kansas City, Kansas, what is reportedly the largest tuberculosis outbreak in modern US history is unfolding - with 67 active cases since 2024. Yet no national health authority has reported on it. "The National Medical Associ-

ation (NMA) is calling for a swift resolution to the federal health communications freeze, which has the potential to exacerbate this outbreak and other public health threats," wrote the group, which represents African American physicians.



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump, alongside Secretary of Commerce nominee Howard Lutnick (center) and Rupert Murdoch (right), speaks to the press after signing an executive order to create a US sovereign wealth fund, in the Oval Office of the White House. — AFP

Caitlin Rivers, senior scholar at the Center for

Health Security at Johns Hopkins University, writes a weekly newsletter updating readers on disease outbreaks in her free time, relying on CDC data for influenza tracking. "The last two weekends, I have had to compile data by hand because key data sources have been unavailable," she said. — AFP

In fire-ravaged LA, a long road of rebuilding

NEW YORK: After the loss of more than 10,000 homes in last month's Los Angeles fires, the region faces a daunting challenge to rebuild with a tight labor market, constrained construction supplies and strict regulations. "It's going to be a very difficult rebuild process ... and it's going to take a long time," said Jim Tobin, CEO of the National Association of Home Builders. "Fire is very unique: we're talking about total loss." Even when there is still a foundation or a chimney, "fire wreaks havoc with those materials and they all have to be knocked down," said Tobin, describing what is often a more complete annihilation compared with a flood or hurricane.

Before new work can begin, the old properties must be cleared of debris because of the risk of toxic waste, said Mary Comerio, professor of architecture at the University of California at Berkeley and a specialist in disaster recovery. In Paradise, California - where 18,000 structures were obliterated in fires in 2018, including 11,000 homes - this initial step of clearing out the old property took nine months, according to Colette Curtis, who directed the rebuilding for the city.

Only 10 percent of Paradise's homes and some 500 buildings overall survived the conflagration. The initial rebuilding permits were granted in 2019. There are about 400 buildings currently under construction in the city. "We expect our recovery will be another 10 years probably before we're completely rebuilt," Curtis said. Things could move faster in wealthy areas such as Malibu and Pacific Palisades, devastated in last month's fires, if the homeowners don't need to wait for funds from an insurer, or if they receive federal aid.

Burst of activity

Experts say construction permits for new homes

'We will not leave,' say Gazans...

Continued from Page 1

the Palestinian people" and their attachment to the land. "We will remain on this land no matter what. Even if we have to live in tents and on the streets, we will stay rooted in this land," the 30-year-old said. Ahmed told AFP that Palestinians had learned lessons from the 1948 war that followed the British mandate, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were chased from their homes at the creation of Zionist state, and never allowed to return. "The world must understand this message: we will not leave, as happened in 1948."

Standing near crumbling buildings blocks destroyed by war in the northern Gaza city of Jabalia, Raafat Kalob is concerned about the consequences that the Trump-Netanyahu meeting will have on his life. "I expect Netanyahu's visit to Trump to reflect his future plans to forcibly displace the Palestinian people and redraw the Middle East," he said. "I sincerely hope this plan does not succeed."

Beyond him, rows of tents provided by charity organizations line a patch of land at the foot of concrete buildings whose facades still bear marks of war: bullet holes, blown away windows and facades stripped of their stone finishing. In Jabalia and Gaza's north, areas that were particularly hard-hit by the war, displaced Palestinians who returned after a ceasefire took effect on January 19 have taken residence in tents next to their destroyed homes.

Some were nevertheless optimistic, like Majid Al-Zebda, a 50-year-old resident of Jabalia. Trump "will pressure Netanyahu to end this war" permanently, he said. The first phase of the ceasefire

brought a fragile end to fighting in Gaza and started the process of a hostage and prisoner exchange between Zionists and Hamas, but negotiations have yet to begin for a permanent end to war. Zebda, a father of six who lost his home in the war, said neither he nor any Gazan would leave the coastal territory. "We are the owners of this land; we have always been here, and will always be. The future is ours," he said.

Meanwhile, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said on Tuesday that the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank is heading in a "catastrophic direction, adding that residents had "endured the impossible". The Zionist military launched a major offensive in the West Bank on January 21 aimed at rooting out Palestinian armed groups from the Jenin area, which has long been a hotbed of militancy. On Sunday, the army said that it had killed at least 50 militants since it launched the operation, while the Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah said troops have killed 70 people in the territory since the start of the year.

The operation has also seen troops leveling buildings in a refugee camp adjacent to Jenin. "The camp is going into a catastrophic direction," UNRWA spokeswoman Juliette Touma told reporters in Geneva. "Large parts of the camp were completely destroyed in a series of detonations by the Zionist forces. It is estimated that 100 houses were destroyed or heavily damaged," she said, speaking from Amman. "The residents of this particular camp have endured the impossible." She added: "This detonation that happened on Sunday was when children were supposed to go back to school. When it comes to UNRWA, 13 schools in the camp and the surrounding areas continue to be closed. That affected 5,000 kids in that area." Touma said UNRWA's services inside Jenin camp have been interrupted for several months and stopped completely in early December. — AFP

Thousands leave as fresh tremors shake Greece's Santorini

SANTORINI, Greece: Thousands of people were leaving the Greek island of Santorini by sea and air for a third day on Tuesday, as an unprecedented series of earthquakes shook the top travel destination. Some 6,000 people have already left the island, known for its spectacular cliffside views and a dormant volcano, which has been hit by hundreds of tremors since last week, officials said. A quake with a magnitude of 4.9 hit early on Tuesday morning amid other smaller tremors.

No injuries or damage were reported on Santorini and the neighboring islands of Anafi, Ios and Amorgos, which have also been affected by the seismic activity. Experts say the region has not experienced seismic activity on this scale in recent history and do not know how long it will last. "This is the first time this is happening, we have not seen it before," Athanassios Ganas, research director at the national observatory's institute of geodynamics, told state TV ERT.

He noted that the area had been hit with over 40 earthquakes with a magnitude of over 4.0 in the past 72 hours. Santorini lies atop a volcano which last erupted in 1950 - but an experts' committee on Monday said the current phenomenon was "not linked to volcanic activity." According to the Greek coastguard, over 4,600 people have left the island by ferry since Sunday alone. The country's leading air carrier Aegean Airlines said it had flown nearly 1,300 people out of Santorini on



FIRA, Greece: A view of the town of Fira on the Greek island of Santorini, in the Aegean Sea, on February 4, 2025. — AFP

Monday, with another eight flights able to carry 1,400 passengers scheduled for Tuesday.

Ferry services to Santorini have also been increased. Schools on all four islands have been shut as a precaution until Friday, prompting many locals with children to leave until the situation stabilizes. Some tourists currently on the island say they are not overly concerned. "I'm not so worried about the earthquake or volcano because I came from Tokyo," said Water Saito, a 43-year-old economist who spent a day on the island. He noted that the tremor levels in Santorini are negligible compared to the earthquakes experienced in Japan.

Roger Beauchamp from Arizona called the tremors "tiny." "We've been feeling them all day, little light ones. So we're not afraid of them," he told AFP. The head of Greece's earthquake planning and protection authority, Efthymios Lekkas, has said that an earthquake of 6.0 magnitude was unlikely. — AFP

Gunman wounds four at Sweden education center

OREBRO: A gunman shot and wounded four people at an education center in central Sweden on Tuesday, police said, urging the public to stay away from the area as officers hunted for possible accomplices. Images from the scene showed a large police presence with multiple ambulances and emergency vehicles outside the Campus Risbergska, a school for young adults in the town of Orebro. Several media reported the suspected assailant had turned his gun on himself. Police would not confirm that but said five people were hurt overall, including one who was thought to be the gunman.

"One of the injured persons is a person whom we suspect may be the assailant," Orebro police chief Roberto Eid Forest told a press conference as the massive police operation continued more than three hours after the attack. "We can't rule out other suspects, and that's something we are continuing to work on in this intensive phase now - why it happened and if there are other possible suspects." He said police were not aware of a motive yet. School attacks are relatively rare in Sweden, but the country has suffered shootings and bombings linked



OREBRO, Sweden: Police block the road leading to the scene of the Risbergska School in Orebro, Sweden, on February 4, 2025. — AFP

to gang violence that kill dozens of people each year.

Forest said police received the first reports of a school shooting at 12:33 pm, but could not specify how it unfolded nor whether it occurred inside or outside the school. A Campus Risbergska teacher said he was in the school when he heard gunfire. "I heard shots fired, so I've barricaded myself and am waiting for news. We have an alarm on our security app and I'm communicating with my colleagues." Petter Kraftling was quoted as saying by the online newspaper Vi Larare just after the shooting. — AFP

Kuwait leads regional efforts in cancer...

Continued from Page 1

Over the years, the MoH has launched several cancer awareness campaigns, including the national program for early detection of breast cancer, introduced in 2014, which targets women over 40, offering early detection services through five specialized centers across Kuwait.

As part of Kuwait's efforts to support and develop scientific research and improve the level of health services in the world, Kuwait has allocated Kuwait Prize for the Control of Cancer, Cardiovascular Diseases and Diabetes in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, to enhance regional cooperation in the eradication of diseases and to recognize people who

have made outstanding contributions in the fields of prevention, control or research in those diseases.

Among the major awareness initiatives, is the National campaign for Cancer Prevention (CAN), launched in 2006, which focuses on educating the public about different types of cancer, encouraging early detection and training healthcare professionals in cancer diagnosis. Al-Sidra Association for Psychological Care of Cancer Patients, founded in 2012, plays a crucial role in providing emotional support and a positive environment for cancer patients and the Patients Helping Funding Society, established in 1979, provides financial and medical support to cancer patients in Kuwait and abroad. Beyond its national initiatives, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) actively supports healthcare institutions in various countries to curb the spread of cancer by providing appropriate treatments and supporting people with the disease, especially Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. — KUNA

International

Myanmar junta bans possible conscripts from foreign travel

Embattled junta loses control of swathes of the country to armed groups

YANGON: Myanmar's embattled junta has banned anyone eligible for military conscription from leaving the country without permission, as it seeks to shore up its forces fighting rebel groups opposed to its rule. The junta has lost control of swathes of the country to ethnic minority armed groups and other opposition forces in the civil war triggered by its coup d'etat four years ago. A long-dormant conscription law was enforced last year as the army reeled from a string of battlefield defeats to ethnic armed groups and civilian "People's Defense Forces" seeking to oust it from power.

A bylaw passed late last month that has only just come to light imposes new restrictions on those eligible to be called up - men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27. "The person who receives the order shall not be allowed to leave for foreign countries without obtaining the permission of the Central Body," section 51 of the bylaw says. The rule applies to those who have been called up and also those waiting for the outcome of appeals for exemption, reduction, or postponement of military service. Breaking the rules can bring a jail sentence of up to three years. The military service law, authored by a previous junta in 2010 but brought into force only in February last year, requires those

called up to serve for at least two years.

It also has a stipulation that during a state of emergency, the terms of service can be extended up to five years, and those ignoring a summons to serve can be jailed for the same period. Myanmar has been under a state of emergency since soon after a February 2021 coup, with the junta announcing the latest six-month extension on Friday. Rights groups estimate tens of thousands of young people have fled Myanmar to avoid being called up to the deeply unpopular military.

The recent restrictions have affected workplaces in Yangon by driving their employees out of the country, said a senior employee of a private company in Yangon who asked not to be named. "At least six colleagues have resigned from work since the law was imposed," he told AFP. "I worry when they will knock on my door and grab me from home," he said, adding he was looking for a way to leave the country and support his family from abroad. The bloody multi-sided conflict triggered when the junta overthrew the government of Aung San Suu Kyi has left more than 6,000 civilians dead, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners monitoring group. — AFP



YANGON: Members of Myanmar's military patrol on a street next to Shwedagon Pagoda during the fourth anniversary of the military coup in Yangon. — AFP

Frenchman on death row leaves Indonesia prison

JAKARTA: A Frenchman on death row in Indonesia since 2007 for drug offences left prison on Tuesday ahead of his transfer to France, with his lawyer saying he was "happy and calm" ahead of returning home. Serge Atlaoui, 61, was driven in a black van from Salemba prison in Jakarta to the city's main airport to be handed over to French police officers before boarding a commercial flight to Paris. He remained tight-lipped and wore a face mask at a pre-flight news conference, but French ambassador Fabien Penone thanked Indonesian authorities for allowing the transfer.

Indonesia, which has some of the world's toughest drug laws, has released half-a-dozen high-profile detainees in recent weeks, including a Filipina mother on death row and the last five members of the "Bali Nine" drug ring. "Serge is happy and calm," lawyer Richard Sedillot told AFP earlier. "But he is going to need a little bit of time to reorganize himself." Jakarta has left it to the French government to grant Atlaoui - the only Frenchman on death row in Indonesia - either clemency, amnesty or a reduced sentence.

His return was made possible after an agreement between French Justice Minister Gerald Darmanin and his Indonesian counterpart Yusril Ihza Mahendra on January 24. In the agreement, Jakarta said they had decided not to execute Atlaoui and authorized his return on "humanitarian grounds" because he was ill. Atlaoui had been receiving weekly medical treatment at a hospital. "After all these years of incarceration, this is the moment I was waiting for," his wife Sabine told RTL radio.



TANGERANG: Serge Atlaoui (center), a Frenchman on death row in Indonesia since 2007 for drug offences, arrives for a press conference at Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Tangerang, after leaving Salemba prison ahead of his repatriation to France on February 4, 2025. — AFP

Death penalty appeal

Atlaoui was arrested in 2005 at a factory in a Jakarta suburb where dozens of kilograms of drugs were discovered and was accused by authorities of being a "chemist". A welder from Metz in northeastern France, the father of four has always denied being a drug trafficker, saying that he was installing machinery in what he thought was an acrylic factory. "I thought there was something suspicious (about the factory)," Atlaoui told AFP in 2015. Initially sentenced to life in prison, his sentence was reviewed by the supreme court and changed to death on appeal. He was due to be executed alongside eight others in 2015 but was granted a re-

prieve after Paris applied pressure and the Indonesian authorities allowed an outstanding appeal to proceed.

There are currently at least 530 inmates on death row in Indonesia, according to official figures used by human rights organization Kontas. Among them are 90 foreigners, including at least one woman, according to the Ministry of Immigration and Correction. The Indonesian government recently signaled it will resume executions, which have not been used since 2016. Filipina inmate Mary Jane Veloso, who was arrested in 2010 and sentenced to death for drug trafficking, was returned to her home country in December after an agreement was reached between both countries. — AFP

Olympic pool-sized sinkhole highlights risk of old pipes

TOKYO: A massive sinkhole near Tokyo that swallowed a truck and its driver a week ago, and has filled with sewage and debris, highlights the risk posed by Japan's ageing pipes. Emergency workers have been striving in vain to reach the 74-year-old man, who rescuers have had no contact with for a week, and who was likely buried under sediment and sewage water in the sinkhole in the city of Yashio. Officials say corroded sewerage pipes created the sinkhole that is now 40 meters (130 feet) wide—nearly the size of an Olympic swimming pool—and 15 meters (50 feet) deep.

Cranes have been mobilized and a 30-metre slope built to locate and reach the driver, with a second slope under construction, but progress has been slow and dangerous. Koichi Yamamoto, an official with Yashio's fire department, told AFP on Tuesday that rescue efforts had been suspended. A "substantial" amount of sewage water has accumulated at the site, eroding the



YASHIO: Excavators and rescue personnel working to construct a slope for rescue operations are seen at the site where a truck plunged into a sinkhole, trapping the vehicle's driver, in Yashio, Saitama Prefecture. — AFP

surrounding soil and "constantly flowing in like a river", he said. "This makes it impossible for us to proceed."

Also "hampering our rescue operation is a pile-up of heavy masses such as debris, slabs of asphalt and concrete that need removing", Yamamoto added. When the hole suddenly opened up in Yashio, in the region of Saitama near Tokyo, during the morning rush hour

actively forbade Chinese titan Huawei from bidding for the 5G network due to Beijing's refusal to sign an international agreement on cybercrime. "President Chaves has been a great leader in that country in regards to recognizing the threat that China poses," said Mauricio Claver-Carone, the US special envoy on Latin America.

Rubio is also expected to speak in Costa Rica about how to handle neighboring Nicaragua, where strongman Daniel Ortega and his wife last week were granted absolute powers through a constitutional change. Rubio, a Cuban-American and the first Hispanic to be the top US diplomat, is a sworn foe of Latin American leftists, although former president Joe Biden also took a hard line against Ortega. Rubio's five-nation trip is heavily focused on President Donald Trump's top priority of sending back undocumented migrants. Costa Rica, one of the most stable and prosperous nations in Latin America, has long supported US efforts on migration.

On Monday, Rubio visited El Salvador and said he received an extraordinary offer by the country's iron-fisted president, Nayib Bukele, not only to take in migrants but to jail Americans if Trump wants to outsource American prisons. Rubio will arrive later Tues-

day in Guatemala, a key source of migration and also the most populous nation that still recognizes Taiwan. Trump has described China as a major adversary and has imposed punishing tariffs in what he sees as a way to correct an imbalanced trading relationship between the world's two largest economies. — AFP



SAN JOSE: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio arrives at Juan Santamaria International Airport near San Jose, Costa Rica on February 4, 2025. — AFP

day in Guatemala, a key source of migration and also the most populous nation that still recognizes Taiwan. Trump has described China as a major adversary and has imposed punishing tariffs in what he sees as a way to correct an imbalanced trading relationship between the world's two largest economies. — AFP

Belgium urged to act to avoid becoming 'narco-state'

BRUSSELS: Belgium's national drugs commissioner has issued an urgent plea for her country to "act now" to crack down on the revenues of traffickers or risk seeing crime syndicates corrode society. Perched on the northern coast of the European mainland and housing a major port, Belgium has become a key hub for criminal gangs supplying narcotics across the continent. "The accomplices of criminal organizations live among us, the distinction between the legal world of good, and the illegal world of bad, is not holding any more," Ine Van Wymersch told AFP. "Belgium is not a narco-state, but we must act now." Van Wymersch, who has been in the coordinating role since 2023, insisted that authorities at all levels and every sector needed to help "chase illegal money" being laundered.

'Make it harder'

Former prosecutor Van Wymersch said town councils needed to step up their vigilance from the moment businesses first apply for a licence.

"An umpteenth hairdresser or an umpteenth pizzeria in the same street - is that justified, is that good for the local economy?" she said. "Local authorities have to ask themselves these questions." The aim is to clamp down on front companies used to funnel illegal revenues into the legal economy. "We also need to identify shops with no one there," Van Wymersch said. She cited a recent report by Europol that 86 percent of criminal networks also operate legal structures. "Each sector needs to think about how to make it harder for criminal organizations to exploit it," she said.

'Fortress' Antwerp

Belgium has become a focal point for drug gangs due to its giant Antwerp port that has served as a major smuggling gateway into Europe. But last year the amount of cocaine seized at the facility fell by over 50 percent, from a record 116 tons in 2023 to 44 tons. Van Wymersch said that was in part thanks to the authorities at the port ramping up the deployment of scanners and bolstering checks.

But she warned that despite this smugglers were still finding other ways to satisfy the vast demand for illegal drugs in Europe. That included switching to other routes and ports that are less secured to get cocaine onto the market. "Consumption has not fallen, the street price is unchanged, and just as much is still being produced," she said. "It would be naive to believe that, because the port of Antwerp is becoming a closed fortress, illegal activity will stop."

Using ill-gotten gains?

To try to turn the tide in Belgium, the commissioner is currently working on setting up a fund from the ill-gotten gains of traffickers seized by the state. This could help fund anti-drug efforts ranging from aiding investigations, treating addiction and doing outreach in schools. Van Wymersch likened it to the "polluter pays" principle - putting trafficking revenues to use in helping to put right some of the damage. As an example she said that if drug gangs turn a building into a laboratory without the knowledge of its owner then they could use the funds to clean up the property. She pointed to France's agency that manages seized assets as an example, as it takes responsibility for handling the funds off the shoulders of the courts. "It's a way of relieving the pressure on the judiciary with an independent body that can reinject the money," she said. — AFP

Rubio in Costa Rica as he seeks to curb China influence

SAN JOSE: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio arrived Tuesday in Costa Rica as he presses to curb Chinese influence in Latin America on his first foreign trip. Rubio, a longtime hawk on China, began his trip in Panama where he reported headway in his push to decrease China's influence around the crucial Panama Canal. Like Panama, Costa Rica is a longstanding US partner that in recent years received a surge in Chinese investment. Costa Rica in 2007 switched recognition to China from Taiwan, the self-governing democracy claimed by Beijing—a turning point as other Latin American countries followed suit.

But US officials also see hope in the example of Costa Rica, whose relations with China have turned rockier in recent years over local concerns about Beijing. President Rodrigo Chaves, who will meet Rubio, in 2023 ef-

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2025

China hits back with tariffs on US firms

Trade tensions escalate • Measures take effect on Feb 10

BEIJING: China announced a wide range of measures on Tuesday targeting US businesses including Google, farm equipment makers and the owner of fashion brand Calvin Klein, minutes after new US tariffs on Chinese goods took effect. Beijing also slapped tariffs on US products such as coal, oil and some autos in a rapid response to the new duties on Chinese goods imposed by US President Donald Trump, escalating trade tensions between the world's two biggest economies.

China's State Administration for Market Regulation said Google was suspected of violating the country's anti-monopoly law and an investigation was initiated in accordance with the law. It did not provide further details on the investigation or on what it alleged Google had done to breach the law.

Google products such as its search engine are blocked in China and its revenue from there is about 1 percent of global sales. It still works with Chinese partners such as advertisers. In 2017, Google announced the launch of a small artificial intelligence centre in China. But the project was disbanded two years later and the firm does not conduct AI research in China, according to a blog posting.

Separately, China's Commerce Ministry said it had put PVH Corp, the holding company for brands including Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfeger, and US biotechnology firm Illumina on its "unreliable entity" list. It said the two companies took what it called "discriminatory measures against Chinese enterprises" and "damaged" the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies.

Companies added to the blacklist can be subject to fines and a broad range of other sanctions, includ-

ing a freeze on trade and revocation of work permits for foreign staff. While Google declined to comment, PVH said it was "surprised and deeply disappointed" by the ministry's decision, saying that the company maintains "strict compliance with all relevant laws and regulations and operates in line with established industry standards and practices."

PVH added it would continue engagement with relevant authorities and look forward to a positive resolution. Illumina did not respond to a request for comment. Shares of both PVH and Illumina were down nearly 4 percent each in premarket US trading, while Google-parent Alphabet rose 1 percent. PVH had already been under scrutiny from Chinese regulators over "improper" conduct related to the Xinjiang region.

"These moves are warnings that China intends to harm US interests if need be, but still give China the option to back down," Capital Economics said in a note. "The tariffs could be postponed or cancelled before they come into effect... The probe against Google could conclude without any penalties."

China also announced 10 percent tariffs on imports of US farm equipment that could impact firms such as Caterpillar, Deere & Co and, as well as a small number of trucks and big-engine sedans shipped to China from the United States. That could apply to Elon Musk's Cybertruck, a niche offering Tesla has been promoting in China, as it awaits regulatory clearance to begin sales.

China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology designated the Cybertruck as a "passenger car" in a posting in December that was quickly deleted. If the Cybertruck was designated as an



LOS ANGELES: Cargo shipping containers sit on the Evergreen Ever Fame container ship docked at a container terminal at the Port of Los Angeles in Los Angeles. — AFP

electric truck, Tesla would face a 10 percent tariff on any future imports from its factory in Texas. Tesla had no immediate comment. The new tariffs on US products will start on Feb 10, the ministry said.

The announcements made on Tuesday ramped up trade restrictions between Beijing and Washington that had been largely limited to the tech sector under the administration of former US President Joe Biden, which sought to restrict China's

access to high-end semiconductors.

China said in December it had launched an investigation into Nvidia over a suspected violation of the country's anti-monopoly law, a probe widely seen as a retaliatory shot against Washington's latest curbs on the Chinese chip sector. Intel's products sold in China were also called for a security review late last year by an influential Chinese industry group. — Reuters

Trump launches US sovereign wealth fund

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Monday signed an executive order aiming to kickstart the creation of a US sovereign wealth fund that he said could be used to save TikTok.

"Other countries have sovereign wealth funds, and they're much smaller countries, and they're not the United States," Trump told reporters after signing the order. A sovereign wealth fund is a state-owned investment fund that manages a country's excess reserves, typically derived from natural resource revenues or trade surpluses, to generate long-term returns.

Norway's fund, largely built from the country's fossil fuel proceeds, is the world's largest, with Abu Dhabi, China and Saudi Arabia also having considerable versions. Last year Norway's fund posted a return of 13 percent, bringing its total value to \$1.75 trillion. "The extraordinary size and scale of the US government and the business it does with companies should create value for American citizens," said Trump's Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told reporters the fund would be set up in the next 12 months. Trump cited the purchase of popular video-sharing



US President Donald Trump, alongside Secretary of Treasury Scott Bessent (left) and Secretary of Commerce nominee Howard Lutnick (right), speaks to the press as he signs an executive order to create a US sovereign wealth fund, in the Oval Office of the White House on February 3, 2025, in Washington, DC. — AFP

app TikTok as a potential example of a transaction that could be facilitated by a US fund, though he did not give details of what he had in mind. "We might put that in the sovereign wealth fund, whatever we make, or if we do a partnership with very wealthy people," he said.

TikTok is facing down a US law that orders the company to divest from its Chinese owner ByteDance or be banned in the United States. Trump gave

TikTok until early April to obey the law that answers US concerns that the Chinese government could exploit the app to spy on Americans or covertly influence US public opinion. With TikTok, "if we make the right deal, we'll do it. Otherwise we won't," Trump said in the briefing.

Trump has said he is in talks with several people over the purchase of TikTok, including Elon Musk, Larry Ellison and tech giant Microsoft. — AFP

OpenAI chief Altman signs deal with Kakao after DeepSeek upset

SEOUL: OpenAI chief Sam Altman signed a deal with tech giant Kakao in South Korea on Tuesday as the US firm seeks new alliances after Chinese rival DeepSeek shook the global AI industry.

Kakao, which owns an online bank, South Korea's largest taxi-hailing app, and a messaging service, announced a partnership allowing them to use ChatGPT for its new artificial intelligence services, joining a global alliance led by OpenAI amid intensifying competition in the sector. "We're excited to bring advanced AI to Kakao's millions of users and work together to integrate our technology into services that transform how Kakao's users communicate and connect," said Altman.

"Kakao has a deep understanding of how technology can enrich everyday lives," he added. Kakao's CEO Shina Chung said the company was

"thrilled" to establish a strategic collaboration with OpenAI. Altman's company is part of the Stargate drive announced by US President Donald Trump to invest up to \$500 billion in AI infrastructure in the United States. But AI newcomer DeepSeek has sent Silicon Valley into a frenzy, with some calling its high performance and supposed low cost a wake-up call for US developers.

At a closed meeting with South Korean AI developers, Altman admitted OpenAI "hasn't found a strategy yet" to respond to DeepSeek. When asked by an executive of Wrtn Technologies — a Seoul-based AI firm — about his plans for addressing the rise of open-source models such as DeepSeek, Altman said there is "definitely room for open source".

"We haven't figured out a strategy yet, but we want to do more," he added. Altman seems "quite nervous internally but it appears OpenAI is indeed highly aware of, and influenced by, DeepSeek's impact", said Kim Jang-hyun, a data science Professor at Sungkyunkwan University. "With South Korea being a country known for its high loyalty, frequent usage, and tech-savvy user base," OpenAI might use the country as "a testing ground before expanding globally", Kim told AFP.

federal law says they do not have to."

Musk said Monday in a post on X, the social media platform he owns, that the "only way to stop fraud and waste of taxpayer money is to follow the payment flows and pause suspicious transactions for review." "Naturally, this causes those who have been aiding, abetting, and receiving fraudulent payments to become very upset. Too bad," he added.

The Treasury's closely guarded payments system handles the money flow of the US government, including \$6 trillion annually for Social Security, Medicare, federal salaries, and other critical payments.

Musk's control of the payments system was approved by incoming Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and was made possible when a career official was put on administrative leave Friday after refusing to hand over access, according to the lawsuit. The official subsequently retired from the department, a source close to the matter told AFP and the lawsuit confirmed. Bessent's granting access of personal Treasury information to DOGE-affiliated individuals means "individuals from all walks of life have no assurance that their information will receive the protection that federal law affords," the lawsuit argued. — AFP

Musk takes reins of US Treasury payments system

WASHINGTON: Elon Musk and his aides have taken control of the US Treasury Department's payments system, triggering a lawsuit charging he is illegally getting access to private data of millions of Americans. Musk, the world's richest person, is leading President Donald Trump's federal cost-cutting efforts under the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

The suit calls on a federal judge to declare it illegal for Musk or others from DOGE to get personal information about taxpayers and to block the Treasury Department from letting that happen. "People who must share information with the federal government should not be forced to share information with Elon Musk or his 'DOGE,'" read a lawsuit filed in Washington by labor unions and a grassroots advocacy group. "And

OPEC+ sticks to oil output plan after Trump demand

VIENNA: An OPEC+ panel on Monday reaffirmed the oil cartel's plan to gradually hike output starting from April, after US President Donald Trump called for lower prices. In a bid to boost prices, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) headed by Saudi Arabia and Russian-led allies have cut supply by almost six million barrels per day (bpd) since 2022.

The OPEC+ alliance has repeatedly postponed putting some of the withheld barrels back on the market. In December, eight OPEC+ countries announced they would start phasing out 2.2 million bpd of voluntary supply cuts from April, at a rate of 120,000 bpd each month for 18 months.

In a statement following a videoconference, the members of the OPEC+ Joint Ministerial Monitoring

Committee (JMIMC) "reaffirmed their commitment" to the output policy decided on December 5. The decision to stick to the alliance's timetable to unwind cuts comes after Trump said last month that he would ask Saudi Arabia and OPEC to lower oil prices.

In recent weeks, oil prices have been muted, hovering around \$75 per barrel. Analysts say maintaining the timetable was also a sign of caution amid uncertainties the markets face as Trump announced tariffs against Canada, China and Mexico. Oil prices rose Monday as the measures include a 10-percent tariff on Canadian oil.

Amid various uncertainties, "it makes in my view sense to stick to the current path and not change it", UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo told AFP. Following sanctions by Washington and London against Russia's energy sector announced in January, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said the new measures "could result in a tightening of crude and product balances". The alliance also emphasized the improved compliance of Kazakhstan and Iraq, two members which had been criticized for producing more than their quotas. The next JMIMC meeting is scheduled for April 5, the statement said. — AFP

News in Brief

Pfizer earnings top estimates

NEW YORK: Pfizer reported better than expected quarterly profits Tuesday behind cost cuts and growth in some non-COVID-related products including the blood clot drug Eliquis. Other pharmaceuticals with strong sales gains included Vyndaqel, used to treat nerve damage, and the products of Seagen, a cancer-focused company that Pfizer acquired in 2023. "We made great progress with commercial execution and achieved growth across our product portfolio for full-year 2024," said Chief Executive Albert Bourla. — AFP

Vodafone shares slide

LONDON: Vodafone's share price slid more than seven percent Tuesday as the British mobile phone giant suffered from lower television streaming revenues in key market Germany following a law change. Vodafone, which provides broadband and TV services alongside its core mobile business, saw overall revenue beat expectations in its third quarter with growth of more than five percent, it said in a statement. — AFP

Spotify logs first annual profit

STOCKHOLM: Music streaming giant Spotify reported its first annual profit on Tuesday, with the number of active users growing more than expected in the fourth quarter to reach 675 million. The company reported a net profit of 1.1 billion euros (\$1.14 billion) for 2024, compared to a net loss of 532 million euros in the previous year. "I am very excited about 2025 and feel really good about where we are as both a product and as a business," Spotify CEO Daniel Ek said in a comment. — AFP

Nintendo cuts profit forecast

TOKYO: Japanese video game giant Nintendo on Tuesday cut its annual net profit forecast after hardware and software sales for its Switch console fell in the first three quarters. The Switch, which is both a handheld and TV-compatible device, hit shelves in 2017 and became a must-have gadget among all age groups during pandemic lockdowns. — AFP

Business

Gulf Bank empowers youth through 'The Influencer' training program

Lecture organized in partnership with LOYAC

KUWAIT: As part of Gulf Bank's commitment to empowering youth, Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Abdullah Al-Mulaifi, led a session on the role of Corporate Communications and Marketing within the bank. The lecture took place during the third week of The Influencer, a training program by the LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA), an affiliate of the non-profit organization LOYAC. As part of Gulf Bank's strategic partnership with LOYAC, this initiative highlights the Bank's commitment to equipping young individuals aged 15 to 19 with valuable training opportunities. The Influencer program, running from January 20 to February 17, 2025, is designed to enhance participants' public communication and leadership skills.

The program provides a dynamic platform for young individuals to refine their communication skills through a series of interactive workshops and training sessions. Covering a range of topics – including effective communication strategies, leadership development, public speaking, photography and video editing, digital marketing, and podcasting – it equips participants with essential skills for personal and professional growth. Led by experienced train-

ers and industry experts, these sessions provide participants with the essential skills and knowledge to make a meaningful impact in their communities.

For the third year in a row, Gulf Bank proudly sponsors The Influencer program, reinforcing its commitment to social sustainability by supporting civil society organizations – especially those focused on youth development and empowerment.

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

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



Abdullah Al-Mulaifi delivers the lecture.

Trump says he wants Ukraine to supply US with rare earths

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said on Monday he wants Ukraine to supply the United States with rare earth minerals as a form of payment for financially supporting the country's war efforts against Russia. Trump, speaking to reporters at the White House, said Ukraine was willing, adding that he wants "equalization" from Ukraine for Washington's "close to \$300 billion" in support. "We're telling Ukraine they have very valuable rare earths," Trump said. "We're looking to do a deal with Ukraine where they're going to secure what we're giving them with their rare earths and other things."

It was not immediately clear if Trump was using the term "rare earths" to refer to all types of critical minerals or just to rare earths.

Rare earths are a group of 17 metals used to make magnets that turn power into motion for electric vehicles, cellphones and other electronics. There are no known substitutes. The US Geological Survey considers 50 minerals to be critical for the country's economy and national defense, including several types of rare earths, nickel and lithium. Ukraine contains large deposits of uranium, lithium and titanium, although none are considered to be among the world's five biggest by volume and the US has its own untapped reserves of those and other critical minerals.

The US has only one operating rare earths mine and very little processing capacity, although several companies are working to develop projects in the country. China is the world's largest producer of rare earths and many other critical minerals. — Reuters

Japan's Mitsui could study Alaska LNG project

TOKYO: Japanese trading house Mitsui could consider studying a project to liquefy natural gas in the US state of Alaska, but no decisions have been made yet, Chief Financial Officer Tetsuya Shigeta said on Tuesday. Japan is considering offering support for a \$44-billion gas pipeline in Alaska as it seeks to court US President Donald Trump and forestall potential trade friction, sources told Reuters last week.

Shigeta said he hoped a meeting expected this week between Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and Trump would help enhance Japan's presence in the United States, reaffirming its role as the latter's largest source of investment. Asked about the reported LNG development in Alaska, Shigeta said it was a natural candidate for consideration, presenting a valuable opportunity because of its proximity to Japan and other Asian countries.

"But we have nothing we can talk about now, including our policy," he added. China on Tuesday slapped tariffs on some US imports in a swift response to new US duties on Chinese goods, renewing a trade war between the world's top two economies even as Trump offered reprieves to Mexico and Canada. Mitsui's automobile and steel products business in Mexico and Canada could be affected by potential US tariffs, though the increasing geopolitical risks from tariffs and retaliatory measures could provide a great business opportunity for the company to help rebuild US supply chains, Shigeta said.

Mitsui's US domestic businesses such as steel products, used cars and chemicals could also benefit by the tariffs, but shrinking global trade volumes would be a risk, as its business model focuses on solving issues in the global logistics supply chain, he added. On Monday, Mitsubishi Corp8058.T, which led all three consortia winning Japan's first offshore wind auctions in 2021, said it was reviewing its offshore wind business at home amid soaring costs and the weak yen, signaling that Tokyo's renewable energy plans are not immune to global trends. Mitsui, in partnership with others, won an offshore wind farm development right in 2023.

"We are facing challenges due to soaring construction costs and foreign exchange rate fluctuations, but we plan to continue to promote our business firmly," Shigeta said. — Reuters

US Treasury chief Bessent takes over consumer watchdog

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Monday tapped newly-confirmed Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent as acting director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the agency announced. Bessent then halted virtually all CFPB activities, according to an email seen by Reuters, including investigations, litigation, rulemaking and public communications.

Bessent's arrival at the helm of an agency Republicans have long sought to abolish follows Trump's dismissal of Director Rohit Chopra at the end of last week. Under Chopra, the agency aggressively pursued enforcement of consumer finance laws and clashed with the tech sector and banking industry over things such as the oversight of digital wallet apps and credit card fees - pursuing them through the final days of the prior administration.

Bessent said in a statement that he looked forward to advancing Trump's economic agenda. The news



Scott Bessent

was first reported by Bloomberg. In an agency-wide email, Bessent cited a need to conform to the Trump administration's goals and directed all staff and contractors to take no new actions "unless expressly approved by the acting director or required by law."

Agency lawyers on Monday informed a federal appeals court they were seeking a pause to proceedings and would not defend against a lawsuit. Lindsey Johnson, head of the Consumer Bankers Association, an industry body representing retail banks, welcomed Bessent's appointment and said in a statement that Bessent had the immediate oppor-

tunity to rescind Chopra's "partisan policies."

Elizabeth Warren, the top Democrat on the Senate Banking Committee who helped create the CFPB following the 2008 financial crisis, denounced Bessent's decision to halt enforcement activities as an invitation to corporate misconduct. "Shutting down CFPB enforcement actions that are on the verge of delivering money into the pockets of working people is at odds with President Trump's claim that he wants to lower costs for families – which he has done next to nothing on so far," she said in a statement.

Bessent, who was confirmed as Treasury Secretary last month, is a Wall Street veteran and former Trump campaign adviser who has shared Trump's interest in deregulation. Bessent will not be the first acting CFPB director to occupy two roles simultaneously. In his last term, Trump named White House budget director Mick Mulvaney to run the agency. The CFPB survived possible abolition in May when the Supreme Court rejected industry-backed constitutional challenges to its funding structure.

But Democrats on Capitol Hill fear the Republican congressional majority may soon seek to make good on pledges to slash or seize control of the CFPB's funding, which is currently provided by the Federal Reserve, shielding it from the partisan vicissitudes of congressional spending approvals. — Reuters

What is a sovereign wealth fund?

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Monday signed an executive order ordering the US Treasury and Commerce Departments to create a sovereign wealth fund for the United States.

What is a sovereign wealth fund?

Sovereign wealth funds are investment vehicles owned by countries. Most act as an investment account, or as a development tool, or a combination of the two. They are designed to be a nest egg, allowing current money to be deployed in a way that benefits future generations.

Unlike pension funds where people withdraw money for their own spending needs, SWFs are supposed to invest for the collective good of a nation. That could mean things like funding construction of an airport or school. But SWFs also often put money into financial products and buying stakes in companies, which can provide financial benefits well into the future and fund

government budgets or social programs. There are over 90 such funds across the world, managing over \$8 trillion in assets, according to the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds.

How is a wealth fund funded?

Typically, some or all of a country's budget surplus is passed to the SWF, which can then use it for new investments. However, the United States has consistently run budget deficits in recent years.

Many funds have been set up by countries with strong commodities export industries, and proceeds from oil, natural gas, metals and minerals sales by state-owned companies are often behind SWFs. Around 60% of funds are funded by revenue from natural resources, per the IFSWF.

Trump offered little in the way of detail on Monday about how a US fund would operate or how it would be financed. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told reporters the plan was to monetize assets currently owned by the US government "for the American people."

The president has also previously said revenue earned from tariffs on US imports could form the basis for a wealth fund.

Why set up a wealth fund now?

Bessent said the US sovereign wealth fund would be set up in the next 12 months. While on the election campaign trail in September, Trump proposed setting up a fund which would finance "great national endeavors," including infrastructure projects such as highways and airports, manufacturing and medical research.

How big could America's sovereign wealth fund be?

Trump did not give an initial size or target amount for the US sovereign wealth fund. However, when talking about the subject in September, he said an American SWF should approach, or exceed, \$2 trillion. Currently, the largest such fund is Norway's Government Pension Fund Global with \$1.74 trillion in assets, followed by the China Investment Corporation with \$1.33 trillion in assets, according to the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, a data provider.

Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore are among countries with prominent sovereign wealth funds, with between \$801 billion and \$1.06 trillion in assets, the institute said. — Reuters

BNP Paribas beats 2024 profit forecast

PARIS: French banking giant BNP Paribas reported a better-than-expected net profit for 2024 on Tuesday, propelled by a strong performance in its investment and financing services.

The bank posted an after-tax profit of 11.7 billion euros (\$12 billion), up 4.1 percent from the previous year and above its objective of 11.2 billion euros. Its revenue also rose more than expected, up 4.1 percent at 48.8 billion euros. "The group achieved very good performances in the fourth quarter 2024 and surpassed its 2024 objec-

tives, while maintaining a solid financial structure," BNP Paribas chief executive Jean-Laurent Bonnafé said. Its net income rose 15.7 percent in the fourth quarter to 2.3 billion euros. Bonnafé said he expected a "strong acceleration" in the bank's performance thanks to its acquisition of asset management firm AXA Investment Managers, which is expected to be completed this year, and the development of wealth management and life insurance businesses.

BNP Paribas announced last year it was buying Axa IM, a subsidiary of French insurer AXA, for 5.4 billion euros. Under the deal, it will also provide investment management services to AXA.

BNP Paribas confirmed its outlook, with an average growth rate in net income above seven percent between 2024 and 2026. — AFP



(From left) BNP Paribas' Deputy General director in charge of commercial, personal banking and services, Thierry Laborde, BNP Paribas' CEO Jean-Laurent Bonnafé and BNP Paribas' Deputy General director in charge of corporate and institutional banking Yann Gerardin present the annual results of BNP Paribas banking group in Paris on February 4, 2025. — AFP

How China could respond to Trump tariffs

BEIJING: From retaliatory tariffs on US goods like car parts and soy beans to controls on raw minerals essential for American manufacturing — analysts say China has plenty of options if it wants to reply to fresh US levies. US President Donald Trump over the weekend announced 10 percent tariffs on Chinese products, upping the stakes in a trade confrontation between the global superpowers that started eight years ago in his first term.

Beijing in response warned there were "no win-

ners" in a trade war and vowed as yet unspecified countermeasures. News that Canada and Mexico had agreed a deal with Trump to delay 25 percent tariffs on their goods was followed by his announcement that he would be holding talks with China "probably in the next 24 hours" to try for an agreement.

But, as the threat of new measures continues to hang over Beijing, eyes are on what officials there have lined up as a response. With its economy still struggling with sluggish consumption and slow growth, observers expect China to keep its powder dry for now — at least until another round of tariffs that could do greater damage. "We expect China not to jump to immediate retaliation following the 10 percent tariff hike, but will keep the doors of negotiation and cooperation open," UBS bank analysts wrote in a note.

"We do not expect China to follow the same strategy as in the first round of tariff hikes in 2018-19."

Bilateral trade totalled more than \$530 billion in 2024, according to US data, with exports of Chinese

goods to the United States exceeding \$400 billion. That was second only to Mexico. But that yawning trade imbalance - \$270.4 billion in January-November last year - has long raised hackles in Washington.

Key US demands in the first trade war were greater access to China's markets, broad reform of a business playing field that heavily favors Chinese firms, and a loosening of heavy state controls. This time around Washington has also called for China to crack down on exports to Mexico of chemical components used to make the synthetic opioid fentanyl, responsible for tens of thousands of overdose deaths a year. After long, fraught negotiations during Trump's first term the two agreed what became known as the "phase one" deal — a ceasefire in the nearly two-year-old trade war.

Beijing was quick to retaliate throughout that standoff — imposing tariffs of its own on everything from cars to soybeans, designed to inflict harm on Trump's voting base in rural America. — AFP

Business

NBK celebrates graduation of trainees from Moody's credit certificate program

Aligned with bank's strategy to advance excellence across Group's workforce



The bank's executive management during the closing ceremony of the Moody's credit certificate program.

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) proudly celebrated the graduation of its third cohort of trainees from the prestigious "Moody's Credit Certificates-2024" program. Organized in collaboration with the renowned global credit rating agency Moody's, this initiative underscores NBK's commitment to enhancing employee skills and elevating workforce quality.

This initiative aligns with NBK's strategic commitment to developing and enhancing workforce capabilities across the Group by designing and implementing targeted training programs, workshops, and educational initiatives aimed at elevating employee skills and competencies. The five-month program encompassed comprehensive modules on credit analysis, credit structuring, documentation, relationship management excellence, negotiation strategies, effective planning and implementation techniques, as well as advanced credit masterclass, ESG and business strategy.

Approximately 55 trainees participated in the program, divided into three groups



Najla Al-Sager

Developing our people remains a key strategic pillar for driving sustainable growth and maintaining the bank's excellence

We consistently equip our talents to address the dynamic needs of the banking industry

at intermediate and advanced levels. Participants represented various departments across the bank, including the Consumer Banking Group, Risk Management Group, Private Banking Group, Corporate Banking Group, International Banking Group, and the Foreign Corporate, Oil and Trade Finance Group.

On this occasion, Najla Al-Sager, Head of Talent Management, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We are delighted to celebrate the grad-

uation of a new cohort from the Moody's Credit Certificate Program. This initiative underscores the bank's commitment to fostering a culture of excellence and investing in human capital, while preparing qualified banking leaders in line with the highest international standards." "Over the years, we have significantly enhanced the program's content to align with evolving industry demands and trends. The program's duration has been extended from two months to five months, incorporating

approximately a month of in-class training and around 23 hours of e-learning courses. Additionally, we have integrated workshops focused on the practical application of skills throughout the program to further enrich the trainees' knowledge and capabilities," she added.

"We firmly believe that investing in our employees is a key strategic pillar for achieving sustainable growth and maintaining the bank's excellence and leadership. To this end, we are continuously committed to providing the best training and development programs in collaboration with renowned international institutions. Our goal is to build a flexible and dynamic workforce capable of adapting to future challenges and the ever-evolving banking landscape," she emphasized.

"We have a comprehensive plan designed to enhance the efficiency of our workforce. We are committed to continuously preparing our employees to navigate the challenges brought about by the evolving dynamics of the banking sector. By equipping them with the necessary tools

and knowledge, we ensure their ability to drive ongoing success, maintain the bank's excellence, and uphold our position at the forefront of innovation and competitiveness," she highlighted.

Furthermore, Al-Sager stressed that NBK dedicates all its extensive resources to developing its human capital, enhancing the capabilities of its employees, and equipping them with the expertise and skills required to drive the bank's growth. This commitment plays a crucial role in building a highly skilled workforce that supports NBK's long-term objectives and strengthens the sustainability initiatives it champions. The training partnership with Moody's embodies the bank's strategic plans to establish solid foundations for the professional development of NBK Group's employees. By collaborating with renowned universities and prestigious international educational institutions, this initiative aims to cultivate future banking leaders, equipping them with the expertise and experience necessary to tackle the evolving challenges of the banking industry.

China expands key mineral export controls

BEIJING: China said on Tuesday it would restrict exports of five metals used in defense, clean energy and other industries in response to fresh US tariffs, refraining from the outright export bans Beijing has previously used against Washington. The restrictions were the latest attempt by China since 2023 to leverage its dominance in mining and processing critical minerals used in everything from smartphones and electric car batteries to infrared missiles and ammunition.

The new curbs by China stop short of outright export bans and are narrowly targeted in some cases. They form part of the measured package of tariffs and other policies unveiled by Beijing after an additional 10 percent tariff on Chinese imports into the US came into effect at 1201 ET (0501 GMT).

Licenses will now be required to export 20 tungsten, tellurium, bismuth, indium and molybdenum-related products to "safeguard national security interests", the Commerce Ministry said. Uses for the metals range from solar panels to artillery shells. For example, China will restrict the export of certain types of molybdenum powders used to make missile parts. It shipped 287 tons last year, about half going to Japan, customs data showed.

Markets had speculated China would expand export controls ever since its decision last December to ban exports to the US of antimony and other materials, according to Jessica Fung, head of Consulting at Project Blue. The move will



CHONGQING: A worker checks rolls of glass fiber at a factory that produces fiberglass in Chongqing, in southwest China. — AFP

likely force up prices outside China, she added.

However, a London-based trader, who requested anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the media, said the move was a "warning shot" and there wouldn't be a big impact on markets as alternative sources exist. Indices which track a tungsten compound APT-CHINA and indium prices outside China IND-ING-LON hit their highest levels in a decade or more in late January before these curbs were announced.

After previous export curbs were imposed

Currently, international tax issues are largely decided by wealthy member countries of the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Developing nations, which are also pushing for a larger overhaul of international financial systems, have criticized their exclusion from the decision making.

Under pressure from African countries, the UN General Assembly in 2023 moved to proceed toward a new framework tax convention. After a year of discussions, the UN in late 2024 adopted formal guiding principles for the future accord, though several nations, including the United States under then-president Joe Biden, voted against the so-called "terms of reference."

Among the principles outlined were the "equitable taxation of multinational enterprises" and "addressing tax evasion and avoidance by high-net worth individuals." According to the NGO Tax Justice Network, governments lose some \$492 billion in revenue every year due to tax havens.

Almost half (43 percent) of the losses, accord-

ing to the NGO, are made possible by the tax policies of eight countries—Australia, Canada, Zionist entity, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Britain and the United States—which all voted against the terms of reference. That dissent quickly comes into play at the inaugural negotiating sessions this week, as the committee first decides whether its proceedings will operate via majority vote or consensus—the latter of which would give each member de facto veto-power.

The EU's representative argued Monday in favor of consensus, saying otherwise its 27 members might not participate in the future accord. But Ryad Salmani, of the French NGO CCFD-Terre Solidaire, told AFP "it would be heresy to give Donald Trump's United States the power... to block the whole process." The United States meanwhile announced its withdrawal from the negotiating process, with its representative saying the goals of the accord are "inconsistent with US priorities" and would "unacceptably hamper nations' ability to enact tax policies that serve the interests of their citizens, businesses and workers." — AFP

Rare earths: Strategic metals key to future technologies

PARIS: Rare earths, which President Donald Trump hopes to secure from Ukraine as part of a deal for US aid, are strategic metals essential for industries developing computers, batteries, and cutting-edge energy technology.

Not really. With names like dysprosium, neodymium and cerium, rare earths are a group of 17 heavy metals that are actually abundant in the Earth's crust across the globe. In a 2024 assessment, the United States Geological Survey estimated there were 110 million tons of deposits worldwide, including 44 million in China—by far the world's largest producer. A further 22 million tons are estimated in Brazil, 21 million in Vietnam, while Russia has 10 million and India seven million tons.

But mining the metals requires heavy chemical use that results in huge amounts of toxic waste and has caused several environmental disasters, making many countries wary of shouldering the heavy financial costs for production. They are often found in minute ore concentrations, meaning large amounts of rock must be processed to produce the refined product, often in powder form.

Each of the 17 rare earths are used in industry and can be found in a wide variety of everyday and high-tech devices, from light bulbs to guided missiles. Europium is crucial for television screens, cerium is used for polishing glass and refining oil, lanthanum makes a car's catalytic converters operate—the list in the modern economy is virtually endless.

And all have unique properties that are more or less irreplaceable or can be substituted only at prohibitive costs. Neodymium and dysprosium, for example, allow the fabrication of almost permanent, super-strong magnets that require little maintenance, making viable the placement of ocean wind turbines to generate electricity far from the coastline. For decades, Beijing has made the most of its reserves by investing massively in refining operations—often without the strict environmental oversight required in Western countries. China has also filed a huge number of patents on rare earth production, an obstacle to companies in other countries hoping to launch large-scale processing.

As a result, many firms find it cheaper to ship their ore to China for refining, further reinforcing the world's reliance.

The United States and European Union get most of their supply from China, but both are trying to boost their own production and better recycle what they use to reduce dependence on Beijing. At the height of a US-China trade dispute in 2019, Chinese state media suggested that rare earth exports to the United States could be cut in retaliation for American measures, sparking fear among a range of manufacturers. Japan saw first-hand the pain of a cut-off in 2010, when China halted rare earth exports over a territorial conflict.

Since then, Tokyo has pushed hard to diversify supplies, signing deals with the Australian group Lynas for production from Malaysia, and ramping up its recycling capabilities.

Trump said Monday he wanted to reach a deal in which Kyiv guaranteed supplies of rare earths in return for US aid, an idea floated by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky last year. — AFP

UN begins talks toward 'fair' tax accord without US

UNITED NATIONS: UN member states launched negotiations Monday on a global tax accord seeking to tackle in particular evasion by wealthy individuals and businesses, but the United States promptly quit the talks. "Our mandate is clear, we must craft a framework convention that redefines fairness, transparency, equity in the international tax system," said Egyptian official Ramy Youssef, chair of the United Nations negotiating committee that is set to run until 2027.

"This is not merely a technical exercise. It's a moral imperative," he said, denouncing billions of dollars "lost annually to profit shifting, harmful tax competition and illicit financial flows" that could be going toward global development goals.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2025



A truck cleans the road in the settlement on 152 km of the Bishkek-Osh road, unofficially called Paris.



People stand next to trucks parked near a 15-meter replica of the Eiffel Tower.



People sit in a cafe in the settlement on 152 km of the Bishkek-Osh road, unofficially called Paris — AFP photos

PARIS, THE VILLAGE OF LIGHT IN KYRGYZSTAN'S RUGGED MOUNTAINS

To reach Paris's Eiffel Tower, Nurzhigit Abrahman had to zig-zag through treacherous mountain passes and avoid an avalanche before getting a foggy glimpse of the 15-meter (50-foot) monument in a mountain hamlet in Kyrgyzstan. The settlement is one of the few spots of civilization on the only road that links the north and south of the Central Asian nation, a bustling route amid surging trade with Russia and China. Around 100 "Parisians" live in the makeshift village, which got its name from the truckers drawn to the glow of its roadside cafes, and somehow the idea of the City of Light stuck. "I stopped in Paris because the roads are closed, there's too much snow. While they grit the roads, I'm going to eat and rest," Abrahman, 22, told AFP from the inside of his truck cab. "There's a small repair shop here, we can change a tire," said Abrahman, who is ferrying cargo from the capital Bishkek to the southern city of Osh -- a drive of around 700 kilometers (430 miles) and at least 15 hours away.

The route winds through landlocked Kyrgyzstan's Suusamy Valley, which posted a record-low temperature of -47 degrees Celsius (-53 Fahrenheit) in 2023. The road also has the grim distinction of the most road fatalities of any in the country. During the winter storm, visibility is almost zero and uncovered faces are stung by the ice crystals being whipped up by a blizzard.

Kilometer 152

Paris has become a popular stopover for the growing numbers of vehicles nav-



In this aerial photograph people stand among cars parked next to a 15-meter replica of the Eiffel Tower.

igating one of the world's most mountainous countries. In honor of the name, last summer the village was gifted its own version of the famed tower. "Our village is called Paris, and in Paris there's an Eiffel Tower," said Nurzhan Kubatbekov, Kyrgyzstan's answer to Gustave Eiffel, who paid \$14,000 for the replica. Although 20 times smaller than the real thing, it still lights up at night, just like the original. But that is where the comparisons with the French capital end.

Where one Paris has Notre Dame cathedral, the other boasts a new little mosque. Instead of pigeons gathered on open squares or rats scurrying through metro stations, a battered stable for

mountain-hardened horses and cows. But to government officials, this Paris does not exist -- it is just 152 km of the Bishkek-Osh highway.

'Legalize us or raze it'

The village popped up to meet the growing demands of long-distance drivers, but has never been formally incorporated. "Before, there was nothing here, then containers appeared, and a village formed," said Tamara Kachkynbayeva, a 55-year-old who runs a cafe serving traditional meat dishes. "We started feeding and warming drivers between the mountain passes. There's even an infirmary for first aid," she added.



In this aerial photograph a man walks past a mosque in the settlement on 152 km of the Bishkek-Osh road, unofficially called Paris.

Locals are now pushing to get recognition for the village and its French-inspired name. "The population is asking to legalize the situation and make the name Paris official," Kachkynbayeva said. Urmat Nusubaliyev, one of the first to settle in Paris 27 years ago, is waiting for an answer by spring. "No one has any documents for this land. The village technically belongs to two different districts," the 47-year-old said. "Either they legalize us or they raze it." But the future of Paris is uncertain.

To deal with growing cargo volumes, authorities are planning to open an alternative route between Bishkek and Osh, bypassing the village, later

this year. It would be faster, but likely just as risky. After Paris, truckers have to navigate several passes at altitudes of more than 3,000 meters including a dangerous spot known as Camel's Pass, where rocks are covered in phone numbers for emergency breakdown services. Stranded vehicles can quickly become buried under intense snowfall. Eldiyar Dulatov, 26, was one of the unlucky drivers AFP journalists met on the road during the stormy January day. "I've got no signal and seven people in the car," he lamented. "A pipe has burst and the fuel is leaking." — AFP

Cannes Film Festival says Juliette Binoche to head jury

The Cannes Film Festival announced Tuesday that it had chosen Juliette Binoche, one of France's best-known actors, to preside over its 78th edition which will take place in May. The 60-year-old star of films from "The English Patient" to "Certified Copy" will succeed "Barbie" director Greta Gerwig who served as jury president last year. Gerwig, the first American film maker to take on the role, and the rest of the jury awarded the Palme d'Or in 2024 to the film "Anora" by Sean Baker.

"In 1985, I climbed the steps for the first time with the enthusiasm and uncertainty of a young actress," Binoche said in a statement, referring to her first experience in Cannes. "I never imagined returning 40 years later in this honorary role as jury president. I am aware of the privilege, the responsibility, and the absolute need for humility," she added.

Binoche is one of the rare actresses

to have won awards at Europe's three biggest film festivals, having been honored at Cannes, as well as the Venice Film Festival and the Berlinale. She is also among only a handful of French actors to have won an Oscar, taking Best Supporting Actress in the epic 1996 war drama "The English Patient".

Binoche is also known for her outspoken political views, which have seen her take positions on issues from women in Iran to environmental causes and undocumented migrants. She recently signed a petition entitled "Stand Up for Culture" against budget cuts planned by the French government in the cultural sector.

Binoche, whose latest film "Queen at Sea" is set to be released this year, has also publicly backed fellow actors speaking out about sexual violence following the #MeToo scandal in Hollywood. The festival pointed out that it was only the second time in its history that two women had presided over the jury in a row. The previous instance dates back to the 1960s when Italian cinema icon Sophia Loren succeeded Olivia de Havilland from "Gone with the Wind". The remaining Cannes jury members still need to be selected. The announcement of the official competition lineup is expected in mid-April. — AFP

At Damascus opera house, hopes for a better future

To applause, percussionist Bahjat Antaki took the stage with Syria's national symphony orchestra, marking the first classical concert at the Damascus opera house since President Bashar Al-Assad's ouster. The concert was a way of saying "we are here and able to produce art," despite more than years of devastating war, Antaki told AFP after last week's performance, which drew an audience of hundreds. "We will continue, and we will be stronger and more beautiful," the 24-year-old said.

After Islamist-led rebels ousted Assad on December 8, the orchestra's rehearsals and concerts were halted as Syria embarked on a delicate transition away from decades of one-family rule enforced by a repressive security apparatus. While the country has breathed a sigh of relief, many in the capital -- known for being more liberal than other parts of the country -- have expressed apprehension about the direction the new Islamist leaders may take on personal freedoms and potentially the arts.

The new authorities have said repeatedly they will protect Syria's religious and ethnic minorities, and that the country's transition will be inclusive. "There aren't fears, but worries," said violinist Rama al-Barsha before going onstage. "We hope for more support -- under the old regime, we had no financial aid or even symbolic support," the 33-year-old said.

The concert was conducted by Miskak Baghboudarian, a member of Syria's Armenian minority, and included works by Beethoven and Tchaikovsky but also by Syrian composers. In the audience were European and Gulf Arab diplomats as well as new Health Minister Maher Al-Sharaa and his family.

Homage 'to the martyrs'

Sharaa is the brother of interim president Ahmed Al-Sharaa, who un-



The Syrian National Symphony Orchestra performs for the first time since the fall of the regime, entitled: For the Martyrs and for the Glory of Syria, at the Damascus Opera House in the presence of a number of diplomats and ambassadors and a large audience. — AFP

til recently led the Islamist group that spearheaded the offensive against Assad. The group, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham has its roots in Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate but cut ties in 2016. Last month, the opera house also hosted its first concert by well-known Islamic music singer known as Abu Ratib, who returned after decades in exile for his political views and whose recordings until recently were sold in secret.

The orchestral performance paid homage "to the martyrs and the glory of Syria". A minute's silence was held for the more than 500,000 people killed during the civil war which erupted after Assad brutally repressed anti-government protests in 2011.

Images of the destruction wreaked by more than 13 years of fighting were projected on the back wall of the stage, along with pictures of mass demonstrations. Also shown were photographs of Alan Kurdi, the toddler who became a

tragic symbol of the Syrian refugee crisis when his tiny body was washed up on a Turkish beach in 2015 after his family's failed attempt to reach EU member Greece by small boat.

In a reminder of the heavy economic cost of the war, the venue was unheated for the concert despite the winter cold. Organizers said they could not afford the fuel, and both musicians and technical staff performed for free. Audience member Omar Harb, 26, acknowledged concerns about the future of the arts in Syria's Islamist-led political transition but said after the performance that "it seems that nothing will change". "We hope that these events will continue -- I want to come back again," said the young doctor, after watching his first concert at the opera house. Yamama al-Haw, 42, said the venue was "a very dear place". — AFP



French actress Juliette Binoche arrives for the Opening Ceremony and the screening of the film "Le Deuxieme Acte". — AFP

Lifestyle



People visit Ain Atrous, a natural hot spring that flows into the sea in the thermal region of Korbous, in Tunisia's northeastern region of Nabl. — AFP photos



A woman at a spa in Korbous in Tunisia's northeastern region of Nabl.

Tunisia sets sights on becoming world's top seawater therapy spot

With a Mediterranean coastline, natural thermal springs, clement weather and affordability, Tunisia has become the world's second-largest destination for seawater-based treatments known as thalassotherapy. Now, it is setting its sights on overtaking France to claim the top spot. "The main advantage of Tunisia is its coast and thalassotherapy," compared with neighboring countries, said Mario Paolo, an Italian, at the Korbous thermal spa, perched on a hill an hour's drive from the capital, Tunis.

A 78-year-old retiree who has lived in Tunisia for the past five years, Paolo said he frequently visits Tunisian thalassotherapy centers "to get back in shape". "Enjoying sea water and natural springs is not just leisure but also a therapy," Paolo said after a thyme and rosemary oil massage. Korbous, a coastal town on the Cap Bon peninsula, has historically been one of Tunisia's hot spots for the therapy, which uses sea water and other marine resources.

Thalassotherapy is an "ancestral heritage" for Tunisians, "since hydrotherapy has existed in Tunisia since antiquity, at the time of the Carthaginians and the Romans," Shahnez Guizani, the head of the National Office of Thermalism (ONTH), told AFP. Other popular thalassotherapy destinations in the country include Sousse, Hammamet, Monastir, and Djerba, which Tunisian news agency TAP said was named the Mediterranean thalassotherapy capital in 2014 by the World Federation of Hydrotherapy and Climatotherapy.



Rouaa Machat, 22, said she travelled from France to Korbous for a three-day wellness retreat. "I'm here to enjoy the types of water this beautiful town offers," she said, referring to the use of seawater, spring water, and desalinated water for therapy. "But I am also here for this," she added, grinning and pointing to the Korbous sea and mountains. Customers mainly come for the quality of spring water, said Raja Haddad, a doctor who heads the thalassotherapy centre at the Royal Tulip Korbous Bay hotel.

Today, Tunisia boasts 60 thalassotherapy centres and 390 spas, 84 percent of which are located in hotels, according to the ONTH. Tourism accounts for seven percent of the country's GDP and provides nearly half a million jobs,

according to official figures. The sector has seen a decade of setbacks due to terrorist attacks and later the COVID-19 pandemic. But it has been recovering again as the number of foreign visitors exceeded 10 million last year - a record for the country of 12 million people.

'Palm trees and the sun'

Guizani said thalassotherapy on its own draws about 1.2 million foreign visitors a year, with "70 percent coming from Europe, including 40 percent from France". The industry generates approximately 200 million dinars (\$63 million, 60 million euros) per year, she added. That compares with a French thalassotherapy market valued at around 100 million euros last year, according to market research firm Busi-

nesscoot. At a luxury hotel near Monastir, a thalassotherapy center buzzes with customers despite the cold winter season.

Visitors have come from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, among other countries. "As soon as you arrive, you find palm trees and the sun," said Monique Dicrocco, a 65-year-old French tourist. "It's pure happiness, and it's also worth your money." "Here the therapy is much cheaper than in France, with 1,000 euros a week all inclusive instead of 3,000," she added. Jean-Pierre Ferrante, 64, from Cannes, said he found "the quality of the water and the facilities just as good as in France".

Kaouther Meddeb, head of the thalassotherapy and spa center at the Royal Elyssa Hotel in Monastir, said

the number of clients has been growing lately. Yet despite meeting international standards, the sector remains underappreciated in Tunisia, she said. "There's a lack of communication and promotion," she added. Experts say more investment is needed in infrastructure. This includes road improvements and air services, they say, as there are few low-cost flights.

But plans are already underway to develop eco-friendly thermal resorts in regions like Beni M'tir, a mountainous village in the northwest, and near Lake Ichkeul south of Bizerte, said Guizani. "With all the advantages it has, Tunisia is poised to become the world leader in thalassotherapy," she added. — AFP

Baldoni, Lively lawyers face off in \$400 million 'It Ends With Us' case

Lawyers for Hollywood stars Justin Baldoni and Blake Lively faced off Monday in their \$400 million defamation fight, as Baldoni's side dropped a cache of case documents online prompting censure from the judge. Hollywood power couple Lively and Ryan Reynolds are being targeted by Baldoni, Lively's co-star on bleak romance movie "It Ends With Us," after she sued Baldoni and alleged sexual harassment. In the latest caustic twist in the legal battle engulfing the film, Baldoni's team created a website containing a trove of messages and documents relating to the case.

In court, Judge Lewis Liman said the latest amended complaint, which included emails and text messages between Baldoni and Lively and Reynolds - who Baldoni is also suing - broke court procedure, US media reported. The Manhattan federal judge threatened to bring forward the date of the trial, currently slated for March 2026, if the parties to the case continue to litigate the dispute

in the media. "You've got a lot in front of the court that gives, I think, the public plenty to feast upon," Liman said reportedly.

The \$400 million suit from Baldoni, who also directed the film, came after Lively filed a sexual harassment complaint against him, protesting her treatment on set, and then a lawsuit accusing him of launching a retaliatory media campaign against her. Baldoni has sought to have the case against him dismissed. "We just couldn't be more pleased with how all the issues were managed. We're going to move as quickly as we possibly can and prove our innocence," Baldoni's lawyer Bryan Freedman said outside court following the hearing.

Lively's lawyer Michael Gottlieb said he was "very happy with how the hearing went" - but did not elaborate. The war between the stars was dragged into the spotlight when fans noticed during promotion of the film that they did not follow one another on social media. It

quickly emerged that Lively had complained of Baldoni's behavior on the set, accusing him of - among other things - speaking inappropriately about his sex life and seeking to add intimate scenes into the film that she had not previously agreed to.

Lively also said lead producer Jamey Heath had watched her while she was topless, despite having been asked to turn away. Then, Lively alleges, Baldoni ignited a PR campaign to smear her and divert attention away from complaints she might make about the men's alleged actions.

Baldoni has also sued The New York Times after it published a piece about that alleged smear campaign, including what it said were emails and texts discussing the media outcry. Baldoni countered that Lively hijacked the production of "It Ends With Us" and that she defamed him and, with Reynolds, sought to extort him. — AFP



Marcus Mucha, great grandson of Art Nouveau painter Alfons Mucha is pictured during an AFP interview in the Prague's new museum dedicated to his great granddad's in Prague. — AFP photos



'Art for everyone': Mucha's masterpiece to find home in Prague, 100 years on

A new Prague museum dedicated to the Czech Art Nouveau painter Alfons Mucha will offer "art for everyone" when it opens this month, ultimately housing his giant Slav Epic masterpiece after decades in storage, his great-grandson told AFP. A painter, graphic artist and designer, Mucha (1860-1939) gained fame for his floral posters, especially of French actress Sarah Bernhardt, which he made while living in Paris - and his work later helped inspire the hit Disney film "Frozen", according to his descendant.

The museum in the Baroque Savarin Palace in Prague's UNESCO-listed historic center will display over 100 works, including paintings, lithographs and sketches, from February 24. It will also provide a long-sought home for Mucha's grand Slav Epic cycle. British-born Marcus Mucha, who heads a foundation managing the artist's legacy, told AFP that the museum would offer "art for everyone" in line with his great-grandfather's philosophy.

"He always said: 'I did not want my art to be for the salons of the elite'. He thought of his posters in Paris as making the streets and squares an open-air art gallery for everybody." Most of the artwork on display comes from the family collection comprising some 4,000 artworks. The museum will also display four

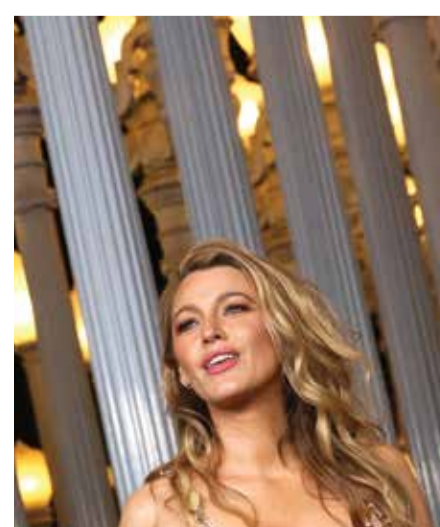
smaller reproductions of his Slav Epic, a cycle of 20 canvases ranging in size from 20 to 50 square meters (215 to 540 square feet).

Mucha spent 18 years on the work depicting moments from the history and mythology of the Slavic peoples. He finished it in 1928, 10 years after Czechoslovakia became independent following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The series went on display in Prague, but was quickly placed in depositories and even under a pile of coal when the Nazis invaded in 1939.

The Slav Epic was not displayed again until 1963, at the Moravsky Krumlov castle near Mucha's native town. It was removed in 2011 as the castle fell into disrepair and reinstalled 10 years later following reconstruction. The cycle also toured Japan in 2017, drawing 660,000 viewers. Mucha donated the work to Prague under a contract from 1913 on condition that the city find a suitable place for it. It had failed to do so until now, following a series of disputes. Describing the Slav Epic as "a sensitive national treasure", Marcus Mucha said the masterpiece will ultimately be showcased in another part of the Savarin Palace, to be designed by acclaimed British architect Thomas Heatherwick. — AFP



US actress Blake Lively's lead counsel, Michael Gottlieb, gathered with other counselors after a pre-trial hearing in a \$400 million defamation suit by Baldoni against Hollywood power couple Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds in New York on February 3, 2025. — AFP photos



US actress Blake Lively attends the LACMA Art+Film Gala at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in Los Angeles, California, on November 2, 2024.

WHAT'S ON
IN KUWAIT



IBPC Kuwait hosts debate titled 'Engaging Minds and Ideas'

The Indian Business and Professional Council (IBPC) Kuwait hosted an intellectually stimulating debate event at Crowne Plaza, Farwaniya, captivating an audience of IBPC members, prominent business leaders, school principals and teachers from across Kuwait with the art of argument and the power of ideas. The event was attended by Dr Manas Patel, First Secretary - Embassy of India, and Harit Shelat, Second Secretary - Embassy of India, alongside senior members of the Indian community in Kuwait.

The evening began with a warm welcome by IBPC Secretary Suresh KP who invited Chairman Kaizar T Shaker to deliver the opening remarks. In his address, Shaker highlighted

IBPC's commitment to increasing its membership base and enhancing visibility through a series of impactful events, such as the industrial exhibitions and seminars, L Subramaniam concert, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations, the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Kuwait, and now the debate event. Vice Chairman Gaurav Oberoi lauded the participants for their enthusiastic preparation and praised the efforts of the organizing committee.

Moderated by Alka Kumra, the debate showcased thought-provoking arguments between two teams. The affirmative team—comprising Anees Saif, Deepak Bindal, Karthik Ramodoss, and Sunilkumar Singh—delivered compelling points, while the op-

posing team—featuring Ketan Puri, Kashif Syed, Krishen Suryakant and Sahil Chopra—countered with sharp rebuttals. The debate was lively, intellectually engaging, and a true testament to the power of ideas.

Timekeepers Vikram Joshi and Nayana Suresh ensured the event flowed seamlessly, keeping the teams on track and within the allocated time limits. All debaters were presented with a special memento, a hand-made artwork of Saura paintings, procured from the Tribes India Stall at Pravasi Bharatiya Divas held at Odisha recently. These paintings with their simple figures and designs, weave beautiful stories about one of the oldest tribes of Eastern India—the Saura tribe.

Adding an element of fun and excitement, spot prizes and raffle draws kept the audience engaged throughout the evening. The evening concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Joint Secretary Sunit Singh Arora, who expressed gratitude to the moderator, participants, sponsors, and the organizing team for their invaluable contributions.

The IBPC debate proved to be another successful initiative in fostering intellectual discussions and strengthening community bonds. With such vibrant events, IBPC continues to uphold its mission of promoting thought leadership, camaraderie, and meaningful engagement within Kuwait's business and professional community.



Kottayam Association holds annual event

Expatriates live two lives in one life. Even while living abroad, expats hold their mother tongue Malayalam close to their heart and love their native state Kerala," said Indian lawmaker Jose K Mani. Mani was speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the 9th annual conference of the Kottayam District Association Kuwait (KDAK) in Abbasiya.

"The role of expatriates in the development of Kerala is invaluable," Mani said adding that the contribution of expatriates is the face of Kerala today. President Chessil Cherian Ramapuram presided over the meeting of 'Kottayam Mahotsavam 2025'.



Jijuna Unni, Hamsa Payyanur, Mohan George, Ladies Wing Chairperson Tresa Abraham, Sam Nanthiyat and Jacob Channapetta extended their greetings.

Mani was presented with a gold medal by KDAK President Chessil Cherian. Subsequently, entrepreneurs from Kottayam district, including CV Paul, Saji Zakaria, Sony Sebastian, Shafeeq Rahman, Kishore Mathew, Shibu Paul, Dominic Mathew, Mathew Philip Tharakan, Jobin P John, Subi John, Ajith Pan-

icker, and journalist Anil P Alex, were honored with mementos by the chief guest Mani.

General Secretary Ajith Zacharia Peter welcomed the meeting, Vice Presidents Harikrishnan Mohan, Harold Mathew, Program Convener Sam Nanthiyat, Advisory Committee Members Mohan George, Anil P Alex, Sunny Thomas, Sony Sebastian, Shafiq Rahman, office-bearers of local associations in Kottayam District Biju Simon Ayarkunnam Association, Antony Peter - Changanassery, Justin Joseph - Perur, Ajith- Tellakam, Tijo Thomas - Thrikkodithanam, Suneesh Mathew - Kadaplamatam, Rari Varghese - Vakathanam, Biju Abraham, Ramapuram College Alumni Association office-bearers Mathew Zacharia - Baseliyos College Kottayam, Rajesh Varkey- CMS Kottayam, Sylvie Jose - Devamatha College, John P Abraham - KG College, Zacharia - Manarkad St Mary's College, Tommy Cyriac - St Thomas College Pala, Shibu Pallikal - SB College Changanachery as well as Renee Jacob representing the Kottayam Club and Suresh T Isaac, representative of the Kuwait Kerala Native Ball Federation, were also present on the stage.

Sports talents Irene Kishore Chooraneli, Jeremy Nanthiyatt, and Eric Sibi were honored. Prizes for individual excellence in the folk ball competition organized by KDAK were distributed to the best ball catcher Eban, best player Ajo, best ballfooter Robichan, best ball handler Jithu, and best ball picker Jijo. Program General Convener K J John expressed his vote of thanks.

Following the official ceremony, a musical evening featuring well-known south Indian singer G Venugopal and his son Aravind Venugopal was held. Playback singer Nayana Nair, singer Veepin Xavier, and stand-up comedian Reji Ramapuram also performed during the event.

Kuwait Tamil Makkal Sevai Maiyam holds free medical camp

The Kuwait Tamil Makkal Sevai Maiyam organized 6th annual free medical camp on January 31. More than 250 people benefited from the free medical check-ups. The event was made possible with the support of Dr Rabiullah and Gunaseelan Pillai.

N L Abdul Haleem, Charge d' affaires of the Sri Lankan Embassy in Kuwait honored the occasion as the special guest. Representatives from various associations also attended the event. The event was organized by the Kuwait Tamil Makkal Sevai Maiyam's President Abdul Rahman, Secretary Gautam, Medical



Secretary Sultan, coordinator Abdul Rashid Abuthahir, Halik, Selvaraj, social worker Alibai, and the administrators and staff members.



Balavedi Kuwait celebrates 76th Republic Day of India

Balavedi Kuwait, the children's wing of KALA Kuwait, organized a celebration to mark the 76th Republic Day of India. A meeting was held in connection with the occasion was inaugurated by M A Siddique, state secretary of the Progressive Arts and Literature Group. He also spoke to the children about the broad visions envisioned by the Indian Republic. Balavedi Acting President Brian Basil presided over the function. Balavedi General Secretary Angelita Ramesh welcomed the gathering. Abu Khalifa regional president Agnes Shine presented the Republic Day message and Balavedi Fahaheel regional president Sneha Jit read the preamble to the Indian constitution.

KALA Kuwait president Mathew Joseph, Balavedi Cen-

tral Patrons' Committee Coordinator Shankar Ram and others spoke and conveyed their greetings. A drawing competition was organized as part of the celebrations and the Pulari Club of Abu Khalifa region won first place. Participants from various clubs in the Fahaheel region won second place and the Abdul Kalam Club of Abbasiya won third place. The winners were awarded prizes by the members of the Balavedi Central Patrons' Committee and Kala Kuwait office-bearers. Around 160 children representing various segments participated in the drawing competition. This was followed by artistic performances by children from Balavedi clubs. Balavedi Abbasiya regional secretary Gouripriya Girish Kumar proposed a vote of thanks.



Upcoming

EVENETS

'Bharat Mela'

Embassy of India in Kuwait is organizing 'Bharat Mela' on February 15, 2025 from 11am to 9pm at Boulevard Park (Cricket Stadium), Salmiya. Indian nationals who are interested in participating in cultural performances may register by filling this form. Shortlisted candidates will be contacted by the Embassy. One person may register on behalf of a team. If you have more than one form of dance, please mention in description below.

<https://forms.gle/S2vCYmLQ15YRHjz9>



Blood donation drive

Konni Nivasi Sangamam -Kuwait, in collaboration with BDK Kuwait Chapter, is organizing a blood donation drive on February 14, 2025, at the Al-Adan Blood Transfusion Center from 2 pm to 5pm. Transportation will be provided for donors. For more details, contact us at 55424021, 90063952, or 96602365.

KALA Kuwait new office-bearers

Kerala Art Lovers' Association (KALA), Kuwait held its 46th annual representative conference on January 24 at Sitaram Yechury Nagar, Indian Central School, Abbasiya, after completing 89 unit conferences and four regional conferences of the association. The conference, which began at 9 am and ended at 5 pm, was attended by 361 delegates elected from four regions. Dr M A Siddique, secretary of the Progressive Art and Literature Group, inaugurated the annual conference. In his address, he underlined the relevance of progressive movements such as KALA which is always ready to extend a helping hand to the less privileged sections in the society.



(Clockwise from top) Mathew Joseph, Hikmat T V, P B Suresh, Praseeth Karunakaran and Praveen P V.

The annual conference elected the office-bearers and a 27-member committee for the 2025 working year. Mathew Joseph was elected as the president, TV Hikmat as the general secretary, PB Suresh as the treasurer, Praveen PV as vice president and Praseeth Karunakaran as joint secretary. The presidium consisting of Anoop Mangat, J Saji, and Shini Robert controlled the proceedings of the conference. The conference discussed and approved the one-year activity report presented by General Secretary Saji Thomas Mathew and the financial report presented by Treasurer Anil Kumar. The sub-committees of Registration, Minutes, Resolution, and Credentials worked as part of the conference proceedings. The credential report was presented by PR Kiran. R Naganathan, a member of the Lok Kerala Sabha, welcomed the conference. At the function, the welcoming committee chairman Sunny Sajesh welcomed the gathering and the newly-elected general secretary TV Hikmat proposed a vote of thanks.

Share your community news!

We love hearing from you! If you have community news, events or happenings to share, please send the details to whatson@kuwaittimes.com. Your story could be featured in our weekly What's On section on Mondays.

Sports

Brunson scores 42 points as Knicks bounce back, Thunder rout Bucks

Warriors hold off a furious late rally from Orlando Magic to bag a 104-99 victory

NEW YORK: Jalen Brunson scored 42 points as the New York Knicks unleashed a late barrage to overwhelm the Houston Rockets 124-118 in the NBA on Monday. The Knicks were humbled at home by the Los Angeles Lakers on Saturday and looked to be sliding to another defeat at Madison Square Garden as Houston powered into an 11-point lead early in the fourth quarter.

But Houston's double-digit lead was the cue for a New York scoring spree that saw the Knicks erupt for an astonishing 46-point fourth quarter that turned the contest on its head. Brunson led the charge with 17 points in the fourth, putting the seal on the comeback with two late free throws to wrap up a win that leaves New York third in the Eastern Conference standings.

Brunson received offensive support from Karl-Anthony Towns and Mikal Bridges, who both chipped in with 22 points apiece while Josh Hart also made double figures with 19 points. Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau saluted his team's ability to dig themselves out of a hole and grab victory against the third-ranked team in the Western Conference.

"You have to win games different ways," Thibodeau said. "We got in a hole but we found a way to win — I loved the way we responded in the fourth quarter. Whatever it was going to take, we were going to do."

Thunder crush Bucks

In other games the Oklahoma City Thunder took full advantage of an under-strength Milwaukee Bucks line-up to extend their lead at the top of the Western Conference with a thumping 125-96 vic-



NEW YORK: Jalen Brunson #11 of the New York Knicks heads for the net as Jalen Green #4 of the Houston Rockets defends at Madison Square Garden on February 03, 2025 in New York City. — AFP

tory. The Bucks, missing Giannis Antetokounmpo, Damian Lillard, Brook Lopez, Khris Middleton and Bobby Portis, were buried by an avalanche of scoring from the Thunder, who led by as much as 44 points at one stage in the third quarter.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the rout with 34

points from just 22min 24sec on court, with Ousmane Dieng scoring 21 from the bench. Oklahoma City improved to 39-9 with the victory and lead the West from the second-placed Memphis Grizzlies, who moved to 34-16 with a 128-109 defeat of the San Antonio Spurs.

Jaren Jackson Jr. led the Grizzlies scoring with 31 points while GG Jackson finished with 27 from the bench, including four three-pointers. Ja Morant added 25 from 9-of-18 shooting. French star Victor Wembanyama topped San Antonio's scorers with 27 points.

In Denver, Nikola Jokic grabbed his 23rd triple-double of the season with 27 points, 14 rebounds and 10 assists as the Nuggets blew past the New Orleans Pelicans 125-113. Michael Porter Jr. was the offensive standout for Denver though with 36 points, including seven-of-12 from three-point range, while Jamal Murray contributed 20 points.

Denver improved to 31-19 and are nine games behind conference leaders Oklahoma City. In San Francisco, the Golden State Warriors held off a furious late rally from the Orlando Magic to bag a 104-99 victory.

The Warriors opened up a 15-point lead to start the fourth quarter after outscoring Orlando 39-24 in the third, only for the Magic to hit back in the fourth to take a fleeting 92-90 lead with just over four minutes remaining.

But the Warriors dominated the final minutes to regain the lead and close out the win, Andrew Wiggins (25 points) and Stephen Curry (24) combining for 49 points. In Portland, Devin Booker became the Phoenix Suns' all-time leading points scorer, surpassing Walter Davis's total of 15,666 points for the franchise.

However Booker's night finished on a downbeat note with a missed free throw at the end of overtime that would have tied the game, allowing the Trail Blazers to escape with a 121-119 victory. — AFP

News in Brief

Dragusin faces knee surgery

LONDON: Tottenham said Tuesday that defender Radu Dragusin needs surgery to repair anterior cruciate ligament damage, deepening the injury crisis at the Premier League club. The Romania centre-back sustained the injury during last week's Europa League win against Elfsborg. "We can confirm that Radu Dragusin will undergo surgery for an anterior cruciate ligament injury to his right knee," Spurs said on X. Dragusin, signed from Genoa in January last year, has made a total of 28 appearances for Ange Postecoglou's side this season, including 14 Premier League starts. Postecoglou has been short of options in central defence in recent weeks due to a persistent injury crisis and on Sunday the club signed Kevin Danso from Lens on an initial loan deal with a commitment to buy. Central defender Micky van de Ven returned from an injury lay-off against Elfsborg but Cristian Romero remains sidelined. Spurs are a lowly 14th in the Premier League but they have qualified for the last 16 of the Europa League and they take a 1-0 lead into the second leg of their League Cup semi-final against Liverpool on Thursday. — AFP

Murley out of Six Nations clash

LONDON: England wing Cadan Murley has been ruled out of the Six Nations clash with France at Twickenham on Saturday with a foot problem. The Harlequins player picked up the injury in England's 27-22 defeat by reigning champions Ireland in Dublin at the weekend, in which he scored a try on debut. The 25-year-old has been replaced in Steve Borthwick's squad by Saracens centre Alex Lozowski, the Rugby Football Union announced on Tuesday. Lozowski, 31, won the last of his five international caps under former head coach Eddie Jones in 2018. If Murley recovers quickly he could be available for fixtures against Italy and Wales later in the Six Nations. — AFP

Okafor joins Napoli

ROME: Napoli announced on Monday the signing of AC Milan attacker Noah Okafor following the departure of Khvicha Kvaratskhelia last month. Switzerland's Okafor arrives at the Serie A leaders on loan until the end of the season, with an option to buy. Georgia's Kvaratskhelia left Napoli in January for Paris Saint-Germain in a deal worth a reported 70 million euros (\$72 million). "Welcome Noah," Napoli owner Aurelio De Laurentiis said on X. De Laurentiis had attempted to sign Borussia Dortmund's Karim Adeyemi and Fenerbahce's Allan Saint-Maximin before turning his attention to Okafor. The 24-year-old has scored just one goal in 11 league games for Milan this season having joined from Salzburg in July 2023. Napoli are three points ahead of second-placed Inter Milan in Serie A before they welcome Udinese on Sunday. — AFP

Baseball umpire fired for violating gambling rules

NEW YORK: Major League Baseball said on Monday it had fired top umpire Pat Hoberg for violating strict league rules concerning gambling.

The league said in a statement a decision to dismiss Hoberg made in May 2024 had been upheld following a lengthy appeals process.

The league emphasised an investigation found no

Eliasch offers hope, big revenue for IOC's 'phenomenal brand'

PARIS: Johan Eliasch has told AFP that if elected Olympics chief he would offer an essential quality in a "divisive world" — that of "hope" — and also the hard-headed business sense to significantly increase the revenues of a "phenomenal brand."

The 62-year-old president of the International Ski Federation (FIS) was the surprise candidate when seven declared their desire to succeed Thomas Bach as president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), probably the most powerful person in global sport.

The Anglo-Swedish billionaire businessman and noted environmentalist says the campaign is likely his "last hurrah" and he will learn if he has been successful when the 100-plus IOC members vote on March 20 in Greece.

While he hopes for a positive outcome personally — he was "very encouraged" by the feedback after his presentation to fellow members last Thursday — hope is also his message to the sporting world.

"Sport has a magic ability to unite people in peace, working together, doing things together," he said in an interview during a stopover in Paris on his way to the World Skiing Championships in Saalbach, Austria. "Hope is the other big thing for me here, and that is the belief that anything is possible.

"Kids believing that if they work hard enough, they can do anything. In the disruptive and divisive world that we live in, we need hope. "Hope that

Gut-Behrami tops downhill training, Vonn coasts

SAALBACH: Switzerland's Lara Gut-Behrami topped the first training run in the women's downhill at the World Ski Championships in Saalbach on Tuesday, as Lindsey Vonn played down the importance of pushing too hard.

Gut-Behrami timed 1min 43.92sec down the 2.9km-long Ulli Maier course, finishing 0.05sec ahead of American Breezy Johnson. Federica Brignone was third at 0.63sec, one of four Italians in the top 11. Vonn, competing in her ninth world championships after coming out of retirement, finished 20th, 2.24sec off Gut-Behrami's pace, but stressed that she was "just taking it easy."

"I wanted to feel the terrain. I'm trying some different boots. I'm just kind of testing. I'm using the training runs as a testing opportunity," the 40-year-old US star said. "I really put zero weight into training runs because I'm testing things.

"For me, this season is all about figuring out what it's going to take to be successful next year. "I'm further along than I expected, but a training run is a training run. It really means nothing. No one's getting a medal for a training run." Vonn's return from retirement following the 2019 Are worlds was made possible after a knee reconstruction, partially of tita-

things will get better or hope that we can do things better. So hope is kind of the most precious commodity we have, really."

Eliasch, who listed sustainability and the IOC retaining its political neutrality as crucial pillars of his programme, believes "expectations are so high" owing to the manner in which revenues have grown during Bach's 12 years in charge.

However, he says all those facets can be more than matched, if the right person is at the helm — but if the wrong person is in charge, the IOC risks "falling from the top floor to the ground."

"We have to increase revenues, we have to increase distributions," he said. "Here I'm not worried because it's such a phenomenal brand, fantastic brand, that we can do a lot more with it. "As president, I will do a lot more with it to significantly increase the revenues and the distributions and the profits. "That's something that I've done in the FIS."

'Magic wand'

Eliasch, who says he has been inspired on his Olympic journey by sporting feats including the decision by high jumpers Gianmarco Tamberi and Mutaz Barshim to share gold in Tokyo in 2021, said he would like to see Winter Games hosts rotated to increase sustainability.

"We pick, let's say, eight to 10 venues, so that would be 30 to 40 years, and then we would be basically set," he said. "Then the international federations would support the venues by allocating World Cup events, so the local organizers have the funding for upkeep to make sure all the venues are tip-top."

He is also a proponent of taking the Summer Olympics to previously untapped territory such as Africa, India and the Middle East.

"We are global, and we have to think global, and



US skier Lindsey Vonn

nium, that left her pain-free for the first time in years.

But she admitted the rolling terrain in Saalbach was "probably the worst hill for someone with bad knees!" "But I felt great. None of the landings hurt at all. I feel really good. I'm a little bit getting a cold, but my knees felt great.

"I thought it was a really fun course. It actually reminds me of when I was learning how to ski downhill in Vail. We had a lot of terrain that we built like this." Vonn added: "There's a lot of room for improvement and for better skiing from my side, for sure."

Reigning world super-G champion Gut-Behrami, in her last world championships after shooting to fame back in Val d'Isere in 2009 with two silvers at the age of 16, said the training run had been useful to see what the course setters had constructed. — AFP

that Mr Hoberg placed bets on baseball directly or that he or anyone else manipulated games in any way.

"However, his extremely poor judgment in sharing betting accounts with a professional poker player he had reason to believe bet on baseball and who did, in fact, bet on baseball from the shared accounts, combined with his deletion of messages creates at minimum the appearance of impropriety that warrants imposing the most severe discipline."

Hoberg, 38, first umpired in Major League Baseball in 2014 before being appointed on a full-time basis from 2017.

He umpired in postseason games every year from 2018 to 2022 and also officiated in the 2023 World Baseball Classic. — AFP



Johan Eliasch

we have to stage our events globally," he said.

He insists, though, that taking the Games to such places does not go against his environmental principles. "We have to think sustainability," he said. "We have to make sure that new constructions, for instance, have the lowest possible carbon impact.

"We have seen, for instance, Masdar City in Abu Dhabi, where they have done this huge construction with a zero carbon footprint. "I mean, sustainability and reducing carbon impact is not a magic wand, and suddenly it all disappears.

"So it's a lot of initiatives, it's a lot of small things which, when added up, has a big impact." Eliasch says the stakes are so high for global sports that the IOC presidential election cannot be a "popularity contest."

"It has to be the right person for the job," he said. "It's essential, because if you do that, pick the wrong person, I mean, it's like the choice between prosperity and success or failure and becoming irrelevant.

"And we can't allow that to happen." — AFP

Gill: WCup triumph, not Australia loss, defines India

NAGPUR: Reigning T20 World Cup champions India have been in top form across all formats, vice-captain Shubman Gill said on Tuesday, dismissing his side's Test defeat in Australia as a one-off. Rohit Sharma's men clinched the T20 crown in South Africa last year, seven months after they ended the most recent ODI World Cup at home as runners-up.

But a 3-0 Test whitewash at home to New Zealand in October-November, followed by the 3-1 defeat in Australia last month, saw star cricketers including Rohit and Virat Kohli come under scrutiny for their poor batting form.

"One series does not define the form of the whole team." Gill told reporters ahead of the first of three one-day internationals against England starting in Nagpur on Thursday. "Definitely we did not play as per our expectations in the Australian series, but still we played some good cricket," the top-order batsman said.

"One match and one day doesn't define us... we should keep all those things in mind." The three ODI matches, which follow India's 4-1 T20 series victory over England, come ahead of the 50-over Champions Trophy starting on February 19.

Rohit and Kohli, who both retired from T20 cricket after the World Cup win, return to the ODI set-up and Gill said the team is upbeat. However, he also warned the three matches against a "good" England team were not a practice run for the Champions Trophy.

Gill, 25, is seen as a potential future leader for India whenever Rohit, 37, retires from ODI and Test cricket. He said being deputy to Rohit had been one of the main challenges of his international career since 2019.

"I take it as a challenge to lead my way, firstly with my performance and then definitely in the field if Rohit bhai (brother) would want my opinions," Gill said. "What are the plans for certain batsmen, certain bowlers, how to take on certain oppositions—just learning that is a big curve for me." — AFP

Sports

Mahomes, Chiefs take on villain role as Super Bowl hype begins

What began as 'Media Day' has become in recent years an event in itself

NEW ORLEANS: The Super Bowl hype began in earnest on Monday with the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles facing the media and each other at the Superdome - the venue for Sunday's NFL showdown in New Orleans.

And it was clear from the outset that the local fans in Louisiana are rooting for the Eagles to end the Chiefs' dream of an unprecedented 'Threepeat'. Not that the Chiefs are worried about being the villains of the piece.

What began as 'Media Day' - a way to promote the game to the largest audience possible has become in recent years an event in itself. Several thousand fans paid \$20 for tickets in the stands to watch the players face a barrage of questions for an hour at a time.

When quarterback Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs top starters were introduced on to the podium to shake hands with their Eagles counter-parts, both teams in all white tracksuits, there was noticeable booing in the crowd, made up mainly of local fans.

The reaction raised the question of whether the Chiefs, by becoming the first dynasty since the decline of the New England Patriots of the Tom Brady era, have taken on their role as the team NFL fans love to hate. If they have - then it doesn't seem to bother Mahomes.

"I don't even think it's embracing being the villains, we embrace who we are," Mahomes said. "I believe we play the game the right way, we believe that we play with a lot of heart and a lot of passion for the game and we win football games. If winning football games makes you a villain, we're gonna keep going out there and doing it," he added.

The quarterback confessed that he too was a Patriots 'hater' but now has an appreciation of what they were able to achieve under coach Bill Belichick.

"I was a Cowboys fan growing up and I used to hate the Patriots but I think now, more than anything, I appreciate the greatness of the Patriots more now when I see how hard it was to do what they did."

Anti-Chiefs sentiment

Some of the anti-Chiefs sentiment has taken the form of suggestions from online fans that they benefit from favorable treatment from referees and in an exchange with a student reporter, tight-end Travis Kelce's response suggested those theories may have needed the team.

Asked what question he would ask the media, if the tables were turned, Kelce said "Hmmm, I guess I'd asked why are you guys leaning into this whole ref thing?" But while many may have tired of the sight of the Chiefs in the Super Bowl, this is their fourth appearance in five seasons, the experience of the big game could prove to be valuable.

"I think it does feel different. It is not so overwhelming or like you are wide-eyed about everything," said kicker Harrison Butker, who already has three Super Bowl rings. "We are obviously very grateful and very hungry but we've been here before and we know how to handle it," he said.

The Eagles also have experience of the biggest game in the sport having been one of the Chiefs' victims, losing by three points, two years ago in Arizona. So it would have been no surprise to them that many of the questions during 'Opening Night' are of a light-hearted variety, even if the era of some media wearing fancy dress appears to be drawing to a close.

Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts was asked how he terms the team's trademark play on short and goal where Hurts is pushed the final yard into the end-zone. Some have taken to call-



NEW ORLEANS: Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes stands with Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts next to the Lombardi Trophy as the teams' captains and coaches meet between interview sessions inside the Caesars Superdome during the Super Bowl Opening Night on February 3, 2025 in New Orleans, Louisiana. — AFP

ing the move the 'tush push' while a more elegant phrase, linked with the city of 'Brotherly Love' is the 'Brotherly Shove'.

But Hurts said he has little time for such descrip-

tions of a play which has brought him and his team such success. "I don't call it that," Hurts said. "You call it that. I call it the quarterback sneak. I keep it very standard," he said. — AFP



Honoring of first place team.



Honoring of second place team.

Kuwait Esports, KFH organize FC 2025 PlayStation tourney

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) organized, in collaboration with Kuwait Esports Committee, a PlayStation tournament (FC 2025) exclusively for Hesabi account holders aged 15 to 25.

Held in the KFH Zone at Winter Wonderland, thirty-two players, divided into sixteen teams, fiercely competed in a knock-out tournament, displaying

both intense competition and great enthusiasm.

The winners were honored at the end of the tournament. The first place winner received KD 1,000 and the opportunity to represent the Kuwait Esports team in external competitions. Second place received KD 500 and third place received KD 250.

This event reaffirms KFH's keen interest in the youth segment, particularly Hesabi account holders. It is also part of the bank's commitment to enhancing customer experience by organizing exclusive events, offering new rewards, and launching various campaigns that exceed their aspirations and strengthen their satisfaction.

The FC 2025 PlayStation tournament is a distinguished addition to the array of activities which KFH

offers to Hesabi holders, aligning with its youth and social responsibility strategy.

Hesabi account benefits

Among the many benefits offered through Hesabi accounts for youth aged 15 to 25 are the following: Automatic enrollment in KFH Rewards program, one of the best rewards programs in Kuwait; 24/7 banking services; exclusive offers and discounts from a wide range of merchants; a free Hesabi prepaid card; free online banking services; eligibility to open an Al-Hassad account, allowing them to win from over 400 prizes annually; and eligibility to open an Al-Rabe account with a wide range of benefits.

PSG, Italian clubs are biggest movers in EU's transfer window

PARIS: Big-money transfers were few and far between on continental Europe during the winter transfer window, as clubs in Spain, Germany, Italy and France had a quiet month with only a few exceptions.

AFP Sport rounds up some of the key moves:

All quiet in Spain

Spanish clubs do not tend to splash their cash in the winter transfer windows and this season's was even quieter than usual. Real Betis loaned Manchester United winger Antony until the end of the season, with the Brazilian aiming to reignite his career in Seville after it stagnated at Old Trafford.

Elsewhere, former Barcelona midfielder Arthur moved on loan to Girona from Juventus, also hoping to find form back in Catalonia, and Liverpool youngster Stefan Bajcetic headed to Las Palmas also on a temporary basis.

Leipzig tie down Simons

The Bundesliga's incoming winter transfer window was quiet too, with the notable exception of RB Leipzig, who smashed their transfer record to make Xavi Simons' loan from Paris Saint-Germain permanent for 50 million euros (\$52 million).

Bayern Munich's main deadline-day news was goalkeeper Manuel Neuer's one-year extension, with their reported pursuit of Chelsea winger Christopher Nkunku falling through. Reluctant to lose wantaway forward Mathys Tel, the German giants sent the young Frenchman to Tottenham Hotspur on a six-month loan. Eintracht Frankfurt brought in Elye Wahi from Marseille for 25 million euros to replace Omar Marmoush, now with Manchester City.

Defending champions Bayer Leverkusen reacted to their injury woes by bringing in Aston Villa's Emi Buendia and Mario Hermoso from Roma, both on six-month loan deals. Struggling Borussia Dortmund, who sit 11th in the Bundesliga table, brought in Chelsea midfielder Carney Chukwuemeka on a loan deal and signed Sweden left-back Daniel Svensson, but a deadline day move for Lyon's Rayan Cherki collapsed.

Milan, Juve make moves in Italy

In Italy, AC Milan and Juventus reacted to poor starts to the season by making swoops in the January window. Milan, well off the pace at the top of the table in Serie A, allowed Spain's Euro 2024-winning skipper Alvaro Morata to join Galatasaray on loan, and spent big to sign a replacement in the shape of Mexico forward Santiago Gimenez from Feyenoord.

England right-back Kyle Walker, a loan signing from Manchester City has also headed to Milan. Meanwhile Juve moved to address their problems in attack with the signing of France forward Randal Kolo Muani on loan until the end of the season from PSG, where he had fallen out of favor.

Kolo Muani has already scored three goals in two games since moving to Turin.

Another notable move saw struggling Como sign England international midfielder Dele Alli, who had been without a club since leaving Everton at the end of last season.

PSG sign Kvaratskhelia

PSG, unsurprisingly, made the single biggest splash in France with the signing of Khvicha Kvaratskhelia from Napoli for a reported 70 million euros (\$72m). The recruitment of the thrilling Georgian winger will further strengthen the PSG attack heading into the Champions League knockout phase.

However, the busiest club in Ligue 1 has been struggling Rennes, who have spent big in an attempt to pull clear of the relegation zone. Monday's six signings, including Jordanian forward Musa al-Tamari from Montpellier, brought their total outlay to close to 70 million euros, with other signings including Ivory Coast midfielder Seko Fofana from Al Nassr of Saudi Arabia and France international goalkeeper Brice Samba from Lens.

Moving away from Rennes was Amine Gouiri, the Algerian international forward who has joined Marseille as a replacement for Wahi. Roberto De Zerbi's Marseille also signed Algerian midfielder Ismael Bennacer from AC Milan on loan with an option to buy as they bid to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Meanwhile, Lyon have been hit with a transfer ban as they fight huge debts, but were allowed to sign Argentina playmaker Thiago Almada on loan from Brazilian champions Botafogo, who have the same owner in John Textor. — AFP

Neymar homecoming is reminder of promise unfulfilled

PARIS: When Neymar left Brazil aged 21 in 2013, bound for Barcelona, he set off to establish himself as a footballing great, seemingly destined to be remembered as his country's greatest player since Pele.

Last week, 12 years on, he returned to first club Santos - Neymar the celebrity with unimaginable wealth, but a footballer whose fragile body has been badly diminished by injuries. Neymar has been one of the finest players in the world when at the top of his game, a forward with dazzling skill who "understands football as art", as his former Barcelona coach Luis Enrique once said.

It is equally true that he never managed to fulfil his potential, a player who dreamt of winning the Ballon d'Or but always found himself in the shadow of others at club level, whether it be Lionel Messi or Kylian Mbappe.

Having signed a six-month deal, he is expected to make his second debut for Santos on Wednesday, his 33rd birthday, when they play Botafogo-SP in the Sao Paulo state championship. "He will play on Wednesday," confirmed Santos coach Pedro Caixinha, who had a short spell as manager of Rangers in Scotland in 2017.

But the Neymar effect is already there, his presence contributing to a 3-1 win over Sao Paulo on Saturday which came just after the superstar had been presented at the club's Vila Belmiro home. "He played a big part in this victory," forward Guilherme said after scoring twice and earning praise from Neymar.

"He passed on so much positive energy. I am grateful. This is not praise from just anyone. He is an idol of mine, of my children, of the nation." Neymar is Santos's greatest player since Pele, and he overtook 'O Rei' as Brazil's record goal-scorer in September 2023.

Diminished by injuries

But by age 33 Pele had won the World Cup three times, while Neymar's three World Cups have ended in tears. Each time he has carried a nation's hopes on his shoulders, but the tournament has exposed his vulnerable physique and brittle emotions.

In 2014, on home soil, he was cut down in a quarter-final win over Colombia and stretched off in agony with a fractured bone in his back. He overcame injury in time to be fit for Russia 2018, but Brazil were sent packing in the quarter-finals by Belgium. — AFP

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

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, BURHANUDDIN, holder of Indian Passport No. V6084334 having permanent address Flat No 201 Taha Apartment Shiksha Bhawan Chauraha, Udaipur, Pin: 313001, Rajasthan, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Burhanuddin (given name) Mashraki (surname).

(#6629, 04-02-2025)

For labor-related inquiries and complaints:
Call MSAL hotline 128

Chelsea hit back to ruin West Ham boss revenge mission

LONDON: Chelsea staged a stirring fight-back to ruin Graham Potter's return to Stamford Bridge and climb to fourth place in the Premier League with a 2-1 win against West Ham on Monday.

Hammers boss Potter was hoping for a victory over the club that sacked him in 2023 after just seven months in charge.

Jarrod Bowen gave West Ham the lead in the first half on his return to action after fracturing his foot in late December. But Chelsea recovered from a listless start to equalize through Pedro Neto after the interval before Aaron Wan-Bissaka's late own goal shattered Potter's revenge mission.

Chelsea moved two points above Manchester City and Newcastle in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top-four finish. It was the first time they had taken three points in a home league game after trailing at half-time since 2013.

Chelsea's second win in eight league matches was a welcome boost for Enzo Maresca after the Blues boss complained that the transfer window was distracting his players. Joao Felix had been linked with AC Milan and Axel Disasi drew interest from Aston Villa, while Ben Chilwell emerged as a Crystal Palace target and Borussia Dortmund eyed Carney Chukwuemeka.

Maresca will have been relieved to see Chelsea finally ignore the speculation on the day the January window closed. Potter insisted being axed by Chelsea after winning just 12 of his 31 games could be "the best thing that happens to me".

The 49-year-old returned to management last month at West Ham and almost two years on from his Chelsea dismissal, he made his first return to the Bridge. But there was no happy ending for Potter as Maresca beat his former West Brom team-mate.



LONDON: Chelsea's English midfielder #20 Cole Palmer (R) is fouled by West Ham United's Scottish midfielder #39 Andy Irving (L) during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and West Ham United at Stamford Bridge in London. — AFP

West Ham have won once in five games in all competitions since Potter took charge, but sit 10 points clear of the relegation zone.

Potter was tasked with driving Maresca to training every day during their time together in the 1990s and once again he was played second fiddle to the Italian. Maresca had dropped Robert Sanchez and brought in Filip Jorgensen after the Spanish goalkeeper's latest costly error in the defeat at Manchester City last weekend.

The 22-year-old settled any nerves with a good save from Bowen's low drive. Mohammed Kudus was impactful for West Ham, the Ghana winger breaking clear for a powerful effort that forced a save from Jorgensen.

It was a warning Chelsea failed to heed

as the Hammers snatched the lead in the 42nd minute. Kudus hassled Levi Colwill into a sloppy back-pass and Bowen seized his chance with a composed finish from just inside the area that arrowed past Jorgensen into the far corner.

Cole Palmer's dipping free-kick drew an agile tip-over from West Ham keeper Alphonse Areola. Palmer tested Areola again from distance on the stroke of half-time, but there were jeers for lethargic Chelsea when the whistle went for the interval. Unimpressed by his misfiring forwards, Maresca hauled off Jackson and Jadon Sancho after just 52 minutes. The changes brought the desired effect as Neto came on to haul Chelsea level in the 64th minute. — AFP

Kuwait curling team loses to Thailand

HARBIN: On Tuesday evening, the Kuwaiti curling team lost its second match in the ninth Asian Winter Games in Harbin, China, against Thailand with a score of (12/3) in the doubles competition for the second group. With this loss, which is the first for the blue (curling), its balance froze at 3 points after its victory earlier today against Mongolia in the opening of their competitions, which is the first for Kuwait at the international level, noting that the team was represented by players Saud Al-Kandari and Fatima Abdullatif.

After the end of the match, Kuwait's coach Ahmed Al-Shaya said in a statement to the Kuwaiti media delegation accompanying the mission that "the blue youth performed well in the tournament in Kuwait's first appearance on the foreign stage at all," praising their strenuous efforts in the two matches.

Al-Shaya attributed the Kuwaiti team's loss to fatigue after they played another match in the morning that ended with a victory over Mongolia, considering that this participation in the sport of curling will be an important start to more successes in the coming years. For her part, Fatima Abdullatif, a player of the Kuwaiti curling team, said in a similar statement that "this first experience for her and the rest of her colleagues in the Kuwaiti team in this major continental sports entitlement will remain in our minds as we recorded the first international victory for Kuwait with the first meeting."

Abdullatif added that "losing the match against Thailand came due to their lack of accustomed to the pressure of matches due to their first experience," noting that the matches in the tournament are characterized by strength and high competitiveness due to the presence of the strongest teams on the continent. She emphasized that



Fatima Abdullatif

she and her teammate Saud Al-Kandari will do their best in tomorrow's meetings with the Chinese Taipei and Hong Kong teams, despite their difficulty, as they have more experience than Kuwait in this game.

The match was attended by the head of the Kuwaiti delegation participating in the tournament, Ali Al-Marri, Director of the Kuwaiti delegation participating in the tournament, Fhaid Al-Ajmi, Director of the curling team, Mohsen Al-Maasab, and a number of members of the Kuwaiti delegation participating.

On another level, the Kuwait ice hockey team will meet tomorrow, Wednesday, with its Singaporean counterpart in its second match in the tournament within the second group in an important match for both teams, as the hockey blue seeks to win and compensate for its loss to Kyrgyzstan in its opening match with a score of (9/8) after its players presented a good match and were close to victory.

The players of the Hockey Blue held their training yesterday, Tuesday, amid great enthusiasm to make up for what they missed in the first match and achieve their first victory, which is within reach, given that the Singapore team defeated the Bahraini team in the first round of the group. — KUNA

VOLVO

The Safest.
Starting from
XC40 KD 14,999

2209 9999 - 9500 0000

* Terms and conditions apply.