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US shock proposal to 'take over Gaza' sparks outrage

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Amir attends luncheon at Azayez farm



KUWAIT: In the presence of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Al-Sabah family members, a luncheon was held by Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Azayez farm in Kuwait's northern Al-Abdali area on Wednesday. — Amiri Diwan photos (See Page 2)

GAZA: President Donald Trump's shock proposal for the United States to take over the Gaza Strip and resettle its people faced a resounding rejection from Palestinians, Middle East leaders and governments around the world on Wednesday. Trump made his announcement to audible gasps during a joint press conference with Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom he was hosting at the White House for talks.

In a proposal that lacked details on how he would move out more than two million Palestinians or control Gaza, Trump said he would make the war-battered enclave "unbelievable" by removing unexploded bombs and rubble, and redeveloping it. "The US will take over the Gaza Strip and we will do a job with it, too. We'll own it," he said. He said there was support from the "highest leadership" in the Middle East for his idea, but hours later, the leaders of Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Turkey, China, Britain, France and Germany hit back.

Netanyahu, however, welcomed the idea, saying it could "change history" and was worth "paying attention to". Suggesting "long-term ownership" by the United States, Trump said his idea would make it "the Riviera of the Middle East. This could be something that could be so magnificent." Hamas, which seized sole control of Gaza in 2007, rejected the proposal, branding it "racist". The group said the proposal to "occupy" the territory was "aggressive to our people and cause, won't serve stability in the region and will only put oil on the fire". Much of Gaza was leveled in a 15-month war triggered by October 2023 attack and Trump has repeatedly claimed credit for sealing a ceasefire agreement that took effect last month.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Pre-marriage health exam mandatory

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health has announced the approval of a ministerial decision regarding the updated executive regulation of Law No 31 of 2008, which mandates medical examinations for individuals wishing to marry. This move is part of ongoing efforts to modernize health legislation, safeguard public health, ensure a healthy marital life and align procedures with international medical standards. A significant change introduced in the updated regulation is the expansion of the medical examination scope to include all documented marriage contracts in Kuwait - whether both parties are Kuwaiti, one is Kuwaiti, or neither is Kuwaiti. — KUNA (See Page 4)

CSC launches new version of app

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) launched the new version of its official mobile application for employees of government agencies that implement the integrated system and the website. The commission said in a press statement on Wednesday that the new application includes several services, including issuing certificates and allowing employees to submit a request, in addition to the leave service where a request for periodic leave and emergency leave can be submitted. The statement added that the application also includes a leave service that allows employees to submit a leave request of all kinds, in addition to an advertisement service, where all important advertisements related to the CSC are added to the application. — KUNA

Leader of Ismaili Muslims Aga Khan dies at 88

LISBON: The Aga Khan, imam of the Ismaili Muslims and head of a major development aid network, has died in Lisbon at the age of 88, his foundation announced on Wednesday. He was the founder and president of the Aga Khan Development Network, which employs 96,000 people and finances development programs particularly in Asia and Africa. "His Highness Prince Karim Al-Hussaini, Aga Khan IV passed away peacefully in Lisbon on 4 February 2025, aged 88, surrounded by his family," the foundation said in a statement.

"The announcement of his designated successor will follow," the statement added, regarding who could become the fifth person to hold the post since the 19th



Racehorse billionaire and Islamic spiritual leader the Aga Khan

century. Present in multiple countries, notably in central and southern Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the Ismaili community numbers 12 to 15 million, according to its website. United Nations chief Antonio Guterres described the Aga Khan as "a symbol of peace, tolerance and compassion in our troubled world" following the religious leader's death.

Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace laureate and ed-

ucation campaigner, said his legacy would "live on through the incredible work he led for education, health and development around the world". Born in Geneva, the Aga Khan spent his childhood in Kenya and was appointed in Tanzania to succeed his grandfather in 1957. His father was passed over in the line of succession after a tumultuous marriage to American actor Rita Hayworth. A billionaire owner of yachts and jets, the Aga Khan was a regular on the racetrack and continued the family tradition of breeding thoroughbreds. He also ploughed a large amount of his inherited wealth into philanthropic projects.

The apolitical and secular development foundation he created in 1967 is credited with raising literacy levels in 18 countries across South and Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Its work in Pakistan earned the Aga Khan the wrath of Sunni Taliban militants who accused the foundation's schools of "brainwashing" men and women to stay away from Islam.

During his lifetime, the Aga Khan was awarded honorary Canadian citizenship for his

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Google introduces new class of cheap AI models

SAN FRANCISCO: Alphabet's Google on Wednesday announced updates to its Gemini family of large language models, including a new product line with competitive pricing to low-cost artificial intelligence models like that of Chinese rival DeepSeek. The tech giant offers several versions of Gemini that vary in price and performance. It already offered a lightweight variant known as "Flash" but its new "Flash-Lite" model is even cheaper.

On Wednesday, Google released Gemini 2.0 Flash to the general public after previewing it to developers in December. It also launched Flash-Lite and re-

leased a new version of its flagship "Pro" model into test phases. Google created Flash-Lite after receiving positive feedback about the 1.5 version of Flash. Koray Kavukcuoglu, chief technology officer of Google's DeepMind AI lab, said in a press release. Gemini 2.0 Flash is costlier than its predecessor.

The cost to develop AI models and, in turn, the cost to use them have come under investor scrutiny in recent weeks after DeepSeek revealed it spent less than \$6 million on the final training run of a model. Developers at leading US AI firms said the total cost was likely magnitudes larger. Still, DeepSeek's rise drew questions on the earnings calls of Alphabet and rivals Microsoft and Meta. All have so far signaled intent to continue massive capital expenditures in the field.

Alphabet shares slumped Tuesday in part due to investor pessimism around a planned capex hike that was 29% higher than Wall Street expected. Certain inputs on Gemini Flash-Lite cost \$0.019 per 1 million tokens, a term for the units of data processed by an AI model.



BEIJING: People walk past a Google logo outside a building housing Google offices in Beijing. — AFP

That compares to \$0.075 on the cost-efficient version of OpenAI's flagship model and \$0.014 on DeepSeek's cheap model, though DeepSeek states on its website that the pricing will increase fivefold on Feb 8. — Reuters





KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed at the luncheon hosted by Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Azayez farm. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses with a child for a picture.

Kuwait's Amir Sheikh Meshal attends luncheon at Azayez farm

KUWAIT: In the presence of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Al-Sabah family members, Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah hosted a luncheon at Azayez farm in Kuwait's northern Al-Abdali area on Wednesday. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the gathering.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah carries a child at the gathering.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah takes a picture with a child at the gathering.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is greeted at the gathering.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives greetings from Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's CEO Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed at the gathering.



His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah poses for a photo with a child at the gathering.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah interacts with a child at the gathering.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah poses for a group picture.



The Ardah dance performance during the event.



A folklore group performs the Ardah dance during the gathering.

UK official reaffirms support for Palestinian humanitarian aid

UK's Bryson-Richardson condemns West Bank settlements

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Mark Bryson-Richardson, the UK Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, affirmed the UK's commitment to a two-state solution including the international recognition of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. He condemned illegal Zionist entity settlements, settler violence, and increasing restrictions on the freedoms of Palestinian civilians in the West Bank, urging all parties to proceed with hostage-prisoner exchanges to advance the ceasefire process.

Regarding President Trump's calls for Gazans to relocate to Egypt or Jordan, he stated that the Palestinian people hold sovereignty over the strip and have a right to determine its future, condemning the detention conditions facing detainees on both sides: with the Zionist entity's treatment of Palestinians prisoners one of three key reasons the UK last September suspended arms export licenses for items used by the IDF in Gaza. At a media roundtable, he stated that his country and Kuwait recently committed \$6 million (\$3 million each) in joint funding for UNICEF projects in Gaza and Yemen, emphasizing the UK's desire to strengthen humanitarian partnerships with Kuwait, particularly in Gaza.

He indicated that there were some improvements in aid flow following the ceasefire but called for allowing more essential goods into Gaza and resuming commercial trade to support economic recovery. He added, "The UK has provided £129 million—including £41 million for UNRWA—in humanitarian aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories this financial year and is working with partners on



Mark Bryson-Richardson

reconstruction efforts."

He addressed the urgent humanitarian needs of the Gazan people including through restoring basic services such as electricity and clean water supply. Remained its overwhelming short-term priority, Bryson-Richardson confirmed that the UK was engaging with partners including the World Bank, UNDP, and Palestinian Authority on reconstruction plans, expecting Kuwait to continue playing a prominent role in efforts to provide a better future for the Palestinian people, both individually and through its Presidency of the GCC.

He also stressed the need for the international community to come together in support of the Palestinian Authority, which the UK - in line with Kuwait and the wider GCC - views as the legitimate body to take forward the interests of the Palestinian people in both the West Bank and Gaza.

During his visit to Kuwait, Bryson-Richardson met

just about providing aid, but also about sending "messages of solidarity from the Kuwaiti people to the people of Gaza," reaffirming Kuwait's unwavering support.

Al-Otaibi outlined Kuwait's significant contributions, including the first relief ship sent in March 2024 from Turkey with 200 tons of food, a second ship in April 2024 carrying 1,000 tons, and a third ship in August 2024 with 1,600 tons of food parcels and health supplies. Kuwaiti trucks have also crossed Jordanian territory to deliver medical and relief supplies to Gaza, continuing efforts to support those in need.

In addition to food and medical aid, Kuwaiti medical teams, including consultants and surgeons, entered Gaza through the Rafah crossing to provide essential healthcare services for the wounded amid the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

Aid to Syria, Sudan

On Syria, Al-Otaibi highlighted Kuwait's role as one of the first countries to provide assistance, having host-



KUWAIT: Mark Bryson-Richardson poses for a group photo with local media representatives.

with key officials and humanitarian organizations. He met the Acting Director General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and the Deputy Assistant Foreign Ministers for Arab World and Development and International Cooperation Affairs.

He had also called on several colleagues from the United Nations (UN) including Ghada Hatim Eltahir, the UN Resident Coordinator in Kuwait; Rami Tahboub, Ambassador of Palestine to the State of Kuwait; representatives of the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charity Society, Kuwait

and mobilized global support for Syrian refugees. To date, Kuwaiti charities have operated over 19 relief flights, delivering thousands of tons of aid to Syria via Damascus, Beirut, and Amman airports. Regarding Sudan, Al-Otaibi emphasized Kuwait's quick response to the crisis, launching an air bridge that carried hundreds of tons of food and supplies, in addition to sending five ambulances to support medical efforts.

Al-Otaibi also noted that the Kuwaiti Union of Charitable Societies and Foundations serves as a coordinating body for charities and relief organizations, ensuring efficiency and synergy in delivering aid globally. "Kuwait is not just a donor country; it is a role model for global humanitarian work," he said, stressing the nation's commitment to mercy and solidarity with vulnerable populations.

Salmi Al-Mutairi, a representative from the Ministry of Social Affairs, commended the rapid response of Kuwaiti charitable organizations and stressed the

importance of strengthening partnerships between official and private entities to maximize aid distribution. He also highlighted that Kuwait's charities go beyond emergency relief by supporting long-term development projects for affected communities.

Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait, Rami Tahboub, praised Kuwait's vital role in supporting Gaza, affirming that Kuwait has always been at the forefront of nations rushing to provide aid, using its air bridge and mobilizing charities and institutions. He also expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Defense and the Kuwaiti Air Force for operating over 50 flights carrying humanitarian relief. Similarly, Sudanese Ambassador to Kuwait, Awad Balla, lauded Kuwait as a symbol of humanitarian work, noting its long-standing support for Sudan. He emphasized that Kuwait's humanitarian efforts include ongoing assistance in education, healthcare, and emergency relief, including the launch of an air bridge to Sudan in May 2023, and the dispatch of over 35 relief flights alongside three ships.

Kuwait sends over 50 relief airlifts to Palestine since 2023

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Union of Charitable Societies and Foundations announced on Wednesday that Kuwait has dispatched more than 50 relief flights since October 2023 as part of the "Fazaa for Palestine" campaign, providing medical, food, and shelter aid. In addition, three relief ships loaded with thousands of tons of essential supplies were sent to Gaza, alongside ongoing humanitarian efforts in Syria and Sudan.

At a press conference highlighting Kuwait's relief efforts, Union Chairman Saad Al-Otaibi stated that over 23 Kuwaiti charitable societies had participated in the campaign. He emphasized that these relief flights were not

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Kuwait's Ministry of Health

Pre-marriage health exam now mandatory for expats in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health has announced the approval of a ministerial decision regarding the updated executive regulation of Law No. 31 of 2008, which mandates medical examinations for individuals wishing to marry. This move is part of ongoing efforts to modernize health legislation, safeguard public health, ensure a healthy marital life, and align procedures with international medical standards.

A significant change introduced in the updated regulation is the expansion of the medical examination scope to include all documented marriage contracts in Kuwait—whether both parties are Kuwaiti, one is Kuwaiti, or neither are Kuwaiti. Additionally, digital applications will now be utilized to streamline some aspects of the pre-marriage medical examination process. Previously the test was only obligatory for Kuwaitis.

The ministry has called upon all relevant authorities to ensure compliance with the new regulations, which will take effect on April 1, 2025, following its publication in the official gazette. This update is part of the ministry's continued commitment to enhancing the quality of health services, protecting public health, and reducing the incidence of genetic and infectious diseases within the community.

In other health news, Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, the official spokesperson for the Ministry of Health, announced that the pediatric department at Al-Adan Hospital will begin receiving patients at the new Maternity and Children Hospital starting Wednesday. This move is part of the ministry's efforts to improve healthcare services and make it easier for families to access specialized medical care.

The new hospital is equipped with 14 floors, nine specialized wards, nine operating rooms, two delivery rooms with 20 beds each, and one of the largest fertility units in Kuwait. The hospital is fully equipped with modern technologies, devices, and surgical tools to ensure the health of women and children. — KUNA



Rings from the jewelry collection of Bahraini designer Fatima Akbar.

Gulf heritage woven into modern jewelry at Sadu House exhibition

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Artists from across the Gulf came together to celebrate the region's rich intangible heritage at the ATHR Jewelry Cultural Platform, organized by Al-Sadu Society on Tuesday as part of the Qurain Cultural Festival. Drawing inspiration from Oman's desert journeys, the UAE's khous weaving crafts, Qatar's traditional tents, Bahrain's iconic attire, and Kuwait's minimalist style, the event showcased the timeless art of Sadu weaving. It highlighted both traditional techniques and modern interpretations, reimagining heritage through contemporary design.

Kuwaiti designer Anas Alomaim, an assistant professor at Kuwait University, described Kuwait's approach to ornamentation as "subtle and minimal." Alomaim said he appreciated the understated elegance loved by Kuwaitis. "When you reduce some details, you encompass more people and more cultures," he explained. For Alomaim, the Gulf's cultural fabric is woven not only in Sadu but also in cuisine, dialects, and shared heritage. "The differences between us highlight the beauty of our unique identities," he added. With that in mind, Alomaim is hosting a panel discussion with the artists participating in the event,

Kuwaiti team behind first remote robotic surgery given Amiri grant

Grant reflects His Highness's vision of encouraging local medical expertise

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi welcomed the medical team that performed the first-ever remote robotic surgery in the region, which was supervised by Consultant Urologist Dr Saad Aldousari and the medical team.

During the meeting, the minister conveyed the sincere gratitude of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the medical team and their supervisors. The Amir's message expressed pride in their achievements and wished them continued success in enhancing Kuwait's healthcare excellence.

On behalf of His Highness the Amir, the minister presented the medical team with a royal honor, underscoring the leadership's commitment to supporting national talent and motivating further progress in the medical field. This gesture affirms Kuwait's continued focus on advancing healthcare, enhancing the country's medical infrastructure, and raising its profile both regionally and globally.

The Minister of Health also expressed profound appreciation to His Highness the Amir for his unwavering support for the healthcare sector and his dedication to the well-being of Ministry of Health personnel. The Amiri grant reflects His Highness's vision of encouraging local medical expertise and advancing groundbreaking healthcare initiatives.

The medical team, led by Dr Saad Aldousari, expressed their heartfelt thanks to His Highness the Amir for the support and recognition. They reaffirmed their commitment to utilizing all available resources to improve medical services and deliver top-quality healthcare to citizens and residents of Kuwait.



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi (center) poses for a photo with Consultant Urologist Dr Saad Aldousari and the medical team behind first-ever remote robotic surgery in the region.

A robotic breakthrough

The surgery was performed at the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Urology, with the patient present in Kuwait, while the surgical team, based in Shanghai, China, performed the procedure remotely under Dr Saad Aldousari's supervision. A qualified surgical team was also present in Kuwait to intervene if needed, demonstrating the synergy between advanced technology and skilled medical professionals.

Robotic surgery technology facilitates collaboration with international centers, enabling the treat-

ment of complex cases. It offers significant advantages, including less invasive procedures, reduced pain, minimal bleeding, and shorter hospital stays, contributing to a faster recovery and improved patient experience. This achievement aligns with the Ministry of Health's strategy to incorporate cutting-edge medical technologies and strengthen partnerships with renowned global health centers. It reflects Kuwait's ongoing commitment to advancing its healthcare sector and ensuring the highest standards of care for the community.



MUSCAT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah meets Omani Minister of Interior Hamoud Al-Busaidi. — KUNA photos

First Deputy PM discusses security cooperation in Oman

MUSCAT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah held discussions with Omani Minister of Interior Hamoud Al-Busaidi on Wednesday, focusing on enhancing security cooperation between Kuwait and

Oman. The goal is to strengthen mutual interests and bolster security and stability in both nations.

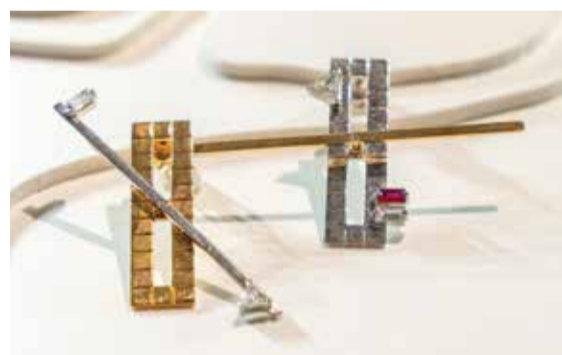
According to a press release from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior, Sheikh Fahad emphasized the deep relations between the two countries and praised the high level of security cooperation. Minister Al-Busaidi expressed appreciation for the alignment of views on security issues and highlighted the desire for further joint coordination to improve security for both nations. Both sides also stressed the importance of exchanging expertise to enhance security forces' capabilities and address potential threats to regional stability.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef also met with Omani Deputy Prime Minister for Defense Affairs Shihab bin Tariq Al Said to explore further areas of cooperation. The meeting focused on ways to strengthen bilateral relations and develop strategies for regional security and stability.

On the same day, Sheikh Fahad visited the Omani Maritime Security Center, accompanied by Vice Admiral Abdullah Khamis Al-Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces. During the visit, Sheikh Fahad was briefed on the center's role in safeguarding maritime navigation and the environment within Oman's territorial waters. — KUNA



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef meets with Omani Deputy Prime Minister for Defense Affairs Shihab bin Tariq Al Said.



Jewelry pieces by Kuwaiti designer Anas Alomaim.



Designers participating in the ATHR Jewelry Cultural Platform pose for a photo with Sheikhha Bibi Al-Sabah, Chairperson of the Al-Sadu Society.

where he looked forward to "learning from their experiences and finding inspiration in their stories," he said.

Saudi Arabian artist Reem Almashoug drew inspiration from her grandmother's craftsmanship in her displayed collection. "I started and was inspired by my grandmother—I always watched her weaving Sadu, observing how every pattern and line carried meaning," she said. "A piece can be worn, but behind it lies a story, meaning, and heritage." She emphasized the timeless nature of these traditions, adding: "The old is not distant; in fact, it is our present and future if we know how to embrace and develop it in a modern way." For UAE artist Majedah Al-Awadhi, tradition is a foundation rather than a boundary. "I reimagined traditional Arabic gold pieces," she explained, referring to Tabla, a square-shaped Emirati jewelry piece she modernized while preserving its Sadu essence.

Qatari designer Abdullah Al-Fakhroo, founder of

Medad Jewelry, drew inspiration from Quranic text. "It's about identity, about embracing our heritage as Arabs and Muslims," his cousin, representing him at the event, said.

"You'll notice the pieces are modern and tailored to contemporary tastes, yet they remain deeply rooted in our traditions." Reflecting on the region's historical connection to pearl diving, he pointed to one of the jewelry pieces and added, "Mother of Pearl, for example, isn't just a material—it's a reflection of our history." Omani designer Nadia Al-Shamsi found resilience and beauty in Arabian camels—central to her Desert Threads collection. "Heritage isn't static; it evolves," she noted, drawing parallels between Sadu and Oman's architectural and cultural icons, from carved windows to traditional turbans. "Our traditions all stem from the same roots." Also among the artists was Bahraini jewelry designer Fatima Akbar, who shared her insights

about her work. Discussing her choice to draw inspiration from traditional attire, she said: "I chose to focus on traditional fashion because it aligns with the upcoming holy month of Ramadan."

As for the differences between Bahraini and Kuwaiti Sadu weaving, Akbar clarified: "There's not much difference, but our method of stitching the naqda is a bit distinct." She also highlighted key features that make Bahraini Sadu unique: "Bahraini Sadu stands out for its geometric designs, especially the use of triangles, which we incorporate in a slightly different style from other traditional designs," she said.

Sheikha Bibi Al-Sabah, Chairperson of the Al-Sadu Society—Weaving Cooperative, highlighted the aim of the event. "This is about inspiring a new generation to find creativity in their heritage—to see what unites us and what makes each of us distinct."



Jewelry pieces by UAE designer Majedah Al-Awadhi.



Jewelry pieces by Qatari designer Abdullah Al-Fakhroo.



Jewelry pieces by Saudi designer Reem Almashoug. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and KUNA



India's Modi takes ritual dip at Hindu mega-festival

All 67 bodies from Washington air disaster recovered

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OREBRO: King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden (right), Sweden's Queen Silvia (2nd right), Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson (2nd left) his wife Birgitta Ed (left) stand at a memorial outside the adult education center Campus Risbergiska school in Orebro, Sweden, on February 5, 2025. — AFP

Sweden reels from worst mass shooting in history

Mass shooting kills 11 at adult education center

OREBRO, Sweden: Sweden reeled Wednesday from the deadliest mass shooting in its history after 10 people plus the suspected gunman were killed in a shooting at an adult education center in the central city of Orebro. Several media reported the suspected gunman turned his gun on himself—but police have not confirmed those reports. “Eleven people are dead, including the killer,” police told AFP about Tuesday’s massacre at Campus Risbergiska, a secondary school for young adults.

Local health authorities said Wednesday six people were being treated at Orebro’s university hospital. Five of them—three women and two men—had undergone surgery for gunshot wounds and were in a “stable but serious” condition. A woman was also being treated for minor injuries. Orebro County authorities said in a statement, adding that all the injured were over the age of 18. “This is the worst mass shooting in Swedish history,”

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told a press conference late on Tuesday. Kristersson noted a lot of “questions were still unanswered”. “But there will come a time when we will know what happened, how it could happen and what motives may have been behind it,” Kristersson said, urging people not to “speculate”. “The motive for the shooting is not yet known, but all the indications are that the perpetrator acted alone, without ideological motive,” Orebro police said in a statement.

Police have not disclosed any information about the identity or ages of the dead, nor whether they were students or teachers at the school. School attacks are relatively rare in Sweden, but the country has suffered shootings and bombings linked to gang violence that kill dozens of people each year. “The perpetrator is not known to the police, he has no gang affiliations. We believe there will be no further attacks,” Orebro police chief Roberto Eid Forest told reporters on Tuesday evening.

‘Numb, speechless’

Swedish television channel TV4 reported that police had raided the suspect’s home in Orebro late on Tuesday afternoon. It said the suspect was around 35 years old and had a license to carry a weapon and no criminal record, but did not provide any details about his identity.

The man lived reclusively, was unemployed, and had distanced himself from his family and friends, newspaper Aftonbladet reported, citing family members. The shooting struck around midday on Tuesday. “I was standing there, watching what was happening, and I was just around here when I saw some bodies lying on the ground. I don’t know if they were dead or injured,” 16-year-old Linn, who goes to school near the site of the massacre, told an AFP correspondent at the scene.

“There was blood everywhere, people were panicking and crying, parents were worried... it was chaos,” she added, her voice trembling. Liv Demir, 36, whose son attends a

school near the Campus Risbergiska, said she was shocked to hear of the shooting. “I became numb, speechless. I didn’t really know where to go,” she told AFP on Wednesday morning. Her son also has gym classes at Campus Risbergiska. “So my thoughts were spiraling because I packed his sports bag in the morning,” Demir said.

‘Dark hour’

Sweden’s King Carl XVI Gustaf said in a statement Tuesday that he had received the news of the shooting with “sadness and dismay.” The Royal Court announced Wednesday that flags would be “flown at half-mast at all royal palaces” during the day. The government announced a similar measure for its own offices and parliament. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen described the shooting as “truly horrifying”. “Such violence and terror have no place in our societies—least of all in schools. In this dark hour, we stand with the people of Sweden,” she said in a post on X. — AFP

Fire and fury: Intense fight for DRC’s Goma

GOMA: Goma, which fell to M23 fighters and the Rwandan military last week, has become a symbol of the conflict that has ripped apart the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo over three decades. In early January, a push on the capital of North Kivu province, where thousands of UN and humanitarian workers were based, was seen as unlikely. But worrying signs soon emerged as clashes intensified in the surrounding region.

First, M23 fighters and Rwandan soldiers took Minova, a port on Lake Kivu to the southwest, tightening the noose around Goma, which is home to about a million people and nearly as many displaced by the fighting. On January 23, the front still held on the plain around Sake - the last obstacle to the northwest of the city. Congolese army helicopters flew overhead, launching rocket salvos. Columns of reinforcements headed out from Goma to cheering crowds from nearby camps for the displaced, as explosions rang out in the distance. The military tried to contain the offensive, with help from the local militia, UN peacekeepers in armored vehicles, heavy artillery from a southern Africa regional force and Romanian paramilitaries. Since 2021, the Congolese army has been steadily retreating due to the M23 advance and Rwandan troops, which are seen as significantly better armed and trained. Eventually pushed back to Goma, there was nowhere to go, trapped by the enemy on one side and Lake Kivu on the other.

Weak link

The morning of January 23, several Rwandan army units routed thousands of their Congolese counterparts and militia near Sake. The military governor of North Kivu was killed near the front line. The brief counter-offensive around Sake would be the last. Two days later, an assault on Goma was seen as inevitable. NGOs and the United Nations evacuated their non-essential staff from the city. On the volcanic plain of Sake, the road leading to the front consumed men and materiel, spitting out stragglers and the wounded in the rain. The smoldering wreck



GOMA: Members of the Congolese Red Cross and Civil Protection bury dozens of victims of the recent clashes in a cemetery in Goma. — AFP

of a UN armored vehicle was left by the roadside, its roof caved in by a direct hit. The UN and southern African forces paid a heavy price: at least 19 of their soldiers were killed, while the Congolese army, riven by corruption and incompetent leadership, seemed unable to fight back. Spotting a weak link on the poorly secured northern front, M23 fighters made their move.

Goma woke on January 26 to the sound of bombs, as Rwandan forces crossed the border, taking the Congolese army and Romanian paramilitaries by surprise. Fighting broke out in the heart of impoverished, densely populated neighborhoods. Bullets and shells flew, forcing civilians to seek shelter in their homes. Congolese forces meanwhile retreated towards central Goma. The UN peacekeepers, aware of the army collapse, stopped fighting and switched focus to protecting civilians. As night fell, the streets were deserted. Anxious residents huddled indoors, cut off from the outside world by an internet and phone outage as gunfire rang out. The next morning, January 27, saw prisoners break down the doors of their cells and set fires at Goma prison, near the city’s airport. Many inmates were stuck inside the burning building. — AFP

CIA’s entire staff offered buyouts

WASHINGTON: The US Central Intelligence Agency offered buyouts to its entire workforce on Tuesday, the Wall Street Journal reported. The move would make it the first intelligence agency to join a voluntary redundancy program initiated

by President Donald Trump for federal employees. The agency is also freezing the hiring of job seekers already given a conditional offer, the paper reported, citing an aide to CIA Director John Ratcliffe. The anonymous aide said some of those frozen offers are likely to be rescinded if the applicants do not have the right background for the agency’s new goals, which include targeting drug cartels, Trump’s trade war and undermining China, according to the Journal.

The move is part of a massive overhaul of the

US government by Trump, who has vowed to radically downsize the federal workforce in the name of efficiency and frugality that has sent shock waves through Washington. The report on the buyout offers at the CIA - whose work gathering foreign intelligence is vital to US national security - came just hours after Trump announced an extraordinary scheme for the United States to “take over the Gaza Strip.” The CIA did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment. — AFP

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International

Another Guantanamo Bay? Salvadorans divided on accepting US, other convicts

Iron-fisted Bukele cracks down on violent gangs

SAN SALVADOR: Salvadorans are split over the offer from President Nayib Bukele to take in prisoners from the United States, with some fearing it could turn the country into another Guantanamo Bay while others say the proposal could reap dividends. El Salvador's iron-fisted Bukele enjoys sky-high approval ratings for his sweeping crackdown on violent gangs, which has led to a sharp reduction in crime in what was once one of the world's most violent countries.

Over 80,000 Salvadorans have been arrested since he declared a state of emergency in 2022, thousands of whom are being held at a sprawling new Terrorism Confinement Center, Latin America's biggest penitentiary, with capacity for 40,000 inmates. On Monday, Bukele stunned Salvadorans and Americans alike by offering to incarcerate US convicts and deported prisoners alike at the maximum security prison on the edge of the jungle.

Georgina Garcia, a 60-year-old stay-at-home mother, expressed alarm at the prospect. "Bukele is trying to clean the country of evil. How then could he then bring in more criminal people? He can't!" she told AFP in a square in the capital San Salvador. Sixty-year-old former guerrilla Juan Jose Ordonez, who was running some errands nearby, also believed it would be "wrong" to accept prisoners from other countries. "We do not need him to bring more criminals into this country...we have enough social problems," he said.

Metal beds, windowless cells

Ahead of US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit this week, Washington had touted El Salvador

a possible "safe third country" for expelled migrants whose countries do not accept US deportation flights. Bukele offered to lock up convicts "of any nationality" at the facility known as CECOT, where prisoners live crammed in windowless cells, sleeping on metal beds with no mattress, forbidden from having visitors and kept under watch 24 hours a day.

Rubio said the proposal, which was cheered by President Donald Trump even as he acknowledged questions over the legality of deporting US prisoners, covered members of El Salvador's own MS-13 gang as well as the powerful Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua. Garcia said she feared that "Colombians, Haitians, Venezuelans" and other convicts would "corrupt this society even more, just as it is starting to straighten out."

But some Salvadorans said the country stood to gain from housing foreign convicts for a fee that Bukele said would be "relatively low for the US" but "significant" for his debt-ridden nation. Newspaper vendor Juan Ascencio, 67, mused that "if there is money" in it, the scheme could be worthwhile. Others saw potential dividends for around 230,000 Salvadorans whose protection from deportation was extended by Trump's predecessor Joe Biden in his last days in office. The Trump administration has not yet touched the status of Salvadorans while stripping 300,000 Venezuelan migrants of the same protections.

Retired army sergeant Jose Alberto Claros, 65, suggested that Bukele strike a deal with Trump to halt all deportations of Salvadorans and to "legalize our fellow citizens" in the United States. But



TECOLUCA: Inmates remain in a cell at the Counter-Terrorism Confinement Centre (CECOT) mega-prison, where hundreds of members of the MS-13 and 18 Street gangs are being held, in Tecoluca, El Salvador. — AFP

one of El Salvador's main rights groups warned it would not stand by and watch the country become a "Guantanamo 2.0." On Tuesday, the United States began flying detained migrants to the notorious military base in Cuba, where hundreds of terrorism

suspects were held for years after the 9/11 attacks, many without formal charges. Ingrid Escobar, director of the rights group Socorro Juridico Humanitario, warned of a similar lack of due process for prisoners in El Salvador. — AFP

All 67 bodies from the Washington air disaster recovered

WASHINGTON: Salvage crews have recovered the bodies of all 67 people killed when a passenger plane and a US Army helicopter collided near Washington and plunged into the Potomac River, officials said Tuesday. All but one of the bodies have been identified, said a statement from a variety of government agencies involved in the recovery effort after the deadliest US air crash in 20 years. The statement called the completion of the search for remains a "significant step" toward bringing closure to the families of the people who died in the accident last week.

"Our hearts are with the victims' families as they navigate this tragic loss," the statement said. "We extend our deepest condolences and remain committed to supporting them through this difficult time." Crews continue working to recover the wreckage of the passenger plane - a Bombardier CRJ-700 operated by American Eagle airlines - from the frigid waters of the Potomac.

So far crews have retrieved pieces including the right wing, a center section of the fuselage, part of the left wing, the tail cone and rudder, the National Transportation Safety Board said. Work to recover the chopper will begin when the plane work is done, the city agencies said. Sixty passengers on the plane



ARLINGTON: A US Coast Guard ship sails away from the recovery site of American Eagle Flight 5342 from the Potomac River in Arlington, Virginia. — AFP

and four crew members were killed in Wednesday's accident along with three soldiers aboard the US Army Black Hawk helicopter. There were no survivors.

The plane was on a flight from Wichita, Kansas, to Ronald Reagan National Airport in Washington when the collision occurred. President Donald Trump was quick to blame diversity hiring policies for the accident although no evidence has emerged that they were responsible. Trump also said the helicopter, which was on a routine training mission, appeared to be flying too high. According to US media reports, the control tower at the busy airport may have been understaffed at the time of the accident. The National Transportation Safety Board is expected to compile a preliminary report within 30 days, although a full investigation could take a year. — AFP

world calls the "Nakba", or catastrophe - the mass displacement of Palestinians during Zionist entity's creation in 1948. Zionists in Jerusalem welcomed Trump's proposal, though some did not believe it could be achieved. "I really like what he said, but in my wildest dreams (I doubt) if it happens, I don't believe it, it's hard for me to believe it will happen, but who knows, God knows," said Refael, a 65-year-old massage therapist.

Trump was vague on the details, but hinted it could require US boots on the ground in one of the most volatile places on earth "if necessary". Egypt and Jordan have rejected any resettlement from Gaza, with Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty calling for a swift reconstruction "without the Palestinians leaving". Jordan's King Abdullah II, in a meeting with Abbas, rejected "any attempts" to take control of Palestinian territories and displace people.

In Washington, Netanyahu hailed Trump as Zionist entity's "greatest friend" and praised his "willingness to think outside the box". The Zionist premier would not rule out a return to hostilities with Hamas, or with its other foes in the region including Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iran. "We will end the war by winning the war," Netanyahu said, while vowing to secure the return of all hostages held in Gaza.

He voiced confidence a deal with regional rival Saudi Arabia to normalize relations was "going to happen". But Saudi Arabia said it would not formalize ties with Zionist entity without a Palestinian state, while rejecting any "attempts to displace the Palestinian people from their land". Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan also lashed out, saying relocating Palestinians was something "neither we nor the region can accept". — AFP

Top climate scientist declares 2C climate goal 'dead'

WASHINGTON: Holding long-term global warming to two degrees Celsius - the fallback target of the Paris climate accord - is now "impossible," according to a stark new analysis published by leading scientists. Led by renowned climatologist James Hansen, the paper appears in the journal "Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development" and concludes that Earth's climate is more sensitive to rising greenhouse gas emissions than previously thought. Compounding the crisis, Hansen and colleagues argued, is a recent decline in sunlight-blocking aerosol pollution from the shipping industry, which had been mitigating some of the warming.

An ambitious climate change scenario outlined by the UN's climate panel, which gives the planet a 50 percent chance of keeping warming under 2C by the year 2100, "is an implausible scenario," Hansen told a briefing Tuesday. "That scenario is now impossible," said Hansen, formerly a top NASA climate scientist who famously announced to the US Congress in 1988 that global warming was underway. "The two degree target is dead." Instead, he and co-authors argued, the amount of greenhouse gases already pumped into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels meant increased warming is now guaranteed.

Temperatures will stay at or above 1.5C in the com-

ing years - devastating coral reefs and fueling more intense storms - before rising to around 2.0C by 2045, they forecast. They estimated polar ice melt and freshwater injection into the North Atlantic will trigger the shutdown of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) within the next 20-30 years. The current brings warmth to various parts of the globe and also carries nutrients necessary to sustain ocean life. Its end "will lock in major problems including sea level rise of several meters - thus, we describe AMOC shutdown as the 'point of no return,'" the paper argued.

The world's nations agreed during the landmark Paris climate accord of 2015 to try to hold end-of-century warming to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. Scientists identified the threshold as critical to preventing the breakdown of major ocean circulation systems, the abrupt thawing of boreal permafrost, and the collapse of tropical coral reefs. The 1.5C target has already been breached over the past two years, according to data from the EU's climate monitoring system Copernicus, though the Paris Agreement referred to a long-term trend over decades.

At 2C, the impacts would be even greater, including irreversible loss to Earth's ice sheets, mountain glaciers and snow, sea ice and permafrost. The authors acknowledged the findings appeared grim, but argued that honesty is a necessary ingredient for change. "Failure to be realistic in climate assessment and failure to call out the fecklessness of current policies to stem global warming is not helpful to young people," they said. "Today, with rising crises including global climate change, we have reached a point where we must address the problem of special interests," they added, stressing they were "optimistic" for the future. — AFP

US shock proposal to 'take ...

Continued from Page 1

While Netanyahu's visit to the White House was billed to focus on a second phase of the truce, it quickly turned into the revelation of a proposal that would, if implemented, completely transform the Middle East. Trump, who also floated travelling to Gaza, appeared to suggest it would not be rebuilt for Palestinians. "It should not go through a process of rebuilding and occupation by the same people that have... lived there and died there and lived a miserable existence there," he said.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas rejected the proposal, saying "legitimate Palestinian rights are not negotiable" and that it would constitute a "serious violation" of international law. UN human rights chief Volker Turk said deporting people from occupied territory was "strictly prohibited" under international law. It is not the first time that Trump has suggested Palestinians should move from Gaza. In recent days, he has cited Egypt and Jordan as possible destinations, but people from the territory have said they want to stay. "We create dignity because we are the dignity here, and we say in short to Trump and Netanyahu, Palestine is not for sale," 24-year-old Gazan Ahmed Al-Minawi said.

For Palestinians, any attempts to force them out of Gaza would evoke dark memories of what the Arab

Frenchman returns home after Indonesian death row reprieve

BOBIGNY: A Frenchman reprieved after 18 years on death row in Indonesia for alleged drug offences landed back in France on Wednesday and was taken to jail, prosecutors said. Serge Atlaoui, 61, was driven from the Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport to a court where a prosecutor informed him where he would be held in custody. He was then taken to the jail on the outskirts of Paris, they said. Atlaoui was arrested in 2005 at a factory in a Jakarta suburb where dozens of kilograms of drugs were discovered, with Indonesian authorities accusing him of being a "chemist".

A welder from Metz in northeastern France, he has always denied being a drug trafficker, saying that he was installing machinery in what he thought was an acrylic factory. Under an agreement last month between both countries for his transfer, Jakarta has left it to the French government to grant him either clemency, amnesty or a reduced sentence. France abolished capital punishment in 1981.

Atlaoui's lawyer Richard Sedillot said he was "very moved and relieved" to know his client was in France, and would be seeking permission to visit him in prison as soon as possible. Sedillot had earlier said he would work to have his sentence "adapted" so that the father of four could be released. An Indonesian court initially sentenced Atlaoui to life in prison, but the supreme court changed that to a death sentence on appeal in 2007. The Frenchman was due to be executed alongside eight others in 2015 but



TANGERANG: Serge Atlaoui (seated right), a Frenchman on death row in Indonesia since 2007 for drug offences, looks on during the signing of his handover report at a press conference at Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Tangerang, after leaving Salemba prison. — AFP

was granted a reprieve after Paris applied pressure and the Indonesian authorities allowed an outstanding appeal to proceed.

Atlaoui's 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 it had decided not to execute Atlaoui and authorized his return on "humanitarian grounds" because he was ill. He had left Jakarta for Paris on Tuesday evening on board a KLM flight via Amsterdam. Atlaoui was tight-lipped and wore a face mask at a news conference at Jakarta's main airport, after he was driven there in a black van from the capital's Salemba prison and handed over to French police officers. — AFP

Leader of Ismaili Muslims Aga...

Continued from Page 1

work on development and "tolerance around the world". He also held British and Portuguese citizenship. The Ismaili leadership is based in Lisbon, where there is a significant community. Britain's King Charles was "deeply saddened" by the death of the Aga Khan, who was "a personal friend of many years", an unnamed royal source was quoted in the British press as saying. Canada's Prime Minister Jus-

tin Trudeau described the Aga Khan as an "extraordinary man of vision, faith, and generosity" who "devoted his life to peace and prosperity for all".

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, praised "his exemplary commitment to culture, philanthropy and humanitarian causes". Despite his role as the spiritual head of the Ismaili Muslims, he was reluctant to discuss Middle East conflicts, religious fundamentalism or Sunni-Shiite tensions. Islam is not a faith "of conflict or social disorder, it's a religion of peace," he told AFP in 2017. It is used in situations which are "essentially political, but which are presented for various reasons, in a theological context. This is simply not correct," he said. — AFP



GAZA: People walk amid collapsed buildings along Saftawi street in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip on February 5, 2025. Palestinian militant group Hamas lashed out on February 5, at President Donald Trump's shock proposal for the United States to take over the Gaza Strip and resettle its people in other countries. — AFP

International

US expels Indian migrants

Thousands of undocumented migrants arrested

AMRITSAR: A US Air Force plane carrying more than a hundred Indian migrants expelled by the United States landed in India on Wednesday, local media reported. Thousands of undocumented migrants have been arrested since Trump's January 20 inauguration, including some accused of crimes. An AFP photographer in the northern city of Amritsar saw the US military aircraft land, with Indian media reporting it was carrying 104 Indian migrants.

Trump's flurry of executive actions aimed at overhauling immigration to the United States is estimated to impact 11 million undocumented migrants. Neither New Delhi nor Washington have commented specifically on the deportations. But a US embassy spokesperson in India said Washington was "vigorously enforcing its border, tightening immigration laws, and removing illegal migrants".

India's foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said last week that New Delhi was "firmly opposed to illegal migration, especially as it

is linked to other forms of organized crime". "As part of India-US migration and mobility cooperation, both sides are engaged in a process to deter illegal migration, while also creating more avenues for legal migration from India to the US," Jaiswal said. India is the world's fifth-largest economy and enjoys world-beating GDP growth, but hundreds of thousands of its citizens still leave the country each year seeking better opportunities abroad.

While its diaspora spans the globe, the United States remains the destination of choice. According to data from the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, over 5,000 Indians were deported from the country between 2018-2023. The US president and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi — whom critics both accuse of authoritarian tendencies — enjoyed warm relations when Trump was in the White House from 2017 to 2021. Indian media have widely reported Modi is likely to visit Washington next week, where he is expected to meet with Trump. — AFP



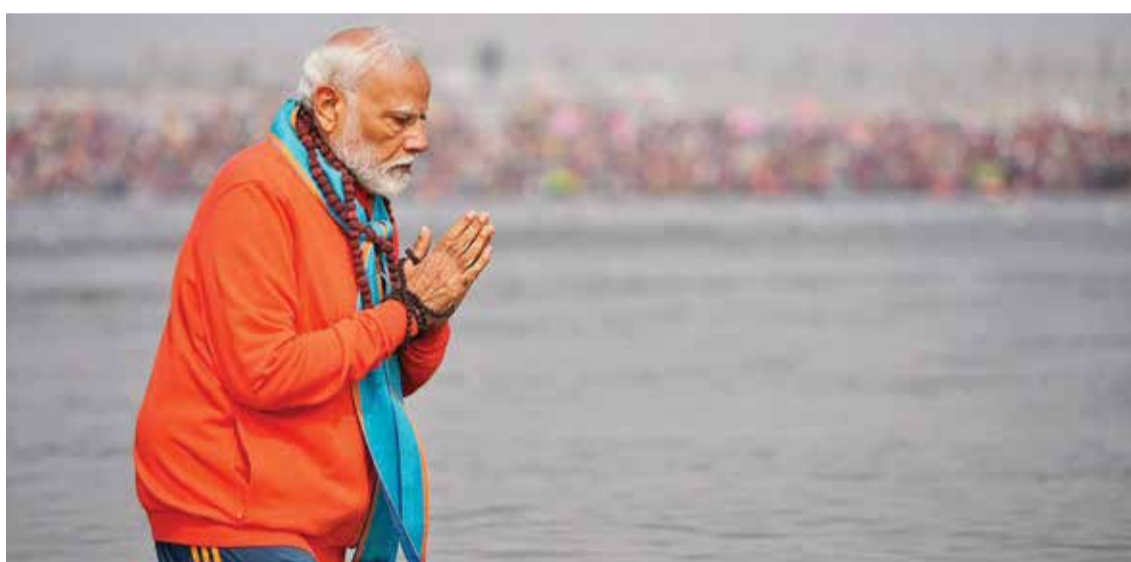
AMRITSAR: US Air Force aircraft carrying Indian migrants deported from the United States, lands at the Guru Ram Das Jee International Airport in Amritsar in India on February 5, 2025. — AFP

India's Modi takes ritual dip at Hindu mega-festival

PRAYAGRAJ: India's Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a ritual river dip on Wednesday at the world's largest religious festival, a week after a stampede killed at least 30 pilgrims. Many millions of people have already bathed in the confluence of rivers at the Kumbh Mela, a six-week-long Hindu celebration of prayer and bathing held every 12 years. Modi, dressed in a saffron-colored top and counting prayer beads in his hands, waded out thigh-deep to the holiest site of the Sangam, the meeting point of the Ganges, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati rivers.

He then dunked his head under the waters several times, watched by vast crowds packed along the river banks in the north Indian city of Prayagraj, in Uttar Pradesh state. Modi said he was "blessed" to take part, calling it a "moment of divine connection". "Like the tens of millions of others who have taken part in it, I was also filled with a spirit of devotion," he added in a statement. Hindus believe that those who immerse themselves in the waters cleanse themselves of sin, breaking free from the cycle of rebirth and ultimately attaining salvation.

Organizers say the scale of the Kumbh Mela is that of a temporary country, boasting that as many as 400 million pilgrims are expected to attend. Last month, at least 30 people were killed and many



PRAYAGRAJ: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi offers prayers before taking a holy dip in the sacred waters of Sangam, the confluence of Ganges, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati rivers during Maha Kumbh Mela festival, in Prayagraj. — AFP

more injured after a surging crowd spilled out of a police cordon and trampled bystanders. More than 380 million people have so far taken a dip in the rivers during the festival, which began last month and runs until February 26, according to state government figures.

Modi was accompanied by Yogi Adityanath, a hardline Hindu monk and Uttar Pradesh state chief minister, a key figure in the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Yogi's successful management of

the mega event was seen as a critical test for the 52-year-old firebrand leader, viewed as a potential eventual successor to Modi, 74. But the deadly stampede on January 29 took the sheen off Yogi and his government's claims touting the stellar management of the event promoted on billboards across the city. Modi's visit to the Kumbh coincides with state elections in the capital New Delhi, where the BJP is the main challenger to the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party, led by charismatic Arvind Kejriwal. — AFP

US freezes funding contributions to Haiti multinational force

UNITED NATIONS: The United States has frozen its financial contributions to a United Nations fund for a multinational security support mission in Haiti, a UN spokesperson said, a move that would stop \$13.3 million in pending aid. "We received an official notification from the US asking for an immediate stop work order on their contribution" to the trust fund for the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission, Stéphane Dujarric, the UN secretary-general's spokesperson, said Tuesday, referring to the already underfunded Kenya-led force. The UN Security Council gave the green light in October 2023 to the MSS mission designed to support Haiti's authorities in their fight against criminal gangs, which control swaths of the country.

Washington's funding freeze comes as part of President Donald Trump's push to slash US overseas aid, a drive that has included an effort to shutter the operations of the government's main aid agency, USAID. In late January, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that Haiti's capital could become overrun by gangs if the international community did not step up aid to the security mission. More money, equipment and personnel were needed for the international force, Guterres said, adding that any further delays risked the "catastrophic" collapse of Haiti's security institutions and "could allow gangs to overrun the entire metropolitan area" of the capital Port-au-Prince.

Haiti's Foreign Minister Jean-Victor Harvel Jean-Baptiste, speaking at a meeting of the UN Security Council, has said the country faced "major difficulties" that threaten not just the population but also "the very survival of the state." The MSS is not a UN force, but the United Nations has set up a voluntary fund to finance it, which has raised \$110 million to date, an amount that has been deemed largely insufficient. Just under 800 of the 2,500 security personnel hoped for have been deployed.

The United States had transferred \$15 million to the fund — the second-largest contribution, after Canada's \$63 million — with \$1.7 million already disbursed. Kenya's principal secretary for foreign affairs Korir Sing'Oei said the fund had so far received \$83 million from several pledged countries, "including substantial amounts from the United States." "While undisbursed US contribution to the Trust Fund of \$15 million has been paused as per presidential directive, the Fund has sufficient resources to continue underwriting the Mission until end of September 2025," he said Wednesday in a post on social media platform X.

In parallel with the UN-hosted fund, the United States, then headed by Joe Biden, had contributed more than \$300 million in funds and equipment directly to the MSS, including dozens of armored vehicles. Haiti currently has no president or parliament and is ruled by a transitional body, which is struggling to manage extreme violence linked to criminal gangs, poverty and other challenges. — AFP



NEELUM VALLEY: A health worker climbs during a door-to-door poliovirus vaccination campaign amidst heavy snow in the Bakwali-Surgan area of Pakistan-administered Kashmir Neelum Valley. — AFP

Pakistan health workers kick off polio drive

SURGAN: Health workers are braving freezing temperatures this week to administer polio vaccinations in Pakistan-administered Kashmir after cases surged nationwide last year. Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan are the only countries where polio is endemic, and militants have for decades targeted vaccination teams and their security escorts. A police officer guarding polio vaccinators in the northwest was shot dead by militants on Monday, the first day of the annual campaign that is due to last a week.

In Kashmir, health worker Manzoor Ahmad trudged up snowy mountains as temperatures dipped to minus six degrees Celsius (21 degrees Fahrenheit) to administer polio vaccinations in the region. "It is a mountainous, hard area... we arrive here for polio vaccination despite the three feet of snowfall," Ahmad, who heads the polio campaign in

Pakistan-administered Kashmir, told AFP.

Social worker Mehnaz, who goes by one name and has been helping the vaccinators since 2018, said the difficult climate poses a huge risk to the vaccination teams. "We have no monthly salary... we come here to give polio shots to the children despite the glaciers and avalanches," she told AFP. "We risk our lives and leave our children at home." The challenge is larger this year for the country with a population of 240 million, after it recorded at least 73 polio cases in 2024 - a sharp increase from just six cases the year before.

Health workers aim to vaccinate approximately 1,700 children within a week in the town of Surgan, around 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-administered Kashmir. "Our target is to give polio shots to 750,000 children below the age of five. There are 4,000 polio teams that visit house-to-house," Ahmad said. "There have been no polio cases in Kashmir for the last 24 years," he added with pride. Polio can easily be prevented by an oral vaccine, but in the past some Islamic religious leaders have falsely claimed that the vaccine contains pork or alcohol, declaring it forbidden for Muslims to consume. — AFP

Spain arrests hacker who targeted US army, UN, NATO

MADRID: Spanish police on Wednesday said they had arrested a hacker who launched dozens of cyberattacks on strategic institutions including the US army, NATO, the United Nations and the defense ministry. Investigators began their probe in February 2024 after a Madrid-based business association suffered data theft, recording more than 40 cyberattacks on international and Spanish institutions throughout the year.

Among the targets were the US army, NATO, the UN, the Spanish defence and education ministries,

the Civil Guard, universities and the International Civil Aviation Organization, police said in a statement. The hacker gained access to databases with information about employees and clients as well as internal documents that were then sold or published on internet forums.

The suspect claimed the attacks on forums on the "dark web" under various pseudonyms and used anonymous messaging and browsing apps to avoid identification. The most recent attack, on the Civil Guard and the defense ministry in December, led the authorities to identify and arrest the suspect in the southeastern Alicante region on Tuesday. The hacker, suspected of revealing secrets, illegal access and damage to IT systems and money laundering, also held more than 50 cryptocurrency accounts with various assets. EU law enforcement agency Europol and the US Homeland Security Investigations contributed to the operation. — AFP

Baltics to cut Soviet-era ties to Russia power grid

VILNIUS: Baltic states Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are to disconnect from the Russian power grid on Saturday, a politically-charged move that severs their Soviet-era energy ties with Moscow. A giant digital clock in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, is counting down the hours until the states join the western European power grid. "We are now removing Russia's ability to use the electricity system as a tool of geopolitical blackmail," Lithuania's Energy Minister Zigmantas Vaiciunas told AFP. Official celebrations are planned across the Baltics, although some consumers worry about disruptions to supply.

Latvia will physically cut a power line to Russia on Saturday and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen is to attend a ceremony with Baltic leaders in Vilnius on Sunday. "This is the last step in our fight for energy independence. We can finally take matters into our own hands," Vaiciunas said. The Baltic states were once Soviet republics but are now part of the European Union and key NATO members on the frontier with Russia. They have been preparing to integrate with the European grid for years but have faced technological and financial issues. The switch became more urgent after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, which spooked the Baltic states into thinking they could be targeted.

They stopped purchasing Russian gas and electricity after the invasion but their power grids remained connected to Russia and Belarus, controlled from Moscow. This left them dependent on Moscow for a stable electricity flow, which is crucial for factories and facilities requiring a reliable power supply. After Saturday, the three states will regulate their own supply. "So far, Russia has been able to use energy as a weapon, creating the risk of unplanned electricity disruptions driven by political decisions," Vaiciunas said.

'In sync with Europe'

After the Baltic states disconnect from the Russian power grid at 0700 GMT on Saturday, the three countries will operate in so-called "isolated mode" for about 24 hours to test their frequency, or power levels. "We need to carry out some tests to ensure Europe that we are a stable energy system," said Rokas Masulis, head of Lithuania's state-run grid operator, Litgrid. "We'll switch power stations on and off, observe how the frequency fluctuates and assess our ability to control it," he said. The states will then integrate into the European power grid via Poland. "In simple terms, the only change will be that our frequency will start fluctuating in sync with Europe," Masulis said.

Lithuania has warned of potential risks linked to the change. "Various short-term risks are possible, such as kinetic operations against critical infrastructure, cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns," the country's state security department told AFP in a statement. Poland's power grid operator PSE said it will use helicopters and drones to patrol the connection with Lithuania. Several undersea telecom and power cables have been severed in the Baltic Sea in recent months. Some experts and politicians have accused Russia of waging a hybrid war, an allegation Moscow denies.

Generator sales increase

A total of 1.6 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) has been invested in the synchronization project across the Baltic states and Poland. Vaiciunas said consumers should not see disruptions during the change. "I do not expect any supply interruptions," he said. But sales of generators have shot up in Estonia as some consumers worry about power cuts. "January sales numbers show a clear rise in interest towards generators," Margo Pruunlepp, sales and marketing director at home improvement store Ehituse ABC, told AFP. Prit Vaio, director of corporate sales and e-commerce at home improvement store, Bauhof, said: "In January 2025, generator sales rose several dozen times compared to the same time last year."

The Baltic states are meanwhile ramping up domestic energy production capacity, including with offshore wind farms in the Baltic Sea. After the Baltic decoupling, the energy system in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad will lose its grid connection to mainland Russia. Kaliningrad has been building up power generation capacity for years and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov dismissed all concerns. Asked about the cut-off last week, he said: "We have taken all measures to ensure the uninterrupted reliable operation of our unified energy system." — AFP

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2025

US trade gap swells in 2024

Deficits under fresh scrutiny as Trump returns to White House

WASHINGTON: The US trade gap swelled last year to nearly \$920 billion, according to government data released Wednesday, as deficits come under the spotlight with President Donald Trump's return to the White House.

In 2024, the overall US trade deficit grew to \$918.4 billion, widening 17 percent from 2023 as imports ballooned more than exports, said the Commerce Department. This could attract renewed scrutiny under the new administration, with Trump already threatening tariffs on major US partners over trade and other issues. Over the weekend, Trump announced fresh duties on the United States' three biggest trading partners in goods — Canada, Mexico and China — before reaching deals with Canada and Mexico to halt the levies for a month as talks continued.

Chief among his justifications were concerns over illegal immigration and the flow of deadly fentanyl across US borders, but he has previously also pointed to America's deficits with the countries.

Stock markets wavered as tariffs targeting Beijing came into effect Tuesday, with an accompanying suspension of duty-free exemptions for low value parcels sparking worry. With Beijing's announced retaliation, economies are on edge over the prospect of broadening trade wars. For all of last year, imports jumped by 6.6 percent or \$253.3 billion while exports increased 3.9 percent by \$119.8 billion. Driving the

growth in goods exports were products like computer accessories and semiconductors, while travel was a key factor behind services exports growth.

Imports surged on the back of goods like consumer goods, computers and semiconductors, as well as foods. For all of 2024, the goods deficit with China — which was a major issue during Trump's first administration — came in at \$295.4 billion.

This was wider than values for the trade gap with North American neighbors Canada and Mexico combined, and more than the gap with the European Union as well, according to government numbers. In December alone, the US deficit rose by nearly 25 percent to \$98.4 billion, said the Commerce Department. This was slightly above the consensus estimate by Briefing.com of \$98.0 billion.

Imports rose 3.5 percent to \$364.9 billion while exports slipped 2.6 percent to \$266.5 billion for the month. "The jump in import volumes may reflect companies efforts to accelerate imports to beat Trump import threats," said Carl Weinberg and Mary Chen, of High Frequency Economics.

But they added that this is hard to prove, given that strong exports also indicate "a fast-growing economy that is near its full potential level of output." Beyond the United States' immediate neighbors, Trump has also threatened he would impose tariffs on the EU, previously saying they had treated Washington "very badly." — AFP



BEIJING: People shop for clothes at a Calvin Klein store at a mall in Beijing on February 5, 2025. — AFP



A group photo featuring members of Burgan's Executive Management with Mizuho's team at the signing ceremony.

Burgan Bank launches \$500 million CDs program in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced the establishment of a strategic \$500 million Certificates of Deposit (CDs) program in Kuwait, rated 'F1' by Fitch Ratings which is equivalent of 'A'. This short-term debt instrument, spearheaded by the Bank's Treasury team, serves as a strategic mechanism for the bank to maintain a diversified source of liquidity, optimize the balance sheet and allow for sufficient access to funding.

The program has been established in coordination with Mizuho, as the Lead Arranger, whereas MUFG Bank, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), the Korea Development Bank (KDB), the Development Bank of Singapore (DBS), and Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) act as a dealers. CDs are short term debt instruments with maturities up to one year. They are primarily popular with Asian investors and can be priced at fixed, floating or zero



Tony Daher



Abdullah Marafie

coupon (at a discount).

Tony Daher, Group Chief Executive Officer at Burgan Bank, commented "We are proud to introduce our new CD program and are pleased with the positive reception it has received. This program reinforces our commitment to achieving the strategy aimed at growth in both the local and regional markets. This program demonstrates our commitment to growth and strengthens our leading position in the domestic and regional markets."

Daher added: "In addition to strengthening our

dian demand remained resilient, dropping just two percent in 2024," the WGC added. China's economy came under severe pressure last year, ceding its position as the world's biggest consumer of gold jewelry to India, whose demand was supported by reduced import tax on the commodity.

Gold traded at a fresh pinnacle of \$2,877 an ounce on Wednesday as investors rushed to the metal seen as a haven investment in times of economic unrest. "The precious metal is finding support amid dollar weakness and growing apprehension over the escalating trade war between the US and China, as well as its likely negative impact on global economic growth prospects," noted Ricardo Evangelista, analyst at ActivTrades. It comes after gold struck 40 record highs last year as global demand reached a record high of 4,974 tons, driven by central bank purchases, said the WGC.

Its senior markets analyst Louise Street forecast that central banks would again lead demand in 2025.

"Geopolitical and macroeconomic uncertainty should be prevalent themes this year, supporting

cess to the Treasury Department's closely guarded payment system, which handles trillions of dollars of transactions, from Social Security and Medicare payouts to federal salaries. In response, Democratic Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ron Wyden sent a letter Tuesday to the congressional watchdog agency demanding it probe reports that Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had personally granted Musk and his aides that permission. The Treasury, in a letter sent to Congress and shared with AFP, confirmed Krause's team has access to the system, but said it is "read-only access... in order to continue this operational efficiency assessment."

They said the permission was "similar to the kind of access that Treasury provides to individuals reviewing Treasury systems, such as auditors."

Musk's efficiency drive has run into strong oppo-

relationships in the global financial and investment markets, the inclusion of CD program to Burgan Bank's portfolio enables the bank to attract new segments of investors in the global market and enhances the bank's risk profile and resilience against market fluctuations," Abdullah Marafie, General Manager of Treasury and Financial Institutions at Burgan Bank, added: "The launch of CD program aligns with the group's policies that aim to diversifying the sources of funding, which enhances liquidity stability and protects the bank from any financial shocks. This program will contribute to the bank's adherence to Basel III ratios including Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR), Loan to Deposit Ratio (LDR), and Net Stable Funding Ratio (NSFR)."

Marafie added: "The program has been carefully designed to expand Burgan Bank's presence in the region, particularly in Asian markets where short-term debt instruments are in high demand. Building relationships with foreign investors also helps to open broader horizons for securing long-term financing. In line with our commitment to meeting market needs, this program was developed based on comprehensive studies and research to ensure that our products align with our position as a trusted financial partner."



KOLKATA: Gold jewelry kept on display inside a shop in Kolkata. — AFP

demand for gold as a store of wealth and hedge against risk." However, "jewelry weakness will likely continue as high gold prices and soft economic growth squeeze consumer spending power", Street added. — AFP

sition from Democratic lawmakers, who have raised a wide range of legal and ethical concerns about his moves to slash federal spending.

In a separate letter sent to Republican President Donald Trump on Tuesday, other Democratic policymakers expressed concern over DOGE's work involving government data and facilities.

Labor unions and a grassroots advocacy group have also objected to the moves, filing a lawsuit calling on a federal judge to declare it illegal for Musk or others from DOGE to get personal information on taxpayers, and to block the Treasury Department from letting that happen. In a post on X, the social media platform that he owns, Musk said Monday that the "only way to stop fraud and waste of taxpayer money is to follow the payment flows and pause suspicious transactions for review." — AFP

Canada posts first trade surplus in ten months of C\$708m

OTTAWA: Canada saw its first trade surplus in ten months in December as exports continued to expand faster than imports, led by higher energy product exports, higher crude oil prices and partly by weaker local currency, data showed on Wednesday. The December trade surplus was at C\$708 million (\$496 million), from a revised deficit of C\$986 million the prior month, helped by a 4.9 percent growth in exports, Statistics Canada said. Imports grew by 2.3 percent in December, a bit slower than the 2.8 percent gain seen in November, it said.

Analysts polled by Reuters had forecast a surplus of C\$750 million. Canada's trade surplus with the US widened for the second month in a row, growing 5 percent in December to C\$11.3 billion led primarily by higher exports of energy products and a higher price of crude oil. Its imports from the US fell 1.5 percent in December. US President Donald Trump, who paused a plan to implement 25 percent tariffs on almost all Canadian imports earlier this week, has often expressed frustration on the country's gaping deficit with its neighbor north of the border.

Canada also followed suit by rolling back sweeping retaliatory tariffs. Canada's merchandise trade surplus with the US, its biggest trading partner, amounted to \$102.3 billion for the year 2024, down from a surplus of \$108.3 billion in 2023, the statistics agency said. The combined value of Canada's imports and exports of goods traded with the US surpassed the C\$1 trillion mark for a third consecutive year, it said, adding that last year Canada exported 75.9 percent of its total exports to the its neighbor, and bought 62.2 percent of its total imports from south of the border. — Reuters

UAE leans on trade deals for growth as non-oil trade jumps

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates' non-oil trade in goods touched a record 3 trillion dirhams (\$817 billion) in 2024, up 14.6 percent from the previous year, as the Gulf oil exporter leans on its trade strategy to spur future growth. Thani Al-Zeyoudi, the UAE's trade minister, announced the figures in a post on X. Earlier, UAE Prime Minister Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum wrote on X that the country had already reached 75 percent of its 4 trillion dirham target for non-oil trade set for 2031.

The UAE is widely considered to be the region's tourism and business hub, and it has invested heavily in trade and logistics infrastructure and devised policy to help accelerate efforts to diversify its economy. Since 2021 it has initiated a raft of bilateral trade, investment and cooperation deals called Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPAs), and has so far negotiated deals with countries ranging from India and Indonesia to politically opposed nations such as the Zionist entity and Turkey, as well as smaller states. The share of exports in UAE's total non-oil trade rose to 18.7 percent last year, from 11 percent in 2015, Zeyoudi said. The value of exports to partner CEPA countries jumped 42.3 percent year on year in 2024, and accounted for about a quarter of overall non-oil exports, which reached 561.2 billion dirhams last year.

"Through our CEPA program, we are securing partnerships with those nations who share our belief that open, rules-based trade is an essential driver of economic growth, development and diversification," Al-Zeyoudi said in emailed comments to Reuters. "The UAE will always take a long-term view," he said, adding the country's economic strategy is not informed by day-to-day headlines.

The country is hoping to kick off trade talks with the European Union in 2025, a move which has the support of many EU member states. — Reuters

Global risks seen supporting gold demand in 2025

LONDON: Geopolitical and economic uncertainty will support investment demand for gold in 2025 but jewelry purchases will stay weak owing to record high prices, an industry body predicted Wednesday. Global demand for gold hit an all-time high last year at nearly 5,000 tons as the precious metal struck record high prices on the London Metal Exchange — and has continued to do so at the start of 2025.

However, "high prices dampened demand in the jewelry sector", with consumption down 11 percent to 1,877 tons, the World Gold Council said in its latest annual report.

"The decline was driven largely by weakness in China, down 24 percent year-on-year, though In-

Treasury: Musk has 'read-only' access to data

WASHINGTON: The US Treasury said Tuesday that Elon Musk's government reform team can read data from its highly sensitive payment system but not alter it, after Democratic lawmakers raised the alarm over the move and called for an investigation. 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).

As part of that drive, he reportedly pushed for a team led by IT executive Tom Krause to be given ac-

Business

KD 336.5 million is stc's revenues for 2024 with KD 31.4 million net profit

Revenue increased by 2.8% to reach KD 336.5 million

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc), a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers and enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its financial results for the financial year ended December 31, 2024, highlighting the most significant achievements, financial and operational performance in addition to the social initiatives made by the company during 2024.

Commenting on the announcements of these results, Eng Muataz Al-Dharrab, the company's CEO, stated: "Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc) has achieved a number of financial and operational milestones during the financial year ended December 31, 2024. This reflects the company's commitment to achieving its strategic objectives and strengthening its position as a leader in the telecommunications and ICT market. In line with the rapid developments in the sector and the growing demand for digital services, stc consistently strives to meet market needs by offering the latest comprehensive and integrated digital and technological solutions for both the individual and enterprise sectors. Furthermore, stc is committed to making every effort to enhance its infrastructure, expand its product portfolio, and deliver top-notch services with the aim of enriching customer experience, increasing market share, and creating added value for its shareholders."



Eng Muataz Al-Dharrab

the level of services in addition to effectively and innovatively meeting customer aspirations.

stc takes pride in receiving numerous prestigious awards that reflect its excellence and leadership in digital solutions and information technologies. These awards highlight the company's advanced digital capabilities and its active role in supporting SMEs - Small and Medium Enterprises in achieving their digital transformation strategies. In line with our strategic vision to deliver innovative services and platforms to our customers, enable digital transformation in Kuwait, and adapt to the rapid developments in the telecommunications and IT market, we have successfully launched a new dynamic and flexible operating model for stc and its subsidiaries. This model aims to enhance the efficiency of our internal operations, enable us to make strategic investments, and seizing promising opportunities in the market more effectively."

Commenting on the announcement of the financial results as of December 31 of 2024, Al-Dharrab stated: "stc has achieved outstanding financial results during the financial year ended December 31st, 2024, with total revenue reaching KD 336.5 million by the end of December 2024 with a growth rate of 2.8 percent compared to KD 327.4 million in 2023. The main reason for this growth is attributed to the increase in the Consumer sector revenues, which constitute 76 percent of total revenues. Meanwhile, Business sector revenues accounted for 24 percent of the company's total revenue during the financial year ended December 31, 2024. This is the result of efforts to enhance the company's business model, develop digital services, and provide integrated technological solutions for businesses across various sectors."

Al-Dharrab added: "These outcomes resulted in a growth of EBITDA by 0.3 percent to reach KD 85.3 million during the financial year ended December 31, 2024, compared to KD 85.1 million in 2023, supported by the increase in stc's revenue. As for the net profit, it amounted to KD 31.4 million (EPS 31 fils) in the financial year ended December 31, 2024, compared with KD 32.7 million (EPS 33 fils) in 2023. Despite the decrease in net profit, which is primarily attributed to the financial impact of the early retirement plan, this

The financial results for the financial year ended 31 December 2024	
Revenues	KD 336.5mn
EBITDA	KD 85.3mn
Net Profit	KD 31.4mn
Earnings per share	31 Kuwaiti fils
Assets	KD 462.2 mn
Shareholders' equity	KD 240.5mn
Book value per share	241fils per share
Customer base	2.3mn customers

strategic initiative reflects our commitment to optimizing operations while recognizing the valuable contributions of stc employees. Excluding the non-recurring expenses related to the early retirement plan, the net profit for 2024 amounts to approximately KD 33.3 million, achieving a growth rate of 1.8 percent compared to 2023.

These results, along with the continued focus on efficiency and innovation, highlight stc's ability to enhance profitability and achieve sustainable growth. It is worth noting that stc's customer base reached approximately 2.3 million customers by the end of December 2024, reflecting the ongoing success in attracting more customers and providing high-quality services."

eral Meeting. This decision reflects stc's confidence in the progress of its business, the strength of its financial position, and the robustness of its cash flows."

In 2024, stc issued its first standalone Sustainability Report, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Throughout the year, we launched a series of initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable resource management, enhancing transparency, and raising awareness about the importance of sustainability and its impact on the company and society. Our commitment to sustainability extends to integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards into all our operations, contributing to Kuwait's Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," for a sustainable future, and driving positive change in alignment with national and global sustainable development goals."

Al-Dharrab also emphasized: "Recognizing the importance of defining a financial strategy to achieve success and sustainability, stc is committed to periodically reviewing and updating its financial strategy to align with the company's ambitious strategic projects. Accordingly, the efficiency of stc's financial strategy contributes to achieving its vision, diversifying investments, and managing its financial resources effectively, which strengthens its leadership position in the telecommunications sector, ensures meeting customer needs, and delivers added value to shareholders."

stc is also committed to regularly reviewing the company's key performance indicators alongside successfully executing its projects, supported by digital solutions and its long-term plans. These efforts align with the company's strategic and financial objectives, contributing to enhanced operational efficiency and the implementation of best governance practices to ensure operational sustainability and achieve excellence."



Commenting on the company's financial position as of December 31, 2024, Dr Abdulrahman stated: "The company's total assets amounted to KD 462.2 million at the end of December 2024, while total shareholders' equity reached KD 240.5 million. Additionally, the company has a strong solvency position among telecommunications companies in the Middle East."

The Board of Directors has recommended distributing cash dividends to shareholders at 35 fils per share, representing 35 percent of the nominal value of the share for the year 2024. This recommendation is subject to the approval of the company's Annual Gen-

- EBITDA increased by 0.3% to reach KD 85.3 million
- Net profit reached KD 31.4 million
- stc's customer base reached 2.3 million customers

Driven by our digital transformation strategy and the increasing demand for digitization, we have refreshed our corporate strategy, "r.e.a.c.h.", during the year. This strategy is intended to be implemented over the next three years and reflects stc's forward-looking vision. It aims to contribute to shaping the digital future, promote sustainable growth that benefits all stakeholders, and pave the way for achieving further milestones in the years to come in addition to enhancing profitability."

Commenting on the key achievements of stc during the financial year ended December 31, 2024, Eng Muataz Al-Dharrab, said: "stc launched several projects, during the fourth quarter of 2024, targeting both the individual and enterprise sectors aimed at delivering an unparalleled experience to our customers. The company has also adopted modern technologies to enhance



Salma Al-Hajjaj and bank officials pose for a group photo with the participants.

Gulf Bank participates in ninth edition of Innovation Challenge

KUWAIT: As part of its commitment to developing national talent and building a strong foundation of young leaders, Gulf Bank participated in the Innovation Challenge Program for 2024-2025. Held annually by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) in partnership with the IE Business School, the program is designed to drive innovation and cultivate creative skills within private sector companies, fostering economic growth and advancing Kuwait's shift toward a knowledge-based economy.

Gulf Bank's team for this year's program included Mohammed Sahib Shokr, Senior Manager of the Anti-Money Laundering Unit; Ahed Abdulmoneim, Assistant Manager of Human Resources; Sarah Al-Abdulhadi, Assistant Manager of Financial Institutions & Sovereigns; and Hamad Boursesli, Associate Manager of Credit Card Management. Over three months, Gulf Bank's team embarked on a structured learning journey, tackling a real-world business challenge while applying cutting-edge methodologies in design thinking, business model innovation, and strategic problem-solving. Led by KFAS, the multi-stage Innovation Challenge Program began in Kuwait and culminated in an immersive experience at IE Business School in Madrid — offering world-class mentorship and hands-on training in prototyping, pitching strategies, and customer-centric innovation. Through collaboration and expert guidance, the team refined innovative solutions to drive Gulf Bank's

growth and operational excellence.

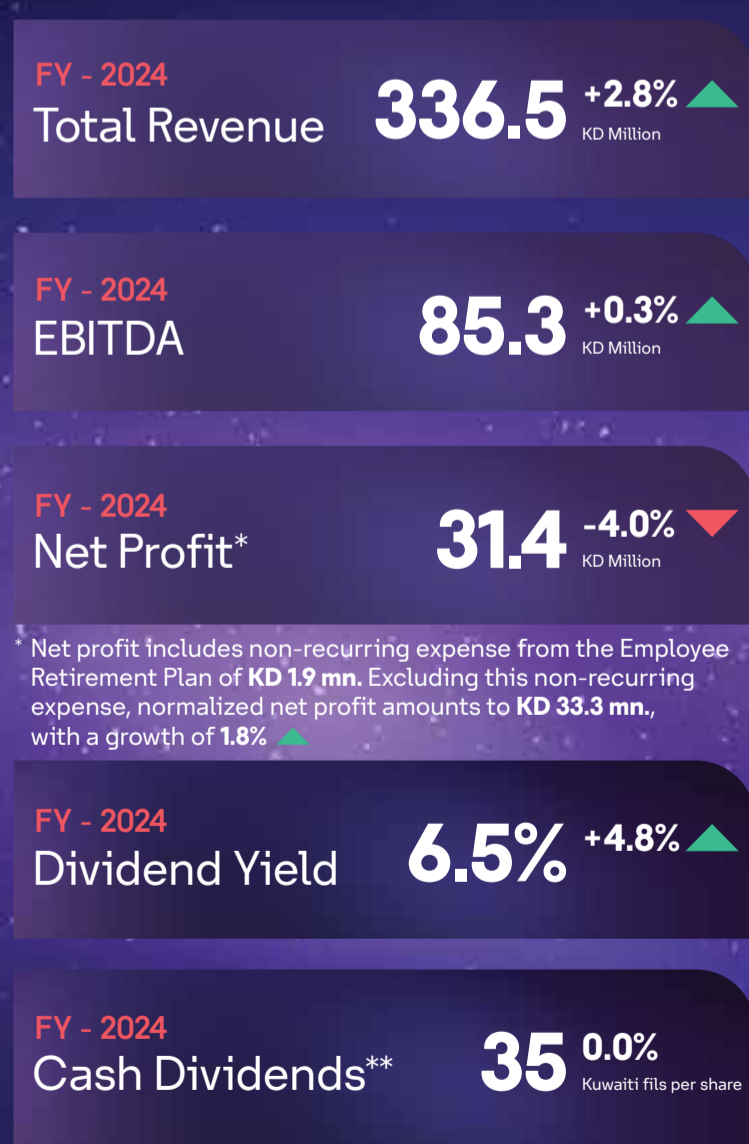
Gulf Bank is a key player in Kuwait's private and banking sectors, actively fostering innovation and developing exceptional national talent. This commitment aligns with the Bank's strategic focus on digital transformation, reinforcing its position as Kuwait's Bank of the Future. By delivering seamless, innovative services that enhance customer experiences and drive sustainable growth, Gulf Bank continues to invest in advanced technological solutions as a core pillar of its strategy.

As a leading private sector institution in Kuwait, Gulf Bank is committed to nurturing and supporting Kuwaiti talent throughout their careers. Recognizing its employees as its greatest asset, the Bank continuously invests in their growth by providing training programs, ongoing learning opportunities, and professional challenges in collaboration with top local and international institutions. In addition to delivering exceptional banking products and services, Gulf Bank is dedicated to strengthening its workforce and promoting a culture of continuous learning and development.

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.

The Board of Directors of Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc)

is pleased to announce to its shareholders that the company has achieved a net profit of KD 31.4 million (earnings per share 31 fils) for the financial year ended 31st December 2024.



Net profit includes non-recurring expense from the Employee Retirement Plan of KD 1.9 mn. Excluding this non-recurring expense, normalized net profit amounts to KD 33.3 mn., with a growth of 1.8%.

** Cash dividends distribution for the year 2024 is subject to the approval of the Ordinary General Assembly.



Business

NBK maintains strong financial position to sustain growth into 2025: Al-Bahar

Deputy Group CEO speaks in an interview with CNBC International

KUWAIT: Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy Group CEO at National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) mentioned that despite the spark of geopolitical tensions, its negative consequences on the business environment and the downside cycle of interest rates, the bank managed to sustain profit trends across different business lines in 2024.

In an interview of CNBC International, Al-Bahar added, "Our resilience against challenges testifies the success of our diverse strategic initiatives in creating value to customers, communities and stakeholders alike."

Government agenda priorities

Al-Bahar went on to say that on the legislative front, developments on long-awaited laws are progressing with expectations of their passing in the near future. "On the debt law front, it remains a top priority on the government's agenda given the ever-increasing level of public spending, volatile oil revenues, and efforts to elevate sovereign ratings."

"The government seeks to promote FDIs through increasing investment opportunities in the field of renewable energy, infrastructure, tourism and technology, as well as increasing non-oil revenues to contribute initially to 10 percent of total revenues; with efforts to increase this contribution to higher levels in line with GCC peers through revisions of taxes and fees frameworks and diversifying income and limiting spending and injecting government investments in the domestic economy."

"With regards to mortgages, we witnessed some adjustments to the underlying laws for housing as an instance, which shall facilitate in part the passing of the mortgage law. Overall and in the presence of such developments, we are becoming more and more optimistic with regards to the passing of key laws including the mortgage and debt law soon as the government is clearly pushing towards structural reforms," she added.



NBK Deputy Group CEO Shaikha Al-Bahar during an interview with CNBC International.

- Our adaptable business model will benefit the bank in diversifying revenue streams and mitigating risks in the face of global challenges
- The infrastructure development agenda and project awards have accelerated as the decision-making process is simplified
- Our performance affirms our ability to capture growth opportunities while maintaining our high asset quality and healthy capitalization levels

Strong year for project awards

On the pickup in development project market, Al-Bahar commented, "Project awards positive momentum in 2024 continued in each quarter. "The government also recently announced the inclusion of more than 100 projects

in the 2025-2026 budget, covering the state's needs in various sectors at a cost of KD 1.7 billion," she explained.

Innovation and excellence

Al-Bahar mentioned that NBK constantly strives

for excellence and innovation in all products and services provided to customers as the cornerstones of its success. "We will continue demonstrating agility and resilience in navigating the evolving economic landscape and seizing emerging opportunities with cutting-edge technologies and data-driven strategies," she said.

"In Kuwait, on the retail front, we will continue with improving our digital offerings towards targeting various client segments and boosting customer satisfaction." "With the domestic corporate banking landscape poised to improve on the back of projects activity momentum, we will focus on capturing growth opportunities including enhanced services through a customer-centric approach. Beyond borders, our international banking group will continue to expand in key markets, optimizing costs and leveraging technology to enhance operational efficiency in addition to exploring opportunities in sustainable finance," she explained.

"Likewise, as we continue to stand-out in building a wealth management powerhouse, NBK Wealth aims to broaden reach by presence and advisory and investment offerings to enrich client experience."

High adaptability

Al-Bahar emphasized that NBK's adaptable business model will operationally benefit the bank in diversifying revenue streams, focus on core banking activities and mitigate risks when it comes to facing global and regional challenges. "Our ability to adjust to changing economic conditions is demonstrated through the execution of our strategic investments and diversification of our strategy, reflecting our high asset quality, ample liquidity and a historically strong balance sheet."

"With our global presence across 13 markets, we stood resilient in the face of challenges and the modest domestic growth and are well positioned to build on our diverse strategic agenda during 2025," she affirmed.

US Postal Service halts China, HK suspension

WASHINGTON: The US Postal Service (USPS) said Wednesday it would continue accepting packages from China and Hong Kong, hours after an order to suspend shipments over President Donald Trump's new tariffs sparked fears of major trade disruptions.

Tensions between the US and China have soared in recent days as the world's two largest economies slapped a volley of tariffs on each others' imports, hitting hundreds of billions of dollars in trade.

As part of Trump's trade actions—which he enacted citing drug trafficking concerns—the United States on Tuesday scrapped a duty-free exemption for low-value packages. The "de minimis" exemption allows goods valued at \$800 or below to enter the United States without paying duties or certain taxes, but it has faced scrutiny due to a surge in shipments in recent years. The US Customs and Border Protection agency said last month that exemption shipments were worth over \$1.36 billion in 2024, creating challenges for its enforcement of trade laws, health and safety requirements, intellectual property rights, and consumer protection rules.

US officials have pointed to the growth of Chinese-founded online retailers Shein and Temu as a key factor behind the increase—and Tuesday's halt threatened major delays to parcels from both companies from entering the country. But Wednesday morning the USPS said it would "continue accepting all international inbound mail and packages from China and Hong Kong Posts."

"The USPS and Customs and Border Protection are working closely together to implement an efficient collection mechanism for the new China tariffs to ensure the least disruption to package delivery," it added, without further details.

Beijing had responded with fury to the move, accusing the US of "politicizing trade and economic issues and using them as tools." Vowing to "take



TIANJIN: Port workers are seen at the Binhai economic area in the municipality of Tianjin, northwest China on February 5, 2025. — AFP

necessary measures to resolutely safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian accused Washington of "unreasonable suppression."

AFP has reached out to Shein and Temu for comment. Other retailers such as Amazon might also be impacted by the "de minimis" removal. The low-cost retailers took another hit Wednesday as the European Commission announced it would seek to impose new fees on e-commerce imports—the bulk of which come from China. The measures are part of efforts to tackle a surge of "harmful" products into the bloc.

Tuesday saw Beijing say it would impose levies on imports of US energy, vehicles and equipment in a return salvo minutes after Trump's threatened tariffs on Chinese goods came into effect.

A day earlier, Trump suspended duties on Mexico

and Canada for a month after both countries vowed to step up measures to counter flows of the drug fentanyl and the crossing of undocumented migrants into the United States. Beijing's moves hit roughly \$20 billion worth of US goods per year—roughly 12 percent of total American imports into China, according to calculations by Capital Economics.

But their impact is a far cry from US tariffs announced over the weekend, which will affect some \$450 billion worth of goods. Although earlier it appeared that US parcels could still be sent from Macau, by Wednesday evening the semi-autonomous Chinese city's post office announced that its service was also suspended. Trump had signaled earlier that the talks with Xi could take place early this week, but addressing reporters at the White House Tuesday afternoon, he said he was in "no rush." — AFP

Vietnam's trade surplus with US hits record high

HANOI: Vietnam's trade surplus with the US soared to a record high last year, US data released on Wednesday showed, potentially complicating Hanoi's efforts to stave off trade tariffs from the new Trump administration. The data shows the Southeast Asian nation behind only China, the European Union and Mexico in the scale of its trade imbalance with Washington, but analysts say Hanoi's pledges to import more from the US as well as other offsetting measures could spare it from the punitive measures.

Sweeping US tariffs on all Chinese imports came into effect on Tuesday, prompting an immediate response from Beijing, while Trump has also threatened the EU with new levies. Mexico and Canada had new 25 percent duties suspended for 30 days on Tuesday after they promised to beef up border protection.

US President Donald Trump has not made any comment about Vietnam since his reelection, but "he is still obsessed with trade deficits," making the

country a likely target for tariffs, said Deborah Elms, head of trade policy at the Asia-based Hinrich Foundation. Vietnam's trade surplus with the US rose annually by nearly 20 percent in 2024 to a record level exceeding \$123 billion, according to the latest data from the US government.

In the same period the gap with China grew by less than 6 percent to \$295.4 billion, far below its peak in 2018; the EU's surplus went up by nearly 13 percent to a high of \$235.5 billion; and the deficit with Mexico increased by 12.5 percent to almost \$172 billion, also an all-time record.

Vietnam and Mexico were both major beneficiaries of the last US-China trade war, as manufacturers based in China moved production overseas to avoid tariffs imposed on Beijing from 2018 during Trump's first term in office.

Despite the ballooning trade gap, Vietnam is in a different position from other top exporters, as it does not pose an apparent security threat to the US, said Sayaka Shiba, a senior analyst at research firm BMI. The Trump administration prepared tariffs on Mexico and China under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), citing risks from immigration and drugs, said Shiba, noting "it would be more difficult to argue convincingly that Vietnam is a

threat to national security."

Vietnam may still face trade-related tariffs, Shiba said, adding that such measures would need to be upheld with investigations, which would give Vietnam time to work out ways to avoid them. Sectoral tariffs may carry a higher risk for Vietnam, especially on the import of semiconductors, Shiba said, noting Vietnam is a top exporter of semiconductors to the US.

Vietnamese officials have repeatedly said they would seek to find compromises with Washington on trade. Earlier on Wednesday Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh instructed officials to prepare for the impact of a possible global trade war without mentioning the prospect of tariffs on Vietnam, according to a post on the government portal. Among possible sweeteners are boosting Vietnam's imports from the US of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and a reduction of import duties on US agricultural products, such as soybeans, cotton and meat, Shiba said, noting exports were hard to cut as they were mostly from large multinational companies operating from Vietnam, such as Samsung Electronics and Intel.

"Promising to buy things is the best strategy for Vietnam, even if tangible results are not always possible in the short term," Elms said. — Reuters

South Africa eyeing Musk investment

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa is courting investment from Elon Musk, the world's richest man, the presidency said on Wednesday, after he accused the government of his birth country of racist laws.

President Cyril Ramaphosa had spoken with Musk "with the intention to see him invest more in South Africa," his spokesman told reporters. Ramaphosa had particular interest around Musk's satellite internet service Starlink, which provides web access to remote locations, said his spokesman Vincent Magwenya.

Licensing of the network, which is currently in 17 African countries, has been delayed by South Africa's black empowerment regulations, which aim to mitigate the legacy of racial inequality left by apartheid.

Musk and Ramaphosa met in September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly and also spoke by telephone on Tuesday, the presidency said. The conversation this week followed accusations by Musk on his social me-

Indonesia economy tops forecast but worries remain

JAKARTA: Indonesia's economy grew more than expected last year, the government said Wednesday, as a pick-up in trade, mining and agriculture helped offset ongoing global headwinds. The 5.03 percent expansion in Southeast Asia's largest economy topped estimates in a survey of economists by Bloomberg, while the 5.02 percent growth enjoyed in the final three months of the year was also better than expected.

"All sectors grew positively in 2024. The sectors that gave the biggest contribution to the economy were processing, trade, agriculture, construction and mining," head of Statistics Indonesia Amalia Adininggar Widayanti said in a news conference. However, the annual figure marked a slight slowdown from the 5.05 percent seen in 2023 and was well short of the government's 5.2 percent target.

Indonesia was badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic, with its key export and tourism sectors taking a massive hit in 2020 -- suffering its first recession since the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

While the economy has slowly recovered it is well short of the government's target of eight percent growth by the end of President Prabowo Subianto's term. Still, Prabowo said last month he remained confident that figure could be reached through cost-cutting and efficiency. But economists and other government agencies did not share the same optimism.

Bank Indonesia, the central bank, has projected growth will slow further this year owing to lower domestic demand and slowing exports. Monetary policymakers have steadily raised interest rates to defend the rupiah amid growing global economic uncertainty and rising inflation.

Analyst Gareth Leather at Capital Economics said: "Looking ahead, the official data will probably continue to show growth of close to five percent." "However, we expect growth to slow on our measure of activity as the impact of lower commodity prices and subdued global demand offsets the boost from lower interest rates," he said. — AFP

dia platform X that Ramaphosa's government had "openly racist ownership laws". US President Donald Trump, who is advised by Musk, also threatened to cut funding to South Africa on assertions that the country was "confiscating" land via an expropriation act.

The newly signed act says the government may, in certain circumstances, offer "nil compensation" for property it deems necessary to seize in the public interest, but only after attempts to reach an agreement on compensation with the owner. Ramaphosa had flagged in the conversation with Musk the "disinformation that we saw in the announcement by President Trump" and also his own accusation of racism, Magwenya said. "South Africa does not have racist ownership laws," he said.

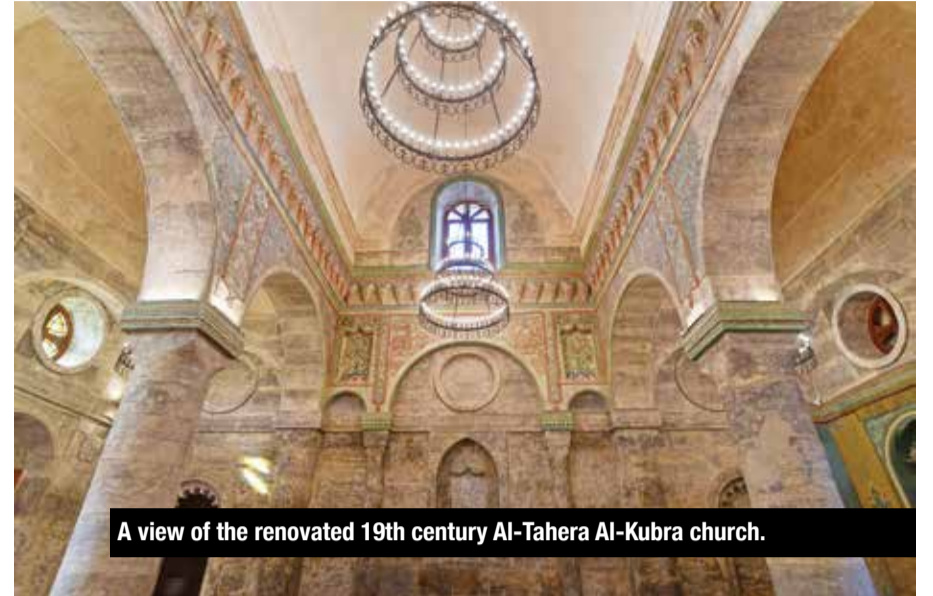
Musk, who left South Africa in the late 1980s when he was aged 17, may have been referring to the Black Economic Empowerment policy. This says that major companies—including foreign investors—must provide 30 percent equity to historically disadvantaged groups to address racial inequalities created during decades of white-minority rule.

South Africa's telecoms regulator is holding a public hearing this month on regulations for potential operators that are expected to influence efforts to bring Starlink into the country. — AFP

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2025



An aerial picture shows a view of the historic Great Mosque of Al-Nuri, whose "Al-Hadba" leaning minaret during a ceremony celebrating the final phases of restoration work on heritage monuments in old Mosul.

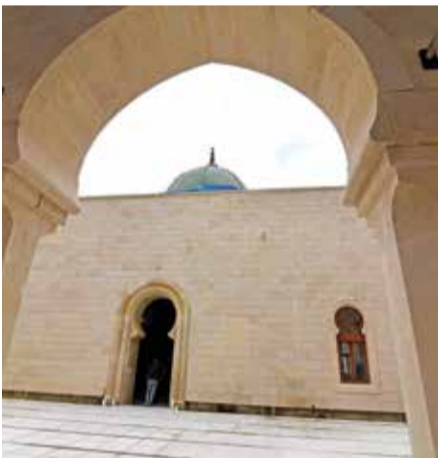


A view of the renovated 19th century Al-Tahera Al-Kubra church.



A view of the historic Great Mosque of Al-Nuri with its "Al-Hadba" leaning minaret.

Iraq's famed 'hunchback' of Mosul rebuilt brick by brick



A view of the historic Great Mosque of Al-Nuri in old Mosul during a ceremony celebrating the final phases of restoration work on heritage monuments in the city that was damaged during the fight with the Islamic State (IS) group.

The leaning minaret of Mosul in northern Iraq has been restored using its original brickwork, years after it was reduced to rubble under Islamic State group rule. The Al-Hadba or "hunchback" minaret is part of the historic Al-Nuri Mosque from where former IS chief Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi in July 2014 declared his "caliphate" that committed atrocities across swathes of both Syria and Iraq. The mosque and minaret were destroyed in June 2017 during the battle to oust IS from Mosul, and Iraq's authorities accused the jihadists of planting explosives before their withdrawal.

The minaret and mosque are the latest landmarks in Mosul to be restored by United Nations heritage body UNESCO, whose teams have worked for five years to revive several sites there. The Al-Hadba minaret of today is an exact replica of the old one, "built with the same bricks", said Abdullah Mahmoud of the Iraqi department of antiquities. "Al-Hadba is our identity, and by restoring it, the identity of the city has been reclaimed."

The restored minaret's tilt has been retained at 160 centimeters (63 inches), just as it was in the 1960s. However, engineers have reinforced the foundations so it no longer leans quite so precariously, as it began to do gradually after being built in the 12th century. "The minaret's body from the inside needed 96,000 new bricks," Mahmoud said. "But for the exterior we used 26,000 old bricks" to preserve its historical legacy.

'Massive change'

Days before work was completed, hundreds of workers put the finishing touches to Al-Nuri's columns, dome and yard. Mahmoud said the mihrab, a niche indicating the direction of Mecca, has been largely repaired using its original stones. But the minbar, from

where sermons are delivered, has lost most of its original pieces. Across the street, Imad Zaki, a former muezzin at the mosque, said: "Every day I stand here for an hour to watch as they are restored to their original state."

"Today one can feel the spirituality. It's as if our souls have finally found peace," added the 52-year-old, wearing a long traditional Iraqi abaya, or robe.

meaningful monuments for the city and also to bring life back" to Mosul.

"When I arrived here in 2019 it looked like a ghost city," Acetoso said. "In five years plus, there has been a massive change." In Mosul on Wednesday, UNESCO chief Audrey Azoulay hailed her team's efforts and said on that the renovation had allowed "the identity of the city" to return.

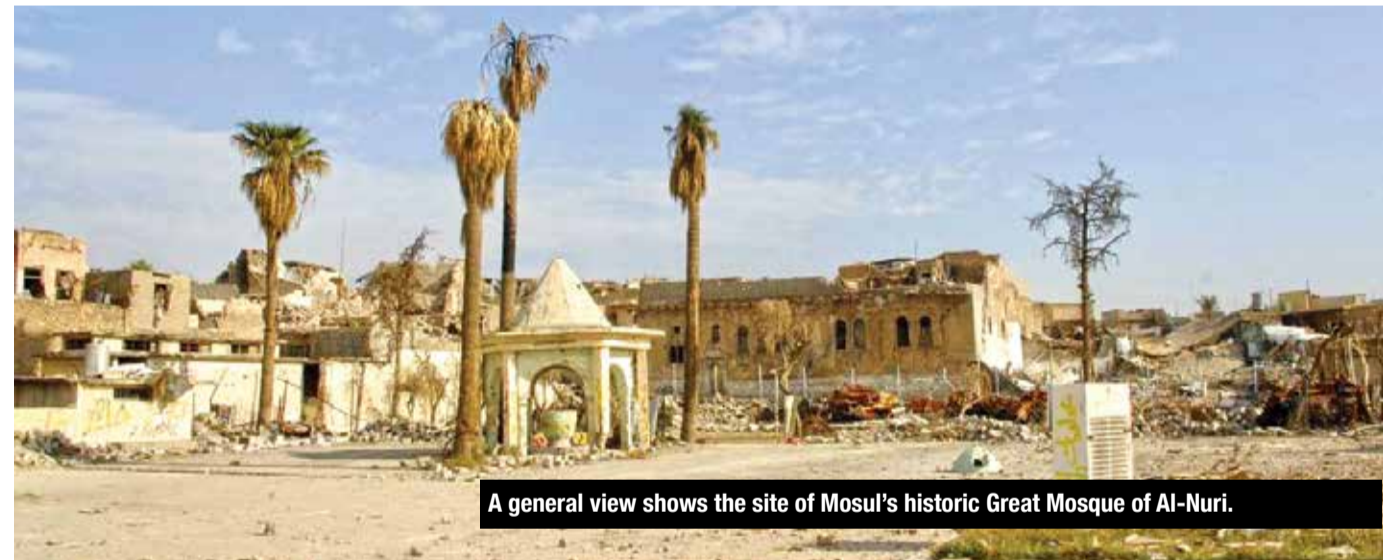
Mohammed Kassem, 59, came back to the old city a few years ago, to a new house as his former home was just debris. Mosul still "needs a great deal" of work before it is back to normal, he said. "It needs its former residents... the Christians to come back. This is their place," Kassem added. Across the street from Al-Nuri Mosque, Saad Mohammed, 65, said he hoped



A view of a restored chamber at the 19th century Al-Tahera Al-Kubra church.



A man inspects details at an older Islamic prayer hall discovered during renovation works beneath the historic Great Mosque of Al-Nuri in old Mosul.



A general view shows the site of Mosul's historic Great Mosque of Al-Nuri.

Eighty percent of Mosul's old city was destroyed in the fight against IS, and more than 12,000 tons of rubble was removed for the UNESCO restoration project, which also included Al-Tahira and Our Lady of the Hour churches and 124 heritage houses.

The Al-Tahira Church, dating from 1862, has been rebuilt with its arcades, embellished pillars and stained-glass windows. During restoration, workers discovered an underground cellar and large jars once used for wine. It now has a glass ceiling so visitors can look inside. Maria Acetoso, senior project manager at UNESCO Iraq, said the project aimed "to work in parallel on

Scars of battle

After IS was defeated, life returned to the city's streets, where the chatter of patrons in small cafes blended with the clatter of construction work at the mosque. In the coming weeks, Iraqi authorities will inaugurate the restored landmarks. But Mosul still bears scars from the ferocious fight against IS. Tucked away in narrow old city alleyways are ruined houses. Some bear the word "safe" scrawled in red on walls, signaling that they that have been cleared of explosives. The crumbling walls and shattered windows tell tales of displacement. Their original owners, mostly Christian, have yet to return.

the restoration efforts will attract visitors to Mosul, although he still feels sad because of what it has lost.

But he couldn't help but smile when he looked up at the minaret from his little shop. "We opened the window once and saw the black IS flag on top of the minaret. Then we opened it again and the minaret was gone," said Mohammed, who never left Mosul, even at the height of the fighting. "Today the minaret has risen again, alongside the mosque and the churches. Now we feel safe," he said. — AFP



A view of the renovated 19th century Al-Tahera Al-Kubra church.

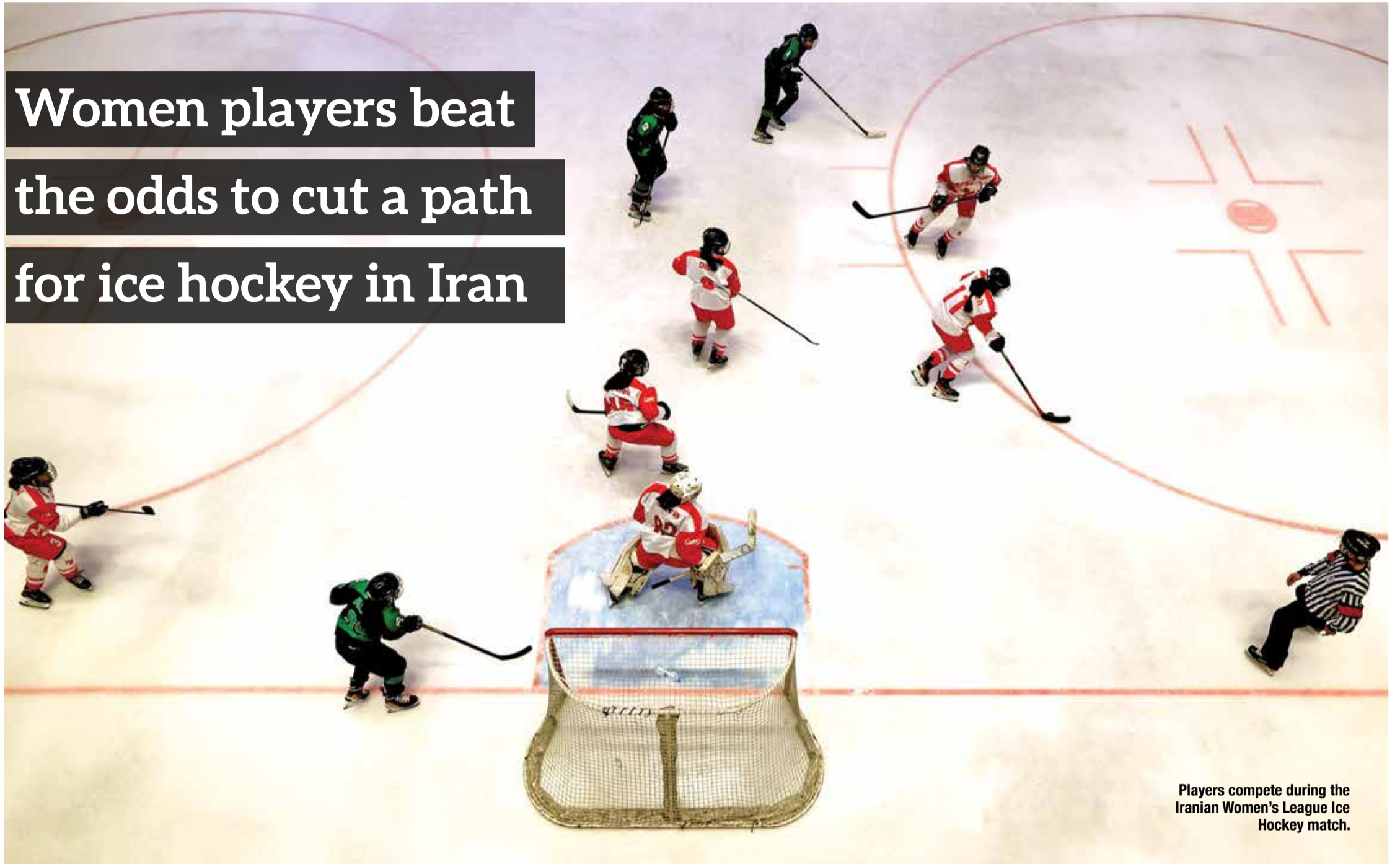


A view of the historic Great Mosque of Al-Nuri.



A view of the renovated 19th century Al-Tahera Al-Kubra church.

Women players beat the odds to cut a path for ice hockey in Iran



Players compete during the Iranian Women's League Ice Hockey match.

Iran may seem an unlikely setting for women's ice hockey, but a fledgling league has seen its young players confront the country's deeply conservative values and financial obstacles to blaze a trail for the sport. "The first time I was given a stick, I fell in love with this sport," said Soheila Khosravi, a member of the Iranian women's league, which played its inaugural round just three years ago. Khosravi left her family home two years ago to dedicate herself fully to ice hockey in Tehran, where Iran's only Olympic ice rink is located.

lines and claim a place in the country. "Hockey is a sport that requires courage and bravery, and you see these two characteristics in Iranian women," Kaveh Sedghi, a former captain of the men's national team, told AFP. "We are the only country with more female players than male ice hockey players," added Sedghi, who is now the president of Iran's ice hockey association.

'Motivated'

At the rink in Tehran, two teams battle it out for victory to the frenzied cheers of hundreds of exuberant spectators -- both women and men. The M.R team, wearing red and white, and the Pandas, in green and black jerseys, are two out of the six teams competing in the league this year.

The young women glide across the ice, skillfully maneuvering the puck at the Iran Mall ice rink -- one of only four in the country -- which opened less than six years ago. Iran's ski federation, which oversees ice hockey, introduced a girls' ice hockey league last August to support the newly established women's league. But the road to the league is not without obstacles. "We observe hijab when we play and no, we have no restrictions," said national team player Dorsa Rahmani. "Our jerseys are exactly the same as men. From afar, sometimes you can't even tell if a girl is playing or a boy," the 19-year-old added.

Financial constraints can nonetheless be a significant hurdle as many talented athletes come from less affluent backgrounds. "They are motivated, but the expenses are their biggest difficulty," explained Azam Sanaei, the coach of the Iranian women's team. According to her, a hockey stick, which may need to be replaced every two months, costs around \$200 -- equal to the average monthly salary in Iran. Despite these challenges, the players remain highly motivated and show great potential, according to Sanaei. Rahmani echoed this sentiment. "We work hard to achieve results," said the young player who proudly wears the national jersey. —AFP

"It's hard to live alone here, but it's for the love of hockey," said the 17-year-old athlete from the central province of Isfahan. Many of the players often face difficult odds, from social pressures to logistical and financial challenges in pursuing the sport. The players are required to wear the hijab head covering under their helmets, in keeping with the Islamic dress code mandated after the 1979 Islamic Revolution -- though in recent years women in big cities have increasingly flouted the law.

But despite these challenges and its very recent inception, the women's league has seen a stellar rise since its first round in December 2021, when four teams competed. The Iranian women's team claimed the title at the 2024 International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) Asia and Oceania Cup after defeating the Philippines in the finals, completing an unbeaten run. The victory marked a leap forward for the sport, allowing it to emerge from the side-



Team M.R players listen to their coach during their Iranian Women's League Ice Hockey match against team Hockey Panda at the Iran Mall ice rink in Tehran.-- AFP photos



Team M.R. players gather in a huddle ahead of their Iranian Women's League Ice Hockey match.



A player with team M.R prepares ahead of their Iranian Women's League Ice Hockey match.



A referee looks on during the Iranian Women's League Ice Hockey match.



Team Hockey Panda players celebrate a goal during their Iranian Women's League Ice Hockey match.



Team M.R players prepare for their Iranian Women's League Ice Hockey match.



Team Hockey Panda players react at half-time during their Iranian Women's League Ice Hockey match.



A player with team M.R prepares ahead of their Iranian Women's League Ice Hockey match.



Team Hockey Panda players react at half-time during their Iranian Women's League Ice Hockey match.

Lifestyle



Players compete during the Iranian Women's League Ice Hockey match.



British-US editor-in-chief of Vogue Anna Wintour poses with their medal after being appointed as a Member of the Order of the Companions of Honour (CH) following an investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace in London.--AFP

Anna Wintour vows to keep working as receives latest UK honor

Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour revealed Tuesday she has no intention of retiring, as the fashion legend accepted her latest prestigious UK honor from King Charles III at Buckingham Palace. Wintour, 75 -- already made a dame in 2017 -- was this time made a companion of honor, joining a select group never numbering more than 65 recognized for major contributions in their field. Renowned British artist Tracey Emin was also at the palace Tuesday to formally receive her damehood, after both women were named in

Charles' first birthday honors list in 2023. "It's wonderful to be back at Buckingham Palace and I was completely surprised and overwhelmed to be given this great honor," said Wintour, who removed her trademark sunglasses to receive it. British-born Wintour -- who has helmed American Vogue for more than three decades -- noted that when she was last honored, by Queen Elizabeth II, "we both agreed that we had been doing our job a very long time." "Then this morning His Majesty asked me if this meant I was going to

stop working and I said firmly, no," she added, wearing an Alexander McQueen outfit. "It makes me even more convinced that I have so much more to achieve." The Order of the Companions of Honor, founded in 1917 by King George V, is limited to 65 members at any one time. Those who have made a long-standing contribution to arts, science, medicine or government can be appointed, with Judi Dench, Elton John, David Hockney current honorees. Wintour, who was raised in the UK to a British father and an American mother,

has edited Vogue in the United States since 1988. Over the ensuing decades she has earned a reputation as one of the most influential and formidable figures in fashion. Emin, 61, one of Britain's best-known living artists, was made a dame for her services to art. A leading figure in the provocative Young British Artists movement of the late 1980s and 1990s, she has battled cancer and has undergone major surgery in recent years.--AFP

YouTubers causing monkeys to attack tourists at Cambodia's Angkor Wat

Wild monkeys egged on by YouTubers have been rampaging at Cambodia's famed Angkor Wat complex, attacking tourists, wrecking temple stonework and damaging information boards, officials said Wednesday. The agency that runs the UNESCO-listed site warned visitors to steer clear of the growing gangs of "aggressive" macaques that live around the sprawling complex of ruins and have been biting tourists. The macaques are native to the lush forests that surround Angkor Wat, but Apsara National Authority said human interaction -- particularly by people filming content to post online -- had changed their behavior.

A small number of YouTubers regularly fed monkeys to create videos and this has "changed the monkeys' natu-

ral behavior from being wild animals to domestic ones that are aggressive, steal foods, and cause injuries among people", it said in a statement. Some have reportedly even filmed themselves abusing macaques. Long Kosal, a spokesman for the Apsara National Authority, told AFP that as well as the danger posed to tourists, the agency was increasingly worried about the monkeys damaging the centuries-old stonework.

"On top of biting visitors, they have been climbing up and pushing stones down, damaging temples," he said, adding that the macaques had also damaged information boards. The agency has urged tourists to leave the monkeys alone while visiting the ruins, and said it is looking for "an appropriate solution" to the problem. Angkor Wat,

built from the 9th to the 15th centuries, was the capital of the Khmer Empire and is Cambodia's top tourist attraction, bringing in valuable revenue to a poor country.

More than a million foreign tourists visited the park last year. Since it became a world heritage site in 1992, Angkor Wat and the surrounding jungle have benefited from increased legal and physical protections. There are hopes that wildlife sightings will also spark interest in local and foreign tourists and boost conservation education efforts. Last year, the agricultural ministry announced a plan to conduct a census of monkeys in public areas and to identify and relocate those posing a danger to humans.--AFP



This picture shows tourists taking photographs of macaque monkeys at the Angkor Wat temple complex in Siem Reap province.



This photo shows macaque monkeys at Bayon Temple in Angkor Park in Siem Reap province.



This photo shows macaque monkeys next to Bayon Temple in Angkor Park in Siem Reap province.--AFP photos



A man wearing a costume poses at the booth of 'Sid Meier's Civilization VII', a video game developed by Firaxis Games, during the media day at the Gamescom video games trade fair in Cologne, western Germany on August 21, 2024.--AFP

Next round for strategy game lineage in 'Civilization VII'

Fans have waited more than eight years for the new instalment in heavyweight strategy game Civilization, with the release of the seventh instalment on February 11 promising to get budding philosopher-kings thinking more about the consequences of their actions. At first glance, little has changed since the very first title released in 1991: players are presented with a top-down view of the game world in which they build up their society turn by turn from the Neolithic period to the modern era. Virtual rulers can exert their will over opponents either by diplomacy or war -- a formula that brought sales over the whole series to 73 million by summer 2024, according to Take Two, parent company of publisher 2K Games.

"Civilization" spawned a whole genre known to gamers as 4X, for its core gameplay activities: Explore, Expand, Exploit and Exterminate. Comparable titles include Paradox Interactive's starfaring "Stellaris" (2016) or French developer Amplitude's "Humanity" (2021). That range of alternatives is one reason why fans "don't just want the same game with a new coat of paint, with fancier graphics," Ed Beach, creative director for the Civilization franchise, told AFP in August at Germany's Gamescom trade fair. "We need to do something new each time... something that is going to really improve the game."

Civilization is still developed by US studio Firaxis, which has run the franchise since its third instalment. Its seventh edition, available on PC and console, allows players to set any historically-inspired ruler at the head of any empire -- allowing Charlemagne to govern Egypt, for example. A match is now divided into three acts, each wrapped up with a major crisis such as the collapse of an empire or a foreign invasion. The way players cope with the challenge defines how their civilization will adapt as they enter the next age.

'The human journey'

That is one way the developers wanted to confront player-governors with the consequences of their actions.

"We're not trying to say you have to play a certain way," Beach said. "There are times I play as a very bad guy, and that's an interesting way for me to look at the world and look at history as well." Nevertheless, topics tackled in Civilization -- such as climate change or the battle of democracy versus autocracy -- are hot issues out in the everyday world.

"It's not getting political, it's just we're always thoughtful about what the human journey has been," Beach said. "The more our game can mirror that in interesting ways and let people adjust it and play with it and experiment with it, we think that it's doing what it should do."

Civilization's image as a "serious" game is a legacy of its origins on desktop computers, "at a time when the PC was a tool for work," said Sebastian Genvo, a researcher specializing in video games at the University of Lorraine in eastern France. Firaxis itself brought in historians to advise on keeping gameplay plausible and modelling civilizations in the new structure -- all while allowing the player as much freedom as possible.

Return of Sid Meier

"Civilization doesn't aim to teach you history," Genvo said, even if the close attention to certain historical details may "awaken an interest" among players. Hundreds of people have contributed to the development of "Civilization VII", going back to before the COVID-19 pandemic. Among them has been Sid Meier, 70, the original creator of the series, whose name still features proudly in the game's full title.

Meier had been "off doing other projects" during the development of the previous instalment, "Civilization VI", Beach said. "He likes to experiment... he offered to prototype some of the early ideas for Civ VII," he added. These included how units are moved around the map or the different military, scientific and cultural objectives players must achieve in each age.--AFP

Sports

William Nylander's hat trick propels Leafs over Flames

Lightning end Senators' five-game winning streak

WASHINGTON: William Nylander netted his second career hat trick and Matthew Knies collected one goal and one assist as the visiting Toronto Maple Leafs rode a four-goal second period to a 6-3 victory over the Calgary Flames on Tuesday. John Tavares and Bobby McMann also scored for the Maple Leafs, who beat both Alberta teams to kick off a four-game road trip. Auston Matthews posted three assists in his 600th game and goaltender Joseph Woll made 23 saves. Matt Coronato, Yegor Sharangovich and Joel Farabee replied for the Flames, who have lost two of three games. Goalie Dustin Wolf stopped 24 shots, while MacKenzie Weegar, Jonathan Huberdeau and Nazem Kadri all collected two assists. Nylander's empty-net goal, his fifth tally in a three-game stretch, sealed the victory and completed his hat trick, which came eight years to the day after his first three-goal game.

Utah 3, Flyers 2 (OT)

Dylan Guenther had a storybook return to the ice Tuesday for the Utah Hockey Club, capped by scoring the game-winning goal with a second left in overtime to lift the hosts to a victory over Philadelphia in Salt Lake City. Returning from a lower-body injury kept him out for 12 games, Guenther scored twice and had an assist to snap Utah's five-game losing streak (0-3-2). Mikhail Sergachev had a goal and two assists, Barrett Hayton also notched two assists, and Karel Vejmelka made 18 saves. Samuel Ersson stopped a career-high 39 shots for Philadelphia, which lost its fourth straight (0-3-1). Philadelphia broke a 182-minute scoring drought thanks to goals by Rodrigo Abols, his first NHL tally, and Tyson Foerster.

Capitals 6, Panthers 3

Lars Eller and Nic Dowd each scored a goal early in the third period and Alex Ovechkin added career goal No. 878, lifting host Washington over Florida. Ovechkin scored for the third time in as many games; his team-leading 25th goal of the season moved him 17 goals away from breaking Hall of Famer Wayne Gretzky's NHL record. Dowd had two assists to go along with his goal. Andrew Mangiapane and Aliaksei Protas each collected one of each and Tom Wilson added a short-handed tally. Logan Thompson made 30 saves as the Capitals snapped a two-game skid overall and extended their home point streak to 14 games (10-0-4). Florida's Sam Bennett recorded a goal and an assist, and Aleksander Barkov and Matthew Tkachuk also scored. Sergei Bobrovsky turned aside 20 shots for the Atlantic Division-leading Panthers, who saw their three-game winning streak come to a halt.

Canadiens 4, Sharks 3

Joel Armia's short-handed goal late in the third period lifted Montreal to a win at San Jose. The victory snapped the Canadiens' five-game (0-4-1) winless streak. Alex Newhook had a goal and an assist, and Kirby Dach had two assists. Brendan Gallagher and Cole Caufield both scored with the extra attacker as part of a 2-for-4 night for Montreal's power play. Sam Montembeault stopped 27 of 30 shots. Celebrini and Tyler Tofoli each had a goal and an assist on the power play as San Jose was also 2-for-4 with the man advantage. Colin Graf scored the Sharks' other goal for his first career NHL tally. Alexandar Georgiev stopped 16 of 20 shots for the Sharks, who are 1-8-0 in their last nine games.

Canucks 3, Avalanche 0

Jake DeBrusk had a goal and an assist and Thatcher Demko recorded his first shutout of the season as Vancouver snapped a two-game losing skid by beating visiting Colorado. Brock Boeser and Drew O'Connor scored and Filip Hronek had two assists for the new-look Canucks, who were playing with an extra spring in their step after adding four new players in a pair of trades on Friday. Demko stopped 25 shots for his ninth career shutout as he played one of his best games since returning from a long injury absence in mid-December. Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 28 of 30 shots for the Avalanche, who had won their previous two games. Blackwood had his shutout streak snapped at 146:55 after he recorded shutouts in his previous two games.

Oilers 3, Blues 2 (OT)

Connor Brown scored 2:33 into overtime to lift visiting Edmonton past St. Louis. Connor McDavid tallied a goal and two assists and Leon Draisaitl had a goal and an assist for the Oilers, who are 4-1-1 in their last six games. Stuart Skinner made 20 saves to earn the victory. Jordan Kyrou and Colton Parayko scored and Jordan Binnington made 35 saves for the Blues, who are 1-4-1 in their last six.

Jets 3, Hurricanes 0

Eric Comrie made 29 saves for his first shutout of the season as Winnipeg secured a seventh consecutive victory, blanking visiting Carolina. Nino Niederreiter had a goal and an assist for the Jets, while Neal Pionk and Rasmus Kupari were the other scorers. Winnipeg is one victory away from matching the club best, achieved three times since the franchise began as the Atlanta Thrashers in 1999-2000. Pyotr Kochetkov stopped 27 shots for Carolina.

Sabres 3, Blue Jackets 2

Alex Tuch scored two second-period goals after registering a first-period assist and Buffalo recorded their first four-game winning streak in more than two years by beating Columbus. Bowen Byram had a goal with an assist, Jason Zucker added two helpers and James Reimer made 27 saves for the Sabres, who notched four straight wins—to sweep their homestand—for the first time since a five-game run in January 2023. Reimer improved to 2-4-1 in seven starts since joining Buffalo. Ivan Provorov logged a goal and an assist and Kent Johnson also scored for Columbus, which dropped two after winning the first two of a four-game road stretch. Elvis Merzljkins made 18 saves for the Blue Jackets, who have lost two straight games in regulation for the first time since mid-December.

Bruins 3, Wild 0

Jeremy Swayman pitched a 35-save shutout and Charlie McAvoy scored the eventual game-winning goal as Boston beat visiting Minnesota. Trent Frederic and Morgan Geekie also tallied as the Bruins won their second straight game. Matt Poitras assisted on Boston's first two goals, and David Pastrnak had one helper to extend his point streak to 11 games. The loss was Minnesota's second straight since a three-game win streak. Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 32 shots in his 1,044th career game, tied with Roberto Luongo for the second most by a goaltender in NHL history.



VANCOUVER: Drew O'Connor #18 of the Vancouver Canucks celebrates scoring a goal against the Colorado Avalanche during the third period of their NHL game at Rogers Arena on February 4, 2025. — AFP

Lightning 4, Senators 3

Brandon Hagel broke a third-period tie and host Tampa Bay snapped Ottawa's five-game winning streak. Luke Glendening, Nikita Kucherov and Ryan McDonagh also netted goals for the Lightning, who are 3-4-1 in the past eight games. Victor Hedman had two assists, and Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 25 shots. Michael Amadio, Claude Giroux and Drake Batherson tallied for the Senators. Thomas Chabot had two assists, and Linus Ullmark made 34 saves.

Devils 3, Penguins 2 (SO)

Jack Hughes scored both regulation goals for New Jersey, which earned a shootout victory at Pittsburgh. Timo Meier scored the deciding goal in the seventh round of the shootout. Jesper Bratt had two assists for the Devils, and Nico Dawes stopped 25 shots to record his first victory of the season. Rickard Rakell scored in the second period and Kevin Hayes scored in the third as the Penguins erased a 2-0 deficit. Alex Nedeljkovic made 19 saves.

Islanders 2, Golden Knights 1

Brock Nelson scored the winning goal just beyond the midway point of the third period for surging New York, which edged Vegas in Elmont, N.Y. Bo Horvat scored in the first for the Islanders, who won for the eighth time in nine games despite being outshot 34-14. Ilya Sorokin made 33 saves. Brandon Saad scored his first goal for the Golden Knights since signing with the team on Friday. Ilya Samsonov stopped 12 shots for Vegas, which has lost four straight (0-2-2) and 11 of 14 (3-8-3).

Ducks 2, Stars 1

John Gibson made 26 saves to pick up the win in his 500th NHL game as host Anaheim edged Dallas. It was the 202nd career victory for Gibson, who became the 11th active goaltender and 85th in NHL history to hit the 500-game mark. Trevor Zegras and Cutter Gauthier scored for Anaheim, which won for the fifth time in six games. Colin Blackwell scored and Jake Oettinger made 26 saves for the Stars, who had a five-game winning streak snapped. It marked the first loss of Oettinger's career in nine starts against the Ducks.

Red Wings 5, Kraken 4

Patrick Kane set the NHL record with his 53rd shootout goal as visiting Detroit beat Seattle to claim its seventh consecutive win. Kane scored with a backhanded shot off the crossbar and into the net, the lone tally in the skills competition. He passed former Chicago teammate Jonathan Toews for the top spot in shootout goals. Lucas Raymond, Moritz Seider, Jonatan Berggren and Elmer Soderblom scored in regulation for Detroit. Cam Talbot made 23 saves through overtime, plus all three shootout attempts. The Red Wings, who finished a perfect four-game road trip—with three wins coming in extra time—are riding a 15-3-1 run. Shane Wright scored twice, while Matty Beniers and Chandler Stephenson replied for the Kraken, who have one win in the past five games. Joey Daccord stopped 36 shots through overtime. — Reuters

Stiff competition as Vonn hunts gold in world super-G

SAALBACH: US star Lindsey Vonn will go for a ninth world medal at her ninth world championships when she takes to the start hut of the women's super-G in Saalbach on Thursday. The American veteran will have stiff competition in the second of the two speed events, however, not least from Switzerland's Lara Gut-Behrami and the Italian squad headed by Federica Brigone and Sofia Goggia.

AFP Sports looks at five things ahead of the first individual medal race in the Austrian resort:

Return of the Vonn

In the absence of Mikaela Shiffrin, who won silver and bronze in the last two world champs, Vonn, Lauren Macuga and Breezy Johnson will be carrying American hopes. Macuga notched up her maiden World Cup win for the US team at St Anton, where Vonn finished fourth, her best result in a comeback from retirement following a successful knee operation that left her pain-free for what she said was the first time in years.

Vonn has insisted that this season is all about building to next year's Winter Olympics in Milan/Cortina d'Ampezzo. The question is whether these world champs have come too soon for her to trouble the podium. "World championships and Olympics are all about managing pressure and expectation and I don't have those now. I'm just skiing for me," Vonn said.

Gut-Behrami lurks

The 33-year-old Swiss racer has some serious form in the super-G. She comes into the race as reigning Olympic champion, having also won world gold in 2021 as well as silver in 2013 and bronze in 2017. While she failed to bother the podium at the last worlds in 2023, finishing sixth, she won the most recent super-G on the World Cup circuit in Garmisch-Partenkirchen to back up three other second-placed finishes this season. "I will try to do my best, to produce good skiing, and we will see," was Gut-Behrami's take on her goals in Saalbach.

Australia fear rank turner for second Lanka Test

GALLE: Australia are on guard for a spin trap when the second and final Test gets underway in Galle on Thursday despite an unassailable lead in the series. Steve Smith's men blew the hosts out of the water in the opening contest, winning by an in-



HINTERGLEMM: (From L) Italy's Filippo Della Vite, Italy's Lara Della Mea, Italy's Giorgia Collomb and Italy's Alex Vinatzer celebrate on the podium after winning the mixed team parallel final race of the Saalbach 2025 FIS Alpine World Ski Championships in Hinterglemm on February 4, 2025.—AFP

La squadra azzurra

Federica Brigone sits second behind Gut-Behrami in the World Cup super-G standings, just ahead of Italian teammate Sofia Goggia. Compatriot Marta Bassino is reigning world champion. Brigone has won twice on the circuit this year, in Beaver Creek and Cortina d'Ampezzo, and will pose a real threat down the Ulli Maier piste. "They've always been good skiers. But again, the older you are, the more experience you have," Vonn said of the Italian women's success.

Huetter shoulders home hopes

Home hopes of an early medal lie with Cornelia Huetter, who the super-G in St Moritz this season. She claimed a joint bronze two years ago, and will be joined by Stephanie Venier and Mirjam Puchner,

who topped the times in the second downhill training. "We're at the world championships, it's only about 1-2-3," said Venier.

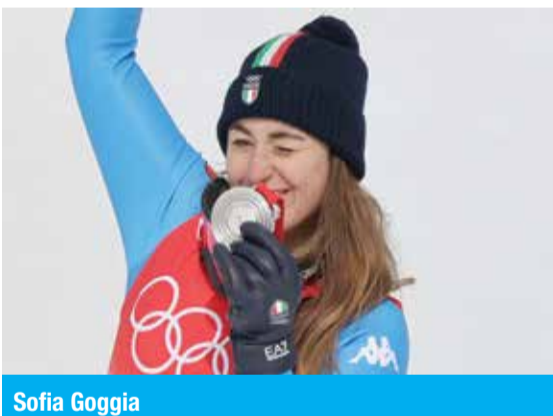
Downhill's cousin

The super giant slalom, or the super-G as it is more commonly known, combines elements of the downhill and the giant slalom, and is decided over one race. Skiers must negotiate widely-spaced gates, as in giant slalom, over a long course with speeds approaching those in downhill over a course that drops 400-600m for women. The minimum number of gates is 30 for women. Unlike the downhill, skiers do not have the chance of a pre-race training run, only a one-hour visual inspection on the morning of the race. — AFP

trolling the game from the outset. We didn't do that last time we were here, so it would be a great achievement to win 2-0," he said.

Sri Lanka are expected to shuffle the pack for the second Test after the last bruising innings loss. Opening batsman Pathum Nissanka is set to return, having recovered from a groin injury, and will replace Oshada Fernando.

Off-spinner Ramesh Mendis is likely to come back into the XI in place of Nishan Peiris, whose 41 wicketless overs leaked 189 runs in the first Test. "Pathum has been declared fit and he will play. But we haven't finalised our bowling combination yet," Sri Lanka skipper Dhananajaya de Silva said. — AFP



Sofia Goggia

Goggia pursuing Olympic dreams with 2026 Games

ROME: Sofia Goggia is hunting more Winter Olympic success as the one-year-to-go countdown begins for the 2026 Milan-Cortina Games, where the Italian skiing star will be one of the favourites for gold on home snow.

Speedster Goggia will compete in the women's alpine skiing events at Cortina d'Ampezzo, a special place for the 32-year-old who will be trying to reclaim the downhill gold medal she won in Pyeongchang in 2018.

Goggia, silver medallist at the 2022 Beijing Games, has won four World Cup downhill races on the Olympia delle Tofane piste, more than any other slope, with her most recent success there coming in typically fearless fashion last month.

"My first two Olympics were at white elephant venues in Asia, so I'm happy to take part in the games at Cortina, it's a place that has meant a lot to me throughout my career, it's a great piste," said Goggia in an interview with AFP. "Every day that I spend at Cortina is a good day."

Goggia's courageous style has made the bubbly Bergamo native a four-time World Cup downhill champion and one of Italy's most popular athletes, but it has also brought her a raft of injuries, beginning with anterior cruciate ligament tears in each knee in two separate crashes as a teenager.

Her silver medal in China three years ago, when she finished 0.16sec behind Corinne Suter, came just weeks after suffering a minor leg fracture and partial ACL tear at Cortina and was a result she calls "a miracle".

"I was focused, but I didn't feel pressure, I looked at the Olympics as if they were a game because that's what they are," says Goggia. "So many athletes put so much pressure on themselves!" Goggia's most recent win at Cortina was also her first in a downhill World Cup race since she suffered multiple fractures in her right leg during a giant slalom training session in Ponte di Legno a year ago. — AFP

Sports

Mahomes avoids 'G.O.A.T' talk

Mahomes is keen to share the glory with his teammates

NEW ORLEANS: Patrick Mahomes will enter the NFL history books with an unprecedented third straight Super Bowl win on Sunday but the Kansas City Chiefs quarterback is in no mood for legacy talk. Like most quarterbacks, Mahomes is keen to share the glory with his teammates, but he also knows that at 29-years-old, he has the chance to add quite a few more chapters to his story beyond Sunday's clash with the Philadelphia Eagles.

So he isn't going to take the bait about whether he is entering the conversation about being the 'G.O.A.T' - Greatest of All Time. "I'm just trying to be the greatest Patrick Mahomes that I can be," Mahomes told reporters.

"I mean, that's obviously a goal of anyone's is to be the greatest at their profession, but in order to do that, you have to be the greatest that you can be every single day," he said. "That's on the field and the work ethic I put in or off the field in the father and husband that I am."

"I'm going to try to be the greatest in that way, and whenever I'm done with football, if I leave everything out there the way that I feel like I have so far, as far as effort and mentality, I'll be happy with the results and I'll let others talk about who the greatest is," he added.

Still Mahomes will become one of just four quarterbacks in the history of the NFL to have won more than three Super Bowls should be triumph in Sunday's showdown with the Philadelphia Eagles. Tom Brady has won the most, with seven Super Bowl ti-

ties, while Joe Montana won four with the San Francisco 49ers and Terry Bradshaw the same amount with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Learning from legends

As much as Mahomes likes to play down comparisons with greats from the past, he says he does talk to several former quarterbacks and takes suggestions from them. "Yeah, I talk to Tom and I talk to Peyton (Manning), I talk to a lot of these guys, and I think the best thing that they do for me is just feed confidence on what I'm doing and how I'm doing it and how I can continue to be great," he said.

"And then if they'll give me any other advice, I always will take it. So it's always great to look at the legends of the sport, especially in my position, and hear what they have to say because they've done it before and they know what it takes to have a (Hall of Fame) gold jacket and have their number retired and everything like that," he said.

Brady will be close to the action in New Orleans as part of the Fox Sports broadcasting team and Mahomes is happy to have him. But it is a less heralded quarterback, Alex Smith, who Chiefs coach Andy Reid believes played a key role in Mahomes' rise to the top. In his rookie season, Mahomes spent most of the year on the sidelines as back-up to Smith, allowing him the time to learn about the demands of the position in the NFL before becoming the starter.

"I'm not saying he couldn't have been as great as he is now if he didn't sit, but being with Alex Smith I



NEW ORLEANS: Patrick Mahomes #15 of the Kansas City Chiefs speaks during a news conference at New Orleans Marriott on February 04, 2025. — AFP

thought was something you can't buy," Reid said on Tuesday. "He was able to sit there and watch a guy who's the ultimate professional, on and off the field, and just get an idea of the lay of the land of how things work in this league. I think that's helped him in that part of his career. I'm sure if he stepped in as a

rookie he probably would have been just as great as he is now, but that helped, for sure," he said.

Mahomes concurs. "It was extremely important to me. Instead of being thrown into the fire and having to figure it out on the fly, I got to learn behind one of the smartest quarterbacks of all time". — AFP

Bove's future uncertain after heart attack

MILAN: Edoardo Bove and Fiorentina will relive Italian football's most harrowing episode of recent years on Thursday when the Viola complete their home match with Inter Milan, which was interrupted in December when the midfielder suffered a heart attack on the pitch.

The 22-year-old will be watching from the bench as Inter try to join Napoli at the top of the table in the remaining 74 minutes of a fixture stopped by his collapse in front of distraught players and fans, who watched in horror as medics dashed onto the Stadio Artemio Franchi pitch and rushed him to Florence's Careggi hospital.

That quick response saved Bove's life but his future in football is still uncertain as he awaits the results of a raft of tests carried out during his two-week stay in intensive care. Bove left hospital with defibrillator which could be removed if deemed safe to do so, but if the test results show he has to have one permanently installed his career in Italy will almost certainly be over due to the stringent health regulations which govern sport in the Mediterranean nation.

Since 1982 it has been mandatory by law for anyone who practices competitive or non-competitive sport of any level—from gym membership right up to Serie A football—to be in possession of a certificate which deems that individual healthy enough to participate. For professional athletes, the criteria for the certificates is established by each sport's governing body and goes beyond what is required by law.

Footballers have to undergo a battery of heart exams including an ultrasound, a form of medical imaging, a three-minute step test which is either monitored or preceded and followed by an ECG, and blood tests.

A source who works on the medical staff at a Serie A club told AFP that there is "little to zero chance" that a footballer with a heart condition which required the installation of a defibrillator, essential to ensure a regular heartbeat, would be given permission to play in Italy. That's because contact sport would be considered dangerous for the athlete in question as the defibrillator could be damaged, for instance, in a tackle or while challenging for a header. The source told AFP that the mandatory tests for professional and semi-professional athletes can't detect every single heart problem because more complicated tests would increase costs, not just for the top Serie A clubs but for teams in lower down the football pyramid where finances are much tighter. — AFP



STUTTGART: Stuttgart's Swiss defender #20 Leonidas Stergiou and Augsburg's French midfielder #20 Alexis Claude-Maurice vie for the ball during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) quarter-final football match between VfB Stuttgart vs FC Augsburg. — AFP

Striker Undav sends Stuttgart into German Cup semi-finals

STUTTGART: A 29th-minute goal from Stuttgart striker Deniz Undav was enough for a 1-0 home win over Augsburg on Tuesday, sending them through to the German Cup semi-finals. "It wasn't our strongest game but at the end it was enough," Undav told Germany's ARD of the "dirty" win.

Stuttgart coach Sebastian Hoeness, who has turned the club's fortunes around since arriving in the middle of a relegation battle in April 2023, also praised his side's fight. "With all the games we've played, it certainly wasn't a performance to savor, but the win was deserved."

Stuttgart, surprise runners-up in the Bundesliga last season a year after narrowly avoiding relegation, were sloppy early as underdogs Augsburg looked to reach the semis for just the second time. The hosts began to warm into the game, with Angelo Stiller chipping the Augsburg defence and finding his Ger-

many teammate Undav, which was denied by visiting keeper Nediljko Labrovic with 26 minutes gone.

Undav put the home side in front three minutes later when he played a clever one-two with former Augsburg striker Ermedin Demirovic, before blasting through Keven Schlotterbeck's legs and into goal. Undav, who made his loan from Brighton and Hove Albion permanent in the summer, now has 10 goals in 24 games in all competitions.

Augsburg lacked class going forward and created few chances, outside of Mert Komur forcing Stuttgart goalie Alexander Nuebel into a desperation save with 71 minutes gone. The victory came after three straight defeats in all competitions for Stuttgart, including Wednesday's 4-1 home loss to Paris Saint-Germain which ended their Champions League campaign at the group stage.

Three-time winners, Stuttgart last lifted the German Cup in 1997 and have not won a title since the 2006-07 Bundesliga. On Wednesday, holders Bayer Leverkusen host bitter derby rivals Cologne. The remaining quarter finals will be held late in February, with RB Leipzig—who have won two of the past three German Cups—host 2015 winners while six-time champions Werder Bremen travel to third-division Arminia Bielefeld. — AFP

Even in career twilight, Ronaldo's star undimmed at 40

RIYADH: Cristiano Ronaldo's playing days may be numbered but his following is bigger than ever as he celebrates his 40th birthday in his adopted home of Saudi Arabia on Wednesday.

The Portuguese great appeared to trade an end-of-career payday for football obscurity when he moved to Riyadh's Al Nassr two years ago in a deal said to be worth \$250 million. But his influence became clear when he was followed by a parade of ageing superstars, including Karim Benzema and the perennially injured Neymar, to the big-spending Saudi Pro League.

Saudi Arabia was then awarded the 2034 World Cup in December, the crowning glory for the oil-rich kingdom's strategy of revamping its image through sports, tourism and culture. Leading the charge has been Ronaldo, an ambassador for the Saudi World Cup and now an online phenomenon, with more than a billion followers across his social media channels.

When Ronaldo launched his YouTube channel in August, he gained one million subscribers in just 90 minutes and 20 million within 24 hours. He currently has 73.5 million. While Ronaldo's perfect white teeth, bulging torso and product promotions are ubiquitous online, he remains equally energetic on the pitch.

He scored twice for Al Nassr on Monday, including a trademark leaping header, and berates his own and team-mates' mistakes as fiercely as if he was still playing El Clasico for Real Madrid. "With age, one's physical prowess diminishes hence it would have been easy for Ronaldo to take Saudi Arabian money and gently fade from view," Simon Chadwick, professor of Sport and Geopolitical Economy at Skema Business School, told AFP. "However, the gusto and passion that he continues to display suggests a consummate professional, deeply passionate player, and a physically determined athlete, the likes of which we don't commonly see," he added.

Although World Cup glory has probably eluded him, unlike his Argentine rival Lionel Messi, records still dangle in front of the five-time Ballon d'Or and Champions League winner. In September he passed 900 professional goals, an unmatched feat in official matches. Now on 923, and with a record 35 Saudi Pro League goals last season, the hallowed 1,000 is not too far away. Despite this prodigious form Ronaldo is yet to win a Saudi or continental trophy with Al Nassr, with the Arab Club Champions Cup of 2023 his only triumph with the club. — AFP

Olympics on horizon as China hosts Asian Winter Games

HARBIN: China will welcome a mix of world-class athletes and relative novices from desert and tropical nations when the Asian Winter Games open in the city of Harbin on Friday.

It is the ninth edition of the event, stretching back to 1986, but the first since 2017 and crucially comes with the Winter Olympics in Milan-Cortina a year

away. Harbin is in China's northeast, towards the borders with Russia and North Korea, and temperatures were minus 24 Celsius (-11F) during the day Wednesday. A total of 1,275 athletes across 34 countries and territories have registered for the Games, organizers say. Competitors will battle for medals and continental glory in 11 disciplines. Staples of the Olympics are in the week-long program, including speed skating, figure skating, alpine skiing, snowboarding, ice hockey and curling.

There is no direct qualification for the Winter Olympics but the Asian Winter Games will act as preparation. "This is the last comprehensive competition before the 2026 Winter Olympics," said Zhang Jing, head coach of China's short track speed skat-

ing squad. "We will cherish this opportunity, strive to showcase our athletes' best condition and deliver top performances." The Asian Winter Games are a greatly scaled-down version of the summer Asian Games, which featured about 12,000 athletes in 2023 when China also played host.

Olympic pedigree

China, Japan and South Korea are the traditional powers at the Games and boast Olympic medalists and world champions. They include Japanese figure skaters Kaori Sakamoto, a three-time world champion, and two-time Olympic silver medalist Yuma Kagiyama. South Korea's formidable short track speed skaters are also in action. "We are looking at winning six gold

medals or more," head coach Yoon Jae-myung said, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency.

Short track speed skater Lin Xiaojun, who won gold for hosts South Korea at Pyeongchang in 2018, will lead China's short track squad. Lin, also known as Lim Hyo-jun, was naturalized by China in 2021 after he was banned from the South Korean team for a now-overturned sexual harassment conviction. Also naturalized to compete for China are short track speed skaters Liu Shaolin and Liu Shaoang—brothers who previously won Olympic gold for Hungary. China will however be missing Eileen Gu, the double Olympic champion and face of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, after the California-born free skier pulled out injured on Tuesday. — 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)

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MADRID: (From L) Atletico Madrid's French forward #07 Antoine Griezmann, Atletico Madrid's Brazilian forward #12 Samuel Dias Lino, Atletico Madrid's Uruguayan defender #02 Jose Gimenez and Atletico Madrid's Spanish defender #24 Robin Le Normand jump in the wall during the Spanish Copa del Rey (King's Cup) quarter-final first leg football match between Club Atletico de Madrid and Getafe CF at Metropolitano Stadium in Madrid. — AFP

Simeone brace helps Atletico thrash Getafe, reach Copa del Rey semis

Atletico, came flying out of the blocks at their Metropolitano stadium

MADRID: Giuliano Simeone struck twice as Atletico Madrid thrashed Getafe 5-0 on Tuesday to power into the Copa del Rey semi-finals. The son of Atletico coach Diego Simeone has become vital for the Rojiblancos in recent months and his brace got his side off to the perfect start in a one-sided last eight clash.

Samuel Lino, Angel Correa and Alexander Sorloth were also on the score-sheet as the hosts ran out convincing winners. "I'm very happy to have a night like that in the stadium, it was crazy, but

first of all I have to thank the whole team because we made a huge effort," man of the match Simeone told TVE.

"I am happy, I am thinking a lot about the things that I have to improve, I'm working on improving day to day... and I have to keep growing." Atletico, who last won the Spanish cup in 2013, came flying out of the blocks at their Metropolitano stadium.

Simeone nodded them ahead after just eight minutes, with Getafe goalkeeper Jiri Letacek wavering on his

initial decision to come out for Javi Galan's cross and getting caught in no man's land. Rodrigo De Paul teed up the 22-year-old forward for his second goal in the 17th minute, as Getafe's defence was cracked open too easily.

Julian Alvarez should have tucked home the third but fired wide after Antoine Griezmann fed him unselfishly. Lino grabbed it before half-time, producing a clever turn to leave defender Juan Iglesias sliding in the wrong direction before finishing clinically.

Simeone tapped home early in the second half for what would have been his hat-trick, but the goal was disallowed for offside against Galan in the build-up. Getafe steadied the ship for a while, giving up fewer chances to an Atletico side seemingly content with their advantage.

Atletico substitute Correa eventually drilled home the fourth from outside the area with a low effort after 78 minutes. The fifth followed with another substitute Sorloth firing past Letacek after Correa laid the ball off to him.

"The team started very well, playing at such a high speed... we took control early on," said Diego Simeone, who added that his son had to continue his rich vein of form. "He's in a very good moment, the fans recognise it, they will demand a lot more from him and he has to maintain this level," noted the Atletico coach.

On Wednesday Real Madrid cross town to face Leganes, with Real Sociedad hosting Osasuna and record 31-time winners Barcelona at Valencia on Thursday in the other quarter-finals. — AFP

Nets stun Rockets, halt 11-game home losing streak

NEW YORK: D'Angelo Russell sank the game-winning 3-pointer with 3.4 seconds remaining as the Brooklyn Nets snapped an 11-game home losing streak with an unlikely 99-97 victory over the Houston Rockets on Tuesday night in New York.

The Nets trailed by four with 9.5 seconds left after Houston's Dillon Brooks split a pair at the line. Following a clean inbound pass by Tosan Evbuomwan, Keon Johnson sank a 3-pointer over Jae'Sean Tate with 8.1 seconds left.

After Evbuomwan stole Amen Thompson's inbound pass for Brooks, he got the ball near the foul line and tapped it to Russell. Russell spotted up and his open trey from the left side of the key cleanly went in. Brooklyn's Jalen Green missed a desperation 32-foot 3-point attempt at the buzzer. Johnson scored 22 points for Brooklyn, and Evbuomwan and Nic Claxton added 14 apiece. Alperen Sengun returned from missing the previous three games with a calf injury and collected 24 and a season-high 20 rebounds, but the Rockets dropped their season-high fourth straight.

Lakers 122, Clippers 97

LeBron James scored 26 points, grabbed eight rebounds and dished out nine assists as Los Angeles beat the host Clippers in Inglewood, Calif. Playing with Luka Doncic (calf) on the bench after acquiring him in a blockbuster trade with the Dallas Mavericks over the weekend, the Lakers got 20 points apiece from Rui Hachimura and Austin Reaves. Norman Powell scored 20 points and Derrick Jones Jr. added 17 for the Clippers, who gave up at least 122 points for the eighth time this season.

76ers 118, Mavericks 116

Joel Embiid recorded a triple-double in his return to the court and Tyrese Maxey had a double-double as Philadelphia nipped visiting Dallas. Embiid finished with 29 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists in 36 minutes. Maxey contributed 33 points and 13 assists, while Guerschon Yabusele pitched in with 19 points for Philadelphia, which avoided a third straight defeat. Kyrie Irving scored 34 points for Dallas, which was annihilated by Cleveland 144-101 in its first game after trading Luka Doncic to the Los Angeles Lakers over the weekend.



NEW YORK: Tosan Evbuomwan #12 of the Brooklyn Nets shoots against Cam Whitmore #7 of the Houston Rockets during their game at Barclays Center on February 04, 2025 in New York City. — AFP

Anthony Davis, the centerpiece of the Doncic deal, continued to sit with an abdominal injury. Max Christie made his Dallas debut and went 4-of-4 from 3-point range en route to 15 points.

Trail Blazers 112, Pacers 89

Anfernee Simons recorded 22 points and seven assists and Jerami Grant added 20 points as Portland continued its home domination of Indiana. Scoot Henderson amassed 17 points, eight rebounds and five assists and Shaedon Sharpe produced 17 points and three steals as the Trail Blazers won their fifth consecutive game and prevailed for the ninth time in the past 10. Toumani Camara added 13 points for Portland, which never trailed and won for the 15th time in its past 16 home contests against Indiana. Andrew Nembhard scored 17 points and Pascal Siakam added 16 for the Pacers, who had a four-game winning streak halted and lost for just the third time in the past 15 games. T.J. McConnell put up 14 points and Bennedict Mathurin added 12 points and seven rebounds as Indiana had a six-game road winning streak stopped, one shy of the franchise record set at the outset of the 2003-04 season.

Bulls 133, Heat 124

Rookie Matas Buzelis scored a career-best 24 points on 10-for-10 shooting and Josh Giddey added 24 points to lift host Chicago to a win against Miami. Ayo Dosunmu tallied 21 points and nine assists and Coby White had 22 points for Chicago, which outscored Miami 39-21 in the fourth quarter. Tyler Herro had 23 points, nine assists and eight rebounds for the Heat, while Bam Adebayo contributed 23 points and eight boards. Kel'el Ware notched a double-double of 17 points and 12 rebounds.

Celtics 112, Cavaliers 105

Derrick White scored 14 of his 20 points in the fourth quarter to help visiting Boston extend its winning streak to four games with a victory over Cleveland. Jayson Tatum scored a team-high 22 points and had seven assists for Boston. Kristaps Porzingis had 19 points and seven rebounds. The Celtics also received a 16-point performance from Jaylen Brown. Donovan Mitchell had 31 points, 10 rebounds and six assists in the loss, which dropped Cleveland's home record to 2-4. Darius Garland added 25 points for the Cavaliers, who received 17 points and 18 rebounds from Jarrett Allen. — Reuters

Halep announces retirement after home defeat

BUCHAREST: Former tennis world number one Simona Halep announced her retirement on Tuesday after her first-round defeat at the WTA Cluj-Napoca tournament in her native Romania.

The 33-year-old lost 6-1, 6-1 to 72nd-ranked Italian Lucia Bronzetti. "I don't know if it is with joy or sadness that I speak to you but I made this decision in my soul and conscience, I have always been lucid. My body no longer follows, but today I wanted to play and say my goodbyes on the court," Halep told the Romanian crowd.

The two-time Grand Slam champion, who had been working to re-establish herself after a doping ban, pulled out of Australian Open qualifying last month citing pain in her knee and shoulder. Halep returned to tennis in March last year after her career had been on hold since October 7, 2022, after testing positive for roxadustat at the US Open.

The winner of the 2018 French Open and 2019 Wimbledon singles titles was then caught up in a second affair, over "irregularities" in the data of her biological passport. She was handed a four-year ban by the ITIA, but successfully appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), arguing her positive test for roxadustat — used to treat anaemia and banned as a blood doping agent — was the result of a tainted supplement.

She denied knowingly doping and her ban was reduced from four years to nine months. But she never managed to regain the level that allowed her to rise to the top of the world rankings in October 2017, a position she occupied for a total of 64 weeks in her career.

Halep won 24 WTA titles over her 19-year career including the French Open in 2018 and Wimbledon in 2019. She also played in three other Grand Slam finals — the French Open in 2014 and 2017 and the Australian Open in 2018. — AFP