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# Hamas, Zionists complete 6th captive-prisoner swap

'Bulldozer tore everything apart': Zionist raid expands in West Bank



GAZA: Former Palestinian prisoners, released as part of the sixth hostage-prisoner exchange, are welcomed by friends and relatives upon arriving at the European Hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on February 15, 2025. — AFP photos

GAZA: Palestinian militants released three hostages on Saturday in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian inmates freed by Zionists, completing the latest swap despite fears the Gaza truce deal was near collapse. An AFP journalist saw masked Hamas gunmen parade the hostages onto a stage in front of a crowd in Gaza's southern city of Khan Yunis, where they were made to make statements into a microphone before being handed over to the Red Cross and taken back to Zionist territory.

Clutching gift bags given by their captors and certificates to mark the end of their captivity, the three men, flanked by fighters, called for the completion of further hostage exchanges under the ceasefire deal. Not long after, a busload of Palestinian prisoners departed Ofer Prison and was greeted by a cheering crowd in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, an AFP journalist said. More buses took inmates from Zionist prison in the Negev desert to the Gaza Strip, according to another AFP journalist.

Saturday's swap, the sixth since the truce took effect on January 19, came after Hamas had threatened to pause hostage releases over alleged Zionist

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## GCC ranked first globally in crude exports, reserves

MUSCAT: The Gulf states ranked first in global energy indexes for crude oil exports, production and reserves, the Gulf Cooperation Council Statistical Center (GCCSC) said on Saturday. The GCC states also ranked first in natural gas reserves, second in exports and third in marketed natural gas production, the center added in a report issued on Saturday. In 2023, crude oil output from GCC states reached 17 million barrels per day, accounting for 23.2 percent of global crude oil production and marking a decrease of 6.8 percent compared to 2022.

The states' crude oil reserves in 2023 totaled 511.9 billion barrels, representing 32.6 percent of global reserves and an average annual growth of 0.3 percent between 2014 and 2023, the report noted. In 2023, GCC states exported 12.4 million barrels of crude oil per day, making up 28.2 percent of the world's total exports and reflecting a decrease of 8.2 percent compared to 2022.

The GCC states' oil derivatives exports reached approximately 1,518.6 million barrels, constituting 13.4 percent of global oil derivative exports and an increase of 7.1 percent compared to 2022, it pointed out. Oil derivatives imports amounted to 212.3 million barrels, with an average annual growth rate of 0.1 percent. Gas oil/diesel output recorded the highest rate among petroleum derivatives in 2023, reaching 660.4 million barrels, followed by gasoline with 336.2 million barrels and kerosene and jet fuel with 319.4 million barrels, the report stated.

Gasoline consumption in GCC countries reached about 336.6 million barrels in 2023, while gas oil/diesel consumption was 299.7 million barrels.

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## Arab Summit to discuss Trump's Gaza plan

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia will host the leaders of four Arab countries at a summit on February 20 to discuss President Donald Trump's proposal for a US takeover of Gaza, a source with knowledge of the preparations said on Friday. The leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates will attend the summit, to take place ahead of an Arab League meeting in Cairo one week later on the same issue, the source said. Speaking on condition of anonymity, another source said Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas would also attend.

## Tunisian startup takes on e-waste challenge

TUNIS: Engineer turned social entrepreneur Sabri Cheriha hunches over a washing machine at a small depot in a suburb of Tunisia's capital, the unassuming home of a startup he launched to tackle the country's mounting electronic waste problem. Cheriha said there were currently about eight million household appliances and nine million cellphones in use across Tunisia, but once these devices break down or are replaced, "there's no service to properly dispose of them".

WeFix, the startup that won him a second-place regional social entrepreneur award last year, stands

out by offering an "all-in-one service", providing collection, repairs and recycling to reduce e-waste. The aim is to have "an environmental and social impact, but also an economic gain", Cheriha said, adding that refurbished products can be up to 60 percent cheaper in a country where the average monthly salary is around 1,000 dinars (\$310).

The startup "avoided" 20 tons of waste in 2023 and 80 tons last year, according to its founder, who anticipates handling another 120 tons this year. "When we talk about 'avoided waste', we're also considering the resources needed to manufacture a single washing machine - 50 or 60 kilos of finished product require over a ton of raw materials," he explained. "So our environmental impact is twofold."

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der a framework that would allow for the Palestinians to remain in the territory.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Thursday the United States was eager to hear new proposals on Gaza from Arab governments but that, "right now the only plan - they don't like it - but the only plan is the Trump plan". In January, Rubio's predecessor Antony Blinken outlined a roadmap for post-war Gaza and warned it required Zionist acceptance of a path to a Palestinian state - something the government strongly opposes. Regional states including Saudi Arabia have repeatedly called for a Palestinian state, existing alongside Zionist entity. Rubio was on his way to Europe on Friday.

He was set to join Vice President JD Vance in a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, after Trump spoke by phone with his counterpart Vladimir Putin and said he would pursue talks

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## Ukrainian leader calls for creation of 'Europe army'

MUNICH: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called Saturday for the creation of a European army, as he insisted Kyiv and its backers on the continent must be listened to in peace talks with Russia. Speaking at a gathering of top policymakers in Munich, the Ukrainian leader said that with the return of President Donald Trump to the White House Europe could no longer count on Washington to always have its back.

Trump stunned allies and upended the status quo of

US support for Ukraine this week when he announced he would likely soon meet Russian leader Vladimir Putin to start truce talks. Zelensky's rallying cry came a day after he met US Vice President JD Vance as Kyiv scrambles to ensure it is not sidelined in Washington's push to wrap up the three-year war. "Let's be honest - now we can't rule out the possibility that America might say no to Europe on issues that threaten it," Zelensky said. "I really believe that time has come. The Armed Forces of Europe must be created."

The push for a joint continental force has been mooted for years without gaining traction and Zelensky's intervention seems unlikely to shift the balance. In the short-term, the priority for Kyiv remains ensuring its voice is heard at any peace talks involving Russia and that it doesn't get a bad deal.

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TUNIS: Sabri Cheriha, a Tunisian engineer turned social entrepreneur, works at the depot that hosts WeFix, a startup business that he founded in Tunisia. — AFP



MUNICH: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky delivers a speech during the 61st Munich Security Conference (MSC) in Munich, southern Germany on February 15, 2025. — AFP



# Kuwait, Azerbaijan consider new initiatives to bolster bilateral ties

## Azerbaijan FM to visit Kuwait in April to attend interstate joint commission

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Yalchin Rafiyev stated that the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan will visit Kuwait to attend the interstate joint commission between Kuwait and Azerbaijan, where both countries will discuss and agree on key initiatives and undertakings. During a press conference, the Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister revealed that the high-level visit is scheduled to be on April 29-30, noting that the visits play a crucial role in strengthening ties between the two countries.

He said that the first round of political consultations was held on Thursday between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait and the Republic of Azerbaijan, pointing out that the Azerbaijani delegation met also the Kuwaiti Minister of Industry and Trade and Kuwait's Direct Investment Promotion Authority to discuss a broad range of political issues and trade and investment opportunities.

He added "Azerbaijan and Kuwait share a strong brotherly bond, considering each other among their closest friends both bilaterally and within international organizations. The two countries have a history of mutual support and cooperation. While political relations are solid, efforts are now focused on enhancing economic and trade partner-

ships. The goal is to further advance the existing trade and economic relationship, and this visit, along with the upcoming joint commission meeting, aims to achieve that." Additionally, he emphasized that Azerbaijan has extended an invitation to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to visit the country in 2025, marking a significant moment in bilateral relations, stating "Previously, the President of Azerbaijan visited Kuwait for bilateral discussions, while Kuwait's HH the Crown Prince attended a multilateral event in Azerbaijan in November 2024.

These exchanges are vital for advancing diplomatic and economic cooperation." He continued that cooperation in education and people-to-people exchanges is flourishing, noting that last year, Azerbaijan welcomed 31,000 Kuwaiti tourists, a significant figure with three daily flights between both countries and the growing interest in travel between the two nations is evident.

On Gaza, he affirmed that Azerbaijan has consistently supported a two-state solution to the Zionist entity-Palestinian conflict, with East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent State of Palestine. He said, "Recently, we inaugurated our representative office in Ramallah to maintain direct communication. Additionally, we have provided humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza. As



The Azerbaijani Ambassador Emil Karimov (left) with Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Yalchin Rafiyev.

the chair of the Non-Aligned Movement from 2019 to 2023, we have consistently upheld the rights of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, as part of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), we have taken significant steps to support their just cause for self-determination." Regarding the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the deputy minister said "The decades-long conflict ended in 2020, followed by a counter-terrorist operation in 2023, restoring full Azerbaijani sovereignty.

The normalization process is progress-

ing along three tracks: a nearly finalized peace agreement, border delimitation and demarcation, and the reopening of communication lines. However, Armenia must demonstrate a reciprocal commitment to these efforts." On tourism levels, he indicated that the possibility of increasing flights from Kuwait to different cities in Azerbaijan depends on demand, revealing that new international airports, such as in Gabala — one of Kuwaitis' favorite destinations — are ready to accommodate more flights if interest grows. In terms of trade and investment,

he said, "Current levels are below expectations and do not reflect the depth of friendship between the two countries. To address this, a business forum will be held alongside the upcoming joint commission meeting in April, bringing Azerbaijani companies to Kuwait to meet with local counterparts. Azerbaijan is also inviting Kuwaiti investors to explore opportunities in renewable energy, agriculture, and reconstruction projects in liberated territories." On the issue of food security, discussions have begun on increasing Azerbaijani food exports to Kuwait. He noted "Logistics challenges, especially due to high temperatures affecting land transport, are being addressed through existing flight and cargo options. Strengthening business-to-business connections is expected to lead to Azerbaijani products appearing in Kuwaiti markets soon."

The deputy minister stated that his country also plays a key role in connecting Central Asia with the GCC, participating in ministerial and head-of-state meetings between the two regions, adding "This engagement reflects Azerbaijan's commitment to fostering stronger ties with Gulf countries, including Kuwait. This visit has served as a crucial step in expanding cooperation across various sectors, and further discussions will continue in preparation for the upcoming joint commission meeting," he added.

## Defense minister in Tunisia to attend Arab Council session

**TUNIS:** Kuwait Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah arrived in Tunisia on Saturday to participate in the 42nd session of the Arab Interior Ministers Council, which kicks off on Sunday on behalf of Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

The general secretariat of the Arab Interior Ministers said in a statement that the session is scheduled to discuss a number of topics on the agenda, including the report of the Secretary-General of the Council on the work of the General Secretariat between the 41st and 42nd sessions of the Council. Among the most prominent topics on the agenda of the session are the draft of an eleventh phased plan for the Arab strategy to combat the illegal use of narcotics and psychotropic substances, the draft of a seventh phased plan for the Arab strategy for civil



TUNIS: Kuwaiti Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah arrives in Tunisia to participate in the 42nd session of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers. — KUNA

protection (civil defense), and the draft of a second phased plan for the Arab strategy to confront information technology crimes.

The session will also discuss recommendations issued by conferences and meetings held within the scope of the General Secretariat during 2024

and the results of joint meetings with Arab and international bodies, in addition to emphasizing the importance of holding periodic meetings of specialized Arab ministerial councils to confront extremism and terrorism.

Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah was re-

ceived upon his arrival by Tunisian Interior Minister Khaled Al-Nouri, Secretary-General of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers Mohammed Koman, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Tunisia Mansour Al-Omar, a number of leaders of the Kuwaiti ministry of interior and members of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Tunisia. — KUNA

## Kuwait Diving Team cleans up southern coasts of Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Diving Team, affiliated with the Environmental Voluntary Foundation, announced the completion of the first phase of the project to clean the southern coasts of the country, where five tons of plastic waste, wood and fishing nets were removed. Team leader Waleed Al-Fadhel told KUNA on Saturday that the coasts that the team cleaned are Bnaider, Al-Zour, Al-Khiran and Al-Nuwaiseeb, indicating that three stranded buoys that pose a danger to maritime navigation were removed.

Al-Fadhel explained that this initiative came due to the country experiencing strong seasonal south-

ern winds that led to high waves and throwing of waste, in addition to the winds shifting to the north, which led to its anchoring on the coasts. He stated that plastic waste poses a danger to the environment and marine life, according to a United Nations report that states that plastic causes the death of one million birds in the world annually, in addition to a quarter of a million marine creatures, including endangered turtles.

He stated that the team used equipment, boats and cars to pull waste and its removal, adding the team's continuation in cleaning the country's coasts, including Al-Jadilyat and Jahra Reserve was in cooperation with the Environment Public Authority. He also stressed the team's continuation in retrieving boats and fishing nets from coral reefs and its campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of preserving the marine environment through lectures and publications distributed to all segments of society. — KUNA



Abandoned fishing nets removed south of Kuwait.

## KU opens UNESCO forum to boost cultural interaction

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait University opened on Saturday the second edition of UNESCO World Peoples' Day Forum at Sabah Al-Salem University City with the participation of 25 countries from different continents.

Acting Dean of Student Affairs at the University Dr Jassim Al-Hamdan said in a speech he delivered during the opening ceremony that this annual event reflects the vision of the Deanship of Student Affairs in consolidating cultural interaction between countries of the world. Al-Hamdan explained that the forum aims to exchange knowledge and information about the diverse customs and traditions of peoples, which contributes to strengthening human relations and enhancing rapprochement between different cultures.

He added that the university is keen on promoting cultural diversity and academic openness by providing scholarships and student exchange programs in addition to concluding agreements and memoranda



KUWAIT: Acting Dean of Student Affairs Dr Jassim Al-Hamdan delivers a speech at the forum. — KUNA

of understanding with universities and academic institutions around the world.

He pointed out the keenness to create an educational environment rich in pluralism that allows students to expand their intellectual horizons and consolidate the principles of international cooperation in the fields of research and education. Al-Hamdan welcomed the ambassadors and representatives of embassies in Kuwait participating in the forum, say-



KUWAIT: The Kuwait Down Syndrome Association (KDSA) launched the second edition of the "Our Path is One" marathon on Saturday.

## KDSA launches 'Our Path is One' marathon

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Down Syndrome Association (KDSA) launched the second edition of the "Our Path is One" marathon on Saturday, with the participation of more than 60 members of the association, in the presence of a number of supporting bodies and families of participants. The marathon aims to break the psychological and health barriers facing people

with Down syndrome, based on the importance of sports in enhancing their capabilities and developing their social skills, in addition to spreading community awareness of their rights and encouraging their positive interaction with others.

The event witnessed distinguished participation from parents and trainers, which was positively reflected on the performance of the contestants and contributed to their achievement of advanced results in the race. The event was characterized by an atmosphere of joy and interaction, as it concluded with the distribution of awards and medals to the winners in celebration of their achievements and as an incentive to continue active community participation. — KUNA



Opening of the UNESCO World Peoples' Day Forum with the participation of 25 countries.

ing "You are in a country of peace and love, and we appreciate you." He also addressed the students, saying, "You are ambassadors of your cultures, and through your active participation in this forum, you contribute to building bridges of communication and understanding between peoples and enhance the values of tolerance and mutual respect."

He stressed that every culture carries with it a history, inherited values, and human experiences, noting

that "cultural diversity is a source of enrichment and inspiration that enhances understanding and coexistence between societies." It is worth noting that the forum will be held for one day at the Cultural Center in Sabah Al-Salem University City, and will include many cultural, artistic, and heritage activities and events presented by students from different countries, in addition to a number of participating entities from within Kuwait. — KUNA

Local

# MoH has made remarkable progress in field of anesthesia: Dr Al-Awadhi

## 149 kidney transplants performed at Jaber Hospital in 2024: Minister



Dr Awadhi poses for a group photo with some of the delegates. — KUNA photos



During the 11th Anesthesia Conference in Kuwait on Saturday.

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi said that the field of anesthesia has recently witnessed remarkable development in doctors' skills and expertise, especially in dealing with complex cases, indicating that as a result of this development, anesthesia departments were able to perform more complex surgeries than before.

Al-Awadhi explained in a speech at the opening of the 11th Anesthesia Conference on Saturday, with international participation, that the development in this field has led to a noticeable decrease in the rate of complications after surgeries, which contributed to providing distinguished medical services to patients. He pointed out that the anesthesia departments contributed to increasing the number of kidney transplants, achieving a new record number, as 149 kidney transplants were performed at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital during the past year, in addition to expanding pain treatment clinics. He stated that the ministry has been keen over the past years to support the anesthesia specialty morally and materially, realizing its importance as one of the rare medical specialties in Kuwait. He said the ministry has signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) and the launch of an anesthesia technician specialization program to prepare qualified national cadres in rare specializations that are difficult to find among local cadres.

Minister Al-Awadhi said that this program will result in the graduation of national cadres that contribute to supporting the ministry and providing integrated medical services to citizens, pointing out that the implementation of modern work



Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi inaugurates the 11th Anesthesia Conference on Saturday.

policies through the ministerial policies committee and the Departments Council with the aim of unifying the work mechanism and providing advanced medical services, especially for cancer patients through innovative techniques such as non-surgical interventions.

He added that the development was not limited to medical services only, but investment was made in the human element by holding many workshops and enhancing cooperation with international organizations in the field of anesthesia to exchange experiences and encourage scientific research. The entry of new hospitals into the health system also contributed to increasing the number of operating rooms and reducing patient waiting periods.

The head of the organizing committee of the conference, Dr Hassan Behbehani, said in a simi-



lar speech that the conference includes a number of diverse topics, all of which will positively reflect on developing the skills of medical cadres in Kuwait and providing safe and distinguished care to citizens and residents alike. This will in turn contribute to improving the quality of health services, he said. Behbehani explained that the conference is an important opportunity to enhance expertise, as it is attended by an elite group of anesthesia

specialists from prestigious international medical centers to discuss the latest developments in this field. The conference will also address the topic of anesthesia for pregnant women, which coincides with the opening of the new maternity hospital with advanced specifications. The conference will also include important topics such as pain management in children, peripheral anesthesia, and the role of artificial intelligence in anesthesia. — KUNA



Assistant Undersecretary for Medical Support Services at the Ministry of Health Dr Abdullah Al-Fars speaks during the event.



An official being honored.



## Kuwait ambulance service, a symbol of sacrifice: MoH

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health stressed the importance of the role of emergency medical personnel in saving lives and their continuous efforts around-the-clock in dealing with emergency reports, transferring patients and securing various events in the country.

Delivering a speech during the celebration of the third Kuwait Ambulance Day on Saturday, Assistant Undersecretary for Medical Support Services at the Ministry of Health Dr Abdullah Al-Fars emphasized the importance of the efforts of emergency medical personnel and their major role in improving health services and ensuring a quick and effective response to emergencies.

Dr Al-Fars praised the performance of the members of the Medical Emergency Department during the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup Football Championship (Khaleeji Zain

26) hosted by Kuwait and their clear presence in major accidents, including fires, stressing that they are "a safety valve for society." He said the continuation of support and development is necessary to achieve the highest levels of efficiency and excellence in the health sector.

Director of the Medical Emergency Department Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti said in his speech during the celebration that Kuwait Ambulance Day aims to enhance awareness of the importance of ambulance services and the vital role they play in saving lives including providing first aid. Dr Al-Shatti added that the celebration also seeks to motivate individuals and communities to participate in volunteer work in the field of ambulance and medical services, renewing the pledge to give more for Kuwait on the occasion of the national holidays.

He explained that the celebration also aims to honor ambulance workers, including paramedics and health practitioners, and appreciate their efforts for their great contributions to society. Al-Shatti said that "humanity in times of crisis shows the highest meanings of heroism, and Kuwaiti ambulance is not just a medical service, but a symbol of sacrifice and loyalty." "Emergency medical technicians are the heroes who are on the front lines

in times of crisis and respond to the call of duty with courage and professionalism," he said. He said the work of emergency medical technicians around the clock, facing challenges and enduring pressures in order to save lives and provide the necessary care to those in need, explain that their role is not limited to transporting patients only. Rather, it extends to include assessing the medical condition, providing first aid, and providing psychological support in times of crisis. He mentioned that last year's achievements include responding to more than 174,000 reports and 1,000 requests for air ambulance, and transporting more than 78 cases via the medical evacuation service, with a response rate ranging from seven to 11 minutes. This is in addition to the presence of more than 17,000 graduates from community first aid courses within the "A Paramedic in Every Home" campaign.

Dr Al-Shatti noted the increase in evacuation and emergency exercises, reached 97 exercises in various government and private facilities, simulating more than one scenario for hypothetical risks, noting that the training department provided 279 professional courses of various types, from which 2,815 people benefited. — KUNA

## MoH updates list of anti-narcotic drugs, substances

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Health Dr Ahmad Al-Awadhi issued on Saturday new decisions to update the schedules against narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances by inserting new items, in line with their legal categories. The move aims to ensure controlling pharmaceutical markets and protecting society from misusing such drugs, the ministry said in a press release on Saturday.

The decrees are compatible with ongoing efforts aiming to boost censorship regarding taking narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, it added. Such a step also shows keenness on keeping pace with the latest scientific developments and legislations in this field, it noted.

The decision N 29/ 2025 includes adding "Promethazine" to the schedule No 1 of Law N 74 of 1983, it elaborated. The decision No 30 of 2025 contains the insertion of some items like "Chloromethcathinone and Fluorodischloroketamine", and their derivatives to the schedule No 2 of Law No 45/1987. The ministry affirmed its permanent eagerness to update laws and regulations of drugs control in a manner that ensures achieving the utmost safety and public health standards, it added. — KUNA

## MoI issues 1,789 traffic citations, arrests 25 violators

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior announced on Saturday that it carried out a security campaign on Friday in the Saad Al-Abdullah area under the direct supervision of Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, which resulted in the issuance of 1,789 traffic violations and the arrest of 25 violators and wanted persons.

The department of Relations and Security Media at the ministry said in a press release on Saturday that the traffic, operations and special security sectors participated in the campaign as part of the Ministry of Interior's efforts to control violators and lawbreakers, adding that the results of the campaign resulted in the arrest of 11 residency and labor law violators, 10 vehicles wanted for cases and 10 wanted persons for cases. It pointed out that the campaign also resulted in the arrest of a person without proof of identity and two persons issued (absenteeism) and the referral of a person to the traffic police.



The honorees pose for a group photo. — KUNA photos

## Local

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Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika delivers his inaugural speech.

# 'Bharat Mela' celebrates strong Kuwait-India cultural relations

## 700+ artists perform at Kuwait's first Indian mega festival

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, Dr Adarsh Swaika, told Kuwait Times that "Bharat Mela" is one of the first events of its kind that the embassy has organized on such a massive scale, featuring over 700 artists performing from 11 am to 9 pm.

Held on Saturday at Boulevard Park Cricket Stadium, the event highlighted India's rich cultural diversity, with performances representing North, South, West, East, and Northeast India. It also brought together Indians, Kuwaitis, and other expatriates, creating a lively cultural exchange.

Dr Swaika emphasized the deep cultural connection of the Indian community in Kuwait, describing it as "the largest in the country" and highlighting how their strong ties to their heritage are reflected in the quality of performances. "Our goal is to unite the Indian community, build trust and camaraderie, and give them a day to enjoy, express themselves, and experience Indian music, dance, cuisine, and traditions," he said.

The event also featured various Indian businesses, reflecting what the ambassador described as "one of the major roles of the embassy," which is to



A group of young dancers perform during 'Bharat Mela'.

support Indian enterprises. It also highlighted India's growing economic presence in Kuwait.

Dr Swaika emphasized India's expanding trade ties with Kuwait, stating, "Many Indian firms are engaged in major infrastructure projects here." He noted that the recent visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Kuwait was "highly successful," with discussions



focused on strengthening economic cooperation. "These business engagements are a testament to our growing partnership. Our bilateral trade exceeds \$10 billion, and for the first time, Indian exports have reached \$2 billion. Seeing Indian-made cars and products in Kuwait is also a sign of this expanding collaboration," he said.

According to the ambassador, community-centered events have long been part of the embassy's initiatives. "We have been organizing such events in different formats — some at the embassy, some at other venues. But this is the first time, at least in recent memory, that we have done something on this scale. We hope to replicate it in the future as well," he said.



## LuLu Hypermarket launches Ramadan Souq

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket officially launched its much-awaited "Ramadan Souq" at the Al-Rai outlet, on February 12, 2025, marking the beginning of an exciting and impactful Ramadan. The event was graced by esteemed representatives from prominent charity groups, including Namaa Charity, Mabarrat Kafel, Islamic Care Society, Baladal Al-Khair, and Humanitarian Charity, who joined the celebration and symbolized the spirit of generosity and unity that defines the holy month of Ramadan.

The launch of the "Ramadan Souq" sets the stage for LuLu's month-long Ramadan campaign, which aims to provide attractive offer, exceptional shopping experiences while making a positive impact on the community. As part of this year's campaign, LuLu Hypermarket has introduced a series of charity card initiatives designed to bring joy, support, and convenience to its customers throughout Ramadan.

LuLu Hypermarket has rolled out festive Ramadan gift cards and available in denominations of KD 5, KD 10, KD 25 and KD 50. These cards offer a sim-



ple and effective way for shoppers to spread joy and support during Ramadan. To make Ramadan shopping even more convenient, LuLu Hypermarket is offering exclusive Ramadan kits in two options: a kit priced at KD 10 and KD 15. These kits contain a selection of Ramadan essentials, catering to the diverse needs of customers. Additionally, iftar meal counters will be available throughout the store, offering ready-to-serve meals for those who are fasting. This year's Ramadan campaign also brings exciting experiences

to the store, including the "Dates Festival," "Big TV Majlis," and "Ramadan Home," each catering to different tastes and preferences. Through the launch of the "Ramadan Souq" and its upcoming Ramadan campaign, LuLu Hypermarket continues to strengthen its commitment to community, offering a unique blend of tradition, generosity, and modern shopping experiences. This year's initiatives reflect the spirit of Ramadan, providing customers with opportunities to give back, celebrate, and enjoy the holy month with loved ones.

## Kuwait's Al-Nouri Charity opens mosque in Ankara

ANKARA: Kuwait's Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charity Association inaugurated a mosque in the Turkish capital Ankara on Friday at the expense of Kuwaiti donors. Chairman of the association Jamal Al-Nouri told KUNA that the inauguration of the mosque, which bears the name of Salah Al-Din Al-Ayyubi, "embodies the highest meanings of faith and brotherhood among Muslims. He stressed that this project "would not have seen the light without the grace of Allah Almighty and then the benevolent people of the State of Kuwait."

Al-Nouri added that the cost of the project to build this mosque amounted to \$350,000, indicating that the area of the main prayer hall is 150 square meters, in addition to the external courtyards, where the mosque can accommodate 300 worshippers.

He pointed out that this project "is nothing but a



Jamal Al-Nouri speaks on the occasion. — KUNA photos

link in a chain of charitable offering that has always distinguished the State of Kuwait, which Allah has blessed with generous rulers and a generous people who are always keen to spread goodness and establish the meanings of Islamic solidarity."

He said that the association is proud to be part of "this blessed journey that enjoys the generous support and patronage of the political leadership that continues Kuwait's pioneering journey in giving and charitable work inside and outside Kuwait. He said the mosque, which was inaugurated on Sat-



The new mosque inaugurated by Kuwait's Sheikh Abdullah Al-Nouri Charity Association in Ankara.

urday, "will remain a witness to the strength of the close relations between our two Muslim countries - Kuwait and Turkey," adding that "this fraternal relationship is based on the foundations of love, brotherhood and cooperation in everything that is good for the Islamic nation." — KUNA

## Jumping jerboa widespread in Kuwait deserts

KUWAIT: Many types of rodents from the jerboa family live in Kuwait's desert areas, specifically in Al-Shaqaya, Jal Al-Zour, Al-Salmi, Sabah Al-Ahmad Nature Reserve, some parts of Ahmadi and the southern regions, but the most prominent of them is the "jumping jerboa" scientifically called (Jacolus).

Deputy Director General for Technical Affairs at the Environment Public Authority Dr Abdullah Al-Zaidan told KUNA Saturday that the jumping jerboa has been spotted in abundance in the country, noting that it is also found in Central Asia, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and in desert and semi-desert areas that can be sandy or rocky.

Al-Zaidan added that the size of the jumping jerboa ranges from approximately 10 to 25 centimeters and appears only at night when the weather is cooler in the desert. It is a solitary creature that digs burrows in the sand in a spiral opposite to the direction of the wind. Its hands range in depth from one to two meters and can dig side holes that reach the surface to help it escape. He explained that these jerboas block the entrances to their burrows with



A rodent from the jerboa family found in the desert area in Kuwait

plants or sand to prevent predators from entering. It also helps it maintain cool and humid conditions and remain asleep in their burrows during the very hot periods in the summer. It has the ability to move long distances of up to ten kilometers in search of food.

He mentioned that the jumping jerboa can also cover vast areas quickly thanks to its large hind feet compared to the rest of its body size and moves in a manner similar to the movement of a kangaroo. It also uses its long tail, which usually ends in a mass of hair for balance and the color of its fur is usually the color of sand, which gives it an important advantage in camouflage.

He stated that it feeds on fresh green leaves and plants that grow in the desert after rainfall, but the dryness and scarcity of plants in these environments makes the jumping jerboa dig in the ground to reach the roots of the plant to eat them. — KUNA



Lebanese leader vows to punish attackers of UN peacekeeper

## Ukrainians mark Valentine's Day with tears



MUNICH: US Vice President JD Vance (right), US Secretary of State Marco Rubio (2nd right) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (left) meet on the sidelines of the 61st Munich Security Conference (MSC) in Munich, southern Germany on February 14, 2025. — AFP

# ‘New sheriff in town’: US Vice President lambasts Europe

## Europe must ‘step up’ in managing its own security: Vance

MUNICH: US Vice President JD Vance launched a withering attack on Friday against European policies on immigration, populist parties and free speech, echoing President Donald Trump whom he called Washington’s “new sheriff in town”. Vance’s speech — which focused on key themes of Trump’s election campaign — was a combative broadside at the Munich Security Conference at a time of transatlantic discord over Ukraine, defense and trade.

Vance stressed that Europe must “step up” in managing its own security, a key bone of contention. But he mostly lambasted the EU’s members on culture war issues. “There is a new sheriff in town under Donald Trump’s leadership,” said Vance in a speech that stunned the room, and was later condemned as “unacceptable” by German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius. Vance slammed EU “commissars” for stifling free expression and charged that “across Europe, free speech, I fear, is in retreat”. Trump, speaking in Washington, doubled down on Vance’s attack on traditional US allies.

“I heard his speech. He talked about freedom of speech. And I think it’s true in Europe,” the president told reporters at the White House. “They’re losing their wonderful right of freedom of speech. And he talked about immigration, and Europe has a big immigration problem.”

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier had earlier made clear that Berlin’s relationship with Washington had sharply deteriorated since Trump’s return. “The new American administration has a very different world view to ours,” Steinmeier said. “One that has no regard for established rules, partnership and established trust.”

### Immigration

The German head of state urged European leaders to keep calm in the face of a blizzard of disruptive policy announcements from Washington. “We must not freeze in fear, or as the English saying goes: Let’s not be a deer caught in the headlights.”

Vance, undeterred, in a later speech urged European countries, including conference host Germany, which faces elec-

tions on February 23, to “change course” on immigration. His remarks came a day after a 24-year-old Afghan man was arrested in Munich over a car-ranming attack that wounded 36 people.

“How many times must we suffer these appalling setbacks before we change course and take our shared civilization in a new direction?” he said. “Why did this happen in the first place? It’s a terrible story but it’s one we’ve heard way too many times in Europe and unfortunately too many times in the United States as well.

“An asylum seeker, often a young man in his mid-20s already known to police, rams a car into a crowd and shatters a community.” Defending political parties that oppose immigration and their supporters, Vance added: “No voter on this continent went to the ballot box to open the floodgates to millions of unvetted immigrants.”

### ‘Meddling’

Germany warned Friday against foreign “meddling” in its politics after Vance also called for a bigger role for Europe’s anti-immigration parties,

nine days before the German general election. Vance told the Wall Street Journal: “Unfortunately, the will of voters has been ignored by a lot of our European friends.”

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) looks set for its best-ever result of around 20 percent in the election and has received enthusiastic backing from tech billionaire and Trump ally Elon Musk. Vance met on the sidelines of the conference with AfD leader Alice Weidel, according to German press.

Vance additionally warned Germany to get used to Musk weighing in, just as the United States tolerated criticism by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg. “If American democracy can survive 10 years of Greta Thunberg’s scolding, you guys can survive a few months of Elon Musk,” he said.

Pistorius blasted Vance, saying “democracy was called into question by the US vice president for the whole of Europe”. “He is comparing conditions in parts of Europe with those in authoritarian regimes... that is not acceptable.” — AFP



LOS ANGELES: This illustration photo shows a high-flow showerhead in Los Angeles. Gas stoves, shower heads, incandescent light bulbs: since his return to the White House, Donald Trump has had his sights set on environmental standards for many everyday items, with the motto: it was better before. — AFP

## Outdated showers and inefficient toilets: Trump’s nostalgia for retro ways

WASHINGTON: Old-school gas stoves, generous showerheads, delicate light bulbs. Since his return to the White House, President Donald Trump has sought to reverse environmental standards for many household appliances, using a familiar refrain: It was better before. “I am hereby instructing Secretary Lee Zeldin to immediately go back to my Environmental Orders, which were terminated by Crooked Joe Biden, on Water Standards and Flow pertaining to SINKS, SHOWERS, TOILETS, WASHING MACHINES, DISHWASHERS, etc.,” Trump said on his Truth Social platform on Tuesday.

The 78-year-old billionaire has for years complained about modern showerheads, saying they slow the flow of water. “You turn on the shower, if you’re like me, you can’t wash your beautiful hair properly,” Trump said in 2020. During his first term, Trump reversed federal regulations limiting water flow on a number of appliances, only to see them reinstated by Democrat Joe Biden. And during his election campaign, Trump also accused Democrats of wanting to ban gas stoves and gasoline or diesel-powered automobiles, framing it as a freedom issue for Americans.

### ‘I always look orange’

And the former reality TV star also frequently rails against LED light bulbs, which have been gradually replaced by incandescent bulbs over the past decade. “I’m not a vain person... but I look better under an incandescent light than these crazy lights that are beaming down on us,” Trump said in 2019. “I always look orange.” In his Truth Social post on Tuesday, Trump announced that he would sign an executive order to return “to the common sense standards on LIGHTBULBS, that were put in place by the Trump Administration, but terminated by Crooked Joe.”

Andrew deLaski, head of the Appliance Standards Awareness Project, ASAP, which advocates for energy efficiency standards for everyday items, called Trump’s concerns outdated. “Today, there’s a huge array of modern, efficient products that are top performers,” he said. According to ASAP, LED bulbs “lower energy costs for households and businesses, and reduce pollution.” Similarly, “showerhead standards save consumers money on their water and energy bills and help protect the environment,” the group says. — AFP

## Russia drone attack on Chernobyl sparks outrage, fear

KIEV: A Russian drone pierced a cover built to contain radiation at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine early Friday, causing damage but not releasing any radiation, officials said. Ukraine has repeatedly warned since Russia invaded that attacks and fighting near its nuclear power plants risk triggering a potential catastrophe. The Kremlin rejected that its military targets Ukrainian nuclear sites, while the European Union said the attack was “reckless” and showed Russia was “not looking for peace”.

“Last night, a Russian attack drone with a high-explosive warhead struck the cover protecting the world from radiation at the destroyed 4th reactor of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a social media post. He said it was evidence that “Putin is definitely not preparing for negotiations - he is preparing to continue deceiving the world”.

CCTV footage posted by the Ukrainian leader showed a blast on the side of the Chernobyl structure, timestamped 2:02 am. AFP was shown the shattered fragments of the drone, laid out in the snow. Among them were jagged pieces of metal and what appeared to be an electronic component. The drone pierced the outer shell and “there was an explosion inside”, the plant’s chief engineer Oleksandr Titarchuk told reporters, without detailing the extent of the damage. He said the consequences “could have been much worse and more disastrous”. The Kremlin called the incident a “provocation” staged by Kyiv.

### Kremlin denial

“There is no question of any strikes on such nuclear infrastructure sites,” Russian President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. “Any claims that this was the case do not correspond to reality. The Russian military does not do this,” he said, after stating that he did not have “exact information” about the reported hit on Chernobyl. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas meanwhile said



CHERNOBYL: This photograph shows parts of an explosive device at the New Safe Confinement (NSC), which protects the remains of reactor 4 of the former Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant to contain radiation, following a drone attack on February 14, 2025, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

the strike “clearly shows” the Russians “don’t want peace”. Poland’s Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said the attack “strengthens the argument for improving Ukraine’s air defenses in our own self-interest”. “In 1986 the radioactive cloud endangered all Europe and beyond,” he added. In 1986, a reactor at Chernobyl exploded during a botched safety test, resulting in the world’s worst nuclear accident, which sent clouds of radiation across much of Europe and forced tens of thousands of people to evacuate. Zelensky said the drone had flown at an altitude of 85 meters, too low to be detected by radar.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) also reported an “explosion” at the site, and said “radiation levels inside and outside remain normal and stable”. The agency, which has had a team deployed at Chernobyl since the early stages of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, published images showing a drone on fire after crashing into the covering. The IAEA has warned of the dangers of fighting around nuclear plants following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In the first days of the conflict, Russian forces briefly seized the Chernobyl plant and also captured the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in southern Ukraine, which they still control.

### ‘Outrageous’ attack

Soviet authorities initially tried to cover up and then play down the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. In November 2016, a massive metal dome was erected over the remains of the reactor - paid for with 2.1 billion euros (\$2.5 billion) in international funding - to stop future leaks. Shaun Burnie, a nuclear specialist at Greenpeace Ukraine, said the shelter is “not just a roof but a massive, sophisticated machine designed specifically to prevent the release of radioactivity into the environment”.

The environmental group called it an “outrageous” attack that showed Russia was “escalating its war against Ukraine to a new level”. “The only country in the world that attacks such sites, occupies nuclear power plants, and wages war without any regard for the consequences is today’s Russia,” Zelensky added in his statement. The Ukrainian energy ministry meanwhile “called on the IAEA to intensify efforts to prevent hostile attacks on nuclear facilities”. The apparent attack came ahead of highly anticipated meetings at the Munich Security Conference on Friday, in which Zelensky sat down with US Vice President JD Vance. On Wednesday, Trump stunned Kyiv and European allies by holding a lengthy telephone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin and announcing the two leaders had agreed to soon start Ukraine peace talks. — AFP

## International

# US or China? Latin Americans under pressure to pick a side

## Beijing condemns 'Cold War mentality'

**BOGOTA:** Latin America has emerged as a key battleground in US President Donald Trump's confrontation with China, and the region is coming under pressure from Washington to choose a side. The Trump administration's approach to China's growing Latin American footprint - seen as a national security and economic threat - has so far been more stick than carrot.

Trump has repeatedly threatened to "take back" the US-built Panama Canal if Panama doesn't reduce Chinese influence in the strategic waterway, which handles 40 percent of US container traffic. China is also an indirect target of tariffs Trump has announced on steel and aluminum from allied countries such as Mexico. The White House says Chinese producers are abusing the USMCA North America free-trade treaty to "funnel" aluminum into the United States through Mexico, tariff-free.

China has condemned a "Cold War mentality," accusing the United States of using "pressure and coercion to smear and undermine" its Latin American investments. "There's no doubt that the Trump administration sees China's footprint in the Americas as a relevant threat to its national security and foreign policy interests," Arturo Sarukhan, who was Mexico's ambassador to Washington from 2006 to 2013, told AFP. "That's what basically explains President Trump's diplomatic bullying of Panama, his America First Trade Policy... and his threats to upend USMCA," he said.

### Entering US via backdoor

The United States for two centuries claimed Latin America as part of its sphere of influence. But China has been making inroads. Two-thirds of Latin American countries have joined Chinese President Xi Jinping's trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure program and China has surpassed the United States as the biggest trading partner of Brazil,

Peru, Chile and several other countries. In November, Beijing's ambitions were on full display when Xi inaugurated a \$3.5 billion, Chinese-funded megaport in Peru that will allow China to skirt North America in trading with South America.

The Trump administration's immediate concerns appear to be with Chinese influence closer to home, particularly in Panama and top US trading partner Mexico. Chinese investment in Mexico has soared since Trump's first presidency when companies in sectors targeted by US tariffs moved part of their supply chains to Mexico. In a nod to Washington's complaints that it had a free trade deal "with Mexico, not China," President Claudia Sheinbaum announced plans to cut Chinese imports by boosting local production of cars, textiles and other goods.

China is also deeply embedded in Panama's economy, beyond the two ports operated by a Hong Kong company on the canal, which have raised hackles in Washington. Jason Marczak, senior director of the Latin America Center at the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington, described parts of Panama as being "inundated with Chinese displacing Panamanian local entrepreneurs." There too, Washington's pressure tactics appeared to pay off, with Panama pulling out of China's Belt and Road program days after a visit by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

### 'Into Beijing's arms'

Experts predict the rivalry to be tough in South America, where China has invested heavily in critical minerals including copper and lithium. Before coming to power in 2023, Argentina's libertarian President Javier Milei, who wants a free trade agreement with the United States, vowed he would not "make deals with communists" in China. A year later, he was praising the world's second-biggest economy as an "interesting" trade

partner that asks for nothing in return. Brazil, for its part, maintains strong ties with Washington as well as Beijing - a fellow member of the expanding BRICS alliance of non-Western powers.

Sarukhan, the former ambassador, says Trump's threats and trolling of South American countries "could push them further into the arms of Beijing." Colombia's leftist President Gustavo Petro, for example, announced plans to strengthen ties with

sowing terror in the country of 18 million squeezed between the world's biggest cocaine producers, Peru and Colombia. In recent years, the nation has been plunged into violence by the rapid spread of transnational cartels that use its ports to ship drugs to the United States and Europe. In 2023, Ecuador registered a record 47 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.

Under a state of emergency and military crackdown launched by President Daniel Noboa, in office since November 2023, that figure dropped to 38 per 100,000 last year, according to official data. Noboa is seeking a new term in elections that will go to a runoff in April after an inconclusive first round last Sunday saw him narrowly pip challenger Luisa Gonzalez. In a message on social network X, ex-president Rafael Correa paid homage to his "dear friend" Cedeño, who had served as a member of his security team. And the presidency in a statement said the events "demonstrate the state of war in which Ecuador is immersed." — AFP

on the parties to "continue to use this momentum to make a swift and responsible agreement for everyone" still held in Gaza.

### 'Welcome back'

A crowd gathered in the commercial hub of Tel Aviv to watch a live feed of the exchange, with many carrying Zionist flags and posters with messages including "Sorry and welcome back" and "Complete the ceasefire". Last week's release sparked anger after the freed hostages were paraded on stage, with their emaciated state sparking concern over conditions in captivity. There were also fears for Palestinians in Zionist custody after several were hospitalized following their release last week. The Red Crescent said four of those released on Saturday were also transferred to hospital in the West Bank.

The ceasefire has been under massive strain since US President Donald Trump proposed a takeover of the Gaza Strip under which the territory's population of more than two million people would be moved to Egypt or Jordan. Arab countries have come together to reject Trump's plan, and Saudi Arabia will host the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates on Thursday for a summit on the issue. A joint statement from the heads of Christian churches in Jerusalem also said Gazans "must not be forced into exile".

### Zionist raid expands

In another development, an intense military raid had already sent Qusay Farhat fleeing his home in the occupied West Bank, but the offensive has since expanded, threatening a relative's house where he sought shelter. The raid, which according to Zionist entity aims to dismantle "terrorist infrastructure", has targeted Palestinian refugee camps in the northern West Bank including Jenin where 22-year-old Farhat is from.

But since it began on January 21, the deadly offensive has gradually encroached upon more cities and towns. "Here, it feels like the camp all over again," said Farhat, surveying wreckage outside the relative's house in Jenin city where he had gone with his family for safety. An army bulldozer has ripped through the street, a common sight during Zionist raids which the military says aims to clear roads of explosives. "When the bulldozer came, it tore everything apart while we were inside," said Farhat. "We shouted for help," he said, adding the family was left "trapped" as the roaring machine left the front of the house in ruins. — AFP

no official recycling system to turn to, he added. Merdassi said the government should require manufacturers and retailers to take back used machines, and encourage the 13 local companies specialized in recycling to extract and export valuable raw materials like gold, copper and platinum from the devices they process.

In the meantime, WeFix is making strides at its own pace, reducing Tunisian e-waste by promoting the sale of refurbished appliances instead of buying new. Cherifa said. Cherifa eventually hopes to expand WeFix to Morocco, despite the challenges of scaling up nationally, he said. "Finding skilled workers in the electronics sector is becoming increasingly difficult", as many emigrate to Europe where demand for refurbished appliances is high, he said. — AFP

## Ecuador hitmen gun down cartel-busting colonel Cedeño

**GUAYAQUIL:** Hitmen on Friday gunned down an Ecuadorian colonel in charge of anti-drug operations in a city hard-hit by the narco crime that has plunged this once-peaceful South American country into violence. Police said Colonel Porfirio Cedeño, who led an air force special operations unit, was shot multiple times in the city of Guayaquil while traveling to a military ceremony.

More than 20 shots were fired at the pickup truck transporting him, and the driver was hit in the leg, said police official Santiago Tustón. Cedeño was traveling from Guayaquil to Manta about three hours

## Hamas, Zionists complete...

### Continued from Page 1

violations, while Zionists had threatened to resume the war if it did. The three hostages - Sagui Dekel-Chen, Sasha Trupanov and Yair Horn - had been held by Gaza militants since October 7, 2023 attack that sparked the war 16 months ago.

Friends and family members of the hostages shed tears of joy at the sight of their loved ones on Saturday. "Finally, Sasha can be surrounded by his loved ones and begin a new path," Trupanov's family said in a statement. Dekel-Chen's wife, Avital, said in a call to her sister aired by Kan public broadcaster: "My breath has returned. He looks so handsome."

### Next phase

Later in the day, hundreds of Palestinians freed by Zionist entity reached Khan Yunis, where they threw up victory signs and waved to a jubilant crowd, an AFP reporter said. According to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group, Zionist entity was to release 333 Gazans who were taken into custody during the war, as well as 36 prisoners serving life sentences, 24 of whom were due for deportation under the terms of the truce deal. Zionist entity confirmed it had released a total of 369 prisoners.

Images broadcast on Zionist media showed Palestinian prisoners ahead of their release wearing sweatshirts featuring the prison service logo and the slogan: "We will not forget and we will not forgive." After the deal had appeared to be on the brink of collapse, a Hamas official said the group expected talks on a second phase of the ceasefire to begin early next week. Another source familiar with the talks offered a similar timeline.

The negotiations on the second phase are meant to lay out steps towards a more permanent end to the war. United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio, whose country is Zionist top backer and one of the truce mediators arrived in Zionist entity on Saturday ahead of expected talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the truce. A Zionist campaign group, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, warned in a statement against the "collapse" of the ongoing agreement, calling

## Tunisian startup takes on e-waste...

### Continued from Page 1

While Tunisia has vowed to tackle waste in general, e-waste presents a particular challenge, and there is a lack of institutional avenues for dealing with it.

Tunisia produces an estimated 140,000 tons of e-waste per year, said Walid Merdassi, a waste management expert. The majority of that - an estimated 80,000 tons per year - is generated by households, which have



**BOGOTA:** This photo illustration shows the Gulf of Mexico branded as 'Gulf of America' displayed on the Google Maps application on a tablet in Bogota, Colombia. Google on February 10, 2025 changed the name of the Gulf of Mexico to "Gulf of America" for those using its Maps platform inside the United States, complying with an executive order by President Donald Trump. — AFP

China after being threatened with sanctions and trade tariffs for initially turning away US migrant deportation flights. But his attempts to rally a Latin American coalition opposed to Trump's plans fizzled. "No country wants to be in the middle of an 'us versus them' global geostrategic battle. But when given the option, there's a great alignment of US and Western values," said Marczak. "And so the US investment is preferred." — AFP



**EL ORO:** Members of the Ecuadorian armed forces inspect a boat as they patrol the Jambeli Archipelago in the province of El Oro, Ecuador. — AFP

## Arab Summit to discuss Trump's...

### Continued from Page 1

to end the war in Ukraine, which Russia invaded in 2022. Afterwards Rubio is set to fly on to Zionist entity, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to discuss the fragile Gaza ceasefire in effect since January 19. Following his surprise call with Putin, Trump said the two leaders were "going to meet probably in Saudi Arabia the first time".

Riyadh, which has been increasingly prominent on the international diplomatic stage, on Friday expressed "its welcome to hosting the summit in Saudi Arabia", without confirming whether or when the

meeting would go ahead. Mutlaq Al-Mutairi, of King Saud University, said Saudi Arabia is seeking to emphasize the importance of its role in any solution to the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. It wants "to emphasize that it stands behind Egypt and Jordan, the Arab countries threatened with displacement", he said, adding that would include economic backing should the United States withdraw support.

Saudi analyst Suleiman Alogheli said the meeting will seek to "lay out the rules of engagement and the foundations of an Arab alternative solution to the issue of displacement". Two of the governments invited, Qatar and Egypt, are mediators in the Gaza war. They and the other participants "are now the core countries with regards to Palestine", said Umar Karim, a specialist on Saudi politics at the University of Birmingham. "So the purpose is to develop a unified stance and then rally all other Arab countries around it," Karim said. — AFP

## GCC ranked first globally in crude...

### Continued from Page 1

The remaining derivatives varied from 34.8 million to 268.3 million barrels. GCC states' natural gas reserves were around 44.195 billion cubic meters in 2023, accounting for 21.4 percent of global reserves and reflecting a 0.2 percent increase in reserves compared to 2022.

GCC natural gas exports reached 180.9 billion cubic meters in 2023, constituting 13.1 percent of world total exports, with an average annual growth rate of 2.5 percent from 2014 to 2023, it said. The market-led natural gas output from GCC countries in 2023

reached about 464.2 billion cubic meters, representing 10.8 percent of total global production, with a rise of 1.4 percent compared to 2022. In terms of renewable energy indicators, the capacity of GCC renewable energy stations was 10,742 megawatts in 2023, an increase of 74.7 percent compared to 2022, thanks to policies promoting renewable energy usage in place of fossil fuels.

Energy production from GCC stations reached approximately 14,403 gigawatt-hours in 2023, reflecting a rise of 72.4 percent from 2022. GCC electricity production was about 794,900 gigawatt-hours in 2022, with an average growth of around 4.7 percent from 2019 to 2023, and an increase of 1.2 percent compared to 2022. Electricity consumption recorded approximately 732.5 gigawatt-hours, an increase of 1.3 percent compared to 2022, the report concluded. — KUNA

## Ukrainian leader calls for creation...

### Continued from Page 1

"Ukraine will never accept deals made behind our backs without our involvement," Zelensky said in a speech. "No decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine. No decisions about Europe without Europe."

Zelensky cautioned Putin would seek to use Trump as a "prop in his own performance", possibly by trying to get him to Moscow for Russia's WWII victory parade in May. Zelensky is pushing for "security guarantees" from both the United States and Europe to ensure that any peace deal does not allow Moscow just to restart the war later. "Putin cannot offer real security guarantees, not just because he is a liar but because Russia in its current state needs war to hold power together," he said. The Ukrainian leader said forceful sanctions on Russia and building up Ukraine's military could help secure peace, and

said he was "open" to eventually having European peacekeepers.

European leaders backed up Zelensky's call to action and for their continent to play a key role. "There will only be peace if Ukraine's sovereignty is secured," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told the Munich Security Conference. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk pressed Europe to establish its own stances on Ukraine and security as the United States sows doubts about its commitment to Europe.

"Europe urgently needs its own plan of action concerning Ukraine and our security, or else other global players will decide about our future," Tusk said. "This plan must be prepared now. There's no time to lose." NATO boss Mark Rutte said that leaders in Europe were "now getting into the concrete planning phase" of possible security guarantees. US officials have said that Ukraine will not be left in the cold after three years of battling Russia's invasion. Vance said after his sit-down with Zelensky that Washington was looking for a "durable, lasting peace" that would not lead to further bloodshed in coming years. — AFP

## International

# Scam centre survivors tell of beatings, abuse in Myanmar

## Myanmar militia to deport 10,000 cyber scam workers

**PHOP PHRA:** At a scam compound in Myanmar, Filipina worker Pieta had just days to romance strangers online and trick them into investing in a fake business — failing which she would be beaten or tortured with electric shocks. Pieta was one of 260 people — many visibly injured or bruised — rescued from an illicit centre along the Myanmar border this week and handed over to Thailand, following a series of crackdowns on the illegal operations.

Scam compounds have mushroomed in Myanmar's borderlands and are staffed by foreigners, sometimes trafficked and forced to work, swindling people around the world in an industry analysts say is worth billions of dollars. Pieta, a pseudonym to protect her identity, thought she was accepting a job in Thailand that paid \$1,500 a month when she left the Philippines six months ago. Instead, she was forced to work gruelling shifts for no pay at the compound in Kyauk Khet, a village in Myanmar's Karen state, scamming people in Europe and living in constant fear of punishment.

"If we didn't reach the target, we were beaten up... (or given) electric shocks," she told AFP from a holding centre in Phop Phra, about 30 kilometers south of Thailand's Mae Sot after the rescues were taken by boat across a small border river on Wednesday. "I'm just going to cry. Oh my God. I'm so happy... that I left that place," she said, adding that enforced squats — sometimes up to 1,000 — were also meted out as punishment. The 260 foreign nationals — among thousands allegedly lured into the notorious cyberscam centers with promises of high-paying jobs before they are effectively held hostage — came from over a dozen countries including Ethiopia, Brazil and Nepal.

### Signs of physical abuse

AFP spoke to some of them under the condition of anonymity. Many bore signs of physical abuse, in-

cluding one woman who had huge bruises on her left arm and thigh and said she had been electrocuted. Liu, one of 10 Chinese nationals rescued, described gory methods his Chinese bosses inflicted as punishment. He told AFP that he saw one worker having his face rubbed into a metal grate on the floor until he bled to death — a claim AFP is unable to verify. "So many were beaten to death, it was so bloody," he said.

Scam centres have proliferated across Southeast Asia in recent years, including the Philippines, where police this week rescued 34 Indonesians from a Manila compound. Chinese supervisors there had allegedly stripped them of their passports and said they would be moved to a new site in Cambodia against their will. Gilberto Cruz, of the Philippines' anti-organized crime commission, told AFP Friday that about 21,000 Chinese nationals who had worked for now-banned offshore gaming centers continued to operate smaller-scale scam operations in the country.

Thai officials said the Kyauk Khet centre is also run by Chinese nationals and first appeared on the other side of the Moei River in 2019, although it is still under construction. None of the returnees — exhausted and overwhelmed — told how they travelled, or were trafficked into the compound. Other victims in the past have said that after arriving in Thailand, they were whisked across the border and forced to commit online fraud. But Thatchai Pitaneelaboot, a senior police official, told local news outlet The Standard on Friday that in many instances, victims come to work in the centers voluntarily.

### Escape attempt

"The majority are aware of what to expect, although some are deceived while still in their countries of origin," he said. For those who come out of choice, it is unlikely they fully understand the horror awaiting them. Kokeb from Ethiopia said he and his



**KAYIN STATE:** Alleged scam centre workers and victims rest during a crackdown operation by the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) on illicit activity in Shwe Kokko in Myanmar's eastern Myawaddy township on February 14, 2025. — AFP

fellow were workers were forced to toil for 17 to 18 hours a day, and many had their phones confiscated to prevent escape. Still, two other Kenyans — who said they had been forced to defraud Internet users in "rich countries" such as the United States — staged an escape with several others days before the handover, and were caught by a local militia.

### Workers face deportation

Meanwhile, a Myanmar ethnic militia said on Saturday it was preparing to deport 10,000 people linked to cyber scams in the area it controls to Thailand as part of a crackdown on the illicit compounds.

Scam compounds have mushroomed in Myanmar's borderlands and are staffed by foreigners who are often trafficked and forced to work, swindling people around the world in an industry analysts say is worth billions of dollars.

"We have announced to get rid of all scams from our soil. We are now implementing it," Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) spokesman Major Naing Maung Zaw told AFP on Saturday. "We have made a list and are prepared to transfer about 10,000 people (to Thailand)," he said. The deportations would be carried out in groups of 500 per day. AFP has contacted Thai authorities for comment. — AFP

## After revolution, Bangladesh textbooks rewrite history

**DHAKA:** Bangladeshi high schooler Laiba is being educated for the future, but what she learns has been determined by the latest chapter in her country's battle over its past. Last year, a student-led revolution overthrew the government of iron-fisted premier Sheikh Hasina when public anger over her increasingly autocratic rule boiled over. Her ouster has prompted Bangladesh to do something that has followed every sudden change in national leadership: rewrite its history books to suit new orthodoxies.

"The tradition of altering history must stop at some point — the sooner, the better," Laiba's mother Suraiya Akhtar Jahan told AFP. "Textbooks should not change every time a new government takes office." Radical changes to the school curriculum are routine in Bangladesh, where febrile political divisions dating back to its ruinous 1971 independence war against Pakistan have persisted. Until this year, textbooks gave special exaltation to the country's first president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for spearheading that liberation struggle.

But Mujib, assassinated in 1975 in a military coup, is also Hasina's father, and his daughter's disgrace and



**DHAKA:** Students study in their classroom at a school in Dhaka. — AFP

exile has dented the late leader's stature. "The books had turned into one side's political manifesto," AKM Riazul Hassan, head of the national agency tasked with reforming the curriculum, told AFP. "That does not conform to the purpose of textbooks. We tried to get them back on track." New history books have expunged dozens of poems, speeches and articles penned by Mujib, alongside images of his daughter.

They instead now valorize the hundreds of people killed in the protests that ultimately toppled Hasina last summer, while bringing back from exile other pre-

viously erased heroes of Bangladesh's early history. Among them is former army chief Ziaur Rahman — no relation to Mujib — credited with issuing the first public proclamation of Bangladesh's independence during the 1971 war. Zia had been left out of the curriculum during Hasina's time because he founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), her chief opposition. His return to the page augurs the resurgence of the political force he created, which is strongly favored to win elections expected by next year.

While the overhaul of Bangladesh's official history gives clues as to the country's future direction, critics say the new curriculum has its own litany of omissions. Of particular contention is one of the country's darkest chapters — the murderous purge of its intellectual elite in the final days of the 1971 war. Bangladesh's main Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami, which at the time opposed the country's independence, helped orchestrate these killings in concert with Pakistani forces. Revised textbooks mention that militia groups were responsible for the murders, without mentioning that the militias were run by Jamaat. The omission is significant because Jamaat — another party suppressed by Hasina's government — is likely to be a major force in Bangladesh's next parliament, and has governed in the past in coalition with the BNP. Dhaka University professor Mujibur Rahman — no relation to the independence leader — told AFP that the apparently deliberate attempt to obscure details around the purge raised questions about the reasons behind the changes. — AFP

## Lebanese leader vows to punish attackers of UN peacekeeper

**BEIRUT:** Lebanese President Joseph Aoun vowed to punish the perpetrators of an attack on a United Nations peacekeeping convoy, with authorities set to hold an emergency meeting on Saturday. The UN and Lebanese authorities have condemned Friday's attack, which came as Hezbollah supporters for a second night blocked the road to the country's only international airport over a decision barring two Iranian planes from landing there.

Aoun "emphasized that the attackers will receive their punishment" and said "security forces will not be lenient with any party that tries to upset stability and civil peace", according to a statement from the presidency on X. The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has demanded an investigation after one of its vehicles was set on fire during the incident, which wounded Nepalese outgoing deputy force commander Chok Bahadur Dhakal as he was returning home.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam strongly condemned the "criminal attack" and promised to arrest the perpetrators during a conversation with UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert and UNIFIL Commander General Aroldo Lazaro. Interior Minister Ahmad al-Hajjar has called an emergency security meeting on Saturday at 11:00 am, and said he visited two injured UNIFIL officers in hospital, emphasizing "the Lebanese government's rejection of this attack".

The presidency's statement said Aoun had also checked on the deputy commander's condition and emphasized that the incident "cannot be allowed to be repeated". Aoun also "followed up on developments regarding roadblocks, setting fires and riots, and issued directives to the army and security forces to put a stop to these practices", the statement said, adding that the judiciary "has begun investigations on the ground". There was no immediate official comment from Hezbollah. However, the group's ally the Amal movement, led by powerful parliament speaker Nabih Berri, said "the attack on UNIFIL is an attack on south Lebanon" and that "blocking roads anywhere is an assault on civil peace". — AFP



**BEIRUT:** A young boy holds a balloon bearing a picture of Saad Hariri, former Lebanese prime minister and the son of late premier Rafiq Hariri, during an event marking 20 years since the assassination of his father, in Beirut's Martyrs' Square on February 14, 2025. — AFP

## Thousands mark 20 years since death of Lebanese ex-PM

**BEIRUT:** Thousands gathered in Beirut Friday to mark 20 years since the assassination of ex-premier Rafiq Hariri, and to call for the return of his son Saad to political life. Rafiq Hariri, a billionaire and towering political figure who oversaw Lebanon's reconstruction after the 1975-1990 civil war, had recently resigned as premier when he was killed on February 14, 2005. In 2022, a UN-backed court sentenced two Hezbollah members in absentia to life imprisonment for the massive suicide bombing that killed him and 21 others, though the group has refused to hand them over.

His son Saad was thrust into the political limelight following his father's murder, widely attributed to Damascus and Hezbollah, which triggered massive protests that drove Syrian troops out of Lebanon after 29 years of occupation. Saad Hariri, who has since served three times as prime minister, is based in the United Arab Emirates, but returned for the annual commemorations to a changed Lebanon.

Hezbollah, once a dominant force, is now badly depleted after its recent war with Zionist entity and

the ouster in Syria of Bashar Al-Assad. In a speech to a crowd of supporters at his father's tomb on Friday, Saad Hariri stopped short of announcing a return to politics, but did say his Future Movement party would "stay with you and be your voice in all national milestones and in all upcoming events". The commemoration comes days before the deadline for implementing a Hezbollah-Zionist ceasefire, which ended more than a year of hostilities that left the group depleted.

But Hezbollah still carries weight, with supporters Thursday blocking the airport road after two Iranian planes were barred from landing. A day earlier, Zionist army had accused Iran of sending funds to arm the group through the Beirut airport. On Friday, thousands of flag-waving Hariri supporters began gathering at his father's burial site in Beirut. "For the first time in 20 years, our joy is double: first because the Syrian regime fell... and second because Sheikh Saad is among us," homemaker Diana Al-Masri, 52, told AFP.

Muin Desouki, 25, had come all the way from Lebanon's eastern Bekaa region. "We came today to stand by Saad Hariri on the anniversary of his father's martyrdom," he said. "We want him to return to the political scene because he is a national symbol." A source close to Hariri, who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media, had said before his speech that he may not resume political activities right away. — AFP

### News in Brief

#### Pro-Trump rally in South Africa

**PRETORIA:** About a thousand people gathered outside the US embassy in Pretoria on Saturday to show their support for President Donald Trump after he hit out at the "unjust" treatment of white South Africans. Denouncing a recent law on land expropriation and murders committed against farmers, 1,200 people took part in the rally, according to the South African police. "It's the first time we've seen in my lifetime that a foreign president stands up for the Afrikaner people like what we've seen him do, so we have to support this," said Walter Wobben, a 52-year-old owner of a cattle farm in the Western Cape province, referring to the descendants of Dutch settlers. — AFP

#### 'Disrespectful' Canada slammed

**LAGOS:** Nigerian government officials have lashed out at Canada for denying visas to a number of senior military officials, including the country's highest-ranking military official. Christopher Musa, the Chief of Defense Staff, said the delegation had been scheduled to attend an event honoring Nigeria's wounded army veterans. "Half of my team... they've already gone," Musa said at an event in the capital city of Abuja Thursday. But the Canadian embassy, "for the knowledge best known to them, denied us visa", he added. Canada's embassy in Nigeria said on its X account that it was aware of the matter but declined to comment further, citing "privacy reasons". — AFP

#### Los Angeles girds for floods

**LOS ANGELES:** A monster rainstorm was drenching southern California, with officials in Los Angeles readying for flooding and landslides in areas burned by last month's huge wildfires. Heavy rain was falling across a swath of the state, with as much as six inches expected in some places, forecasters from the National Weather Service (NWS) said. That volume of water in such a short period of time could create problems in areas ravaged by blazes that killed at least 29 people in January. "There's a high risk for flooding, especially in and around the road areas and urban areas, as well as an appreciable risk for debris flows," Ryan Kittell, a meteorologist with the NWS, told reporters earlier in the week. — AFP

#### 23 die in Nigeria road crash

**KANO:** Twenty three people were killed when a truck carrying passengers and goods overturned in the northern Nigerian city of Kano, a road safety official said Friday. The official said the driver lost control of the truck before it plunged into an underpass at the Hotoro district on the outskirts of the city, Abdullahi Labaran, the spokesman of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) in Kano, said. The truck was travelling from the northeastern city of Maiduguri heading to Nigeria's commercial hub of Lagos in the southwest region of the country. "Total fatalities stand at 23 while 48 other passengers sustained varying degrees of injuries," said Labaran. He blamed the accident on reckless driving and speeding by the driver "which resulted in loss of control." — AFP



Ahmed Al-Matari contacts the winner.



Calligrapher Shaima Al-Azmi writes the winner's name.

## Islam Khattab wins KD 2 million cash prize in Gulf Bank's AIDanah Millionaire draw

AIDanah Millionaire draw gives away the largest cash prize linked to a bank account in the world

**KUWAIT:** In a remarkable milestone, Gulf Bank has announced Islam Mohamed Mahmoud Khattab as the grand prize winner of the AIDanah Millionaire account, awarding an incredible KD 2 million – the largest cash prize linked to a bank account in the world, as recognized by Guinness World Records.

The announcement took place during a spectacular event at Al-Khiran Mall on Thursday, February 13, 2025. Broadcast live on 360 FM and Gulf Bank's social media channels, the event was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young.

In the lead-up to the highly anticipated draw, attendees took part in a range of engaging activities from 4 PM to 7 PM, building excitement for the live announcement between 7 PM and 8 PM.

As anticipation filled the air at Al-Khiran Mall, the moment everyone had been waiting for arrived – the winner's name was announced and contacted live to receive the life-changing news. Overwhelmed with joy, the winner expressed heartfelt gratitude to Gulf Bank, acknowledging how this incredible prize has transformed their future.

### Financial goals

During the event, Acting General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, Bader Al-Ali, welcomed the attendees and extended his warm congratulations to the winner. He expressed his appreciation to the winner for choosing the AIDanah Millionaire account as a means to achieve their financial goals and wished all customers the best of luck in the upcoming draws. Al-Ali noted that those who did not win the KD 2 million prize still have a chance to participate in the upcoming semi-annual draw, which offers a grand prize of KD 1 million, in addition to the monthly and

### Najla Aleisa

- We are excited to continue rewarding our customers who choose to save with the AIDanah Millionaire Account.
- We encourage everyone to continue depositing into their AIDanah account to increase their chances of winning in the upcoming draws.
- We offer a variety of banking solutions that cater to customer needs, making saving easy and convenient.



Bader Al-Ali (right) and Najla Aleisa after signing the cheque.

### Bader Al-Ali

- We congratulate the winner and wish the best of luck to all other customers in the KD 1 million draw, as well as the monthly and quarterly draws.
- We take pride in offering this valuable opportunity to transform our customers' lives and help them achieve their dreams and aspirations.
- Gulf Bank's services are among the most seamless, efficient, and advanced in the banking sector, supported by technology that goes beyond customers' expectations.

quarterly draws.

He added, "We take great pride in providing our customers with opportunities that can change their lives for the better and help them achieve their aspirations through the AIDanah Millionaire account. At Gulf Bank, our mission is to be a trusted partner in supporting our customers' financial success."

Al-Ali also highlighted the remarkable advancements in Gulf Bank's services, including enhancements to the mobile banking application, innovative products, digital banking solutions, branch services, ATMs, and the contact center. These improvements ensure that Gulf Bank continues to offer the most seamless, efficient, and

advanced banking experience, exceeding customer expectations.

He concluded by reaffirming Gulf Bank's commitment to continuous investment in digital transformation and employee development, strengthening the Bank's position as a forward-thinking financial institution dedicated to delivering an exceptional customer experience.

### Promoting savings culture

Gulf Bank's Chief Marketing Officer, Najla Aleisa, said: "Our goal today was to create a vibrant and engaging experience for participants and attendees at the annual draw by hosting various activities, awarding cash prizes, and promoting a

culture of saving and financial planning." Aleisa emphasized that the AIDanah Millionaire account is a key savings solution from Gulf Bank, providing customers with an easy way to save, along with a range of other banking products designed to support their financial goals. "For over 25 years, the AIDanah Millionaire account has helped us build strong relationships with our customers and achieve significant milestones in reinforcing sustainability principles. We have also launched impactful initiatives and supported events that bring positive value to the community," she added.

She concluded by expressing her excitement to continue rewarding customers

who choose to save with the AIDanah Millionaire account, and encouraged everyone to keep saving to increase their chances of winning in the upcoming draws.

### Supporting the Diraya campaign

As part of its commitment to enhancing financial awareness across all segments of society and supporting the "Diraya" banking awareness campaign – led by the Central Bank of Kuwait in collaboration with the Kuwait Banking Association – Gulf Bank actively engaged attendees through interactive competitions and educational messages. The event featured a quiz on key campaign topics, offering cash prizes to the winners.



Gulf Bank officials pose for a group photo with the bank's employees.





Artist Mohammed Al-Hamli the Backstage Group performs.



Children enjoy with the Neo Account mascot.



TV band presents traditional songs.

**Supporting young talent**

As part of its dedication to nurturing young Kuwaiti talent and empowering women, Gulf Bank partnered with calligrapher Shaimaa Al-Azmi to elegantly inscribe the grand prize winner's name on the big cheque.

**Open an AIDanah Account in moments**

Open an AIDanah Millionaire account with just KD 200 in moments by visiting a branch, using the Gulf Bank app or website, or calling the Bank – unlocking your chance to enter all upcoming draws.

**Backstage Group performance**

Backstage Group, led by renowned artist Mohammed Al-Hamli, participated in the AIDanah draw celebrations with captivating performances and traditional songs.

**Engaging young savers with Neo Mascot & activities**

As part of its commitment to supporting customers of all ages, Gulf Bank featured the Neo account mascot along with a fun drawing activity for children during the grand draw event. The Neo account offers parents a simple and secure way to invest in their children's financial future while instilling

**Empowering youth through sports**

As part of its ongoing commitment to youth and encouraging sports participation, Gulf Bank organized various sports and youth-focused events that attracted a large audience.

**Youngest AIDanah Millionaire announces the winner**

The 21<sup>st</sup> AIDanah Millionaire, Alaa Youssef Adel Al-Mutairi, made history last year as the youngest winner of the world's biggest prize and the first to receive the grand prize after its increase to KD 2 million. This year, she had the honor of activating the automated draw system to announce the 2025 grand prize winner.

**Celebrating the 23<sup>rd</sup> AIDanah Millionaire**

Mark your calendars for July 17, 2025, as we unveil the 24<sup>th</sup> AIDanah Millionaire with a KD 1 million grand prize

- A prize that brings joy and inspires bigger dreams with Gulf Bank.
- Exciting rewards and exclusive benefits with AIDanah – the leading savings account in Kuwait.
- The only account in Kuwait where your chances roll over to the next year.
- Maintain a deposit of KD 200 or more to increase your chances of winning.

The winner of the KD 2 million grand prize in the annual AIDanah Account draw is officially the 23<sup>rd</sup> AIDanah Millionaire in the account's history. Through its draws, AIDanah provides customers with countless chances to win significant cash prizes throughout the year, inspiring hope, joy, and bigger dreams with Gulf Bank. In 2025, the AIDanah draw schedule offers an exciting lineup of prizes. Alongside the KD 2 million grand prize, the semi-annual draw awards KD 1 million. The quarterly draws, held twice a year, distribute KD 100,000 each to 100 winners. Additionally, monthly draws award KD 1,000 to

10 winners every month, making a total of 322 AIDanah winners for the year.

The AIDanah Savings Account is one of the best savings accounts in Kuwait, offering regular draws with valuable prizes and numerous benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank has raised the grand prize from KD 1.5 million to KD 2 million, earning a Guinness World Record once again for offering the largest cash prize ever linked to a bank account. Additionally, the quarterly prize, awarded twice a year, is now distributed among 100 winners, with each receiving KD 1,000, instead of a single winner taking the full KD 100,000, increasing customers' chances of winning.

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.

**AIDanah Millionaire Account key highlights**

- Established in 1998 – The year the AIDanah Millionaire prize was introduced.
- KD 55 million – Total value of prizes awarded since its inception.
- 23 millionaires – Number of individuals who became millionaires through AIDanah.
- 282 winners – Total winners across all draws held annually.
- Guinness World Record Holder – Recognized for offering the largest cash prize ever linked to a bank account.

**Increase deposits, boost your chances**

To improve your chances of winning and becoming the 24<sup>th</sup> AIDanah Millionaire, consider increasing your deposits. The deadline to participate in the semi-annual draw for the KD 1 million prize is March 31, 2025, with the draw taking place on July 17, 2025. To be eligible for future AIDanah monthly, quarterly, and annual draws, customers must maintain a minimum balance of KD 200 in their accounts.



Najla Aleisa with Manal Barakat and Yasser Suleiman.

The Kuwait Television Band presented a diverse selection of folk, national, and traditional songs, with a special focus on maritime songs that received enthusiastic engagement from audiences of all ages. Founded in 1978, the Television Arts Band is a Kuwaiti folk arts group established under the initiative of former Minister of Information Mohammed Al-Sanoussi, and the suggestion of singer Shadi Al-Khaleej. Their mission was to preserve, develop and celebrate Kuwait's rich cultural heritage.

ing the importance of saving and financial responsibility from an early age. Designed for children up to the age of 14, the account can be opened by parents at any Gulf Bank branch with no minimum balance or fees.

**Wishing wall for Kuwait's National Day celebrations**

As part of Kuwait's National Day celebrations in February, a dedicated wall was placed in the mall for visitors to share their heartfelt wishes for the country.



Representative of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry conducts the draw.

A standout feature of the AIDanah Millionaire Account is that it's the only account in Kuwait that carries over your chances of winning from one year to the next, as part of Gulf Bank's commitment to rewarding customer loyalty. To maximize their chances of winning, customers are required to maintain a minimum deposit of KD 200 in their AIDanah account and are encouraged to increase their balance for even more opportunities to enter the monthly, quarterly, and annual draws.

**Your chance to win never ends with AIDanah**

The AIDanah Millionaire Account makes dreams come true with the world's largest prize linked to a bank account, along with continuous prizes throughout the year. There's always hope with AIDanah. The more you deposit and the longer you save, the higher your chances of winning.

**30 November**

is the last day to enter the draw

**KD 2,000,000**

Year-round draws with KD1,000 awarded to 280 winners.

**31 March**

is the last day to enter the draw

**KD 1,000,000**



Open an AIDanah Millionaire Account today  
e-gulfbank.com/AIDanah • 1 805 805



## Business

# NBK-Egypt reports a net profit of EGP 7.3 billion in FY 2024

We are on the right path toward further expansion, market share growth: Al-Bahar



Shaikha Al-Bahar

- In 2024, we delivered the highest profit in the bank's history, driven by strong operational performance across our business segments
- Financial indicators reaffirm that we are on the right path toward further expansion and market share growth
- NBK-Egypt remains one of the fastest-growing banks, strengthening its presence with a distinctive footprint in the Egyptian market
- Our strategic focus is on advancing banking transactions and enhancing their quality to meet the rising demand

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait - Egypt (NBK-Egypt) reported net profits of EGP 7.3 billion (equivalent to KD 51.9 million) for the financial year 2024 compared to EGP 4.021 billion (equivalent to KD 41.4 million) reported in 2023 marking an impressive 81 percent increase compared to financial year 2023. Net operating income stood at EGP 13.5 billion by the end of FY2024, recording a substantial increase of 57 percent from EGP 8.7 billion recorded by the end of FY2023. In the meantime, Net Interest Income grew by 66 percent, reaching EGP 11.6 billion compared to EGP 7 billion in FY2023. Meanwhile, net operating income (excluding interests) increased to EGP 1.9 billion in FY2024, compared to EGP 1.7 billion in FY2023, up by 17 percent, while cost to net operating income dropped from 28 percent in FY2023 to 21.2 percent in FY2024.

Total assets reached EGP 196 billion by the end of FY2024, up by 50 percent compared to EGP 131 billion by the end of FY2023. Furthermore, total loans and credit facilities expanded to EGP 104 billion in FY2024, reflecting a growth rate of 37 percent compared to EGP 76 billion recorded at the end of FY2023. Additionally, customer deposits increased to EGP 160 billion by the end of FY2024, up from EGP 106 billion at the end of FY2023, representing a growth rate of 51 percent.

Furthermore, the return on average assets (ROAA) improved to 4.5 percent by the end of FY2024, compared to 3.4 percent by the end of FY2023, while the return on average equity (ROAE) increased to 39.2 percent in FY2024, up from 30.7 percent in FY2023.

Commenting on the financial results announced by NBK-Egypt, Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy Group

Chief Executive Officer, National Bank of Kuwait, and Chairman of NBK-Egypt, said: "NBK-Egypt delivered record profits in 2024, underscoring the success of its operational strategy and reaffirming its trajectory toward further strengthening its position in the Egyptian market. As NBK Group's most significant market outside Kuwait, Egypt holds substantial growth potential, driven by its promising opportunities and positive economic outlook."

Al-Bahar highlighted that NBK's operations in Egypt are among the group's most profitable, delivering the highest returns on equity and assets. Al-Bahar emphasized that the sustained expansion of the balance sheet and the growth of the bank's financial indicators reaffirm the success of its business diversification strategy and accelerated digital transformation. This approach aims to strengthen market share, particularly in retail banking, within the region's most populous country and a key hub for investment opportunities.

"We are committed to enhancing service quality, expanding our geographical presence, and reaching a more diverse customer base. This progress is driven by the significant advancements in our digital infrastructure, information technology, and alternative electronic channels, which have positioned the bank as a strong competitor with a distinct presence in the Egyptian banking sector. This comes amid the rising demand for banking services and the increasing momentum of financial inclusion," Al-Bahar stated.

"Egypt is a key growth market for NBK Group and a long-term strategic investment, where the Group remains committed to reinforcing its presence and strengthening its position," Al-Bahar confirmed.



Yasser El Tayeb

- The bank continues to deliver strong performance, surpassing expectations across all financial indicators
- We remain focused on strengthening our position in both the corporate and retail banking sectors
- NBK-Egypt continues its expansion in digital services and products to cater to a diverse customer base
- CSR remains a core priority, reinforcing our commitment to long-term community impact.

Meanwhile, Vice Chairman, CEO, and Managing Director of National Bank of Kuwait-Egypt, Yasser El-Tayeb, said: "The bank's strong financial performance at the end of 2024 surpassed expectations and targets, despite challenges and exceptional circumstances affecting the business environment both locally and globally. This achievement underscores the bank's resilience and prudent business model, reinforcing its ability to sustain success and growth."

Al-Tayeb emphasized that the bank's growth is balanced across all business activities, ensuring efficiency and a risk profile aligned with sustainable expansion. This success is driven by a prudent strategy that meets the evolving needs of both corporate and individual clients while diversifying income streams. Al-Tayeb noted that the bank's income sources stem from credit operations in the corporate sector, alongside a rapidly expanding retail banking segment, which has grown significantly in recent years. The bank's credit portfolio reflects a diverse client base, encompassing large, medium, and small enterprises, while its retail banking portfolio serves a broad spectrum of customers. This diversity underscores the strength and stability of the bank's revenue streams. He further emphasized the bank's commitment to strengthening its position in retail banking by introducing more advanced services and products tailored to meet customers' evolving financial needs and aspirations.

El-Tayeb further emphasized NBK-Egypt's commitment to supporting the global shift toward sustainable finance and the transition to a green economy. The bank actively backs environmentally friendly

projects that promote sustainability and increased reliance on renewable energy while exploring solutions to mitigate climate change and reduce carbon emissions. He highlighted that sustainable finance has become a vital tool for ensuring long-term financial stability and resilience.

He also affirmed the bank's strong commitment to leveraging technology and digital channels to enhance its competitive edge in the banking sector. Recognizing their pivotal role, NBK-Egypt continues to expand its electronic services and encourage broader customer adoption of digital payments. This aligns with the broader strategy of the Egyptian government and the Central Bank of Egypt to promote financial inclusion, integrate new customer segments into the formal banking system, and drive the transition toward a less cash-dependent economy.

El-Tayeb concluded by highlighting NBK-Egypt's steadfast commitment to social responsibility, emphasizing that since the Group's entry into the Egyptian market in 2007, the bank has actively supported the local community. Through partnerships with reputable civil society organizations, NBK-Egypt channels its development efforts toward impactful initiatives, reinforcing its role as a responsible corporate citizen. Social responsibility remains a cornerstone of the bank's sustainability strategy, contributing to national development across key areas, including:

- Healthcare provision
- Education and employment support
- Environmental conservation
- Social solidarity
- Development of underserved areas
- Economic development

## US retail sales battered by severe weather

WASHINGTON: US retail sales plunged by the most in almost two years in January — a bigger drop than forecast and one that follows an unexpected uptick in inflation that President Donald Trump has vowed to tame. The fall in sales came as cold weather hit much of the country alongside wildfires in California, data showed Friday, reflecting broad declines across different product categories. Households have also been drawing down on savings, grappling with stubborn inflation and facing uncertainty over Trump's threats of tariffs on goods from major US trading partners. Retail sales fell 0.9 percent between December and January to \$723.9 billion, partly due to slumping auto sales, the Commerce Department said.

This was the biggest month-on-month drop since early 2023 and a significantly larger decline than the 0.2 percent fall predicted by economists polled by the Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal. Analysts generally expect growth in the world's biggest economy to cool this year, and are closely eyeing the strength of consumption — a key economic driver.

Experts warn that blanket duties, if imposed for a prolonged time, would mean importers face higher costs that could be passed on to consumers. Although Trump has threatened sweeping levies on both US allies and adversaries, tariff hikes have largely not taken effect as countries negotiate with Washington. Out of 13 categories logged by the Commerce Department, only four saw month-on-month growth including sales at gas stations and those at restaurants and bars.

Sales at autos and parts dealers in particular dropped by 2.8 percent last month, while those at clothing stores, building material dealers and furniture shops also slid. Excluding motor vehicles and parts, retail sales still fell 0.4 percent from December to January. But from a year ago, retail sales in January were up 4.2 percent, the Commerce Department added.

"The sharp decline in January retail sales was due in large part to the extreme wintery conditions and California wildfires last month," said Nationwide chief economist Kathy Bostjancic in a note.

While she expects a "healthy rebound" in February, she added that "the strong momentum for consumer spending has softened." Corporate economist Robert Frick of the Navy Federal Credit Union believes that although the drop was dramatic, "there's no cause for alarm" for now. — AFP



HAWTHORNE: Customers fill up Pepsi branded cups at a PepsiCo soda fountain outside a Costco Wholesale warehouse store in Hawthorne, California. — AFP



A group photo of the winning companies at the awards ceremony.

## stc and solutions by stc win big at GBO Awards 2024

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it has won the 'Best Corporate Governance Telecom Company - Kuwait 2024', and its subsidiary, solutions by stc, won the 'Best Customer Experience Digital Platform for B2B - My Business - Kuwait 2024' at the Global Business Outlook (GBO) Awards 2024. The awards ceremony was held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and aimed at recognizing organizations that have demonstrated outstanding achievements in different categories related to business and innovation. Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Murad, General Manager of the Legal Affairs and Compliance Department, represented stc Kuwait while Zainab Ali - Director of Planning & Performance Analytics represented solutions by stc at the awards ceremony, where they received the awards on behalf of the company.

stc and solutions by stc received the awards after submitting comprehensive overviews of the various milestones and initiatives achieved throughout 2024 within the categories they submitted for, along with all supporting documents requested by the Global Business Outlook team. The Global Business Outlook Awards adhere to a rigorous evaluation process, and this efficient and judicious selection process ensures that only organizations demonstrating exceptional innovation, leadership, and commitment to business excellence are recognized. At the Global Business Outlook Awards, stc received the 'Best Corporate Governance Telecom Company Award - Kuwait 2024' due to the Company's diligence in



The awards.

implementing and maintaining a robust governance structure that promotes integrity, accountability, and transparency. The Company's comprehensive corporate governance framework encompasses board composition, compliance policies, risk management, regulatory reporting and ethical business practices. stc also actively tracks the latest regulations as well as policies and procedures released by the Capital Markets Authority in Kuwait, to ensure that the Company is compliant and ready to adopt any new protocols that are announced.

Meanwhile, solutions by stc received the 'Best Customer Experience Digital Platform for B2B Award' for its innovative My Business platform. My Business is a self-service digital platform that empowers B2B customers by providing seamless access to account management, service subscrip-



Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Murad and Zainab Ali receive the awards.

tions, and digital payments. The platform enhances operational efficiency by automating processes, offering real-time insights, and enabling businesses to manage their telecommunications needs with ease. With its user-friendly design and innovative functionalities, My Business has significantly contributed to the digital transformation of enterprise customers in Kuwait.

It is worth noting that the Global Business Outlook Awards recognize companies and individuals that demonstrate innovation, leadership, and commitment to business excellence across various industries. The recognition of stc and its subsidiary, solutions by stc, further builds on the Company's position as a telecom pioneer, dedicated to enabling digital transformation in Kuwait and providing best-in-class services to customers.

# Lifestyle

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2025



Visitors, wearing stuffed costumes, fight in the "sumo arena".



Zorica Bucic, a visitor from Split, sings in the karaoke room.



Museum founder Andrea Golubic poses at the HaHaHouse museum of laughter.



## Croatia laughter museum aims to blow away the blues

Visitors, wearing stuffed costumes, fight in the "sumo arena".



Zorica Bucic, a visitor from Split, visits the HaHaHouse museum of laughter.



A woman lays on the "Bed of Nails" as she visits the HaHaHouse museum of laughter.

A new museum of laughter is offering to put people through the spinner to wash away the negativity of modern life. Visitors to the HaHaHouse in the Croatian capital Zagreb are blasted with a puff of white smoke once they step inside to blow away their worries before climbing into a "giant washing machine". The "centrifuge of life" then whips them away Willy Wonka-style down a twisting slide into a pool filled with little white balls where their journey to a happier place starts.

Its creator Andrea Golubic said she had the idea for the museum during the pandemic when many were feeling down, depressed and isolated. "I realized that I had a mission - to heal people with laughter," added the upbeat 43-year-old. The idea "came straight from the heart", Golubic told AFP, and on that very day I listed 78 exhibits... that's how the HaHaHouse began."

Golubic said it was her carefree seven-year-old self that inspired her - "a picture of me as a first-grader, with wide teeth and dying of laughter. I was constantly joking as a kid," she said. Visitors press a button to be "disinfected from negativity" as soon as they step inside the museum, which has eight interactive zones. One has a rubber chicken choir cheerfully cackling out hits like ABBA's "Dancing Queen", there is a karaoke room with distorted voices and a "Sumo Arena" for wrestling in puffed up costumes.



Museum founder Andrea Golubic (left) talks to a journalist in the lobby of the HaHaHouse museum of laughter.

There is also some serious history of humor from ancient to modern times told through theatre, film or the net. The museum also explains humor styles, from word play, slapstick, toilet and dark humor to satire with the help of some choice one-liners. "I've had so much plastic surgery, when I die they

will donate my body to Tupperware," is one of the featured zingers from US comedian Joan Rivers.

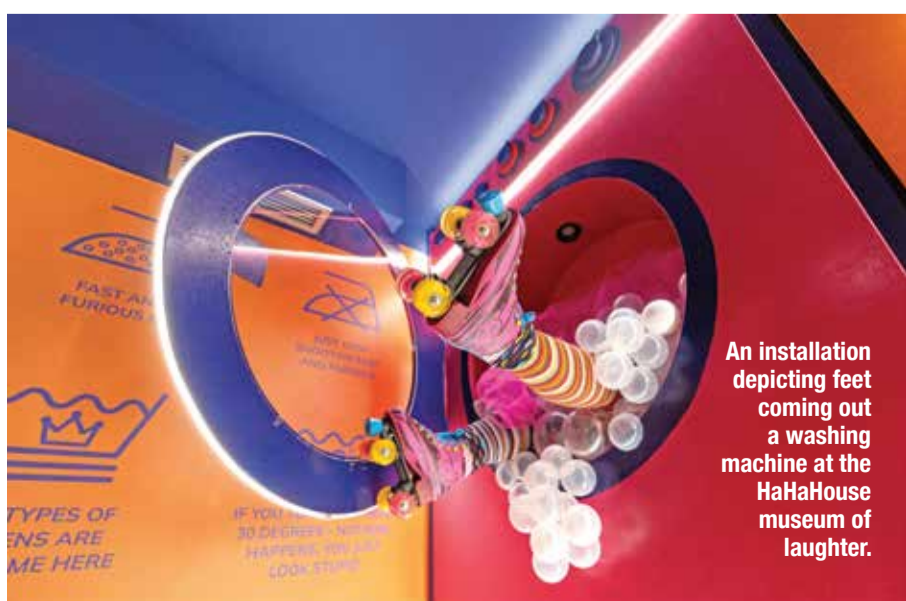
### 'Inner child'

Golubic said the HaHaHouse is drawing everyone from small children to the elderly, with grown-ups seeing it

as a good excuse to play at being kids again themselves. "All those who still feel a bit of childish joy and embrace their inner child, will recharge themselves," she insisted. Pensioner Bruno Dacic told AFP he was "delighted" by his visit "as there is never enough humor in life. "Laughter is a medicine for the soul," he said.

Zagreb's psychiatric hospital has voiced interest in organized visits and links are also being made with schools and retirement homes. "The museum is great," said Aleksandar Suka who celebrated his fifth birthday with a visit. Accompanied by his mother, the little boy said he loved lying on the "Bed of Nails" since they tickled him.

Singer Zorica Bucic, from the coastal town of Split, said the museum was perfect for our times "when we are bombarded with so much bad news. "Entering here is like entering childhood, being relieved of all problems. If you could come here more there would be no need to pay a psychologist," she said. Indeed, laughter is a defense mechanism which gives people strength to face their problems, psychologist Petar Kraljevic told AFP, saying he loved the idea too. "If a prescription for three hours of laughter per 24 hours could be written and followed that would certainly give positive results." — AFP



An installation depicting feet coming out of a washing machine at the HaHaHouse museum of laughter.



A man sits on a "sound machine".



Visitors at the HaHaHouse museum of laughter.

## Lifestyle

## Syrian migrant drama opens Berlin film festival

German director Tom Tykwer said that his latest movie about a Syrian immigrant aimed to encourage people to stop "isolating" themselves, as it opened Berlin's international film festival. "The Light", screening out of competition at the Berlinale, tells the story of a middle-class Berlin family whose lives are upended when they hire a new domestic worker from Syria.

The movie marks a return to feature filmmaking after a long hiatus for Tykwer, 59, who has been focusing on the acclaimed German television series "Babylon Berlin". In "The Light", the Engels family - Tim, Milena and their teenage twins - are all immersed in their separate worlds as they navigate the complexities of modern life. But when the enigmatic Farrah, recently arrived from Syria, is placed in their home as the new housekeeper, they find themselves slowly starting to reconnect. "Everyone is in their own aquarium with their head stuck in it," Tykwer said. "They are stuck with their heads under water and then some energy comes from the outside and pulls them out and enables them look at each other again."

## 'Extra urgency'

Tykwer said the film aimed to show that better communication can help people to relate personally but also "politically". "We have to approach each other again and stop isolating ourselves so much," he said. The Berlinale, which ranks with Cannes and Venice among Europe's top festivals, serves as a key launchpad for films from around the world. US writer and director Todd Haynes will head up the jury at this year's edition, with 19 pictures vying for the festival's Golden Bear top prize.

Haynes said that the world was in a "state of particular crisis" and that filmmakers had witnessed the return of US President Donald Trump "with tremendous concern, shock". Haynes said he hoped the Berlinale, which has a reputation as the most political of the big international film festivals, would serve as a forum for digesting global events. "This festival has always had a strength of conviction and an openness to a challenging and political discourse and bringing that into the filmmaking, and what's happening in the world right now has put an extra urgency to all of that,"



German actor Lars Eidinger (center) and German film director Tom Tykwer (second left) pose for photographers on the red carpet for the opening ceremony and the screening of the film "Das Licht" (The light) in the "Berlinale special" section of the 75th Berlinale, Europe's first major film festival of the year, in Berlin on February 13, 2025. - AFP

he told reporters.

This year's Berlinale winds up on February 23, the same day as a snap election in Germany, called after the collapse of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's governing coalition late last year. The campaign ahead of the election has been bitterly divisive, with the far-right AfD surging in the polls.

## 'Resistance'

Last year, Berlinale organizers made headlines by barring five previously invited AfD politicians and telling them they were "not welcome". Berlinale director Tricia Tuttle said cinema could be an act of "resistance... to all of the perverse ideas that many far-right parties across the whole world and across Europe are

spreading". "This is a space where we want to come together and listen to each other and communicate through cinema... I think the very fact we're all here is a resistance," she said. Films in competition at the Berlinale include "Dreams", from Mexican director Michel Franco, about a Mexican ballet dancer, and "What Does that Nature Say to You", from South Korean arthouse favorite Hong Sang-soo.

Hollywood director Richard Linklater will present "Blue Moon", starring Ethan Hawke, 11 years after Linklater won Berlin's Silver Bear for Best Director for "Boyhood". Romanian director Radu Jude, who won the Golden Bear in 2021 with "Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn", is in the running with "Kontinental '25", a dark comedy about the rise of nationalism. And France's Lucile Hadzihalilovic will present "The Ice Tower", a fantasy drama starring Marion Cotillard. South Korean director Bong Joon-ho will present out of competition his new film "Mickey 17" with Robert Pattinson, and British actor Tilda Swinton will receive a lifetime achievement award. - AFP

## Harry Potter Studio Tour planned for 2027 in Shanghai

China's first official Harry Potter Studio Tour is planned to open in Shanghai in 2027, US entertainment giant Warner Bros. Discovery said Wednesday, announcing an agreement with a local tourism and hotel group. The fantasy franchise is wildly popular in China, whose capital Beijing already has a large-scale Harry Potter-themed attraction at a Universal Studios resort. The Studio Tour, which also has locations in London and Tokyo, takes visitors behind the scenes, displaying sets, costumes and props from the movies.

"This is the first landing of Harry Potter Studio Tour in China," Warner Bros. Discovery said in a post on Chinese social media platform WeChat, adding that the attraction "is expected to open in 2027". The project is being implemented in partnership with Jinjiang International, a Shanghai-based

tourism and hotel conglomerate, it said, adding that the joint venture agreement is still in the process of acquiring regulatory approval.

In its own statement on Wednesday, Jinjiang International said the new Harry Potter attraction "will lead visitors to embark on a splendid and unsurpassed behind-the-scenes exploration" and share various interactive experiences. The future attraction will be located at an existing amusement park in Shanghai - the Jinjiang Action Park - which closed for renovation work on January 26 and is not expected to reopen until the 2027 launch, the statement said. The site is expected to cover an area of approximately 53,000 square metres, Warner Bros. Discovery said, adding that "the entire visit will take about half a day". - AFP



A general view shows a scale model of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry during a preview of the Warner Bros Harry Potter studio tour "The Making of Harry Potter" in north London on March 26, 2012.



Kanye West (left) and Bianca Censori attend the 67th Annual GRAMMY Awards on February 02, 2025 in Los Angeles, California. - AFP

## Kanye West and wife Bianca Censori split

Kanye West and his wife Bianca Censori have split, reports said Thursday, capping two weeks of controversy for the rapper whose once-stellar career has descended into chaos. The pair have separately sought legal advice over a divorce, entertainment website TMZ said, while the Daily Mail reported the 30-year-old architect has agreed to a \$5 million payout.

The reports come just days after the couple caused a stir with a jaw-dropping red carpet appearance in which Censori paraded naked on the arm of her entrepreneur husband. The viral stunt at the Grammy Awards sparked concerns that the 47-year-old rapper and music producer was coercing his wife, who has frequently been seen semi-nude during their two years of marriage. Days later, West - who now calls himself Ye - went on a days-long rant on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter.

He called himself a "Nazi" and said he had "dominion over" his wife. "I don't make her do nothing she doesn't want to but she definitely wouldn't have been able to do it without my approval," he wrote in one unpunctuated all-caps post. The account went dark at the end of last week, though it was not clear if it had been pulled by X or voluntarily shut down. West's Yeezy.com website was yanked this week after it began selling nothing but T-shirts with a swastika on the front. E-commerce provider Shopify said it had removed the site because the retailer had "violated our terms."

On Thursday the URL showed only the apparently handwritten message "Yeezy stores coming soon." The New York Post said West's Nazi T-shirt stunt had tipped Censori over the edge. "She's had enough," the outlet quoted a source as saying. "The swastika shirt was the last straw. She told him that's not who she is, and that she can't be associated with that. She doesn't want any part of that circus. He believes that she'll come back to him, he's saying that she's just mad at him, but right now she's told him that she's completely done."

The Hollywood Reporter, however, quoted right-wing agitator Milo Yiannopoulos, who it said was a rep for the couple, denying the split. "Ye and Bianca are in Los Angeles, about to enjoy Valentine's Day together. Announcements about their private life will come from them directly, not unourced rumor in the tabloid press," he told the outlet. West - who has previously spoken of living with bipolar disorder, but now says he is autistic - was formerly married to reality TV star Kim Kardashian. The couple, who divorced in 2022, have four children. - AFP



A mural of Jim Morrison by Jonas Never aka @never1959 is seen at the Ellison estates in Venice on March 1, 2021 in Los Angeles, California. - AFP

## Jim Morrison's footbridge: Paris to honor 1960s icon

Rock 'n' roll icon Jim Morrison, a towering figure of the 1960s psychedelic music scene, will have a central Paris footbridge named after him, the city has decided. The grave of The Doors frontman in the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris is already a magnet for nostalgic rock fans, who pay their respects in such numbers that the cemetery has put up barriers around the American singer's final resting place.

Morrison, who moved to the French capital a few months before he died in July 1971, "made Paris the location for his last inspirations", said Laurence Patrice, a senior city official and sponsor of the footbridge idea that was adopted by the council this week. The bridge crosses the Arsenal, a basin near the Bastille in the center of the capital, only a short walk from the bohemian Marais neighborhood where Morrison last lived.

The Doors, founded in Los Angeles, were among the most influential rock groups of the late 1960s and early 70s and a mainstay of the counterculture of

the times. Their hits include "Riders on the Storm", "Light My Fire", and "The End", a haunting song that features prominently in Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 Vietnam war movie "Apocalypse Now". Morrison's charisma and magnetic stage performances made him a sex symbol with a cult-like following, but he was also infamous for provocative behavior, indiscipline and substance abuse.

The exact circumstances of Morrison's death at the age of 27 are still shrouded in mystery, with most early accounts saying he died of cardiac arrest in his bathtub. But a French journalist, Sam Bernett, claimed in a 2007 book that close friends and family spun the official version of Morrison's death to sanitize his reputation. Bernett said Morrison actually died from a heroin overdose on the toilet of a nightclub that the journalist owned at the time, the "Rock 'n' Roll Circus" on Paris's Left Bank. Paris last year named a street after rock music icon David Bowie, eight years after his death. - AFP

## France finds smuggled dinosaur teeth in parcels bound for Italy

French customs officers seized nine dinosaur teeth last month from a courier truck transiting through the country from Spain on its way to Italy, they said on Friday. The teeth, probably from Morocco, were found during a routine check along a highway running along France's Mediterranean coastline near the Italian border, customs official Samantha Verduron said.

Using sniffer dogs and opening some parcels at random, inspectors have been known to find cannabis or even cocaine among such truckloads of hundreds of parcels travelling from Spain to Italy, she said. But on January 27, officials from the French border town of Menton found nine enormous teeth in two parcels that were destined for addresses near the Italian cities of Genoa and Milan, French customs said.

An expert at the Menton prehistory museum helped identify the fossils as probably dating back tens of millions of years and originating from what is now Morocco. They included the tooth of a long-necked marine reptile called a zarafasaura oceanis, a type of plesiosaurus at least 66 million years old first discovered in Morocco. Some people believe plesiosaurs, which lived in different parts of the globe, inspired the legend of the Loch Ness monster in Scotland.

Three other teeth would have once belonged to a mosasaurus, an extinct

aquatic lizard with a long snout. The remaining five teeth were thought to belong to a dyrosaurus, an ancestor of the crocodile.

## Prized trophies

Fossils must be authorized for export and without such a license are usually returned to their country of origin. An investigation is under way to identify the receivers and decide how to proceed, Verduron said. In 2020, France returned 25,000 items including fossils, minerals, stones and art objects to Morocco after intercepting them in 2005 and 2006. Most had been found during illegal excavations.

In 2015, customs officers in the French city of Lyon found part of the skeleton of a tarbosaurus bataar, a land dinosaur that walked on its hind legs, that had been illegally excavated in Mongolia. Dinosaur remains have become a hot-ticket item in recent years, with paleontologists voicing concern that museums are losing out to private bidders. A hedge fund CEO last year spent a record \$44.6 million to buy a stegosaurus fossil at a New York auction. Dinosaurs first appeared at least 230 million years ago, while the first humans are believed to have appeared on Earth only around six million years ago. - AFP



A handout photo made available by the "Brigade des douanes de Menton", DGD1 French Customs on February 14, 2025, shows fossilized dinosaur teeth found by Menton customs officers in two packages being transported by an express freight truck in southern France. - AFP



A decorated wedding hall at night in Kabul. — AFP photos



Afghan workers mop a wedding hall at night in Kabul.



A decorated wedding hall at night in Kabul.

# Afghan wedding halls light up sombre Kabul nights



An empty wedding hall in Kabul.



A photographer shoots photos of a groom at a courtyard of a wedding hall at night in Kabul.



Afghan workers mop a wedding hall at night in Kabul.

As night settles over Afghanistan's capital, only a few small lights and neon signs pierce the darkness and thick blanket of winter pollution. But on some street corners, glittering colossal wedding halls loom out of the gloom, a rare display of opulence in the Afghan capital. The city of more than six million people is often plunged into shadow due to ubiquitous power outages, which only the wealthiest can remedy with expensive generators or solar panels. Apart from a few vendors, the streets are deserted, a stark contrast with the chaotic hustle of the daytime.

People huddle at home to shelter from the cold and for lack of nighttime activities. Since the Taliban took power in 2021 and imposed their strict version of Islamic law, a veil of sadness has enveloped the capital. There is no music spilling out from restaurants because it is forbidden, women are banned from parks, and walls decorated with colorful pro-peace graffiti have been splashed with calls to holy war.

The only bright lights emanate from the wedding halls that dot the city center and escape some of the Taliban's scrutiny, as marriage is prized in Afghan culture. The high-ceilinged halls are segregated by gender, with music only tolerated on the women's side. "In Afghanistan, the marriage ceremony is the most important event for girls and boys. It's a once-in-a-lifetime event - we don't have much divorce," said Mohammad Wassil Qaumi, director of the Imperial Continental, a palatial white-and-gold hall that shines with a glitz reminiscent of a Las Vegas casino. "It's the start of a new life so the light should be everywhere, that's why the city is bright, it should have a little bit of luxury!" he told AFP.

### 'Weddings are a necessity'

Bunches of plastic flowers, throne-style sofas, gilded trimming and neon

lights fill the complex's four halls, some of which can accommodate up to 7,000 guests. Qaumi, 32, says he spends \$25,000 to \$30,000 per month for municipal electricity, which provides a few hours of power per day. To keep the lights on, he also pays just under \$15,000 for generators. To recoup his costs, he charges up to \$20,000 for a

out front. "Electricity is very expensive," admits the owner, 24-year-old Siyer Paiman. But, he added, "people in Afghanistan like bright colors".

### 'Brightness of the city'

He has invested in solar panels and spends the equivalent of \$12,000 to \$19,900 on generators and elec-

told AFP, adding that renewable energy sources should be developed but that funding was lacking.

Power cuts also affect heating, with temperatures easily dropping below 0 degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit). Kabul's residents use stoves, burning almost anything from coal and wood to plastic or household waste,



An illuminated wedding hall at night in Kabul.

wedding, in a country where 85 percent of the population lives on less than a dollar a day, according to the United Nations Development Program.

"Weddings are a necessity in the Afghan culture, you have to invite more and more people" even if it means going into debt, said Haji Safiullah Esmafi, owner of the Stars Palace hall. In another district of the capital, the City Star welcomes its guests with a beige and gold facade topped with three sculpted domes and a huge sparkling arch

tricity, which only covers six to seven hours a day, "and not always at night". Afghanistan depends on its Central Asian neighbor's for imported electricity. With the hopes of increasing supply, the country is involved in several regional interconnection projects, but progress is slow. "The current demand in Afghanistan is about 7,000 to 8,000 megawatts but they currently produce locally about 1,000 megawatts and import the rest from Central Asia," a sector expert who asked for anonymity

creating a fog of pollution in the city slung between mountains 1,800 meters (5,900 feet) above sea level. In the nighttime gloom, wedding halls are "the brightness of the city", said Qaumi. "Here, everyone is very happy." "People come here to meet friends and family, (they) wear new clothes, jewelry... showing off so much," he said of patrons enjoying one of the only places left in Kabul where this is still possible. — AFP



A decorated stage at a wedding hall in Kabul.



Afghan security guards stand at an entrance of a wedding hall at night in Kabul.



A general view of an illuminated wedding hall at night in Kabul.



An illuminated wedding hall at night in Kabul.

## Sports

# New Zealand thump Pakistan to win tri-nations final

## Victory gives New Zealanders a timely boost ahead of Champions Trophy

KARACHI: Pace bowler Will O'Rourke claimed four wickets while Daryl Mitchell and Tom Latham hit half centuries as New Zealand defeated Pakistan by five wickets to clinch the tri-nations series final on Friday. O'Rourke's 4-43 helped the tourists dismiss Pakistan for 242 in 49.3 overs before Mitchell's 58-ball 57 anchored the chase as the Black Caps finished on 243-5 in 45.2 overs at Karachi's National stadium.

The victory gives the New Zealanders a timely boost ahead of the Champions Trophy opener against the same opponents at this venue on Wednesday. New Zealand lost opener Will Young in pacer Naseem Shah's first over for five before Devon Conway (48) and Kane Williamson (34) steadied the chase with a second wicket stand of 71.

Williamson lost his wicket while charging down the wicket against spinner Salman Agha while Naseem returned for his second spell to dismiss Conway. At 108-3 the tourists' chase wobbled but Mitchell found an able ally in Latham (56) as the two added 87 for the fourth wicket.

When Mitchell fell caught and bowled off spinner Abrar Ahmed the tourists needed just 48 runs which Latham and Glenn Phillips (20 not out) reduced to ten. Mitchell hit six boundaries in his knock while Latham's 64-ball innings featured five fours.

Naseem was the pick of an otherwise ineffective Pakistan bowling attack with 2-43 off eight overs. "It is nice to win tonight," said New Zealand skipper Mitchell Santner. "Different guys stepping up at different times is good but it means nothing till we play that first game at the Champions Trophy." Losing captain Mohammad Rizwan gave credit to New Zealand's bowlers.

### 'Lost our way'

"We were looking at a target of 280 plus but their bowlers put a squeeze on us," said Rizwan. "We ended up 15 runs short as my wicket was crucial and we lost our way." Earlier, spinners Santner (2-20) and Michael Bracewell (2-38) backed up O'Rourke to ensure Pakistan did not post a big total.

Rizwan top-scored with a 76-ball 46, while Salman Agha hit 45 off 65 balls as slow and variable bounce on the National stadium pitch proved tough for batting. Pakistan lost opener Fakhar Zaman to O'Rourke in the fourth over for 10 and then Saud Shakeel for eight.

Babar Azam looked good for his 29 runs, hitting four boundaries and a six, and reached 6,000 runs scored in one-day internationals when he was on 10. He was playing his 123rd innings, the joint fastest to reach the 6,000-run milestone with South African Hashim Amla. Azam fell to a miscued shot off Nathan Smith, leaving Pakistan struggling at 54-3.

Rizwan and Agha, who shared a match-winning 260-run partnership against South Africa on Wednesday, then revived the innings with an 88-run stand. Rizwan hit four boundaries and a six but he and Agha fell within 19 runs of each other to end any hope of a challenging total. Tayyab Tahir hit a 33-ball 38, also with four boundaries and a six, while Faheem Ashraf (22) and Naseem (19) added 39 invaluable runs to get Pakistan past 240.

### Brief scores:

Pakistan 242 all out in 49.3 overs (Mohammad Rizwan 46, Salman Agha 45; W. O'Rourke 4-43) v



KARACHI: New Zealand's players pose with the trophy after winning the Tri-Nation series final one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Pakistan and New Zealand at the National Stadium in Karachi. — AFP

New Zealand 243-5 in 45.2 overs (D. Mitchell 57, T. Latham 56; Naseem Shah 2-43)

Result: New Zealand won by five wickets  
Toss: Pakistan. — AFP

## Thompson grabs PGA Genesis lead with Scheffler one back

LOS ANGELES: Davis Thompson closed with a birdie to seize a one-stroke lead over top-ranked Scottie Scheffler with Rory McIlroy three adrift after Friday's second round of the PGA Genesis Invitational. Thompson landed his third shot at the par-5 18th only 12 inches from the hole and tapped in for a six-under par 66 and the solo lead.

The 25-year-old American was on eight-under 136 after 36 holes at Torrey Pines near San Diego, where the event was moved from Riviera due to Los Angeles wildfires damage. "It was great," Thompson said. "I felt like I put myself in good position off the tee. Got off to a great start, made some birdies on the front nine. It was kind of a roller coaster on the back nine."

"Finished off strong... tapping in for birdie at 18 is always good." Thompson, who needed only 23 putts in his round, seeks his second PGA title after winning the John Deere Classic last July. "This course is a little tougher than where John Deere is," Thompson said. "I drive it well. Have to use my driver. Hope I can put myself in good position."

Scheffler, whose season start was delayed by a right hand injury, fired a 67 with three birdies and an eagle despite finding only five of 14 fairways in his round. He reached 13 of 18 greens in regulation and finished bogey free.

"A lot of it was missing on the correct sides," Scheffler said. "That's part of shaking the rust off from being injured as well as the short game is continuing to improve as I start to play more. "It was definitely good to have a day where I felt like I didn't play flawless golf but the scorecard was clean." Overnight leader Denny McCarthy shot 70 to grab third on 138, one stroke ahead of third-ranked McIlroy, a winner two weeks ago at Pebble Beach who fired a 67. "I've played well," McIlroy said. "I'm in a good spot going into the weekend."

### Ride the wave'

Thompson made a 28-foot birdie putt at the second then landed his approach four inches from the hole to set up a tap-in birdie at the fifth and birdied the par-3 eighth from just inside eight feet. He reeled off three birdies in a row with a 26-foot chip in from the rough at the par-3 11th, a 40-yard pitch in from the fairway at the par-4 12th and an 11-foot putt at the par-5 13th.

But Thompson missed the green and made bogeys at 14 and 15, missing par putts from five and seven feet, only to sink a birdie putt from just inside 27 feet at the par-3 16th before his closing birdie. "Sometimes you kind of have to ride the wave," Thompson said. "When you're playing a really hard golf course like this, you're going to face adversity. You've just got to be able to bounce back and get in your own lane and stick to your process." Reigning Olympic champion Scheffler, a back-nine starter, made a 20-foot birdie putt at the par-5 13th, birdied from just outside seven feet at the par-5 18th and rolled in a birdie putt from just beyond 15 feet at the par-3 third. — AFP

## China needs to do better despite Asian Winter Games success

HARBIN: China topped the final medal table at the Asian Winter Games in Harbin with a record haul on Friday but its delegation's head stressed the need for improvement if the country is to be competitive at the highest level.

## Shiffrin misses historic world medal as Rast wins women's slalom

SAALBACH: US star Mikaela Shiffrin finished fifth to miss out on a historic world medal as Switzerland's Camille Rast won the women's slalom in Saalbach on Saturday. Rast, the leader after the first run, held her nerve in the second to clock a winning aggregate time of 1min 58.00sec.

Swiss teammate Wendy Holdener claimed silver, at 0.46sec, with Austria's Katharina Liensberger taking bronze (+1.32). Shiffrin had finished third fastest in the first leg to remain on course to become the most decorated alpine World Ski Championships racer in history. If the American had won a slalom medal of any colour, she would have surpassed Christl Cranz, who competed for Germany in the 1930s. Both Shiffrin and Cranz have won 15 world championships medals.

But it was not to be as she eventually finished fifth, at 1.37sec, just behind American teammate Paula Moltzan. It was the unlikely figure of little-known French racer Marion Chevrier, 16th fastest after the first run with a bib number of 37, who held the early provisional lead thanks to an electric second run.

Norway's Mina Fuerst Hotlmann, Sweden's

## Fans cheer Eagles in Super Bowl victory parade

PHILADELPHIA: Hundreds of thousands of Philadelphia Eagles fans lined the streets on Friday to celebrate the team's Super Bowl 59 victory over Kansas City with a parade that ended at the iconic "Rocky" statue.

The NFL team's march down Broad Street began at the team's home stadium on the southside and continued to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where the statue of famed movie boxer Rocky Balboa stands atop the stairs leading into the museum. "This is a special team and we can't be great without the greatness of others and that certainly applies to our fans," Eagles coach Nick Sirianni.

A sea of green-clad supporters, some who arrived Thursday night to get positions along the street, turned out in the "City of Brotherly Love" to cheer their heroes. "You can't use words to describe this," Eagles star running back Saquon Barkley said while riding atop an open-top bus in the parade.

"Every time I think Philly can't take it to another level, it takes it to a whole 'nother level. This city deserves it all and here we are. I might be having too much fun. "The way they showed out, the way they showed up, you can't make it up." It's only the third championship victory parade for a Philadelphia sports team in the past 40 years, following the 2008 Philadelphia Phillies win the World Series and the Eagles victory over New England in Super Bowl 52.

"You get a little greedy and start thinking about the future and this brings you back to the moment," said Barkley. The city's Love statue, with the letters of the word in a square form, received an addition with the word Hurts placed after it in tribute to Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts, the Most Valuable Player in last Sunday's 40-22 Super Bowl triumph over the defending champion Chiefs. "Philly, on behalf of

The hosts won 32 golds - double the tally of nearest challengers South Korea - 27 silvers and 26 bronze to set a new medal-winning record at the end of the eight-day event. Even so, Zhou Jinqiang, head of China's delegation at the Games and vice president of the Chinese Olympic Committee, called on athletes to raise standards ahead of the Winter Olympics in Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo next year.

"While China's performance at the AWG was impressive, it still lags behind global standards in winter sports, with notable gaps



HINTERGLEMM: Winner Switzerland's Camille Rast celebrates after the Women's Slalom event of the Saalbach 2025 FIS Alpine World Ski Championships in Hinterglemm on February 15, 2025. — AFP

Sara Hector and Swiss racer Melanie Meillard all failed to finish in bright, sunny conditions in front of 15,000 raucous fans packed in around the finish area. Chevrier eventually lost her lead to Croatia's Zrinka Ljusic, in 2:00.73, as the top eight prepared themselves.

First down was Germany's Lena Duerr and she promptly went 0.28sec faster than Ljusic. That was short lived as the first of the two home hopes, Katharina Truppe, set the airhorns a'blowing and flags a'waving by leapfrogging the German. Slovenia's Andreja Slokar then took over as leader, breaking the 2min aggregate time, with just the

top five remaining.

First up was Moltzan and she duly replaced the Slovene before Switzerland's Holdener went 0.88sec clear atop the field to pile the pressure on the top three. Shiffrin was next in the start hut, but the American made a big mistake halfway down the course, resulting in just the 12th fastest second run, and had to be content to settle in behind Holdener and Moltzan.

Liensberger, with a -0.22sec deficit, went immediately into the red, but put in a gritty bottom third to pull into second, thus depriving Shiffrin a medal as she slipped to fourth as the horns blew once more. All eyes then turned to Rast, the fastest in the first run and the last of the top 30 to start.

The Swiss racer kicked out of the start gate with a 0.80sec advantage and maintained her rhythmic momentum magnificently throughout on the Ulli Maier course for another 1-2 for the ski mad country. Rast's victory saw her become the first Swiss winner of the women's slalom since Vreni Schneider in 1991 - the last time the world championships were held in Saalbach.

Laurence St-Germain became Canada's first women's slalom world champion for 63 years when she won a shock gold in the last world champs in Courchevel/Meribel in 2023. But the 30-year-old, who is still yet to claim a World Cup podium, was one of a large number of skiers who failed to finish the first leg. — AFP



PHILADELPHIA: The Philadelphia Eagles and fans celebrate during their Super Bowl Championship parade in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. — AFP

my teammates and myself, we want to thank you for all your support this year," Hurts told the fans. "All the passion, every ounce of it."

### 'Next pursuit begins'

Hurts finally saw the Rocky statue in person. "I told myself I wouldn't come to the Rocky steps until we won the championship and now we're here," Hurts said. "This team has had to battle through so much. This team has had to fight, has had to persevere. There has been a ton of scrutiny, a ton of opinions, but one thing about this city, we fight."

"You learn that success isn't built off approval. It's built off endurance. It's built off strength. You

can't lose if you don't quit and in Philly we don't quit. "The next pursuit begins. Go Birds." A throng of fans sang the team fight song "Fly Eagles Fly" from all around the museum stairs before players walked out from atop the stairs to roars of delight from the crowd, later leading the crowd in singing, "We Are The Champions."

"There are no words to describe this, Philly," Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie said. "This team and its fans share a bond second to none." Eagles receiver A.J. Brown took aim at critics, saying: "They said I was a diva. They said all I cared about was stats. You get all those things wrong about me but there's one thing you can get right. I'm a champion." — AFP

Olympics," Zhou said. Japan finished third in the medal table, which featured only nine of the 34 participating nations.

Kazakhstan won four gold medals to finish fourth while the Philippines claimed their first Asian Winter Games title, securing gold in the men's curling with victory over South Korea on Friday. "This is a great achievement that opens the door for our country's first Winter Olympics medal," said Philippine Olympic Committee president Abraham Tolentino. — Reuters

Sports

# Tennis superstar Sinner accepts 3-month ban to end doping drama

## Suspension means Sinner will be free to play in the French Open

MILAN: Jannik Sinner's long doping saga came to an end on Saturday after he agreed to a three-month ban from tennis, the world number one admitting "partial responsibility" for team mistakes which led to him twice testing positive for traces of clostebol in March last year.

The February 9 to May 4 suspension means Sinner will be free to play in the French Open, the second Grand Slam of the season, which begins on May 25 at Roland Garros. In a statement, Sinner said that the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) accepted that he "had no intent and did not derive any competitive advantage from the two positive tests" of the banned substance.

Australian Open champion Sinner has always said that clostebol entered his system when his physiotherapist used a spray containing it to treat a cut before providing a massage and sports therapy.

"This case had been hanging over me now for nearly a year and the process still had a long time to run with a decision maybe only at the end of the year," Sinner said. "I have always accepted that I am responsible for my team and realize WADA's strict rules are an important protection for the sport I love. On that

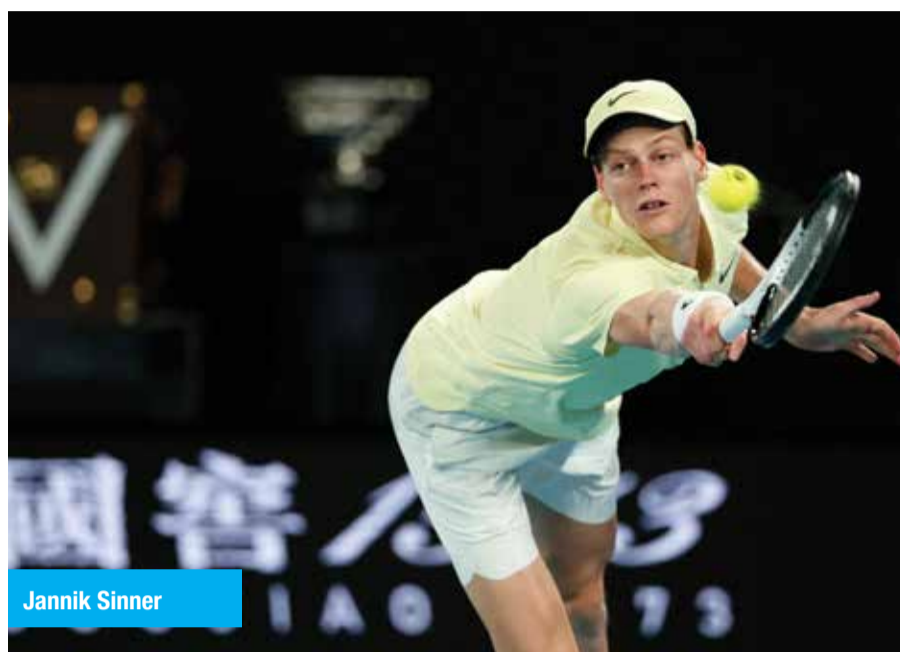
basis I have accepted WADA's offer to resolve these proceedings on the basis of a three-month sanction."

WADA said separately that "Sinner did not intend to cheat" but that he would serve his suspension as he is responsible for the actions of his entourage. Sport's global doping watchdog confirmed it was withdrawing its appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which was due to hear the case in April.

The agreement between Sinner and WADA also means that Sinner will be able to play in front of his home fans at the Rome Open which kicks off just after the end of his suspension and is the last big clay court tournament before Roland Garros. Saturday's announcement brings to an end a controversy which has followed Sinner everywhere just as he rose to become the top player in men's tennis and a multiple Slam winner.

### Doping controversy

Sinner was facing a potential ban of two years after WADA appealed to CAS against his initial exoneration by the International Tennis Integrity Agency, announced in August. The positive tests were not initially made public while the



Jannik Sinner

ITIA investigation was ongoing and Sinner had been allowed to carry on playing after successfully appealing provisional suspensions.

"We were satisfied that the player had established the source of the prohibited

substance and that the breach was unintentional. Today's outcome supports this finding," said the ITIA on Saturday. The ITIA's initial ruling caused uproar among a section of the men's tour, with outspoken Australian player Nick Kyrgios calling it

"ridiculous" and pouring scorn on Sinner's explanation for the contamination. It was made public just days before last year's US Open, which Sinner subsequently won to claim his second Grand Slam after breaking his major tournament duck at the previous Australian Open. Sinner then successfully defended his title at Melbourne Park last month, becoming just the fourth man to do so since the turn of the century alongside tennis icons Andre Agassi, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic.

By that point he had confirmed his status as national hero in Italy by winning the ATP Finals in Turin and then starring in his country's second straight Davis Cup triumph. Sinner, who pulled out of defending his title at this month's Rotterdam Open, had previously been viewed with some suspicion in the Mediterranean nation.

His origins in the German-speaking areas of the South Tyrol and residence in Monaco led to local media and former tennis players casting doubt on whether he was Italian at all. But he is now Italy's biggest sports star after surging to the top of the sport ahead of Spain's golden boy Carlos Alcaraz, himself a four-time Slam champion at the age of 21. — AFP

## Guardiola taunts Liverpool over Man City's record

LONDON: Pep Guardiola has taunted Premier League leaders Liverpool over their failure to match Manchester City's record 100-point tally.

Guardiola's troubled side are trailing 16 points behind Liverpool after their bid for a fifth successive English crown collapsed in astonishing fashion.

Liverpool are seven points clear of second-placed Arsenal as they chase a 20th title, which would equal Manchester United's record. But even if Arne Slot's men go on to secure the trophy, they now cannot match the record points total set when City won the first of Guardiola's six titles in 2017-18.

Responding to criticism of City's spluttering dynasty after Tuesday's 3-2 home defeat against Real Madrid in the Champions League play-off round first leg, Guardiola took a tetchy swipe at Liverpool. "We took all the records in England. Who would do 100 points now in modern football? I'm waiting," Guardiola told reporters on Friday.



LONDON: Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola reacts during the UEFA Champions League football match. — AFP

"Or four in a row? I'm waiting - with clubs like Bournemouth, Fulham and Wolves that you have to play. "The standards, we dictated. Have you seen Liverpool this season? They cannot do 100 points already - 99 but not 100."

While Liverpool may not surpass fifth-placed City's record mark, Guardiola accepts his team have

fallen behind their rivals this season. "I asked 'Gundo' (Ilkay Gundogan) yesterday, 'two years ago you were here, you were one year in Barcelona and you come back here, did you see changes in the Premier League?'," said Guardiola, whose team host top four rivals Newcastle on Saturday.

"He said massively, the difference was unbelievable. It's the truth. The teams are much, much, much better in all departments. People prepare so well. "We cannot do it for the (injury) problems we've had. There are a lot of players, with the amount of minutes they have had, who are so tired, emotionally as well."

"But guys, we deserve to have a bad season. We deserve not to be like we were. They are human beings, it can happen. We weren't consistent and we haven't had the players at their best. "It's the first time that me and many of the players have lived this position but we have to accept it (and recognise) what happened in the past was not normal."

Guardiola believes the difference from previous successful seasons is that City are no longer making the most of their dominance of possession. "I accept when the opponents have the ball, I'm going to suffer," he said. "But now we are suffering when we have the ball. It never happened before and, (right) now, I cannot change it. We are suffering because we are human beings." — AFP

## Atalanta held to goalless draw by Cagliari

MILAN: Atalanta slipped up again in their bid for a first Serie A title with Saturday's goalless draw with Cagliari, as league leaders Napoli get set for a tough clash at Lazio. Little happened in a drab stalemate in Bergamo which left third-placed Atalanta four points behind Napoli who take on Lazio in Rome later on Saturday.

Napoli are bidding to move four points ahead of champions and principle title rivals Inter Milan who travel to Turin on Sunday for a grudge match with Juventus. Already hit with injuries including that of key attacker Ademola Lookman, Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini dropped first teamers like Marten de Roon, Ederson and Charles De Ketelaere ahead of his team's return leg of a Champions League play-off with Club Brugge.

Atalanta trail that tie 2-1 after a hugely controversial penalty given against the Italians in stoppage of the first leg in Belgium on Wednesday night. Gasperini was forced to bring on De Roon, Ederson and De Ketelaere in the second half as Atalanta struggled to break down resilient Cagliari who are 13th and five points above the relegation zone.

The closest the hosts came to taking the lead was when Marco Brescianini poked home from close range on the hour only for Stefan Posch to be penalised for a foul on Cagliari goalkeeper Elia Caprile. Caprile also did well to keep out young striker Vanya Vlahovic who came on as a surprise replacement for Mateo Retegui just before Brescianini's goal was ruled out. AC Milan host Verona in the day's late match hoping to bounce back from their Champions League defeat at Feyenoord. — AFP

## Hamilton can make Ferrari an even greater F1 threat

SILVERSTONE: Carlos Sainz, the driver ditched by Ferrari to make way for Lewis Hamilton, believes his old team could now be even better placed to return to the summit of Formula One with the former world champion on board. Hamilton joined Ferrari from Mercedes, with the 40-year-old set to make his debut for the Italian giants at next month's season-opening Australian Grand Prix as he goes in search of a record-breaking eighth drivers' world title.

Sainz made way for Hamilton's move, with the 30-year-old Spaniard now lining up for Williams instead in Melbourne on March 16 after spending three years driving alongside Charles Leclerc at Ferrari. But Sainz, speaking at British team Williams's 2025 launch at Silverstone on Friday, said: "When I left, I did feel that both Ferrari and Charles were ready to fight for a world championship, and with Lewis joining that is only going to increase."

"I have never been team-mates with Lewis so I don't know what he is capable of doing. I have never seen his data. I have seen Charles's data and I know how good he is. "The only way you can evaluate a driver is when you are a team-mate and you see what they are capable of doing."

"But when I look at Lewis's results and his background, and what he has achieved, I can only say that there will be a very high chance that he is going to be competitive for Ferrari." Hamilton is set to unveil his new Ferrari at the Formula One season launch at the O2 Arena in London on Tuesday before heading to the team's Maranello headquarters the next day,



Lewis Hamilton

where he is due to speak to the media for the first time as a Ferrari driver.

Williams finished a lowly ninth in the 2024 constructors standings but Sainz insists he can help revive the fortunes of the nine-time champions. "I believe I bring a lot of knowledge, a lot of things you know, that I think could be applied to this car and to the team at the same time," said Sainz.

"I see a team that is ready also to fight for wins. It's just a matter of getting everything around the team to make sure we're giving also all the engineers and all the mechanics and the drivers the right tools to compete at the highest level." Sainz, a winner of four Grand Prix, will team-up alongside Alex Albon at Williams for the new 24-round season, with the 28-year-old London-born driver relishing the competition.

"I am going up against someone (Sainz) who has got a big reputation, has just come from a very strong year, possibly his best in Formula One, so that is a great challenge to have and a positive outlook for me," Albon said. "I believe in myself and I am happy to go up against anyone." — AFP

## Dortmund lose, Stuttgart miss chance at fourth

LEVERKUSEN: Borussia Dortmund's Bundesliga slide continued on Saturday with a 2-0 loss at lowly Bochum, while Stuttgart missed a chance to climb to fourth, losing 2-1 at home to Wolfsburg. Bochum, who started the game in last place, grabbed control in the first half when winter loan signing Georgios Masouras scored two goals in three minutes.

Masouras tapped a low Philipp Hofmann shot in from close range after 33 minutes and then pounced on a terrible back-pass from Niklas Sule to double the lead two minutes later. Dortmund have won just one of their past seven league games, five of which were defeats, and sit 11th, eight points off the top four.

Stuttgart failed to take advantage of fourth-placed Leipzig's scoreless draw at Augsburg on Friday, giving up a one-goal lead to lose 2-1 at home against Wolfsburg. Stuttgart's Nick Woltemade came off the bench to put the hosts ahead after 72 minutes with a superb solo goal, but Wolfsburg hit back five minutes later when Tiago Tomas tapped in a Mohamed Amoura assist.

With five minutes remaining, Stuttgart's Joshua Vagnoman handled the ball in the box, bringing Amoura to the spot. The Algerian nervelessly converted to grab all three points and lift the visitors to eighth, keeping alive their hopes of European football for the first time since 2022.

Elsewhere, Freiburg overcame a poor first-half penalty miss from Vincenzo Grifo to win 1-0 at St Pauli thanks to an own goal from Philipp Treu with two minutes remaining. Grifo tried a Panenka from the spot in the 45th minute but his limp effort was easily saved. In the dying stages, Treu, a former Freiburg player, diverted a shot into his own net. The visitors climbed to fifth on the table.

First half goals from Lukas Ullrich and Tim Kleindienst took Borussia Moenchengladbach to a win 2-1 at Union Berlin, who pulled one back from the spot in the second half through Andrej Ilic. The win took Gladbach to seventh, three points behind Leipzig in fourth. Later on Saturday, league leaders Bayern Munich play at second-placed defending champions Bayer Leverkusen. Bayern sit eight points ahead of Xabi Alonso's side and could strike a major blow in the title race with victory. — AFP

# Classifieds

### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707	Qadsiya	22515088
Rawda	22517733	Dasmah	22532265
Adaliya	22517144	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Khaldiya	24848075	Shaab	22518752
Kaifan	24849807	Qibla	22459381
Shamiya	24848913	Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Shuwaikh	24814507	Mirqab	22456536
Abdullah Salem	22549134	Sharq	22465401
Nuzha	22526804	Salmiya	25746401
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764		

### Change of Name

<b>I, Filomena Gonsalves</b> , holder of Indian Passport No. S2392939 having permanent address: r/o H. No. 377/1, Dhakutolem, Assolda, Chandor, South Goa, 403714, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) Filomena Blasia and (surname) Fernandes.	<b>I, PRATHIBA</b> , holder of Indian Passport No. V7121963 having permanent address: W/o Felix Tellis R/o. Devaragundi House Punacha Post and Village Bantwal Taluk - 574243, D.K. District, Karnataka State, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) PRATHIBA and (surname) TELLIS.	<b>I, MEENAZ</b> , holder of Indian Passport No. Z3830726 having permanent address Pabhare, Mhasla, Raigarh, Maharashtra, 402105, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as (given name) MEENAZ ABDUL MAJID and (surname) UKAYE.
16/2/2025	16/2/2025	16/2/2025

## Arsenal close gap on leaders Liverpool, Marmoush treble lifts Manchester City

**LONDON:** Arsenal ignored their injury woes to close the gap on Premier League leaders Liverpool as Mikel Merino inspired a 2-0 win against Leicester, while Omar Marmoush's hat-trick fired Manchester City's 4-0 rout of top four rivals Newcastle on Saturday.

Mikel Arteta's side were in danger of wasting a chance to put pressure on Liverpool in the title race as they laboured to make the breakthrough at the King Power Stadium. With his attacking options limited by a host of injuries, Arteta sent on Spain midfielder Merino to act as a makeshift striker in the closing stages.

It proved an inspired move as Merino netted twice in the last nine minutes to extend Arsenal's unbeaten run in the league to 15 games. In the 81st minute, Ethan Nwaneri swung a pin-point cross into the Leicester area and Merino found space to thump his header past Mads Hermansen from six yards.

Seven minutes later, Leandro Trossard whipped a cross into the six-yard box and Merino's well-timed run eluded the Leicester defence as he slotted home to move second-placed Arsenal within four points of Liverpool. With Kai Havertz ruled out for the season after suffering a hamstring injury blocking a shot during Arsenal's recent training trip to Dubai, Arteta was left with a threadbare attack.

Gabriel Jesus, Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli were already sidelined by injuries. Having lost 2-0 at Newcastle in the League Cup semi-final second



**LONDON:** Manchester City's English midfielder #87 James McAtee (2R) shoots to score their fourth goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Newcastle United at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on February 15, 2025. — AFP

leg before an extended break due to their early FA Cup exit, the Gunners returned to action with a vital victory. Liverpool can increase the lead back to seven points if they beat lowly Wolves at Anfield on Sunday.

At the Etihad Stadium, Egypt forward Marmoush scored his first City goals since arriving from Eintracht Frankfurt during the January transfer window. Marmoush ended a run of four games without a goal in the 19th minute as he

sprinted onto Ederson's long kick and deftly lobbed Newcastle keeper Martin Dubravka. Just five minutes later, Marmoush found the back of the net again with a powerful blast that took a deflection off Kieran Trippier as it whistled past Dubravka.

### City sparkle

The 26-year-old wasn't done, and he completed his 14-minute hat-trick in the 33rd minute. Savinho's pass found

Marmoush in the Newcastle area and he was granted time and space to slot home for the first treble of his career. James McAtee's 84th minute volley capped a much-needed boost for City after Tuesday's 3-2 defeat against Real Madrid in the Champions League play-off round first leg.

But there was a scare for City when Norway striker Erling Haaland was forced off with a potential knee injury in the closing stages. Now fourth in the

Premier League, Pep Guardiola's men head to Madrid on Wednesday needing a second-leg revival to avoid European elimination.

Seventh-placed Newcastle are three points adrift of the top four in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League. Third-placed Nottingham Forest slumped to a 2-1 defeat Fulham. Emile Smith Rowe netted in the 15th minute for Fulham and although Chris Wood equalised in the 37th minute, Calvin Bassey's header sealed the points in the 62nd minute.

Bournemouth are up to fifth as their unlikely bid to qualify for the Champions League gathered pace with a 3-1 win at bottom of the table Southampton. Dango Ouattara headed home in the 14th minute before Ryan Christie's fierce finish two minutes later.

Kamaldeen Sulemana got one back in the 72nd minute, but Marcus Tavernier sealed the points in the 83rd minute. Ten-man Ipswich held on for a 1-1 draw at Aston Villa. Ipswich defender Axel Tuanzebe was sent off just before half-time after earning a second yellow card for a foul on Jacob Ramsey.

Liam Delap put Ipswich ahead from Omari Hutchinson's 56th minute cross, but Ollie Watkins tapped in the equaliser after Marcus Rashford's free-kick hit the bar in the 69th minute. Kevin Schade's fourth-minute goal clinched Brentford's 1-0 win at West Ham. — AFP

OUTDOOR  
GARDENIA  
LIVING

KUWAIT NATIONAL MUSEUM  
FEBRUARY 10-25  
2025

المعهد الوطني للفنون والثقافة والحضارة  
National Museum of Art & Culture