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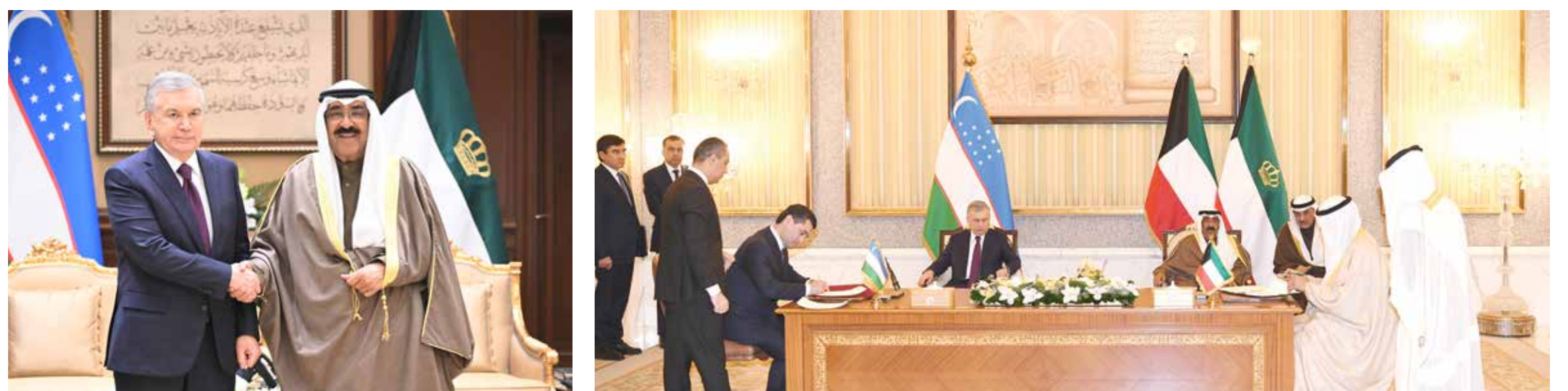
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Kuwait, Uzbekistan boost ties

Amir welcomes Uzbek President • Four agreements signed



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receive Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev during his official visit to the country on Feb 17, 2025, during which four agreements were signed. — Amiri Diwan photos

NEWS IN BRIEF

Blood money raised to KD 20,000

KUWAIT: Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait announced on Monday raising the amount of legal blood money to KD 20,000 to achieve the principle of preserving life and strengthening the concept of fair compensation. The ministry of justice stated on X that the Cabinet approved amending article 251 of the civil code, which aims to re-estimate the value of legal blood money to reflect its true reality per the provisions of Islamic sharia and the requirements of justice. This amendment came in response to the changes witnessed in the financial and economic conditions during the past decades, Al-Sumait added. — KUNA

Zionists to remain in Lebanon

BEIRUT: The Zionist entity was poised to again miss a Feb 18 deadline for withdrawing its troops from Lebanon after the military said Monday it would remain in five "strategic points" despite pushback from Beirut. The Zionist entity has continued to carry out strikes on Lebanon, with the military saying Monday it killed a Hamas commander in the southern city of Sidon. Lebanon's president had earlier voiced concern that the Zionist entity would miss the Tuesday deadline and urged countries to pressure the Zionist entity to honor the cut-off. — AFP

Lebanon extends Iran flight ban

BEIRUT: Lebanese authorities said on Monday they had extended the suspension of inbound and outbound flights to Iran indefinitely, after originally barring Iranian planes from landing in Beirut until Feb 18. The ban came after the United States, which helped broker a Nov 27 Hezbollah-Zionist ceasefire, warned the Zionist entity might shoot the planes down. Iran said in turn it would not allow Lebanese flights to land until its own flights were cleared to land in Beirut. — Agencies

Cairo building collapse kills 10

CAIRO: A building collapse in the Egyptian capital killed 10 people and injured eight more on Monday, with several others believed to be missing under the rubble. Ambulances were dispatched to the scene in the working-class neighborhood of Ker-dasa, where civil defense teams searched for people thought to be missing under the rubble. Eyewitnesses said "a gas cylinder explosion" caused the collapse, and a police investigation was under way. — AFP

KUWAIT: Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his accompanying delegation arrived in Kuwait on Monday on an official visit to the country. HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received the visiting Uzbek President and delegation at the international airport. Senior state officials and ministers were also present. HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal then held a luncheon in honor of President Mirziyoyev and the accompanying delegation at Bayan Palace.

HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal and President Mirziyoyev later oversaw the signing of four agreements

GCC ministers tour Gardenia popup, attend epic show

KUWAIT: GCC tourism and culture ministers visited the Gardenia exhibition at the Kuwait National Museum of Kuwait on Sunday, exploring Gulf heritage, sustainability and smart gardening technologies. The exhibition, organized by Kayan in collaboration with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, promotes cultural exchange through art, workshops and environmental awareness.

The ministers also attended Ocean of the Earth, a theatrical performance produced by the ministry of information. The show, inspired by the life of Kuwaiti astronomer Saleh Al-Ujairi, blends theater, music and visual effects to highlight Kuwait's cultural leadership. The ministers are in Kuwait for the ninth GCC tourism ministers' meeting. — KUNA (See Page 3)

during official rounds of talks. Present at the signing ceremony at Bayan Palace were HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah and Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah. The first agreement between the two countries focused on expanding cooperation within the labor force in the private sector. It was Sheikh Fahad and Uzbek Foreign Minister Baxtiyor Saidov.

The second agreement was a protocol to amend an agreement on air cargo cooperation signed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya and Saidov. The third agreement was to develop cooperation between the two sides within the domain of

smart cities. It was signed by Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Abdullatif Al-Meshari and Saidov. The fourth agreement was within the sector of industrial cooperation, signed by Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel and Uzbekistan's Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment Laziz Kudratov.

President Mirziyoyev also received at Bayan Palace Sheikh Fahad, who was accompanied by Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Noura Al-Fassam and Al-Ajeel. President Mirziyoyev also received Al-Yahya. — KUNA (See Page 2)



KUWAIT: (From left) Gulf Culture Ministers, Qatar's Saad Al-Kharji, Bahrain's Fatima Al-Sairafi, Oman's Salem Al-Mahrouqi, Kuwait's Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi and Saudi Arabia's Ahmed Al-Khateeb, Managing Editor of Kuwait News Hussain Assad, Founder and CEO of Kayan Bashar Al-Salem, Gardenia Team Member Yahya Jeragh and Assistant Secretary-General for the Antiquities and Museums Sector at NCCAL Mohammed Bin Redha visit the Gardenia popup at Kuwait National Museum.

Rubio meets MBS in Saudi, Zelensky meets MBZ in UAE

DUBAI/RIYADH: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with Emirati counterpart Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan in Abu Dhabi on Monday to discuss economic cooperation, the UAE's official news agency said. Sheikh Mohammed emphasized in the meeting the need to "build effective partnerships with the countries of the world", according to the WAM news agency.

The Emirati president also spoke of "the importance of reaching peaceful solutions to crises" around the world, while Zelensky thanked the United Arab Emirates for its "contribution" to the exchange of prisoners between Kyiv and Moscow, WAM said. It added that the two countries also signed an "economic partnership agreement".



(Left) UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan receives Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky at Al-Shati Palace in Abu Dhabi on Feb 17, 2025. (Right) US Secretary of State Marco Rubio meets Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh on Feb 17, 2025. — AFP photos



Zelensky arrived in the UAE ahead of Tuesday talks between US and Russian officials in neighboring Saudi Arabia. Washington and Moscow have said their top diplomats, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will lead the delegations. A source close to the Saudi government told AFP it expected the officials to hold a preparatory meeting ahead of a possible summit between US President Donald Trump and Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Rubio was meeting on Monday with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the State Department said, during the top diplomat's first Middle East tour. Rubio was expected to discuss

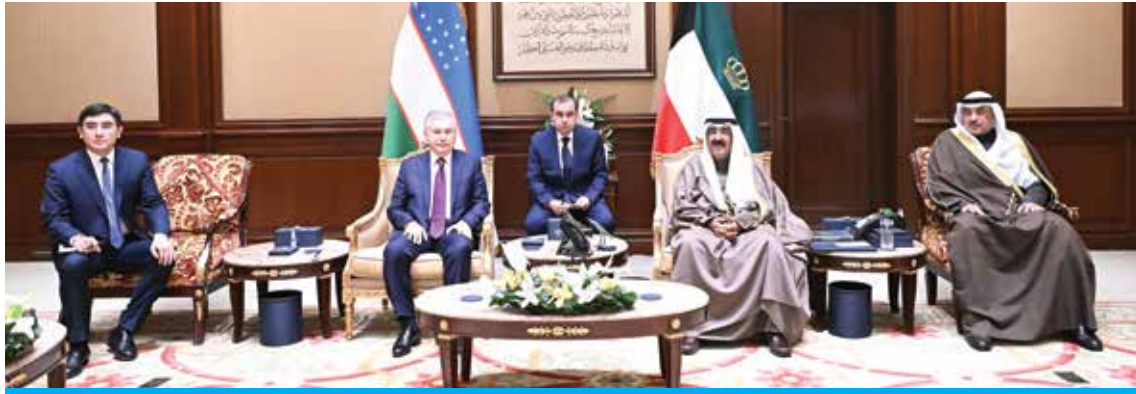
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Local

Kuwait, Uzbekistan expand cooperation

Amir, Uzbek President witness the signing of agreements



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and visiting President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev oversee the signing of four agreements during official rounds of talks.



KUWAIT: Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the accompanying delegation arrived in Kuwait on Monday on an official visit to the country. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receive the visiting Uzbek President and delegation at the international airport.

KUWAIT: President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, began an official visit to Kuwait on Monday, during which he held talks with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, aimed at strengthening bilateral relations and developing prospects in various fields. The two friendly countries have enjoyed distinguished relations since Kuwait recognized Uzbekistan's independence in late December 1991, with Kuwait paying special attention to these relations, especially due to the religious and historical ties between the two nations.

Diplomatic relations between the two countries began in 2001 with the opening of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Uzbekistan, while Uzbekistan opened its first embassy in Kuwait in November 2004. Over the past years, the two countries have witnessed visits by numerous senior officials aimed at developing bilateral relations in all fields and cooperating and coordinating on regional and global issues of common interest.

Former Uzbek President Islam Karimov visited Kuwait in January 2004, where he held talks with senior officials on bilateral relations and ways to enhance them. Six cooperation agreements were signed in the fields of trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation, avoidance of double taxation, encouragement and protection of investments, combating crime, and air transport services, in addition to a memorandum of cooperation between Uzbekistan and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development.

In July 2008, the late Amir, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, visited Uzbekistan and held talks with President Karimov on issues of mutual interest, including the signing of eight agreements in the fields of gas, investment, health, environment, and tourism. In April of last year, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya and Uzbek Foreign Minister Bakhtiar Saidov signed a cooperation program between the foreign ministries of the two countries on the sidelines of the second meeting of the Ministerial Council between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Central Asian nations, which was held in the capital, Tashkent.

Saidov visited Kuwait last August and signed a memorandum of understanding with Al-Yahya on cooperation in the field of diplomatic institutions. In 1997, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development began its lending activities to Uzbekistan when it provided three loans total-

ing KD 18.067 million (about \$55 million), covering health emergencies, water and sanitation, transportation and communications, in addition to two technical aids worth KD 550,000 (about \$1.65 million).

Last November, the first session of the Kuwaiti-Uzbek Joint Committee for Economic, Commercial, and Scientific Cooperation was held in Tashkent. During this session, views were exchanged on cooperation across various fields, and a memorandum of understanding was signed to facilitate trade between the two countries, aiming to overcome trade obstacles and increase trade exchange rates.

In August 2024, an Uzbek economic delegation visited Kuwait, where it met with members of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry and several Kuwaiti investors to present investment opportunities in its country, particularly in the domains of infrastructure and energy. Kuwait, represented by the General Administration of Civil Aviation, signed an agreement with Uzbekistan last October to collaborate in the civil aviation sector during the annual International Aviation Agreements Conference (ICAN 2024) held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In the realm of charity, Kuwait has implemented numerous charitable

projects in Uzbekistan, including sponsoring orphans, digging wells, distributing copies of the Holy Quran, and printing the Holy Quran in Braille for the blind. Additionally, Kuwait has built mosques, sponsored students, and provided educational equipment to several schools.

In July 2004, Kuwait opened the Kuwait-Uzbekistan Friendship Hall at Tashkent Islamic University, which houses information about Kuwait alongside some scientific publications and materials printed there. In May 2024, Kuwait, represented by the Kuwaiti Federation of Women's Associations, participated in the Asian Women's Forum entitled "Regional Approach to Economic, Social and Political Rights Issues and Women's Empowerment," held in Uzbekistan, where discussions focused on women's participation in multiple sectors.

The participation culminated in the signing of a memorandum of understanding by the Kuwaiti Federation of Women's Associations with the Committee on Family and Women in Uzbekistan concerning women's rights and interests. It is noteworthy that the Republic of Uzbekistan was one of the republics of the Soviet Union prior to its dissolution in the early 1990s. Its population exceeds 27 million, with 88 percent identifying as Muslims, while its

total area measures 447,400 square kilometers.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir and visiting President of Uzbekistan oversaw the signing of four agreements during official rounds of talks on Monday. Present at the signing ceremony were His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah. The first agreement between the two countries focused on expanding cooperation within the labor force in the private sector. It was signed by First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad and Uzbek Foreign Minister Baxtiyor Saidov. The second agreement was a protocol to amend an agreement on air cargo cooperation, signed by Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya and his Uzbek counterpart Saidov.

The third agreement aimed to develop cooperation between the two sides within the domain of smart cities. It was signed by the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Abdullatif Al-Meshari and Uzbek Foreign Minister Saidov. The fourth agreement, concerning industrial cooperation, was signed by Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Askar and Uzbekistan's Minister of Industry, Trade, and Investment Laziz Kudratov. — KUNA

Indian ambassador congratulates Kuwait

Dr Adarsh Swaika
Ambassador of India



On the joyous occasion of the National Day and Liberation Day of Kuwait, I extend my warm wishes to the leadership, the government and the people of the friendly Kuwait. I express my gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah for their patronage towards building a strong India-Kuwait partnership and ensuring the well-being of the large and vibrant Indian community in Kuwait.

India and Kuwait share centuries-old historical, trade and people-to-people linkages that has been further upgraded to a Strategic Partnership during the recent visit of Prime Minister of India to Kuwait. The conferment of the highest national award of Kuwait "The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer" on Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi is symbolic of the importance attached by the leadership of Kuwait to its relations with India.

India remains fully committed to working closely with Kuwait in making our bilateral relations truly multi-faceted for the mutual benefit of our peoples. I am confident that under the visionary leadership of Kuwait, the people of Kuwait will see greater progress and prosperity in times to come. I also take this opportunity to convey my heartfelt greetings to all on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan.



The representative of His Highness the Crown Prince, Minister of Education Dr Jalal Al-Tabtabaei, along with Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Scientific Club and Chairman of the exhibition's Supreme Committee, Talal Jassem Al-Kharafi, attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the exhibition, joined by several ambassadors, diplomats, members of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Scientific Club, and representatives of sponsoring and supporting entities. - Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait hosts region's largest international invention exhibition

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Minister of Education Dr Jalal Al-Tabtabaei inaugurated what he hailed as the world's second-largest international invention exhibition and the largest in the Middle East. Representing His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, he officially opened the 15th edition of the International Invention Exhibition in the Middle East on Sunday. Held at Al-Raya Hall in the Courtyard Marriott Hotel, the exhibition runs until February 19, featuring 180 inventors from 42 Arab and foreign countries, showcasing 230 innovations across various scientific and technological fields.

Al-Tabtabaei highlighted the event's remarkable growth since its inception, recalling his time on the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Scientific Club in 2006 and 2007. "The

first edition was held in a small tent with just 12 inventors from different countries. Today, it has evolved into a prestigious international platform that highlights innovation at the highest level," he said.

Talal Jassem Al-Kharafi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Scientific Club and Chairman of the exhibition's Supreme Committee, noted the event's expanding global reach. He announced that this year's edition welcomes new participants from Ecuador and Nigeria, marking their debut appearances. Additionally, he underscored the significance of the Arab League's first-ever participation, represented by five specialized organizations, which adds further value and strengthens the exhibition's international standing.

Al-Kharafi emphasized the critical role of innovation in driving a knowledge-based economy, stating that empowering innovators and encouraging young minds to create is fundamental to sustainable development and global competitiveness. "The exhibition embodies a firm commitment to fostering a culture of innovation, nurturing creative minds, and establishing a supportive environment for inventions that align with global transformations and shape a future based on knowledge and advanced technology," Dr Al-Tabtabaei added.

Ali Kazem Al-Jumaa, Secretary-General of the Kuwait Scientific Club, outlined the exhibition's primary goal of creating investment opportunities for inventors. He explained that the event serves as a platform for innovators to present their ideas to potential investors and research institutions, aiming to transform them into commercially viable projects that contribute to economic growth.

Additionally, the exhibition provides an ideal space for inventors to showcase their innovations to relevant stakeholders for potential development and commercialization. It also encourages Kuwaiti inventors to present their projects both locally and internationally while strengthening collaboration between innovators and government and private institutions to support and advance groundbreaking ideas.

Rehab Ezzeddine, Minister Plenipotentiary and Director of the Economic Relations Department in the Economic Affairs Sector at the General Secretariat of the Arab League, emphasized the importance of international invention exhibitions in fostering innovation and strengthening scientific cooperation between nations. She also announced that the League will be awarding a financial prize to the winning inventors, further highlighting its commitment to supporting groundbreaking ideas and talent.



ACA seniors pose for a group photo with Kuwait Times and Kuwait News staff at the printing press. - Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



ACA students in the editorial department.



With curiosity and enthusiasm, ACA girls explore the archives room under the guidance of Zainab Dashti, Kuwait Times content creator.

ACA senior girls gain hands-on experience in journalism at Kuwait Times

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: Senior students from the American Creative Academy (ACA) girls had an immersive experience in the world of journalism during their recent visit to Kuwait Times and Kuwait News. The field trip offered an in-depth look at how news is gathered, processed, and delivered to the public. The students toured the editorial department, where they observed the fast-paced

workflow of journalists, editors, and designers working together to produce daily news. They learned about the importance of thorough research, fact-checking, and precise reporting, essential elements in maintaining credibility and delivering reliable news.

In the archives section, they explored historic editions of Kuwait Times, gaining insights into how newspapers serve as a record of significant events and societal changes. Moving on to the printing press, the

students witnessed firsthand how newspapers transition from digital layouts to printed copies ready for distribution across the country. During their visit to the studio, the students got a closer look at the production of video news content, an essential component of modern journalism. They discovered how multimedia storytelling enhances audience engagement and expands news reach beyond traditional print formats.

As part of their studio experience, the students also

participated in a fun and interactive game, where they had to guess the meanings of Kuwaiti words, adding a cultural and educational element to their visit. A key highlight of the trip was learning about the evolving role of social media in journalism. The students discussed how platforms like Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok have transformed news consumption and audience interaction, making information more accessible and immediate.

Local

GCC ministers tour Gardenia popup, attend epic theatrical performance

Officials explore Gulf heritage, sustainability initiatives and cultural showcase in Kuwait



(From left to right) Omani Minister Salim Al-Mahrouqi, Saudi Minister Ahmed Al-Khateeb, Kuwaiti Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Qatari Minister Saad Al-Kharji and Bahraini Minister Fatima Al-Sairafi pose for a group photo.



Tourism ministers listen to an explanation about the national Kuwaiti museum artifacts.



Tourism ministers check the artifacts in the museum.



KUWAIT: GCC tourism ministers visited the Gardenia popup exhibition at the National Museum of Kuwait on Sunday and attended the epic theatrical performance "Ocean of the Earth" at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center's National Theater.

During their visit, the ministers toured the Gardenia exhibition, which showcases the cultural and natural heritage of the Gulf countries, and the latest technologies used in museum displays. They received a detailed briefing on the exhibition's focus on environmental and aesthetic diversity in regional gardens and plant life. The tour included various sections highlighting native plants, unique ecosystems and a pavilion dedicated to sustainability and smart gardens. The ministers are in Kuwait for the ninth meeting of GCC tourism ministers. Architect Bashar Al-Salem, Founder and CEO of Kayan, guided the ministers and ambassadors on an informative tour, showing them the distinctive landscapes, gardens and plant life in Kuwait, explaining the exhibition's keenness to raise awareness about sustainable gardening practices and the role of green spaces in enhancing urban environments.

Organized by Kayan, a leading Kuwait-based architecture and construction firm, in collaboration with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, the Gardenia exhibition supports Kuwait's art movement and promotes cultural exchange. It features artistic works in painting, sculpture, and music, fostering connections between artists and the public. Kuwait Times and Kuwait News are the official media sponsors of the event.

The exhibition also provides a platform for showcasing outstanding artworks and encouraging young talents. Additionally, it includes sections on agricultural products and outdoor garden spaces, along with specialized workshops and seminars on garden



Kuwait News and Kuwait Times booths.



lighting design and urban planning, offering visitors opportunities to learn from experts.

Produced by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information, the theatrical performance "Ocean of the Earth" delivers a powerful artistic message through an epic drama inspired by the life of the late Kuwaiti astronomer Saleh Al-Ujairi. Combining theater, music, visual effects and modern technology, the production presents a visionary narrative.

Written and directed by artist Abdullah Abdurassoul, the performance marks the launch of Kuwait: The Arab Capital of Culture and Media 2025. It artistically portrays historical events, highlighting Kuwait's cultural leadership in knowledge transfer and future exploration through an innovative, high-tech theatrical experience featuring renowned artists. — KUNA



Tourism an effective tool for supporting economy: Minister

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Chairman of the Ninth Meeting of Tourism Ministers in the GCC, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, stressed on Monday that tourism has become an effective tool for supporting the economy and diversifying sources of income. During his speech at the meeting, Minister Al-Mutairi conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, along with their heartfelt wishes for the success of this meeting.

"Our meeting today reflects our firm belief in the importance of coordinating efforts and unifying visions to enhance the tourism sector, especially in light of global changes and challenges facing this vital sector," said the Kuwaiti minister. The minister stated that with the development of technologies and changes in travel preferences, it



has become necessary to create innovative tourism experiences that enhance the competitiveness of the sector and make it more attractive to tourists from within and outside the region.

He pointed out that the GCC countries possess rich and diverse tourism components that combine authentic heritage and an ancient cultural legacy, in addition to a unique natural environment and advanced infrastructure. Moreover, he mentioned that it is necessary to develop unified policies and

strategies that enhance Gulf tourism cooperation and achieve maximum benefit from the available capabilities.

In turn, the GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi congratulated Minister Al-Mutairi on his nomination as Chairman of the Regional Commission for the Middle East of the UN Tourism Organization for two years. He also congratulated Kuwait on winning the bid to host the Arab Capital of Culture and Media 2025, an achievement

that reflects the leading position of Kuwait and the GCC countries in supporting culture, arts, and strengthening Arab identity.

He expressed his great pride in the remarkable achievements made by the Gulf countries that enhance their position on the international stage, congratulating the UAE on selecting Al-Ain as the Gulf Tourism Capital for 2025. Al-Budaiwi congratulated Oman on the launch of the unified promotional identity of the Sultanate, which will contribute to enhancing its position as a tourist and investment destination both regionally and globally.

He also congratulated Saudi Arabia on winning the bid to host the 2034 World Cup, which reflects the great excellence in the fields of sports and infrastructure and confirms the Kingdom's ability to organize the largest global sporting events. Furthermore, Al-Budaiwi stressed that the tourism sector in the GCC countries is witnessing a qualitative transformation, thanks to the lofty directives of the GCC leaders and the tireless efforts of the ministers.

Al-Budaiwi thanked the ministers for their support and approval of the General Secretariat's idea to hold a joint Gulf tourism event that will be organized on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos next year, to enhance and highlight the efforts of our countries in the field of tourism globally and the global status they have achieved in this area. — KUNA



Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher Ibrahim Duaij Al-Sabah

Officials discuss human rights, review reports

KUWAIT: The Permanent National Committee for Preparing Reports and Following Up on Recommendations on Human Rights held its first meeting for the year 2025, chaired by Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher Ibrahim Duaij Al-Sabah, at the Foreign Ministry headquarters to follow up on the implementation of its international obligations and enhance its approach in this regard.

The committee reviewed the most prominent work achieved during the past year, which reflected Kuwait's fulfillment of its international commitments, especially within the framework of its membership in the Human Rights Council, which is entering its second year. This included discussions on the sixth periodic national report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The meeting also addressed the fourth periodic report on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) and the submission of the fourth national report on the progress made regarding the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 30 years (Beijing+30). The third comprehensive report was submitted to monitor progress made in implementing the regional strategy for the protection of Arab women (Women, Peace and Security and Security Council Resolution 1325), as well as the report responding to the questions of the US Congress on the human rights situation in Kuwait.

Additionally, preparations were made for the fourth periodic national report in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism and the second periodic national report for the Arab Charter on Human Rights, along with working on preparing the US State Department report on combating human trafficking. The Committee also discussed its work program for 2025, including preparations to submit and discuss its report for the fourth Universal Periodic Review, which highlights its efforts to promote and protect human rights in line with the vision of 'New Kuwait 2035.'

It also enhances its role in supporting human rights. In the context of strengthening cooperation with civil society institutions, the Committee held a meeting with representatives of human rights actors, recognizing the importance of the partnership between the government and civil society in implementing international commitments, particularly those related to protecting the rights of women, children, and persons with disabilities.

The meeting discussed proposals for training workshops and events to be organized during the current year within the framework of Kuwait's commitment to developing national capacities and supporting its efforts in the field of human rights. In her speech during the meeting, Sheikhha Jawaher stressed that this meeting represents a fundamental step in enhancing cooperation between the government and civil society, emphasizing Kuwait's keenness to fulfill its international obligations and promote human rights at all levels. She explained that this meeting is a continuation of a series of meetings held by the committee during 2024, confirming its approach based on cooperation and partnership with various stakeholders.

MoH and WHO seek to improve healthcare coverage and quality

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) of Kuwait, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), launched a pivotal workshop on February 17, 2025 focusing on "The development of a national Health Information Governance and Management Framework." The launching event, held at the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization, gathered key stakeholders from across the public, private, and civil sectors, as well as health experts from various countries, to chart the way forward.

The workshop which runs until February 19, 2025 aims to define strategies for ensuring the proper governance of health data in Kuwait. It underscores the critical role of data in enhancing healthcare systems, supporting evidence-based policies, ensuring patient privacy, and achieving universal health coverage. Key discussions during the workshop focus on issues including data quality, privacy protection, and interoperability, with building trust in the use and management of health data. WHO representatives, including Dr. Assad Hafeez, WHO Representative to Kuwait, Dr. Henry Doctor, WHO EMRO Coordinator for Information Systems for Health, and Dr. Salmi Al Salmi, Consultant from Oman College of Health Sciences, will lead sessions on global best practices, lessons learned, and actionable frameworks for health data governance.

The workshop will also feature important contributions from Dr. Vikas Dwivedi from UNICEF, the private sector, and other national stakeholders. A range of national stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health, Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), and the Ministry of Justice, are participating, contributing to the discussions about their expectations and roles in ensuring ethical, patient-centered health data governance.

Speaking at the launch of the workshop, Dr. Assad Hafeez emphasized the need for a multi-stakeholder



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) launched a pivotal workshop on February 17, 2025.

approach to successfully implement the health data governance framework and reiterated the WHO's commitment to continuing to support Kuwait in building a responsive, inclusive, and effective health data ecosystem. The collaborative nature of this initiative sets the stage for a more integrated and sustainable health data management model in Kuwait.

Dr. Fatima Al-Asoomi, Director of the National Center for Health Information, expressed her gratitude to all participants for their active and valuable contributions. She emphasized that the efforts to enhance health data governance in Kuwait are only just beginning. Dr. Al-Asoomi reiterated the Center's unwavering commitment to collaborating with all relevant stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the governance framework, which will play a pivotal role in improving healthcare services and advancing the United Nations

Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the course of the two-day event, participants will engage in collaborative activities aimed at identifying gaps within current policies, prioritizing the governance of health data, addressing legal and ethical considerations, and developing a comprehensive policy framework that will guide the future management of health data in Kuwait.

Over the course of two days, the participants will engage in group activities focusing on identifying gaps in current policies, defining priorities for health data governance, addressing legal and ethical considerations, and designing a policy framework to guide the future of health data management in Kuwait. As a result of the workshop, an action plan will be developed to guide the implementation of the national health data governance framework.

The group also learned about the role of the governors in looking after and promoting development in the various areas of their governorates and the role of government and private sector in supporting this, especially economic and civic engagement. The trip ended with exploring the governorate of Ahmadi, home of Kuwait's oil and energy production. There, the group learned about the history of oil discovery in Kuwait and how it went on to drive Kuwait's economic progress and much-valued social development for decades.

The group then stopped for a fabulous lunch at the brand new Park Inn hotel in the Mahboula area, where they were met by Narjes Alyousifi, the Chair of the hotel's board of directors. Alyousifi gave the group a tour of the hotel premises where they were impressed by its modern Italian design, while appreciating the combination of Italian and Turkish craftsmanship in the interior finishes and most notably the woodwork installations from the Republic of Benin featured throughout the hotel.

The group then continued the trip to the Farwan-iyah and Jahra governorates while enjoying a film on the history and development of the State of Kuwait. At the end of the trip the members expressed their appreciation for the club's efforts in organizing this trip and wished Kuwait continued success and prosperity as it celebrates its National and Liberation days under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Ambassador of Kuwait to India Meshal Al-Shemali meets with Director General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations Nandini Singla in New Delhi. - KUNA

Kuwaiti ambassador, Indian official discuss enhancing cultural ties

NEW DELHI: Kuwait's Ambassador to India, Meshal Al-Shemali, held talks on Monday with the Director General of India's Council for Cultural Relations, Nandini Singla, in New Delhi to enhance cooperation in cultural and educational fields. In a statement to KUNA, Al-Shemali said that during his meeting with Singla, they discussed expanding areas of cooperation, especially in cultural and educational domains, pointing out that the Indian-Kuwaiti relationship has been built on deep-rooted cultural and social ties dating back centuries.

The ambassador stressed the importance of exchanging visits between officials of the two countries working in the cultural field to enhance communication and open new cultural and scientific avenues. He also underscored the significance of exchanges between scholars and intellectuals of both countries and creating opportunities for student engagement from both nations. Al-Shemali pointed out that Kuwait's Ministry of Information launched a program on Kuwait Radio for Indians in April 2024 in response to the needs of the Indian community, based on the significance the Kuwaiti leadership places on spreading Indian culture and arts.

On her part, Singla expressed her happiness regarding the strong cultural relations between the two countries, stressing the importance of further strengthening and upgrading them. The first agreement in the field of cultural and educational cooperation was signed in 1970, and the cultural cooperation agreement was renewed for the period 2025-2029 during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit in December 2024. - KUNA

International Friends Club explores Kuwait

KUWAIT: Members of the International Friends Club put together a group trip to explore the various sights and attractions in Kuwait, covering Kuwait's six governorates. A group of ambassadors and diplomats as well as members and friends of the club and their spouses took part in this trip, where the group travelled around Kuwait in a tour bus starting from the capital, around the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation headquarters and the residence of Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al Sabah.

The club's advisor, Narjes Alshatti, became the tour guide on this trip as she offered commentary on the background and history of the various areas through which the bus travelled and the sites the bus stopped at. She also talked about the heritage as well as the cultural and social value related to the areas and sights along the route of the trip. She was assisted by Jibril, the consul general of the Republic of Benin, who offered a French translation to the French-speaking members. The route started at the capital governorate then proceeded through the governorates of: Hawally, Mubarak Al-Kabeer and Ahmadi.



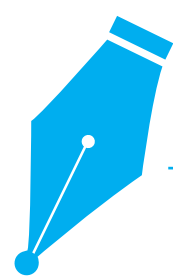
The power of living in the moment

By Donia K Thomas

In today's fast-paced world, it often feels like we're always racing toward something — whether it's the next big milestone, the upcoming weekend, or even the future version of ourselves that we hope to become. We find ourselves either dwelling on the past, replaying old conversations or rehashing regrets, or obsessively planning for the future. I experienced this firsthand as I moved through each grade, feeling a rush of excitement with every new class and new friends. But as I neared the end of my school years, I realized there is very little time left to truly enjoy it.

Living in the moment means fully immersing ourselves in the present, without distraction. It's about letting go of worries, judgments, and expectations, and simply experiencing life as it unfolds. Life is very short and beautiful, and it's important to make the most of the time we have.

Living in the moment means focusing on what's happening right now — without letting our minds



Students' Corner

wander to past mistakes or future worries. It's about being fully engaged in whatever we're doing, whether that's having a conversation, enjoying a meal, or simply sitting quietly in nature. By staying present, we can really savor these experiences, rather than rushing through them or missing the small details. This practice helps us feel less stressed as we stop constantly thinking about what's next or what's already behind us.

Living in the moment also strengthens our con-

nections with others. When we give people our full attention, truly listening to them, we build deeper, more meaningful relationships. As we make a habit of living in the moment, we start to appreciate life more, noticing the small joys and feeling more content with what we have right now. It's a simple way to make each day feel richer and more meaningful.



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PARIS: (Left) French President Emmanuel Macron welcomes European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. (Right) Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz arrives for an informal summit of European leaders to discuss the situation in Ukraine at The Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris on February 17, 2025. — AFP photos

European leaders hold crisis talks

Bloc mulls coordinated response to Trump's shock policy shift on war in Ukraine

PARIS: European leaders met on Monday for emergency talks in Paris called by French President Emmanuel Macron to agree a coordinated response to a shock policy shift on the war in Ukraine by the new US administration of Donald Trump.

With European policymakers leaving the annual Munich Security Forum dazed by Vice President JD Vance's withering attack on the European Union, key EU leaders, as well as UK Premier Sir Keir Starmer, were in Paris for the summit. In the most concrete sign yet of the US policy shift, the top diplomats of the United States and Russia were Tuesday due to have the first such face-to-face meeting since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, a clear sign Trump wants to bring President Vladimir Putin in from the cold.

Facing one of their biggest challenges in years, European leaders fear that Trump wants to make peace with Russia in talks that will not even involve Kyiv, let alone the European Union. Trump sidelined Kyiv and its European backers last week when he called Putin to talk about starting negotiations to end the conflict and said he could meet the Kremlin chief "very soon". Other key participants in the summit include NATO chief Mark Rutte, Danish Premier Mette Frederiksen

— who has in the last weeks battled to rebuff Trump's territorial claim to Greenland — and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Macron held telephone talks with Trump just before the summit, the French presidency said.

Macron has described Trump's return for a second term in the White House as an "electroshock" and there are initial signs some of his counterparts are being stung into action. Britain's Starmer, aware of the importance of London showing commitment to European security after Brexit, said Sunday that he was willing to put "our own troops on the ground if necessary" in response to what he called "a once-in-a-generation moment for the collective security of our continent". Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, another key participant, said on Monday he would urge European leaders at the emergency summit to "immediately" boost Europe's defenses, warning they do not match Russia's.

"We will not be able to effectively help Ukraine if we do not immediately take practical steps regarding our own defense capabilities," Tusk told reporters. Trump's special envoy to Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, has said Europe would not be directly involved in talks on Ukraine, though it would still have "input". French For-

eign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said Sunday it would fall to Europe to guarantee any peace deal in Ukraine, adding he expected the United States to "revise their level of commitment to NATO, including in terms of geography". The American policy shift "requires that we truly wake up, and even take a leap forward, to take our place for the security of the European continent", Barrot said.

But the notion of sending European troops to Ukraine — even after a ceasefire — was already causing friction within the European Union. Spain's foreign minister, Jose Manuel Albares, however said that, while it was necessary for Europeans to meet and prepare decisions, "nobody is currently planning to send troops to Ukraine, especially because peace is still far off". Germany on Monday agreed, with deputy government spokeswoman Christiane Hoffmann telling reporters it was "premature" to talk about sending troops to Ukraine. Chancellor Olaf Scholz had said late Sunday that negotiations on Ukraine's future could not be successful without European guarantees "that we will have created and accepted". Meanwhile Hungary, whose Prime Minister Viktor Orban is close to both Trump and Putin, said that Monday's conference was an effort to "prevent" peace. — AFP

We stand together for a free and sovereign Ukraine



By Michal Cholewa, Head of Polish Mission and Anne Koistinen, EU Ambassador to the State of Kuwait

It has been three years since Russia launched an illegal and unprovoked full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine. The EU and its Member States including Poland, which is Ukraine's neighboring country and the current president of the EU Council, remain united in supporting Ukraine economically, financially, militarily and in terms of humanitarian assistance.

Despite being a permanent UN Security Council member, Russia has repeatedly violated international law and the UN Charter. Even prior to the February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia illegally annexed Ukraine's Crimea in 2014, destabilized the country's eastern regions and later on gobbled them up. This fight is about respect of fundamental values and principles of international law, as enshrined in the UN Charter, which Russia has manifestly violated. We demand that Russia is held accountable for the war crimes, which have been committed in Ukraine. Furthermore, Russia must cease its military aggression and withdraw all forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine. We also demand that Russia fully respects Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognized borders.

Kuwait has been the victim of a war of aggression and numerous war crimes. Hence, Kuwait has always expressed its unwavering support to Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity. We appreciate this principled stance, which was evident in Kuwait's support to UN resolutions condemning the Russian invasion and calling for its immediate halt, and we count on Kuwait's continuous support in this regard.

Polish assistance was the first to reach the Ukrainian front in significant quantities. We will continue to support the Ukrainian people as long as necessary. As the EU Council presidency, Poland will promote adherence to international law and respect for human rights. We will seek sustained support for Ukraine and its reconstruction, for which the aggressor should pay. We will also advocate for increasing pressure on Russia and its allies to end the war through the policy of severe international sanctions. The definitive discontinuation of Russian energy sources imports is essential for Europe's energy security, which the Polish presidency will also actively pursue. The EU is Ukraine's largest overall donor. We have contributed over 134 billion euros, including close to 50 billion euros in military aid. Our sanctions are working. Russia's economy is struggling. We cannot loosen the grip now. Ukraine's victory is a top priority for the EU. But for peace to endure, in the way that Ukraine deserves, we must push the Kremlin to change its goals. The Ukrainians fight very bravely, but we also have to be stronger for Ukraine.

Moscow furious over Italy's 'Third Reich' comparison

ROME: Russia has responded furiously after Italy's president equated its war in Ukraine to the aggression of Nazi Germany, fuelling existing tensions between Rome and Moscow over the conflict.

Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova late on Sunday warned that the comments by President Sergio Mattarella "cannot and will never be left without consequences". Mattarella, Italy's ceremonial head of state, had given a speech defending multilateral institutions at the University of Aix-Marseille in France earlier this month.

Speaking about the conditions that gave rise to World War II, he warned of "authoritarian drifts" where "the criterion of domination prevailed over co-

operation. And wars of conquest followed". "That was the Third Reich's (Nazi Germany's) project in Europe. Russia's current aggression against Ukraine is of this very nature," he continued. Zakharova initially hit back on Friday, accusing Mattarella of "outrageous blatantly false historical parallels".

She accused Italy — which along with other NATO countries has sent weapons and money to help Ukraine defend itself against Moscow — of "pumping the terrorist neo-Nazi regime in Ukraine with modern lethal weaponry". She launched another verbal attack on Sunday, criticizing "the president of a country that historically has been among those who attacked our country". "Unfortunately, Italy was the country where fascism originated," she added, referring to Benito Mussolini's regime that allied with Nazi Germany during World War II.

Russia, then the Soviet Union, was allied with Britain and the United States against Nazi Germany during the war. Politicians in Italy jumped to Mattarella's defense, including Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who said that Moscow's comments "offend the entire Italian nation". — AFP



This combination of pictures shows Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer (left) and US President Donald Trump. — AFP

Starmer to meet Trump 'next week': UK govt

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer will meet US President Donald Trump in Washington next week to discuss a "wide range of issues", a British government spokesperson confirmed on Monday.

Starmer is seeking to foster ties with Trump in a delicate balancing act of maintaining good relations with both the new US administration and the European Union, which Britain left five years ago. He is also hoping the UK can act as a bridge between Europe and the United States over the war in Ukraine, stressing that Britain could have "a unique role" in helping to secure any ceasefire in Ukraine.

"The prime minister will travel to Washington DC next week," the spokesperson said.

The encounter will be the first face-to-face talks between the two leaders since Trump started his second term in the White House in January. "The prime minister looks forward to meeting President Trump shortly to discuss how we can deepen the special relationship across trade, investment and security," the Downing Street spokesperson said.

Trump has said he will impose tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from March and has made sudden policy shifts on the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. The confirmation of the US visit comes as Starmer headed to Paris for a hastily convened meeting of European leaders on Monday on Washington's policy shift on the war in Ukraine.

Trump sidelined Kyiv and its European backers last week when he called his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to discuss ending the conflict — leaving them fearful they will be excluded from any peace negotiations. Starmer has said he is willing to put British troops on the ground in Ukraine as part of potential peacekeeping efforts, and on Monday called for any peace deal to be "lasting, just and enduring". — AFP



TAWILA, Sudan: Displaced Sudanese women and children gather at a camp near the town of Tawila in North Darfur. — AFP

UN seeks \$6 billion to ease 'appalling' suffering in Sudan

GENEVA: The United Nations said on Monday it is seeking \$6 billion for Sudan this year from international donors to help ease suffering in what it called one of the most devastating crises of our times, characterized by mass displacement and growing famine.

The UN appeal represents a rise of more than 40 percent from last year's for Sudan at a time when aid budgets around the world are under increasing strain, partly due to a pause in funding announced by US President Donald Trump last month that has affected life-saving programs across the globe.

But the UN says the funds are necessary because

the impact of the 22-month war between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) — that has already displaced a fifth of its population and stoked severe hunger among around half its population — looks set to worsen. "Sudan is a humanitarian emergency of shocking proportions," said UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher ahead of the launch. "Famine is taking hold. An epidemic of sexual violence rages. Children are being killed and injured. The suffering is appalling." Famine conditions have been reported in at least five locations in Sudan, including displacement camps in Darfur, the UN statement said, adding that this was set to worsen with continued fighting and the collapse of basic services. One of the famine-stricken camps was attacked by the RSF last week as the paramilitary group tries to tighten its grip on its Darfur stronghold. While some aid agencies say they have received waivers from Washington to provide aid in Sudan, uncertainty remains on the extent of coverage for providing famine relief. — Reuters

International

Khamenei warns of attempts to create 'discord' in Iran

Zionist entity and US 'cannot do a damn thing' against Tehran: Official

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned Monday against what he called "soft war" tactics employed by enemies in a bid to sow discord within the Islamic republic.

"Today, we have no concerns regarding hard defense or the enemy's military threats. Islamic Iran possesses strong capabilities to counter such threats, ensuring a high level of security for its people," said Khamenei during a speech in Tehran. He said Iran's "enemies" — referring to Zionist entity and the United States — sought to create problems through "soft war threats" aimed at "manipulating public opinion, creating discord and casting doubt over the foundations of the Islamic Revolution".

The remarks came a day after Zionist entity received a shipment of heavy American weapons during a visit by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio. On Sunday, Zionist entity Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his country had dealt a "mighty blow to Iran's terror axis" and vowed to "finish the job" against Iran with US support. The war also saw rare direct attacks between Iran and Zionist entity for the first time, after engaging in a shadow war for years.

In recent videos, Netanyahu has addressed Iranians in a seemingly friendly tone, and in one, he claimed that the Iranian government was leading its people "closer to the abyss".

During his speech, Khamenei acknowledged that Iranians "have problems and legitimate expectations", referring to the economic difficulties faced by the country due to international sanctions.

Meanwhile, Iran's foreign ministry said on Monday that US and Zionist entity threats against it were a blatant violation of international law and that they could not "do a damn thing" to hurt Tehran. The comments came after Zionist entity Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Jerusalem on Sunday and said their countries were determined to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions and its influence in the Middle East.

Netanyahu said Zionist entity had dealt a "mighty blow" to Iran since the start of the war in Gaza and that with the support of US President Donald Trump "I have no doubt we can and will finish the job".

Speaking at a weekly press conference on Monday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei responded: "When it comes to a country like Iran, they cannot do a damn thing". "You cannot threaten Iran on one hand and claim to support dialogue on the other hand," Baghaei said, state media reported. Trump has expressed an openness to a deal with Tehran while also reinstating the "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran that was applied during his first term to stop Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. While stopping short of renewing a ban on direct talks with Washington decreed in 2018, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has criticized Trump's previous administration for not honoring its promises.

In 2018, Trump pulled the US out of Tehran's 2015 nuclear pact with world powers and reimposed sanctions that have crippled Iran's economy. A year later, Iran reacted by breaching the



TEHRAN: This handout picture released by the office of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on February 17, 2025. — AFP

pact's nuclear curbs, accelerating enrichment of uranium to up to 60 percent purity, close to the roughly 90 percent of weapons grade. It says its nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes

Despite spokesman Baghaei's defiant words, Tehran's influence throughout the region has weakened severely with its regional allies - known as the "Axis of Re-

sistance" - either dismantled or badly hurt since the start of the Zionist entity conflict in Gaza and the fall of Bashar Al-Assad in Syria in December.

US President Donald Trump, who returned to the White House for a second term in January, has reinstated his "maximum pressure" policy of sanctions against Iran, mirroring his approach during his first

term. Under this policy, the United States unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, accusing Tehran of pursuing nuclear weapons, an allegation that Tehran has consistently denied. Trump has recently called for striking a deal with Iran, but Khamenei later said "no problem will be solved by negotiating with America". — Agencies

Pope's condition 'complex', hospital stay extended

ROME: Pope Francis, hospitalized for bronchitis four days ago, faces a "complex clinical picture" that will require the 88-year-old to stay longer than originally expected, the Vatican said on Monday.

After initially cancelling events through Monday, the Vatican said the pope's weekly Wednesday audience would not go ahead either. "The results of the tests carried out in recent days and today have demonstrated a polymicrobial infection of the respiratory tract that has led to a further change in treatment," it said in a statement.

"All the tests carried out until now are indicative of a complex clinical picture that will require adequate hospitalization," Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni had earlier told reporters that the pope was in "good humor", had rested well overnight, had eaten breakfast and read the newspapers.

A source in the pope's entourage had also insisted there was no alarm within the Vatican following his Friday admission to Rome's Gemelli hospital. Francis was admitted after a "very busy" two weeks, during which "he was weakened", the source told AFP, but added: "There is no alarmism."

A Vatican source told AFP the pope was receiving oxygen. Yet the news of the more complex situation raises fresh concerns about the Argentine pontiff, who has suffered increasing health issues in recent years.

In the days before his admission, Francis had ad-



ROME: A candle with a portrait of Pope Francis is set at the bottom of a statue of Pope John Paul II at the Gemelli hospital where Pope Francis is hospitalized for tests and treatment for bronchitis on February 17, 2025. — AFP

mitted to difficulty breathing and had asked aides several times to read his speeches aloud on his behalf. At his weekly general audience last Wednesday, he said he "cannot yet" read his own speeches, adding with a smile: "I hope that next time I can."

But he had continued taking meetings, including one with the prime minister of Slovakia on Friday

morning, shortly before he headed to hospital. Francis had part of one of his lungs removed as a young man and has been particularly susceptible to respiratory infections.

He pulled out of a Good Friday event last year after catching what the Vatican called a "light flu", but went on to lead Easter services as planned. A

year earlier, in March 2023, Francis was admitted to hospital for three nights with bronchitis, which was cured with antibiotics.

Another bout of bronchitis caused him to cancel a December 2023 visit to Dubai to participate in the United Nations COP28 climate change conference. The pope also underwent a hernia operation in June 2023 and in 2021 underwent surgery for a type of diverticulitis, an inflammation of pockets that develop in the lining of the intestine. He has been using a wheelchair since 2022 because of persistent knee pain and uses a cane during rare moments standing up. Francis has also fallen a couple of times in the past few months, bruising his forearm in January and sporting a large bruise on his right jaw in December, caused by toppling from his bed.

Yet despite his health troubles, Francis remains an active pontiff. In September 2024, he completed a four-nation Asia-Pacific tour, the longest of his papacy by duration and distance. And he has a packed schedule, from daily private audiences to the weekly Angelus prayer on a Sunday, and the Wednesday public audience. He followed Sunday's mass this week on television from hospital and sent a written address for the Angelus.

"I would have liked to be among you but, as you know, I am here at the Gemelli Hospital because I still need some treatment for my bronchitis," Francis wrote. The Jesuit has left open the option of resigning, like his predecessor Benedict XVI, if he became unable to carry out his duties. But in a memoir published last year, the pope wrote that he did "not have any cause serious enough to make me think of resigning". Resignation is a "distant possibility" that would be justified only in the event of "a serious physical impediment", he wrote. — AFP

Rubio meets MBS in Saudi...

Continued from Page 1

President Trump's widely criticized plan for the United States to take control of the Gaza Strip and move its Palestinian inhabitants elsewhere.

As Moscow and Washington are preparing for a summit between their two leaders, Europe and Kyiv are worried they will try to settle the three-year war in Ukraine without them. The Ukrainian president posted a video of himself getting off the plane in Abu Dhabi and holding talks with officials. "Our top priority is bringing even more of our people home from captivity," Zelensky said on X. "We will also focus on investments and economic partnership, as well as a large-scale humanitarian program," he added.

Zelensky said Kyiv was not invited to the discussions in Riyadh, while European leaders were gathering in Paris for emergency talks on how to respond to the radical pivot by the new US administration. Trump is pushing for a swift resolution to the three-year conflict in Ukraine, while Moscow sees his outreach as a chance to gain concessions on some of its long-standing gripes about Washington's military presence in Europe.

Zelensky said Kyiv "did not know

anything about" the talks in Riyadh, according to Ukrainian news agencies, and that it "cannot recognize any things or any agreements about us without us". Moscow said ahead of the meeting that Putin and Trump wanted to move on from "abnormal relations" and that it saw no place for Europeans to be at any negotiating table.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and senior Putin aide Yuri Ushakov will meet with US Secretary of State Rubio, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz and Special Envoy Steve Witkoff. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters the talks would be "primarily devoted to restoring the whole complex of Russian-American relations", alongside discussions on "possible negotiations on a Ukrainian resolution, and organizing a meeting between the two presidents".

Moscow, which for years has sought to roll back NATO's presence in Europe, has made clear it wants to hold bilateral talks with the United States on a plethora of broad security issues, not just a possible Ukraine ceasefire. As European leaders gathered in Paris for an emergency security summit, Russia's Lavrov said Monday he saw no point in them taking part in any Ukraine talks. "I don't know what they would do at the negotiating table... if they are going to sit at the negotiating table with the aim of continuing war, then why invite them there?" he told a press conference in Moscow. — Agencies

War-weary Gazans reeling from '500 days of humiliation'

GAZA: For 500 days since an unprecedented Hamas attack on the Zionist entity triggered the Gaza Strip's deadliest war, Mohammed Abu Mursa has grappled with "humiliation, suffering and bloodshed" in his fight for survival. Abu Mursa and his family have been displaced more than a dozen times since the war began, moving from place to place across the Palestinian territory in a desperate attempt to stay safe, he said.

"It's been 500 days of humiliation, suffering and bloodshed," said the resident of northern Gaza, finally able to return home after a fragile ceasefire took hold on Jan 19. "I just hope the ceasefire holds," he added. "There is only destruction around us." Like the Abu Mursa family, nearly all of Gaza's 2.4 million residents have been displaced at least once during the war.

Within hours of the Hamas attack, launched a blistering offensive on Gaza. More than 16 months later, vast swathes of the territory are in ruins. The Zionist military campaign by land, air and sea has killed at least 48,284 people in Gaza, the majority of them civilians.

Khadija Hammou, 56, said that the 500 days since the war began have felt like "500 years". "There is no tent to shelter us, no water to drink or bathe in, no means of survival in Gaza," she told AFP. "Everywhere we go... there is only suffering." To Hammou, the war has "revealed to the world that (the Zionist entity) is committing massacres and that our people are the occupied and the oppressed".



GAZA: Palestinian children play amidst the rubble in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip on Feb 17, 2025. — AFP

Despite the ceasefire and the diplomatic efforts to extend it, Gazans are concerned that the violence could reignite. "Our fear is that the war will resume" and the world will fail to stop the Zionist entity's actions, said Ayman Al-Jamali, 39, a resident of the Tal al-Hawa neighborhood in Gaza City. "The world watches the massacres unfold without doing anything," he said.

Jamali accused Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of "seeking any opportunity to destroy Gaza", which for years has been under a crippling Zionist-led blockade and, during the current war, a siege. Earlier on Monday, Netanyahu said he was "committed" to a plan proposed by US President Donald Trump for his government to take control of Gaza and expel

its inhabitants to neighboring Egypt or Jordan.

The proposal, which experts say would violate international law, has triggered widespread outrage. "I've never traveled in my life, and I don't intend to leave the country unless they kill us," said Jamali, who now lives in a tent he set up amid the rubble of his former home. "My tent is a witness to (the Zionist entity's) genocide."

Exhausted by the war, Mohammed Skik, 47, fears his family may have to live in a tent for years to come. "Enough with this destruction and humiliation... We are tired, I just hope our children can live like children in the rest of the world," he said. The United Nations has said more than \$53 billion will be required to rebuild Gaza and end the "humanitarian catastrophe" that has gripped the territory. — AFP

International

Jailed PKK leader working on Turkey-Kurd peace plan

Families yearn for an end to PKK-Turkey war

ARBIL: Jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan is working on a "democratic" settlement to the four-decade conflict between Turkey and Kurdish militants, a pro-Kurdish party delegation member said Monday after wrapping up talks in Arbil. A delegation from the main pro-Kurdish DEM party visited Ocalan twice over the past weeks, and then held talks with Turkey's main parliamentary factions before traveling to Iraq last weekend.



ARBIL: Keskin Bayindir, co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Regions Party (DBP), speaks during a press conference following a meeting with Kurdish leaders in Arbil. — AFP photos

The delegation in Iraq, which included two DEM lawmakers as well as Keskin Bayindir from the Democratic Regions Party (DBP) with two seats in the Turkish parliament, met with Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani in Arbil. "Mr. Ocalan is working hard to find a process that could lead to a solution despite all the difficult conditions," Bayindir told reporters after the meeting.

"He is working to remove this issue from the field of war and conflict and to establish a democratic and legal process" to resolve the conflict, he added. "This roadmap will also stop the crises in the Middle East," Bayindir said.

Although no timing has been set for presenting Ocalan's plan, Kurdish politicians are confident it will be soon, and no later than Newroz, the Kurdish New Year, in March. Barzani said he "hopes the PKK adopts a strategic vision towards the process," adding that today's opportunity "must not be missed."

"Experience has proven that war and weapons do not solve any problem," Barzani said in a statement following the meeting. He added he is prepared to offer "full assistance and support" to ensure the success of the peace process, which he described as "an important and historic opportunity."

The pro-Kurdish Turkish lawmakers conveyed a message Sunday from Ocalan to Iraqi Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani, a crucial powerbroker in Kurdish affairs. Their delegation will also hold talks in the city

Sulaymaniyah Tuesday with Kurdish officials including the autonomous region's deputy prime minister Qubad Talabani.

Families worried

A mother weeping for a teenaged daughter shot dead by a Turkish sniper and a father mourning a son killed by PKK militants are among countless families hoping that a new peace drive can end Turkey's four-decade-old Kurdish conflict.

Both live in the Kurdish-majority southeast, where tens of thousands of lives have been lost in violence between the Turkish state and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The new peace efforts are backed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government, and families on both sides of the divide want it to succeed. At her home in the city of Diyarbakir, Fahriye Cukur, 63, cannot take her eyes off a picture on the wall of her daughter Rozerin in school uniform. She was killed during clashes between militants and security forces in January 2016.

The collapse of a truce in 2015 sparked a new round of the conflict when many government curfews were imposed, including in the city's Sur district. Cukur said her daughter — who was passionate about photography — had gone to Sur during a break in a curfew to collect exam papers from friends. But the authorities suddenly reduced the break from five hours to three and the fighting reignited.

"People were stuck there, including my daughter.

She took refuge at the home of an elderly couple, but when she tried to leave, she was shot by a sniper," her mother told AFP.

The family found out about the death through a news bulletin. It took five months, several protests and a hunger strike for the grieving parents to get her body back. Cukur said the authorities had mixed up their teenage daughter with a female PKK fighter, codenamed Roza, who had been hiding in the same district. They claimed she had been trained in the mountains, but her mother told AFP: "My daughter was never engaged in political activism.

"She loved school, she wanted to become a psychiatrist and help her people," she added, indicating the "TC" insignia — meaning "republic of Turkey" — on her school uniform. The PKK's jailed founder Abdullah Ocalan is widely expected to urge followers to lay down their arms in the coming weeks.

Many families hope this will end the conflict and spare other families from the pain they live with.

"We can't forget what happened but we have to hope. I love two more kids: how do I know the same thing won't happen to them tomorrow?" she said. Last month, the International Crisis Group said clashes between the militants and Turkish troops were largely confined to northern parts of Iraq and Syria, with violence on Turkish soil at its lowest level since 2015. "At least we can breathe a bit now," she said. "I want the bloodshed to stop. I want a ceasefire. And I am not alone." — AFP



DIYARBAKIR, Turkey: Men sit in a tea house at the historical Sur district in Diyarbakir, southeastern Turkey, on February 14, 2025.

he said. Russian children are also being encouraged to join pro-military youth movements, a throwback to the days of the USSR. Ivan's school in Istra has set up a small museum displaying objects that belonged to Soviet soldiers in World War II alongside some from those now fighting in Ukraine — including helmets riddled with bullet holes.

Around 20 of the 300 pupils, aged between seven and 18, have joined a group called the "Youth Army" — which says it has 1.7 million members nationwide. "I explain to our children the essence of the ongoing conflict, why it started, that it was an unavoidable decision of our president," Tatiana Kalugina, a music and art teacher who chairs the Youth Army's Istra branch, told AFP.

Putin has long framed the conflict as an existential battle against Ukrainian "neo-Nazis", drawing parallels with the Soviet Union's fight against Adolf Hitler's Germany in World War II. Kyiv and the West reject that narrative, saying Russia wants to conquer and subjugate Ukraine. The Youth Army's agenda covers everything from sports competitions to how to handle a Kalashnikov rifle.

"The motivation for parents... is that the child is disciplined," Kalugina said. They learn "what an order is" and how to be "responsible" toward their comrades, she added. The Kremlin launched its drive to bring its messages on the Ukraine conflict into schools in 2022, with a program of special lessons, called "Important Conversations." Those efforts have become more systematic as the fighting moves towards its fourth year. In a new textbook on Russia's military history for 16 to 17 year-olds, a section on the "special military operation" says it was launched to "defend the population of the Donbas." Kyiv rejects that claim. Alexei, 16, is another young Russian who supports the Russian army. — AFP

Groups slam Australian plan to transfer criminals to Nauru

SYDNEY: Rights groups on Monday denounced an Australian plan to send three violent foreign criminals — including a murderer — to live on the tiny Pacific nation of Nauru. Canberra said Sunday it had paid an undisclosed sum to Nauru — population about 13,000 — in return for it issuing 30-year visas to the trio, who lost their Australian visas due to criminal activity.

"There has to be consideration of the lawfulness of banishing people offshore when they've been living as part of our community," said Jane Favero, deputy chief executive of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

"It's a complete disregard of people's human rights," Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke said the three would be held in immigration detention until they are put on a flight to Nauru or a legal challenge is lodged.

"When somebody has come and treated Australia in a way that has shown appalling character their visas do get cancelled, and when their visas are cancelled they should leave," Burke told reporters. "All three, though, are violent offenders. One is a murderer," he said.

Once in Nauru, they would live in individual dwellings with a shared kitchen space and be allowed to work and move freely, Burke added. Authorities have not disclosed the identities, gender or nationalities of the trio, or said whether they had served sentences for their crimes. Nauru is one of the world's smallest countries with a mainland measuring just 20 square kilometers (around eight square miles). Phosphate mining once made Nauru one of the world's richest countries per capita, but that boon has long dried up, leaving much of the mainland a barren moonscape and its people facing high unemployment and health issues. Australia's government has been searching for a way to deal with migrants who have no other country to go to when their visas are cancelled.

The High Court ruled in 2023 that indefinite detention was "unlawful" if deportation was not an option, leading to the release of 220 people in that situation, including the three now destined for Nauru.

Burke said any decision to transfer others to the Pacific island would depend on the Nauru government. Refugee Council of Australia head Paul Power said the government had a duty to ensure any solution was humane and ensured people's rights and dignity.

"History has shown us the deep mental and physical damage indefinite detention on Nauru has caused," he said. Under a hardline policy introduced in 2012, Australia sent thousands of migrants attempting to reach the country by boat to "offshore processing" centers.

They were held in two detention centers — one on Nauru and another, since shuttered, on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island. The scheme was gradually scaled back following 14 detainee deaths, multiple suicide attempts, and at least six referrals to the International Criminal Court. — AFP

Russia teaches young children to revere army

ISTRA, Russia: On a small stage in a school outside Moscow, a masked soldier presented Ivan with an army flag, a thank you gift signed by Russian troops fighting in Ukraine to the seven-year-old who has sent dozens of letters and gifts to them. Encouraged by his mother, Ivan has offered words of support and praise for those taking part in what the Kremlin calls its "special military operation."

Such events have become common as the Kremlin rallies its youngest citizens to support the initiative and embeds its narratives on the conflict into the curriculum. Thousands like Ivan learn from new history books that justify the Ukraine operation as the latest in a string of successful Russian and Soviet campaigns to defend the motherland. Instilling patriotism in the classroom is just one strand of President Vladimir Putin's wider attempt to elevate the status of the military and champion soldiers and veterans as the country's new elite.

"Children, right from the youngest age, need to learn that they have a duty to protect themselves, their family and their nation," Ivan's mother Alyona Ilyina told AFP. At the school, the masked former Wagner group fighter, codenamed "Raven", posed with Ivan on stage for a photo. His comrade, Yuri, a 39-year old soldier back from a mission near the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, said he fixed the letters to the walls of his shelter near the front. "They were like icons for us,"



MOCOW: Schoolboy Ivan Ilyin, 7, presents a gift to veteran Anatoly, call sign "Voron" (Raven), during a ceremony at a school in the town of Istra. — AFP

News in Brief

Priest knifed to death in Myanmar

YANGON: A Roman Catholic priest was knifed to death in his church in Myanmar by members of an anti-junta rebel group, an official and the head of the country's bishops conference said. Father Donald Martin Ye Naing Win was attacked on Friday by 10 people from a "people's defense force" (PDF) in central Sagaing region's Shwebo township. Myanmar is four years into a bloody civil conflict between the junta and various armed groups including PDFs — bands of former civilians who have taken up arms to oust the generals from power. — AFP

Taliban delegation visiting Japan

KABUL: A Taliban government delegation was visiting Japan for the first time on Monday, in a rare diplomatic visit outside of the region. The Afghan delegation left Kabul on Saturday, in a visit that local media said would last one week and included officials from the higher education, foreign affairs, and economy ministries. "We seek dignified interaction with the world for a strong, united, advanced, prosperous, developed Afghanistan and to be an active member of the international community," Latif Nazari, a deputy minister at the ministry of economy who is part of the delegation, tweeted on Saturday. — AFP

Kazakhstan-Switzerland uranium deal

ALMATY: Switzerland struck a deal with Kazakhstan to buy uranium directly from the world's largest producer for the first time as Bern seeks to relaunch its nuclear power industry, Kazakhstan's national uranium mining firm said on Monday. In a deal with Swiss energy company Axpo, Kazatomprom said they had signed "the first ever contract for the supply of Kazakh natural uranium concentrates for the energy needs of Switzerland's Beznau and Leibstadt nuclear power plants." — AFP

Ugandan veteran hospitalized

NAIROBI: Ugandan opposition figure Kizza Besigye was briefly hospitalized after his health deteriorated following a hunger strike but was back in prison on Monday, his lawyer told AFP. Besigye, 68, is a leading opponent of President Yoweri Museveni — in power for nearly 40 years — whom he has unsuccessfully challenged in four elections. He was abducted in Kenya in November and has been facing the death penalty on treason charges in a court martial that his wife, UNAIDS executive director Winnie Byanyima, has called a "sham." — AFP

US strike in Syria kills militant

WASHINGTON: The US military said Sunday it killed a member of an Al-Qaeda affiliate organization in a precision airstrike in Syria. US Central Command (CENTCOM) said it conducted the strike Saturday "in Northwest Syria targeting and killing a senior finance and logistics official in the terrorist organization Hurras al-Din (HaD), an Al-Qaeda affiliate," according to a statement on X. CENTCOM did not identify its target. The strike was conducted "to disrupt and degrade efforts by terrorists to plan, organize, and conduct attacks against civilians and military personnel" from the United States and allies, the statement continued. — AFP

Man dies in Brazil factory fire

RIO DE JANEIRO: One of the victims hospitalized after a fire at a factory making costumes for Rio de Janeiro's Carnival has died, the hospital where he was being treated said Sunday. Fire officials had said that those affected by the blaze at the Maximus factory were working in precarious conditions in a building with combustible material. Firefighters rescued 21 people from the site in the north of Rio de Janeiro. — AFP

Raid on Pakistan fort kills 4 soldiers

PESHAWAR: A militant raid on a Pakistan fort killed at least four soldiers on Saturday, a senior intelligence official and the military said, the latest in a streak of attacks targeting state forces. More than 1,600 people were killed in attacks in Pakistan in 2024 — the deadliest year in almost a decade — according to the Center for Research and Security Studies, an Islamabad-based analysis group. Most militant violence in Pakistan takes place in its western regions bordering Afghanistan and Iran. — AFP

4.0 magnitude quake hits New Delhi

NEW DELHI: India's capital New Delhi was jolted awake Monday by powerful tremors from a magnitude 4.0 earthquake, with its epicenter on the edge of the sprawling megacity an hour before dawn. There were no immediate reports of major damage, but terrified residents rushed outside as buildings shook. The US Geological Survey said the quake struck at a shallow depth of 10 kilometers (6 miles). Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged people to follow "safety precautions" and stay alert to "possible aftershocks." — AFP

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2025

Zain Kuwait partners with Huawei on BSS digital transformation project

Zain first operator in Kuwait to implement BSS digital upgrade



Nawaf Al-Gharabally and Steven Yi with Zain and Huawei executives.

KUWAIT: Zain Kuwait has partnered with global technology solutions provider, Huawei, to implement a Business Support System (BSS) digital transformation project. This milestone marks a significant step in the company's digital transformation journey, aiming to enhance its technological infrastructure with cutting-edge solutions that comprehensively improve operational efficiency and accelerate the growth of new services to enrich customer experiences.

The project was penciled at Zain's headquarters in Shuwaikh, attended by Nawaf Al-Gharabally, CEO of Zain Kuwait; Steven Yi, President of Huawei Regional Joint Chiefs of Staff; Phillip Gan, President of Huawei Middle East and Central Asia, along with senior executives and teams from both companies.

This project, that positions Zain as the first operator in Kuwait to implement a BSS digital up-



Nawaf Al-Gharabally and Steven Yi sign the project.



From the project's executive meeting.

Cutting-edge solution will drive operational efficiency and accelerate growth of new services

grade, serves as a key pillar in advancing Zain's '4WARD-Progress with Purpose' strategy and vision as the company continues to lead Kuwait's digital transformation as a technology-driven innovator.

Commenting on the occasion, Nawaf Al-Gharabally stated: "Zain is committed to building smarter and more agile digital networks that enhance the company's transition to a techco innovator, reaffirming our position as a pioneer of ICT technologies in Kuwait."

"This pivotal digital transformation project with our strategic partners Huawei writes a new chapter in Zain's journey of achievements, that will unlock unlimited opportunities to enhance operational efficiency, accelerate the growth of new services, simplify processes, and streamline transactions. This enables us to offer more innovative and dynamic experiences to Kuwait's largest customer base of individual, enterprise and government clientele."

"The next-generation BSS will drive a major transformation in our operations across various aspects, including greater service flexibility, enhanced customer experiences, and improved innovation capabilities. This will significantly boost our ability to meet the needs of customers and businesses in smarter and more efficient ways."

The Zain Kuwait CEO concluded: "Today, we take this step under our new '4WARD strategy - Progress with Purpose', which is built on four key forces: Customer Delight, Digital Zain, Purpose and Action, and Collaborative Growth. All these forces are embodied in this project, and we look forward to seeing its fruitful results as we implement and launch it operationally in the future."

Steven Yi remarked: "Zain has always been at the forefront of industry innovation, driving success in

Nawaf Al-Gharabally

Zain committed to building smarter and more agile digital networks that enhance the company's transition to a techco innovator

the 5G era, and is moving towards deeper digital transformation. As the core support for Zain service operation, BSS will continue to enable service agility, customer experience optimization, and B2B service expansion in the next decade."

He continued: "Huawei is honored to remain a long-term strategic partner of Zain to reinforce its leadership. We will fully invest the best resources to ensure high-quality BSS project delivery and support Zain in accelerating Techco transformation, building on the successes we have achieved together over the past decades."

The new-generation BSS system will support personalized marketing strategies, intelligent recom-

Steven Yi

Zain has always been at the forefront of industry innovation, and Huawei is honored to remain a long-term strategic partner to reinforce its leadership

mendations, and an omni-channel user experience to improve customer satisfaction. It will accelerate the launch of new services and packages, reduce market response time, and optimize business performance. Additionally, automation and digitization solutions embedded within the new system will enhance the efficiency of business operations for both consumer and enterprise sectors, drive the growth of SME customers, and improve overall operational efficiency. The system's smart operations will also reduce maintenance costs and ensure service continuity through real-time monitoring and intelligent management of operations and maintenance.

This collaboration reflects Zain and Huawei's

strong partnership over the decades. As a long-term partner, Huawei will support Zain in accelerating the BSS upgrade through its leading solutions and global technical expertise, ensuring the successful implementation of the project.

Beyond a mere technological upgrade, this initiative represents a critical phase in Zain's digital transformation. It paves the way for more innovative, flexible, and efficient digital services for both individual and enterprise customers. This milestone highlights Zain's continued leadership in advancing its infrastructure to keep pace with rapid developments in telecom and ICT, reinforcing its commitment to delivering best-in-class service quality and user experience. The initiative aligns with Zain's strategic vision to maintain a competitive edge in the digital era by providing world-class services, innovations, and exceptional customer experiences. Through Zain's 4WARD strategy, the company looks to maximize its full potential as a customer-centric, future-proof, and impactful leading regional TechCo conglomerate.



Al-Gharabally and Yi with Zain and Huawei executives at the signing ceremony.

Business

NBK ECONOMIC INSIGHT

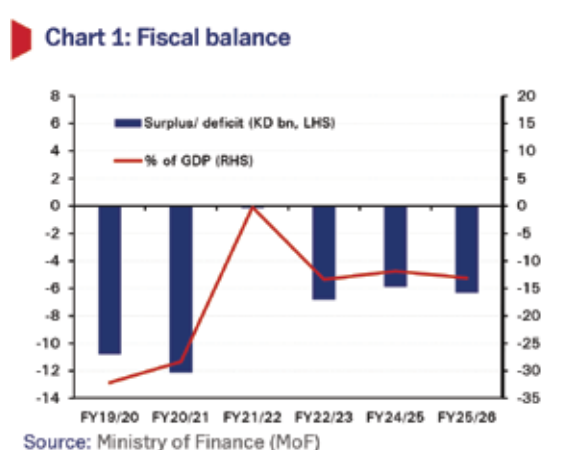
Kuwait projects wider budget deficit

Budget could be a starting point towards larger reforms

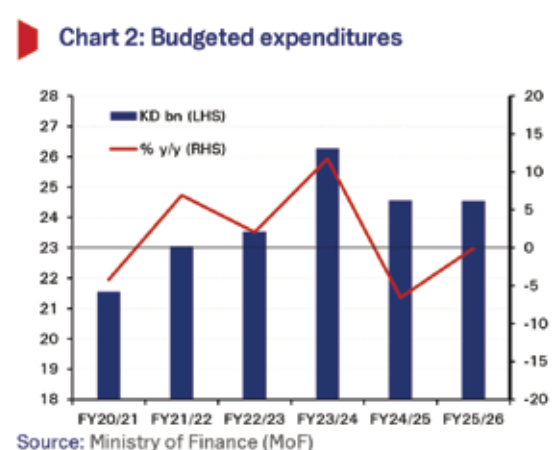
KUWAIT: Kuwait recently approved the draft FY25/26 budget, which projects a wider deficit of KD 6.3 billion (13 percent of GDP), from KD 5.6 billion in the FY24/25 budget. Some spending restraint is evident in the fact that current expenditures are little changed over the previous budget, although budgeted spending remains elevated and not far from historical highs, suggesting that structural reforms will be needed to put the public finances on a more sustainable path. Oil revenues are expected to decline on a lower oil price assumption, outweighing a solid increase in projected non-oil revenues. 2025 should be a pivotal year for the public finances, as the government prepares numerous fiscal measures to help boost liquidity, enhance non-oil revenues and rationalize spending going forward. We view this budget as a start ahead of potentially more meaningful fiscal adjustments later on.

Expenditures in FY2025/26 are budgeted at KD 24.5 billion, down by a negligible 0.1 percent b/b, representing a modest degree of spending restraint as the government signals its intention to adhere to the previously announced spending ceiling. The budget expects a 1.6 percent increase in employee compensation, offset by lower allocations for subsidies (-2.2 percent), other expenses (-3.7 percent) and capital expenditure (-1.7 percent). The budgeted decline in the latter extends a four-year sequence of lower spending and is despite the need to progress towards Vision 2035 infrastructure development goals. Amid these lower spending commitments, structural issues are yet to be fully addressed, such as disproportionately large spending on wages and subsidies – almost 80 percent of all expenditures – while the share of capex continues to trend lower (9.1 percent). Liquidity constraints may partly explain why capex outlays have been limited in recent years.

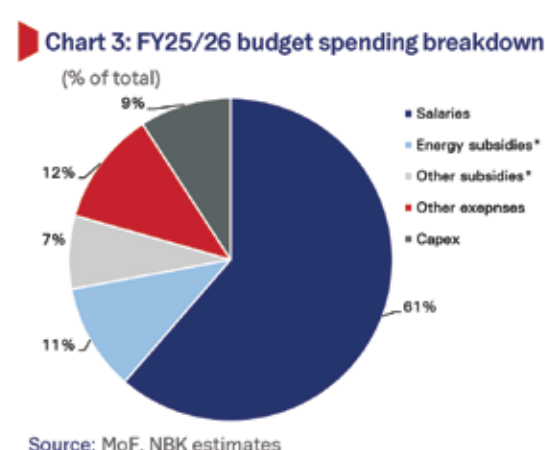
On the revenue side, the budget projects lower oil income of KD 15.3 billion (-5.7 percent y/y) on a low-



Source: Ministry of Finance (MoF)



Source: Ministry of Finance (MoF)



Source: MoF, NBK estimates

er assumed oil price of \$68/bbl compared to \$70 in the previous budget and slightly lower oil production of 2.50 mb/d from 2.55 mb/d. This is expected to outweigh a projected increase in non-oil revenues of 9 percent y/y to KD 2.9 billion, a record high that reflects new revenue measures. In January, a new corporate income tax on large multinationals (15 percent minimum top-up tax), in line with the OECD initiative, was introduced, which should eventually raise tax income to KD 250 million (from KD 160 million in FY24/25 budget), according to ministry estimates. Also included is a new traffic law, with much higher penalties for infringements, which is due to come into effect in April. Finally, a new law allowing ministries to review and set their relevant fees (subject to cabinet approval) will likely lead to a broad repricing of government service fees. Within the scope of the law are administrative, judicial, health, and public property lease rates.

New debt law on the table

A new public debt law is reportedly imminent. Once approved, it should allow the government to return to

the bond market for the first time since the expiration of the debt law in 2017. According to media reports, the new debt law could sanction borrowing of up to KD 20-30 billion over 50 years, which is feasible given Kuwait's low public debt (around KD 1.4 billion in public outstanding debt) and lower debt service costs compared to regional peers. The law could be followed by legislation to regulate withdrawals from the Future Generations Fund, Kuwait's sovereign wealth fund, whose assets under management were reported to have surpassed \$1 trillion recently according to the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute. The measures would serve to boost liquidity and provide more fiscal space for deficit financing and higher capital spending in subsequent budgets, especially given pressures on liquidity in the state treasury in recent years as the sole source of deficit financing.

A starting point for larger reforms

With only a marginal increase in employee compensation and no change in overall current spending, there is little new impetus for strong growth in pri-

ivate consumption. Furthermore, the slight decline in the capex allocation signals less support for higher investment outlays, although we believe that actual capex could still rise given previous underspending relative to the budget allocation. Overall, we would not see this budget as having an expansionary impact unless there is a marked increase in budgeted capex utilization. Spending restraint, coupled with the tapping of new, albeit modest revenue streams could be an indication that this is the start of more meaningful fiscal adjustments ahead.

The government seems to have stepped up the legislative pace this year, which is promising for a raft of fiscal and economic reforms awaiting final cabinet approval. This includes the potential restructuring and merging of government units, the privatization law, the public private partnership law, and the housing financing law. The service repricing law could have significant fiscal implications, given the potential to phase out energy and water subsidies, one of the largest expenditure items, as has been put into effect successfully in Kuwait's GCC peers Saudi Arabia and UAE.

Burgan Bank unveils yearlong discount with Turkish Airlines

KUWAIT: In a new effort to elevate customers' banking experience, Burgan Bank revealed its latest partnership with Turkish Airlines, offering all Burgan credit and prepaid card users a 15 percent discount on the base fare for all one-way and roundtrip flights from Kuwait to any destination worldwide throughout 2025.

This comes as part of the Bank's robust mission to deliver excellent customer experience and its committed strategy for adding value to customers' everyday card purchases, ensuring its cards remain a top-of-wallet choice.

"Everything can be made easier and more exciting with enough understanding of our customers' needs and lifestyles and the right partners, and there's no better way to ground this in action than through our wide range of bank cards," said Manaf Al-Menaifi, Acting General Manager – Retail Banking at Burgan Bank. "From business trips to family vacations, many Kuwaitis have an affinity to travel. That's why, as a Bank that is 'Driven by You' and as a trusted financial partner, we spare no effort to collaborate with the best service providers in the travel industry to grant our cardholders access to an exclusive world of travel luxury and ease."

Until December 31, 2025, customers can



Manaf Al-Menaifi

avail this exclusive 15 percent discount by entering the promo code BURGAN2025 upon checkout – valid for multiple-time use – conditioned that their Turkish Airlines flight is purchased using a Burgan credit or prepaid card. It is worth noting that the promotion does not apply to outbound flights on March 26-30, and June 4-7, as well as inbound flights on March 30-April 2, June 7-10 and August 10-25.

In addition to Burgan's latest partnership with Turkish Airlines, the Bank offers avid travelers among its customers numerous opportunities to elevate their banking and travel experiences by using Burgan credit and prepaid cards.



NBK, LOYAC strengthen partnership

KUWAIT: As part of the continuing collaboration between National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) and LOYAC, both parties have signed the "Sustainability for Kuwait" agreement – a strategic partnership dedicated to empowering and developing Kuwaiti youth while fostering a more sustainable future. As part of the ongoing agreement, NBK is collaborating with LOYAC to implement hands-on training programs that equip young people with the knowledge and skills to drive environmental and social change.

By fostering greater awareness and responsibility, the initiative aims to create a lasting positive impact, aligning with the growing global focus on climate change, global warming, and their far-reaching effects on the economy and society. The practical programs will prioritize environmental impact through a range of sustainability-driven initiatives, including planting diverse tree species, promoting regenerative farming practices, enhancing soil health, and advocating for water conservation and sustainable agriculture. Additionally, the programs will incorporate innovative solutions such as plastic recycling for prostheses and waste-to-energy initiatives.

Marking this milestone, Manal Al-Mattar, Head of



A group photo of the NBK and LOYAC teams on the sidelines of the signing ceremony.

Group Corporate Communications at National Bank of Kuwait stated: "As a responsible and sustainable financial institution, we remain committed to driving positive change and making a lasting impact. Our ongoing efforts over the years reflect our dedication to social responsibility, advancing sustainability practices, and supporting the country's agenda to reduce carbon emissions."

"Our long-standing partnership with LOYAC stands as a successful model of collaboration between the banking sector and civil society institutions. Through this alliance, we aim to support initiatives that align with our vision for environmental, social and corporate sustainability. By launching impactful programs, we seek to empower young people, develop their skills, and deepen their awareness of sustainability and environmental

conservation," she added.

She emphasized that this agreement is not merely a short-term initiative, but a shared vision aimed at creating a tangible and lasting impact. She also highlighted NBK's unwavering commitment to driving positive changes and enhancing the well-being of the communities it serves, with a steadfast focus on investing in community development and providing meaningful opportunities for youth empowerment and growth.

Emphasizing the significance of this collaboration, Farah Al-Saqqaf, Chairperson and Managing Director at LOYAC, stated: "Our strategic partnership with NBK stands as a testament to our shared commitment to sustainability. This agreement is more than just cooperation between two institutions – it reflects a unified vision to build



Manal Al-Matar and Farah Al-Saqqaf during the signing of the agreement.

a more sustainable future for Kuwait while reinforcing our responsibility toward society and the environment."

"Together with NBK, we are committed to tackling environmental and climate challenges, championing social responsibility, and equipping young people with the skills and knowledge to become future leaders in driving a more sustainable society," Al-Saqqaf affirmed. NBK has consistently led the way in supporting projects and initiatives that drive sustainability efforts. The bank has made significant strides in ESG efforts, embedding sustainability as a core pillar across its business models, operations and corporate culture. This commitment reinforces the transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy, aligning with Kuwait's strategic agenda and national development plan.

China's Xi: Private sector hurdles 'surmountable'

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping said Monday that challenges facing the country's embattled private sector were "surmountable", as he met with top business leaders including Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma.

Since coming to power more than a decade ago, Xi has strengthened the role of state enterprises in the world's second-largest economy and waged crackdowns on areas of the private sector undergoing "disorderly" expansion.

But reports last week said he was preparing to meet leading business luminaries, as Beijing battles a slowing economy beset by a real-estate crisis, persistently low consumption and high youth unemployment. State broadcaster CCTV reported Monday that the meeting had taken place at Beijing's Great Hall of the People, with video showing Ma and rows of other entrepreneurs standing and applauding as Xi entered a lavish room.

In a later readout, state news agency Xinhua reported Xi "stressed that the difficulties and challenges currently faced by the development of the private economy have generally appeared during the



BEIJING: A woman walks past Alibaba's offices in Beijing. — AFP

process of reform and development, and industrial transformation".

"They are partial rather than general, temporary rather than long-term, and surmountable rather than unsolvable," Xi said, according to Xinhua. The Chinese leader reportedly urged attendees to "unify thought and action" around the ruling Communist Party's economic policies, "see the prospects, see the light, and see the future". He said Beijing was focused on removing obstacles to commerce, promoting fair competition, cracking down on arbitrary fines and protecting business interests.

Hailing the "significant advantages" of China's socialist market system, Xi added that he expected entrepreneurs to "have the ambition to serve the

country... promote common prosperity and make greater contributions to promoting Chinese-style modernization".

Xinhua did not mention Ma's attendance or say whether he spoke at the conference. But it reported that six business representatives – including Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei, and Wang Chuanfu, CEO of electric-vehicle giant BYD, gave "suggestions on promoting the development of the private economy under the new situation", without giving details.

Ma's inclusion hints at the billionaire magnate's potential public rehabilitation after years out of the spotlight following a tangle with regulators. The former English teacher founded tech behemoth Alibaba in 1999 and built it into one of China's most recognizable and dominant private companies.

He once cultivated an outspoken public persona but reined in his pronouncements towards the end of the last decade as Xi oversaw a sweeping crackdown on the country's once-freewheeling technology and internet platforms.

In 2020, authorities cancelled the blockbuster IPO of Alibaba affiliate Ant Group at the last minute – notably after Ma made a speech criticizing regulators. Ma is no longer an executive at Alibaba but is believed to retain a significant shareholding in the company, despite spending the past few years focusing on philanthropy and rural education. Alibaba, which is expected to publish its latest quarterly earnings report this week, has seen its shares soar more than 40 percent so far this year. — AFP

Sri Lanka budget banks on car taxes to boost coffers

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka is banking on vehicle import taxes to boost revenue and revive the island nation's battered economy, leftist President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's maiden budget showed on Monday. Vehicle imports were banned in 2020 to save foreign exchange but the move deprived authorities of a lucrative revenue stream, as cars were taxed at about 300 percent.

Dissanayake said the ban's end would bolster state revenue to meet the tax target of 15 percent of GDP, which the country must achieve under the terms of an International Monetary Fund bailout agreement.

"For the year 2025, the bulk of revenue gains is expected to be delivered by the liberalization of motor vehicle imports," the president told parliament. "This process is being carefully monitored to ensure that the import of vehicles does not result in undue negative impacts on external sector stability." The budget also doubled the entrance fee of the island's two casinos to \$100 and raised the turnover tax on gaming establishments to 18 percent, up from 15 percent. The IMF wants Sri Lanka to double its income from taxation compared to the 7.3 percent of GDP it took in 2022, when the country defaulted on its \$46 billion foreign debt. — AFP

Gulf Bank deposits KD 2 million into Islam Khattab's account

Bader Al-Ali: Next AIDanah millionaire will be announced on July 17, 2025

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank proudly welcomed Islam Mohammad Khattab, the grand prize winner of the annual AIDanah Millionaire draw, who received an extraordinary KD 2 million prize. The highly anticipated draw took place on Thursday (February 13, 2025) at Al-Khiran Mall, attracting a large audience of customers and visitors. The event was held under the supervision of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young, and was broadcast live across Gulf Bank's social media platforms and 360 FM radio.

Following the official deposit of KD 2 million into his account, the winner shared his immense joy and gratitude, describing the experience as life-changing. He expressed his appreciation to Gulf Bank for continuously rewarding its customers and encouraging a culture of saving. Khattab encouraged others to open an AIDanah Millionaire account, emphasizing that it had been his trusted savings partner for over five years, helping him navigate financial challenges. He shared that his win was met with overwhelming joy, not only in Kuwait but also back home in Egypt, where his family celebrated the exciting news. He expressed his intention to donate a portion of his prize to charitable causes, while carefully investing the remainder to secure his family's future.

Acting General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank Bader Al-Ali, congratulated the winner on becoming the 23rd AIDanah Millionaire in the draw's history. He emphasized Gulf Bank's dedication to delivering outstanding banking experiences while recognizing and rewarding savers, fostering a culture of financial responsibility within the community. He also noted that Gulf Bank offers exclusive banking services designed for high-net-worth clients, providing specialized financial



Najla Aleisa and Bader Al-Ali welcome the new AIDanah millionaire at the Crystal Branch.

Winner: The AIDanah account has transformed my life, and I highly recommend it to anyone looking to navigate economic challenges.

solutions and expert investment advisory services.

Gulf Bank continues to provide customers with numerous chances to win through the AIDanah draws. The next major draw will be the semi-annual AIDanah draw on July 17, 2025, with a grand prize of KD 1 million. Customers have until March 31, 2025, to deposit and qualify for this draw. Custom-

ers can qualify for the monthly, quarterly, and annual AIDanah draws by maintaining a minimum account balance of KD 200. Al-Ali expressed his enthusiasm for continuing to reward customers through the AIDanah Millionaire account, encouraging them to keep saving and increase their chances of winning. He highlighted the program's multiple prize opportu-

nities, including the grand prize of KD 2 million—the largest cash prize tied to a bank account globally.

The semi-annual draw offers a KD 1 million prize, while the quarterly draws, held twice a year, award KD 100,000 to 100 winners in each draw. Additionally, the monthly draws award KD 1,000 to 10 winners each month. Throughout 2025, a total of 282 winners will be selected through the AIDanah draws.

The AIDanah Millionaire account is open to both Kuwaiti nationals and expatriates. Customers can easily open an account by visiting any Gulf Bank branch or using the Bank's mobile app, with a minimum deposit of KD 200. Maintaining this balance ensures automatic entry into all upcoming draws. If the balance drops below KD 200, a monthly fee of KD 2 will be applied until the minimum requirement is met. Gulf Bank encourages AIDanah account holders to increase their savings and enhance their chances of winning by making additional deposits through the Bank's online and mobile banking services. 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.

Baghdad hopes to resume Kurdish oil exports within week

BAGHDAD: Iraq's oil minister said Monday that crude exports from the autonomous Kurdistan region to Turkey should resume within a week, ending two years of wrangling. Oil exports have been a major point of tension between Baghdad and Arbil, with a major pipeline through Turkey shut since 2023 over legal disputes and technical issues.

"We have agreed" with the autonomous region to receive at least 300,000 barrels per day "to export through the Turkish port of Ceyhan," Oil Minister Hayan Abdel Ghani told journalists.

A delegation from Baghdad would head to Arbil on Tuesday to "set up a mechanism to receive and export the oil," Abdel Ghani said. Exports were expected to resume "within a week", he added.

Oil exports were previously independently sold by the Kurdistan region, without the approval or oversight of the central administration in Baghdad, through the port of Ceyhan.

But the region's oil exports have been at a standstill since March 2023 when the arbitration tribunal of the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris ruled oil exports by the regional government illegal. In its judgment in a case first lodged in 2014, the tribunal ruled that the federal government had the exclusive right to market all Iraqi oil, halting the region's independent exports by pipeline via Turkey.

The federal and regional governments have been haggling ever since over the production and transport costs payable to the region and its commercial partners. But in a recent budget amendment, Baghdad agreed to form an independent body to set the cost payments and to pay \$16 a barrel in the meantime. The Association of the Petroleum Industry of Kurdistan, which represents international oil firms operating in the region, put losses to all parties since the export pipeline closed at \$20 billion. — AFP

Tencent trialing own AI reasoning model alongside DeepSeek

BEIJING: Chinese technology giant Tencent on Monday said it had started trialing its own artificial intelligence reasoning model after integrating DeepSeek into some of its products, saying the move would make responses "more human". Insurgent Chinese AI startup DeepSeek made global headlines last month when it unveiled its R1 chatbot that can seemingly match American competitors at a fraction of the cost.

Since then, a series of major Chinese companies have said they will integrate DeepSeek's technology into their products. On Monday, Tencent said in a post on WeChat—the social media platform it owns—that selected users of its Yuanbao chatbot may address queries to either DeepSeek or its homegrown AI reasoning model "Hunyuan Thinker".

"With the support of two deep reasoning models, the question-answering is more professional, the reasoning is more powerful, and the writing is more 'human'," Tencent said of the beta testing rollout.

Tencent, which also operates the QQ messaging app and is a major player in online gaming, has sought to capture a larger share of the burgeoning AI market in China. The Shenzhen-based company is understood to have started exploring the integration of DeepSeek into multiple products, with some users of the domestic version of WeChat noting the addition of an AI search function on Sunday. — AFP

Japan growth slows despite stronger Q4 '24

TOKYO: Japan's economic growth slowed sharply last year, official data showed Monday, although the rate for the fourth quarter topped expectations. The figures come as Japanese companies fret over the impact of US President Donald Trump's protectionist trade policies, including import tariffs, on the world's fourth largest economy.

Gross domestic product expanded 0.1 percent in 2024, well down from 1.5 percent the year before, the data showed.

But the figures for October-December were brighter. Quarter-on-quarter growth accelerated to 0.7 percent, from 0.4 percent in July-September, when a "megaquake" alert and one of the fiercest typhoons in decades dampened activity. The fourth-quarter figure was also more than double market expectations of 0.3 percent growth.

"On the surface, Japanese GDP growth in the final stretch of 2024 looks like a turning point," said Stefan Angrick of Moody's Analytics. "But don't break out the champagne just yet. Japan's preliminary GDP

figures are notoriously choppy, and sizeable revisions are common," he warned.

"The upbeat headline figure masks a domestic economy still stuck in the mud. Consumption is weak as pay gains have trailed inflation for the better part of three years," Angrick said.

"And given the worsening outlook for global trade, Japan won't be able to count on exports to pick up the slack in 2025," Trump said last week that he planned to unveil tariffs on imported cars from around April 2, adding to a cascade of levies he has threatened since taking office.

Ahead of the latest GDP data, the Daiwa Institute of Research said "various growth factors are seen, including normalization of production for motor vehicles". "A strong appetite for capex spending on the part of corporations, and a comeback for inbound consumption" were also positive factors, the institute said in a report. This time last year, Germany overtook Japan as the world's third-biggest economy, with India projected to leapfrog both later this decade.

The change in positions primarily reflected the sharp fall in the yen against the dollar, analysts said at the time. In January, the Bank of Japan raised interest rates again—having done so in March for the first time in 17 years—and signaled more hikes to come. The move, which left borrowing costs at the highest since 2008, was also underpinned by "steadily" rising wages and financial markets being



TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba answers a question during a budget committee session of the lower house at the parliament on February 17, 2025. — AFP

"stable on the whole", the bank said.

Even as the other central banks raised borrowing costs in recent years the BoJ had remained an outlier.

But it finally lifted rates above zero in March, signaling a move away from policies designed to counter Japan's "lost decades" of economic stagnation and static or falling prices. Capital Economics said in a note on Monday that "even though the jump in Q4 GDP wasn't broad-based, it supports our view that the Bank of Japan will tighten policy more aggressively this year than most anticipate". — AFP

Security demands cast shadow on Europe's finances

LONDON: Europe's leaders have long known the region is living beyond the means of its ageing, stagnant economy. The question is whether the ructions created by Donald Trump's second White House term mean they will do something about it. Less than a month after the president was sworn in, the continent's once staunch US ally declared it was done paying to keep the peace in Europe. Trump, said Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, "will not allow anyone to turn Uncle Sam into 'Uncle Sucker'".

But if Europe must now shoulder the cost of its own defense - right at a time when on its eastern flank Russia is waging war with Ukraine - that risks blowing apart budgets that are already struggling to fund the welfare states that are often seen as the envy of the world. "We will have to face difficult days, make complicated decisions and even sacrifices which we weren't expecting until now to ensure this security," French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot told the Munich Security Conference on Saturday.

However, some fear a political backlash if governments simply slash social spending to buy more soldiers and guns. "Then we will have division of our society and the only ones that will benefit will be the far-right parties," German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius told the Munich meeting. One option for Europe might be to hope Trump's departure in four years' time will allow the transatlantic bond to be restored. But the mood at the Munich gathering suggested that European leaders finally accept that America's pivot away from their continent - signalled in less confrontational terms over a decade ago by Barack Obama - means they must now step up.

"Our most important task as political leaders is to protect our people," said Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen. "Two percent is not nearly enough," she said of a barely met target for NATO members to spend on defense as a share of national output. Twenty-three out of 32 NATO members met the target last year after recent increases.

Its post-World War Two social contract was built on the idea that Europeans would pay high taxes to get solid welfare safety nets, health provision and pensions in return. Add to that the labor pacts that led to shorter work weeks and longer holidays. Many voters already feel their governments have reneged on that deal - and have abandoned mainstream parties in favor of radical ones that are riding high on the discontent. The challenge posed by Trump takes the



BRUSSELS: European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen (left) and Europe's Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy, Stéphane Sejourne give a press conference at the European Commission, on January 29, 2025. — AFP

political and economic stakes to a whole new level.

It is hard to put a number on how much it will cost to secure peace and rebuild Ukraine: the shape of any peace is unknown given Trump's desire to cut a deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

However, it is easier to quantify the cost to national budgets if EU countries more than doubled defense spending to the levels that were routinely a feature of the Cold War era. Ratings firm S&P Global estimates that attaining defense spends of 5 percent of GDP would cost them a total \$875 billion a year, or "far beyond what individual states can finance without offsetting such outlays with other spending reductions or likely pressuring their creditworthiness". But others say Europe, which topped up existing budgets with new funds to assemble a 2-trillion-euro stimulus package after the COVID pandemic, can find the money if it wants to.

While the United States has national debt around 120 percent of its output and runs annual deficits of the order of 6 percent, average debt across the EU stands around 81.5 percent of GDP with a deficit of 2.9 percent, according to EU data. In a commentary for the Financial Times last week, former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi estimated that since 2009, the United

States has used deficits to inject five times more money into its economy than the countries of the eurozone have - 14 trillion euros versus 2.5 trillion.

Moritz Kraemer, chief economist at LBBW Bank and formerly S&P Global's chief ratings officer, noted the euro did not have the dollar's status as the world's reserve currency and that "therefore, the level of sustainable debt is lower". But others doubt whether markets would take fright if a country with the sound finances of Germany or the Netherlands sought extra borrowing to meet an existential security need. "Many EU countries could afford to have higher public debt," said Zsolt Darvas, a senior fellow at European economics think tank Bruegel. "The issue is the political will." It is this political will that is about to be tested. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen told the Munich conference she would back "escape clauses" to free national spending on defense from EU rules on deficit caps. She would need support for this from national governments. While the EU is banned from using its own 1.2-trillion-euro budget to buy weapons, some suggest that EU nations and non-EU NATO allies such as Britain and Norway could form a "rearmament bank" with funds injected by members and capital raised on markets. — Reuters

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2025



A monument of musician Johann Strauss Jr is pictured in Vienna's Stadtpark in Vienna. - AFP photos



The death mask of Johann Strauss Jr. is pictured at the Johann Strauss Museum.



The violin of Johann Strauss is on display at the Johann Strauss Museum.

AUSTRIA CELEBRATES 200 YEARS OF 'WALTZ KING' JOHANN STRAUSS II

Even 200 years after the birth of Austria's world-famous "waltz king" Johann Strauss II - widely revered like a modern-day pop star during his lifetime - his music has lost none of its magic. Best known for his rousing waltz "The Blue Danube", which became Austria's unofficial national anthem, many of his 500 dance pieces live on in Vienna's roaring ball season. Strauss' persistent popularity lies in the catchy tunes he composed to cheer up people, his great-grand-nephew Eduard Strauss told AFP.

"He simply created music that touches everyone, regardless of their background," he said. But his fame was rooted in much more than his hits: just like today, selling music meant marketing the star's image. "One could say that he was actually the first pop star in the modern sense," said Strauss Museum guide Clara Kaufmann. Vienna is marking the bicentenary with special events, concerts and exhibitions, and even an Austrian Airlines aeroplane emblazoned with a portrait of Strauss and his violin. Strauss "symbolizes music for all", said British dentist Helen Foster, who visited one of Vienna's Strauss museums, adding that his appealing waltz tunes have been "popular with everyone over the ages".

Impressive stage shows

Strauss was born in the suburbs of Vienna in 1825 into a family of famous



Overview of part of Strauss' apartment is on display at the Johann Strauss Museum.

musicians, but despite his father being a household name, Strauss junior's success did not come easily. Defying his father's explicit wish that he would not follow in his footsteps, he secretly took violin lessons with the support of his mother. After his father abandoned the family for another woman, Strauss' mother Anna became a driving force behind the career of her eldest son, who kept "churning out music" to make a living. "Unlike today, there was no insurance,

no pension scheme or anything like that," Eduard Strauss told AFP. "Life had to be earned," said the retired judge, 69.

Johann made his debut at the age of 18, becoming his father's direct rival. Perfecting his father's simpler waltzes, he elevated them into refined concert works, with the light-hearted, energetic dance music helping many to forget about the hardships they faced in 19th-century imperial Vienna. He put on impressive shows on stage, playing the



A score of the waltz "On the Beautiful Blue Danube" (Danube Waltz) is pictured at the Johann Strauss Museum.

violin with great panache and conducting the orchestra with his bow while frantically jumping up and down. Admired for his impeccable looks, his coiffure was styled "with hair irons before every performance to make it stand up", said Kaufmann. As he aged, he dyed his hair and beard to maintain his youthful appearance.

'Mama's boy'

Marketed as a womanizer, the workaholic was a completely different person

off-stage, plagued by insecurities and self-doubt, his great-grand-nephew said. "He had many phobias - including travel phobia - and had difficulties with women. He was a mama's boy," he said. When his father died in 1849, the younger Strauss took over his orchestra as well as the up-scale entertainment establishments in the city. Despite suffering a nervous breakdown due to exhaustion, he kept performing and composing at an impressive pace.

In 1866, he wrote what is arguably the world's most famous waltz, "The Blue Danube", which is featured in the prestigious Vienna New Year's concert every year. Although Strauss despised travelling, he regularly toured across Europe, entertaining Russian nobility for more than a decade. In 1872, he headlined the World's Peace Jubilee in Boston, a two-week music festival, attended by tens of thousands of people. While initially struggling to compose operettas, he wrote several of them, including a few hits like "Die Fledermaus". "People still dance to Strauss waltzes, but you can also hear them in concert halls, and that was his special achievement," musicologist Thomas Aigner said about the legacy of the revered composer, who died in 1899. — AFP

Spanish tourist hotspot Malaga to ban horse-drawn carriages

A pair of tourists admire the shimmering Mediterranean from their horse-drawn carriage on the seaside promenade in Spain's southern port of Malaga — a postcard image whose days are numbered. The city wants to ban horse-drawn carriages from its streets this year to protect the animals after years of criticism of the trade. The decision to follow in the footsteps of other tourist hotspots such as Rome and Chicago dismayed visitors including Anastasia, a chef who had travelled from Britain.

"It's really nice, I was impressed — seeing Malaga like this is completely different," said the 47-year-old as she dismounted from a carriage. Fellow British tourist Robert agreed, expressing his wonder at his "amazing" trip with a "beautiful" horse. "I am sure it helps the city attract more tourists," added the 46-year-old business owner. Animal rights activists criticize horse-drawn carriages for tourists because of the strain they put on the animals, especially during the searing summer heat.



A horse-drawn carriage driver waits for tourists in Malaga.

Summer temperatures in Malaga can soar to 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit), said Concordia Marquez, founder of a nearby shelter called "Todos los Caballos del Mundo" (All the Horses in the World). "Horses

and horse-drawn carriages have to cover a lot of ground, both to get to where they spend the night, where they sleep, and to get back to their place of work," added Marquez. "That's inhumane to make a horse work like that."

Animal welfare concerns

Malaga city hall had announced in 2015 that it aimed to ban horse-drawn carriages from its streets by 2035, but it now wants to bring the ban forward to this year. Officials are in talks with the holders of the last 25 licenses to reach an agreement. "We have been negotiating for a long time, we have met 99 percent of the demands of carriage owners," Malaga's city councillor for mobility, Maria Trinidad Hernandez, told AFP. "What we are looking for is animal welfare, but it is also the case that they used to have more places to circulate," she added.

"With the building works that have gone on for the last 20 years, there is hardly any left. There is the park and a little bit of the promenade left." Horse-drawn carriages will not totally disappear — they will still be allowed as part of festivals and traditions like Malaga's annual fair in August. "What there won't be are municipal licenses, the tourist horse-drawn carriage, the one you take and pay for as if it were a street taxi," said Hernandez. — AFP



Colombian singer Shakira performs during the worldwide launch of her 'Las Mujeres ya no Lloran' tour at Nilton Santos stadium in Rio de Janeiro on February 11, 2025. — AFP

Shakira cancels Lima concert after being hospitalized

Shakira has cancelled her concert in Peru's capital on Sunday after being hospitalized with abdominal pain, a setback that comes days after she launched her first worldwide tour in seven years. The 48-year-old Colombian star posted on her social media accounts that she had gone to the emergency room on Saturday night and remained hospitalized.

"The doctors whose care I am currently under have communicated that I am not in good enough condition to perform this evening," she said. "I am very sad to not be able to take the stage today. I've been looking forward to reuniting with my incredible fans here in Peru," she added, expressing hope that she would be released from the hospital on Monday to resume the tour.

The singer-songwriter kicked off her tour in Rio de Janeiro just a few days after she received a Grammy for best Latin pop album, which she dedicated to migrants in the United States who are facing deportation under President Donald Trump. Shakira, who is one of the most popular Latin artists of all time, is set to perform nearly 50 dates in Latin America by the end of June, followed by more in the United States and Canada. — AFP



Tourists visit the town of Malaga in a horse-drawn carriage.



Concordia Marquez pets a horse at "Todos los Caballos del Mundo" horse shelter where some retired carriage horses are taken in and cared for, in Alhaurin el Grande, near Malaga.



A volunteer cares for horses at "Todos los Caballos del Mundo" horse shelter where some retired carriage horses are taken in and cared for, in Alhaurin el Grande, near Malaga.



Edward Berger accepts a Directors Guild of America Feature Film Medallion for "Conclave" from Ralph Fiennes onstage during the 77th Annual Directors Guild of America Awards at The Beverly Hilton on February 08, 2025 in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP photos



Swiss film director Ian Bonhote, US film producer Peter Ettegui, British documentary producer Lizzie Gillett and film producer Robert Ford pose with the award for Best documentary for "Super/Man: The Christopher Reeve Story".

'CONCLAVE' AND 'BRUTALIST' SHARE BAFTA HONORS



US costume designer Paul Tazewell poses with the award for Best costume design for "Wicked".



US actor and screenwriter Jesse Eisenberg poses with the award for Best original screenplay for "A Real Pain".



British visual effects supervisor Paul Lambert, Canadian visual effects artist Stephen James, German visual effects artist Gerd Nefzer and visual effect artist Rhys Salcombe pose with the award for Best special visual effects for "Dune: Part Two".



British cinematographer Lol Crawley poses with the award for Best cinematography for "The Brutalist".



British movie editor Nick Emerson poses with the award for Best editing for "Conclave".



US movie director and screenwriter Sean Baker (right) and producer Samantha Quan pose with the award for Best casting for "Anora".



British music composer Daniel Blumberg poses with the award for Best original score for "The Brutalist".



Camila Cabello US singer-songwriter poses with a Gromit figurine in the winners room.

Papal thriller "Conclave" and immigrant epic "The Brutalist" on Sunday tied for top honors at Britain's BAFTA awards with each film picking up four coveted gongs. "Conclave", directed by German-born Edward Berger, won the BAFTA for the best film with its tale of the intrigue and horse-trading behind the scenes during the election of a new pope. Accepting the award, Berger recalled the journey to make the film took seven years, paying tribute to British screenplay writer Peter Straughan's "wonderful script" and lead actor Ralph Fiennes.

US filmmaker Brady Corbet took the BAFTA for best director for "The Brutalist", while leading man Adrien Brody scooped up the best actor gong for his portrayal of a Hungarian Holocaust survivor and architect who emigrates to the United States. Brody told a winners press conference that the film was "an opportunity for me to honor my own ancestral struggles". In "a film that speaks to tremendous cruelty and despicable behavior in our past... we see elements existing today that can guide us and remind us of that," he added.

Veteran British actor Fiennes, who played a cardinal in "Conclave", once again saw his hopes of winning a BAFTA gong dashed, losing out to Brody in the race for the honor. Scandal-hit "Emilia Perez", a surreal musical about a Mexican druglord who transitions to a woman, had been heavily favored at the beginning of the year. But it ended the evening with just two BAFTAs, including one for Zoe Saldana for best supporting actress. Until last month, French director Jacques Audiard's movie had been expected to be a frontrunner having won 11 nominations.

But old racist and Islamophobic tweets by lead actor Karla Sofia Gascon surfaced at the end of January, shaking up the race just before the London ceremony and the Oscars on March 2. A surprise of the night was the BAFTA for best actress which went to 25-year-old Mikey Madison for her portrayal of a sex worker in the black comedy "Anora" about an erotic dancer's whirlwind romance gone wrong. Madison, who beat out frontrunner Demi Moore, told reporters she wanted to dedicate the award to "the sex worker community. I see you, you deserve respect and human dignity".

Glitzy evening

Although they can often set the tone for the Oscars, the BAFTAs -- the biggest night of the year for the British film industry -- regularly diverge from the films favored by the Academy Awards in Los Angeles. "Emilia Perez" director Audiard, in accepting the BAFTA for best film not in the English language, thanked all his stars, including "dear" Gascon who did not attend the ceremony amid the scandal surrounding her past tweets.

Moore, Timothee Chalamet and Ariana Grande were also at the glitzy evening hosted by "Doctor Who" and "Good Omens" star David Tennant, but all left empty-handed. Best supporting actor



Dutch animator Nina Gantz, producer Stienette Bosklopper, filmmaker Simon Cartwright and producer Maarten Swart pose with the award for Best British short animation for "Wander to Wonder".



US singer and actor Vanessa Williams poses on the red carpet.



US actress Mikey Madison poses with the award for Best leading actress for "Anora".

went to "Succession" star Kieran Culkin for his role in "A Real Pain" about Jewish American cousins who tour Poland in honor of their grandmother. The film also garnered the best original screenplay for Jesse Eisenberg. Saldana, who won a Golden Globe last month for her role as the sassy lawyer in "Emilia Perez", said she was dedicating her BAFTA award to her trans nephew. "They are the reason I signed to do the film in the first place", she said.

"Conclave" also picked up awards for outstanding British film, editing and best adapted screenplay, while "The Brutalist" took awards for cinematography and original score. "Wicked" picked up two BAFTAs for costume and production design, while Rich Peppiatt who

wrote "Kneecap", a docu-drama about an audacious trio of Northern Irish rappers, won for an outstanding debut by a British writer. "Dune: Part Two" won BAFTAs for both special visual effects and best sound.

To huge cheers from the audience, "Wallace and Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl" picked up two BAFTAs for best animated feature and best Children's and Family Film. France's Coralie Fargeat was the only woman nominated in the directing category, for "The Substance", which in the end picked up just one BAFTA for hair and make-up.--AFP



British production designers Nathan Crowley and Lee Sandales pose with the award for Best Production Design for "Wicked".



British actor Warwick Davis poses with the BAFTA fellowship Award.



British filmmaker and animator Nick Park, British director Merlin Crossingham, British producer Richard Beek and US singer-songwriter Camila Cabello pose with the award for Best children and family film for "Wallace and Gromit: Vengeance most fowl".



US-Domenican actress Zoe Saldana poses with the award for Best supporting actress for "Emilia Perez".



Make-up artist Pierre-Olivier Persin, make-up artist Stephanie Guillon, hair and make-up artist Frederique Arguello and hair stylist Marilyne Scarselli pose with the award for Best make up and hair for "The Substance".



French movie director Jacques Audiard poses with the award for Best film not in English language for "Emilia Perez".



British screenwriter Peter Straughan poses with the award for Best adapted screenplay for "Conclave".



British writer and movie director Rich Peppiatt (second left) and Irish hip hop trio Kneecap poses with the award for Best Outstanding Debut by a British Writer, director or producer "Kneecap".



Mexican-born Kenyan US actress Lupita Nyong'o.



British actress Felicity Jones

WINNERS

BEST FILM Conclave	BEST ORIGINAL SCORE The Brutalist
OUTSTANDING BRITISH FILM Conclave	BEST CASTING Anora
BEST DIRECTOR Brady Corbet, The Brutalist	BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY The Brutalist
BEST LEADING ACTRESS Mikey Madison, Anora	BEST EDITING Conclave
BEST LEADING ACTOR Adrien Brody, The Brutalist	BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN Wicked
BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS Zoe Saldaña, Emilia Pérez	BEST COSTUME DESIGN Wicked
BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR Kieran Culkin, A Real Pain	BEST MAKE UP & HAIR The Substance
BEST OUTSTANDING DEBUT BY A BRITISH WRITER, DIRECTOR OR PRODUCER Kneecap, Rich Peppiatt	BEST SOUND Dune: Part Two
BEST FILM NOT IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE Emilia Pérez	BEST SPECIAL VISUAL EFFECTS Dune: Part Two
BEST DOCUMENTARY Super/Man: The Christopher Reeve Story	BRITISH SHORT ANIMATION Wander to Wonder
BEST ANIMATED FILM Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl	BRITISH SHORT FILM Rock, Paper, Scissors
BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY A Real Pain	OUTSTANDING BRITISH CONTRIBUTION TO CINEMA Wallace and Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl
BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY Conclave	EE RISING STAR AWARD (voted for by the public) David Jonsson



US actress Demi Moore



British actor Cynthia Erivo



Sound engineer Ron Bartlett and sound editor Gareth John pose with the award for Best sound for "Dune: Part Two".



US actor Adrien Brody and Fashion designer Georgina Chapman.



British German director Edward Berger (third left), Italian actor Isabella Rossellini (fourth left) and British actor Ralph Fiennes (fourth right) pose with the award for Best film for "Conclave".



Nigerian-British actress Wunmi Wunmi Mosaku and British actor Shazad Latif.



US director Brady Corbet poses with the award for Best director for "The Brutalist".



Make-up artists Pierre-Olivier Persin and Stephanie Guillon, hair and make-up artist Frederique Arguello and hair stylist Marilyne Scarselli pose with the award for Best make up and hair for "The Substance".

Sports

Champions Trophy set for liftoff after India-Pakistan row, boycott calls

First global cricket tournament hosted by Pakistan in nearly three decades

KARACHI: The Champions Trophy begins Wednesday after a turbulent build-up that saw the tournament split between Pakistan and Dubai, and with England facing calls to boycott their match against Afghanistan.

The event, regarded as second only to the World Cup in the one-day game, runs until March 9 and is the first global cricket tournament hosted by Pakistan in nearly three decades. India's matches will however be played in the United Arab Emirates after the sport's financial superpower refused to visit their neighbour over long-standing political tensions.

A month-long impasse ended in December when the International Cricket Council said that India would play their games in Dubai. It raises the prospect of the final of the eight-nation showpiece taking place there, rather than in Pakistan, if India get that far—a good chance given they are favourites to lift the trophy.

Arch-rivals India and Pakistan, who only face off in international competitions because of the politics, clash in Dubai on February 23 in the group phase. England play Afghanistan three days later in Lahore in a match that has been met with a backlash in some quarters in Britain.

More than 160 British politicians called for a boycott in response to the Taliban government's ban on women in sport. England Cricket Board chairman Richard Thompson vowed the match would go ahead, saying a "coordinated international response" by the cricket community would achieve more than unilateral action.

The Champions Trophy will be Pakistan's first ICC event since co-hosting the 1996 World Cup with India and Sri Lanka. Karachi and Rawalpindi are the other Pakistani cities that will stage games. Pakistan became a no-go area for foreign teams after the vis-

iting Sri Lankan squad were attacked by gunmen in 2009, leaving eight people dead and wounding several touring players. But with improved security across most of the country, international cricket returned to Pakistan in 2020.

India favourites

India, Pakistan, New Zealand and Bangladesh form Group A while Australia, England, Afghanistan and South Africa are in Group B. Two teams from each group qualify for the semi-finals in Dubai and Lahore.

Pakistan are reigning champions, having defeated India in the final in 2017 at The Oval in London. But it is two-time winners India who are favourites, with superstar batsman Virat Kohli hoping to overcome a poor run of form by his sky-high standards.

It could be the 36-year-old's last hurrah on the international stage, with captain Rohit Sharma also likely to retire after the tournament. "India is playing superb all-round cricket and so are among the favourites for the Champions Trophy," former India skipper Sunil Gavaskar told AFP.

"The other teams, in my opinion, to watch out for are defending champions Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa." India will however be missing ace pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah. Australia beat hosts India to win the one-day World Cup in 2023 but they are missing several key players.

Their formidable pace attack of Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood are all out. Coupled with the sudden retirement from ODIs of Marcus Stoinis and injury to Mitchell Marsh—both key all-rounders—and Australia suddenly look vulnerable.

They were well beaten 2-0 in Sri Lanka in a two-match series last week. Sri Lanka failed to qualify for the Champions Trophy. Pakistan will open the ninth edition of the Champions Trophy with a match



KARACHI: A billboard depicts Indian batsman Virat Kohli (L) and captain Rohit Sharma (3R) ahead of Champions Trophy in Karachi on February 12, 2025. The eight-nation event—regarded as second only to the ODI World Cup—will be staged from February 19 to March 9 in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi. — AFP

against New Zealand in Karachi on Wednesday.

The co-hosts are unpredictable, as they showed in the last edition of the tournament, losing to India by 124 runs in the opening match before winning the final against them by 180 runs. England go into the competition under a cloud, having been outclassed

by India in both a T20 and one-day series in the lead-up. With quality spinners led by Rashid Khan, Afghanistan are dangerous. They shocked England, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in the 2023 ODI World Cup and reached the semi-finals of the Twenty20 World Cup last year. — AFP



KARACHI: Pakistan's captain Mohammad Rizwan (R) attends a practice session ahead of their ICC Men's Champions Trophy one-day international (ODI) cricket match against New Zealand at the National Stadium in Karachi on February 17, 2025. — AFP

Three matches to watch at the Champions Trophy

DUBAI: The Champions Trophy begins on Wednesday with the world's top eight teams competing in Pakistan and Dubai for the prestigious title. AFP Sport looks at three highly anticipated matches in the group phase of the 50-over tournament:

Australia v England

The Ashes rivals clash in Lahore on Saturday. World Cup holders Australia have had the upper hand against their old foes in recent 50-over matches and won their previous series 3-2 last year. But both come into the Champions Trophy with question marks hanging over them. Australia are without their "Big Three" pacemen—Pat Cummins (ankle), Josh Hazlewood (hip) and Mitchell Starc, who has opted out for personal reasons. Add in the absences of all-rounders Mitchell Marsh (back) and Marcus Stoinis (retired), and half of their regular team is missing. The depleted side suffered a heavy 2-0 series defeat in Sri Lanka on the eve of the tournament. England, with Test coach Brendon McCullum now in charge, did no better and were whitewashed 3-0 in India. Since winning the 2019 World Cup and 2022 T20 World Cup, England have struggled in white-ball cricket.

India v Pakistan

TV ratings rocket with millions tuning in to watch the arch-rivals any time they battle it out, owing to the deep rivalry between the nuclear-armed neighbors. The two teams meet on Sunday in Dubai. Tickets for the clash were sold out minutes after going on sale as more than 150,000 fans queued online to grab a seat in the 25,000-capacity stadium. India refused to visit Pakistan for the Champions Trophy, forcing the latter to agree to partially relinquish hosting rights to Dubai after a long stand-off. On the pitch, India are favorites to win the tournament for a third time, in what is expected to be the international swansong for Rohit Sharma. Pakistan are the holders and unpredictable.

Afghanistan v England

More than 160 British politicians called for England to boycott the match in Lahore on February 26 over the erosion of women's rights by Taliban authorities in Afghanistan. Skipper Jos Buttler rejected the idea, saying: "I don't think a boycott is the way to go about it." Barring a shock last-minute about-face, the game will go ahead.

After being well beaten in India last week, Buttler insisted that England can be "dangerous" at the Champions Trophy, even if recent evidence suggests otherwise. Afghanistan have become a rising force in white-ball cricket in recent years, rising to eighth in the ODI world rankings, one place below England. The Afghans beat Australia on the way to a historic semi-final place at last year's T20 World Cup, before losing to South Africa. — AFP

Trump visits Daytona 500 as season begins

MIAMI: US President Donald Trump paid a flying visit to the Daytona 500 on Sunday, saluting the iconic race as a celebration of American culture as the NASCAR season got under way.

In the latest visit by Trump to a high-profile sporting event, Air Force One performed a flyover of the Daytona International Speedway before the race. Trump, who last week became the first sitting president ever to attend the Super Bowl, was subsequently ferried to the circuit in Florida in a presidential motorcade.

The US leader's limousine then led drivers around the race circuit while Trump addressed the participants via a radio message. "This is your favorite president," Trump could be heard telling the drivers. "I'm a big fan. I am a really big fan of you people. How you do this I don't know, but I just want you to be safe. You're talented people and you're great people and great Americans. Have a good day, have a lot of fun and I'll see you later." In a pre-race message released earlier by the White House, Trump said the Daytona 500 embodied American values that he hoped would usher in a new "Golden Age" for the nation.

"The Daytona 500 brings together people from all walks of life — from lifelong racing fans to first-time spectators — they all join in celebrating a shared passion for speed, adrenaline,

Fonseca, 18, captures Argentina Open title in landmark moment

BUENOS AIRES: Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca became the 10th youngest champion in ATP Tour history when he swept past home hope Francisco Cerundolo in the final of the Argentina Open on Sunday. The 18-year-old, ranked 99 in the world and playing in his first tour-level final, came through 6-4, 7-6 (7/1) against his 28th-ranked opponent.

Fonseca twice unsuccessfully served for the match but regrouped to claim victory in the tie-break in a frenzied atmosphere in Buenos Aires. The 2024 ATP NextGen champion is the youngest male player from South America to win a tour title while his victory will also see him rise to 68 when the new rankings

Sweden's Aberg wins at Torrey Pines with final hole drama

LOS ANGELES: Sweden's Ludwig Aberg drained a birdie putt on the 18th hole to win the Genesis Invitational at Torrey Pines on Sunday. Aberg played the last six holes at 4-under as he posted a final round 66 to pip American Maverick McNealy to the title—his second on the PGA Tour.

After a mixed front nine, where he made four birdies and two bogeys, Aberg came alive on the back nine with three straight birdies from the 13th hole. McNealy was in the clubhouse with his 8-under 64 putting him on 11-under for the tournament when Aberg approached the 18th tied for the lead.

The Swede blasted a perfect drive 317-yards down the middle of the fairway but left himself plenty of work to do after his approach shot ended up on the back of the green, 70 feet from the hole. Aberg, need-



DAYTONA BEACH: US President Donald Trump and NASCAR Senior Vice President Chip Wile stand during the national anthem prior to the NASCAR Cup Series Daytona 500 at Daytona International Speedway on February 16, 2025. — AFP

and the thrill of the race," Trump said.

"From the roar of the engines on the track to the echo of 'The Star-Spangled Banner' soaring through the stands, the Daytona 500 is a timeless tribute to the speed, strength, and unyielding spirit

that make America great. "That spirit is what will fuel America's Golden Age, and if we harness it, the future is truly ours." Trump left the circuit during a lengthy rain delay which disrupted the race during the early laps. — AFP



Brazil's Joao Fonseca celebrates with the trophy after defeating Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo in the ATP 250 Argentina Open singles final tennis match in Buenos Aires on February 16, 2025. — AFP

are released on Monday.

"Unbelievable week, even in Argentina there are some Brazilians cheering for me," Fonseca said on

ing two putts for the tournament winning birdie, left himself with a tricky 7-foot putt but kept his cool to sink it and claim the \$4 million first prize at the tournament hosted by Tiger Woods. "It was awesome. It was a great, you know, a great fight. Obviously the golf course is tough but I felt like I was in control of the ball flight all day and I'm really proud of the way that I finished. It was really cool," said Aberg.

"It's so much fun kind of coming down the last couple trying to win a tournament. It really is a special feeling and I'm proud of the way that I fought today," he added. McNealy was on the range keeping himself loose ahead of a possible playoff when the roar went up as Aberg clinched the win on the 18th.

It was a tough blow for the 29-year-old, who reached the turn at 6-under and made three more birdies before a bogey on the par-4 14th opened the door to Aberg. "A few poor shots and an unlucky break or two at the end but I definitely had a few things go my way earlier in the round," said McNealy.

Scheffler still searching

World number one Scottie Scheffler had threatened to make a late charge, chipping in from the bunker on the 15th to get within two shots of the

court. "That's just amazing. Every Brazilian, everyone from their country wants this support from your own country. For me, this moment that I'm living is just unbelievable."

He added: "Of course I want to be No. 1, of course I want to win Slams, titles, but my dream is just to play tennis, and I'm living it." Cerundolo, seeking his fourth career title, was broken in the seventh game of the first set and fought off Fonseca when the teenager served for the trophy at 5-4 and 6-5 in the second.

However, the Brazilian impressively held his nerve in the tie-break and celebrated his triumph by collapsing in joy on the dusty, clay surface. Fonseca made his maiden final the hard way—in Friday's quarter-finals he saved two match points to defeat Mariano Navone in a match six minutes shy of three hours.

In all, he defeated four Argentinian players on the road to the trophy. He had already announced himself on the scene in January when he came through qualifying at the Australian Open and defeated top 10 player Andrey Rublev in the first round. — AFP

lead. But last year's Player of the Year lost the momentum with a bogey on the next hole and his birdie on the last wasn't enough.

His round of 66 was a 10-shot improvement on his disappointing display on Saturday that left him with a mountain to climb. "I wouldn't say it was too much to overcome, I just wasn't able to hit all the shots today. I could have given myself a few more opportunities," he said.

Scheffler, who missed the early part of the season while he recovered from a hand injury, said he was not yet happy with his game. "I think I feel pretty bad about where I'm at. It's not easy to come out here and play competitive golf at a high level and get right back to where I was last year, losing those weeks that I had at home where I couldn't do anything," he said.

"I'm trying to give myself a little bit of grace and some patience, kind of getting back into the swing of things. I did some things in the last few weeks that I'm happy with and definitely some things that I need to improve on," he added. Scheffler finished tied for third with Patrick Rodgers, both three shots off Aberg. The tournament was held at the course near San Diego, instead of the usual home at Riviera, because of wildfire damage in Los Angeles. — AFP

Sports

'Incredible story' as Nabil Bentaleb scores on return from heart attack

Nice regain final guaranteed Champions League slot on goal difference from Monaco

PARIS: Nabil Bentaleb scored four minutes into his first appearance since suffering a heart attack to inspire Lille to a 2-0 victory at Rennes on Sunday with his coach hailing the player's "incredible story". The win allowed Lille to reclaim fifth place in Ligue 1 that Lyon had briefly grabbed earlier in the day by thrashing last-placed Montpellier.

Nice won 3-1 at struggling Le Havre to climb back into the top three. Bentaleb, a 30-year-old Algerian international midfielder, suffered a heart attack last June. He has since been fitted with a defibrillator, club sources told AFP.

The French Football Federation medical commission on Wednesday cleared him to play. He returned to the pitch after 76 minutes on Sunday night, four minutes after the hosts had been reduced to 10 men when Christopher Wooh was sent off. Lille had bombarded Brice Samba in the Rennes goal, who had also saved a weak first half penalty by Chuba Akpom.

But four minutes after coming on Bentaleb broke the deadlock, running in at the far post to poke home the rebound after another Samba save. Bentaleb galloped to the sideline pointing to the coaching staff before jumping into their arms. Akpom slid home a second six minutes later.

'Terrible times'

"It's really an incredible story and we're all happy to experience it," said Lille coach Bruno Genesio. "He hung on, he believed in himself, he believed in the people who took care of him. "There were periods where we all wondered if he was going to play again or not. As time went by,

we all had more and more confidence in him and in his ability to play again."

Genesio added: "Obviously, it was already a real victory for him, because he went through terrible times." On a day when all five away teams won, Nice seized control in Le Havre through a 16th minute goal from Gaetan Laborde and an own-goal from Etienne Youte Kinkoue two minutes later.

Yassine Kechta replied for the hosts after 28 minutes. Nice fullback Melvin Bard received his second yellow card in the final minute, but substitute Sofiane Diop sealed the win for the visitors with a goal deep into added time.

Nice regained the final guaranteed Champions League slot on goal difference from Monaco, who had hammered Nantes 7-1 on Saturday. Lyon took revenge for a home defeat earlier in the season with a 4-1 win at Montpellier. Georges Mikautadze gave the visitors a third-minute lead. Tanguy Coulibaly levelled before the break.

Lyon dominated the second half and struck through Ernest Nuamah, Corentin Tolisso and Alexandre Lacazette, with his 15th career goal against Montpellier. Next up Lyon host league leaders Paris Saint-Germain

"We'll be playing against the best team in the French league. We're going to prepare our strategy well, knowing that we've made good progress," said Lyon coach Paulo Fonseca. Strasbourg rose to seventh as they won 2-0 at Lens. The hosts were reduced to 10 men when fullback Deiver Machado was sent off in the 72nd minute.

The visitors exploited their advantage with an 81st minute goal by Dilane Bakwa and a second,



RENNES: Lille's Algerian French midfielder #06 Nabil Bentaleb (C) celebrates after scoring his team's first goal during the French L1 football match between Stade Rennais FC and Lille OSC (LOSC) at the Roazhon Park stadium in Rennes, western France. — AFP

in the 96th minute, by Emmanuel Emegha. Farid El Melali scored the only goal as Angers won 1-0 at Reims. On Saturday, Fabian Ruiz scored the only

goal as PSG edged out Toulouse 1-0 to stay 10 points clear at the top of the table from Marseille, who thrashed Saint-Etienne 5-1. — AFP

Inter Milan denied Serie A top spot by rivals Juventus

TURIN: Juventus stopped Inter Milan from replacing Napoli at the top of Serie A on Sunday by beating their fierce rivals 1-0 and moving into Italy's Champions League positions.

Francisco Conceicao made sure that Napoli would stay two points ahead of reigning champions Inter by classily tucking home the winning goal 16 minutes before the end of an entertaining contest in Turin. Portugal attacker Conceicao netted his fourth goal of the season in all competitions after brilliant work from Randal Kolo Muani to give Juve a third straight league win.

Juve are in fourth place on 46 points, ahead on goal difference from Lazio who had done wasteful Inter a favor by holding Napoli to a 2-2 draw on Saturday. But Napoli stay at the summit with Antonio Conte's team and Inter facing off in Naples in a fortnight, a match which could well be key to the destination of the Scudetto.

"The win tonight gives us confidence and an awareness of what we're capable of," said Thiago Motta, whose first season in charge of Juve has been difficult. "They deserve it for the effort they put in during training and the fact that they give everything in every match." Juve now turn their attentions to Wednesday's return leg of a Champions League play-off with PSV Eindhoven, with Motta's side leading 2-1 following the first leg in Turin. Sunday's match wasn't quite as exciting as the 4-4 draw at the San Siro in October but the scoreline didn't reflect the number of chances created by both teams, and in particular Inter.

Wasteful Inter

Simone Inzaghi's side were left to rue a clutch of missed opportunities in the first half, with Lautaro Martinez wasting the clearest opening. Argentina striker Martinez smashed over the bar from point-blank range 10 minutes before half-time after being perfectly set up by Denzel Dumfries.

Wing-back Dumfries was also at fault for Inter



TURIN: Inter Milan's Argentine forward #10 Lautaro Martinez (R) vies with Juventus Portuguese defender #12 Renato Veiga (L) during the Italian Serie A football match between Juventus and Inter Milan at the Juventus Stadium. — AFP

not leading at the break as he headed over Martinez's cross when completely unmarked in the 19th minute and just before the break smashed an effort off the post with Martinez waiting for a tap-in in the middle of the penalty box.

Neither side created another decent chance before Conceicao, who also forced an excellent save from Yann Sommer in the first half, sent the home fans and Motta wild in celebration.

And Inter knew the game was up when substitute Marcus Thuram, who was playing against his brother Khephren while his father Lilian watched in stands, lashed over in the final moments. "We're really disappointed but the boys played well tonight," said Inzaghi. "Obviously we needed to be better in front of goal and we should have been ahead at half-time, but the approach in the second half wasn't quite as good as in the first."

Como's survival boost

Earlier Como pulled away from the Serie A relegation zone with a convincing 2-0 away win at

Fiorentina. Assane Diao and Nico Paz struck in each half to give Como a surprise success in Florence which snapped a three-match losing streak and moved them up to 13th.

Cesc Fabregas' team are five points above Parma, who sit just inside the relegation zone after losing 1-0 to Roma, after a deserved win at the Stadio Artemio Franchi. Wealthy Como invested heavily in the winter transfer window in the hope of staying in Serie A and Diao netted his fourth goal in seven matches since arriving from Real Betis.

But Argentina international Paz has been the star of the show at Como and he sealed the win in the 66th minute with a rocket of a shot which took his league tally to six goals. Alessandro Nesta began his second spell as Monza manager with a goalless draw with Lecce which did little to boost their survival hopes.

Monza recalled Italy icon Nesta on Monday after firing his replacement Salvatore Bocchetti but stay rock-bottom and seven points behind Empoli, who sit just outside the drop zone and were beaten 3-0 at Udinese. — AFP

format, Celtic made it out of the group stage for the first time since 2012-13, finishing 21st in the table. But their progress has come in spite of poor away form in Europe.

Two scoreless draws at Atalanta and Dinamo Zagreb were bookended by thrashings at Borussia Dortmund and Aston Villa, with Celtic conceding 11 and scoring three. Six-time Champions League winners Bayern may have struggled away in Europe this season, losing three of five, but are dominant at home. Bayern have not lost in Munich in the Champions League since April 2021, a run of 20 games including battles against Real Madrid and Manchester City in the seasons they won the competition.

After Saturday's 3-0 controlled demolition of

third-placed Dundee United, Celtic have a 13-point lead atop the Scottish Premiership table. Matches against Europe's best have however spotlighted the gulf in quality Rodgers' 'Boys' must overcome should they progress further in the Champions League.

Wednesday's loss to Bayern was Celtic's first defeat on home soil in 33 games dating back to December 2023, once more highlighting the scope of the challenge on Tuesday. On Saturday, Rodgers praised his side's "mentality and focus" as they continued to develop and improve on the European stage.

"We've made great strides this season from last season in the competition. "We've been competitive. I wanted us to show our level throughout the competition and we've done that." — AFP

Neymar on target for Santos with first goal since 2023

SAO PAULO: Neymar scored for the first time in over 14 months on Sunday with his first goal for Santos since his return to his boyhood club at the start of the month. The 33-year-old helped Santos beat fourth division Agua Santa 3-1 in a Sao Paulo state championship match. Neymar, who failed to score in his first three games with Santos, stepped up to slot home a penalty in the 14th minute.

It was his 137th goal in 229 appearances for the club he has returned to after leaving them in 2013 for Barcelona. It was also his first goal for anyone since October 3, 2023 when he was playing for Al Hilal against Nassaji Mazandaran in the Asian Champions League. He terminated his contract with the Saudi club at the end of January to return home. Neymar spent 18 months with Al Hilal after joining from Paris Saint-Germain in August 2023 on a deal that enriched him by a reported 100 million euros (\$103m) a season.

Neymar played five games for them before suffering a serious knee injury playing for Brazil. After a year out, he returned last October and made two more appearances for Al Hilal, only to suffer a hamstring tear. On Sunday, in addition to his goal, Neymar also provided an assist, another first in the four matches he has played since arriving in Brazil. — AFP



Neymar

Classifieds

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Raawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088

Change of Name

I, Ravanamma Pasupuleti, holder of Indian Passport No. N1652162 having permanent address 15/76, Gutta Kinda Racha Palli, T Sundupalle, Annamaya, Andhra Pradesh, 516129, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Jyothi (given name) and Somala (surname). (#6636) 18/02/2025

I, Vishal, holder of Indian Passport No.

S8256191 having permanent address vpo Kahri, Hoshiarpur, Pin: 146111, Punjab, India residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Vishal (given name) and Kumar (surname). 18/02/2025

I, Filomena Gonsalves, 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. 16/2/2025

I, PRATHIBA, 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. 16/2/2025

I, MEENAZ, 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. (#6635) 16/2/2025

Spurs beat Man Utd in battle of Premier League strugglers

LONDON: Tottenham won the battle of the Premier League's underachievers 1-0 on Sunday to inflict another dismal result on Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim. James Maddison scored the only goal on 13 minutes as Spurs moved above United in the table into 12th thanks to a third win over the Red Devils this season. Victory eased the pressure on under-fire Tottenham boss Ange Postecoglou after exiting both domestic cup competitions this month to go with their lowly league position.

United now find themselves down in 15th, but do enjoy a 12-point cushion over the bottom three. "The place in the table is my worry, I am not worried about me," said Amorim, who has won just four of 14 Premier League games since taking charge in November. "I hate to lose. That feeling is the worst. The rest I am not thinking about."

"I understand my situation, my job, I am confident in my work and I just want to win games." Tottenham's first home league win since November came amid a spirit of revolt among their support. Before kick-off and after the match Spurs fans again vented their frustration towards owners ENIC and chairman Daniel Levy.

A huge banner read "24 years, 16 managers, 1 trophy - Time for change" as a sizeable contingent of the home crowd joined a protest calling for Levy to go. However, the mood for Postecoglou was lifted even before kick-off as he was able to welcome back a host of first-team regulars who have been sidelined by injury.

'Quality players' return

Goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario made his first appearance since November. Maddison returned to the starting line-up, while Destiny Udogie, Brennan Johnson and Wilson Odobert were on the bench. "They are quality players. We've had it pretty tough the last two-and-a-half months," said Postecoglou. "It was important for us to win and gain some traction. "I certainly feel there is



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's English midfielder #10 James Maddison (L) shoots to score the opening goal past Manchester United's Cameroonian goalkeeper #24 Andre Onana (R) during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester United at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London. — AFP

still a massive opportunity for us in this back half of the season and hopefully today is the start of that."

United have their own injury troubles with Amad Diallo joining Lisandro Martinez on the sidelines for the rest of the season and Kobbie Mainoo ruled out for a month. Amorim had to name eight teenagers among his nine substitutes, forcing Rasmus Hojlund and Joshua Zirkzee to start together up front after both were overlooked for United's last league game - a 2-0 defeat to Crystal Palace.

Hojlund had the first chance when he fired too close to Vicario before the Italian flew to his left to deny Alejandro Garnacho. Instead, Spurs got the opener when Andre Onana could only parry Lucas Bergvall's shot into the path of Maddison, who

tapped into an empty net for his 10th goal of the season. United should have been at least level by half-time as Garnacho blazed over a glorious opportunity with just Vicario to beat after being picked out by Bruno Fernandes. Vicario continued to frustrate Garnacho with another fine save after the break.

Zirkzee wasted a huge chance to equalize 20 minutes from time when the Dutch international headed Noussair Mazraoui's cross wide with the goal gaping. But United's inability to put the ball in the net comes as little surprise. Only the bottom three plus Everton have scored fewer than United's 28 goals in 25 league games this season. At the other end, Onana kept the visitors in the game by parrying Dejan Kulusevski's powerful effort. — AFP

India postpones winter games due to lack of snow

NEW DELHI: India suspended its winter games on Monday due to a lack of snow in one of the world's highest ski resorts, in a stark sign of rising global temperatures. While snow levels fluctuate each year, scientists say climate change is driving erratic rainfall and shifting weather patterns.

The Himalayan resort of Gulmarg in Indian-administered Kashmir was due to hold national competitions in Alpine skiing, Nordic skiing, ski mountaineering and snowboarding from February 22-25. Organizers had planned for hundreds of athletes to take part, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi had earlier said he was looking forward to the games, which would "encourage upcoming talent".

"The Khelo Winter Games... has been postponed due to insufficient snowfall," the region's Sports Council said in a statement. "A new assessment will be conducted once snow conditions improve." But slopes are lacking enough snow in the tournament's location, perched at 2,650 metres (8,694 feet).

Kashmir's once-thriving skiing industry has been hammered by a lack of snow in recent years. Beyond the collapse of the skiing industry, many in the ecologically fragile region are worried about impending water shortages that would have a dire potential impact on agriculture. Snow melt usually helps refresh the rivers, and changing weather patterns have already altered farming practices, heightening problems of water shortages and the risk of forest fires. — AFP

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