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Ramadan Kareem

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Isha	: 19:09

Trump appoints new US ambassador to Kuwait

Yemen born Ghalib made history in 2021 as first Arab mayor of Hamtramck, Michigan

RAMADAN KAREEM

Be mindful of Almighty Allah

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

Being mindful of Allah involves observing His obligations, adhering to His injunctions and abstaining from his prohibitions with the realization that He is watching over you. If we are mindful of Almighty Allah, He will safeguard us and elevate our status like He did for the Muslims of the early days. The basis of mindfulness is the knowledge that Almighty Allah is watching over us at every moment, seeing our deeds, knowing our feelings, and hearing our innermost thoughts.

Abu Huraira - Prophet's (PBUH) companion-narrated that arch-angel Gabriel approached Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and asked him about faith, Islam and Ihsan (excellence in worshipping Allah). The Prophet (PBUH) answered all his questions and regarding the last one, he said, "Al-Ihsan" (ie, excellence in worship) is attained or manifested in worshipping Almighty Allah as though you see Him, and if you don't see Him, He definitely sees you." (Al-Bukhari # 50)

You may hide yourself and evil acts from people, but you cannot hide them from Almighty Allah. The Majestic Allah tells us in the Noble Quran, translated as: "The treacherous people conceal (their evil) intentions and deeds from people, but they cannot conceal them from Allah, and He is with them (in His Knowledge) when they spend the night deliberating on an (evil) discourse with which He is not pleased. And ever is Allah All-Encompassing of what they do." (An-Nisa'a - Women 4: 108)

A believer who is mindful of Almighty Allah will always feel shy to let any of his body parts commit a sin whether in private or public because he knows Allah is watching over him. Abdullah bin Masoud (ra) narrated that Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "Be sincerely shy to disobey Allah!" We (the narrator relates) said, "We are always ashamed to disobey Allah - and all praises are due to Allah."

He said, "Not that, but being bashful from Allah is to protect the head and what it contains from sins, and to protect the stomach and the internal organs from sins. Moreover, you should remember death and decaying in the grave. And whoever focuses on the Hereafter, abandons the ornaments of this world." (Al-Albani rated it as authentic in Saheeh At-Tirmidhi # 2, 458) A young milk maid was married by Umar bin Al-Khattab's son because she was mindful of Almighty Allah.

During Umar's caliphate, he used to patrol the streets of Medina during the night. It was in fact his routine to do so in order to make sure that everyone was safe. Zaid bin Aslam narrated from his father, who narrated from his grandfather that on one such night, he was patrolling the streets with his servant. Becoming tired after a while, both of them stopped to rest at a house, leaning against its wall.

They could clearly hear the voice of an old woman from inside the house as she was

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US President Donald Trump (left) with former Hamtramck, Michigan, Mayor Amer Ghalib.

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has designated Hamtramck Mayor Amer Ghalib as the new Ambassador to Kuwait. In a statement posted on "Truth Social," Trump expressed his enthusiasm over Ghalib's appointment, highlighting his contributions to Trump's electoral campaigns in Michigan. The US president emphasized that Ghalib, a medical professional with a PhD, would represent the United States with distinction in his diplomatic mission. Ghalib, 45, was born in Yemen and made history in 2021 as the first Arab mayor of Hamtramck, Michigan.

In addition to Ghalib's appointment, Trump announced that Duke Buchan III would serve as the US Ambassador to Morocco. He praised Buchan's role in advancing "peace, freedom, and prosperity" between the two nations. Trump also named Michel Issa as the US Ambassador to Lebanon, describing him as a distinguished businessman, financial expert, and leader in banking, entrepreneurship, and international trade. "I have no doubt that he will serve our country with honor and distinction," Trump stated. — KUNA

Kuwait Airport resumes flights

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced Saturday that operations at Kuwait International Airport have returned to normal following a

temporary closure for emergency runway maintenance. Deputy Director General for Aviation Safety, Air Transport and Civil Aviation Security, as well as acting DGCA spokesperson Abdullah Al-Rajhi, told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the airport was temporarily closed at 8:55 am due to urgent technical maintenance on one of the runways. Operations resumed at 10:25 am.

During the closure, three flights were rerouted

to neighboring airports, while four other flights experienced delays. Al-Rajhi noted that coordination is underway to reschedule the affected flights to ensure their prompt arrival in Kuwait. He affirmed that the airport is now operating smoothly without issues, reiterating the DGCA's commitment to implementing all necessary measures to ensure passenger safety and maintain seamless air traffic operations. — KUNA

'Kuwaiti migrant' dies seeking to reach UK across Channel

LILLE: A Kuwaiti migrant in his 60s died on Saturday while seeking to cross the Channel from northern France to England aboard a small boat, regional authorities said. The man died after suffering a cardiac arrest on the boat that was carrying him and fellow migrants across the Channel, the prefecture of the Pas-de-Calais region in northern France told AFP. The boat returned to the beach and the man was taken off but was declared dead at the scene despite intervention from police and medics, it added. There

was no further information on his identity or why he had chosen to travel clandestinely to the UK.

He is the sixth person to lose their life this year trying to cross the Channel in this manner. "This boat set off again once it had dropped off the people who wanted to disembark on the beach," said the French maritime prefecture of the Channel and the North Sea, adding that the boat was "quite heavily loaded", without giving a precise figure on the number of people on board. According to the French authorities, 78 migrants died in 2024 while trying to reach England aboard small boats, a record since the start of the trend in this area in 2018.

The British and French governments are seeking to stop the crossings by intensifying patrols on France's beaches, intercepting inflatable boats destined for the crossings and apprehending the smugglers who are paid thousands of euros by ev-

ery migrant aboard for the dangerous passage. On February 27, UK Home Secretary Yvette Cooper met with her French counterpart, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau to agree new measures to tackle people-smuggling gangs, including establishing a new intelligence unit and training drone pilots to help intercept boats before they reach the sea.

French authorities will only stop migrants on land but never once they take to sea. But rights groups in France argue that the new measures are simply increasing the peril for migrants by forcing them into increasingly packed boats and choosing crossing points to the west where the Channel is lengthier. According to the UK authorities, 823 migrants arrived on 15 small boats in the week ending March 2. This week has also seen an intense flow as the weather improves, with 326 migrants aboard six boats arriving on March 4 alone. — AFP

Japan's barber, 108, crowned world's oldest

TOKYO: A 108-year-old Japanese woman has been certified the world's oldest barber. Guinness World Records said - and she has pledged to keep working until at least 110. Shitsui Hakoishi, born in 1916, decided to become a barber at the age of 14 when

a friend's mother asked if she wanted to become an apprentice at a hair salon in Tokyo. She still holds her own scissors, and took part this week in a celebration ceremony reportedly attended by her two children, an 85-year-old daughter and an 81-year-old son. "I'm very happy. My heart is full," she said at the ceremony in Nakagawa, a town in the eastern region of Tochigi.

Guinness World Records told AFP on Friday that the oldest barber category is split into male and female categories, but the oldest male barber - Anthony Mancinelli, who worked in New York

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108-year-old Japanese woman Shitsui Hakoishi

340 Alawite civilians killed by Syria forces

BEIRUT: A Syria war monitor reported on Saturday that more than 300 civilians from the Alawite minority have been killed in recent days by security forces and their allies, as authorities clash with militants loyal to the former government of Bashar Al-Assad. Restoring security has been one of the most complex tasks for Syria's new authorities, installed after Islamist-led forces ousted Assad - himself an Alawite - in a lightning offensive in December.

They are now facing their fiercest attacks yet by members of the Assad clan's Alawite minority and have launched a major counter-operation in the ethnic group's Mediterranean heartland. Deadly clashes on Thursday triggered the security operation, after previous tensions in the area. The Syrian Observatory for



BANIYAS, Syria: Members of the Syrian security forces enter the western city of Baniyas in Syria's coastal Tartous province to reinforce government troops in clashes with militants loyal to deposed ruler Bashar Al-Assad. — AFP

Human Rights reported on Saturday that "340 Alawite civilians were killed in the coastal regions of Syria and the Latakia mountains by security forces and allied groups" since then.

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Ramadan Kareem

Diwan Al - Naki

Mohammed Al-Naki

The family diwaniya

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Jassim Al Wazzan Street,
across Al Othman Mosque



Local

Kuwait reflects on commitment to women's rights on Women's Day

Kuwait shows progress in empowering women to take on leadership roles across various fields



KUWAIT: The late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen with the first four Kuwaiti female parliamentarians in 2009.

KUWAIT: The world celebrated International Women's Day on Saturday recognized by the United Nations since 1975 to honor women's struggles, achievements, and their active role in societal development and the pursuit of equality, while rejecting all forms of discrimination. Observed annually on March 8th, this day renews appreciation for the invaluable contributions women continue to make globally, showcasing their pioneering and civilizational roles in societal development and prosperity.

This year's theme, "Rights, Equality, and Empowerment for All Women and Girls," calls for actions that ensure equal rights and opportunities for everyone, aiming for a future where no woman or girl is left behind. The year also marks the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, regarded as the most progressive framework for advancing women's and girls' rights globally.

Kuwait has always emphasized Kuwaiti women's rights, actively raising awareness about their crucial role in society and making decisions to enhance their position locally and internationally. Kuwait also supports various legislative initiatives in United Nations conferences, meetings, and international forums, working to empower women and elevate their societal status. Global indicators of women's empowerment show progress in Kuwait, with the country advancing from 123rd to 61st place out of 177 countries in a report by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security. Additionally, Kuwait improved by 10 points in the Global Gender Gap Index.

Kuwait has consistently integrated women into decision-making and government planning, aligning with Article 29 of the Constitution and the vision of "New Kuwait 2035." The country also supports Goal 5 of the United Nations Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs) 2030, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. Kuwaiti women have demonstrated their leadership in various sectors, a result of decades of advocacy. In 2005, women were granted political rights, a decision recognizing their vital role as active participants in society. Women now occupy 28 percent of leadership roles in state sectors, and their representation has increased across fields such as law enforcement, oil, judiciary, and diplomacy.

Notably, in 2024, four women were appointed as directors in the Public Prosecution, and 88 female prosecutors and 19 female judges are serving. In the security sector, 19 women joined the Amiri Guard, and over 900 female police officers serve in the country. In the economic sector, women hold 41 percent of leadership and supervisory roles at the Central Bank of Kuwait and 35 percent in the banking sector. Additionally, 144 women, or 22 percent of the diplomatic staff, represent Kuwait in its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and women make up 54 percent of the workforce at Kuwait Petroleum Corporation.

Kuwait has been a regional leader in promoting women's empowerment, becoming the first Gulf country to support women's participation in the private sector. It also pioneered the "Waraqati" project, aimed at enhancing and legally empowering women's rights. The Waraqati project, which was launched in the early 2010s, aims to inform women of all their rights as outlined in Kuwait's Constitution and legislation, as well as in accordance with its international commitments.

The project has been implemented in six Arab countries, and its success in those countries served as an impetus for launching it in Kuwait, making it the first country in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah tours the Women's Police Institute. — KUNA photos



Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Dr Amthah Al-Huwailah grants four women in the Supreme Council for Family Affairs authority of judicial enforcement on May 16, 2024.

region to do so. It was implemented by Kuwait in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and under the supervision of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development.

Kuwait has ratified several international agreements, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against

Women and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Kuwait works closely with the United Nations and regional organizations like ESCWA to develop the capabilities of Kuwaiti women, preparing them for more effective roles in achieving developmental goals and implementing programs related to their rights. — Agencies

Burgan Bank celebrates International Women's Day amid inclusive culture

KUWAIT: In celebration of Women's International Day, Burgan Bank upheld its commitment to fostering a work culture of equity, inclusivity, and empowerment that attracts and retains the most aspiring national talents. On its mission to position itself as an employer of choice, Burgan, a certified Great Place to Work®, has successfully built an environment where all employees have numerous, equal-access opportunities for personal and professional growth, empowering the most driven and committed to advance to leadership roles within the institution and across the industry.

These yearlong, cross-departmental efforts echo the Bank's commitment to investing in Kuwait's professional calibers, empowering women in the workplace, and embedding environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles into all operations and initiatives.

"At Burgan, we pride ourselves on fostering a culture of equity and inclusivity that continues to attract the most adept national calibers across Kuwait's banking sector, allowing us to grow with confidence and resolve," said Naqeeb Amin, General Manager – Human Resources and Development at Burgan Bank. "As we celebrate the remarkable women of our team and the invaluable insights they bring to the institution, we renew our commitment to adopting an equity-centered approach to empowerment, which recognizes the different forms of support our diverse employees need to realize their full personal and professional potential."

Amin added: "Empowering employees to achieve their best and continue to grow is a year-round project that demands a thorough and up-to-date understanding of employees' individual needs, aspirations, preferred learning styles, and unique challenges." Among the most notable efforts for fostering an environment of equity and equal chances for success is the 'Lean-In Circle for Women Empowerment' program, which centers on discussing the unique challenges that women face in the workplace and providing them with dedicated mentorship and enabling them to grow past these hurdles.

"Addressing women's unique challenges and aspirations, and ultimately achieving diversity in the workplace, isn't merely a mandatory standard or a quota that businesses need to fulfill; fostering diversity and inclusivity is at the core of any culture's



Ghalia Al-Saleh

Naqeeb Amin

sustainable growth, be it professional, social, or even ecological," commented Ghalia Al-Saleh, Senior Manager – Talent Acquisition at Burgan Bank. "Nonetheless, we are honored to have achieved the highest percentage of female employment in the domestic banking sector in 2025, with women making up 46 percent of our staff."

Al-Saleh underscored Burgan's relentless efforts to acquire and develop the most aspiring Kuwaiti professional talents in line with its commitment to the nationwide Kuwaitization strategy in addition to Burgan's strategy for investing in national human capital, which benefits both employees and undergraduate interns who aspire to build a career in banking and finance.

Besides programs such as the 'Lean-In Circle', Burgan Bank also organized its first 'Empower Her' summer internship, which hosted 18 young women, matching interns with mentors from the Bank's most inspirational and established female leaders. The internship's success was followed by the 'Empower Her' seminar, which was held under the auspices and sponsorship of Sheikha Danah Al-Sabah, with the participation of prominent figures and impactful female industry leaders in the Kuwaiti banking and finance sector.

Burgan Bank upholds its commitment to female representation in the workplace, underscoring its vital importance in achieving fundamental industry-wide change, which depends on female representation in leadership roles and equal opportunity for claiming decision-making positions within institutions and across the country's various sectors.

It serves to note that Burgan Bank remains one of the most active contributors to achieving the 'New Kuwait' Vision 2035 goals through its dedicated strategy for investing in Kuwait's national calibers and human capital. Throughout the year, the Bank continues to offer its staff the best learning and development opportunities that meet their various needs and aspirations across all employment grades.

No country has full gender equality: Australian envoy

By Passant Hisham

KUWAIT: At a ghabqa hosted by the Australian Embassy in Kuwait on Thursday, Australian Ambassador Melissa Kelly stressed the global struggle for gender equality. "There are no countries in the world that have achieved gender equality," Australian Ambassador Melissa Kelly stated. Addressing a gathering of female leaders, diplomats, and professionals, she highlighted the importance of continued efforts toward equality. "Gender equality is a very simple idea but yet it still receives a lot of challenge across the globe," Kelly said, emphasizing that true progress requires ensuring that all individuals "have academic, economic and social opportunities, live lives free of violence, and have

the freedom to forge their own paths."

The event, held at the Australian Residence, also reflected on the spirit of Ramadan, which Kelly described as a deeply meaningful time in Kuwait. The Holy Month, she noted, brings people together in reflection, gratitude, and acts of goodwill—values that align closely with the push for a more just and equal world. "I have to say there's something very special about Ramadan in Kuwait and it's a real honor for me as an ambassador to be able to take part in rituals and festivities that happen in Kuwait throughout the month," she said.

She pointed out that Ramadan strengthens community bonds and offers a chance for personal reflection. "Kuwait is all about community and I think that comes to the fore during Ramadan when it takes on additional meaning." Praising the accomplished women in attendance, Kelly expressed her appreciation: "Tonight is really our way of acknowledging you all – your roles both professional and personal in Kuwait," she said, addressing female ambassadors, Kuwaiti leaders, activists, and expatriates who have contributed to their communities.



KUWAIT: Australian Ambassador Melissa Kelly poses for a photo with diplomats and women leaders at the ghabqa hosted by the Australian Embassy in Kuwait.

Local

Kuwait cuts life prison term to 20 years

Directive aims to enhance Kuwait's reformative within correctional institutions



KUWAIT: Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah prays with inmates and their families during his visit to the Central Prison. — KUNA photos



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef gives a speech during his visit to the Central Prison.



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef is seen with interior ministry personnel during his visit to the Central Prison.



Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef speaks with Central Prison inmates and their families during his visit to share iftar with them.

KUWAIT: Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah has directed that the life imprisonment sentence be reduced to 20 years, instead of being for the convict's lifetime with permanent hard labor. This decision comes following the directives of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Friday, during his visit to the Central Prison to have iftar with inmates and their families, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef said he has ordered the formation of

a committee to review the files of those sentenced to life imprisonment three months before completing the 20-year term. He urged correctional leadership and those enforcing sentences to promptly identify inmates eligible for this reduction and expedite the review process.

This initiative is part of Kuwait's vision to enhance the reformative and rehabilitative approach within correctional institutions. The directive aims to balance the execution of sentences with the goal of justice, providing inmates with an opportunity to

rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society after serving their sentences.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef emphasized that the Ministry of Interior, through its correctional institutions, believes that punishment should contribute to rehabilitation, not just penalize. He also congratulated the correctional sector, prison staff, and inmates on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. He noted that the Ministry places significant focus on correctional facilities, recognizing that their role extends beyond enforcing penalties and towards providing a

rehabilitative environment that helps inmates reintegrate into society with a renewed commitment to the law and national development.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef praised the significant progress in Kuwaiti correctional institutions, particularly in the quality of facilities, healthcare, and social services, making Kuwaiti prisons a model for adherence to international humanitarian standards. He stressed the importance of collaboration between government agencies and civil society to support reform and rehabilitation programs. — KUNA

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Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: The Dickson family's desert camp in 1934. (Source: Center for Research and Studies in Kuwait.) — Compiled by Mahmoud Zakaria, researcher in heritage.

In my view

Roads update: Is Kuwait finally seeing the end of traffic woes?



By Khaled Al-Abdulahdi

Anyone visiting Kuwait can't help but notice the ongoing road construction projects scattered across the country. Despite these efforts, even a light drizzle seems capable of causing havoc on our streets, with potholes forming and concrete loosening.

But after years of frustration, it feels like the much-needed road improvements are finally underway. Though the process is daunting and will take time, I'm confident that the roads will soon meet Kuwait's standards.

For years, angry drivers and congested streets have been an undeniable part of daily life in Kuwait. However, major initiatives tied to Kuwait's New Vision 2035 aim to reduce these issues. The combination of bad roads and poor driving habits has contributed to delays and accidents, making it clear that action was necessary.

The government has started addressing transportation issues on multiple fronts. Last year, the interior ministry stressed that there would be zero tolerance for reckless driving and endangering public safety, with traffic fines significantly increased—set to take effect in April. Meanwhile, the public works ministry has accelerated the repair of existing roads and the construction of new ones, including bridges that are crucial for easing traffic.

In August of last year, the interior ministry held a crucial meeting to discuss short, medium, and long-term solutions for traffic congestion. The meeting, based on a decision from the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, felt like a long-awaited step in the right direction—one, and frankly, a dream come true.

The efforts made in 2024 are beginning to come to fruition. One key project that has seen noticeable progress is the renovation of the Fifth Ring Road, a major route connecting Bidaa to Amghara across four governorates. A large part of the road has been renovated with the construction of a tunnel in both directions. Converting Damascus Street into an overpass is still in progress.

Accidents reached an all-time high in 2023, with reports indicating an average of eight accidents per hour. However, there has been a reduction in incidents in 2024, likely due to the increased enforcement of traffic laws. Now, as fines are going to be increased, and roads being improved... things are expected to change.

Public Works Minister Dr Noura Al-Mashaan emphasized the ministry's commitment to road safety, describing it as a pivotal issue that concerns society. "Kuwait is committed to applying the best methods in developing infrastructure, enhancing safety standards, and supporting policies and strategies aimed at reducing traffic accidents and minimizing both human and material losses," she said. She pointed out that Kuwait has placed road safety among the priorities of its development plans and work program by implementing projects to develop, expand and maintain roads using high-quality materials to enhance their durability and extend their lifespan.

Kuwait is in the midst of a significant transformation. It's like a house undergoing renovation—noisy and uncomfortable at times, but with time and patience, the work will ultimately reveal a more functional and safer environment for all. The road to improvement may be long, but we're on the right track.

Despite need, some parents hesitant about school buses

Lifestyle changes drive busing demand, but concerns over safety remain

By Jassim Al-Awadi

KUWAIT: With over 682,000 students enrolled in Kuwait's public and private schools as of the 2021/2022 academic year, daily transportation has become a significant challenge. The traditional system—where parents or stay-at-home chauffeurs handle drop-offs and pickups—is increasingly unfeasible due to changes in lifestyle, housing arrangements, traffic, and school locations. These pressures have made it clear: alternative transportation solutions are urgently needed.

A major obstacle to the traditional model is the lack of accommodation for stay-at-home drivers. With many families moving from houses to apartments, space for live-in chauffeurs is often unavailable. "I live in an apartment, and I simply don't have room to accommodate a driver," said Abdullah, the father of a four-year-old. "Fortunately, I can rely on the driver at my father's house, but that's not an option for everyone." This has led parents to explore alternatives, primarily school buses and hired taxi services. While both options exist, school buses are the more widely discussed solution.

School busing has been under discussion in Kuwait since the 1960s. In 2023, the ministry of education awarded a KD 30 million contract to provide school bus services for public schools, allocating 1,696 buses for the 2024/2025 academic year. Assuming each bus carries 50 students, this would accommodate about 12 percent of total students at best. However, many parents remain hesitant about school buses due to concerns over lack of oversight and regulation, safety, extended commute times, fees and affordability, and cleanliness and comfort issues, among others.

"Part of what drives this hesitation is fear or anxiety about the unknown or uncontrollable," one parent explained. "When I take my kids to school myself or use my own driver, I know the vehicle's condition, who is in the car, and what the journey will be like. With a school bus, there could be disruptive students, cleanliness concerns, or temperature issues that affect my child's comfort."

Rainy weekend in Kuwait as low pressure system brings showers

KUWAIT: Kuwait experienced a significant weather event on Friday, as a surface low-pressure system, accompanied by a deep upper-level low, unleashed persistent rainfall and occasional thunderstorms across the country. Meteorological stations recorded varying amounts of rainfall throughout the day, affecting multiple regions and disrupting daily activities.

Acting Director of the Meteorological Department Dherar Al-Ali explained to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the heaviest rainfall was recorded in Al-Wafra, with 54.1 mm, followed by Ras Al-Salmiyah with 21.8 mm and Kuwait Airport with 20.6 mm. Other regions that saw significant rainfall included Jal Al-Liah, with 14.9 mm, Al-Abdali, with 13.8 mm, and Al-Sabriyah, with 11.4 mm. Al-Jahra recorded 10.1 mm, and Umm Al-Maradam saw 7.4 mm. Rainfall in Kuwait City was recorded at 4.3 mm, while Failaka Island received 3.5 mm and Bubiyan 3.1 mm. The lowest rainfall, 2.2 mm, was

reported in Al-Salmi.

In response to the heavy rainfall, the Kuwait Municipality mobilized all available resources, including equipment and machinery, to assist relevant authorities in draining rainwater from streets, squares, and public areas. The municipality's cleaning and road maintenance teams in all governorates said they worked around the clock in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works and other concerned agencies to ensure that roads are cleared and traffic flows smoothly despite the ongoing rainy weather.

Minister of Public Works Dr Noura Al-Mashaan, along with the Ministry's Undersecretary Eid Al-Rashidi, visited the Joint Operations Room in Shuwaikh to monitor the situation and oversee the efforts being made to address the consequences of the rainfall affecting different parts of the country.

Additionally, the Kuwait Army announced that its "Ghaith" task force was on full alert and ready to provide



KUWAIT: School students cross the street as a bus pull over in this file photo.

The UAE has led the way in implementing high safety and regulatory standards for school transportation. In 2022, nearly 241,000 students commuted via 7,217 buses across both public and private schools. The UAE's system ensures parental confidence by providing real-time tracking, strict regulations and high safety standards. Such a structured approach has encouraged many parents to adopt school busing, offering them flexibility to focus on their careers and eliminating the stress of early school pickups and parking challenges.

An unexpected catalyst for school busing adoption in Kuwait has been the introduction of the third fingerprint attendance system for government employees. This policy has made it increasingly difficult for parents to personally transport their children to and from school. "We have seen a jump in demand, especially after the introduction of the third finger-

print," said Hasan Akbar, a full-time school bus operator of six years.

For more parents to take school busing seriously, there must be clear and consistent regulations. Currently, most agreements between bus operators and schools operate on a trust-based system, creating inconsistencies in service. "People want a consistent driver they trust, and the same goes for the supervisor," Akbar explained. "Right now, most bus operators work independently, and there is little oversight, which has skewed the market."

To improve confidence in school busing, Akbar emphasized the need for increased regulation and oversight from multiple entities. "Ideally, for parents to consider school busing a viable option, there must be more regulation from the ministry of interior, ministry of education and the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation."



KUWAIT: Fog covers Kuwait City's skyscrapers on March 7, 2025. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

logistical and humanitarian assistance in coordination with the Ministry of Public Works, the Civil Defense, and other relevant state institutions. The

task force assisted in the evacuation and drainage of accumulated rainwater, particularly from the main roads in the Sabah Al-Ahmad area. — KUNA



Migrants shun shelters on their way home to South America

North Korea's Kim inspects 'nuke-powered submarine' project

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CAIRO: In this aerial view, students and Muslims from different countries gather in the courtyard of the Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo, to pray before breaking their fast and to mark the 1,085th anniversary of its establishment, during the holy month of Ramadan on March 7, 2025. — AFP

Trump invites Iran leader to nuclear talks—or else

No talks with US under 'maximum pressure' policy: Iranian FM

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Friday that he has written to Iran's supreme leader pressing for new talks on its nuclear program, warning of possible military action if not. Iran's foreign minister told AFP on Friday that his country would not negotiate so long as the United States applies "maximum pressure," but he was not responding directly to Trump's letter to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Trump's outreach marks a departure at least in tone from the hardline stance that marked his first term and could put him at odds with close ally Zionist entity, which last year carried out bombing strikes inside Iran. "Hopefully we can have a peace deal," Trump told re-

porters at the White House, saying "we're at the final moments" on the Iranian nuclear program.

"I'd rather see a peace deal than the other," he said of military action. "But the other will solve the problem." Trump earlier revealed the letter in an interview on Fox Business in which he said he told Khamenei: "I hope you're going to negotiate because if we have to go in militarily it's going to be a terrible thing for them."

It was unclear how Trump sent the letter, which Iran's mission to the United Nations said it has not received. Former president Barack Obama negotiated a landmark 2015 deal that promised sanctions relief in return for Iran curbing its nuclear program.

Trump denounced the agreement and pulled out in 2018 during his first term, over the objections of European allies. He instead imposed sweeping unilateral US sanctions on any other country buying Iran's oil. Tehran, which denies seeking nuclear weapons, initially adhered to the deal but then rolled back commitments.

US officials estimate Iran would now need more weeks to build a nuclear bomb if it chooses to. On his return to the White House, Trump said he was reinstating—but only reluctantly—his "maximum pressure" policy on Iran. He has since sidelined officials from his first term associated with the hard line, and has vowed to break out of a foreign policy establishment he de-

scribes as war-mongering. Trump's brash billionaire confidant Elon Musk was reported to have met Iran's ambassador to the United Nations shortly after the election to deliver a message that Trump wants calm and diplomacy. Iran has been cautious about returning to diplomacy. "We will not enter any direct negotiations with the US so long as they continue their maximum pressure policy and their threats," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told AFP on Friday. Speaking on the sidelines of an Organization of Islamic Cooperation meeting in Jeddah, Araghchi also warned that Iran's nuclear program "cannot be destroyed through military operations." —AFP



GAZA CITY: Rami Arrouqi and his wife Iman Farahat interact with their newly-adopted five-month-old orphaned baby Jannah (paradise in Arabic), at their home in Gaza City on March 6, 2025. — AFP

Adopted orphan brings couple 'paradise' in war-ravaged Gaza

GAZA CITY: In their home in war-devastated Gaza City, Iman Farhat and her husband cherish the "paradise" brought by their newly-adopted baby, one of many orphans in the Palestinian territory after more than 15 months of fighting between Zionist entity and Hamas. Wrapping five-month-old Jannah in a brightly colored blanket, Farhat gently sang as she rocked her to sleep. "I chose Jannah just as she was," the new mother said smiling, explaining the couple simply wanted to adopt a young child without preference for gender or physical appearance. "Her name was Massa, and I officially changed her name from Massa to Jannah," which means "paradise" in Arabic, she added. Farhat, 45, and her husband Rami Al-Arouqi, 47, adopted the well-behaved and chubby baby in January. "At first, we had mixed feelings of both joy and fear, because it is a huge responsibility and we had never had a child," said Arouqi, a Palestinian Authority employee.

The couple already owned a cat. "The idea of adopting a child had crossed our minds, but it was cemented during the war" which "wiped out entire families and left only orphans", he added. In September, the United Nations children's fund, UNICEF, estimated there were 19,000 children who were unaccompanied or separated from their parents in Gaza. Jonathan Crickx, UNICEF's spokesman for the Palestinian territories, told AFP. Data for the number of adoptions in Gaza was not immediately available. Farhat and her husband said that before Jannah's adoption, she was taken care of by the SOS Children's Villages—an international NGO which looks after children in need. —AFP

Zionists damaged historic West Bank mosque: Officials

NABLUS: Palestinian officials denounced the partial burning of a historic mosque in the occupied West Bank city of Nablus on Friday, which they said had been carried out during a raid by Zionist entity armed forces.

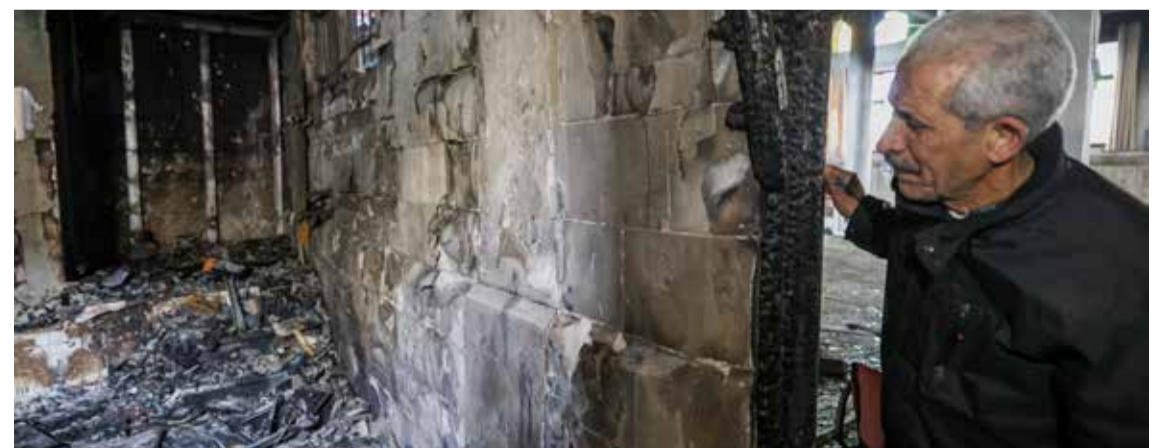
AFP TV footage from Friday showed Palestinians inspecting the blackened and partially charred interior of the Al-Nasr mosque—a landmark in Nablus' Old City.

Witnesses interviewed by AFP said the military operation took place between 2:00 am and 6:30 am. When contacted by AFP, the Zionist entity army did not immediately provide official comment on its operations in the northern West Bank city. Local religious authorities said a total of six mosques had been targeted. The destruction came as Muslims marked the first

Friday of the holy month of Ramadan. In a statement, the Palestinian Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs called the damage to the Nablus mosques "a serious attack in its size and timing", and condemned "a systematic plan... in the desecration of our holy sites, mosques and places of worship".

Nablus endowments director Sheikh Nasser Al-Salman denounced "the Zionist entity occupation's barbaric invasion of Nablus mosques". In a statement, he accused Zionist entity of "working hard to violate Islamic holy sites and mosques at an accelerated pace".

Zionist entity has been waging a weeks-long offensive in the northern West Bank that began around refugee camps regarded as bastions of Palestinian militancy. It has since expanded to more areas, displaced tens of thousands of people and saw the first deployment of Zionist entity tanks in the territory in 20 years. In a statement, the Nablus municipality condemned Zionist entity forces' "burning of the Al-Nasr mosque, which is considered a historical mosque and an important heritage landmark inside the Old City". —AFP



NABLUS: A Palestinian man checks the partially burned Al-Nasr Mosque following a Zionist military raid in the old city of Nablus, in the occupied West Bank, on March 7, 2025. — AFP

WhatsApp group admin shot dead for removing member

PESHAWAR: A Pakistani man has been charged with murder after allegedly shooting the administrator of a community WhatsApp group who removed him from the chat, police said Saturday. Mushtaq Ahmed was shot dead on Thursday evening in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a prov-

ince that borders Afghanistan, which has a history of bloody sectarian violence.

A man named only as Ashfaq has been charged with his murder, according to police documents seen by AFP and a local police official. Mushtaq allegedly kicked Ashfaq out of the WhatsApp group following an argument, according to a statement by Mushtaq's brother seen by AFP. He said that both parties had arranged to meet and reconcile but alleges that Ashfaq turned up with a gun and opened fire, killing his brother. Ashfaq was angry "in reaction to removal from WhatsApp group," according to his statement. The availability of firearms, the influence of tribal customs, and sometimes weak law enforcement contribute to the frequency of such incidents. — AFP

US carries out first firing squad execution since 2010

WASHINGTON: A South Carolina man convicted of murdering his ex-girlfriend's parents with a baseball bat was put to death by firing squad on Friday in the first such execution in the United States in 15 years. Brad Sigmon, 67, was executed by a three-person firing squad at the Broad River Correctional Institution in the state capital Columbia, South Carolina prison spokeswoman Chrysti Shain said. Shain said the fatal shots were fired at 6:05 pm (2305 GMT) and Sigmon was pronounced dead by a physician at 6:08 pm (2308 GMT).

Journalists who witnessed the execution from behind bulletproof glass said Sigmon was wearing a black jumpsuit with a small red bullseye made of paper or cloth over his heart and was strapped into a chair in the death chamber. In a final statement read out by his attorney, Gerald "Bo" King, Sigmon said he wanted to send a message of "love and a calling to my fellow Christians to help us end the death penalty." A hood was then placed over Sigmon's head. About two minutes later, the firing squad—volunteers from the South Carolina Department of Corrections—fired their rifles through a slit in a wall about 15 feet (five meters) away.

Anna Dobbins of WYFF News 4 TV station said the shots "were all fired at once" like it was "just one sound." "His arms flexed," Dobbins said. "There was something in his midsection that moved—I'm not necessarily going to call them breaths, I don't really know—but there was some movement that went on there for two or three seconds." "It was very fast," she said. "I did see a splash of blood when the bullets entered his body. It was not a huge amount, but there was a splash." Sigmon, who confessed to the 2001 murders of David and Gladys Lark and admitted his guilt at trial, had asked the Supreme Court for a last-minute stay of execution but it was denied. South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster also rejected his appeal for clemency. "Brad's death was horrifying and violent," King, his lawyer, said in a statement. "It is unfathomable that, in 2025, South Carolina would execute one of its citizens in this bloody spectacle." —AFP



Brad Sigmon

International

'Not animals': Migrants shun shelters on their way home to South America

'Reverse migration reflection of a larger crisis that has left thousands in limbo'

MIRAMAR, Panama: Luis Montilla chose sleeping on a beach in Panama instead of being confined to a migrant shelter on his way home to Venezuela after failing to enter the United States. "We're not animals," the 28-year-old said, adding that staying at a government reception center meant being "shut in, keeping quiet, staying in bed and doing as you're told."

Montilla was one of several dozen people from his country waiting for relatives to send them \$260 for the boat trip to Colombia from Panama's Caribbean coast. They had already made the arduous journey back from Mexico on foot and by bus after US President Donald Trump toughened immigration policy and canceled appointments for asylum seekers.

Trump's crackdown has triggered a new migration wave from north to south that has left authorities in the region struggling to cope. "Reverse migration is not a voluntary return, but rather a reflection of a larger crisis that has left thousands in limbo. It is a forced return flow," Diego Chaves, an analyst at the Washington-based Migration Policy Institute, told AFP.

Neither Montilla nor the others waiting for boats wanted to take advantage of a plan announced this week by Costa Rica and Panama to bus migrants at their own cost to shelters in remote border areas.

"They treat you like a criminal there. You're a prisoner. People prefer to walk," said Victor Diaz, 19. Like hundreds of others over the past month, Diaz opted to take the risks of traveling by boat rather than trekking through the Darien jungle on the border with Colombia again. So did Jinnelis Navas, who arrived on Panama's Caribbean coast with 10 relatives who were trying to get money for a boat.

In Mexico, they were treated "like dogs" in a shelter, the 50-year-old said.

"That's why we didn't turn ourselves in" to the au-

thorities in Costa Rica and Panama, Navas said.

Migrants returning southward to Costa Rica from Nicaragua who accept the official scheme are sent by bus to a shelter on the border with Panama. They then board another bus that crosses Panama before arriving at Lajas Blancas and San Vicente, two migrant centers in the Darien region.

From there, they are supposed to fly out on humanitarian flights, but so far none have departed.

Under pressure from Trump, Costa Rica and Panama are now "bridges" for deportations from the United States. Two of the shelters house more than 200 Asian deportees, including Afghans and Iranians, who do not want to return to their countries.

The International Organization for Migration is seeking another country to accept them.

Amid the controversy, Panama announced Friday that it would grant a 30-day permit to more than 110 Asian migrants at San Vicente, so they can leave and arrange transport elsewhere. It also announced that the Lajas Blancas shelter would be closed, along with another one in the area. The government did not say where those arriving from Costa Rica would now be taken.

Criminalized

According to lawyer Gabriela Oviedo of the Center for Justice and International Law, a Latin American rights group, "migrants are criminalized," and shelters in Costa Rica and Panama "are detention centers." Those who do stay at the shelters are guarded by police and undergo biometric checks to rule out criminal records.

They have no access to defense or legal advice, according to Oviedo, who urged the authorities not to keep children in confinement. AFP requested access to shelters in Costa Rica and Panama but with-

out success. More than 2,200 homebound migrants arrived in Panama in February, according to the government. Many fall deeper into debt on their way back because they have to pay for buses and boats.



PALENQUE: Migrants bound for Colombia wait for a boat in Miramar, near Palenque, Panama, on March 5, 2025. — AFP

out success. More than 2,200 homebound migrants arrived in Panama in February, according to the government. Many fall deeper into debt on their way back because they have to pay for buses and boats.

"Reverse migration will not be the end of the road for many, but rather a new cycle of precariousness and forced mobility," said Chaves. The Costa Rican

Ombudsman's Office said that many migrants in the shelter on the border with Panama want to go out and work informally so they can earn money to continue their journey. "They have the right to not have their freedom of movement arbitrarily restricted," Juanita Goebertus, Americas director at New York-based Human Rights Watch, said. — AFP

Scientists rally in US cities to protest Trump's staff cuts

WASHINGTON: Scientists rallied in cities across the United States on Friday to denounce efforts by the administration of US President Donald Trump to eliminate key staff across multiple agencies and curb life-saving research.

Since Trump returned to the White House, his government has cut federal research funding, withdrawn from the World Health Organization and the Paris Climate Agreement, and sought to dismiss hundreds of federal workers working on health and climate research. In response, researchers, doctors, students, engineers and elected officials took to the streets in New York, Washington, Boston, Chicago and Madison, Wisconsin to vent their fury at what they see as an unprecedented attack on science. "I have never been so angry," said Jesse Heitner, a researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, who joined more than 1,000 people demonstrating in the US capital.

"They're lighting everything on fire," Heitner told AFP at the Lincoln Memorial. He felt particularly incensed about the appointment of noted vaccine skeptic Robert F Kennedy Jr as the head of the Department of Health and Human Services. "If you put someone in charge of NASA who's a 'Flat Earther,'

that's not okay," he said.

"Fund science, not billionaires" and "America was built on science," read some of the signs brandished at the Washington protest. "What's happening now is unprecedented," said Grover, a university researcher in his 50s who declined to provide further personal details due to professional constraints.

Dressed in a white lab coat and wielding a pink sign that read "Stand Up for Science," he told AFP his employer had urged staff to keep a low profile, fearing financial retribution in the form of suspended or cancelled federal grants. "I've been around research over 30 years, and what's going on has never happened," he said, adding that the "inexcusable" actions by the federal government would have "long-term repercussions."

Many researchers told AFP about their fears about the future of their grants and other funding. The suspension of some grants has already led some universities to reduce the number of students accepted into doctoral programs or research positions.

For those just getting started in their careers, the concern is palpable. "I should be at home studying, instead of having to be here defending my right to have a job," said Rebecca Glisson, a 28-year-old doctoral student in neuroscience. Glisson is due to defend her thesis at her program in Maryland next week, but feels apprehensive about her future beyond that, as funding for the laboratory she had planned to work for has been cut.

Chelsea Gray, a 34-year-old environmental scientist working on shark preservation, had dreamed of working for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

Administration, one of the federal agencies under particular threat over its climate research. Instead, she has begun the process of obtaining an Irish passport. "I did everything right and set myself up for success, and I've watched my entire career path

her and found out that she was unmarried. He then married her to his son Aasim (may Allah be pleased with him). Allah blessed their marriage; for one of their grandchildren turned out to be a just and pious Caliph - Umar bin Abdul-Aziz. (Refer to Sifat al-Safwah by Ibn Al-Jawzei and Tareekh Dimashq, by Ibn Asakir 70/253)

Great acts of courage, patience and independence become possible, because the individual senses the company of the Majestic Allah by his or her side. Finally, mindfulness is the state of awareness of oneself in relation to the All-Loving Allah. In its purest form, it is the highest spiritual state that a believer can achieve. Mindfulness involves being present with one's heart and mind before Allah in the moment. Mindful believers learn how to silence the 'self-talk' within their inner beings by habitually redirecting their attention to Almighty Allah.

Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue

need for unity in the new Syria, which is seeking funds for reconstructing a nation ravaged by years of civil war under Assad. The coastal region has been gripped by fears of reprisals against Alawites for the Assad family's brutal rule, which included widespread torture and disappearances.

The Britain-based Observatory has reported multiple "massacres" in recent days, with women and children among the dead. "The vast majority of the victims were summarily executed by elements affiliated to the Ministry of Defence and the Interior," the rights group said on Friday. The Observatory and activists released footage showing dozens of bodies in civilian clothing piled outside a house, with blood stains nearby and women wailing. Other videos appeared to show men in military garb shooting people at close range. AFP could not independently verify the images.

The United Nations envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, decried "very troubling reports of civilian casualties". He called on all sides to refrain from actions which could "destabilize Syria, and jeopardize a credible and inclusive political transition". Aron Lund of the Century International think tank said the violence was "a bad omen". The new government lacks the tools, incentives and local base of support to engage with disgruntled Alawites, he said. "All they have is repressive power, and a lot of that... is made up of jihadist zealots who think Alawites are enemies of God." — AFP



NEW YORK: Scientists protest in Washington square park on March 7, 2025. — AFP

Administration, one of the federal agencies under particular threat over its climate research. Instead, she has begun the process of obtaining an Irish passport. "I did everything right and set myself up for success, and I've watched my entire career path

crumble before my eyes," Gray told AFP.

"I want to stay and serve the United States as a United States citizen," she said. "But if that option is not available to me, I need to keep all doors open." — AFP

Be mindful of Almighty Allah...

Continued from Page 1

ordering her daughter to adulterate milk with water so that they earn more profits. The daughter refused to obey her. Instead, she said, "Indeed, the Leader of the Believers has sent someone to announce that it is forbidden to mix milk with water." The mother tried to reason with her daughter, saying, "Where is Umar now? Verily, he does not see us." Her believing and trustworthy daughter answered, "If Umar does not see us, then indeed, the Lord of Umar sees us."

The Leader of the Believers was very impressed by what he heard from that young woman. On the following morning, he asked about

340 Alawite civilians killed by Syria...

Continued from Page 1

The Observatory indicated they were killed in "executions" carried out by security personnel or pro-government fighters and accompanied by "looting of homes and properties". The civilian deaths bring the overall toll to 553 people, including 93 members of the new government's security forces and 120 pro-Assad fighters, data from the Observatory shows. The killings followed clashes sparked by the arrest of a wanted individual by security forces in a predominantly Alawite village, the Observatory reported.

The monitor said there had been a "relative return to calm" in the region on Saturday, but that security forces were continuing sweeping operations and deploying reinforcements. Early on Saturday, state news agency SANA reported that the security forces had repelled an "attack by remnants of the ousted regime" on the national hospital in the coastal city of Latakia.

In an address on Friday, Syria's interim President Ahmed Al-Sharaa urged the insurgents to "lay down your weapons and surrender before it's too late". Western powers and Syria's neighbors have emphasized the

Fitch affirms Kuwait 'AA-' rating with stable outlook

KUWAIT: Fitch Ratings has reaffirmed Kuwait's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'AA-' with a stable outlook, citing the country's strong financial and external balance sheets. Despite its heavy reliance on oil and a sizable public sector that could exert long-term fiscal pressures, Kuwait maintains the strongest external balance sheet among all Fitch-rated sovereigns, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said in a statement.

According to Fitch, Kuwait's sovereign net foreign assets are projected to rise to 601 percent of GDP by 2025, up from an estimated 582 percent in 2024. A significant portion of these assets is managed by the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) and held in the Future Generations Fund (FGF) and the General Reserve Fund (GRF), which serves as the government's treasury account.

The recently appointed government has initiated a series of reforms aimed at reducing dependence on oil revenues, enhancing efficiency in public administration, and optimizing expenditure. As part of these efforts, a 15 percent domestic minimum top-up tax (DMTT) on multinational corporations will take effect on Jan 1, 2025. This tax is expected to generate approximately 0.5 percent of GDP annually, with collections anticipated to commence by 2027. Additionally, the government is working towards pass-

ing a liquidity and debt law to enable the issuance of new debt, following the expiration of the previous debt legislation in 2017. However, the timeline for its implementation remains uncertain.

Despite fiscal challenges, Kuwait is expected to meet its financing obligations over the coming years, supported by its substantial financial reserves, Fitch noted. The agency forecasts a deterioration in Kuwait's budget position for the fiscal year ending March 2026 (FY25), largely due to declining oil revenues amid lower global oil prices and OPEC+'s delay in unwinding production quotas. While non-oil revenues are expected to grow moderately in FY25, they are likely to fall short of the government's target of KD 2.9 billion (6 percent of GDP).

Fitch estimates Kuwait's fiscal breakeven oil price, inclusive of investment income, at \$58 per barrel for FY25-FY26. The country's gross government debt remains low, standing at an estimated 2.9 percent of GDP in FY24. Should the liquidity law be enacted in FY25, government debt is projected to rise to 6 percent of GDP in FY25 and 9.2 percent in FY26. While geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and disruptions to Red Sea shipping have had minimal impact on Kuwait, the country's reliance on hydrocarbons poses a structural risk to its fiscal position, making it highly sensitive to fluctuations in oil prices.

On the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) front, Kuwait has an ESG Relevance Score (RS) of '5[+]' for Political Stability and Rights, Rule of Law, Institutional and Regulatory Quality, and Control of Corruption. These scores reflect the high weighting of the World Bank Governance Indicators (WBG) in Fitch's sovereign rating methodology. — KUNA

Japan's barber, 108, crowned ...

Continued from Page 1

until at least 107 years old - has now passed away. Hakoishi married in her early 20s and opened a salon with her husband, but he was conscripted during World War II and died. The salon, which doubled as her family home, "was reduced to ashes during the bombing of Tokyo by the US

military," Guinness said in a statement.

Hakoishi and her children survived, however, as they had evacuated to her hometown of Nakagawa. Several years after the war, Hakoishi opened a new salon in Nakagawa, where she works to this day and where old clients sometimes ring up to book a haircut. While she now lives in a care home, she is still able to look after herself. She was one of the Tokyo Olympics torchbearers in 2021, walking around 200 meters, according to regional broadcaster Tochigi TV. Asked about her future goals, she said that she turns 109 this year but wants to "work hard until 110". — AFP

International

North Korean leader Kim inspects 'nuclear-powered submarine' project

'Radically' boosting navy a key part of Pyongyang's defensive strategy

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspected a project to build a nuclear-powered submarine, state media reported Saturday, saying that "radically" boosting the navy was a key part of Pyongyang's defensive strategy. Kim visited shipyards focused on building warships, the Korean Central News Agency reported, without giving details of the exact date or location of the inspection.

Kim "learned about the building of a nuclear-powered strategic guided missile submarine," the report said, which was one of Kim's key military goals on a laundry list of high tech weaponry unveiled at a previous party congress. The report is likely referring to a nuclear-powered submarine capable of launching ballistic missiles. Yonhap news agency reported, adding this was the first time the nuclear-armed North had revealed construction of a ballistic missile submarine.

Kim said the country's "sea defense capability... will be fully displayed in any necessary waters without limitation," KCNA said. "The development of the naval force into an elite and nuclear-armed force constitutes an important content in the strategy for the development of the national defense," it added.

In 2023, North Korean state media reported on the launch of the country's first "tactical nuclear attack submarine"—although the South Korean mili-

tary said at the time that the vessel might not be operational. According to the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a US-based think tank, North Korea is estimated to have between 64 and 86 submarines, one of the world's largest fleets.

However, experts doubt if all of them are operational given their age, according to NTI.

Ties between Pyongyang and Seoul are at one of their lowest points in years, with the South accusing Kim Jong Un of sending thousands of soldiers to Russia to help Moscow fight Ukraine, violating rafts of sanctions on both countries. Last week, North Korea carried out a test-launch of strategic cruise missiles in the Yellow Sea, in a drill Pyongyang said was aimed at showing off its "counterattack" capabilities. Joint South Korea-US "Freedom Shield" military exercises are set to begin later this month, and the USS Carl Vinson, the flagship of a carrier strike group, arrived in Busan for a scheduled port visit on Sunday, prompting an angry retort from Pyongyang.

Washington and Seoul describe such exercises as defensive in nature, but Pyongyang claims they are rehearsals for invasion and has responded with weapons tests of its own.

The two Koreas remain technically at war since the 1950-1953 Korean War ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty. — AFP



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (left) inspecting a development project at the Onpho Kulloja (working people) Holiday Camp in North Hamgyong Province of North Korea. — AFP

Ex-cyclone batters Australia, causing huge blackouts

LABRADOR, Australia: Ex-Cyclone Alfred stalled off the rain- and wind-lashed coast of eastern Australia on Saturday, threatening to unleash floods after blacking out more than 330,000 homes and businesses.

The former tropical cyclone -- now downgraded to a tropical depression—has battered the coastline with gale-force winds that toppled trees, brought down power lines, and damaged buildings. It was still creating heavy rainfall, swelling rivers in parts of a 400-kilometre (250-mile) stretch of the coast straddling southeast Queensland and northeast New South Wales, government forecasters said.

Utility companies said 295,000 properties in southeast Queensland and another 42,600 in New South Wales were without power, warning that floods could hamper repairs. "That's the largest ever loss of power from a natural disaster in Queensland's history," said the state's premier, David Crisafulli, estimating that about 750,000 people had been im-



SYDNEY: Workers fix electricity wires next to a tree uprooted by strong winds from Cyclone Alfred in the suburb of Eianora on the Gold Coast on March 8, 2025. — AFP

pacted since the blackouts began. Meanwhile, two army trucks on a storm aid deployment in eastern Australia collided on Saturday, injuring 36 people, with some rushed to multiple hospitals, emergency services and police said. Australian Defense Force personnel were injured when the trucks crashed southwest of the flood-prone city of Lismore, New South Wales police said in a statement.

Police sent specialist rescue units to the scene while the state's ambulance service dispatched teams of paramedics including two helicopters, of-

ficials said. "A total of 36 patients was the last count I had," said a spokesman for New South Wales Ambulance, adding that some of the injured were taken to four hospitals.

The spokesman said he was not authorized to give further details of the defense personnel's condition.

Although the weather system "stalled and began weakening", the bureau of meteorology warned that intense rain and damaging wind gusts were a risk throughout the weekend.

"Rivers are already starting to respond to the heavy rainfall, with many Minor to Major Flood Warnings current," the bureau said in a statement. A 61-year-old man's body was found Saturday after his four-wheel drive pick-up truck was swept off a bridge into a river in northern New South Wales. He had clambered out of the vehicle and tried in vain to cling to a tree branch in the river before disappearing into the rapid waters on Friday, police said.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese warned people not to underestimate the risks. "While it has been downgraded, very serious risks remain so it is important that people do not take this downgrading as a reason for complacency," Albanese told a news conference. "Its impact will be serious and will intensify over coming hours and indeed over coming days." — AFP

Myanmar junta chief says election to be held by January

BANGKOK: Myanmar's junta chief said the country would hold an election in December or January, the first in the war-torn nation since the military staged a coup in 2021. "We are planning to hold the election in December 2025 or ... by January 2026," General Min Aung Hlaing was quoted as saying in the state-run newspaper Global New Light of Myanmar published Saturday. The vote would be "free and fair" he said on Friday during a state visit to Belarus, adding that 53 political parties had "submitted their lists" to participate.

"We also invite observation teams from Belarus to come and observe" the slated election, he said during a meeting with Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko in Minsk.

The Myanmar military seized power in 2021, making unsubstantiated claims of massive electoral fraud in 2020 polls won resoundingly by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). It has since unleashed a bloody crackdown on dissent and as fighting ravages swathes of the



YANGON: Members of Myanmar's Union Election Commission (UEC) speak during a demonstration of voting machines to be used in future elections in Yangon on September 5, 2023. — AFP

country had repeatedly delayed plans for fresh polls that critics say will be neither free nor fair.

The junta is struggling to crush widespread opposition to its rule from ethnic rebel groups and pro-democracy "People's Defence Forces".

In 2022, the junta-stacked election commission announced that Suu Kyi's NLD would be dissolved for failing to re-register under a tough new military-drafted electoral law. Junta-appointed foreign minister Than Swe in December told delegates from five neighboring countries at a meeting in Bangkok

that "progress was being made" towards an election in 2025.

The junta in January extended an already-prolonged state of emergency by six months, eliminating the possibility of long-promised polls until the second half of the year at the earliest.

Southeast Asian foreign ministers in January told the junta to prioritize a ceasefire in its civil war over fresh elections during a meeting in Malaysia. Min Aung Hlaing told his ruling military council in January that "peace and stability is still needed" before the state of emergency can be lifted and polls held.

The United States has said any elections under the junta would be a "sham", while analysts say polls would be targeted by the military's opponents and spark further bloodshed.

A joint statement by election experts published on the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance's website in February said they "unequivocally reject" plans by Myanmar's junta to hold an election in 2025. More than 6,300 civilians have been killed since the coup, and more than 28,000 arrested, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) monitoring group.

The conflict has forced more than 3.5 million people to flee their homes, while an estimated 19.9 million people—or more than a third of Myanmar's population—will need humanitarian aid in 2025, according to the UN. —AFP

Son of Hong Kong's jailed Jimmy Lai asks to meet UK PM

LONDON: The son of jailed Hong Kong media mogul Jimmy Lai has called for an urgent meeting with Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer, saying he was "desperate" as his father's defense drew to a close in a high-profile trial. Sebastien Lai said a fresh diplomatic push was now needed to free the 77-year-old pro-democracy activist, who holds British citizenship and has been kept behind bars in Hong Kong since December 2020.

Jimmy Lai's lawyers have complained about his conditions in detention and say they are increasingly worried about his health. "I don't want my father to die in jail," Sebastien Lai told AFP in London. "I need to meet with the prime minister imminently."

This week Lai concluded more than 50 days of courtroom testimony as he fights charges of foreign collusion under Hong Kong's national security law. The law was imposed by China to quell dissent after pro-democracy protests in 2019.

Lai is the founder of the now-shuttered Chinese-language tabloid Apple Daily, which supported the protests, and he is one of the most prominent figures to be prosecuted under the law.

The collusion offence carries a maximum penalty of life in prison, while Lai also faces a charge related to "seditious publications". "It is desperate now," Sebas-

tien Lai told journalists at a briefing in London organized by the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) rights group. "I really don't know how long my father has." UN rights experts have called for Lai's release, as have Western governments including Britain. A UK government spokesperson said: "British national Jimmy Lai's case is a priority."

"We continue to call on the Hong Kong authorities to end their politically motivated prosecution and immediately release Jimmy Lai."

Last year Starmer raised Lai's case with Chinese President Xi Jinping and has said securing his freedom was a "priority" for the government. But in London, Lai's legal team said more urgency was needed.

Lawyer Caoilfhionn Gallagher said delays in proceedings coupled with Lai's age, health and conditions of detention could lead to "a British national dying in prison for being a journalist and for standing up for democratic values." "That's why there's such an urgency today to actually getting on with sitting down to talk to the government," she told journalists.

RSF's UK director Fiona O'Brien said Lai's plight had reached a "pivotal moment". It was, she said, "a case about the values of press freedom for which he has fought his whole life".

But Sun Qingye, the deputy chief of Beijing's national security apparatus in Hong Kong, on Friday dismissed the idea of freeing Jimmy Lai. It was wrong to put pressure on judges, he added.

"This matter must be dealt with according to law," Sun told reporters on the sidelines of Beijing's annual political gathering. "Why grant a pardon? What would be the reason?" — AFP

Massive clean-up after India's Hindu mega-festival ends

PRAYAGRAJ, India: Thousands of sanitation workers were toiling on Friday to clean up 20,000 tons of waste left behind by hundreds of millions of Hindu devotees after India's Kumbh Mela mega-festival.

The massive sanitation drive has been underway since the six-week gala drew to a close last week in the northern city of Prayagraj.

Hundreds of millions of people visited the city during the festival according to government figures, with mounds of discarded clothing, plastic bottles and other waste now littering the grounds.

"We have deployed 15,000 workers to clear up some 20,000 tons of waste generated from the festival," Prayagraj municipal commissioner Chandra Mohan Garg told AFP. The Kumbh Mela is the single biggest milestone on the Hindu religious calendar, staged every 12 years at the holy confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers.

It is rooted in Hindu mythology, a battle between deities and demons for control of a pitcher containing the nectar of immortality. Workers were also busy dismantling a temporary infrastructure, that includes 150,000 portable toilets. In several places, open areas were used as makeshift toilets, posing a challenge to the army of sanitary staff. — AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Thai ex-cop dies in prison

BANGKOK: A former Thai police officer serving life in prison for murder was found dead in his cell and an investigation into his death has been launched, prison officials said Saturday. Thitisan Uthananon, nicknamed "Joe Ferrari" for his vast collection of luxury sports cars and flashy lifestyle, was found guilty of murder in 2022 for torturing a suspect to death during a brutal interrogation. The high-profile case caused public outrage and shone a rare light on police brutality and corruption in the kingdom. — AFP

NY mayor graft case

NEW YORK: A court-appointed legal expert recommended Friday closing the corruption case against New York Mayor Eric Adams, after President Donald Trump's Justice Department tried to stop the prosecution over its alleged effect on the city's migrant crackdown. District Judge Dale Ho had selected outside attorney Paul Clement to make the case for why the charges against Adams should not be dropped -- but the lawyer recommended dismissal with prejudice. — AFP

Mexico's new finance minister

MEXICO CITY: Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum on Friday named a new finance minister to help steer Latin America's second-largest economy through challenges including the threat of sweeping US tariffs. Edgar Amador, previously a deputy finance minister, will replace Rogelio Ramirez de la O, whom Sheinbaum appointed as her economic advisor for international affairs. — AFP

Son of Mexican carter jailed

WASHINGTON: A top leader of Mexico's violent Jalisco New Generation cartel was sentenced to life in US prison Friday for his bloody role in creating one of the world's most powerful drug syndicates. Ruben Oseguera Gonzalez, 35, is the son of Mexico's most-wanted man -- Jalisco New Generation leader Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, who has a \$15 million US bounty on his head. Known as "El Menchito," Oseguera was convicted by a federal jury in Washington in September of multiple drug trafficking and firearms charges. — AFP

US halts imagery access for Kyiv

WASHINGTON: Washington has "temporarily suspended" Ukraine's access to US government-purchased commercial satellite imagery, a National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency spokesperson said on Friday. Maxar, one of the companies contracted by the US program that provided the imagery to Kyiv, confirmed the suspension, while saying there is "no change to the way we support our other customers nor their programs or contracts." — AFP

Two die in US measles outbreak

WASHINGTON: A measles outbreak in the southwestern United States has killed two people and infected more than 200, prompting a top health agency to issue a travel warning. As of Friday, Texas had reported 198 cases and New Mexico 30, bringing the total to 228. Each state confirmed one death, and both were unvaccinated. The Texas patient was a child while the New Mexico patient was an adult who tested positive for measles after death. Although the official cause of the adult's death has not been released by the New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has classified it as a measles-related fatality. — AFP

SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 2025

Zain teams up with eero

First MENA operator to work with the global leader in mesh-networking solutions

KUWAIT: Zain has teamed up with eero, a global leader in mesh-networking technology and wireless solutions, and a subsidiary of Amazon. This collaboration brings the cutting-edge eero mesh technology to Zain customers in Kuwait, marking Zain as the first telecom operator in the Middle East and North Africa to work with eero.

The announcement was made at the Mobile World Congress 2025 (MWC) in Barcelona, attended by Zain Kuwait's Operational Marketing Director Charlie Asfour, Managing Director of Global ISP Business Development at eero John Caldwell, and Managing Director of EMEA Business Development at eero Nabil Elhawary. Commenting on the partnership, Zain Kuwait Chief Commercial Officer Meshal Al-Kandari said: "We're delighted to collaborate with one of the global pioneers in wireless device solutions, bringing innovative digital experiences to our customers. eero devices offer technical features that enhance the user experience, providing in-home coverage, speed, stability, and reliability, to deliver an enhanced internet experience on Kuwait's biggest 5G network."

He added: "Our customers are deeply passionate about the digital lifestyle, which is why we've prioritized delivering innovative, 5G-powered experiences that cater to their needs and aspirations. These include top-tier entertainment



eero Pro 6E covers entire home at superfast speeds through Zain's 5G network

plans, collaborations with leading global content providers, and a wide range of gaming options. This collaboration aligns perfectly with our vision of providing a fully comprehensive digital experience to our customers."

"At eero, our goal is to provide fast, reliable, and secure Wi-Fi to customers around the world," said Nick Weaver, CEO and co-founder of eero. "And I'm always excited when we have the opportunity to bring our amazing products to new parts of the world. That's why we're thrilled to work with Zain to offer eero to their customers in Kuwait and the Middle East."

The eero Pro 6E offers technical features to deliver a reliable home internet experience, supporting network speeds up to 2.3 Gbps. It also supports Wi-Fi 6E technology, which supports faster speeds and offers more bandwidth compared to

previous generations of Wi-Fi technology. The device operates on 2.4 GHz, 5 GHz, and the new 6 GHz band. Mesh networks allow multiple routers to work together to provide fast, reliable and secure Wi-Fi. Unlike traditional home networks that rely on a single router, mesh networks consist of as many access points as a user needs to get coverage in the home. This design results in wider coverage, faster speeds, and greater stability compared to traditional networks.

eero devices deliver high speeds throughout the home, using eero's patented TrueMesh networking technology to dynamically find the optimal data path on the network, ensuring a reliable internet experience. The devices are easy to install, boast top security standards, receive regular updates for quality assurance, and can be conveniently controlled via the free eero app.



Charlie Asfour, John Caldwell and Nabil Elhawary at MWC in Barcelona.

Trump says dairy and lumber tariffs on Canada soon

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Friday that he could impose reciprocal tariffs on Canadian dairy and lumber within days—a move set to fuel tensions with Ottawa just days after an earlier wave of levies. Since taking office in January, Trump has unleashed a series of tariffs and threats targeting US allies and adversaries, including duties of up to 25 percent on imports from Canada and Mexico.

On Thursday, he provided the vital trading partners temporary reprieve, exempting goods coming in from both countries under a North American trade pact. But he has vowed broader "reciprocal tariffs" as soon as April 2, aimed at remedying practices that Washington deems unfair. Trump also signaled that reciprocal levies could come as soon as Friday: "Canada has been ripping us off for years on tariffs for lumber and for dairy products."

"They'll be met with the exact same tariff unless they drop it, and that's what reciprocal means," the president added. "We may do it as early as today, or we'll wait till Monday or Tuesday," he said of the two sectors which have long been affected by trade disputes between the neighbors.

Economists warn that blanket levies could weigh on US growth and raise inflation, adding that they also weigh on business and consumer sentiment.

But Trump kept the pressure up on Canada on Friday: "It's not fair. Never has been fair, and they've treated our farmers badly." In an earlier interview with Fox Business, Trump said that tariffs affecting Canada and Mexico could rise in the future. Asked if companies might get more clarity on his trade poli-



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump speaks from the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, on March 7, 2025. — AFP

cies, Trump said: "I think so. But, you know, the tariffs could go up as time goes by."

White House senior counselor Peter Navarro told CNBC in a separate interview he rejected the idea that there was uncertainty surrounding Trump's trade policies. "The uncertainty is created by the fact that people don't take President Trump at his word," he said. Trump's move to back off some tariffs on Canada and Mexico came after stock markets tumbled as his levies of up to 25 percent took effect this week.

On Thursday, the White House said adjustments exempting goods under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) recognize "the unique impact that these tariffs could have on Amer-

ican automotive manufacturers." A White House official told reporters that about 62 percent of Canadian imports will still face the fresh levies, though much of them are energy resources slapped with a lower 10 percent rate.

For Mexico, the proportion of imports affected is around 50 percent, the official added on condition of anonymity. However, Marcelo Ebrard, Mexico's secretary of economy, said 90 percent of its exports to the United States fall under the three-nation trade pact and will be exempted from tariffs until April.

"Under the agreement, we estimate that we will reach very close to 90 percent...of all types of products," he told a press conference. — AFP

IMF chief says Sri Lanka stabilized, pledges more help

COLOMBO: IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva pledged to support Sri Lanka's economic recovery, praising the cash-strapped nation's "remarkable turnaround" during online talks with its president.

The International Monetary Fund Managing director promised unspecified help to the South Asian nation during a virtual meeting with President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, his office said Saturday. "The economy has stabilized and is now performing well," Georgieva said during her overnight meeting with Dissanayake, according to a video clip shared by the Sri Lankan presidency.

"This is so important for people, especially for poor people. We see a remarkable turnaround from the days when it was near collapse," she said. Sri Lanka secured a \$2.9 billion IMF bailout in 2023 after declaring its first sovereign default in April 2022 following an unprecedented foreign exchange shortage and an economic meltdown. Dissanayake, a self-avowed leftist, came to power in September promising to renegotiate the IMF loan but has since continued with his predecessor's painful and unpopular austerity measures.

"Taking action domestically to strengthen the economy in this time of greater global uncertainty is even more important than it would be if we were in a sort of plain vanilla global economic situation," said Georgieva. She added that the IMF "would be very happy and eager to back you fully in what has been a successful journey". Dissanayake told her that he was keen to reduce the island's debt and boost private investment. — AFP

US drops bid to make Google sell AI investments

WASHINGTON: The US Department of Justice on Friday dropped a proposal to force Alphabet's Google to sell its investments in artificial intelligence companies, including OpenAI competitor Anthropic, to boost competition in online search. The DOJ and a coalition of 38 state attorneys general still seek a court order requiring Google to sell its Chrome browser and take other measures aimed at addressing what a judge said was Google's illegal search monopoly, according to court papers filed in Washington.

"The American dream is about higher values than just cheap goods and 'free' online services. These values include freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom to innovate, and freedom to compete in a market undistorted by the controlling hand of a monopolist," prosecutors wrote.

A spokesperson for Google said the "sweeping proposals continue to go miles beyond the Court's decision, and would harm America's consumers, economy and national security." A spokesperson for Anthropic did not immediately respond to a request for comment. President Donald Trump has said he would continue a crackdown on Big Tech, which began during his first term and continued into former President Joe Biden's administration. Trump has tapped veteran antitrust attorney Gail Slater to lead the DOJ's efforts. Google holds a minority stake worth billions of dollars in Anthropic. Losing the investment would hand a competitive advantage to OpenAI and its partner Microsoft MSFT.O, Anthropic wrote to the court in February. Evidence prosecutors obtained since making their draft recommendation in November showed a risk that banning Google from AI investments "could



CALIFORNIA: A giant Google logo is seen at Google's Bay View campus in Mountain View, California. — AFP

cause unintended consequences in the evolving AI space," they said in the final proposal on Friday. They asked that Google be required to give prior notice to the government about future investments in generative AI. Google, which has said it will appeal, has made its own proposal that would loosen agreements with Apple and others to set Google as the default search engine on new devices. US District Judge Amit Mehta has scheduled a trial on the proposals for April.

The blockbuster case is one of several US antitrust cases against Big Tech companies. Apple, Meta Platforms and Amazon.com also face allegations of maintaining illegal monopolies in their respective markets. Since Trump's reelection, Google has sought to make the case that the DOJ's approach in the case would hobble the company's ability to compete in AI and "jeopardize America's global economic and technological leadership." Many of the measures prosecutors proposed in November remain intact with a few tweaks. For example, a requirement that Google share search query data with competitors now says that Google can charge a marginal fee for access and that the competitors must not pose a national security risk. — Reuters

US Fed chair flags policy uncertainty

WASHINGTON: US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell flagged high uncertainty Friday surrounding President Donald Trump's economic policies and their effects, maintaining that the central bank need not rush to adjust interest rates. "It is the net effect of these policy changes that will matter for the economy and for the path of monetary policy," Powell told a forum in New York.

"We do not need to be in a hurry, and we are well positioned to wait for greater clarity," Wall Street's main indices picked up shortly after Powell's comments.

Powell's remarks come as Trump's return to the White House in January brings swift changes that promise to ripple through the world's biggest economy. The president has taken aim at illegal immigration while imposing sweeping levies on major trading partners Canada, Mexico and China, triggering retaliation. The tariffs sent US markets tumbling and economists have warned that if kept in place, such additional duties could weigh on longer-term economic growth and push up inflation.

But for now, Powell maintained that the US economy remains in a good position, adding that it has been growing at a solid pace while the labor market remained robust.

Government data released Friday showed that the US economy added 151,000 jobs in February, a healthy rate though lower than anticipated. Unemployment crept up slightly.

With ongoing shifts in trade policy, Powell stressed that the Fed is focused on separating signal from noise as the outlook evolves. He also remained cautious in assessing the effects of households' and businesses' uncertainties over economic prospects. "It remains to be seen how these devel-

opments might affect future spending and investment," he said.

He warned that sentiment readings are not always a good predictor of consumption growth. Powell added Friday that even as inflation has cooled significantly from its peak in mid-2022 without a sharp spike in unemployment, the path to lowering levels further is likely to remain bumpy. Some near-term measures of inflation expectations have recently risen, with consumers and businesses pointing to tariffs as a driving factor. Yet longer-term expectations



NEW YORK: Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell speaks at the 2025 US Monetary Policy Forum on March 07, 2025. — AFP

remain stable and consistent with policymakers' two percent goal, Powell added. Besides the effects of trade policy, Powell noted the administration is also in the process of introducing "significant policy changes" in areas like fiscal policy and regulation.

Trump's administration has referred to tariffs as a means to raise government revenue, remedy unfair trade practices and exert pressure on other countries on US priorities. — AFP

Business

Greenland's mining bonanza remains a distant promise

Minerals at the centre of major geopolitical and industrial ambitions today

NUUK, Denmark: Before it could cast its first gold bar, Amaroq had to build a port and housing, repair a road, and ship over equipment—a logistical nightmare highlighting the complexities of mining in inhospitable Greenland. “This is obviously much, much harder than setting up any other business around the world,” Eldur Olafsson, the head of the Canadian mining company, told AFP.

Amaroq operates one of only two active mines on the vast Arctic island, a region full of promise for mineral wealth but which has proven difficult to exploit. From Ukraine, where US President Donald Trump wants to get his hands on natural resources, to the seabeds that numerous companies want to explore, minerals are today at the centre of major geopolitical and industrial ambitions. Greenland remains almost entirely unexploited, and its minerals are seen as a potential springboard to independence, a goal backed by a majority of the island's 57,000 inhabitants.

Trump's stated ambitions to take over the Danish autonomous territory have only served to boost islanders' support for independence, and the timeframe for full sovereignty has been one of the main topics ahead of Greenland's March 11 legislative elections. For many Greenlanders—and probably Trump too—the wealth generated by the minerals is front of mind.

They would likely generate enough revenue to replace the \$565 million Denmark gives Greenland in annual subsidies. With its underground riches, Greenland “could be a vital player” in the global mining industry, insists Thomas Varming, a geophysicist and consultant at the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland (GEUS).

“Many of these deposits that we have are actually crucial for the green transition: minerals that go into batteries—lithium, graphite—and also elements that go into super strong magnets that you use in wind turbines or your electric cars or if you want to electrify your trains,” he explained. But in order for those minerals to become a cash cow for Greenland, the price of raw materials has to go up, because right now it's not profitable enough to mine them. Around 80 percent of Greenland is covered by ice, it has an extreme climate, very little infrastructure, and strict environmental considerations.

All those factors send operating costs soaring, while competitors like mining powerhouse China have few such issues. “There have been many mining projects on the table and the short version is: nothing has happened. There has simply not been a business case,” said one economist. Greenland Ruby, which operated a small ruby mine, went bankrupt last year. “Mineral development is a very slow-moving business. It takes about 16 years to develop into a mine. And in that period of time, you just spend a lot of money. You don't earn a lot of money,” stressed Naaja Nathanielsen, Greenland's Minister for Business and Mineral Resources. “We have a lot of mines in the making, but they are still in this 16-year period,” she told AFP in her office in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland. She said eight companies were due to hold operating licenses by the end of the year—which doesn't necessarily mean there will be that many mines—and around 80 exploration licenses have also been issued.

Greenlandic authorities have drawn several red lines when it comes to mining: no uranium, no oil and



NUUK: Geologist Thomas Varming show findings of rare minerals and precious metals on a survey map at the University of Greenland during an interview with AFP in Nuuk, Greenland, on March 5, 2025. -- AFP

gas, and no deep sea mining. “We are very reliant on our fisheries, and we as a tourist nation try to brand ourselves as a green and pristine place in the world,” Nathanielsen said.

“We don't want that image to be tarred by environmental hazards.” For now, the mining industry accounts for just a minute part of Greenland's economy, especially since many of the jobs go to foreigners due to a lack of skilled locals. Even though the United

States and the European Union have both signed memorandums of cooperation with Greenland, a mineral bonanza remains promising but distant, leaving the island without a key pillar needed for its economic independence. “We are not developing the mineral sector to become independent. We're developing it to get revenue for the Greenlandic society and people, and better welfare. And at some point, we will get to independence as well,” Nathanielsen said. --AFP

US hiring misses expectations in February

WASHINGTON: The United States added fewer jobs than expected in February and unemployment ticked up, government data showed Friday, while analysts warn cracks may be appearing in the labor market under President Donald Trump's new administration.

Friday's report paints a solid picture of the employment market in the first full month of Trump's second term, amid unprecedented cuts to the US government that are attracting growing blowback.

But analysts warned of uncertainty ahead linked to Trump's volatile tariffs policy, and cautioned that effects from the administration's cost-cutting have yet to show up entirely. The world's biggest economy added 151,000 jobs last month, up from January's revised 125,000 figure, while the unemployment rate edged up to 4.1 percent from 4.0 percent, the Labor Department said.

“Within government, federal government employment declined by 10,000 in February,” it said.

The federal downsizing efforts have been led by Trump's billionaire adviser Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which has slashed thousands of jobs and upended agencies, prompting a flurry of lawsuits. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell nevertheless said at an event in New York that the labor market remains solid, with wages growing faster than inflation.

The White House was quick to emphasize an uptick in manufacturing jobs, with Trump himself touting “major gains” and pointing to an added 9,000 jobs in the auto industry. “We're trying to shrink government and grow the private sector,” the president said. The Trump administration has expressed plans to “re-privatize and re-industrialize the American economy,” according to Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, alongside wider efforts towards deregulation and fair trade.

The Republican president has launched a broad offensive aimed at cutting public spending and reducing the federal government's footprint—pledges he made on the campaign trail.

Yet the full hit from Trump's federal workforce cuts is not necessarily reflected in the February report, given the payroll survey was likely conducted “too early in the month,” said EY senior economist Lydia Boussour this week. “We expect a more visible dent to federal payrolls in March and subsequent months,” she added. Pantheon Macroeconomics noted this week that the return of more seasonally normal weather had likely boosted payroll growth.

The Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM) cheered February's factory job gains but warned of “a very uncertain future,” with Trump recently unveiling a volley of tariffs and threats on both allies and adversaries. AAM President Scott Paul said in a statement that the manufacturing sector had been stalled for 30 months.

He called for a “responsible and orderly application of new tariffs, particularly on China and other countries with persistent unfair trade practices.”

On Tuesday, Trump's steep tariffs on major US trading partners Canada and Mexico took effect, roiling markets. The president has since walked back some of these moves with temporary exclusions for imports covered by a North American free trade pact. Pantheon Macroeconomics cautioned that “cracks are appearing in the labor market,” citing a separate report this week from outplacement and coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas. That report noted tens of thousands of government job cuts, but also flagged significant private sector layoffs, many of them in the retail and consumer products industries. For Pantheon, that hints at the impact of “heightened uncertainty around trade policy.”—AFP

Sri Lanka signs \$2.5 billion debt deal with Japan

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka signed a deal with Japan Friday to restructure \$2.5 billion in loans, marking the first agreement with official creditors who had pledged debt relief to the cash-strapped nation last year.

Japan said it was granting concessions on a 369.45 billion yen (\$2.5 billion) loan under a comprehensive debt treatment plan, which the International Monetary Fund considers essential for Sri Lanka's economic recovery. “The development of Sri Lanka, which is located at a strategic point in the Indian Ocean, is essential for the stability and prosperity of the entire Indo-Pacific region,” the Japanese foreign ministry said in a statement. “Japan intends to further contribute to the sustainable development of Sri Lanka.”

Colombo's finance ministry said Tokyo had played a “pivotal role” in helping Sri Lanka restructure its debt. “Its leadership, commitment, and constructive engagement have been instrumental in helping Sri Lanka navigate the challenges of economic recovery,” the ministry said in a statement. Sri Lanka announced last June that it had reached an understanding with all its bilateral lenders to delay repayments until 2028. Formal agreements were delayed due to



COLOMBO: Japan's ambassador to Sri Lanka Akio Isomata (left) and Secretary to Sri Lanka's finance ministry Mahinda Siriwardana shake hands after signing of debt restructuring agreements between two countries in Colombo on March 7, 2025. -- AFP

protracted negotiations, making Friday's deal with Japan the first with an official creditor of the South Asian nation.

China remains Sri Lanka's largest bilateral lender, accounting for \$4.66 billion of the \$10.58 billion borrowed from other nations. Japan is the second-largest, with just over \$2.5 billion in loans. Sri Lanka had concluded debt deals with the Export-Import Bank of China and the China Development Bank last year. Japan is the first country in the 17-member Official Creditor Committee (OCC) of Sri Lanka to ink a debt deal, Sri Lankan

officials said. Beijing is not a member of the OCC. The government of leftist President Anura Kumara Disسانayake, which came to power in September, had hoped to finalize debt deals before the end of last year. The island nation defaulted on its \$46 billion external debt in April 2022 after running out of foreign exchange to finance even the most essential imports, such as food and fuel. Its economy has since recovered following an IMF rescue package and the implementation of austerity measures aimed at repairing the government's ruined finances.—AFP

German factory orders in largest fall in a year

FRANKFURT: German industrial orders in January posted their biggest monthly fall in a year, data showed Friday, underlining the challenges faced by Europe's top economy before a new government takes office.

New orders, an indicator of future business activity, fell seven percent month-on-month, according to preliminary data from the federal statistics agency Destatis. That was a far greater fall than the 2.5 percent expected by analysts polled by financial data firm FactSet and the biggest drop since January 2024.

At the same time, December's rise was revised downward to 5.9 percent from a 6.9 percent increase. Large one-off orders mean the data can vary from month to month. A less volatile three-month comparison nevertheless showed orders falling 2.4 percent between November and January, Destatis said. Overall, industrial orders are almost 20 percent down on their 2021 level.

LBBW bank analyst Jens-Oliver Niklasch said the figures showed continued stagnation for the German economy, noting that orders from within Germany fell even further than those from outside the country.—AFP

ACICO Construction Partners with House Of Light to Offer Integrated Lighting Solutions to Its Clients

KUWAIT: In line with its commitment to providing a comprehensive and modern construction experience, ACICO Construction, one of Kuwait's leading construction companies, has signed a collaboration agreement with House Of Light, a pioneer in lighting solutions, to offer advanced lighting designs and exclusive discount vouchers to ACICO clients when contracting for home construction.

The agreement was signed in the presence of Mr. Mohamad Yassin, CEO of ACICO Group, Mr. Ahmad Al-Nouri, General Manager of the Group's Block Factories, and Mr. Mohammed Eissa, CEO of House Of Light. This partnership aims to enhance ACICO's customer experience by offering integrated lighting solutions that adhere to the highest standards of quality and innovation.

Under this agreement, ACICO clients will benefit from professional lighting designs that enhance the aesthetics and functionality of their homes. Additionally, they will receive exclusive discount vouchers upon signing their contracts, allowing them to acquire the latest lighting solutions from House Of Light at competitive prices.



A Commitment to Excellence in Home Lighting Solutions.

Commenting on the partnership, Mr. Mohamad Yassin, CEO of ACICO Group, stated:

“At ACICO, we are committed to providing our clients with a holistic construction experience. Our collaboration with House Of Light, a leading specialist in the field, ensures that our clients receive innovative lighting solutions that elevate their homes to new levels of luxury and comfort.”

Meanwhile, Mr. Mohammed Eissa,



CEO of House Of Light, emphasized:

“We are delighted to partner with ACICO Construction, allowing us to bring our expertise and innovative lighting solutions to its clients. Our goal is to provide designs that seamlessly blend aesthetics with functionality, ultimately enhancing the overall residential environment.”

Lighting in Architecture: A Key Element of Beauty and Comfort

Lighting plays a crucial role in modern architecture, helping to create balanced atmospheres, enhance user comfort, and highlight

architectural details. With advancements in lighting technology, smart lighting solutions now offer improved energy efficiency and a more comfortable and visually appealing environment.

Through this collaboration, ACICO Construction and House Of Light aim to provide integrated solutions that combine high-quality construction with advanced lighting technologies, ensuring a sophisticated and exceptional residential experience for ACICO clients.

Business

China to 'firmly counter' US trade pressure, warns FM

Chinese exports slow as US trade war escalates

BEIJING: China's foreign minister on Friday vowed Beijing would "firmly counter" US pressure, after Donald Trump heaped tariffs on Chinese goods and torched off a trade war between the world's two largest economies. Trump imposed more blanket tariffs on Chinese imports this week, following a similar move last month—levies expected to hit hundreds of billions of dollars in total trade.

The mercurial magnate has overturned the international order since returning to office in January, from pushing Ukraine to seek a peace deal with Russia to floating a widely condemned plan to relocate Palestinians from Gaza. At a press conference on the sidelines of a key political meeting, China's foreign minister Wang Yi framed Beijing as a bulwark of stability in an unstable world.

He warned the "law of the jungle" could take hold if nations were to pursue purely their own interests.

Wang touted Beijing's cooperation with the United States in the fight against the fentanyl epidemic, in which Washington has accused China of being complicit in justifying its tariffs. Washington should not "repay kindness with resentment, let alone impose tariffs without reason", he said. "There are around 190 countries in the world," Wang said.

"Imagine if every country emphasized their own priority and believed in strength and status, the world would fall back into the law of the jungle." He said the policy currently implemented by Washington was "not how a responsible major country behaves". The Chinese top diplomat was speaking on the sidelines of the "Two Sessions" political meetings in Beijing, so far clouded by a new administration in the United States that is overturning the international order. He told the attending press that good China-US economic and trade ties benefitted all parties.

"If you choose to cooperate, you can achieve mutually beneficial and win-win results," he added.

"If you use only pressure, China will firmly counter." "China and the United States will both exist on this planet for a long time, so they must coexist peacefully," Wang stressed.

The veteran diplomat, however, appeared to side with Trump's push for peace talks to end the conflict



SHANDONG, China: Excavators to be exported to Africa are seen waiting to be loaded on a cargo ship at a port in Yantai, in eastern China's Shandong province on March 7, 2025. — AFP

in Ukraine. He also called for negotiations between all parties—warning "conflict has no winners, and peace has no losers". Beijing, he stressed, "welcomes and supports all efforts dedicated to peace".

And he urged all parties to seek a "comprehensive and lasting ceasefire in Gaza and increase humanitarian assistance". Beijing has vowed to fight a trade war with the United States "to the end" as tariffs from Washington buffeted the global economy and threatened to hit Beijing's lagging growth.

The country's leaders set an ambitious annual growth target of around five percent this week, vowing to make domestic demand its main economic driver as the escalating trade confrontation with the United States hit exports. They also raised

the country's military budget by 7.2 percent as Beijing's armed forces undergo rapid modernization and eye deepening strategic competition with the United States.

Among key flashpoints in the past year have been the self-ruled island of Taiwan, which Beijing claims. Wang on Friday said the island's return to Beijing's control remained the "shared hope of all Chinese people, the general trend of the time, and a righteous cause".

"Using Taiwan to control China is just like trying to stop a car with the arm of a mantis," he said. And he touched on another key flashpoint, the South China Sea—which Beijing claims almost in its entirety despite an international arbitration ruling that de-

clared its stance baseless. Wang accused the Philippines, with which Chinese ships have repeatedly clashed in the disputed waters, of provoking confrontation. "For every Philippine maritime operation, it is the forces outside of the region that write the script and the Western media that undertake the live broadcast," he said.

"The same old theatre is being used to discredit China," he said.

Meanwhile, China's exports grew slower than expected in the first two months of the year, official data showed Friday, as a deepening trade war with the United States piles on economic malaise. Over a month into his second term as US president, Donald Trump has slapped sweeping tariffs on the export-dependent nation, citing Beijing's failure to stem fentanyl flows as justification. China last year saw exports surge to a record high—a key economic lifeline as persistent woes including slow consumption and a property sector crisis weighed on activity. While experts say the full impact of Trump's tariffs on China's economy remains to be seen, early signs indicate that its overseas shipments are bound for choppy waters.

Exports in US dollar terms in January and February combined grew 2.3 percent compared to the same period last year, official data from China's customs administration showed Friday.

The reading came in short of a Bloomberg forecast, which had anticipated exports to grow 5.9 percent during the first two months of 2025. It also represented a slowdown from 10.7 percent growth in December. The deceleration could be "partly due to the slowdown of export front loading, which was strong late last year to avoid the trade war", wrote Zhiwei Zhang, President and Chief Economist at Pinpoint Asset Management.

The full extent of damage caused by new US tariffs—imposed in two rounds of 10-percent blanket hikes in early February and this week—will likely begin to be seen next month, said Zhang.

Imports, meanwhile, fell sharply during the first two months, a sign that domestic consumption remains mired in a slump. — AFP

China hits back at Canada with fresh agriculture tariffs

BEIJING: China announced tariffs on over \$2.6 billion worth of Canadian agricultural and food products on Saturday, retaliating against levies Ottawa introduced in October and opening a new front in a trade war largely driven by US President Donald Trump's tariff threats. The levies, announced by the commerce ministry and scheduled to take effect on March 20, match the 100 percent and 25 percent import duties Canada slapped on China-made electric vehicles and steel and aluminum products just over four months ago.

By excluding canola, which is also known as rapeseed, and was one of Canada's top exports to the world's No1 agricultural importer prior to China investigating it for anti-dumping last year, Beijing may be keeping the door open for trade talks. But the tariffs also serve as a warning shot, analysts say, with the Trump administration having signaled it could ease 25 percent import levies the White House is threatening Canada and Mexico with if they apply the same extra 20 percent duty he has slapped on Chinese goods over fentanyl flows.

"Canada's measures seriously violate World Trade Organization rules, constitute a typical act of protectionism and are discriminatory measures that severely harm China's legitimate rights and interests," the commerce ministry said in a statement. China will apply a 100 percent tariff to just over \$1 billion of Canadian rapeseed oil, oil cakes and pea imports, and a 25 percent duty on \$1.6 billion worth of Canadian aquatic products.

"The timing may serve as a warning shot," said Dan Wang, China director at Eurasia Group in Singapore. "By striking now, China reminds Canada of the cost of aligning too closely with American trade policy." "China's delayed response (to Ottawa's October tariffs) likely reflects both capacity constraints and strategic signaling," she added. "The commerce ministry is stretched thin, juggling trade disputes with the US and European Union."

"Canada, a lower priority, had to wait its turn." The Canadian embassy in Beijing did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in August that Ottawa was imposing the levies to counter what he called China's intentional state-directed policy of over-capacity, following the lead of the United States and European Union, both of which have also applied import levies to Chinese-made EVs. In response, China in September launched an anti-dumping investigation into Canadian canola imports. More than half of Canada's canola exports go to China and the trade was worth \$3.7 billion in 2023, according to the Canola Council of Canada.

"The investigation on Canadian canola is still ongoing. That canola was not included in the list of tariffs this time might also be a gesture to leave room for negotiations," said Rosa Wang, an analyst with agricultural consultancy JCI. Beijing could also be hoping that a change in government in Ottawa makes it more amenable. Canada's next national election must be held by October 20. — Reuters

Roiled markets and negative polls: Trump's honeymoon over

WASHINGTON: After only seven weeks back in the White House, President Donald Trump is facing stock markets roiled by his volatile trade policy, consumers exhausted by stubbornly high prices, and general unease about the power of his advisor Elon Musk. Musk's efforts to dismantle the federal bureaucracy as the nominal head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), with mass firings that have sparked legal battles, have created a sense of chaos around Trump's second administration. And even if the 78-year-old Republican's base is generally happy with his moves on immigration and national security, the Trump train is wobbling on the rails, and experts say he needs to pivot to voters' basic concerns.

"He still has momentum and still commands the public stage," Julian Zelizer, a history professor at Princeton University, told AFP. "But he needs to refocus on policies that will boost the economy rather than the chaos of DOGE and haphazard tariff policies."

Trump hardly mentioned trade or inflation during his lengthy speech to Congress on Tuesday night. He instead focused on illegal migration and hot-button societal issues such as policies targeting the transgender community. "The American Dream is unstop-

pable, and our country is on the verge of a comeback the likes of which the world has never witnessed, and perhaps will never witness again," Trump said Tuesday. In his speech to lawmakers, Trump hailed the work of Musk, but on Thursday, he responded to growing criticism over unprecedented cuts to the US government overseen by the Tesla and SpaceX chief, saying they should be carefully calibrated.

"We say the 'scalpel' rather than the 'hatchet,'" Trump posted on his social media platform Truth Social after a cabinet meeting attended by Musk.

Americans seem so far unconvinced that the future will be as bright as Trump promises, even after the Republican campaigned hard on cost of living issues in his election battle with Democrat Kamala Harris. With the country polarized and Trump's approval rating middling from the get-go, the grace period appears to be over.

"We used to have a brief period of unity, but it's not happening anymore, especially with Trump," University of Virginia political scientist Larry Sabato told AFP. But he added that "the good news for Trump is that he still has a honeymoon with MAGA," his loyal Make America Great Again base.

In an Ipsos poll conducted for Reuters after the Oval Office face-off Friday between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, only 22 percent of respondents said the country was moving in the right direction on cost of living issues. Only a third said they were optimistic about Trump's foreign policy. Consumer confidence has taken a nosedive, and inflation in the world's largest economy is accelerating, with some experts saying the risk of recession is up as well.



Jakarta: A store offers Apple products by displaying the latest models they sell to provide a user experience in Jakarta on February 26, 2025. —AFP

Apple step closer to ending Indonesia iPhone sales ban

JAKARTA: Indonesia approved local certificates for more than a dozen Apple products on Friday, the industry ministry said, moving the tech giant a step closer to having a ban lifted on iPhone sales in Southeast Asia's biggest economy.

Apple struck a deal with Indonesia last month to invest in the country of 280 million after months of deadlock over the tech titan's failure to meet regulations requiring phones to be built with at least 40 percent of components made locally. "We have issued local content requirement certificates for 20 Apple products," Industry Ministry spokesperson Febri Hendri Antoni Arief said in a statement.

It did not specify the products that were certified, but local media reported they included the latest iPhone 16 model. Apple now needs to obtain a series of certificates and approvals from various ministries, the statement said.

Jakarta rejected a \$100 million investment proposal from Apple in November, saying it lacked the "fairness" required by the government. Apple later agreed to invest \$150 million in building two facilities—one in Bandung in West Java province to produce accessories, and another in Batam for AirTags. Industry Minister Agus Gumiwang Kartasmita said last month that Apple had also committed to building a semiconductor research and development center in Indonesia, calling it a "first of its kind in Asia".

Despite the ban on iPhone sales in Indonesia, the government had allowed the devices to be brought in if they were not being traded commercially.

Indonesia has also banned the sale of Google Pixel phones for failing to meet the 40 percent local parts requirement. — AFP



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) at the opening bell on March 7, 2025. — AFP

Markets have already erased the so-called "Trump Bump" that came with his election, in large part due to uncertainty over tariffs. Trump told reporters Thursday he was "not even looking at the markets," instead accusing "globalist" investors of being to blame for the drop—shortly after he hit pause on most tariffs levied on Mexico and Canada.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that "access to cheap goods is not the essence of the American Dream," and that any impact of tariffs on prices would be temporary. Several opinion polls show that Americans generally support downsizing the federal government, but the brutal methods so far employed by Musk's DOGE have frayed many people—and come up for court scrutiny. — AFP

Heathrow mulls shorter third runway to cut costs

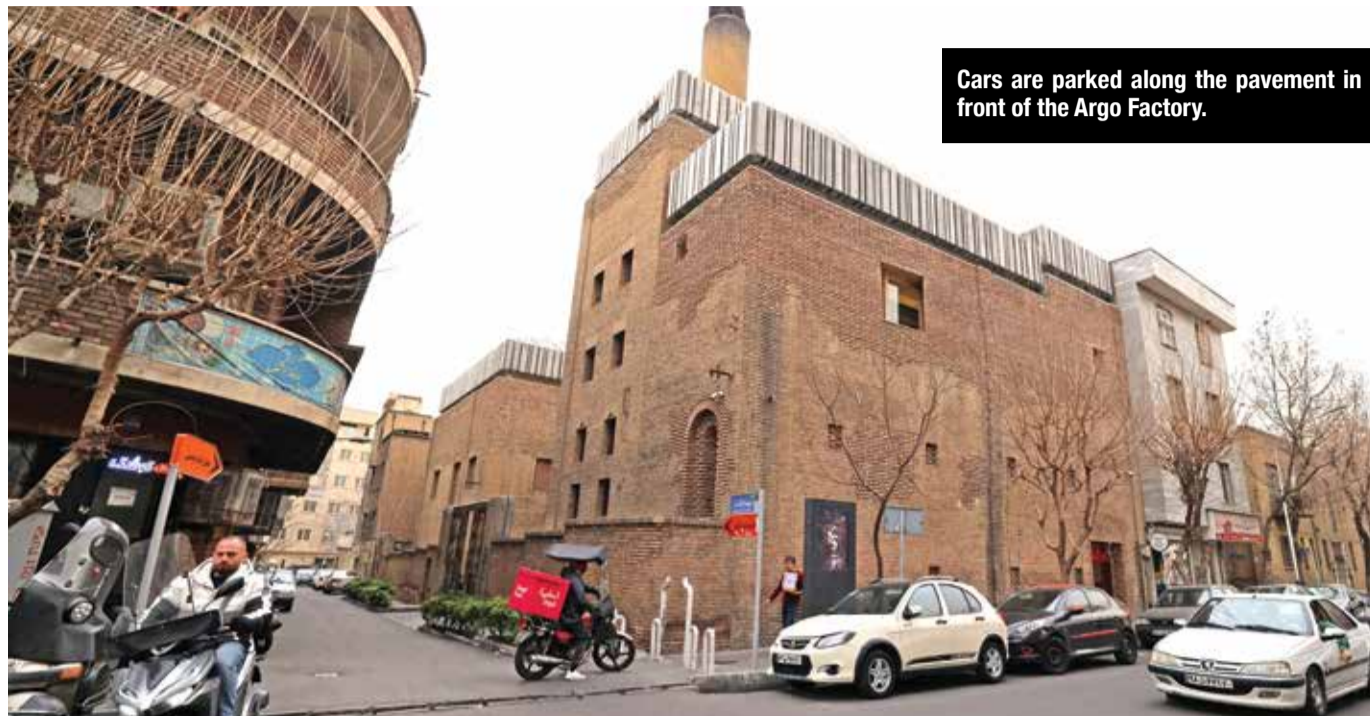
LONDON: Britain's Heathrow Airport is weighing changes to its previous expansion blueprint in a bid to cut costs and has been evaluating options such as building a shorter third runway, the Financial Times reported on Saturday. A Heathrow Airport spokesperson told Reuters in an emailed statement that the airport had been looking at plans on how to deliver the privately funded expansion project and would present them to the British government in the summer.

The airport, Europe's busiest, is considering all options before making a final decision, the FT said. One option being explored is an expansion to the northwest, with a shorter third runway to avoid diverting London's M25 motorway through a tunnel, according to the newspaper. Last month, Heathrow Airport CEO Thomas Woldbye said a proposal for a third runway would be submitted this summer. His comments came shortly after the government threw its weight behind the project, citing its potential to boost trade and economic growth. Woldbye said a third runway could be operational by 2035. The airport's two runways are full and it can only add passengers when airlines fly larger planes. European competitors Paris and Amsterdam have four and six runways, respectively. — Reuters

SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 2025



This picture shows a partial view of the Argo Factory, a contemporary art museum and cultural center, housed in a former brewery in Tehran.--AFP photos



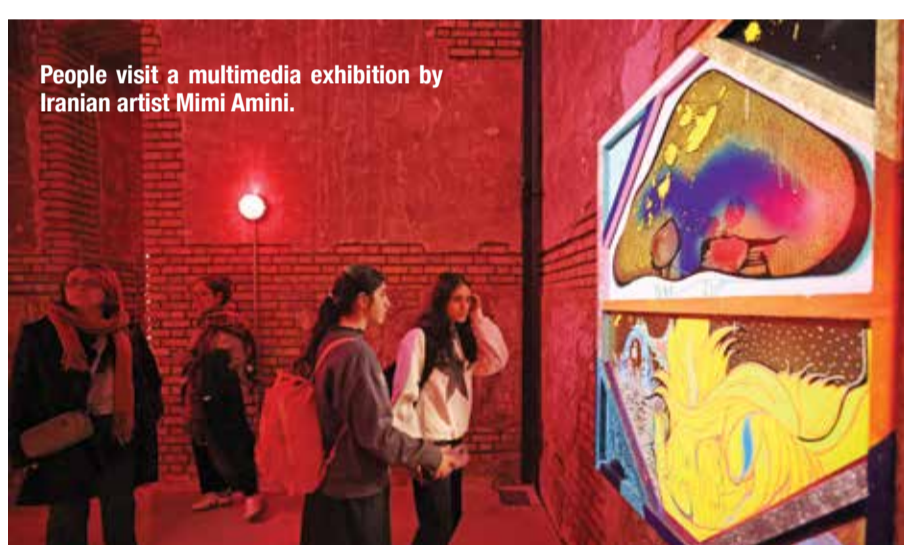
Cars are parked along the pavement in front of the Argo Factory.

ONCE A CRUMBLING RELIC OF OLD IRAN, BREWERY REBORN AS ARTS HUB

Hidden behind imposing brick walls in the heart of Tehran, a renovated industrial cellar where decades ago Iranian beverage was made has been transformed into a hub for contemporary art. The ambitious restoration of the derelict Argo factory has made it "one of the most beautiful buildings of Tehran", said architect Nazanin Amirian, visiting the latest exhibition there.

While the former factory with its towering chimney and cavernous cellar has been given a new life, many other historic buildings in the Iranian capital face a grimmer fate. "We hoped restoring Argo would inspire others to preserve similar buildings," said Hamid Reza Pejman, director of the Pejman Foundation that took on the project.

But "economic conditions are tough", said Pejman, after years of crippling sanctions and with no government funding to support restoration endeavors. Established more than a century ago, the Argo factory had produced one of Iran's oldest and biggest beverage brands before falling into disuse. It had ceased operations just a few years before the 1979 Islamic revolution, which toppled Iran's Western-backed shah and ushered in a strict ban on the production and consumption of alcoholic beverages.



People visit a multimedia exhibition by Iranian artist Mimi Amini.

The brand itself lives on alcohol-free, with rights to the Argo logo transferred to a local beverage company, Pejman said. He said that since the factory was eventually purchased by the Pejman Foundation in 2016. Its brick walls and chimney were restored, keeping their distinct industrial look, while other parts like the roof had to be entirely rebuilt.

Since 2020, the building has been open to the public as a museum, featuring local and international artists. In a

'Transform the city'

Left a crumbling structure of weathered brick walls that also served as a shelter for homeless people, the Argo building was eventually purchased by the Pejman Foundation in 2016. Its brick walls and chimney were restored, keeping their distinct industrial look, while other parts like the roof had to be entirely rebuilt.

Since 2020, the building has been open to the public as a museum, featuring local and international artists. In a



Women look at a painting, part of a multimedia exhibition by Iranian artist Mimi Amini at the Argo Factory.



A man looks at prints, part of a multimedia exhibition by Iranian artist Mimi Amini at the Argo Factory.

nod to its past life, the Argo arts center offers non-alcoholic beverage for sale.

The current exhibition is a collection of installation works, sculptures and paintings by Iranian multidisciplinary artist Maryam Amini. Over the years, the building has been swallowed by Tehran's rapid urban expansion, now surrounded by high-rises, modern cafes and sprawling commercial centers in one of the city's busiest neighborhoods. Much like the Argo factory until 2016, some of Tehran's historic buildings in-

cluding old movie theatres have been abandoned for years, largely due to economic hardship.

Others were demolished as shifting urban priorities have favored modern developments over restoration. Amir Ali Izadi, a 43-year-old artist visiting the factory-turned-museum, expressed his hope that similar buildings would undergo renovation. "It would transform the city's landscape," he said.--AFP



People visit a multimedia exhibition by Iranian artist Mimi Amini at the Argo Factory.



People buy tickets to see a multimedia exhibition by Iranian artist Mimi Amini at the Argo Factory.



A man looks at an art installation, part of an exhibition by Iranian artist Mimi Amini.

'Prince of Persia' creator 'never imagined' game would be his magic carpet

The 1980s childhood dream of American video game maker Jordan Mechner was crowned with its latest success when a new "Prince of Persia" title was named game of the year in France. The latest episode in the long-running series, "Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown" came out on top at the Pegases (Pegasus) awards for French games in Paris, winning not just best game overall but also best sound, game design and accessibility.

Developed by publishing giant Ubisoft's studio based in southern city Montpellier, the action-adventure inspired by the "Thousand and One Nights" folktales has added 1.4 million copies to the more than 20 million sold in the saga over 35 years. Mounir Radi, who directed "The Lost Crown", said it had been "a great privilege and unheard-of opportunity" to

work on a series "I spent so many hours on when I was younger". It had been 13 years since the previous instalment.

A family affair

"I had two dreams growing up: make video games and make movies," acclaimed creator Mechner told AFP in December 2023, just before the game was released. "Thanks to 'Prince of Persia' I've achieved both." Much has changed between the game's genesis in Mechner's 1980s California "home studio" to the latest version.

It was one of the first games to use "motion capture", where movements are first filmed to make them more realistic once transferred to the screen. Back then, the 60-year-old American, who has lived in Montpellier since 2015, would use a VHS camera to film his little brother doing the full range of movements the hero would need in the game.

He then uploaded them image by image to a computer, using the rotoscoping technique borrowed from 20th century cartoon makers. Mechner's amateur pianist father was also part of the family affair, composing the game's music. "It really was an artisanal production," he said.

Upon its release in 1989, gamers were impressed by the advanced animation and fluid movements. And it es-

tablished Mechner, who had already received attention in 1984 with "Karateka", a game he made entirely himself while still a student. He'd taught himself the basics of programming by reading magazines and experimenting on his Apple II computer which he was given as a teenager.

'Princess of Persia'

"Prince of Persia" became a cult saga with each new tech advance, above all

going from 2D to 3D. It was acquired by Ubisoft in 2000 and was turned into a hit Disney movie in 2010. Mechner said he "never imagined" that the game's universe would last as long as it has. He's now working on graphic novels, a popular art form in France. His "Replay: Memoires d'une famille" (Memories of a Family), published by Delcourt, was released in April and recounts the story of his father and grandfather, Austrian Jewish refugees who made it to the United

States just before World War II. It will be released in English in March by Macmillan's First Second Books. It tells how his great uncle Joji managed to get an exit visa to move to France shortly after the Nazi takeover of Austria by showing off two watercolors painted by Adolf Hitler that he'd bought years earlier and stumbled on while cleaning out a cellar. "After retiring, my grandfather spent three years writing a family memoir," he said. "I have to one day share these incredible family stories I grew up with."

He also mixes in his personal life, such as an exchange with his two children after he told them in 2015 that he was moving to France. His son told him, "You should do something else besides working on 'Prince of Persia.'" To which his daughter added: "At least make 'Princess of Persia'."--AFP



Producer Abdelhak Elguess (right) delivers a speech as team members of Ubisoft receive the Best Video Game award for 'Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown' during the 6th edition of the Pegases video game awards ceremony at La Cigale in Paris.--AFP



DIOR'S CHIURI CREATES ELEMENTAL SHOW FOR WHAT COULD BE HER LAST



Dior womenswear chief designer Maria Grazia Chiuri gave little clue about her future as she presented what could be her last collection at Paris Fashion Week, structured around the elements earth, air, ice and fire. Chiuri was inscrutable at the end of the 25-minute mega show in the Tuileries Gardens, briefly acknowledging applause from a crowd that was relatively low on A-list celebrities compared to usual.

Split into several distinct parts featuring the elements, the live streamed spectacle featured models in muted tones of black, beige, slate grey and green in 1980s-inflected designs for the Fall/Winter 2025 season. Chiuri's collection included trench coats, a variety of embroidered white and cream blouses, high leather boots and long dresses featuring fake fur, as well as the lace and sheer materials that have dominated catwalks in recent seasons.

Her future remains a source of major speculation in the fashion industry with persistent rumors that she is on the way out. Dior has boomed under her nine-year stewardship, becoming the second-biggest brand in the stable of luxury labels owned by French powerhouse LVMH. But some observers have suggested the classic French house is growing stale and is ripe for a shake-up, with its growth of crucial financial and dynastic importance to LVMH owner Bernard Arnault.

He placed his daughter Delphine in charge of the brand in February 2023. Chiuri, who in 2016 was the first woman to be named Dior's creative director after a career at Italian brands Valentino and Fendi, has refused to comment on rumors about her future.

Speaking to Grazia magazine last

month, she mused on how the fashion business had changed over her 40-year career. "Fashion used to be about family companies and there were small audiences — clients and buyers," she said. "Now fashion is like a channel. It's something more popular, it's like pop. It's a form of media." Dior parted ways with its long-time artistic director for menswear, Kim Jones, at the end of January.

Designer debuts

More than 100 fashion houses are set to unveil their Fall-Winter 2025-2026 collections during Paris Womenswear Fashion Week, hoping to rally sales in what is an increasingly difficult global luxury market. Among the most anticipated moments will be Sarah Burton's debut at Givenchy on Friday.

Burton, a 51-year-old Briton who made her name as creative director at Alexander McQueen, was appointed to Givenchy in September. Her nomination was one of a number of recent changes at major brands, with Belgian veteran Dries Van Noten stepping down from his namesake label last year and handing the reins to fellow countryman Julian Klausner, 33. Klausner's first collection on Wednesday in Paris will also be closely scrutinized.

The French Haute Couture and Fashion Federation has also pulled off a feat by attracting Tom Ford, a mainstay of New York Fashion Week, to Paris for the first time. Chief designer Haider Ackermann, in the top job at the label since September, will be making his catwalk debut.—AFP



Models present creations by Dior for the Womenswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2025/2026 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris on March 4, 2025. — AFP Photos



Lifestyle



A person looks at the Moutier-Grandval Bible, a 9th century illustrated Bible, one of the oldest fully preserved Bibles in the world, during the press day of the exhibition "Sur les traces d'un chef-d'oeuvre: La Bible de Moutier-Grandval" or "On the trail of a masterpiece" at the Musée jurassien d'art et d'histoire (MJAH), in Delemont, the capital of the Swiss canton of Jura March 6, 2025. --AFP photos

Priceless ninth-century masterpiece Bible returns to Swiss homeland

The Moutier-Grandval Bible, an illustrated ninth-century masterpiece considered one of the finest manuscripts in the world, is back in Switzerland, where it miraculously survived the ages in impeccable condition. The priceless Bible was produced in Tours in France in around 830-840, before making its way to Moutier-Grandval Abbey, in the mountainous Jura region in north-western Switzerland.

Now in the care of the British Library, the 22-kilogram (50-pound) manuscript is being loaned for three months to the Jura Museum of Art and History in the region's tiny capital Delemont. It is only the second time it has been loaned from London, after being shown at the Jura Museum in 1981, when 32,000 people flocked to see it. "We could even call it a miracle: this mediaeval masterpiece has survived the ages, the circumstances of history; it has escaped ransacking, wars, fires, revolutions, and has reached us in remarkable condition," said the museum's director Nathalie Fleury.

When it returned on Tuesday, "the emotion was palpable: more than 1,200 years of history were in our hands", she said. Around 100 Bibles were produced during the same period in Tours, of which 18 have survived intact, including only three that are illustrated. The Moutier-Grandval Bible is the best-known.

'Joy, awe and wonder'

The Bible is going on show in the museum's basement, behind a thick steel door. Sealed inside a glass cabinet, it is the only object in the bare, darkened room. It is open on the first page, showing a vivid illustration of the story of Adam and Eve -- its colors still remarkably bright -- from the Book of Genesis. For optimum conservation conditions, only five people at a time are allowed in the room, for five minutes only.



This photograph shows a detail of the Moutier-Grandval Bible.

"The Moutier-Grandval Bible really is a masterpiece of scribal and artistic endeavor," said Claire Breay, head of ancient, mediaeval and early modern manuscripts at the British Library. "It is one of the greatest treasures of the British Library," where it is periodically displayed on rotation. "This spectacular, 1,200-year-old, hand-written Bible, with this wonderful decoration, is still bringing people together and bringing joy, awe and wonder to everyone who sees it."

The 450 leaves, or 900 pages, measure 50 by 37.5 centimeters (20 by 15 inches), with text written in two columns of 50 to 52 lines each. The skins of 210 to 225 sheep were required to produce the parchment. It contains four full-page illustrations and around 20 copyist



A woman walks past the sign announcing the exhibition "Sur les traces d'un chef-d'oeuvre: La Bible de Moutier-Grandval" or "On the trail of a masterpiece" during the press day of the Musée jurassien d'art et d'histoire (MJAH).

monks worked on the text, written in Latin in highly legible Carolingian minuscule script.

"It's very emotional to see it in real life: it's completely different from seeing a reproduction of it in a book or online," said book historian and co-curator Angeline Rais. "People can see how big it is, how beautiful the colors and the gold still are," she told AFP.

Unravelling the mysteries

"There's a lot of mystery around the Bible," said Rais. How it came to Moutier-Grandval remains uncertain. The Bible was left behind by canons and forgotten about until it was found, according to legend, in a Delemont attic in the late 1810s or early 1820s. It was sold to an antiques dealer in 1822. It was eventually sold to the British Museum in 1836 for £750, or \$93,600 in today's money.

With much of its back story so little known, the Bible even today remains shrouded in a degree of mystery: how it was transported from London to Delemont, and all matters of security, remain a guarded secret. Rais said it had "enormous" resonance for the region. The founding of Moutier-Grandval Abbey, in around 640, is seen as the starting chapter in local history. "There is a really, really strong link between the community here of Delemont, of Jura, and the Bible," Rais told AFP.

The exhibition opens to the public from Saturday until June 8. Research continues on the Bible, notably on the parchment and the pigments used in the illustrations. The museum's experts hope that the Bible will be displayed in the Jura again, and when it does, that studies will have finally unraveled the mysteries of its long journey. --AFP

Hackman died of natural causes, a week after wife: Medical examiner

Oscar-winning actor Gene Hackman died of natural causes about a week after his wife's death, a medical examiner said Friday, ending more than a week of mystery surrounding the death of one of Hollywood's most beloved stars. The bodies of "The French Connection" star and his wife were found on February 26 in their home in New Mexico after emergency services were called to their property.



US actor Gene Hackman holds the Cecile B. DeMille Award at the 60th Annual Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, California, on January 19, 2003. --AFP

"The cause of death for Mr. Gene Hackman, aged 95 years, is hypertensive and atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, with Alzheimer's disease as a significant contributory factor," Heather Jarrell, the chief medical examiner for the New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator, told reporters. "The cause of death for Miss Betsy Hackman, aged 65 years, is hantavirus, pulmonary syndrome. The manner of death is natural."

Neither body showed any sign of trauma, nor any indication of carbon monoxide poisoning, which had been an initial suggestion. Hantavirus presents as a flu-like disease, with symptoms including fever, muscle aches, cough, sometimes vomiting and diarrhea that can progress to shortness of breath and cardiac or heart failure and lung failure, Jarrell said.

"This occurs after a one- to eight-week exposure to excrement from a particular mouse species that carries hantavirus," Jarrell said data from Hackman's pacemaker showed its last activity over a week before his body was found when maintenance workers were unable to access the couple's sprawling Santa Fe property.

"Based on this information, it is reasonable to conclude that Mr. Hackman probably died around February 18. Based on the circumstances, it is reasonable to conclude that Miss Hackman passed away first, with February 11 being the last time that she was going to be alive," said Jarrell. First responders found the door unlocked and open, and pills scattered next to Betsy Hackman's body, which was in the bathroom.

Gene Hackman's body was found in another room, fully clothed, with sunglasses nearby, indicating a sudden fall. Investigators suggested it could be the

case that the elder Hackman had not realized his wife was dead in the bathroom, given his advanced age and neurodegenerative disease. "He was in an advanced state of Alzheimer's, and it's quite possible that he was not aware that she was deceased," the medical examiner said.

A Hackman family spokesperson had previously denied reports of his Alzheimer's disease. In addition to the deceased couple, a dog was found dead in the bathroom, and two other healthy dogs were at the house. Along with the autopsies, the investigation had focused on piecing together a timeline of the couple's last days, which detectives said had been complicated by their low profile and their preference for privacy. Hackman, a two-time Academy Award winner, was credited for intense performances inspired by his troubled upbringing, notching up dozens of movie credits extending into his 70s.

He is perhaps best known as vulgar New York cop Jimmy "Popeye" Doyle in the 1971 crime thriller "The French Connection" -- for which he won an Oscar last year, told AFP. He won another golden statuette two decades later for best supporting actor for his portrayal of the brutal small-town sheriff "Little Bill" Daggett in the 1992 western "Unforgiven." --AFP



A staff member prepares to bake a tray of pies at the traditional pie and mash shop G Kelly in east London. --AFP photos



A picture shows the façade of the traditional pie and mash shop G Kelly in east London. --AFP photos



A picture shows a typical portion of pie and mash at G Kelly.

UK pie 'n' mash fans seek protected status for Cockney classic



A staff member prepares potatoes at the traditional pie and mash shop G Kelly.

"One and one please love," a regular said, leaning on the counter at a pie and mash shop in London's East End. In seconds, one piping-hot beef pie appeared with a single scoop of mashed potatoes at G Kelly's shop, topped off with parsley sauce. Londoners have been eating this classic Cockney combination since at least Victorian times but for many years the working-class staple has had a humble reputation among outsiders.

Now a campaign to get pie and mash special protected status is gaining ground, with supporters arguing the dish deserves an official stamp of recognition. After a British politician took the case to parliament and won the backing of MPs, campaigners hope to land the label this year. "Bout time," said G Kelly customer Daniel Terrance as he tucked into his third pie and mash of the week. "I just want more," the 39-year-old electrician chuckled, eating the meal with a traditional accompaniment of jellied eels.

Stewed eel water

The first pie and mash eateries began to crop up in London in the 1800s, when street hawkers selling pies teamed up with eel vendors and set up shop near the city's docks. Over time, a set of rituals has grown up around the dish, from the quickfire "one and one" ordering system to the fork and spoon that purists insist on using to eat it.

The pie's flaky crust and soft suet base have been a fixture for generations



Customers have lunch at the traditional pie and mash shop G Kelly.



A picture shows freshly baked pies at the traditional pie and mash shop G Kelly.

but most cooks have agreed to let one old-fashioned practice slide -- nowadays, the drink is rarely made from stewed eel water. British cuisine has had a hard time shaking off its bad reputation but backers say pie and mash is worthy of joining hundreds of dishes with official protection in mainland Europe and, increasingly, in other countries including the UK.

The campaigners, among them several pie shop owners, now need to get a recipe for the dish approved by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs so they can secure a Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) label. The stamp legally safeguards traditional recipes but differs from badges awarded to foods like Parma ham in that it allows them to be made outside a specific area.

Neil Vening, the fourth-generation owner of G Kelly's family shop, hopes the label can prevent big companies from capitalizing on tradition to pump out sub-standard pie and mash. "It's under-

mining this great heritage we've got," the 33-year-old said, pointing to the black and white photos of relatives and staff around the shop, founded by George Kelly in 1939.

'Time warp'

For regular customers who have seen dozens of pie and mash shops close since the dish's heyday, nostalgia is a big part of the appeal. Gentrification has pushed London's Cockney population further and further from the East End and changing tastes have ushered in a wave of coffee shops and artisan bakeries.

"I like the changes but not every local does," said Leanne Black, who has worked at the shop for 14 years. The 45-year-old East Ender explained many customers love the comfort an old-fashioned pie and mash shop brings. "It's not just about the food. Some people feel that the world has changed so much and when they come in here it's like a time

warp. "It's the smell in here. It's the tables, the cold marble... It's everything."

Future-proof pie

Pie and mash's recent history is not just a story of decline, though. Vening said G Kelly's is enjoying a boost as newcomers and tourists eat alongside old-timers. And East Enders who moved away from the capital have taken the dish with them -- dozens of pie and mash shops are now flourishing outside London. An official status would cement this turnaround, the campaigners argue.

Conservative MP Richard Holden, who took the motion to parliament last year, told AFP he wanted to celebrate pie and mash shops like those in his Basildon and Billericay constituency east of London. "Let's give them the protected status they deserve," he said. --AFP



Staff member Leanne Black pours parsley sauce at the traditional pie and mash shop G Kelly.

Sports

Ingebrigtsen wins 6th indoor gold

Norway's Ingebrigtsen dominates 1,500 m in Apeldoorn

APELDOORN: Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen won his sixth European indoor gold as he dominated the 1,500 m in Apeldoorn on Friday in the first step in his bid for a third consecutive double gold on the covered continental stage. The three-time European outdoor 1,500 m champion, who won 5,000m gold at last year's Paris Olympics, sped to the front of the pack a third of the way through the race. That move by the Norwegian, still just 24 years of age, immediately strung the field out as Germany's Robert Farken took a tumble as the athletes jostled for places.

Hitting the bell in the lead, Ingebrigtsen made it look all too easy as he cruised to his 22nd European gold medal—including indoor, outdoor and cross-country—in a winning time of 3min 36.56sec. France's Azeddine Habz and Portugal's Isaac Nader claimed silver and bronze respectively. "I'm only halfway there," said a jubilant Ingebrigtsen, who will be back on the track for heats of the 3,000m on Saturday, with the final of that event scheduled for 1550 GMT on Sunday.

"You need to do a lot of good things, not only in the preparations, but also in the race. I decided to stay a little bit relaxed the first half, and then go past the field when the pace is usually at its slowest. "There was never any doubt in my mind, but there is always a game of chance. In the back of my head I know that I have a race tomorrow as well. Now I have to do the good things and prepare for that."

Hunter Bell upstaged

Britain's Georgia Hunter Bell went 11th fastest

ever when winning Olympic bronze in Paris and was big favorite in the Netherlands. But she was totally upstaged in the women's 1,500 m by France's Agathe Guillemot, who claimed gold in 4:07.23. Hunter Bell froze on the final lap, eventually finishing fourth as Guillemot put in an impressive fast finish in a slow race to edge Portugal's Salome Afonso, with Britain's Reeve Walcott-Nolan taking bronze.

"It's incredible because I could celebrate my victory during the last 100m," said Guillemot. "At one point, I even wanted to wave at my coach and say 'look I am winning!'" There was also an upset in the men's long jump as Bulgaria's Bozhdar Saraboyukov seized his moment in the absence of flu-hit double Olympic champion Miltiadis Tentoglou of Greece.

The 20-year-old Bulgarian won with a clutch 8.13m leap in the final round - just 1cm ahead of Italian Mattia Furlani's best effort from the fifth round. Home hopes of a third Euro indoor title for Nadine Visser in the 60m hurdles went up in smoke after she was edged into silver by Switzerland's Ditaji Kambundji. The Swiss hurdler clocked an European record of 7.67sec, with Visser at 0.10sec. Poland's Pia Skrzyszowska rounded out the podium with Finland's defending champion Reetta Hurske finishing fifth.

There was a Polish gold in the men's 60m hurdles, however, Jakub Szymanski clocking 7.43sec for victory, just two-hundredths ahead of France's Wilhelm Belocian. Spain bagged the first gold of the evening session on offer when reigning European outdoor



APELDOORN: Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen (right), France's Azeddine Habz (center) and Portugal's Isaac Nader (left) compete in the final of the men's 1500m event during the European Athletics Indoor Championships at Omnisport in Apeldoorn. — AFP

champion Ana Peleteiro-Compaore sealed victory in the women's triple jump with a 14.37m effort in the fifth round. It was her second continental indoor gold after previous winning in Glasgow in 2019. There

was a late scare from Romania's Diana Ana Maria Ion, who produced a personal best of 14.31m to take silver, while Finland's Senni Salminen secured bronze with a final-round jump of 13.99m. — AFP

Five key factors in India-New Zealand Trophy final

DUBAI: India and New Zealand face off in the final of the Champions Trophy in Dubai on Sunday to decide the winner of the eight-nation ODI tournament. AFP Sport looks at five key factors that could decide the fate of the title clash.

Henry's opening burst

New Zealand pace spearhead Matt Henry leads the bowling charts in the 50-over tournament with 10 wickets—five when the Black Caps faced India earlier in the competition. Henry took down Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli in the group match in Dubai to reduce India to 30-3, before a middle-order fight-back lifted Rohit Sharma's team to 249-9. Henry, who combines pace with good seam movement, returned figures of 5-42, albeit in a losing cause. His opening burst in the final could be vital for New Zealand in gaining the upper hand.

Chakravarthy's mystery spin

Wrist spinner Varun Chakravarthy was a late addition to the India squad for the tournament and against New Zealand bamboozled the opposition with figures of 5-42. That was his first match of the tournament and only his second ODI, having made his debut against England in February. The 33-year-old, a mystery spinner who has many variations up his sleeve, took another two wickets in the semi-final against Australia. Chakravarthy could be key to India's chances—if part of the XI—on pitches that have helped the spinners.

Ravindra, Williamson threat

Rising star Rachin Ravindra and old warhorse Kane Williamson come into the final fresh from centuries against South Africa in Lahore. The left-handed Ravindra and Williamson put together 164 runs in a match-winning stand in the semi-final and have the



DUBAI: India's Virat Kohli stretches during a practice session a day ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy one-day international (ODI) cricket final match between India and New Zealand at Dubai International Stadium on March 8, 2025. — AFP

ability tackle the Indian spinners with aplomb.

Williamson, 34, hit a valiant 81 in the previous match against India and with Ravindra, 25, will once again pose a serious threat to India on an expected sluggish pitch. Skipper and left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner said Williamson and Ravindra's batting makes life a "little easier" for the bowlers.

Rohit's start

India captain Rohit hasn't hit top gear in the tournament, with his highest score being 41 in the opening win against Bangladesh. But even his scores of 20-plus in two matches—against Pakistan and Australia—have handed India quick starts for others to build on. Critics have slammed the opener for not converting those starts into bigger scores. Head coach Gautam Gambhir says his impact has been crucial and not driven by numbers. "You evaluate from the runs; we

evaluate from the impact. That's the difference," Gambhir shot back at a question on Rohit's form.

The pitch factor

The pitches at Dubai International Cricket Stadium have been a talking point with India playing all their matches at the same venue after refusing to tour Pakistan for political reasons. The surface in Dubai has been sluggish and aided spinners with Australia posting the highest total in this tournament of 264, which was overhauled by India with 11 balls to spare. Tracks in Pakistan have produced tall scores with New Zealand getting a Champions Trophy record 362-6 before restricting South Africa to 312-9 in Lahore. While India stay at their temporary home for the final, New Zealand's Ravindra said "we pride ourselves in adapting and playing the situation in front of us". — AFP

6 Nations challengers England in 'no-win' clash with Italy

LONDON: England go into Sunday's Six Nations match with Italy at Twickenham knowing a win may not be enough to appease critics of their faltering attack. If third-placed England, whose points difference currently stands at minus three, are going to remain in realistic title contention ahead of their tournament finale against Wales in Cardiff a week on Saturday, they will have to improve on their recent one-point wins over France and Scotland. Those narrow victories followed England's run of seven straight defeats by top-tier opposition, including a loss away to reigning champions and unbeaten tournament leaders Ireland, up against in-form France in Dublin on Saturday, in their Six Nations opener.

And while Steve Borthwick's men deserve credit for their resilience, the England coach's claims they had "found a way to win" after a 16-15 triumph over Scotland at Twickenham a fortnight ago rang slightly hollow given the Scots outscored his side three tries to one, only for Finn Russell to miss all three conversions. Clearly relying on the opposition goalkicker having a bad match is not a policy for sustained success, with 2003 World Cup winner Will Greenwood berating the current England side for playing "no rugby".

But England vice-captain Ellis Genge insisted the team deserved more credit. "It's like you're damned if you do, damned if you don't," said the prop. "In the last 18 months, every time we've lost by a point, we've been slandered, and we win by a point and it's the same old story." And yet for all England were booed by their own fans during a prolonged bout of box-kicking early in the second half against Scotland, expectations will remain high this weekend.

Italy have lost all 31 of their previous Tests against England and the Azzurri arrive at Twickenham on the back of a 73-24 thrashing by France - a match where Les Bleus scored 11 tries, a record for one team in a single Six Nations match. Borthwick has rejigged his attack by dropping full-back Marcus Smith and center Henry Slade, with their places taken by Elliot Daly and Fraser Dingwall - one of five Northampton players behind the scrum. — AFP



TOULOUSE: Toulouse's Italian wing Ange Capuozzo runs to score a try during the French Top14 rugby union match between Stade Toulousain Rugby (Toulouse) and RC Vannes at the Ernest-Wallon stadium in Toulouse. — AFP

Italy change six for England, Capuozzo at full-back

ROME: Italy coach Gonzalo Quesada on Friday announced six changes, one positional, to the starting line-up for the Six Nations match against England at Twickenham. After losing 31-19 to Scotland in their opener, Italy rebounded to beat Wales 22-15 in Cardiff, but suffered a humiliating 73-24 rout at the hands of France last time out. "I know there is not much to compare between the two nations and the two forms of rugby," Quesada said in reference to Italy and France. "I think it was impossible to beat that French team, but we should not have conceded such a defeat with such a deficit."

Quesada has rung the changes for the fourth and penultimate round of action, with Ange Capuozzo named at full-back to allow the return from injury

of Monty Ioane on the right wing for Sunday's Test. Matt Gallagher, son of former All Black John, makes his Six Nations debut on the other wing. Wales-born Stephen Varney comes in to partner Paolo Garbisi at half-back, with Juan Ignacio Brex and Tommaso Menoncello again combining in midfield.

Ross Vincent starts at No 8 with Lorenzo Cannone dropping to the bench and is flanked by captain Michele Lamaro and Sebastian Negri. The second row is unchanged in the shape of Federico Ruzza and Niccolo Cannone, while tighthead prop Marco Riccioni and hooker Giacomo Nicotera replace Simone Ferrari and Gianmarco Lucchesi, both named on the bench.

"With these changes, we wanted to strengthen our defence, strengthen our game upfront and also give a break to some players who have given a lot," Quesada said. Italy have never beaten England in 32 Test matches, but the former Argentina fly-half expects a reaction from his side after the French debacle. "It is up to us to show that what happened against France was a blip, which can happen in a process like the one in which we are engaged," he said. — AFP

Canada, Mexico trade war makes 2026 World Cup 'exciting': Trump

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Friday that trade tensions with Mexico and Canada would be a boost for the 2026 World Cup as he announced the creation of a White House task force to help organize the tournament. Speaking to reporters in the Oval Office alongside Gianni Infantino, the head of world football's governing body FIFA, Trump brushed off suggestions that his administration's on-going spat with the USA's 2026 World Cup co-hosts could impact the tournament.

"Oh, I think it's going to make it more exciting," Trump replied when asked how the tensions between the United States, Canada and Mexico might affect the event. "Tension is a good thing ... it makes it much more exciting," Trump added after signing an executive order formally creating the 2026 World Cup task force that he will chair.

Trump said the task force would assist in planning for what his executive order described as the "largest sporting event in history." "We're going to be establishing a task force, a very important task force - White House - and that's on the FIFA World Cup of 2026 which, as you know, is a big event," Trump said. Infantino meanwhile said the 2026 World Cup - and this summer's FIFA Club World Cup in the United States - would create 200,000 jobs and have an economic impact of \$40 billion.

"And more than that, we will give joy and happiness to the entire world, and this is priceless, definitely," Infantino added. "So thank you, Mr President, for setting up this task force, because it is important that everyone that comes to America feels safe, feels welcome, and that's why it's important that the government puts together this White House Task Force." Infantino meanwhile added that the scale of next year's World Cup - which is being expanded to include 48 teams - was equivalent to staging three NFL Super Bowls a day for one month. "That's really amazing when you think of it," Trump remarked. "I've never heard that expressed." — AFP

Barrett's injury adds to Super Rugby woes for champion Blues

AUCKLAND: An injury to All Blacks fly-half Beauden Barrett has compounded the Auckland Blues' problems after the Super Rugby defending champions suffered a last-gasp 21-20 loss to the ACT Brumbies. Brumbies scrum-half Ryan Lonergan landed an 80th-minute penalty goal from close range in Auckland on Friday to consign the Blues to a third defeat in their first four games. Star playmaker Barrett didn't return for the second half after suffering damage to his right hand while making a tackle on Brumbies debutant David Feliua.

Blues management confirmed the fracture on Saturday but wouldn't estimate a return date for the 33-year-old. Hand fractures typically demand a recovery time of six to eight weeks. "The injury requires ongoing assessment before determining details of treatment or time required for recovery," the Blues' statement said. Coach Vern Cotter conceded Barrett was sorely missed in the second half as the visitors overcame a 10-point deficit at the interval.

"We need to be better than that," Cotter said. "I saw some really good things out there. We generated a lead but to lose at the last minute is always disappointing." Two-time world player of the year Barrett had been a key figure in his first start at fly-half for the season, directing play expertly and using his pace to cross for one of the Blues' three tries. He joins injured All Blacks Dalton Papali'i, Stephen Perofeta and Sam Darry on the list of Blues players unavailable for next week's match against the Waikato Chiefs.

Brumbies coach Stephen Larkham was thrilled with the team's first win at Eden Park since 2013, improving their season record to 2-2. "There was an opportunity for us. We knew that the Blues were a little bit wounded coming into this game and then Beauden didn't come back out in the second half," Larkham said. — AFP

Sports

Griekspoor stuns Zverev

Tallon Griekspoor avenges French Open 'heartbreak'

INDIAN WELLS: Tallon Griekspoor stunned top-seeded Alexander Zverev 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/4) in the second round at Indian Wells on Friday, avenging a devastating loss to the German at Roland Garros last year. Zverev, the world number two who is heading the field of the prestigious ATP Masters event with No. 1 Jannik Sinner serving a three-month drugs ban, is the first Indian Wells men's top seed to lose his opening match since Andy Murray in 2017. It was a cherished win for Griekspoor, who had lost five straight matches - including four last year - to the German.

That included a five-setter at the French Open in which Griekspoor was up a double break in the fifth in a defeat he called "absolute heartbreak". "It was such a mental thing. I played so many battles against him and had chances but they all went his way," said Griekspoor, who claimed his first victory over a top-five player in his 19th attempt. "I am incredibly proud of myself from this performance and to get it over the line," the 28-year-old added. Broken to trail 5-6 in the third set, Zverev saved five match points in a dramatic 12th game, finally converting his fifth break point of the game to force the tiebreaker. But Griekspoor sealed it on his first chance in the decider.

The defeat in a tension-packed Stadium Court clash continued a lackluster run for Zverev since he fell to Sinner in the Australian Open final. Following that loss he has made early exits at Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro and Acapulco. "I always struggle against him," Zverev said of Griekspoor. "He played a good match. There's no question about that. But I have to look at myself a little bit, and it's nowhere near where I want to be." American Marcos Giron

joined Griekspoor in posting his first win over a top-five player, upsetting fourth seed Casper Ruud 7-6 (7/4), 3-6, 6-2.

Russian Daniil Medvedev, runner-up to Carlos Alcaraz the past two years, moved on with a 6-2, 6-2 victory over 71st-ranked Bu Yunchaokete of China. Fifth-seeded Medvedev, bundled up against the cold desert night air with leggings under his shorts and long sleeves, dropped his serve to open the match. But he broke back immediately and was never seriously threatened despite the wealth of long rallies. "I'll be surprised if he had more than five winners in the match," Medvedev said. "I just knew that I have to put the ball in court and run."

Swiatek safely through

Iga Swiatek, the women's defending champion in this combined ATP and WTA 1000 event, eased through her opener 6-2, 6-0 against French veteran Caroline Garcia. "I'm happy that I was solid until the end, and I'm just happy that I adjusted to the conditions well," said Swiatek, who played as the late afternoon temperature dropped and the breeze picked up.

"First matches are not easy, and didn't know what to expect from Caro, but I'm happy that I could dominate from the beginning." Swiatek converted six of her nine break points and was broken only once in the 61-minute victory. Fourth-seeded American Jessica Pegula also powered through, beating Poland's Magda Linette 6-4, 6-2. "Honestly, I think it was just handling the conditions," Pegula said. "I felt like I was able to handle the side with the wind pretty well and really take advantage of using that for my serve ... and then just being a little gritty and digging out some



INDIAN WELLS: Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands plays a backhand against Alexander Zverev of Germany in their second-round match during the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. - AFP

tough points on the side that was against the wind." Mirra Andreeva, the 17-year-old Russian, who became the youngest ever WTA 1000 champion in Dubai last month, battled back from 0-4 down in the second set to beat France's 70th-ranked Varvara Gracheva 7-5, 6-4 in another windblown, error-laden

late match. Andreeva, seeded ninth, booked a third-round meeting with Denmark's Clara Tauson, the woman she beat in the Dubai final. Tauson advanced with a 7-6 (7/3), 7-5 victory over Colombian Camila Osorio, who had ousted four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka in the first round.— AFP



KVITFJELL, Norway: Italy's Dominik Paris competes in the men's downhill World Cup race in Kvitfjell, Norway on March 8, 2025. - AFP

Miami struggle to 2-0 win over Jamaica's Cavalier

FORT LAUDERDALE: Inter Miami rested Lionel Messi again and had to grind out a 2-0 win over Jamaica's Cavalier in the first leg of their CONCACAF Champions Cup round-of-16 tie on Thursday. Messi, who was also absent for Sunday's 4-1 win at the Houston in Major League Soccer, is not believed to be suffering from any injury and the club has described his non-selection as 'load management'.

Miami coach Javier Mascherano clearly believed his team was good enough to beat their youthful Caribbean opponents without the Argentine World Cup winner but for the opening hour that looked far from certain. The Kingston side impressed as they threatened on the counter-attack, showed energy in midfield and were solid at the back against a lacklustre Miami team. Indeed, the visitors could have gone ahead in the 28th minute when Jamilio Rigters whipped a cross from the left towards the far post but the arriving Jalmaro Calvin couldn't get his shot on target.

Minutes later, the Jamaican side were denied by the woodwork when Calvin was found inside the box

and the ball deflected off the lunging David Martinez and struck the post. Just before half-time, the Jamaicans thought they had the lead when Miami failed to deal with a free-kick into the box and Richard King set up Shaquille Stein who slotted home. The celebrations were cut short though by the referee indicating a VAR review which went on for several minutes before, to the fury of the away side, the effort was ruled out for offside.

There was a more determined approach from Miami after the break and they were rewarded in the 61st minute when after a goalmouth scramble the ball fell to Tadeo Allende who fired into the corner. Cavalier paid the price for their high-energy approach in the first half, tiring as the game wore on and weary defending in the 83rd minute was punished by Luis Suarez who pounced after a mis-control by Shamar Watson and tucked home the second.

The return leg will be played in Kingston on March 13 and whether Messi will make his first appearance on the Caribbean island remains to be seen. Mascherano denied that Messi was suffering from anything other than tiredness. "I am guided by what the doctors tell me and the doctors have told me that he has no injuries or scars. He is tired from having played three games in six days, from the changes in the weather, from a lot of situations and since we want to take care of him and we intend not to aggravate that fatigue, we decided to rest him," said the Argentine.—AFP

Mainz beat Borussia Moenchengladbach

BERLIN: Mainz climbed into third place in the Bundesliga with a 3-1 win at Borussia Moenchengladbach on Friday. The result takes Bo Henriksen's charges to 44 points, provisionally two ahead of Eintracht Frankfurt in fourth place. Goals shortly before and after the half-time interval from Paul Nebel and Dominik Kohr put Mainz in the driving seat. Stefan Lainer pulled one back for the hosts in the final 20 minutes but Nadiem Amiri swiftly restored Mainz's two-goal lead to earn them their fourth league victory in their last five outings. "It was a deserved win for us over 90 minutes," Kohr told DAZN. "We're happy where we are. We have 44 points, what a feeling. The way we play football, we belong up there."

Mainz boast a four-point buffer to Freiburg, who lie just outside the Champions League spots in fifth and face sixth-placed RB Leipzig on Saturday. With nine games to go, Mainz are seeking to earn European football for the first time since their 2016-17 group stage appearance in the Europa League. And with Friday's result, they firmly have their eyes set on reaching the continent's top club competition for the very first time in their 120-year history. Defeat leaves Moenchengladbach in eighth place on 37 points, one shy of Leipzig in the final European spot.—AFP

Odermatt closes in on World Cup titles; Paris wins Kvitfjell downhill

KVITFJELL: Marco Odermatt closed in on two World Cup globes as he finished second to Dominik Paris in a windblown men's downhill in Kvitfjell on Friday. Paris took his first victory of the season in 1min 44.67sec. It was a record fourth victory on the Olympiabakken and the 19th downhill win in his career, taking him level with Switzerland's Petter Muller in second place on the all-time World Cup downhill winners list. "I don't know if I am the 'king', but I am feeling well, it's a good hill for me," said the 35-year-old who previously won in the Norwegian resort in 2016, 2019 and 2022.

Paris, with just two top-10 finishes this season and without a victory for 14 months, added: "You have to be very smooth and yeah, I know the key section. That makes it a bit easier." Odermatt was 0.32sec behind the veteran Italian, but increased his lead in the discipline standings as he led a convoy of red-clad Swiss skiers home. Stefan Rogentin was third at 0.63sec, Franjo Von Allmen placed fourth at 0.83sec after a characteristically wild ride, and Alexis Monney finished fifth at 0.89sec. The Swiss men have now claimed 14 of the 21 downhill podium spots this season.

"It's nice to be captain of such a great team," said Odermatt, with one hand on a fourth consecutive overall World Cup title. "The young guns, they are coming, they are pushing me a lot. I try to stay on the top. Franjo came very, very close in many races already. "We are having a good time together, we try to help each other, push each other. They also push me and that's something very good." Odermatt collected 80 points to increase his lead in the downhill standings to 103 over Von Allmen and 220 over Monney. "I tried several times before in the downhill (here) and never came better than seventh place. A great step," said the 27-year-old Odermatt.—AFP

Kyrgios at a loss after latest injury setback

INDIAN WELLS: A devastated Nick Kyrgios said he doesn't know what else he can do to get his tennis career back on track after pain in his surgically reconstructed right wrist forced him out of Indian Wells. Kyrgios had a set point in the first set but lost the tiebreaker and trailed 3-0 in the second when he called a halt, sending Dutch lucky loser Botic van de Zandschulp into a second round meeting with Novak Djokovic.

It was the latest setback for Kyrgios, who hasn't won an ATP match since 2022. He had extensive wrist surgery in September 2023 to address debilitating pain that affected him not only on the court but also doing simple tasks like turning a doorknob. "No one in the sport has had a wrist reconstruction and tried to play after that," said Kyrgios, who was sidelined for 18 months. "There's been players that have had wrist surgeries and nowhere near as bad as what I had."

"It would be nice if someone had this injury prior if I could just go there and ask them, OK, these are setbacks you were having. "It's all an experiment at this point. I was told I was arguably maybe not ever playing tennis again. I feel I'm like right there, I feel like I can compete. "This guy (van de Zandschulp) beat (Carlos) Alcaraz at US Open in straight sets, and I've got set points against him in the first set. I'm there, but if I'm not able to finish matches it doesn't really matter at this point." Kyrgios said he knew it would be touch and go after pain in his wrist forced him to stop practicing earlier this week.



Nick Kyrgios of Australia

Sharp pain

"After Australian Open, all I did was rehab, train, and then try and get ready for this tournament." Kyrgios said. "I was two days out of the tournament here and I was having a great training session, and literally the second-to-last point in my training session I hit a forehand, I felt a sharp pain, and I had to stop playing. "I guess, I don't know, we go back to the drawing board as a team, and we just try and figure out and navigate a way to just get through these matches. "I would have loved to be able to finish that match even if I lose just as a building block, to say, OK, I went out

there and was competing with a very good player, and I had chances and set points and breakpoints.

"So it's like these building blocks, but now if I'm not finishing matches that becomes a concern." Kyrgios said he hadn't given up on the idea of playing the Miami Open, which starts on March 19. "Obviously the time frame of Miami is not ideal, but, you know, I was scheduled to play that, so I will see how my wrist responds," he said. And he's not ready to give up on the game. "This is all I've done since I was seven years old is play tennis," Kyrgios said. "I want to go out there and I want to compete."— AFP

Classifieds

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134

Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

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

Change of Name

I, Desireddy Amaravathi (old name) Passport No. M8391261, w/o Desireddy Ramanaidu, r/o Gaddamvaripalli, Udayamanikyam post, Yerravaripalem Mandal, Tirupati district, Andhra Pradesh, I changed my name to Desireddy Amaravathin (new name) w/o Desireddy Ramanaidu.

(07-03-2025)

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Cavs survive Hornets scare

Jokic makes history in Nuggets win



CHARLOTTE: Donovan Mitchell #45 of the Cleveland Cavaliers drives to the basket during the game against the Charlotte Hornets on March 07, 2025 at Spectrum Center in North Carolina. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: The Cleveland Cavaliers staged a dramatic late rally to stretch their unbeaten streak to 13 games with a nail-biting 118-117 over the lowly Charlotte Hornets in the NBA on Friday. Charlotte, buoyed by a stellar 46-point display from Miles Bridges, looked ready to score a massive upset after opening up a nine-point lead with just over five minutes remaining. But Eastern Conference leaders Cleveland, who this week became the first team to punch their ticket to the postseason, rallied superbly to claw their way back into the game.

A sensational Evan Mobley three-pointer tied it for the Cavs at 106-106 with just over two minutes remaining, before Donovan Mitchell put the Cavs into a winning position with six straight free throws. Mitchell led the scoring for Cleveland with 24 points while Darius Garland finished with 20 and Mobley 19 as the Cavs improved to 53-10. Cleveland lead the East by eight games. Bridges almost

single-handedly inspired Charlotte to what would have been a remarkable upset. Only two other Hornets players finished with double figures as Charlotte fell to 14-48 to remain one place off the bottom of the table.

Cleveland coach Kenny Atkinson said his team's determination to dig out victory augured well for the looming playoff campaign. "Thirteen in a row—I think yes, we're in a good groove," Atkinson said. "We've had to scratch and claw these last couple of games, which is great for playoff prep—playing in some tight games and having to execute at the end of the game. "Our group's in a really good place. It did feel like our energy was a little bit down, but when our energy's high it's really tough to beat us."

History for Jokic

In the Western Conference meanwhile, the Oklahoma City Thunder extended their lead at the top

of the standings after defeating the Portland Trail Blazers 107-89. Thunder coach Mark Daigneault could afford to rest Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Chet Holmgren, Jalen Williams and Cason Wallace, but they were still too strong for an outgunned Blazers line-up. Aaron Wiggins led the Oklahoma City scoring with 30 points while Jaylin Williams posted his first career triple-double with 11 rebounds, 11 assists and 10 points. OKC improved to 52-11 and lead the West by 11 games from the second-placed Los Angeles Lakers.

In Denver, Nikola Jokic made history en route to equaling his career-high tally of triple-doubles for a season as the Nuggets downed the Phoenix Suns 149-141 in an overtime thriller. Three-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic finished with 31 points, 21 rebounds and 22 assists to complete his 29th triple of the season. It marked the first time ever a player has scored more than 30 points,

20 rebounds and 20 assists in a single game. The Suns, desperately needing a victory as they chase a place in the play-in tournament, rallied back brilliantly from 21 points down in the third quarter to tie it up when Kevin Durant drained a three-pointer on the buzzer.

But Jokic took over in overtime to close out a victory that leaves the Nuggets third in the West on 41-22. Elsewhere, the Memphis Grizzlies halted their four-game skid with a 122-111 victory over the Dallas Mavericks, who were without the injured Kyrie Irving and Anthony Davis. Ja Morant sparked the Grizzlies with 31 points, while Desmond Bane added 27 points, 16 rebounds and six assists. The Grizzlies are fourth in the West with a 39-24 record while Dallas fell to 32-32. In Miami, the Minnesota Timberwolves' balanced offense was enough to secure a 106-104 victory over the Heat, with seven Timberwolves players finishing in double figures. — AFP

Women step into the ring at west African wrestling tournament

ABUJA: Legs taut, backs bent at the waist, the wrestlers slowly stretched out their arms towards each other, searching for a grip while trying to avoid becoming exposed themselves. In a flash it was all over—a tangle of grappling, pushing and jostling that ended with the Beninese fighter tossed to the ground by her Nigerian counterpart, the soft sand surface spraying out beneath her. Traditional west African wrestling—and the gargantuan, sometimes sumo-like men who step into the ring—captivates audiences across the region, from stadiums in Senegal to desert villages in Niger.

This week's ECOWAS wrestling tournament, however, marked the first time that the annual showdown featured a women's division, drawing competitors from across the regional bloc to the Nigerian capital Abuja. "Women know how to fight. We just had to be given a chance," 33-year-old Ivorian fighter Celine Bakayoko told AFP on Friday from the sidelines. She only started competing professionally in 2019, but she said she grew up wrestling with her friends, adding that "for us, it's not a sport, it's an innate practice." "They look serious, they don't look like they're just coming here to fill a gap," spectator Yussuff Fashola said.

Though the tournament, which continued into the weekend, marked a step forwards for women in the male-dominated sport, "to get other females on your team, to be able to train with them... that's the challenge," said Ghana's Jocelyn Asante. But even after suffering a defeat on Friday, Liberia's Garmai Sangh-



ABUJA: Athletes compete during the 13th Edition of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) African Wrestling Tournament at the National Stadium in Abuja on March 7, 2025. - AFP

no found a silver lining in "representing my country" and using the opportunity to "develop skills" for future bouts.

Missing champions

Missing, however, was last year's medal table-toppers, Niger. Run by military juntas, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali all left the bloc earlier this year after years of deteriorating relations with ECOWAS. The split came after the July 2023 coup in Niger, when the bloc threatened military intervention and pushed economic sanctions on Niamey. Though envoys have been sent to bridge the divide, and ECOWAS

officials at the tournament spoke of regional unity during the opening ceremony, none of the nations sent fighters to this year's tournament.

"Sport is supposed to unify us, right?" asked Fashola, 33, over the whoops and whistles of a men's match, lamenting the countries' absences. "They are our friends," said Abdullahi Ahmed Libata, the former secretary general of the Traditional Sports Federation of Nigeria, who grew up wrestling each dry season as rivers would recede and leave soft sandy banks that were perfect for combat. "Niger are our neighbors, we love them," he said. "They are our people, we came up together." — AFP

Indian football great Chhetri comes out of retirement aged 40

MUMBAI: Indian football legend Sunil Chhetri will return to the national team aged 40 in an unexpected reversal of his decision to hang up his boots last year. The former captain, the fourth-highest men's international goalscorer of all time, played his last match for India in June 2024 in a World Cup qualifier. Chhetri said last year that "instinct" told him the match against Kuwait should be his last and he bowed out in front of nearly 59,000 fans in Kolkata. But on Thursday, India head coach Manolo Marquez announced the return of India's most-capped player for the March international window. India are out of qualifying for the 2026 World Cup and are now targeting the Asian Cup in 2027.

"The qualification for the Asian Cup is very crucial for us. Given the importance of the tournament and the matches ahead, I discussed with Sunil Chhetri about making a comeback to strengthen the national team," Marquez said in a statement from the All India Football Federation. "He agreed, and so we have included him in the squad." India play a friendly against Maldives on March 19, in preparation for an Asian Cup qualifier against Bangladesh on March 25. Football has struggled to find its feet among the 1.4 billion people of India, where the sport is dwarfed by the nation's longstanding cricket obsession.

Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter once called India a "sleeping giant" of football. Chhetri is a sporting icon in cricket-mad India. The diminutive striker, who is 1.7 meters (5ft 7in) tall, made his debut against fierce rivals Pakistan in 2005 and scored India's only goal. Chhetri had two brief but unsuccessful spells in Portugal and the United States, but has spent most of his career in India. — AFP