



Ramadan 11, 1446 AH

Fajr	: 04:44
Shrooq	: 06:03
Dhuhr	: 11:58
Asr	: 15:21
Maghrib	: 17:54
Isha	: 19:10

## Zionists cut power to Gaza

Hamas slams 'cheap blackmail tactics' • PA condemns 'escalation in genocide'

### Electricity minister's resignation accepted



**KUWAIT:** An Amiri decree was issued Monday accepting the resignation of Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr Mahmoud Boushehri. Another decree was issued appointing Minister of Public Works Dr Noura Al-Mashaan as Acting Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy. — KUNA



**GAZA:** A youth pushes a bicycle loaded with filled-up water containers outside the southern Gaza desalination plant in Deir el-Balah, which stopped working after the Zionist entity cut off electricity supply to the Gaza Strip on March 10, 2025. — AFP

**JERUSALEM:** The Zionist entity sent a delegation to Qatar on Monday for a fresh round of talks on extending a fragile ceasefire in Gaza, after cutting off the electricity supply to ramp up pressure on Hamas. Hamas accused the Zionist entity of reneging on the ceasefire deal, saying in a statement Monday the Zionist entity "refuses to commence the second phase, exposing its intentions of evasion and stalling".

The Zionist entity has halted aid deliveries to Gaza amid the deadlock, and on Sunday announced it was cutting off the territory's electricity supply. Hamas described the electricity cut as "blackmail", a term it had also used after the Zionist entity blocked the aid. "We will use all the tools at our disposal to bring back the hostages and ensure that Hamas is no longer in Gaza the day after" the war, Energy Minister Eli Cohen said as he ordered the power cut.

The move echoed the early days of the war when the Zionist entity announced a "complete siege" on the Palestinian territory, severing the electricity supply which was only restored in mid-2024. Hamas spokesman Abdul Latif Al-Qanoua said the Zionist entity's move will impact its captives still held in Gaza. "The decision to cut electricity is a failed option and poses a threat to its prisoners, who will only be freed through negotiations," Qanoua said in a statement on Monday.

The Palestinian foreign ministry said in a statement that it "strongly condemns the (Zionist) Ministry of Energy's decision to cut electricity to the Gaza Strip, considering it an escalation in the genocide, displacement and humanitarian disaster in Gaza", which is controlled by Hamas and not the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority.

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### RAMADAN KAREEM

### Body and soul in Islam

By Hassan Twaha Bwambale

A human being is made up of body and soul. Many verses of the Noble Quran allude to the fact that the soul was breathed into Adam (AS) after he was created and fashioned from clay. Also, it is construed from many prophetic narrations that the soul is breathed into a fetus after 120 days (4 months from conception). (Refer to Al-Bukhari # 3, 208 and 3, 3332)

Almighty Allah says what can be translated as: "(Allah, the Exalted in Might, the All-Merciful), perfected everything He created and began the creation of man from clay. Then He made his (first man's) progeny from a (quintessence) of a humble fluid drawn forth. Then He proportioned him and breathed into him from His (created) soul, and (then) gave you (the faculties) of hearing and sight, along with hearts that comprehend." (As-Sajdah 32: 7-9)

The body is regarded as a house for the soul. The soul departs it during sleep and returns when we wake up. When someone dies, the body becomes like a demolished house. Almighty Allah says what can be translated as: "Allah takes the souls (of people) at the (predestined) time of their death. But for those whose (souls) that have not yet died, He takes them during their sleep. Then He withholds the ones upon which He has decreed death and sends the others (back) for a specified time. Indeed, in (all) this there are sure signs for people who reflect." (Az-Zumar 39: 42)

If we compare a human being to a computer, then his body is like a computer itself, his life like electricity, and the soul like software programs. So, with such complex software programs, the computer is different from other machines just like a human being is different from animals.

Despite unanimity about the dichotomous relationship between the body and the soul, the vast majority of the people focus more on the body at the expense of the soul. They eat good food, drink tasty beverages and some undergo cosmetic surgery to look more beautiful or handsome, but very few make an effort to cater for their spiritual needs. Allah says what can be translated

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### Syria ends military operation, Sharaa vows accountability

**LATAKIA, Syria:** A Syrian military operation against loyalists of ousted President Bashar Al-Assad has been completed, the defense ministry said on Monday, after the heaviest fighting since former rebels seized power three months ago. Clashes between Assad loyalists and the country's new Islamist rulers in the former president's coastal heartland have killed more than 1,000 people, mostly civilians, according to a war monitoring group.

### Palestinian student protester arrested at Columbia University

**NEW YORK:** US immigration agents arrested a Palestinian graduate student who has played a prominent role in pro-Palestinian protests at New York's Columbia University as part of US President Donald Trump's promised crackdown on some anti-Zionist activists. Mahmoud Khalil, a student at the university's School of International and Public Affairs, was arrested by US Department of Homeland Security agents at his university residence on Saturday evening, the Student Workers of Columbia labor union said in a statement, adding thousands of people have signed a petition calling for his release.

Khalil's wife is a US citizen, eight months pregnant, according to news reports, and he holds a US permanent residency green card, the union said. His arrest was condemned by civil rights groups as an attack on protected political speech. In an interview with Reuters hours before his arrest on Saturday about Trump's criticism of student protesters, Khalil

said he was concerned that he was being targeted by the government for speaking to the media. Secretary of State Marco Rubio shared a news report of Khalil's arrest on social media on Sunday, adding the comment: "We will be revoking the visas and/or green cards of Hamas supporters in America so they can be deported." He did not elaborate and spokespeople for Rubio did not respond to questions. The Department of Homeland Security said in a social media post that it had arrested Khalil because he has "led activities aligned to Hamas", without elaborating.

US law forbids providing "material support or resources" to groups the US has designated as terrorist organizations, including Hamas, the Palestinian-nationalist Islamist group that governs Gaza and controls the territory's militant wing. That law does not define or prohibit "activities aligned to" these groups, and DHS spokespeople did not respond to questions about their accusation. Neither department has said Khalil is accused of giving material support to Hamas, or of any other crime.

Khalil's detention is one of the first efforts by Trump, a Republican who returned to the White House in January, to fulfill his promise to seek the deportation of some foreign students involved in the pro-Palestinian protest movement, which he has

called antisemitic. The US-supported Zionist assault on Gaza have led to months of pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist protests that have roiled college campuses in the US and overseas. Khalil calls it an anti-war movement that includes Jewish students and groups, who reject antisemitism allegations. He was one of the lead negotiators with school administrators for the pro-Palestinian student protesters, some of whom set up tent encampments on Columbia lawns last year and seized control of an academic building for several hours before Columbia called in police to arrest them. He was not among the several dozen students that occupied the building, but was a mediator between Columbia vice provosts and the protesters.

The New York Civil Liberties Union said Khalil's detention was unlawful, retaliatory and an attack on free speech rights. Donna Lieberman, the group's executive director, said in a statement the detention "is a frightening escalation of Trump's crackdown on pro-Palestine speech, and an aggressive abuse of immigration law". Khalil grew up in a Palestinian refugee camp in his native Syria and has worked for the British embassy in Beirut, according to an online biography. He was being held on Sunday at a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention

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### Canada's incoming PM Carney vows to 'win' US trade war

**OTTAWA:** Canada's incoming prime minister Mark Carney struck a defiant note as the former central banker vowed to win US President Donald Trump's trade war, saying his country will "never" be part of the United States. Carney lost no time standing up for "the Canadian way of life" after the Liberal Party overwhelmingly elected him on Sunday to succeed Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

"We didn't ask for this fight. But Canadians are

always ready when someone else drops the gloves," Carney told party supporters in Ottawa. "So the Americans, they should make no mistake, in trade as in hockey, Canada will win," he said. "Canada never ever will be part of America in any way, shape or form," said the 59-year-old, who will take over from Trudeau in the coming days.

Carney may not have the job for long. Canada must hold elections by October but could well see a snap poll within weeks. Current opinion polls had the opposition Conservatives as slight favorites. Carney warned in his victory speech that the United States under Trump was seeking to seize control of Canada. "The Americans want our resources, our water, our land, our country," he said, adding "these were dark days brought on by a country we can no longer trust".

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**DAMASCUS:** Syria's interim President Ahmed Al-Sharaa speaks in a handout video statement on March 9, 2025. — AFP

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**OTTAWA:** Canada's Liberal Leader and Prime Minister-elect Mark Carney speaks after being elected on March 9, 2025. — AFP





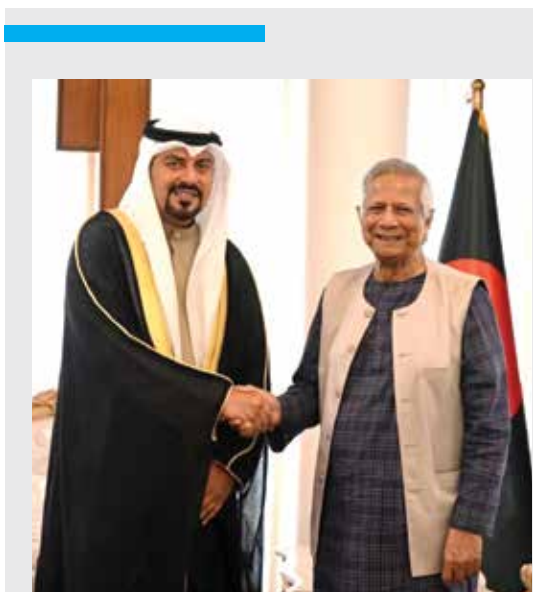
## Local



Zain and 965 teams in a group picture.

# Zain x 965 Ramadan Nights: Strengthening connections

## Expo featured promising startups from talented Kuwaiti entrepreneurs



### Kuwait, Bangladesh discuss boosting ties

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Bangladesh Ali Hamada discussed avenues for strengthening bilateral relations in diplomacy, trade, and the economy during a meeting Sunday with Bangladesh's interim Prime Minister Muhammad Yunus. In a statement, the Kuwaiti Embassy in Bangladesh said both sides reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing cooperation in key sectors, including investment, energy, food security, and employment. Ambassador Hamada reiterated Kuwait's continued support for Bangladesh's efforts to achieve progress and prosperity, underscoring its commitment to stability and security in the country.

For his part, Prime Minister Yunus expressed appreciation for the strong historical ties between Kuwait and Bangladesh, emphasizing the need to bolster cooperation in strategic economic sectors. He invited Kuwaiti investors to explore opportunities in Bangladesh's special economic zones, particularly during the upcoming Investment Summit in Dhaka from April 7-9. He noted that the summit presents a valuable platform to strengthen economic collaboration. The interim Prime Minister and 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate lauded the enduring Kuwaiti-Bangladeshi partnership, describing it as "rooted in mutual respect" and reaffirming both nations' commitment to expanding cooperation in trade, energy and beyond. — KUNA

KUWAIT: The first edition of Zain x 965 Ramadan Nights took place over three days at Salhiya Plaza, providing a vibrant space for fostering community connections during the Holy Month of Ramadan while highlighting the creativity and promising ventures of Kuwaiti entrepreneurs. Zain's support for this unique event came as part of its ongoing partnership with 965 Outlet, known for organizing initiatives that empower local entrepreneurs to showcase their products and services in a dynamic social setting.

This year, for the first time, the event was held during Ramadan, reflecting the spirit of togetherness and connection that defines the month. Zain remains committed to nurturing local talent and innovation across various fields, particularly entrepreneurship, by supporting startups and small businesses. This

initiative aligns with the company's efforts to empower the next generation of Kuwaiti entrepreneurs, enabling them to contribute effectively to national economic growth.

Zain x 965 Ramadan Nights aimed to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), offering them a unique opportunity to market and present their products and services in an engaging social atmosphere alongside their industry peers. Zain's participation in this event is part of a broader commitment to supporting initiatives that stimulate local talent and promote national products, ultimately benefiting the country's economy. The event also attracted a significant number of visitors, including families and shoppers, further enhancing its impact.



Event strengthened connections during holy month.



### Namaa Charity launches iftar meal project for families in North Gaza

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Namaa Charitable Society has launched a humanitarian initiative to provide 1,600 iftar meals daily to families affected by the ongoing crisis in North Gaza. Namaa Charity CEO Saad Al-Otaibi reaffirmed the foundation's unwavering commitment to supporting the people of Gaza, emphasizing that the project serves as a beacon of hope for those who have lost everything amidst the devastation.

Al-Otaibi highlighted that this initiative reflects Namaa's mission to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan, a time of mercy and solidarity. He underscored Kuwait's longstanding role in spearheading humanitarian efforts for Palestine, in line with the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad



Iftar preparations funded by Namaa Charity. — KUNA photos

Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, Head of the Wafaa Foundation for Development and Capacity Building Marwan Hussain expressed profound gratitude to Ku-

wait's leadership and people for their unwavering support and steadfast solidarity with the Palestinian people. — KUNA

### Kuwait real estate market sees sharp decline in January

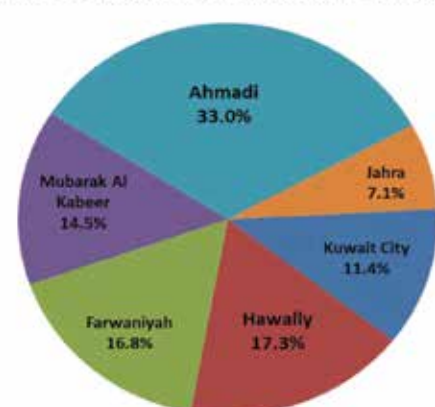
KUWAIT: The latest data from the Ministry of Justice's Real Estate Registration and Authentications Department indicates a significant slowdown in Kuwait's real estate market in January 2025 compared to December 2024, excluding activity in the crafts sector and coastal strip system. Total traded real estate contracts amounted to KD 237.8 million in January, reflecting a 45.2 percent decline from KD 434 million recorded in December.

The market also registered a 9.8 percent drop year-on-year compared to KD 263.6 million in January 2024. The number of real estate transactions reached 394 deals in January, with Ahmadi Governorate securing the highest share at 130 transactions (33.0 percent of total deals). Hawally Governorate followed with 68 deals (17.3 percent), while Jahra Governorate recorded the lowest share with 28 deals (7.1 percent).

#### Private housing sector

The private housing sector recorded a total trading value of KD 106 million, down 27.8 percent from

Kuwait's Governorates Deals Distribution - January 2025



KD 146.7 million in December. Despite this drop, its share of total real estate activity rose to 44.6 percent, up from 33.8 percent in the previous month. The 12-month average for this sector stood at KD 124.5 million, making January's trading value 14.9 percent below the average. The number of transactions totaled 282 deals, compared to 357 deals in December. Consequently, the average transaction value in this sector declined by 8.6 percent to KD 376,000 per deal, down from KD 411,000 in December.

#### Investment residential sector

Trading in the investment residential sector to-

taled KD 119.3 million, marking a 47.1 percent decline from KD 225.4 million in December. Its share of total market activity dropped slightly to 50.2 percent, compared to 51.9 percent in December. However, this sector outperformed its 12-month trading average of KD 104.3 million, posting a 14.3 percent increase. The number of transactions in this sector stood at 107, down from 154 deals in December. The average transaction value fell to KD 1.1 million, a 23.8 percent decline from KD 1.5 million in December.

#### Commercial, warehousing sectors

The commercial real estate sector witnessed a steep decline, with trading value plummeting 91.6 percent to KD 5.2 million, down from KD 61.9 million in December. Its share of total market activity fell to 2.2 percent, compared to 14.3 percent in December. The 12-month trading average for this sector stood at KD 58.9 million, making January's figures 91.1 percent lower. The number of commercial real estate transactions dropped to just three, compared to 15 in December. Consequently, the average deal value in this sector fell 57.8 percent to KD 1.7 million, down from KD 4.1 million in December. In the warehousing sector, two transactions were recorded in January, totaling KD 7.3 million.

#### Year-on-year market comparison

Comparing January 2025 to January 2024, Kuwait's real estate market liquidity declined from KD



263.6 million to KD 237.8 million, reflecting a 9.8 percent drop. This decline was driven by an 87.9 percent drop in the commercial sector and a 25.1 percent decline in the private housing sector. Meanwhile, the investment residential sector saw a notable 55.1 percent increase in trading value. — Al-Shall



## Local

# PAHW signs consultancy services deal to develop 3 residential sites

## A pivotal step in implementing Kuwait's real estate developer model

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) signed a consultancy services contract on Monday to develop three residential sites in accordance with Law No 118 of 2023, which facilitates the establishment of companies to develop cities and residential areas with an economic focus. Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdullatif Al-Meshari described the agreement as a pivotal step in implementing the real estate developer model, marking a shift in Kuwait's housing care philosophy. He emphasized the government's commitment to engaging the private sector in driving housing projects and offering sustainable, high-quality housing solutions that cater to the diverse needs of Kuwaiti families.

Speaking on the sidelines of the signing, Al-Meshari noted that implementing the new law in tandem with the existing housing welfare system would enable a smooth transition from the traditional state-driven housing approach to a partnership model with the private sector. He underscored that this transition aligns with Kuwait's broader development policies, shifting the state's role from direct service provider to regulatory and supervisory authority. The minister highlighted that the consultancy contract would serve as a pilot initiative to assess the effectiveness of the real estate developer system. PAHW will closely monitor all project phases to ensure optimal application of the law and promptly address any implementation challenges.

Regarding the locations of the three new residential areas, Al-Meshari stated that authorities carefully selected strategic sites near developed urban zones to encourage citizen interest. He noted that site evaluations are ongoing and affirmed PAHW's commitment to providing diverse housing options that reflect the varied needs of Kuwaiti families. Looking ahead, Al-Meshari revealed that future housing projects would extend beyond traditional Kuwaiti family



KUWAIT: Public Authority for Housing Welfare's officials sign a consultancy services contract on Monday to develop three residential sites. — KUNA photos

units to include other eligible groups, such as women, single women and single men. He emphasized that housing policy must be inclusive, offering tailored support to different categories based on their eligibility for housing welfare.

On the potential impact of the real estate developer system on property prices, Al-Meshari expressed confidence that introducing a competitive environment among investors would help stabilize supply and demand, mitigating inflation in residential property prices. He stressed that the system is a cornerstone of the government's sustainable housing program, carefully designed to align with Kuwait's long-term development goals.

Al-Meshari also highlighted the significant progress made in launching the country's first real estate



developer projects through extensive consultations with government bodies, private sector stakeholders and the Real Estate Union. He noted that real estate financing is a shared responsibility involving PAHW, the Ministry of Finance, the Public Investment Authority, and the Central Bank of Kuwait. Discussions with leading real estate development firms have yielded recommendations, some of which have already been implemented, with additional policies set to be introduced in the near future.

Regarding key development sites such as Nawaf Al-Ahmad, Al-Khiran, and Al-Sabriya, Al-Meshari announced that PAHW's Board of Directors has approved the launch of design and infrastructure plans for these areas, which will collectively provide 150,000 housing units. He invited local and regional

investors, along with real estate developers, to participate in the projects, citing promising investment opportunities that reinforce the private sector's role in Kuwait's housing development strategy.

Touching on labor cities, Al-Meshari affirmed that they form part of international agreements and are a government priority. He mentioned ongoing consultations with various stakeholders to integrate these projects into the private sector and assess their feasibility. Several labor cities fall under the jurisdiction of PAHW, the Ministry of Finance and other relevant entities. The newly signed consultancy contract will oversee the development of three residential areas under the real estate developer system, with an estimated total capacity exceeding 5,000 housing units. — KUNA

## Acting Prime Minister honors officer for his outstanding dedication

KUWAIT: Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah on Sunday honored Major Fawaz Al-Ruwaili of the General Department of Airport Security in recognition of his outstanding dedication and exceptional performance in carrying out his duties. According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef commended Major Al-Ruwaili for his commitment, emphasizing that the recognition reflects the ministry's appreciation for distinguished personnel. He stressed that such honors serve as a motivation for security personnel to continue their efforts in serving the nation with excellence and dedication.

Major Al-Ruwaili expressed his pride in receiving the honor, considering it an incentive for himself and his colleagues to further enhance their efforts



in serving the homeland and its citizens. The ceremony was attended by Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Ports Security Affairs Brigadier Atef Al-

Habashi and Acting Director General of the General Department of Airport Security Brigadier Bader Al-Shaya. — KUNA

## GCC empowers women and girls with disabilities

GENEVA: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen, reaffirmed the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) steadfast commitment to empowering women and girls with disabilities and upholding their rights within the society. Speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the GCC Council of Ambassadors during an interactive dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on Persons with Disabilities, held as part of the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Ambassador Al-Hayen emphasized the importance of closing gaps that hinder full equality for women and girls with disabilities.

He highlighted the challenges posed by double discrimination and systemic barriers, which continue to render this group among the most vulnerable and marginalized segments of society despite global progress in disability rights. Al-Hayen underscored the priority given to the rights of persons with disabilities across GCC states, citing ongoing efforts to develop legislative, technical, and financial frame-

works to ensure their full inclusion. He pointed to the region's commitment to leveraging economic, technological, and healthcare advancements to facilitate the better social and economic integration of persons with disabilities.

He noted that all GCC countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and have implemented national legislation and programs aimed at fostering inclusivity, particularly for women and girls. These efforts include dismantling systemic barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and social services. Al-Hayen further highlighted the "holistic approach" adopted by GCC nations to enhance the participation of women and girls with disabilities in public life, leadership roles and decision-making processes.

He outlined various pioneering initiatives undertaken across the region, such as leadership training, capacity-building programs, and financial resource allocations, alongside the establishment of national and regional platforms and competitions to amplify their voices and enhance their presence in diverse fields. These initiatives, he said, have led to significant advancements, with Gulf women and girls with disabilities assuming prominent roles in cultural, political, and scientific arenas at both national and international levels.

Al-Hayen also referenced the GCC's adoption of the Unified Law for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities in 2019, a legislative milestone aimed at



Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen. — KUNA

safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities across member states by removing obstacles, fostering empowerment and strengthening their contributions to community development. He concluded by reaffirming the GCC's unwavering commitment to supporting and empowering women and girls with disabilities while maintaining close cooperation with the international community to advance their rights and ensure comprehensive development. — KUNA

## Kuwait participates in 68th UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs session

VIENNA: The United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) convened its 68th session in Vienna on Monday to address key issues and challenges related to global drug control, with the participation of Kuwait. According to a statement by the UN Information Service in Vienna, the five-day session is chaired by India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Shimbu S. Kumaran. The session opened with a speech by Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Ghada Wali, who provided an overview of the latest global developments in the fight against narcotics.

Discussions will cover a range of topics, including international drug policies, the exchange of expertise among nations, scientific advancements in drug control, and progress in implementing international obligations. Representatives from member states, UN entities, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, and the scientific community will participate in dialogues and seminars, alongside over 180 side events and 30 exhibitions highlighting various as-



UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS  
POLICYMAKING BODY OF THE UNITED NATION SYSTEM WITH PRIME RESPONSIBILITY FOR DRUG-RELATED MATTERS

The United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs holds its 68th session in Vienna to address key issues and challenges related to global drug control, with the participation of Kuwait. — KUNA

pects of drug control on a global scale.

Kuwait's delegation to the session is led by the country's Ambassador to Austria and Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna, Talal Al-Fassam. The delegation also includes

Dr. Hussein Al-Shatti from the Ministry of Health, Colonel Abdullah Al-Rabeeah and Lieutenant Colonel Mahdi Al-Anzi from the Ministry of Interior, and Third Secretary of the Permanent Delegation to the UN in Vienna, Rehab Al-Farhan. — KUNA

## Central Bank sets final deadline for banknote exchange

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has announced that April 18 is the final deadline for exchanging the fifth issue of Kuwaiti banknotes. The exchange process will take place exclusively at the CBK's headquarters banking hall. In an official statement, the CBK emphasized that individuals wishing to replace these banknotes must visit the banking hall in person, present valid identification, and complete the required form. The banking hall operates from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm during regular working days and from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm during the holy month of Ramadan.

The CBK clarified that this exchange process is in accordance with Article 10 of Law No 32 of 1968 concerning currency, the Central Bank of Kuwait and the regulation of the banking sector, as well as its subsequent amendments. The decision aligns with Resolution No (37/405/2015), published in the official gazette Kuwait Today on April 19, 2015, which mandates the withdrawal of all denominations of the fifth issue from circulation.

According to Article 3 of the resolution, following the expiry of the period specified in Article 1, all banknotes from the fifth issue will lose their legal tender status and will no longer be accepted for transactions. However, holders retain the right to exchange them at the CBK's counters for a period of ten years from the decision's effective date. After April 18, it will no longer be permissible to exchange these banknotes under any circumstances. The Central Bank reaffirmed its commitment to providing efficient banking services and ensuring seamless financial transactions. It urged all holders of the fifth issue banknotes to exchange them before the deadline to avoid any inconvenience. — KUNA

## Tanzania ambassador lauds KRCS' humanitarian efforts

KUWAIT: Tanzanian Ambassador to Kuwait Saeed Masoro on Monday commended the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) for its vital humanitarian and relief efforts worldwide, particularly in Tanzania. Following a meeting with KRCS Secretary-General Fahad Al-Mandee, Masoro told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that he was briefed on the society's key humanitarian initiatives aimed at supporting relief work across the globe. He underscored the importance of strengthening and expanding collaboration between KRCS and the Tanzanian Red Crescent, emphasizing Kuwait's significant role in Africa, particularly in training and relief efforts.

Masoro highlighted the longstanding and distinguished relations between Kuwait and Tanzania, affirming his country's commitment to further enhancing bilateral ties at the highest levels. For his part, Al-Mandee welcomed Ambassador Masoro's visit, describing it as an opportunity to showcase the society's humanitarian efforts both locally and internationally. He reiterated KRCS' dedication to assisting those in need worldwide, working on sustainable projects that empower communities to become self-reliant.

Al-Mandee emphasized that KRCS remains a cornerstone of Kuwait's humanitarian and charitable work, serving as the country's humanitarian arm. He noted the society's proactive approach in responding to global crises, ensuring swift assistance in times of distress. During the meeting, Al-Mandee reviewed KRCS' extensive relief efforts, both within Kuwait and beyond, reaffirming its commitment to alleviating human suffering and upholding Kuwait's legacy of generosity and compassion. — KUNA



## Local

## In my view

## Ramadan: A month of renewal for body, mind and soul



By Dr Khalid Al-Saleh  
local@kuwaittimes.com

As the holy month of Ramadan begins, we are reminded of its immense spiritual, psychological and physical benefits. This sacred period is not merely about abstaining from food and drink—it is a time for self-reflection, discipline and rejuvenation. Do you struggle with health concerns? Are you burdened by psychological stress? Do you ponder the after-life? These are challenges that touch everyone to varying degrees. Ramadan serves as a divine station for maintenance—an opportunity to restore balance to our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

But is fasting truly essential for us as human beings? The answer is a resounding yes. This is precisely why the Creator has mandated it for all who believe: "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil." (Al-Baqarah 183) Fasting is not merely an act of worship; it is a fundamental human need that ensures our three core elements—body, mind, and soul—function optimally. It is a divine blueprint for maintaining our well-being. Let us seize this blessed opportunity.

### Physical renewal

If you suffer from health issues or wish to enhance your body's performance, fasting can be a powerful tool. When done correctly, it can help reduce excess weight, improve organ function, and rejuvenate your cells. However, those with medical conditions should consult a doctor to ensure fasting is adapted to their needs. The key lies in following the prescribed fast, regulating food intake after sunset, and incorporating movement and activity. With commitment, you will witness remarkable improvements in your health.

### Psychological, social healing

For those battling stress, anxiety, or emotional fatigue, Ramadan offers a profound remedy. It is a month of mercy and connection—an opportunity to rekindle relationships, visit loved ones, and strengthen social ties. The support of family and community alleviates burdens, restoring confidence and hope. Wealth is shared, the less fortunate are supported, and the spirit of giving brings comfort to all. By engaging with others and embracing the month fully, one finds solace and renewed purpose.

### Spiritual awakening and faith

For those struggling with faith, Ramadan is an invitation to reflect, listen, and seek guidance. The Quran, revealed in this sacred month, offers wisdom that resonates with scholars and seekers alike. Its verses serve as a beacon for those in doubt, illuminating the signs of the Creator in every aspect of existence. "O people, a parable is set forth, so listen to it: surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create (even) a fly, though they should all gather for it; and should the fly snatch away anything from them, they could not take it back from it; weak are the invoker and the invoked." (Hajj 73)

In Ramadan, hearts are open to faith, and souls long for divine words that bring clarity and peace. It is a time for those searching for truth to find solace and direction, to recognize their Creator, and to quiet the doubts that have lingered for too long. This is the essence of Ramadan—a month in which we purify our bodies, discipline our souls, and strengthen our faith. It is a sacred gift, a time to reset and reconnect. Let us embrace it fully and emerge renewed, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil." (Al-Baqarah 183)

## What it takes to shine like a diamond

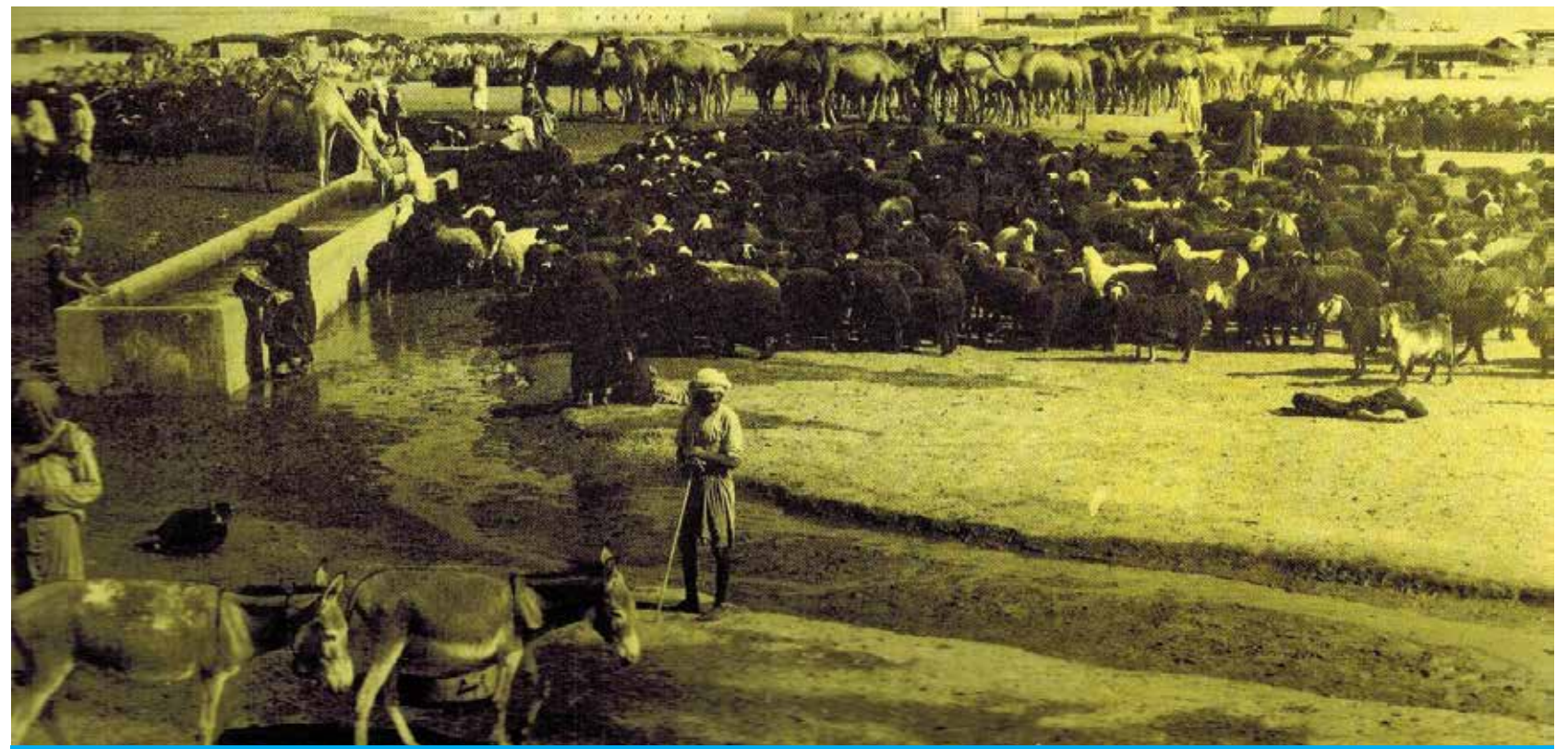
By Helna Charly

Are you the kind of person that has big dreams but is lazy? Do you want immediate results but procrastinate? Do you avoid stress or having expectations but only take action under pressure or when you have a deadline? That's okay, there are a lot of people like you, including me. We are like pieces of coal that can turn into diamonds if we learn to be patient and do well under pressure.

Patience is a person's ability to wait something out or endure something tedious, without getting frustrated. Patience also involves being consistent in your actions over a long period of time. This means: showing up every day and putting in the work, even when you don't feel like it or when progress is slow.

Some tasks like studying may feel tiresome at times. Getting stuck on questions or being unable to answer even after studying the concept over and over makes us feel frustrated, discouraged and want to

## Kuwait Heritage



Watering the flocks in Kuwait, early 1950s. (Source: Jehan S Rajab, *The Voice of the Oud: A Story of Kuwait*, 1997.) — Compiled by Mahmoud Zakaria, researcher in heritage.

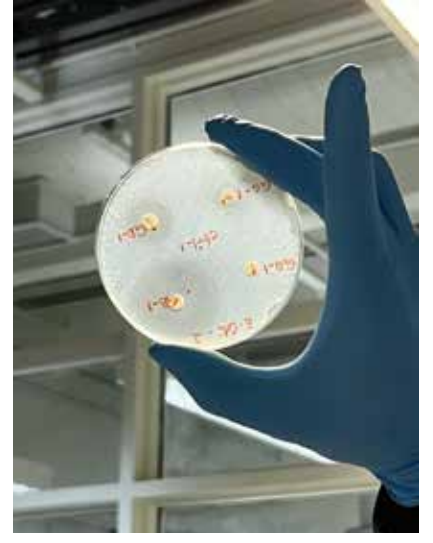
# KISR secures US patent for virus-resistant surfaces

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) announced that its Environment and Life Sciences Research Center has been granted a patent for an innovative project aimed at developing virus-resistant surfaces from solid waste. The project, spearheaded by Dr Sultan Al-Salem, Dr Fadila Al-Salmeen and Dr Mohammed Al-Iskandrani, utilizes a combination of solid plastic waste and biodegradable plastics coated with nanomaterials. The patent, awarded by the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), marks a significant advancement in waste valorization

and management in Kuwait. The newly developed surfaces are designed to resist both the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and common bacteria responsible for infectious diseases, enhancing public health protection.

According to KISR, the research team employed nanoscale coatings composed of a blend of antimicrobial metals, including nickel, silver, and copper. Various formulations were tested using different manufacturing techniques to create resistant surfaces from pure plastic, recycled plastic waste, and biodegradable materials. KISR emphasized that this breakthrough represents a

major step forward in addressing environmental challenges by reducing the impact of waste accumulation. It also opens new opportunities for key industries, particularly in waste management, biotechnology, and nanotechnology. The institute highlighted the potential of this innovation in developing antimicrobial materials and products for everyday use, contributing to both economic growth and sustainable development. The project's success aligns with Kuwait's future strategic plans, offering promising economic and developmental benefits for the country.



## Finance minister, Indian ambassador hold talks



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika holds talks with Noura Sulaiman Al-Fassam, Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs and Investment on bilateral investment cooperation in different sectors.



give up. This is when we need to learn to be patient, to stay committed and persistent even when the results are not immediate or apparent.

The process takes time. It took a million years for diamonds to form. It's going to take time for you to shine like a diamond. Just keep working and be patient. Patience also means being able to focus on the process rather than just the outcome. Try to enjoy the process of working towards your goals, and find ful-



## Students' Corner

fillment in the effort itself. While patience is important, being too patient without taking actions leads to procrastination, missed opportunities and slow progress towards goals. So, don't be too patient.

The next value we can learn from diamonds is resilience. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity and move forward positively. It is an essential quality that can help us navigate the ups and downs of life. Research has shown that resilient peo-

ple are better equipped to handle stress and are more likely to achieve their goals. Job interviews often include the question: "Can you work under pressure?" This question tests how well you manage stressful situations and tight deadlines. We students still have yet to face bigger challenges in the outside world. In today's fast-paced work environment, the ability to handle stress and perform well under pressure is a valuable skill. Stress can affect our mental and physical health, leading to anxiety, depression, and even bodily illnesses. That is why, we need to learn to persevere through challenging times, build resilience and develop coping mechanisms that can help us better handle stress.

We can start by training to never give up on small goals like getting an answer right or learning something new even if you are bad at it. We need to learn from failure and setbacks, and using them as opportunities for growth and improvement.

The ability to focus on goals without getting overwhelmed by the pressure is key to shaping the right kind of character, just as carbon turns into diamonds under intense conditions. To live a diamond-like life means to use our resources in a worthwhile way and in service to others, whether time, energy, or money. By balancing speed and patience, and embracing the pressure that comes with it, we can achieve great things and make meaningful progress towards our goals. Just as a dull piece of coal turns into a bright and strong diamond.

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Five years ago, WHO's pandemic call shook world

## Europe's dependence on US arms rose in last 5 years: Report

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# Ukraine to propose sky, sea truce at US talks in Saudi

### US hopes talks will outline 'framework for a peace agreement and an initial ceasefire': Witkoff

KYIV: Kyiv will propose an aerial and naval ceasefire with Russia during talks with US officials in Saudi Arabia this week, a Ukrainian official told AFP on Monday as President Volodymyr Zelensky was due to arrive in the kingdom. Those discussions from Tuesday will be the first Ukraine-US meeting since a White House blowup between Zelensky and US President Donald Trump that led to Washington halting military aid to Kyiv. "We do have a proposal for a ceasefire in the sky and ceasefire at sea," the official told AFP on Monday, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Because these are the ceasefire options that are easy to install and to monitor and it's possible to start with them."

Ukrainian and American officials will meet on Tuesday to seek a way out of the conflict more than three years since Russia launched its full-scale invasion. Zelensky on Monday said Ukraine only wants peace, insisting Russia was the "only reason" the war was carrying on. "Ukraine has been seeking peace since the very first second of the war, and we have always said that the only reason that the war is continuing is because of Russia," he wrote on social media.

Zelensky said he would meet Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on Monday, after which his officials will meet the American team on Tuesday. Zelensky has said Ukraine is "fully committed to constructive dialogue", but wants its interests to be "taken into account in the right way". "We hope for results, both in terms of bringing peace closer and continuing support," he said in his evening address on Sunday. US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff said Washington wanted to use the talks "to get down a framework for a peace agreement and an initial ceasefire as well".

In Jeddah, the Red Sea port city close to Islam's holiest sites in Mecca and Medina, dozens of Ukrainian and Saudi flags flew on a main roundabout near the airport and on thoroughfares. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will fly there on Monday, the US State Department said. Mike Waltz, US President Donald Trump's national security adviser, has also confirmed his participation. Zelensky said his nego-



JEDDAH: Flags of Saudi Arabia and Ukraine line the King Abdulaziz Road in the Saudi Red Sea port city of Jeddah ahead of a visit by the Ukrainian President on March 10, 2025. — AFP

tiators will include Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga and Defence Minister Rustem Umerov, his chief of staff Andriy Yermak and Pavlo Palisa, a military commander and Yermak's deputy.

#### 'Significant advantage'

Washington has suspended military aid to Ukraine as well as intelligence-sharing and access to satellite imagery in a bid to force it to the table with Moscow, which launched its invasion in February 2022 on orders from President Vladimir Putin. Russia could enjoy a "significant advantage" against Ukrainian troops if the US sustains its pause on sharing intelligence, a senior Ukrainian official told AFP. "The main thing is how long it will last. If it lasts a long time, it will give the Russians a significant advantage," the source said.

Britain's Financial Times newspaper, citing a

source briefed on preparations for the talks, also said Kyiv would propose a partial ceasefire, hoping that Washington would resume military aid and intelligence-sharing. Trump has renewed communications with Putin and criticized Zelensky, raising fears in Kyiv and among European allies that the US leader may try to force Ukraine to accept a settlement favoring Russia.

On Friday, however, Trump said he was considering further sanctions on Russia for "pounding" Ukraine on the battlefield. Ukraine's European allies last week held a summit with Zelensky and announced they would greatly increase defense spending. The UK's Economist magazine reported that any deal curbing Ukraine's ability to re-arm, recognizing occupied territory as Russian, or interfering in Ukrainian politics through insistence on elections, would be seen as unacceptable by Kyiv. — AFP

## Russia expels 2 UK diplomats as it seeks to restore US ties

MOSCOW: Russia accused two British diplomats on Monday of spying and gave them two weeks to leave the country, reinforcing the downward trajectory of Moscow's diplomatic relations with Europe even as it negotiates to restore ties with the United States. Britain's Foreign Office rejected the allegations against its diplomats as "baseless".

Moscow has been angered by Britain's continued military support for Ukraine and by Prime Minister Keir Starmer's recent statements about putting British boots on the ground and planes in the air in Ukraine as part of a potential peace-keeping force. The expulsions also come days after three Bulgarians were found guilty in a London court of being part of a Russian spy unit run by Wirecard fugitive Jan Marsalek to carry out surveillance on a U.S. military base and other individuals targeted by Moscow.

The two Britons appear to be the first Western diplomats to be expelled from Russia since Moscow and Washington opened talks on restoring staff at their respective embassies that have been depleted by tit-for-tat expulsions, part of Donald Trump's rapprochement with the Kremlin that has alarmed European allies. Similar expulsions have sharply curtailed the functioning of Russian embassies across the West and of Western missions in Russia since President Vladimir Putin sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in 2022.

Russia's Federal Security Service said the two British diplomats had provided false information when getting permission to enter the country, and it had "identified signs of intelligence and subversive work" they had carried out, harming Russian security. — Reuters

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## International

# Europe's dependence on US arms rose in last 5 years: Report

## US is world's top weapons exporter, accounting for 43 percent of global exports in 2020-24

STOCKHOLM: NATO countries in Europe more than doubled their arms imports in the past five years, more than 60 percent of which were purchases of US weaponry, researchers said on Monday. The findings by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) coincide with an announcement by European Union states that they intend to strengthen the continent's defense capabilities in response to a US foreign policy shift under President Donald Trump.

In the period 2020 to 2024, Ukraine became the world's largest arms importer. The United States consolidated its position as the world's top weapons exporter — accounting for 43 percent of global exports — far ahead of the second largest, France, which accounted for 9.6 percent. Over that same period, arms imports by European NATO members rose by 105 percent compared to the previous five years.

That reflects "the rearmament taking place among states in Europe in response to the threat from Russia", said Mathew George, the head of the SIPRI Arms Transfers Program. The United States provided 64 percent of these weapons, compared to 52 percent in the period from 2015 to 2019.

"With an increasingly belligerent Russia and transatlantic relations under stress during the first Trump presidency, European NATO states have taken steps to reduce their dependence on arms imports and to strengthen the European arms industry," senior researcher Pieter Wezeman said. "But the transatlantic arms supply relationship has deep roots. Imports from the USA have risen and European NATO states have almost 500 combat aircraft and many other weapons still on order from the USA," he added.

Countries including Italy and the United Kingdom have also bought US-made F35 fighter jets and Patriot anti-air defense systems, which are

complex systems that are difficult to quickly substitute, Wezeman told AFP. "The F-35 is, of course, an American product but as part of (F-35) sales to European states ... the industry in those states has also been involved in the production of key components," the researcher said. Countries like Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark — which is currently embroiled in diplomatic tensions with the United States over Greenland's future — are even more dependent on US weaponry, he explained. Changing that "would require an enormous financial and political investment", Wezeman said. "Arms procurement takes many years, and often it takes a lot more time than a US presidential term."

### Russian decline

This surge in imports has led Europe to become the largest weapons market for the United States for the first time in 20 years. European states as a whole accounted for 35 percent of US arms exports in 2020-24, putting them ahead of the Middle East, which accounted for 33 percent. In terms of individual countries, though, Saudi Arabia remained the single largest individual purchaser of US arms. The US continues to dominate the world arms trade. "At 43 per cent, its share of global arms exports is more than four times as much as the next-largest exporter, France," George said.

France meanwhile has tripled its exports to the rest of Europe compared to the 2015-19 period, mainly due to the sale of the Rafale fighter jet to Greece and Croatia and the supply weapons to Ukraine. India accounts for the largest share of France's exports with 28 percent, almost twice as much as all other European states combined.

Russia is still the third largest arms exporter, despite seeing a massive 64-percent decline in exports in the 2020-24 period compared to the previous



JASIONKA: The US Army's most advanced air defense system, Patriot, is installed at the Rzeszow-Jasionka airport, a logistics hub for US and European military aid to Ukraine, in Jasionka, south-eastern Poland. — AFP

five years. In addition to prioritizing its own needs, Russia has suffered from international sanctions, as well as pressure from the United States and its allies not to buy Russian weapons following the invasion of Ukraine.

For instance, India — which still accounted for 38 percent of Russian exports in 2020-24 — is increasingly turning to other countries. Meanwhile China, which bought 17 percent of Russian weapons exports, has bolstered its own defense industry. In

the Middle East, arms imports by the Zionist entity remained stable between 2015-19 and 2020-24, according to SIPRI.

However, the US — already the biggest provider of military aid to the entity (66 percent in 2020-24) — has been ramping up supplies of "major" weapons such as guided bombs since late 2023. That has coincided with an intensification of Zionist military operations in Gaza, Iran, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen, SIPRI said. — AFP

## Greenland's Inuits rediscover their national pride

NUUK, Denmark: With her colorful Inuit earrings and on prominent display, Ujammiugaq Engell, like many Greenlanders, flaunts her rediscovered cultural identity, which US President Donald Trump's expansionist ambitions have only spurred further. "I'm a whole lot of person. I carry my Greenlandic and Danish sides with pride," said the smiling 30-some-year-old, the daughter of a mixed Danish and Greenlandic couple.

After moving to Copenhagen for university, she returned to live in Nuuk, the capital of the vast Arctic island, where she now works as a museum curator. As Greenland's former colonial power, Denmark pursued assimilation policies that included de facto bans on the Inuit language and traditional tattoos, forced sterilizations and the removal of children from their families to be placed in Danish homes. The policies left Greenlanders bitter and cast a dark shadow over Denmark's national conscience.

As Greenland gradually regained autonomy in the second half of the 20th century, its population, still made up of almost 90 percent Inuits today, began to rediscover their long-stifled traditions. Engell's dark hair is piled high on her head in a bun, showcasing long beaded earrings that land beneath her collarbone.

Just below her right elbow, two parallel lines of dots encircle her forearm, symbolizing holes to let the spirits move freely, she said. "All women used to wear (tattoos) and then they disappeared with colonial history and Christianity taking over," the historian by training told AFP. "They were gone for a long time and then about 10 years ago they started making their way back into our culture."

### Neither Danes nor Americans

Independence is backed by all of Greenland's main political parties, with the question of when to achieve it dominating the run-up to the island's legislative elections on Tuesday. Trump's repeated remarks that he wants to get his hands on Greenland — first made during his previous term in office — have only served to boost Greenlanders' national pride. "I think it plays very much into the way that we are starting to understand our own importance and our own national identity," said Engell.

Ebbe Volquardsen, a cultural history professor at the University of Greenland, said he had observed a "mental decolonization" taking place among Greenlanders. Volquardsen defined that as a "process where you try to become aware of colonial patterns of thought that you have internalized in your thinking and your way of looking at yourself and your own culture". Once identified those patterns could then be unlearned, he said.

So Greenlanders have begun "to value cultural techniques that have been discredited by the colonial power and by the Church on a very practical basis, like handicrafts and drum dancing and kayaking," he told AFP. In Nuuk, many locals say they see their future as neither Danes nor Americans, but Greenlanders. "We have to fight for our culture, because Denmark took



NUUK: Election posters of candidates from the pro-independence party Naleraq are seen on a shelter as two elderly women are waiting for a bus in Nuuk, Greenland, on March 5, 2025. — AFP photos

it away from us," said Liv Aurora Jensen, a candidate for the green-left Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA), one of the two parties that make up the outgoing government coalition. Nowadays, "we have to think like Danes, we have to dress like Danes, and we have to eat like Danes. And I want our culture back".

Greenland today is a land of emigration. Over the past three decades, 300 to 400 more people have left the territory each year than have arrived. That is

expected to shrink the population from 57,000 currently to fewer than 50,000 around the year 2040, according to Greenland's statistics agency. Whether the renewed debate on independence will reverse the trend is uncertain. But the exiles represent a loss of skilled workers who could otherwise have contributed to the building of an independent state. Many exiles are often students going abroad for higher education, mostly to Denmark. Many never come back. — AFP

## Zionists cut power to Gaza...

### Continued from Page 1

Germany criticized the Zionist entity Monday for its latest decisions. Foreign ministry spokeswoman Kathrin Deschauer said Gaza was "again threatened with a food shortage" and that cutting off electricity was "unacceptable and not compatible with (the Zionist entity's) obligations under international law".

The sole power line between the Zionist entity and Gaza supplies its main desalination plant, and Gazans now mainly rely on solar panels and fuel-powered generators to produce electricity. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians now live in tents across Gaza, where temperatures reach a night-time low of about 12 degrees Celsius. Top Hamas official Izzat Al-Rishq called the Zionist entity's decision "to cut off electricity to Gaza, after depriving it of food,

medicine, and water" a "desperate attempt to pressure our people and their resistance through cheap and unacceptable blackmail tactics".

Hamas has repeatedly demanded that the second phase of the truce — brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States — include a comprehensive hostage-prisoner exchange, a complete Zionist withdrawal from Gaza, a permanent ceasefire and the reopening of border crossings to end the blockade. Spokesman Hazem Qassem told AFP that Hamas wanted the mediators to ensure the Zionist entity "complies with the agreement... and proceeds with the second phase according to the agreed-upon terms".

Former US president Joe Biden had outlined a second phase involving hostage releases and the withdrawal of all Zionist forces from Gaza. US envoy Adam Boehler, who has held unprecedented direct talks with Hamas, told CNN Sunday a deal could be reached "within weeks" to secure the release of all remaining captives, not just the five dual Zionist-US nationals, most of whom have been confirmed dead. —Agencies

neglected without yielding benefits or for its inhabitants to be indifferent to it. The phrase "subjected to you" expresses the meanings of empowerment, facilitation and discovery in this universe in order to benefit from its elements and its abundant wealth. Almighty Allah says what can be translated as: "Rather, seek the (reward or abode) of the Hereafter by means of what Allah has granted you, without forgetting your share of this world. And be good (to others) as Allah has been good to you. Yet do not seek to sow corruption in the land. For, indeed, Allah does not like the sowers of corruption." (Al-Qasas 28: 77)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) presented the most splendid examples and directives concerning the balance between spirituality and materialism. He was annoyed by those who opposed the inborn human nature and traditions of the prophets and messengers. Once, he heard that some people, out of keenness to worship Allah (SWT), had taken an oath to refrain from sleep, marriage and from food and drinks. His position toward them was strict determination to uphold the balance between the physical and the spiritual needs.

From the Islamic point of view, the religious man should be more active than the materialistic man who neglects his spiritual needs in his domestic and social life, which extends from the confines of the household to the market square, and even to international conferences.

— Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue

## Syria ends military operation, Sharaa...

### Continued from Page 1

and stability," Abdul Ghany said. He added that plans were in place to continue combating the remnants of the former government and eliminate any future threats.

Sharaa vowed on Sunday to hunt down the perpetrators of the violent clashes and said he would hold to account anyone who overstepped the new rulers' authority. Al-Sharaa's office also said it was forming an independent committee to investigate the clashes and killings carried out by both sides.

In a speech broadcast on national television and posted on social media, Sharaa accused Assad loyalists and

foreign powers that he did not name of trying to foment unrest. "Today, as we stand at this critical moment, we find ourselves facing a new danger - attempts by remnants of the former regime and their foreign backers to incite new strife and drag our country into a civil war, aiming to divide it and destroy its unity and stability," he said.

Media reports including from the Saudi-owned Al Arabiya TV channel have suggested that Iran and allied groups in the region were behind the violence. Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei roundly rejected the accusation in his weekly press briefing on Monday. "This accusation is completely ridiculous and rejected, and we think that pointing the finger of accusation at Iran and Iran's friends is wrongly addressed, a deviant trend, and a hundred percent misleading," he said. Baqaei said there was "no justification" for attacks on minorities in Syria, including Alawites. —Agencies

## Palestinian student protester arrested...

### Continued from Page 1

center in Elizabeth, New Jersey, according to the ICE online detainee locator. Khalil's wife declined to comment through one of Khalil's fellow students. A spokesperson for Columbia said the school was barred by law from sharing information about individual students, but said in a statement the school was "committed to the legal rights of our students". Spokespeople for Trump did not respond to questions.

Trump has singled out Columbia for its handling

of student protesters and has quickly increased pressure on the school: Khalil's arrest came a day after the Trump administration said it had canceled government contracts and grants awarded to Columbia University worth about \$400 million. It said the cuts and the student deportation efforts, which face legal challenges, are because of antisemitic harassment "on and near" Columbia's Manhattan campus.

"What more can Columbia do to appease Congress or the government now?" Khalil told Reuters hours before his arrest, noting that Columbia had repeatedly called in police to arrest protesters and had disciplined many pro-Palestinian students and staff, suspending some. "They basically silenced anyone supporting Palestine on campus and this was not enough. —Agencies

## Canada's incoming PM Carney vows...

### Continued from Page 1

"We're all being called to stand up for... the Canadian way of life." Carney previously led both the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England. He soundly defeated his main challenger, Trudeau's former deputy prime minister Chrystia Freeland, who held senior cabinet positions in the Liberal government first elected in 2015. Carney won 85.9 percent of the nearly 152,000 votes cast. Freeland took just eight percent of the vote.

Carney campaigned on a promise to stand up to

Trump. Trump has repeatedly spoken about annexing Canada and thrown bilateral trade, the lifeblood of the Canadian economy, into chaos with dizzying tariff actions that have veered in various directions since he took office. Trudeau said "Canadians face from our neighbor an existential challenge".

European leaders meanwhile signaled interest in working with Carney's government, as French President Emmanuel Macron said "the ties between France and Canada are stronger than ever". British Prime Minister Keir Starmer congratulated Carney, saying: "I look forward to working closely with him on shared international priorities." China, which has a turbulent relationship with Canada, also congratulated Carney but said it hoped the country could "pursue a positive and pragmatic policy towards China". — AFP

## Body and soul in Islam...

### Continued from Page 1

as: "And by the soul and Him who fashioned it, and informed it (with consciousness) of its wickedness and righteousness. Truly, whoever purifies it succeeds. And truly, whoever defiles it, fails." (Ash-Shams 91: 7 - 9)

Anyone who contemplates the Islamic religious teachings conveyed from Allah (SWT) through Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) will notice a balance in the various aspects of human life between the needs of the physical body for food, drinks, marriage and personal rights — among others, the need of the soul for worship and moral purification — among others — and the need of the intellect for knowledge, research and discovery, etc. Majestic Allah says what can be translated as: "Allah is the One Who has subjected the sea for you so that ships may sail upon it by His command, and that you may seek His bounty, and that perhaps you will be grateful. He (also) subjected for you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth, all by His grace. Surely, in this are (miraculous) signs for people who reflect." (Al-Ja'ithyah 45: 12 - 13)

So Allah (SWT) did not create this universe to remain



## International

# Gaza fishermen turn old fridge doors into lifeline

Zionist entity bans fishing outside port after destroying boats, crippling Gaza's fishing sector



GAZA: A man prepares bait paste as Palestinian men use the door of a refrigerator as a makeshift rowing boat to catch fish at the port of Gaza City on March 9, 2025. — AFP photos



A Palestinian man shows his catch as he stands on the door of a refrigerator that he uses as a makeshift rowing boat, at the port of Gaza City.

GAZA: Balanced calmly on top of what was once a refrigerator door, fisherman Khaled Habib uses a makeshift paddle to propel himself through the waters of Gaza City's fishing port. During more than 15 months of bombardment, the Zionist entity destroyed most of the boats in the harbor, wrecking the fishermen's means of making a living. "We're in a very difficult situation today, and struggling with the fishing. There are no fishing boats left. They've all been destroyed and tossed on the ground," Habib told AFP. "I made this 'boat' from refrigerator doors and cork — and thankfully it worked."

So he could continue feeding his family, Habib came up with the idea of stuffing cork into old fridge doors to make them buoyant. He covered one side with wood and the other with plastic sheeting to help make the makeshift paddleboard waterproof. Habib also crafted a fishing cage out of wire be-

cause of the lack of nets, but admitted that his resulting catch was "small".

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization said in December that the conflict had taken Gaza's "once thriving fishing sector to the brink of collapse". "Gaza's average daily catch between October 2023 to April 2024 dropped to just 7.3 percent of 2022 levels, causing a \$17.5 million production loss," the FAO said.

#### 'Learn how to swim'

Using dough as bait, Habib now fishes mainly inside the small port area. Despite the fragile ceasefire that came into force on January 19, and which largely halted the fighting, Habib said that fishing outside the port is not allowed. "If we go (outside the fishermen's harbor), (the Zionist entity's) boats will shoot at us, and that's a problem we suffer from a lot."

Habib said he catches enough fish to feed his family and tries to help others by selling the rest at an affordable price.

After dividing his catch into small plastic bags, the fisherman sells some at the harbor market where prices can be high.

The first phase of the Gaza truce, which ended on March 1, had enabled the entry of vital food, shelter and medical assistance into the Palestinian territory. The Zionist entity announced on March 2 that it was blocking aid deliveries to Gaza, where Palestinians say they fear food shortages and price hikes.

Several other fishermen, particularly the younger generation, have also taken to using the new makeshift floating platforms. Habib sees the home-made paddleboards as having a dual purpose. "If we wanted to raise a new generation to learn how to swim, boats should be made for them from refrigerator doors, and then everyone would learn how to swim, row and sail," he said. "Thank God, now they've learned how to swim," he added, looking out over the water at children trying to keep their balance. — AFP



A Palestinian man uses the door of a refrigerator as a makeshift rowing boat to catch fish at the port of Gaza City on March 9, 2025. — AFP

## Five years ago, WHO's pandemic call shook world

GENEVA: Five years ago on Tuesday, the World Health Organization announced COVID-19 had become a pandemic — a moment when the world finally woke up to the unfolding disaster. The WHO had already sounded its own highest alarm five weeks earlier. But that warning — which does not mention the "p" word — had gone unheeded. At a press conference on March 11, 2020, the head of the United Nations' health agency, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, finally said the worsening outbreak could be "characterized as a pandemic". Only then did many countries grasp the severity of the situation and — way too late — jolt into action. The pandemic, the likes of which had not been seen in a century, killed millions, shredded economies and crippled health systems.

#### SHOC room scene

Tedros had already rung the world's top alarm bell by declaring a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020. The PHEIC lasted until May 5, 2023. Throughout February 2020, journalists had repeatedly asked about a pandemic and at a press conference on March 9, Tedros indicated "the threat of a pandemic has become very real". The March 11 press conference was scheduled for 5:00 pm (1600 GMT) in the Strategic Health Operations Centre (SHOC) lower room at the WHO's headquarters in Geneva.

The emergency ops hub was being used for WHO internal morning updates on COVID and informing the press in the afternoon. The



GENEVA: World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus is surrounded by journalists at the end of a daily press briefing on COVID-19 at the WHO headquarters in Geneva on March 11, 2020. — AFP

59-minute press briefing featured Tedros, WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan and Maria Van Kerkhove, technical lead at the WHO health emergencies program.

Tedros took two pens from his jacket, adjusted his glasses, looked round the room and read his bombshell update from a print-out on his desk. He began by saying how the number of cases outside China had increased 13-fold in the past fortnight and the number of affected countries had tripled to 114. Some 4,291 people were dead and thousands more in hospital. "We're deeply concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity — and by the alarming levels of inaction," Tedros said. "We have therefore made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic."

#### Game-changer

Veteran correspondent John Zarocostas was sitting three seats along from Van Kerkhove.

easily the caravan was found and the lack of any detonator, Australian Federal Police Deputy Commissioner Krissy Barrett told a news conference. "Today, I can reveal that the caravan was never going to cause a mass casualty event, but instead was concocted by criminals who wanted to cause fear for personal benefit," she said. Out of an "abundance of caution", police followed up terrorism-related tip-offs over the purported caravan plot rather than making public their belief that the information was fake, Barrett said.

#### 'About causing chaos'

Organized criminals in Australia and offshore contrived the scheme, she said. "Put simply, the plan was the following: organize for someone to buy a caravan, place it with explosives and written material of anti-Semitic nature, leave it in a specific location, and then, once that happened, inform law enforcement about an impending terror attack against Jewish Australians," Barrett said.

Police suspect that the person "pulling the strings" hired local criminals to carry out the caravan hoax in the hope of getting "changes to their criminal status", she said. Barrett declined to elaborate on the motivation but said criminals sometimes seek to

"The word 'pandemic' changed the game," he told AFP, which also attended the historic briefing. He said the shift came as a greater shock to the outside world than to those in the room, who had been following WHO briefings. "I had a feeling they (the WHO) had to do that because they were not getting the anticipated member state reaction" from the PHEIC declaration weeks earlier, he explained. "It changed the political dynamics in terms of national government reaction. They all moved into full gear."

The WHO saw the announcement as describing a situation that had become evident, rather than declaring a new level of emergency. But the world saw it differently. "The world was possessed with the word pandemic," a frustrated Ryan said on the March 2022 anniversary. "The warning in January (2020) was way more important than the announcement in March. "Do you want the warning to say you've just drowned? Or would you like the warning to say the flood is coming?"

#### New 'pandemic emergency' button

The COVID-19 pandemic upended human society. And it could happen again. The WHO says the next pandemic is only a matter of time. In December 2021, WHO member countries began drafting an accord on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, to address the failures exposed by COVID-19. They have one final negotiating session next month to finalize the text for the WHO's annual assembly in May. They have already agreed that the WHO head will, from September, be able to declare an even higher-level "pandemic emergency" — a PHEIC with pandemic potential — which should hopefully grab more attention. Tedros continues to warn countries against repeating the cycle of neglect followed by panic that characterized the build-up to March 11, 2020. — AFP

leverage information to get a reduced jail sentence or other benefits.

No one had yet been arrested over the caravan hoax, police said. But detectives probing a string of anti-Semitic incidents across Sydney arrested 14 people Monday, New South Wales Police Deputy Commissioner David Hudson told reporters. Following the simultaneous raids in eastern Sydney, five of the suspects had been charged with offences including spray-painting graffiti and property damage, state police said.

None of those arrested displayed "any form of anti-Semitic ideology", Hudson said. Investigations into attacks on two Sydney synagogues, the fire bombings of cars, and the spraying of "abhorrent graffiti" on cars and houses indicated it was only "a very, very small group — and potentially one individual behind all these matters", he said.

Police suspect the same "individual or individuals" were behind both the anti-Semitic attacks and the caravan hoax, Hudson said. "It was about causing chaos within the community, causing threat, causing angst, diverting police resources away from their day jobs to have them focus on matters that would allow them to get up to, engage in other criminal activity," he added. — AFP

## Musk, Polish FM clash over Starlink access for Ukraine

WASHINGTON: A tense exchange erupted on Sunday between billionaire Elon Musk and Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski over the use of Musk's Starlink satellite network, which has become crucial for Ukraine's military efforts in its ongoing war with Russia.

Sikorski, whose country funds a significant portion of Ukraine's Starlink service, expressed concerns over the reliability of Musk's system, suggesting that Poland might have to seek alternative providers if the network proves unreliable. His remarks were made in response to Musk's comments that Ukraine's military operations would collapse without Starlink, which has been integral for maintaining communication in the war-torn country.

Musk, who has long been an outspoken supporter of Ukraine, responded forcefully on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). "Starlink is the backbone of the Ukrainian army. Their entire front line would collapse if I turned it off," Musk said in a post. Sikorski fired back, noting that Poland was covering a substantial portion of the costs for Starlink in Ukraine — around \$50 million annually. He warned that if Musk's satellite system failed, Poland might be forced to find other options, casting doubt on Musk's continued commitment to providing support.

"Be quiet, small man," Musk countered. "You pay a tiny fraction of the cost. And there is no substitute for Starlink." Musk further clarified his position, emphasizing that Starlink would remain operational for Ukraine regardless of his personal views on the conflict. "To be extremely clear, no matter how much I disagree with the Ukraine policy, Starlink will never turn off its terminals," Musk wrote.

The exchange caught the attention of US officials, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio also weighing in on the matter. Rubio dismissed Sikorski's claims, accusing the Polish minister of spreading falsehoods. "No one has made any threats about cutting Ukraine off from Starlink. And say 'thank you,' because without Starlink, Ukraine would have lost this war long ago, and Russians would be on the border with Poland right now," Rubio stated in a post.

The disagreement comes amid rising tensions between the United States and Ukraine, with US President Donald Trump recently ordering a suspension of military aid to Ukraine. Musk's role as a private-sector partner in Ukraine's defense efforts has drawn attention, especially as his satellite network plays a pivotal role in the country's ability to communicate on the battlefield.

Musk has previously expressed frustration with the ongoing conflict and questioned the long-term viability of Ukraine's defense, but his comments on Sunday reinforced his commitment to keeping Starlink operational for the country. US officials are set to meet with the Ukrainian delegation in Jeddah on Tuesday as the Trump administration vies to secure a ceasefire and a "framework" for a peace agreement. — Agencies

## Mob faked plan to attack Australia synagogue: Police

SYDNEY: A supposed plot to use explosives stashed in a caravan in a "terrorism event" targeting a Sydney synagogue has been revealed to be a hoax fabricated by an organized crime network, police said on Monday. The caravan was discovered in January in a semi-rural suburb on the outskirts of Sydney with "Powergel" mining explosives inside and written notes listing "Jewish entities", police said. It hit the headlines after a wave of anti-Semitic fire bombings, graffiti and vandalism swept through Melbourne and Sydney in previous months, piling pressure on the Australian government.

Detectives said at the time they were looking into whether the caravan might be part of a preparation for a "terrorism event", warning that the explosives could have created a 40-metre (130-foot) blast zone. However, investigators suspected from the start it was "essentially a criminal con job" because of how



TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2025

# 'Got cash?' Tunisians grapple with restrictions on cheques

## Unemployment already at 16% nationwide as analyst warns of recession



TUNIS: Tunisians walk in a commercial area in central Tunis on March 7, 2025. — AFP

**TUNIS:** Olfa Meriah stands, frustrated, before a smartphone shop near the capital Tunis. How can she buy a phone in instalments, she wonders, when a new banking reform has made split payments nearly impossible?

In Tunisia, where the average monthly salary hovers just around 1,000 dinars (\$320), people have long relied on post-dated cheques to make purchases by paying in increments over months.

Unlike many other countries where cheques are now rarely seen in the era of instant online payments, the culture of paying by cheque persists in Tunisia. But as part of banking reforms introduced in February the government seeks to reinforce the original role of cheques as a means of immediate payment. Cheques had effectively become a form of credit often tolerated by merchants.

Unlike debit cards, credit cards are not widely available in the north African country. The new law officially aims at "curbing consumer debt" and "improving the business climate" in an economy whose real GDP growth, according to the International Monetary Fund, is projected at just 1.6 percent for 2025. But many feel it has also begun disrupting

household budgets and small businesses.

Ridha Chkoundali, a university professor and economist, said the new law "could be the last straw" for consumption and economic growth. He said the measure upsets Tunisians' customary consumer behavior, with mainly the middle class bearing its brunt.

"Since it came out, I've been searching for ways to pay for a smartphone over several months without it eating away my salary," said Meriah, 43. "But the new cheques don't allow that." Once a crucial pillar of Tunisia's economic and social stability, the middle class made up around 60 percent of the population before the country's 2011 revolution. Experts now estimate it has fallen by more than half to 25 percent.

### 'Got cash? Welcome'

Leila, the owner of the smartphone shop in the Tunis-area district of Ariana, told AFP her sales have fallen by more than half, after she started taking cash only. "No one buys anything anymore," said Leila, who didn't give her last name. "We didn't understand the law because it's complicated and we don't trust it. We decided not to accept cheques anymore." "Got cash? Welcome. If not, I'm sorry," she summed up.

Consumers are under even more pressure during the current Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan.

Tunisians tend to buy more during Ramadan, stocking up on food and sweets as families gather for collective meals before and after their daytime fasting. And as Eid Al-Fitr — the holiday marking the end of Ramadan — approaches at the end of March, shopping for clothes and gifts rises. Many merchants had already grown reluctant to deal with cheques when the previous finance law ordered harsh prison sentences for cheque kiting — the fraudulent practice of issuing cheques with non-existent funds.

Last April, judicial authorities said they were investigating more than 11,000 bad-cheque cases.

This year's reform is meant to reduce those cases. Based on the buyer's income and assets, it has introduced a cap on the amount that cheques can be written for. It also allows the merchant to check if the payer has enough funds upon each transaction by scanning a QR code on their cheque. Many feel the measure is intrusive, and the technological shift already adds a level of complexity. Badreddine Daboussi, who owns one of Tunis's oldest bookstores told AFP the change has crippled his sales, adding

to an already waning demand for books.

"Before, customers paid with post-dated cheques, but now they can't, and the new online tool is complicated and unreliable." "They just can't buy books anymore," he added, noting he had even considered closing up shop. Tunisia, a country of more than 12 million people, has long suffered sporadic shortages of basic items such as milk, sugar and flour.

Its national debt has risen to around 80 percent of GDP and inflation is at six percent, according to official figures. Hamza Meddeb, a research fellow at the Malcolm H Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, wrote in October that President Kais Saied — who rejected IMF reforms — has engaged in "economic improvisation" with "heavy reliance on domestic debt".

Chkoundali, the other analyst, warned of "another recession". "As consumption shrinks, the already little economic growth we have will also decline," he said. Unemployment is already at 16 percent nationwide, according to official figures. Feeble consumption would help push that figure even higher, Chkoundali explained, with workers risking significant layoffs as profits dwindle. — AFP

## Trump declines to rule out 2025 US recession

**WASHINGTON:** President Donald Trump declined Sunday to rule out the possibility that the United States might enter a recession this year.

"I hate to predict things like that," he told a Fox News interviewer when asked directly about a possible recession in 2025. "There is a period of transition, because what we're doing is very big — we're bringing wealth back to America," he said, adding, "It takes a little time." Trump's commerce secretary, Howard Lutnick, was more definitive when asked Sunday about the possibility of a recession.

"Absolutely not," he told NBC's "Meet the Press" when asked whether Americans should brace for a downturn. Trump's on-again, off-again tariff threats against Canada, Mexico, China and others have left the US financial markets in turmoil and consumers unsure what the year might bring.

Stock markets just ended their worst week since the November election. Measures of consumer confidence are down, as shoppers — already battered by years of inflation — brace for the higher prices that tariffs can bring. And widespread government layoffs being engineered by Trump's billionaire advi-



WEST PALM BEACH: US President Donald Trump speaks to journalists aboard Air Force One as he travels from West Palm Beach back to Washington on March 9, 2025. — AFP

sor Elon Musk add further concern.

When asked later Sunday to clarify his remarks on whether there could be a recession, Trump told reports on Air Force One "Who knows?"

Overall, the signs are mixed. A widely watched Atlanta Federal Reserve index now predicts a 2.4 percent contraction of real GDP growth in the year's first quarter, which would be the worst result since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of the

New Deal" in favor of "that liquid gold under our feet." Trump's January 20 executive order represents a potentially wide-ranging attack on tax incentives embraced by energy companies to advance billions of dollars of energy transition projects connected to laws enacted during Biden's presidency to mitigate climate change.

Some pundits think Trump will stop short of actions canceling existing projects, where workers have been hired, including many in Republican regions. But the abrupt shift to Trump from the climate-focused Biden likely "turns 2025 into a paralyzed year where folks are hesitant to push on any kind of decarbonization," said Dan Pickering of Pickering Energy Partners, a Houston advisory and investment firm.

The schedule for the five-day Houston CERA gathering lists three top Trump appointees, including Energy Secretary Chris Wright, who will open the proceedings on Monday morning. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and Environmental Protection Agency head Lee Zeldin are slated to speak later in the week. Wright, an energy industry entrepreneur and executive, and Burgum, the former governor of North Dakota, appeared together last week to tout an announcement by Venture Global of an \$18 billion expansion of a liquefied natural gas export facility in Louisiana. — AFP

uncertainty stems from Trump's shifting tariff policy — effective dates have changed, as have the sectors being targeted — as businesses and investors try to puzzle out what will come next. Kevin Hassett, Trump's chief economic advisor, was asked on ABC whether tariffs were primarily temporary or might become permanent.

Hassett said that depended on the behavior of the countries targeted. If they failed to respond positively, he said, the result could be a "new equilibrium" of continuing tariffs.

The administration has insisted that while the economy will pass through a possibly bumpy "transition," things are headed in a positive direction. In his State of the Union message on Tuesday, Trump told Americans to expect "a little disturbance" as tariffs take hold, while adding: "We're okay with that. It won't be much."

And his Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has warned of a "detox period" as the economy cuts government spending. Given the uncertainties, economists have been wary of making firm predictions.

Economists at Goldman Sachs, citing Trump's policies, have raised their odds of a recession over the next 12 months from 15 percent to 20 percent. And Morgan Stanley predicted "softer growth this year" than earlier expected. Recessions are generally defined as two consecutive quarters of weak or negative GDP growth. The US was briefly in recession in early 2020 as the Covid pandemic spread. Millions of people lost jobs. — AFP

## Egypt's headline inflation falls to 12.8% in Feb

**CAIRO:** Egypt's annual urban consumer price inflation plunged to 12.8 pct in February from 24.0 pct in January, decelerating even faster than analysts had expected, data from statistics agency CAPMAS showed on Monday. Due to the base effect, the exceptionally high price increases of the last two years are no longer being reflected in the statistics, analysts said. Fifteen analysts polled by Reuters last week had expected inflation to cool to a median 14.5 percent.

Month on month, prices were 1.4 percent higher in February than in January. Food and beverage prices were up by an annual 3.7 percent after rising 0.2 percent from January. Inflation had been climbing since early 2022 following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which prompted foreign investors to withdraw billions of dollars from Egyptian treasury markets.

Headline inflation reached a record high of 38.0 percent in September 2023. The price rises were fuelled in part by rapid growth in the money supply. M2 money supply expanded by an all-time high of 32.1 percent in the year to end-January, central bank data showed. Egypt a year ago sharply devalued its currency, raised interest rates by 600 basis points and signed an \$8 billion financial support package with the International Monetary Fund, helping to bring its finances under control. — Reuters

## Energy industry meets after Trump tears up US green agenda

**HOUSTON:** Top energy industry figures converge on Houston this week for their biggest gathering since Donald Trump returned to the White House to champion fossil fuels and undo Joe Biden's climate legacy.

The president himself won't appear at the annual Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) conference, but Trump appointees are expected to talk up the Republican's petroleum-led program as embodied by the slogan: "Drill Baby Drill." Since returning to Washington less than two months ago, Trump and his team have laid siege to the existing economic order at a dizzying pace, launching trade wars against allies and neutering government agencies the president and his libertarian allies dislike.

Trump made energy central to his agenda with his day-one "Unleashing American Energy" executive order, vowing during his inaugural address to "end the Green



BUDAPEST: (From left) Azerbaijan's Energy minister Parviz Shahbazov, Georgia's Deputy PM Levan Davitashvili, Hungary's Foreign and Trade Minister Peter Szijjarto, Romania's Energy Minister Sebastian Burduja and Bulgaria's Energy Minister Zhecho Stankov deliver a joint press conference after they signed cooperation agreement for electricity import from Azerbaijan to Europe in Budapest, Hungary, on March 10, 2025. — AFP



## Business



Great demand from customers for Gulf Bank initiative.



A Nuqsa gift packet is delivered.



Gulf Bank collaborates with Matbakhi Restaurant to offer Nuqsa.

# Gulf Bank marks fifth year of 'Nuqsat Al-Khaleej' initiative

## Event supports SMEs and fostering community connections this Ramadan

KUWAIT: For the fifth consecutive year, Gulf Bank continues to host its weekly "Nuqsat Al-Khaleej" events throughout the holy month of Ramadan. This initiative features a variety of events and activities in partnership with local Kuwaiti restaurants. The first event took place on the first Thursday of Ramadan at Matbakhi Restaurant, where dozens of Gulf Bank customers had the opportunity to enjoy a variety of special products offered free of charge.

Every year, Gulf Bank continues its dedication to engaging with the community during Ramadan by organizing various events, including "Nuqsat Al-

Khaleej." The main goal is to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by promoting their products while reviving the cherished Kuwaiti tradition of sharing food, nurturing a spirit of generosity, love, and collaboration within the community. It is worth noting that Gulf Bank has evolved the concept of "Nuqsat Al-Khaleej" from its humble beginnings of sharing homemade dishes with family, neighbors, and friends, into a powerful initiative supporting SMEs. This program enables businesses to distribute their products for free to the public, helping them increase their visibility, expand their reach, and attract new

customer segments. In turn, this supports their growth and expansion, contributing positively to the national economy.

Gulf Bank is committed to driving sustainability in the community, economy, and environment. Through carefully selected initiatives that benefit both the Bank and the broader community, Gulf Bank aligns its efforts with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Kuwait's Vision 2035.

Gulf Bank aims to be Kuwait's leading bank, fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace to deliver exceptional customer service while contributing sustain-

ably to the community. Through its extensive branch network and innovative digital services, the Bank empowers customers to conduct banking transactions conveniently and efficiently, ensuring a seamless experience. In alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," and its commitment to fostering collaborative partnerships, Gulf Bank is dedicated to driving robust sustainability initiatives across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions. The Bank is committed to implementing strategically selected and diverse sustainability programs both internally and externally.

## Mexico president says confident Trump tariffs will be resolved

MEXICO CITY: Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum told cheering crowds Sunday that she is confident that her country has headed off the threat of US tariffs for now. Last week, Sheinbaum's US counterpart Donald Trump agreed to offer another month of temporary relief on threatened tariffs on imports from Mexico. During a huge rally in Mexico City of 350,000 people, according to local authorities, Sheinbaum declared herself "optimistic" about the future of the trade relationship.

But she also warned Mexico "cannot give up our sovereignty." Sheinbaum originally organized the event to announce the tariff and non-tariff trade measures with which Mexico would respond if Trump had carried through with his threat. But on Thursday, Trump once again put a pause on plans to impose a 25 percent tariff

on imports into the United States from Mexico—which represent 80 percent of Mexican exports.

Announcing the truce, Trump said he had done this out of respect for Sheinbaum and argued that the pair have a "very good" relationship. US financial markets had also reacted negatively to the tariff threat, and most economists agree that if implemented they would damage both countries' economies. "We gather to congratulate ourselves because, in the relationship with the United States, with its government, dialogue and respect prevailed," Sheinbaum said. In the Mexican capital's Zocalo square, she added: "We cannot yield on our sovereignty, nor can our people be affected by decisions made by foreign governments.

"In such a case, we will always act immediately," she said. "I am convinced that the relationship must be good, respectful, and that dialogue will always prevail." Trump's justification for tariffs on US imports from Mexico and Canada—which are part of the USMCA trilateral free trade deal—has varied.

He claims the US economy is losing out to unfair Mexican and Canadian competition, but also accused both of turning a blind eye to undocumented migrants and illegal drugs. In particular, Washington is incensed

over shipments of fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that kills thousands of Americans each year.

Citing US figures, Sheinbaum told the crowd that—thanks to seizures made in Mexico—the amount of fentanyl into the United States across the countries' 1,900-mile (3,100-kilometer) border decreased by half between October 2024 and January 2025.

She said Mexico will continue to cooperate to tackle smuggling for "humanitarian reasons" and she hopes the United States remembers its promise to control the trafficking of arms to Mexican criminal organizations. While Mexico is an important supplier to the United States of products such as avocados and tequila, the biggest impact of a trade war would be on the manufacturing production chains of the three USMCA partners. Experts warn that if the tariffs as described by Trump were implemented then Mexico would fall into recession. Seeking to correct alleged trade imbalances, Trump has pledged to launch "reciprocal" tariffs on all countries beginning on April 2. Sheinbaum said she was "optimistic because on that day... they would not have to be applied" to Mexico, given most products are covered by the USMCA trade deal. — AFP

## US shipbuilders welcome Trump's support for revival

NEW YORK: Shipbuilding has been in steady decline in the US since the end of the Cold War but some in the industry now hope for a revival of the sector, as was promised last week by President Donald Trump. The United States was once a world leader in both commercial and naval construction, but has fallen far behind its main rival China.

Trump has now promised to reverse this, declaring in an address to Congress on Tuesday that he would "resurrect" the sector and create an Office of Shipbuilding in the White House. "We used to make so many ships," Trump said, promising tax breaks. "We're going to make them very fast, very soon."

American shipbuilders say they are ready to seize the moment, but experts warn that even a concerted effort to respond to China's overwhelming dominance of the sector will take years—and cost many billions of dollars.

"This is a historic moment," said Matt Paxton, president of the Shipbuilders Council of America (SCA), which represents more than 150 US shipbuilding companies. The US Navy, when asked for comment, referred AFP to the White House. "We are waiting to learn more," Cynthia Cook, who heads the defense-industrial group at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), told AFP. "It is clear that shipbuilding is an industrial weakness of the United States."

But, she added: "You cannot immediately get more ships by throwing money at the problem." US ship production is down 85 percent from the 1950s, and the number of naval shipyards capable of building the largest vessels has fallen by 80 percent, according to the McKinsey consultancy.

In the 1970s, five percent of commercial ships built in the world (in gross tonnage) came from American shipyards. That share has since plunged to a scant one percent, a drop in the water compared to China (50 percent), South Korea (26 percent) or Japan (14 percent).

"We need some solutions to our shipbuilding gaps," said the CSIS's Cook, while noting that Seoul and Tokyo, at least, are US allies. "I absolutely admit that US shipyard capacity is not what it once was," Paxton said last month before a congressional committee.

"Our market has changed dramatically since World War II, when shifting administrative priorities, from Republican and Democratic administrations, curbed programs to support our industry," he said.

The US naval fleet has shrunk from 471 vessels after the Cold War in 1992 to 295 today, Paxton said.

According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the US Navy's current plan to build a fleet of 390 vessels by 2054 -- with the purchase of 364 new vessels because of the decommissioning of older models—would cost an average \$40 billion a year. Paxton said the Trump administration needs a comprehensive strategy for the industry—including ways to reduce administrative and regulatory obstacles—if it is to achieve its shipbuilding goals.

Republican Senator Roger Wicker painted a dire picture during a confirmation hearing last month for businessman John Phelan as navy secretary. "Just about every major US shipbuilding program is behind schedule, over budget or irreparably off track," said Wicker, who chairs the Armed Services Committee. —AFP



MEXICO CITY: Supporters of Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum attend a rally at the Zocalo square in Mexico City on March 9, 2025. -- AFP

## Germany's spending boost to leave lasting impact on bond markets

LONDON/SINGAPORE: A sea change in German fiscal policy is rapidly transforming global bond markets as it is expected to increase the pool of top-rated, safe-haven debt and propel Germany into a new era of structurally higher government bond yields. The parties hoping to form Germany's next government agreed last week to create a 500 billion euro (\$543 billion) infrastructure fund and overhaul borrowing rules.

In response, Germany's bond market suffered its biggest weekly selloff since the 1990s, pushing 10-year bond yields up more than 40 basis points to around 2.9 percent as investors anticipated a jump in bond sales to fund increased spending. Even considering road bumps such as securing parliamentary support to pass reforms, many suspect the end result will be a lasting shift for German government bonds, the euro area benchmark.

Several banks reckon 10-year Bund yields could now reach 3 percent, more than 20 bps above Monday's trading. The German 10-year yield has not sustained a level above 3 percent since the global financial crisis and the government's 2009 introduction of

a "debt brake" to balance the books. It fell below 0 percent between 2019 and 2022 and ended last year just above 2 percent.

But investors are suddenly facing the prospect of a more dynamic German economy with higher growth and higher borrowing. "To suddenly have this fiscal impulse from Germany, a paradigm shift, it makes our clients question the region completely differently," said Kal El-Wahab, head of EMEA linear rates trading at BofA, who noted that for much of his twenty-year-long career the outlook for Europe's economy had been sluggish.

El-Wahab said it was too early for large structural portfolio shifts to take place, but trading activity so far showed there was conviction around the European growth story. Germany's plans and increased European defense spending increase potential GDP growth by 1.5 percent in Germany and 0.8 percent in the euro zone by 2030, BNP Paribas estimates.

Meanwhile, Commerzbank says the measures could easily add up to more than 1 trillion euros of additional debt over the next 10 years, significantly boosting the supply of top-rated bonds sought after by investors globally. Overall, Germany's AAA rating benefits from its high fiscal flexibility, S&P Global Ratings said.

"This fiscal awakening is a push further into collateral abundance with far-reaching consequences for Bunds and their place in the European government bond market," said Barclays head of rates strategy Rohan Khanna. —Reuters

## JPMorgan downgrades Mexican stocks, ups 'rating on Brazil equities

NEW YORK: JPMorgan on Monday downgraded Mexican stocks due to slower economic growth and US tariffs, while taking a bullish stance on Brazilian equities, citing the potential end of the interest rate hiking cycle and boost from China's stimulus measures. The Wall Street brokerage raised Brazilian equities to "overweight" from "neutral", and cut Mexican stocks to "neutral" from "overweight".

"What is bothering us most on Mexico is the very steep growth slowdown, which is likely to bring GDP to a halt, at least in the first half of the year," JPM said. Last month, data showed, Mexico's economy shrank in the fourth quarter for the first time in over three years, with the central bank expecting at best lackluster growth this year and economists seeing stiff risks ahead, including trade tensions.

US President Donald Trump's new 25 percent tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada took effect on Tuesday, along with fresh duties on Chinese goods. However, two days later, he exempted many imports from Mexico and some from Canada for a month, the latest twist in a fluctuating trade policy. —Reuters



## Business

# Chinese shoppers shrug off tariffs on US pantry staples

## Vendors not worried about sales despite potential for higher prices

BEIJING: Chinese tariffs on a range of US fruit, vegetables and other pantry staples took effect on Monday but locals at a lively Beijing market largely shrugged off the escalating trade war.

The levies of 10 and 15 percent on American agricultural products, which also include meat, grains and cotton, were imposed after US President Donald Trump raised a blanket tariff on all Chinese goods to 20 percent last week. Vendors in a downtown market said they weren't worried about sales despite the potential for higher prices at the check-out. "If prices go up, folks won't eat imported stuff," a fruit seller, surnamed Shi, told AFP.

"There will be more domestic goods sold, and I think this is something folks can accept," Shi's offerings—from bananas and strawberries to durian and mangosteen—come from all around the world, but he said fruit grown within China typically sells better. "The freshness of our domestic products is greater than imported stuff," the 31-year-old said.

Shi said he might sell fewer US varieties while offering more options from other countries, such as Thailand and Malaysia. A steady stream of shoppers, mostly retirees, carried bags of meat and produce as they meandered through the market's stalls. He Yulian, who was visiting her daughter in Beijing, said she was indifferent about the trade war. She said she cared only about quality, not where a product was from. "For regular folks, if we can tell something is im-

ported from the United States, we can try to buy less of it—or not at all," the 65-year-old from Shanxi said.

### 'Responsibility to ourselves'

However, he said that for certain products such as milk and infant formula, she preferred imports to their Chinese versions. The Chinese public is no stranger to domestic food safety scandals.

One of the most notorious involved milk adulterated with the chemical melamine, which killed six infants and poisoned hundreds of thousands of others in 2008. Beijing has pledged to do more to tighten food safety regulations in recent years but distrust lingers. In 2022, pork-processing giant Henan Shuanghui apologized after unhygienic work practices such as packaging meat that had dropped on the floor were exposed. "It's not that we're not patriotic," he said. "It's because we have a responsibility to ourselves."

Beijing's tariffs took effect on Monday, although they will not apply to goods that left before March 10 as long as they arrive in China by April 12. Fruit seller Shi said that, while levies were being put in place by both sides, the fight would be "better for China" because domestic goods would "become more powerful". In the short term, though, he acknowledged that everyday budgets might be hit. "You still need to buy what you need at home," he said. "Indeed, it's regular people who suffer the most." — AFP



BEIJING: A man buys tomatoes in a market in Beijing on March 9, 2025. — AFP

## Tariff, growth fears boost safe-haven yen, Swiss franc

TOKYO: The Japanese yen and Swiss franc strengthened against the dollar on Monday, as traders flocked to safe haven currencies due to lingering worries over tariffs and a US economic slowdown, while the euro steadied after a strong run last week. Following a volatile week that saw the euro's biggest weekly gain since 2009 after Germany's game-changing fiscal overhaul, the common currency edged 0.1 percent higher against the dollar and hovered near its four-month high as the markets awaited details on European spending.

"We've seen a lot of news from Germany on defense and infrastructure, but the feeling is that there's going to be some follow through," said Samy Chaar, chief economist at Lombard Odier. Markets have also been fixated on trade tensions as US President Donald Trump slapped tariffs on top trading partners only to delay some of them for a month amid fears of a US economic slowdown.

That has led to some investors losing faith in the US economy which has been outperforming its peers.

On currency futures markets, investors have slashed net long dollar positions to \$15.3 billion from a nine-year high of \$35.2 billion in January. Risk-averse investors have sought the Japanese yen and Swiss franc instead, sending both currencies to multi-month highs. On Monday, the yen was 0.58 percent firmer at 147.19 per dollar, just below the five-month high of 146.94 it touched on Friday.

"We still favor the JPY to outperform as we think wage discussions and the shunto (spring wage talks) announcement on Friday should solidify the wage-inflation cycle that will keep the BOJ on a hawkish path ahead," said Dominic Bunning, global forex strategist at Nomura. Japan's real wages fell in January after two months of slight gains, data showed on Monday, days before the annual spring rounds of pay talks culminate at major firms. The

## German industrial output up slightly, exports decline

BERLIN: German industrial production rose slightly in January even as exports fell, official data showed Monday, a sign that Europe's top economy could be ready to turn the corner after a prolonged slump.

Industrial production rose two percent in January on the previous month, federal statistics agency Destatis said, with exports falling 2.5 percent over the same period. Analysts polled by financial

Growth has been driven to a large extent by sharply increased budget spending, not only on the military but on infrastructure projects. These projects include investment to improve transport links with China, secure greater economic self-reliance by producing goods previously imported from the west, and tackle some of Russia's social problems — above all, its low birth rate.

In 2025, the government is increasing its maternity payments, with first-time mothers to receive 677,000 rubles (around £5,800) — up from 630,400 rubles in 2024. Making sure Russians have "as many children as possible", Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the Washington Post in 2024, is "the underlying goal of our state policy".

However, the 2.5 percent growth in GDP forecast for 2025 is probably overoptimistic. Problems have mounted in recent months. The Russian economy became overheated, fuelled by budget funding and generous credit, leading to inflation of at least 10 percent. Increased military production, the mobilization of personnel to the armed forces, and significant outward migration gave rise to an acute labor shortage. The end-of-year unemployment rate was only 2.3 percent, compared with 4.5 percent before the war. To attract labor and recruits, wages and payments to people signing military contracts have increased rapidly. Russia's central bank increased its interest rate from 16 percent in December 2023 to 21 percent in October 2024, where it remains. It is these developments that have prompted claims that Russia's economy is heading for disaster. But Russia has had high interest rates before: 19 percent in 1998 and 13.1 percent in 2009, and inflation fell quickly on both occasions. — Reuters



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) at the opening bell in New York City. — AFP

## Stock markets slip on China and US economy fears

LONDON: European and Asian stock markets mostly fell Monday, as investors feared the impact of President Donald Trump's trade policy on the economic growth of the United States and China, the world's biggest economies.

A weak reading on Chinese consumer prices, showing they slipped back into deflation, added to growth concerns. The London, Paris and Frankfurt stock markets were all lower nearing the half-way stage, tracking losses in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Tokyo ended higher. "Unease about the effect of Trump's tariffs hangs over financial markets at the start of the week," said Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown. "The prospect of a recession in the US is lurking, with consumer confidence falling, companies facing increasing trade complexity and investors turning more nervous," she added. Trump raised worries about a recession Sunday when asked by Fox News if a downturn was possible this year by replying: "I hate to predict things like that."

He added: "There is a period of transition, because what we're doing is very big—we're bringing wealth back to America," noting: "It takes a little time".

Traders kept tabs also on Beijing as Chinese leaders wrap up their annual gathering where they set a 2025 annual growth target of around five percent, vowed to make domestic demand their main economic driver, and unveiled a rare hike in fiscal funding. The need for more measures to boost China's faltering economy was highlighted at the weekend by figures showing consumer prices fell 0.7 percent in February, the first drop in 13 months.

"The data only reinforces what's been clear for months—deflationary pressures remain firmly entrenched in the world's second-largest economy," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management. "The property sector remains stuck in the mud, domestic demand is weak, and despite a bounce in tech stocks, the broader wealth effect just isn't filtering through to consumers." — AFP

## Russia's economy stagnating, but won't force it to end war

MOSCOW: In recent months, many western media commentators have suggested the Russian economy is in such serious trouble that President Vladimir Putin will soon have little choice but to end the war in Ukraine. In December, the Washington Post reported fears among Russian businesses that interest rate hikes to combat inflation could bring the economy to a halt in 2025. More recently, an article in Politico suggested the reason Putin now seems ready to negotiate an end to the war is because he wants to "avoid a humiliating bankruptcy". Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine three years ago and the subsequent imposition of tough economic sanctions, the Russian economy has unquestionably been under pressure. Problems have been accumulating and Russia does appear to be experiencing gradual economic decline — but not at all to the extent that has been claimed.

Russia's economic performance over the last four years can be summarized by a look at the key indicators. While there are doubts as to the precision of some official Russian statistics, they still present a fair picture of the overall situation. How Russia's economy has changed throughout the war: In spite of the war and sanctions, the Russian economy has proved to be robust.



People walk past an electronic quotation board displaying the exchange rate for the Japanese yen against the US dollar in Tokyo. — AFP

Bank of Japan is widely expected to keep interest rates unchanged at its next policy review on March 18-19. The Swiss franc hit a three-month high of 0.87665 per dollar on Monday.

The dollar index, which measures the US currency against six others, was last at 103.98, stuck near a four-month low touched last week. The dollar fell more than 3 percent last week against major rivals, clocking its weakest weekly performance since November 2022. "If Trump is looking to pursue a weaker dollar, lower yields ... then certainly that adds to this idea that maybe the dollar can't strengthen or can't move aggressively higher," said Parisha Saimbi, Asia-Pacific rates and FX strategist at BNP Paribas in Singapore. Investors were also digesting data

data firm FactSet had expected a rise of just 0.9 percent in industrial production.

The data was an indication that Germany's industrial slump was "bottoming out", ING bank analyst Carsten Brzeski said. "However, it is too early to call any substantial turnaround," Brzeski said, pointing out that industrial production was still about 10 percent below its levels before the coronavirus pandemic.

Production rose particularly strongly in the car, food and machine-building industries, Destatis said.

Meanwhile, the fall in exports was driven above all by declining business with other EU member states and the United States, which last year overtook China to become Germany's largest trading partner.

from Friday that showed US job growth picked up in February, but cracks are emerging in the once-resilient labor market amid a chaotic trade policy. Eyes will now be on US inflation data due on Wednesday.

Traders are pricing in 75 basis points of cuts from the Fed this year, LSEG data showed, with a rate cut fully priced in for June. In other currencies, the Norwegian crown gained against the dollar and the euro. It was at its highest against the dollar since October at 10.7442 crowns after surging inflation sowed doubts about the central bank's plans to start cutting borrowing costs in March. China's yuan slipped on Monday after data over the weekend showed consumer price index in February fell at the sharpest pace in 13 months. — Reuters

Exports could continue to struggle in the short term after US President Donald Trump said he would slap tariffs on exports from the European Union, Brzeski said. "This is not just because of the potential impact on German exports, but more so the effect on German investments if companies were to move production to the US," he said. Last week, Destatis released data showing that German industrial orders—an indicator of future activity—posted their largest fall in a year.

Economists have said a proposal by the incoming German government to boost defense and infrastructure spending by hundreds of billions of euros could help revive the country's ailing economy after months of stagnation. Germany registered its second-straight year in recession in 2024, with GDP contracting by 0.2 percent. — AFP



MOSCOW: A billboard promoting contract army service and reading "5,200,000 rubles for the first year of the contract" is seen in western Moscow. — AFP



TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2025



Young beginner students hold their begenas after a practice session.



A beginner student plays the begena during a practice session at Eman Begena School in Addis Ababa.

## Ethiopia's ancient instrument **begena** healing souls



Ethiopian Orthodox iconography is hand-painted on a begenas as a student practices during a class session.



Students of Eman Begena School sing religious songs as they carry their begenas on a taxi bus heading to perform at a begenas therapy session.



A student listens as another plays the begenas during a practice session.



Senior begenas player Zekarias Gezahegn, 23, plays his begenas at Eman Begena School.



Students of Eman Begena School disembark from a taxi bus as they arrive to perform at a begenas therapy session.

**B**iruktawit Tasew's fingers glide over the strings of the begenas, producing a deep, hypnotic sound. Along with six fellow musicians, she breaks into a solemn religious melody, holding their audience spellbound. One of the country's oldest instruments, the begenas was once reserved for the elite -- and effectively banned during the Marxist Derg regime between 1974 and 1991. But it is experiencing a resurgence among Ethiopia's artistic community. For the past three years, Biruktawit's group has visited a nursing home in Addis Ababa every Friday to play for its residents.

The begenas "is medicine for the soul," said Biruktawit, 23, who has been playing the instrument for about a year. Legend has it that the instrument was brought over from Zionist entity in the 10th century BC by Menelik I, Ethiopia's first emperor, who received it from King David. For centuries, the instrument's music has accompanied the prayers and meditations of monks of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church, which represents about 40 percent of Ethiopia's 120 million people.

That association with religion meant it fell from favor as the country turned towards communism in the 20th century, but it has slowly returned. Resembling a harp or a large lyre, trapezium-shaped and about a meter tall, it has 10 strings -- traditionally made from sheep's intestines -- that symbolize the Ten Commandments. It is plucked with the left hand, either bare or with a plectrum, while players wear a netela -- a traditional white cloth -- draped across the chest for men, and in the form of a veil for women.

### Begena therapy

At Grace Nursing Home for the elderly, the begenas brings healing. Sitting in a small courtyard where residents gather to listen to the soothing melodies, 60-year-old Solomon Daniel Yohanes gently shakes his head in his wheelchair as the tunes fill the air. Yohanes has been a resident for two years and said the begenas has "brought him peace". "When you're looking for God, you look for him in different ways, and I see the begenas as God speaking in his own voice," he said.

Natnael Hailu, a doctor and co-founder of the institution, admits to being "shocked" to see his patients "forget their pain and drift into sleep" to the tune of the instrument. "It calms their heart rate, lowers their blood pressure and soothes them. More than any other instrument,



Students of Eman Begena School tune their begenas during a begenas therapy session at Grace Nursing Home in Addis Ababa.--AFP photos



Solomon Daniel Yohanes, 60, (second left) listens as students of Eman Begena School play their begenas next to nursing home patients during a begenas therapy session at Grace Nursing Home in Addis Ababa.

begena therapy has a real calming effect," he said. Gene Bukhman, a cardiologist and lecturer at Harvard University who attended one of the performances, told AFP the begenas's melodies could have a positive influence on people suffering from chronic illnesses.

### Positive influence

Ermias Haylay, now 23, started play-

ing the begenas when he was 15. He was not immediately convinced: "I found it smelled bad since some parts come from sheep," he said. But he soon came to love its "spiritual aspect" and founded a school to train students in the ancient instrument. It was his idea to play the begenas in retirement homes and hospitals -- he even plays during surgeries -- hoping to entertain patients and "bring them



A student of Eman Begena School carries her begenas on a taxi bus as she arrives to perform at a begenas therapy session.

a bit of joy". Before long, he noticed "extraordinary changes" in patients with Alzheimer's, dementia and autism. "They became very calm," he said. Demands for the lessons have been booming and he hopes to open schools around the world to help more patients.--AFP



Students of Eman Begena School play their begenas.



Ermias Haylay, 23, (center) founder and teacher of Eman Begena School, plays the begenas with students during a practice session at Eman Begena School.



# Plan B: Pakistan beekeepers widen pursuit of flowers



**U**nder a dry, smoggy sky, a beekeeper in Pakistan's Punjab province carefully loads boxes filled with tens of thousands of bees onto the back of a truck. Together they will travel 500 kilometers (around 300 miles) in an increasingly desperate chase to find flowering plants, clean air and moderate temperatures for honey production as climate change and pollution threaten the industry.



Honeybees collect nectar from mustard flowers near a honeybee farm.

beekeepers typically move seasonally to spare their charges stifling heat or freezing cold. Summers are spent in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and winters in central Punjab province. But weather patterns made unpredictable by climate change - coupled with some of the worst pollution in the world - mean beekeepers must move more frequently and travel further. This winter was marked by soaring, hazardous smog levels that the government declared a national disaster. Research has found air pollution can make it harder for bees to locate flowers. Diminished rainfall, meanwhile, failed to clear the choking air and triggered drought warnings for farmers. "Almost half of my bees died when the smog and fog hit this winter because they could not fly,

There was hardly any rain," said Khan, who moved his bees as frequently as every few weeks in January and February.

### Honey varieties plummet

The bees of Pakistan's 27,000 beekeepers once had diverse foliage fed by reliable rainfall, offering a rich source of nectar. Their honey is used in local flu remedies, drizzled over sweets, and given as gifts. Since 2022 however, Pakistan's honey production has dropped 15 percent, according to the government's Honey Bee Research Institute (HBRI) in the capital Islamabad. "Heavy rainfall and hail storms can destroy the flowers, and erratic rainfall and high temperatures during the winter flowering season can stop them from blooming," said Muhammad Khalid, a researcher at the institute.

"When the flowers disappear, the bee population declines because they cannot find nectar, resulting in reduced honey production." Bees are threatened globally by changing weather patterns, intensive farming practices, land-use change, and pesticides. Their loss threatens not just the honey trade, but food security in general, with a third of the world's food production dependent on bee pollination, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Pakistan's bees once produced 22 varieties of honey, but that has plummeted to 11 as flowering seasons shorten. Three of the country's four honey bee species are endangered. "The places that used to be green for our bees to fly 30 years ago, no longer are," says 52-year-old honey trader Sherzaman Momaan, who speaks with tenderness about his winged charges. "We didn't move around then as much as we do now."

His hives were almost entirely wiped out by 2010 floods in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but he believes deforestation is the most significant long-term change and threat. Yousaf Khan and his brother, based in Islamabad, have been producing honey for 30 years, moving short distances around neighboring Punjab to catch the best blooms.

"Now, we go as far as Sindh (province) for warmer temperatures and to escape extreme weather conditions," Khan told AFP, referring to areas up to 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) away. "Bees are like babies, they need a good environment, good

surroundings, and proper food to survive."

### 'Fight and kill'

Moving the bees comes with its own risks. "If the weather is very hot, or if the distance is too long, there is a chance that some bees could die. It has happened to

ees without permission from landlords. On barren land outside Chamkanni in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gul Badshah watches helplessly as bees appear and disappear from dozens of boxes on a fruitless search for flowers. "They fight and kill each other if the weather conditions do not suit them,"



A man walks past a honeybee farm at Lak Mor village.



Malik Hussain Khan, a beekeeper, checks beehives in a honeybee farm at Lak Mor village.

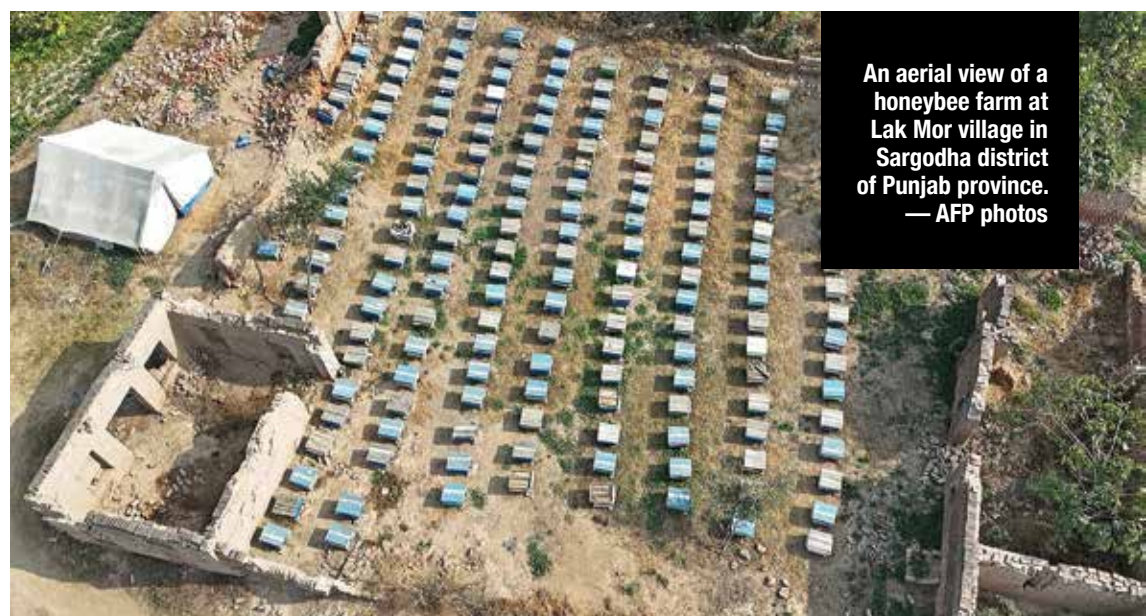


Farmers ride on a motorcycle-driven cart through mustard fields near a honeybee farm.

my bees before," Khan explained. On long trips, they must also be fed artificial food because they cannot produce honey while travelling. Moving so often is expensive for beekeepers in a country where fuel prices have risen dramatically in recent years.

And beekeepers seeking better weather can face harassment if they set up in ar-

he told AFP. Badshah, whose boxes were also washed away in floods in 2010, and again in 2022, has given up travelling long distances. "There is nowhere to be found. We do not know where else to go."



An aerial view of a honeybee farm at Lak Mor village in Sargodha district of Punjab province. — AFP photos



A worker carries honey canisters on a handcart at a key honey market in Chamkanni.



Vendors sit outside their shops at a key honey market in Chamkanni on the outskirts of Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.



Lifestyle



A vendor fills a bottle with honey at his shop in Chamkanni.



Gul Badshah, a beekeeper, speaks during an interview with AFP as he inspects a honeycomb at a farm in Chamkanni.



Malik Hussain Khan, a beekeeper, poses beside a mustard field near his honeybee farm.

**Cool bees**

Some hope is offered by new technology intended to keep bees cool, addressing the problem of how extreme temperatures affect the insects - if not their food source. Abdullah Chaudry, a former beekeeper, developed new hives with improved ventilation based on inspiration from other honey-producing nations dealing with rising temperatures, including Turkey and Australia.

Early signs suggest the boxes improve production by around 10

percent. "Extreme heat does not make bees comfortable and instead of making honey, they keep busy cooling themselves," he told AFP at the capital's beekeeping research centre. "These modern boxes are more spacious, and have different compartments giving more space to the bees." The improved hives are just part of the adaptation puzzle though, he acknowledges. "It is an ongoing battle," Chaudry told AFP. — AFP



A vendor waits for customers at a key honey market in Chamkanni.



A queen bee (center) is pictured on a honeycomb at a farm in Chamkanni.

# 'We will save them': The quest to rescue nearly extinct rhinos



OI Pejeta ranger and head care giver Zacharia Mutai, caresses one of the last two northern white rhinos in the world, 35-year-old Najin.

**T**wo rhinos munch serenely on grass as the sun rises over Mount Kenya, oblivious to the massive global endeavor to prevent them being the last of their kind. Najin and her daughter Fatu are the only northern white rhinos left on Earth. The clock is ticking before they become the latest in a long line of animals that humans have poached to extinction.

But a recent breakthrough means this could be the year the world celebrates a new northern white rhino foetus. It would be an unprecedented comeback for the subspecies, declared functionally extinct after the death of the last male, Sudan, in 2018. Uterus problems mean neither Sudan's daughter Najin nor his granddaughter Fatu can carry a pregnancy to term.

But Fatu still produces viable eggs, making her a candidate for in-vitro fertilizations (IVF). For years, scientists have been collecting her eggs at the OI Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya, where the rhinos remain under 24-hour guard. The eggs are sent to Europe where they are fertilized in a lab with sperm from dead male northern whites. There are now 36 fertilized eggs - or embryos - ready to be implanted, said Jan Stejskal, project coordinator for BioRescue, the most prominent of numerous such initiatives worldwide.

It is thought Fatu can produce around 10 more eggs before she is too old. "We hope to achieve the first successful pregnancy with the northern rhino embryo this year," Stejskal said. "But I cannot promise it."

**'Mixed with sadness'**

The plan is to use a female southern white rhino - a closely related subspecies - as a surrogate. A year ago scientists announced a breakthrough: a surrogate was pregnant with a male



OI Pejeta ranger and head care giver Zacharia Mutai, caresses 24-year-old Fatu next to her mother 35-year-old Najin (left), the last two northern white rhinos in the world in OI Pejeta conservancy, Laikipia county. - AFP photos

southern white foetus, the first time IVF had worked for rhinos. But like so much about this long and difficult process, the joy was "mixed with sadness", OI Pejeta head of research Samuel Mutisya told AFP. By the time the 6.4-centimetre, 70-day-old foetus was discovered, the surrogate had already died from an unrelated bacteria infection.

Worse still, a sterilized male who had played the role of "teaser bull" - to help identify when the female is ready for impregnation - also died from the infection, and finding a replacement has proved tricky. The team is determined to try again, this time with a northern white embryo.

**How many chances?**

There are other avenues, including a Japanese effort using stem cells to create northern white rhino eggs and sperm. This could dramatically boost the number of embryos and create a wider gene pool for future inseminations. The stem cell efforts are roughly halfway there, Stejskal said, estimating

they could produce embryos in around four years.

Meanwhile, another initiative at Oxford University is attempting to use ovary tissue from dead rhinos to create eggs. It could mean that even after Najin, 35, and Fatu, 24, have died, scientists could retrieve immature eggs from their ovaries. Suzannah Williams, a researcher leading the effort, said her "best guess" was they could retrieve a few hundred eggs, even if not all would be viable. But scientists hope for a solution while Najin and Fatu are still alive to teach the future baby how to be a northern white rhino.

**'When, not if'**

No one knows how likely it is that an individual IVF attempt will result in pregnancy. It took three attempts for the southern white surrogate, but that is a tiny sample size. Plenty else could go wrong during a rhino pregnancy, which lasts up to 18 months. Stejskal remains optimistic, saying: "We will save them," while Williams agreed it was a matter of "when, not if". Others are unconvinced.

Even if babies were born from the embryos, the genetic diversity would still be "too low" to revive the species, Save the Rhino International CEO Jo Shaw told AFP. It is probably too late for northern rhinos, she said, and the focus should be on the Javan and Sumatran subspecies, which each have fewer than 50 surviving. The northern white researchers say the techniques they are developing will help all rhinos, as well as other species.

BioRescue's work is already contributing to saving the Sumatran rhino, Stejskal said. Back in the OI Pejeta enclosure, Najin and Fatu's main handler Zacharia Mutai said that it was humans who poached northern whites to the edge of extinction, so it is our responsibility to bring them back. Mutai, who was there when Sudan died, said the birth of a new baby would be a cause for "world celebration". "And I will be looking after the baby," he said with a smile, as Fatu and Najin kept on munching behind him. — AFP



Baraka (blessing in Swahili), a blind rhino naps at the OI Pejeta conservancy, Laikipia county.



A tour van enters the OI Pejeta conservancy, Laikipia county.



Two of the last northern white rhinos in the world, 35-year-old Najin (right) and her daughter 24-year-old Fatu graze together in OI Pejeta conservancy.



A general view of a ranger's silhouette at the entrance of the OI Pejeta conservancy, Laikipia county.



## Sports

# Swiatek, Medvedev sprint into Indian Wells fourth round

## Mirra Andreeva and Elena Rybakina join Swiatek in fourth-round clash

**INDIAN WELLS:** Defending champion Iga Swiatek edged closer to an unprecedented third Indian Wells WTA title Sunday, overwhelming Dayana Yastremska 6-0, 6-2 to reach the fourth round. Swiatek's 65-minute victory set the tone on a day that saw Daniil Medvedev spend just 10 minutes on court before ailing opponent Alex Michelsen retired.

Swiatek, the world number two from Poland, was in full control against hard-hitting Ukrainian Yastremska, swinging freely as she won the first 10 games. She converted six of her 11 break chances and didn't face a break point herself. It was all but over by the time Yastremska got on the board by winning her last two service games.

"It's always hard to finish a match like that," Swiatek said. "But I'm happy that I got my intensity up the last game and closed it with confidence." Swiatek next faces Czech Karolina Muchova, who trailed 3-5 in the first set but won 10 of the next 11 games to beat compatriot Katerina Siniakova 7-5, 6-1.

Russian 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva and 2023 Indian Wells champion Elena Rybakina joined Swiatek in dishing out bagels as they lined up a fourth-round clash. Andreeva, who triumphed in Dubai last month to become the youngest ever winner of a WTA 1000 event, needed 63 minutes to beat Denmark's Clara Tauson 6-3, 6-0 in a rematch of the Dubai final.

Rybakina downed Britain's Katie Boulter 6-0, 7-5. Fourth seed Jessica Pegula of the United States, fresh off her first WTA title of the year in Austin, was another quick winner, putting away China's Wang Xinyu 6-2, 6-1 in just 62 minutes. Pegula next faces Ukraine's Elina Svitolina, a 6-2, 6-4 winner over Danielle Collins.



**INDIAN WELLS:** Iga Swiatek of Poland plays a backhand in her match against Dayana Yastremska of Ukraine at Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

Medvedev headlined the men's lineup in the combined ATP Masters and WTA 1000 event, but he was barely under way when 20-year-old Michelsen retired because of illness after dropping the first two games.

"Food poisoning or something like this, these things happen," said Medvedev, who was headed to the practice courts to tune up for a fourth-round clash with 10th-seeded American Tommy Paul. Paul beat Britain's 2021 Indian Wells winner Cameron

Norrie, now ranked 77th in the world, 6-3, 7-5.

### Gladiator

Eighth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas, coming off his first title in almost a year in Dubai, beat Matteo Berrettini 6-3, 6-3 in a rematch of their Dubai quarter-final last week.

Tsitsipas dropped just eight points on his serve as he wrong-footed the Italian with a variety of athletic shots, breaking him three times on the way to victory in 68 minutes. After months in the doldrums Tsitsipas said he was relishing a new mental approach to the game.

"I just feel like I want to get out there on the court and be a gladiator, and that's how I approach every single match I get to play," he said. Tallon Griekspoor, the world No. 43 from the Netherlands who shocked world number two and top seed Alexander Zverev in the second round, backed up his big win with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 victory over France's 29th seed Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard.

Griekspoor needed an hour and 16 minutes to secure the win, but in a season in which dropping the first set has become an alarming habit that was fast enough. "It feels nice to win a match in under one and a half hour," he said.

Griekspoor next faces Japanese qualifier Yosuke Watanuki, who hit 47 winners in his 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) upset of 16th-seeded American Frances Tiafoe. Ranked 349th in the world after missing more than six months last season with left knee tendinitis, Watanuki is the lowest-ranked player to reach the fourth round since 882nd-ranked Tommy Haas in 2004. — AFP

## KL Rahul: India's unsung hero and run chaser maestro

**DUBAI:** KL Rahul was hailed Monday as India's Champions Trophy unsung hero, having twice kept a cool head under pressure to see his team to victory in tense semi-final and finals. Captain Rohit Sharma top-scored with 76 to lead India to a four-wicket final win over New Zealand in Dubai on Sunday, following Virat Kohli's 84 to anchor India's semi-final chase against Australia.

Both won Player of the Match awards for their respective knocks, but after they had departed it had been number six Rahul, almost under the radar, who had kept calm to guide India across the finish line. He was unbeaten on 34 in the final as India chased down 252, just a few days after his 42 not out took India past Australia's 264 in the last four of the 50-over competition.

Rohit was full of praise for Rahul's composure at the sharp end of the nerve-shredding chases. "Look, when we discussed KL's batting position, that is one thing we discussed quite deeply about how calm he is when he is batting," Rohit said after guiding India to a third Champions Trophy crown. "I'm very, very happy with how he ... batted in the pressure situation, both in the semi-finals and this game.

### 'Over the moon'

"With KL being there, we know that he's got that mind where he keeps himself calm and keeps the dressing room also very calm." While Rohit and Kohli grabbed the headlines, a softly spoken and smiling Rahul, 32, was quietly enjoying his first win in an ICC championship.

"ICC victories are not so easy to get and it's my first one, so I'm over the moon," Rahul said. "It's been a complete team effort, all 11-12 players have stood up and their chance and opportunity has come and it's one of the biggest reasons why we have ended up winning the tournament." An elegant batsman, Rahul started off as an opener for India in white-ball cricket. But a loss of form and intense media scrutiny forced him to reinvent his batting. He dropped down to number six recently as he edged out Rishabh Pant behind the stumps.

"What I have been taught by my coaches from an early age is that cricket's a team game and whatever the team requires of you, you need to be able to do that," said Rahul, who sports a trademark beard and a man bun on his tattooed, athletic frame.

"It requires a lot of preparation, lot of work outside the field. I just watch and learn from the batsmen I like at four, five, six." Rahul started his crickering journey as a wicketkeeper-batsman but had given up the gloves in domestic cricket. It was not until an injury to Pant against Australia in 2020 that he again stood behind the stumps. — AFP

## Brook withdraws from IPL to 'recharge' and focus on England

**NEW DELHI:** England batsman Harry Brook on Monday pulled out of the Indian Premier League, saying he needed "to recharge" and focus on international cricket. The 26-year-old, who is regarded as a front-runner to replace Jos Buttler as England white-ball captain, was signed to Delhi Capitals for

## Kuwait Olympics partake in medical screening program at 'Turin 2025'

**KUWAIT:** Special Olympics Kuwait participated on Sunday in the medical screening program at the 12th Special Olympics World Winter Games (Turin 2025) in Turin, Italy, to maintain the safety and health of athletes with intellectual disabilities.

The medical examination program included several areas, most notably (oral health, hearing, vision and physiotherapy) to ensure the health readiness of the participants amid a strong competitive atmosphere between 100 participating countries and about 1,500 athletes competing in various winter games including snowboarding, and mountain skiing.

Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist Dr Bibi Al-Omairi presented her role in the Strong Minds program, which focuses on coping with psychological pressures and adapting to weather and geographical changes, which are among the most prominent challenges faced by athletes during inter-



**KUWAIT:** Special Olympics Kuwait team participated in the medical examination program.

national competitions.

The Kuwaiti delegation was accompanied by a specialized medical team that included, in addition to Dr Al-Omairi, a specialist emergency doc-

tor from the Kuwait Ministry of Health, Dr. Ismail Habash, who worked to follow up on the health status of the athletes and ensure their safety during the competitions. — KUNA

## Hamilton, Verstappen under pressure for F1's 75th 'versary

**PARIS:** The 2025 Formula One season has all the makings of a white-knuckle 24-race celebration to mark 75 years since the inaugural seven-race championship back in 1950.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen appears to have his work cut out to seal a fifth straight title with Lando Norris poised to knock the Dutchman off his perch. Hamilton's move from Mercedes to Ferrari is just one of numerous intriguing subplots in a season that gets underway in Australia next Sunday with six rookies gracing the grid. Here AFP Sport looks at five talking points before lights go out in Melbourne.

### Fifth title for Verstappen?

Seventy-five years after Giuseppe Farina claimed the first F1 world championship at the wheel of an Alfa Romeo Max Verstappen embarks on the 2025 season in pursuit of a fifth successive title, a feat only achieved once before, by Michael Schumacher. If he succeeds it will cement the Dutchman's place as a titan of the sport. He hoovered up seven of the first 10 races in his rampaging Red Bull last year, before a 10-race winless run as McLaren, Mercedes and Ferrari ran riot. But Verstappen had the last word, fighting back to win in Brazil and clinch title number four in Las Vegas with two races to spare. McLaren prised the constructors championship away from Red Bull to seal their long road back to the F1 summit. The tough task facing Verstappen is underlined by the betting, which has him as only second favourite behind Norris (who ended 2024 63 points behind) for the 2025 crown, with Ferrari duo Charles Leclerc and Hamilton leading the rest of the pack.

### Class of 2025 rookies

An Italian teenager who only passed his driving test in January is among the six-strong 2025 season's rookie intake. Kimi Antonelli is an exciting 18-year-old

who uses the nickname of his uncle who was a fan of Ferrari's last world champion, Finn Kimi Raikkonen, takes Lewis Hamilton's seat alongside George Russell at Mercedes. "I really want to make my own story" insists last year's multiple Formula 2 winner, brushing off suggestions he is the seven-time world champion's 'replacement' at the Silver Arrows. Kiwi Liam Lawson, a 'veteran' of 11 grand prix already, makes his fully fledged debut as Verstappen's new wingman at Red Bull. Ferrari's British academy driver Ollie Bearman was thrown into the F1 deep end when he was called up as a last minute replacement for appendicitis-victim Carlos Sainz at the Saudi Grand Prix last year, becoming the youngest ever driver to compete for the Scuderia. He seized his chance, holding off Hamilton and Norris to finish seventh. He joins Ferrari-powered Haas. Brazil has a presence on the grid for the first time in five years in F2 champion Gabriel Bortoleto at Sauber. Aussie Jack Doohan will be hoping to enjoy even a small slice of his dad Mick's success on two-wheels in MotoGP as he graduates from reserve driver to become Pierre Gasly's

the new IPL season beginning later this month. "I have made the very difficult decision to pull out of the upcoming IPL," Brook, who plays Tests, ODIs and T20s for England, wrote on social media. "I apologize unreservedly to the Delhi Capitals and their supporters." Free-scoring batsman Brook also withdrew from his contract with the Delhi side last season after the death of his grandmother.

He now faces a possible two-year suspension under rules designed to prevent late pullouts from the money-spinning T20 league by overseas players. Exceptions can be made, mostly for injuries. "I love cricket. Ever since I was a young boy I have dreamt of playing for my country and I am extreme-



**SAKHIR: (FILES)** Ferrari's British driver Lewis Hamilton drives on the third day of the Formula One pre-season testing at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir on February 28, 2025. — AFP

ly thankful to have the opportunity to play the game I love at this level," Brook added.

England play five Tests against India from June during their home summer this year, followed by an Ashes tour to Australia starting in November. Either side of the India Tests, England host white-ball series against each of the West Indies, South Africa and Ireland plus a one-off Test against Zimbabwe in May.

"It is a really important time for England cricket and I want to fully commit to preparing for the upcoming series," said Brook. "In order to do this I need time to recharge after the busiest period in my career to date." Buttler resigned as white-ball

teammate at Alpine. Last but not least is RB's Isack Hadjar, the 20-year-old French-Algerian who narrowly missed out to Bortoleto for the F2 title.

### FIA in drivers' crosshairs

In the volatile unpredictable high-octane bubble that is F1, one thing seems assured in 2025: renewed tension between the governing body and the drivers. Notably over the FIA's crack down on swearing. Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc fell foul of the rules in 2024 for turning the air blue at press conferences. The guidelines were strengthened in January, triggering an indignant response from drivers, who took a swipe at FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem. "We urge the FIA president to also consider his own tone and language when talking to our member drivers, or indeed about them, whether in a public forum or otherwise," they wrote, adding: "Our members are adults. They do not need to be given instructions via the media, about matters as trivial as the wearing of jewellery or underpants". — AFP

Brook played one previous season in the IPL, for Sunrisers Hyderabad in 2023, when he scored a 55-ball century against Kolkata Knight Riders. The 2025 IPL begins on March 22 when defending champions Kolkata host Royal Challengers Bengaluru at Eden Gardens. — AFP



## Sports

# Napoli win refreshes title hopes as Atalanta thrash Juventus

## Antonio Conte's Napoli climb back to within a point of leaders Inter Milan

ROME: Napoli breathed fresh life into their Serie A title hopes on Sunday with a 2-1 victory over Fiorentina that ended a five-match winless run, while Atalanta routed Juventus 4-0 to stay in the hunt.

Romelu Lukaku gave Napoli the lead on 26 minutes and Giacomo Raspadori doubled that on the hour before Albert Gudmundsson pulled a goal back for Fiorentina.

Antonio Conte's Napoli climbed back to within a point of leaders Inter Milan, who came from two goals down to beat bottom side Monza 3-2 on Saturday. "We deserved the victory," said Conte. "We could have been a bit more efficient with our chances and managed the final part of the game with less anxiety because let's not forget that we dropped many points around the 90th minute in the last five games."

Napoli, who won the title two years ago, were top at the end of January but have been playing catch-up with Inter after picking up just four points in five matches before beating Fiorentina at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona.

Atalanta hammered Juventus 4-0 in Turin to stay within three points of Inter and snap the hosts' five-game winning streak. It was just a second defeat of the season for Thiago Motta's side. Mateo Retegui notched his league-leading 22nd goal of the season from the penalty spot after a handball in the first half and Marten de Roon added a second right after the break for Atalanta.

Davide Zappacosta steered in a third for Gian

Piero Gasperini's rampant side before Ademola Lookman's deflected strike completed a thumping victory. "It was an unimaginable result for many, but it was the perfect performance from us," Gasperini told DAZN, suggesting an unlikely tilt at the Scudetto for the traditionally small, provincial club was not beyond them.

"People need to dream. We must never stop them dreaming. We may say it's impossible, but if you believe enough, things can become possible." Fourth-placed Juventus are now nine points adrift of Inter and could be overtaken by Lazio, who host Udinese on Monday.

Motta said the defeat signalled the end of any outside title chances for his team. "We are sad, we are disappointed, but at the same time this talk of the Scudetto that you dragged us into will no longer be talked about," he said. Roma continued their resurgence under Claudio Ranieri as Matias Soule's goal after only 22 seconds was enough to secure a 1-0 win at Empoli for their fifth successive league victory.

The 73-year-old Ranieri has brought stability to a club that sacked Daniele De Rossi in September and then moved on from his successor Ivan Juric less than two months later. Roma are unbeaten in 12 games in Serie A since mid-December, rising from just above the relegation places into contention for Europe next season. They are four points behind Bologna in sixth, which offers a spot in the UEFA Conference League. — AFP



NAPLES: Napoli's Uruguayan defender #17 Mathias Olivera fights for the ball with Fiorentina's Argentinian defender #22 Matias Moreno during the Italian Serie A football match between Napoli and Fiorentina at the Diego Armando Maradona stadium in Naples. — AFP

## Arsenal held by Man Utd in latest blow to EPL title bid

MANCHESTER: Declan Rice's equalizer denied Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim a much-needed win but Arsenal's faltering Premier League title challenge suffered another damaging blow in a 1-1 draw at Old Trafford on Sunday.

The Gunners sit 15 points behind runaway leaders Liverpool, now with just one game in hand, with their focus beginning to turn to holding off the chasing pack for a place in next season's Champions League. Bruno Fernandes' stunning free-kick put United ahead in first-half stoppage time.

The Red Devils, though, could not hold on for just a sixth Premier League win in 16 games under Amorim as Rice swept home on 74 minutes. United missed a string of late chances to win the game, with a point leaving them down in 14th. "How we conceded chances in certain moments was not acceptable," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta.

"They have so much quality and they pick the right player and normally that would end in a goal. We opened the gate to lose the game, there was no chance to lose the game and we opened it ourselves. I will defend my players all the time but in those moments we have to do better." United have had three permanent managers and an interim during Arteta's five years in charge of Arsenal. Amorim said he knows he will not get the time Arteta did to turn around a sinking ship at Old Trafford.

The discontent among the home support could be seen around the stands with many taking part in a protest by wearing black over what they perceive as "the death" of their club. "This club will never die, that is clear, this is a big business and maybe all the fans in this league sometimes feel it is harder to go to the games and pay for tickets."

Arsenal had failed to score in either of their previous two league games to realistically wave goodbye to their hopes of a first title in 21 years. Despite still missing the attacking quartet of Kai Havertz, Gabriel Jesus, Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli, the Gunners hit back in stunning fashion to thrash PSV Eindhoven 7-1 in the Champions League on Tuesday.



MANCHESTER: Arsenal's English midfielder #41 Declan Rice controls the ball during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Arsenal at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England. — AFP

Infused with fresh confidence, Arsenal started on the front foot but again missed the focal point of a natural center-forward. Midfielder Mikel Merino has been forced to deputize up front in recent weeks and fired wide from the edge of the area with an early opening. United have struggled for goals all season, but their skipper has remained a source of inspiration and Fernandes produced once more with a sumptuous free-kick just before half-time. Questions will be asked over Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya's starting position, but Fernandes still had to whip the ball over an imposing wall and back down into the visitors' net.

### Raya rescues Arsenal

If Raya was at fault for the opener, he made amends with a string of saves in the second period. Noussair Mazraoui and Joshua Zirkzee were the first

to be denied as United threatened a second on the counter-attack.

Arteta was able to throw on Martinelli on his return from a hamstring injury in the hunt for an equalizer. Instead, it was Rice who matched Fernandes' fine finish by arrowing a shot beyond Andre Onana from Jurrien Timber's pass.

Amorim had dropped Rasmus Hojlund to the bench after a run of 19 games without a goal. The Dane should have ended that streak when he allowed Rice to get back and make a goal-saving challenge. More Raya heroics followed to stop Fernandes from snatching a winner as the match entered stoppage time. However, a draw did little for Arsenal's title challenge. Arteta's men edge four points clear of third-placed Nottingham Forest and eight clear of Manchester City in fifth in the battle for a place in next season's Champions League. — AFP

## Henley snatches win at Arnold Palmer as Morikawa stumble

MIAMI: Russell Henley fired a two-under-par 70 to snatch victory at the Arnold Palmer Invitational on Sunday, conjuring a magical eagle in a late charge down the stretch to reel in Collin Morikawa.

The 35-year-old Henley bagged the fifth and biggest PGA Tour win of his career after erasing Morikawa's three-shot lead over the final five holes at the Bay Hill Club & Lodge in Orlando, Florida. Henley's closing 70 left him on 11 under for the tournament, with Morikawa's final-round 72 putting him on 10 under.

After being congratulated by his watching wife and children on the 18th, Henley admitted he had been "unbelievably nervous" before sealing his win. "I can't breathe right now," Henley told NBC Sports. "It's just so hard and difficult around this place. I just tried to hang tough and keep committing to every shot. This game is just so hard and that was unbelievably difficult."

"I've tried to just work really hard in all aspects of my game to try to put myself in position to win tournaments and compete at the highest possible level on the biggest and best courses. Just crazy that it happened like that. It's just hard to take in."

Henley, whose last tournament win came at the World Wide Technology Championship in Mexico in 2022, looked set for another near-miss with Morikawa seemingly in control through 13 holes. But Morikawa's lead was slashed to one shot on the 14th when he missed a difficult 12-foot putt for par before Henley rolled in an awkward 10-



ORLANDO: Russell Henley of the United States hits driver off the 12th tee during the final round of the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard 2025 at Arnold Palmer Bay Hill Golf Course in Orlando, Florida. — AFP

foot birdie putt to complete a two-shot swing.

### 'Momentum killers'

After both players parred the 15th, Henley then edged ahead on the par-five 16th with a stroke of genius, chipping in for eagle from the back of the green to take the lead. Morikawa had a birdie putt to reclaim a share of the lead but could not sink it and the two men headed to the par-three 17th with Henley leading by one.

Both men missed long birdie putts on 17, but calmly drained their par putts to leave Henley one shot clear with one to play. Morikawa made a challeng-

ing 10-foot putt on 18 to leave Henley with a nervy four-footer to seal victory, which he duly rolled in.

The victory—which earned Henley a cool \$4 million winner's check—was a handsome reward for the veteran's doggedness after a shaky start where he carded two bogeys inside the first six holes. Henley described those two early blunders as "momentum killers."

"I didn't really feel like I had a great chance at that point, and Collin was just playing so steady, like he always does," Henley said. "So just to hang in there enough to give myself some looks is what I'll take from this day." — AFP

## Settled Szczesny paying off Barca bet as Benfica visit

BARCELONA: Barcelona hold a slender lead on Benfica ahead of their Champions League last 16 second leg clash on Tuesday and goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny deserves a fair share of the credit for it.

Pedri was named man of the match in Barca's 1-0 win in Lisbon last Wednesday but Polish veteran Szczesny said he merited at least "half" of the trophy, and the Spaniard said his team-mate should have it. The goalkeeper, 34, will get another chance to win one himself at the Olympic Stadium with Portuguese visitors Benfica needing to go on the attack to turn the tie around.

With Barcelona down to 10 men in the first leg after Pau Cubarsi's early red card, Szczesny made several fine saves to help the Catalans hold on after Raphinha sent them ahead. It was his best performance since arriving at Barcelona in October on an emergency basis, after first-choice goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen suffered a severe knee injury.

"He is fantastic, he helped us a lot, that is his job, we cannot hide it," said Barca coach Hansi Flick. Former Arsenal and Juventus stopper Szczesny came out of retirement to join the Catalan giants and has become Flick's number one in 2025, repaying his coach for his decision to back him ahead of Inaki Pena.

In August last year he hung up his boots and gloves, agreeing to terminate his deal with Juventus, before heading to the south of Spain to enjoy his new life. "In September I was retired from football and I was enjoying my life on the beaches and golf courses of Marbella," said Szczesny on Instagram in January, after winning the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia.

The goalkeeper was sent off in the final against Real Madrid, accepting he made a "bad decision". Later that month he also committed two glaring errors in Barca's thrilling 5-4 group stage win over Benfica, but in the weeks since has improved rapidly, with Flick maintaining his faith in him.

Szczesny has now played 14 times for Barcelona across all competitions, with the club winning 12 of those matches and drawing the other two, despite his early wobbles. As well as helping the team stay unbeaten, Szczesny has recorded eight clean sheets and seems settled, calmer with the ball at his feet than a few weeks ago.

### 'Clear to everyone'

Szczesny's solid performances between the sticks have underpinned Barcelona's revival after a dismal end to 2024. With a run of four defeats in seven league games, the Catalans threw away their advantage in La Liga, usurped by Atletico in the final match before the winter break.

Szczesny has started every Barcelona match in 2025 bar two, one of which he was suspended for after the Super Cup dismissal. Pena had started well after stepping in for the injured Ter Stegen but despite making no obvious mistakes, did not inspire full confidence in the defenders ahead of him.

Flick said watching Szczesny on a daily basis at the training ground, he began to see that the veteran stopper could perform at a higher level. "When you watch players in training, you get a feeling, I discuss it with my staff. I see how the players work and what level they can reach," said Flick on Friday.

"It was clear to everyone that Szczesny could reach this level. We all knew it. I make the decisions, but I talk with my coaching staff." The coach received his reward with Szczesny's first leg display against Benfica. However, when asked if it was his best performance for Barcelona, the goalkeeper produced a cool response. — AFP



## Rohit and stingy spin attack lead India to Champions Trophy title

**DUBAI:** Rohit Sharma made a combative 76 to back up a potent spin bowling display as India beat New Zealand by four wickets to win a record third Champions Trophy title on Sunday. Chasing 252 to win, India got off to a fast start through their captain's first half-century of the tournament before KL Rahul hit an unbeaten 34 to help seal victory with six balls to spare in the final in Dubai.

India added to their trophies in 2002 and 2013 to go past Australia, who have two titles. The world number one ODI team, India finished unbeaten in the eight-nation tournament played in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

"It is very nice," Rohit said. "We played some good cricket through the tournament. To have the result our way is a great feeling." Star batsman Virat Kohli said: "It's been amazing, we wanted to bounce back after a tough Australia tour. Lovely playing with a bunch of amazing youngsters. They're stepping up and taking India in the right direction."

"When you leave, you want to leave in a better position. So many impactful knocks (Shubman) Gill, Shreyas (Iyer), Rahul have played. The team is in good hands," he added. Both Kohli and Rohit had a lean run of form in India's 3-1 Test defeat in Australia earlier this year and the pair came into the tournament with speculation swirling over their ODI retirements. In a battle of spin on a sluggish Dubai pitch, New Zealand's bowlers put India in trouble at 203-



**DUBAI:** India's players celebrate with the trophy after winning the ICC Champions Trophy one-day international (ODI) final cricket match against New Zealand at the Dubai International Stadium in Dubai on March 9, 2025. — AFP

5 with Rohit and Shreyas Iyer, who hit 48, back in the pavilion.

But Rahul kept calm and along with Hardik Pandya (18) and Ravindra Jadeja, who hit the winning boundary, steered the team home to loud cheers from a largely Indian crowd in a sea of blue. India played all their matches at the Dubai International Stadium after they refused to tour hosts

Pakistan due to political tensions.

### Phillips takes another stunner

India played four spinners in their last three matches, which proved telling in deciding the outcome. Varun Chakravathy and Kuldeep Yadav took two wickets each to help restrict New Zealand to 251-7 after the Black Caps elected to bat first.

In reply, Rohit came out firing as he took on the pace bowlers with regular boundaries including a six and two fours in one over off Nathan Smith. The captain reached his fifty in 41 balls to put the pressure on the opposition. New Zealand's spinners attempted to pull things back and a stunning catch from Glenn Phillips secured a key breakthrough.

Phillips went airborne to pluck a flying ball at extra cover to dismiss Shubman Gill for 31 off skipper Mitchell Santner. Kohli fell in the next over, trapped lbw for one off Michael Bracewell's off spin and the momentum shifted as runs dried up for India.

Rohit, after a maiden over from Bracewell, jumped out of his crease against Rachin Ravindra only to be stumped by Tom Latham as India slipped from 105 without loss to 122-3. Iyer controlled the chase aided by a dropped catch by Kyle Jamieson but soon fell to Santner.

India lost Axar Patel and Pandya but Rahul stood strong to drag his team over the line. "It's been a good tournament," said New Zealand's Santner. "We have been challenged along the way and the way we have grown as a group. We lost to a better side today."

New Zealand missed their pace spearhead Matt Henry after he was forced out of the final due to a shoulder injury. Kane Williamson also could not come out to field after his batting effort of 11 due to a quad strain. Daryl Mitchell hit 63 and Bracewell made a quickfire 53 not out for New Zealand, but it was not enough against an Indian side with considerable batting depth. Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep's two wickets in the space of two overs to dismiss Ravindra, for 37, and then Williamson proved crucial as India followed up their group-stage win over New Zealand with another triumph. — AFP

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