

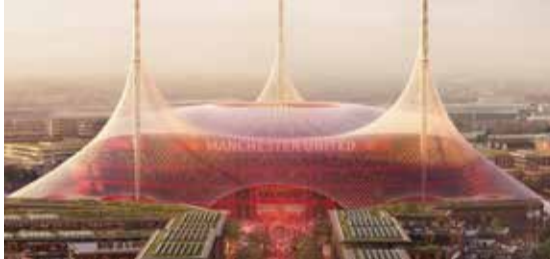


**3** Cabinet establishes grievance panel for citizenship revocation

**5** Syria's president signs deal with Kurdish-led SDF to merge forces

**16** Man United to leave Old Trafford for new 100,000-seat stadium

Ramadan 1446 AH	
Fajr	: 04:43
Shrooq	: 06:02
Dhuhr	: 11:58
Asr	: 15:22
Maghrib	: 17:54
Isha	: 19:11



## Amir commends armed forces

Sheikh Meshal visits Defense Ministry and National Guard headquarters



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets senior officials and officers during his visits to the Ministry of Defense and the National Guard on March 10, 2025. — Amiri Diwan photos (See Page 2)

### RAMADAN KAREEM

#### The rarest book

By Teresa Lesher

Millions of books are published annually around the world, covering every conceivable subject and genre. Printed books include new titles, editions, reprints and reproductions, and audiobooks are rising in popularity. Every book has one or more authors, and whether their names are printed on the cover or some remain anonymous, nobody doubts their human origin.

But there is one book that is unique. It is the only book in the world that asserts repeatedly to be from the Creator of humans, rather than from a human being. It is the Noble Quran. The Creator-author says He knows everything in the heavens and the earth, and that everything that exists or has ever existed is recorded in a timeless register. The Holy Quran is a revelation of a portion of His knowledge, presented to humans for their benefit and guidance.

This Book is unique for many reasons. In no other book does the author claim to have witnessed the creation of the first human, or the context and conditions of that origin. No other author claims to know what thoughts cross through the minds of men, or the conversations among ancient civilizations, or the deeds that were done assuming that there were no witnesses. No other author claims perfect knowledge of all things, including astronomy, history, psychology and ecology. No other author claims to be God. But Almighty Allah - the Quran's author - does. He says, translated as: "There certainly has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book (5:15). "The Revelation of the Book which contains no doubt has been (sent) by the Lord of the Universe." (32:2)

The holy month of Ramadan is, first and foremost, a celebration of the Holy Quran. "The month of Ramadan is when the Quran was sent down as a guidance for mankind, with explanations for guidance and as a Standard (of truth)" (2:185). It is in this month, about 1,460 years ago, that the Holy Quran was sent down and began to be revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his people, but for all mankind until the end of time. "O mankind, instruction has been given to you by your Lord, and healing for whatever is in your breasts, plus guidance and mercy for believers." (10:57)

Among all the books throughout time, the Holy Quran is the one that deserves our utmost attention. It is unique in that it has a divine origin and is still available in its original Arabic language and precise form. Not only that, but it has been translated to most languages so that the recipients of the message can access its wisdom. It is the one book you don't want to miss. It most certainly it has answers to our questions. It is life's instruction manual, it is a gift and a miracle. — Courtesy of Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue

KUWAIT: HH the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, paid visits on Monday to the Ministry of Defense and the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) headquarters. Accompanied by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Acting Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, HH the Amir was received by senior military and security officials at both institutions.

At the Ministry of Defense, HH the Amir was welcomed by Minister of Defense and Acting Minister

of Interior Sheikh Abdullah Ali Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense Sheikh Dr Abdullah Meshal Mubarak Al-Sabah and Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Kuwait Army Air Vice Marshal Sheikh Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

In his speech, HH the Amir congratulated the ministry's personnel on the holy month of Ramadan, praying for blessings upon the Arab and Islamic nations. He expressed pride in the armed forces as the cornerstone of Kuwait's security, stability, and independence. HH the Amir emphasized the impor-

ance of enhancing the efficiency and capabilities of the armed forces to fulfill their sacred duties in protecting the nation by air, sea and land. He reaffirmed his commitment to advancing military readiness, improving armament and ensuring alignment with modern technological standards.

Extending condolences to the families of martyrs who lost their lives in a recent live ammunition exercise, he wished the injured a speedy recovery. HH the Amir also acknowledged the defense ministry's

Continued on Page 6

#### Ukraine, US hold talks in Saudi as drones hit Russia

JEDDAH: Ukraine said talks with the United States in Saudi Arabia began "very constructively" on Tuesday, with a partial ceasefire with Russia on the table hours after Kyiv conducted its largest drone attack on Moscow in three years of war. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga attended the meeting in Jeddah — which Russia was not participating in — as President Donald Trump ramped up pressure on Ukraine to end the war that began with Russia's 2022 invasion.

The talks come just days after

President Volodymyr Zelensky's public dressing-down at the White House, after which the United States cut off military aid, intelligence sharing and access to satellite imagery. Ukraine is hoping the offer of a partial ceasefire in the sky and at sea will persuade Washington to restore the assistance. "We are ready to do everything to achieve peace," Ukrainian presidency chief of staff Andriy Yermak told reporters as he entered Tuesday's meeting at a luxury hotel.

Kyiv officials said the "largest drone attack in history", in which hundreds of drones slammed into Moscow and other areas overnight, was intended to push Russian President Vladimir Putin to agree to the aerial and naval ceasefire. "This is an additional signal to Putin that he should also be interested

Continued on Page 6



JEDDAH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman greets Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky at the Royal Palace on March 10, 2025. — AFP

#### Anger over arrest of Palestinian, Trump says 'first of many'

WASHINGTON: Protesters in New York and rights groups expressed outrage Monday over the arrest of a leader of pro-Palestinian demonstrations at Columbia University, as President Donald Trump vowed further crackdowns. Mahmoud Khalil, a recent graduate and one of the most prominent faces of the university's high-profile protests, was arrested by US immigration officials over the weekend despite holding a permanent residency green card.

The Department of Homeland Security, confirming Khalil's arrest on Sunday, claimed he had "led activities aligned to Hamas" and that the DHS action was taken "in coordination with the Department of State". "We know there are more students at Columbia and other Universities across the Country who have engaged in pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity, and the Trump Administration will not tolerate it," the president wrote Monday on his Truth Social platform. "This is the first arrest of many to come," he pledged.

The protests at Columbia, launched last year in opposition to the Zionist entity's devastating war in Gaza, brought widespread media attention as tensions mounted on campus and spread to other universities around the country.

Continued on Page 6



NEW YORK: Protesters march to demand the release of Columbia University graduate and Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil on March 10, 2025 — AFP

#### Manila arrests Duterte for crimes against humanity

MANILA: Former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte was arrested Tuesday in Manila by police acting on an International Criminal Court warrant tied to his deadly war on drugs. The 79-year-old faces a charge of "the crime against humanity of

murder", according to the ICC, for a crackdown that rights groups estimate killed tens of thousands of mostly poor men, often without proof they were linked to drugs.

ABS-CBN News posted a video on X of Duterte boarding a jet in a Manila airfield and the Philippine Star newspaper said on X it had received confirmation from a senior police official that the flight was bound for the Hague, where the ICC is based. Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte earlier said there were plans to swiftly transfer him to the Hague. "As I write this, he is being forcibly taken to

Continued on Page 6



HONG KONG: Former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte speaks during a gathering with the Philippine community at the city's Southern Stadium on March 9, 2025. — AFP



# Amir visits Ministry of Defense



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, accompanied by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Acting Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah visited the Ministry of Defense. His Highness was received by Minister of Defense and Acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense Sheikh Dr Abdullah Meshaal Mubarak Al-Sabah and Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army Major General Pilot Sheikh Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir delivered a speech on the occasion.

# Amir visits National Guard HQ



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, visited the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) headquarters on Monday. His Highness the Amir was accompanied by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Acting Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Saud Al-Sabah. His Highness was received by KNG Chief Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, KNG Deputy Chief Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and KNG Undersecretary Lieu Gen Hashim Al-Refai. During his speech, His Highness said that he was proud of the National Guard for its decades of history and achievements, wishing the KNG's Chief, Deputy Chief, and all officers in the Guard success, as well as congratulating them on the blessed month of Ramadan. He noted the great effort of the officers and chiefs in various military, security, administrative fields for defending the homeland, supporting security services, protecting vital facilities, and providing support to state institutions.

Local

# Cabinet decree establishes grievance committee for citizenship revocation

## Al-Dhubaibi named head of grievance committee

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet issued a decree on Tuesday establishing a grievance committee to review cases of citizenship withdrawal and revocation. The committee is tasked with receiving and examining grievances submitted by individuals whose Kuwaiti citizenship has been revoked or withdrawn, formulating necessary recommendations, and presenting proposals in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and decisions.

The committee will convene at the General Secretariat of the Cabinet but may hold meetings at other locations as determined

by its chairman. Meetings will be called by the chairman as needed and will be considered valid if attended by an absolute majority of members, including either the chairman or his deputy. Deliberations will remain confidential, and decisions will be issued by an absolute majority of those present.

During its inaugural session, the committee will establish its operational framework and set timelines for addressing matters within its jurisdiction. It is authorized to request information from relevant entities, which are required to cooperate. The com-

mittee's tenure is set at one year from its first meeting, with the possibility of extension by Cabinet decision as necessary.

The committee is chaired by Counselor Ali Musaed Ali Al-Dhubaibi, with Abdulwahab Abdulrahman Yousef Al-Muzaini serving as vice president. Other members include Counselor Khaled Abdulrahman Ahmed Al-Baker, Jamal Khalifa Al-Reesh, and Fawaz Suleiman Al-Mashaan. The decree takes immediate effect from its issuance and will be published in the Official Gazette. — KUNA



## National Guard chief and Turkish envoy hold talks

KUWAIT: Chief of Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah discussed on Tuesday with Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez a number of issues of common interest. The National Guard said in a press statement that Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah praised the role of the Turkish Embassy in supporting the distinguished relations between the two friendly countries, stressing the importance of developing and strengthening bilateral cooperation. For her part, Ambassador Sonmez stressed the strong relationship between Kuwait and Turkey and mutual cooperation in all fields. — KUNA



## Ministry adopts new electronic means to announce lawsuits

KUWAIT: Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait has issued a ministerial decision introducing new electronic methods as official channels for the electronic notification of lawsuits, court rulings, judicial orders, and other legal documents. The decision, in line with the Civil and Commercial Procedures Law (Decree-Law No 38 of 1980), aims to streamline and expedite the notification process while ensuring that legal advertisements reach recipients securely and reliably.

In a statement, the Ministry of Justice announced that Resolution No. 125 of 2025 marks a significant step toward modernizing the judicial system and advancing digital transformation. Under the new regulation, electronic notifications will now be considered valid through the "My Identity" application, the "Sahel" and "Sahel Business" applications, registered email addresses with the Public Authority for Civil Information, verified emails used in litigation stages, web services, and text messaging.

The ministry highlighted that this move will significantly reduce the time required for legal notifications compared to traditional paper-based advertisements. Additionally, it will enhance the credibility and security of judicial notifications by utilizing verified electronic platforms. The decision is set to take effect from the first day of the month following its publication in the Official Gazette. — KUNA

## Kuwait condemns Zionist violations

KUWAIT: Kuwait has strongly condemned the ongoing actions of occupation forces and their policy of collective punishment against the Palestinian people, the latest of which is the cutting off of electricity to the Gaza Strip— a blatant violation of fundamental human rights. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called on the international community, particularly the United Nations Security Council, to take immediate action to halt these violations, facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid, and end the Zionist authorities' policy of starvation and deprivation. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan on Tues-

day condemned Zionist decision to cut electricity supply to the war-battered Gaza Strip, calling in separate statements for the international community to take action. Zionist entity announced it was disconnecting the only power line to a water desalination plant in Gaza, in an effort to pressure Palestinian militant group Hamas into releasing hostages amid an apparent impasse in truce talks.

Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry expressed "condemnation in the strongest terms of the occupation authorities' use of collective punishment against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip by cutting off electricity to the area". A Qatari foreign ministry statement said the Gulf state "strongly condemns the occupation's act of cutting electricity to the Gaza Strip, considering it a blatant violation of international humanitarian law".

Jordanian foreign ministry spokesman Sufyan Qudah called the electricity cut "a clear continuation

of the policy of starvation and siege imposed by Zionists", about a week after Zionist authorities blocked the entry of aid into Gaza. The United Nations has warned of "dire consequences" for Gaza's population, while Britain said it was "deeply concerned" by the Zionist move. Saudi Arabia called on the international community to "take urgent actions immediately", while Qatar also urged "immediate action to provide the necessary protection for the Palestinian people".

Jordan's Qudah called on the world "to assume its legal and moral responsibilities, and oblige Zionists to continue with the ceasefire agreement... restore electricity to Gaza" and reopen border crossings for aid deliveries. Zionist negotiators were expected to hold talks with mediators in Qatar, part of efforts to extend a fragile truce since January that has largely halted the war in Gaza. — Agencies



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## Local

## Kuwait welcomes deal to integrate military and civil institutions in Syria

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Tuesday affirmed Kuwait's support for an agreement integrating all civil and military institutions in northeastern Syria under the administration of the Syrian state. The ministry described the agreement as a pivotal step toward rebuilding state institutions and bolstering security and stability in Syria. Kuwait reiterated its steadfast commitment to Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

Meanwhile, the Arab Parliament welcomed the Syrian presidency's announcement of signing the agreement to incorporate the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) into Syrian state institutions. In a statement, the Arab Parliament underscored the importance of this step in safeguarding Syria's unity, sovereignty, and independence while rejecting any form of partition. It emphasized the necessity of reinforcing national unity and rebuilding the state in a manner that fulfills the aspirations of the Syrian people. The Arab Parliament renewed its full support for Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty, along with efforts to maintain civil peace and complete the process of strengthening Syrian state institutions. Notably, the Syrian presidency announced on Monday that interim President Ahmed Al-Sharaa had signed the agreement to merge the SDF into national institutions.

In a related development, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi on Monday praised the agreement to unify all civil and military institutions in northeastern Syria under the Syrian state. Al-Budaiwi reiterated the GCC's firm stance urging all Syrian parties to unite, prioritize national interests, and uphold unity to fulfill the aspirations of the Syrian people.

He stressed the importance of ensuring civilian safety, achieving national reconciliation, preserving state institutions and resources, integrating armed factions under the Ministry of Defense, and limiting weapons possession to the state to maintain security and stability. Additionally, he highlighted the GCC's commitment to supporting efforts that facilitate a comprehensive and inclusive transitional process, fostering Syria's stability, development, and prosperity. Al-Budaiwi expressed optimism that this agreement would contribute to Syria's stability and growth while reinforcing its unity, sovereignty and independence.

### Strengthening relations

In another development, the GCC Secretary-General reaffirmed the Secretariat's commitment to enhancing cooperation and diplomatic ties between GCC states and their regional and international partners. This was highlighted during an iftar ceremony at the GCC Secretariat's headquarters in Riyadh, attended by accredited ambassadors, heads of diplomatic missions and officials. Al-Budaiwi noted that the event, held in the spirit of the holy month of Ramadan, served as a valuable opportunity to foster meaningful dialogue and exchange perspectives on shared issues. He emphasized that such gatherings contribute to strengthening international and regional cooperation, reinforcing the GCC's dedication to constructive engagement and diplomacy. — KUNA

### Kuwait Heritage



A scene inside Kuwait's old market in 1960, depicting the bustling activity of sellers and buyers. (Source: Jehan S Rajab, *The Voice of the Oud: A Story of Kuwait, 1997.*) — Compiled by Mahmoud Zakaria, researcher in heritage.

## Kuwait reiterates its commitment to combating drug-related challenges

### Envoy emphasizes importance of collective action in tackling drug-related threats

**VIENNA:** Kuwait's Ambassador to Austria and Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna, Talal Al-Fassam, reiterated Kuwait's unwavering commitment to combating drug-related challenges and strengthening international cooperation in addressing this global menace. Speaking at the 68th session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Al-Fassam underscored Kuwait's deep appreciation for the Commission and the UN Secretariat's efforts in organizing the session, emphasizing the importance of collective action in tackling drug-related threats to societies.

Al-Fassam highlighted Kuwait's prioritization of drug control within its national policies, recognizing the severe impact of drug abuse on sustainable development and social stability. He outlined the country's comprehensive approach, which includes stringent legislative measures, preventive and treatment pro-

grams, and a strong focus on international collaboration to address cross-border drug-related challenges.

He further detailed Kuwait's efforts to enhance its legislative framework in alignment with international obligations, reinforce law enforcement mechanisms, and expand awareness, rehabilitation, and treatment initiatives aimed at reintegrating individuals recovering from addiction into society. In particular, he noted Kuwait's dedication to protecting youth from drug addiction through awareness campaigns in collaboration with educational institutions and civil society organizations.

Al-Fassam also highlighted the recent establishment of an advanced addiction treatment center, reflecting Kuwait's commitment to providing high-quality rehabilitation services based on the latest medical and scientific standards. This initiative, he said, strengthens Kuwait's comprehensive strategy in tackling drug-re-

lated issues. Reaffirming Kuwait's stance on national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of states, Al-Fassam stressed the need to respect the legal, social, and religious diversity of member states when formulating international drug control policies, all while upholding human rights principles.

Concluding his speech, Al-Fassam reiterated Kuwait's dedication to supporting global anti-drug efforts, urging intensified cooperation and a collective response to the drug crisis to ensure security, stability, and sustainable development for all nations. Ambassador Al-Fassam leads Kuwait's delegation at the session, which includes Colonel Abdullah Al-Rabeeah and Lieutenant Colonel Mahdi Al-Enezi from the Ministry of Interior, Dr Hussein Al-Shatti from the Ministry of Health, and Third Secretary of the Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Vienna, Rehab Al-Farhan. — KUNA



## IWG hosts ghabga under the theme 'Palestine: The History and Civilization'

**KUWAIT:** The International Women's Group (IWG), in collaboration with the Embassy of Palestine, hosted a Ramadan ghabga under the theme "Palestine – The History and Civilization" at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. The event brought together members of Kuwait's diplomatic corps, government officials, and IWG members in a gathering that celebrated Palestine's rich heritage and cultural legacy.

IWG President Polina Dlamini, wife of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Eswatini, expressed her gratitude to the Embassy of Palestine and IWG member Rima Khalidi, wife of the Palestinian Ambassador, for organizing the event. She emphasized the significance

of Palestine's history and its deep-rooted connection with its indigenous people. The evening commenced with a moment of silence in remembrance of the martyrs of Palestine.

In his opening remarks, the Ambassador of Palestine, Rami Tahboub, extended his congratulations to the leadership and people of Kuwait on the occasion of the Holy Month of Ramadan. He paid tribute to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Ambassador Tahboub also acknowledged International Women's Day and expressed his appreciation to IWG's executive board for providing a platform to host the Palestinian Ramadan ghabga. He then briefed attendees on the current situation in Palestine and its profound impact on the Palestinian people.

The program, expertly led by master of ceremonies Rima Khalidi, featured an in-depth exploration of Palestine's history, culture and civilization. A visual

presentation of artworks by renowned Palestinian artist Suleiman Mansour accompanied the proceedings, enhancing the cultural ambiance of the evening. Guests were treated to screenings highlighting Palestinian Ramadan traditions in Jerusalem and a feature titled "Welcome to Palestine," showcasing the nation's historical, religious and cultural landmarks.

The program also included a performance by "Daughters of Jerusalem," an all-female ensemble of young Palestinian musicians and artists. Additionally, three inspiring Palestinian women were featured in a documentary, highlighting their remarkable contributions in their respective fields. Another screening presented the ancient city of Jericho, known as the world's oldest continuously inhabited city and a significant agricultural hub. Attendees also viewed a short documentary on the traditional production of Nabulsi soap.

Adding to the cultural experience, IWG member Shireen Hattar performed the song "Haddiya Bahar," accompanied by oud player Ra'fat Al Jada'. The event

continued with a Palestinian fashion showcase featuring the music of composer Clarissa Bitar. The demonstration celebrated the beauty of traditional Palestinian embroidery, tracing its origins to the Canaanite era. The highlight of the evening was a captivating performance by Shabab Falasteen Folklore Troupe, who delighted the audience with the Palestinian Dabkeh dance, incorporating elements of a traditional Palestinian wedding.

The program concluded with a presentation on Palestinian cuisine and its intrinsic connection to the land, particularly olive trees. Each dish reflected a deep cultural and historical significance. Interactive stations offered attendees an immersive experience into Palestinian heritage, featuring a henna corner, live Qatayef-making, a traditionally dressed carob vendor, and displays of Palestinian handicrafts. The evening culminated with a feast of authentic Palestinian cuisine, thoughtfully prepared by the chefs of the Crowne Plaza Hotel, leaving guests with a profound appreciation for Palestine's enduring legacy.





**Ships blaze, spill feared after North Sea crash**

## Ukraine fires largest drone barrage at Russia, killing 3

Page 6

Page 7



**JABALIA:** Palestinians queue for water next to a distribution truck at a displacement camp west of Jabalia city in the northern Gaza Strip on March 11, 2025. — AFP photos

# Zionist entity kills 4 in Gaza

## Entity's decision to cut electricity leaves Gazans without water

**CAIRO/GAZA:** A Zionist entity air strike killed four Palestinians in Gaza on Tuesday, the territory's civil emergency service said, as Arab mediators and the United States tried to hammer out differences between Hamas and the Zionist entity over a January 19 ceasefire agreement. The Zionist entity's military said its air force attacked "terrorists who were engaged in a suspicious activity on the ground in central Gaza and posed a threat to the force." The entity sent a delegation to the Qatari capital, Doha, for more ceasefire talks, and Hamas leaders ended a round of talks in Cairo earlier this week. But there has been no sign of a breakthrough to resolve the disputes that threaten a return to armed conflict.

On Tuesday, Hamas accused the entity of trying to cause famine in Gaza by continuing to suspend the entry of aid and by its decision to sever its last working line of electricity to the enclave, a move that impacted a water desalination and sewage treatment facility.

"We call on mediators to pressure the occupation to abide by its pledges and open the crossings immediately, to ensure the flow of humanitarian aid and end the policy of collective punishment pursued by the occupation authorities against our people," it said in a statement.

The Zionist entity cut aid flows of food, medicine, and fuel imports earlier this month, a move it said was designed to pressure militant group Hamas in ceasefire talks. On Sunday, it announced an electricity cut, which aid groups say would deprive Gazans of clean water.

There is a risk that Gaza will experience another hunger crisis if the entity continues to block aid, the head of the UN Palestinian relief agency (UNRWA) in Gaza said on Monday, warning the situation is quickly deteriorating. "I think the more we go ahead (with aid blockages), the more we will see the impact increasing on the population. And obviously, the risk ... is that we go back to situation we experienced months ago about deepening hunger in the Gaza Strip," said UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini.

For Gaza teacher Abdullah Mortaja, the entity's decision to cut off electricity to the war-battered



**BUREIJ:** Mourners carry one of the bodies of victims who were killed in overnight Zionist bombardment in the north of the Bureij camp for Palestinian refugees, during the funeral in the camp in central Gaza Strip on March 11, 2025.

territory was "a joke", having already lived with little power supply since war began more than 16 months ago. For many in the Palestinian territory where Zionist entity had imposed a "complete siege" at the start of the war in October 2023, living without electricity has become the norm. "What electricity do they want to cut?" said Mortaja, 40. "There is no electricity in Gaza".

Of the nearly dozen high-voltage power lines cut at the start of the war — along with food and water supply — one was reconnected by the Zionist entity in November to restart Gaza's main water desalination plant.

in Jenin". It did not offer further details on how she was killed. When AFP contacted the military about her death, it did not offer an immediate response.

The health ministry said that another Palestinian, Ahmad Fathi Ahmad Salah, 32, had been killed on Monday "when he was run over by an occupation vehicle in Jenin". In a separate incident, a Palestinian was killed by Palestinian Authority security forces in Jenin overnight between Monday and Tuesday, according to a statement from PA forces spokesman Major General Anwar Rajab. He said the individual was "wanted for repeatedly firing at security forces".

In December, PA forces launched a major crackdown on Palestinian militants in Jenin after fighting broke out triggered by arrests of several militants at the time. Armed factions in Jenin and elsewhere in the West Bank see themselves as more effective resistance to Zionist entity's occupation than the PA, which has limited control over the territory and coordinates security matters with the entity.

Zionist forces have also been waging a week-long offensive in the northern West Bank that began around refugee camps regarded as bastions of Palestinian militancy. It has since expanded to more areas, displaced tens of thousands of people and saw the first deployment of Zionist tanks in the territory in 20 years. — AFP

## Zionist military kills 4 Palestinians in West Bank

**RAMALLAH:** The Zionist entity military said its forces shot dead three Palestinian men during an operation in the occupied West Bank on Tuesday, while Palestinian sources reported a woman killed. During a raid in the areas of Qabatiya and Jenin, Zionist entity forces "encountered several armed terrorists who had barricaded themselves inside a structure in Jenin," the military said in a statement. "During the exchange of fire, they (soldiers) eliminated two of the terrorists and struck an additional operative," it said.

A third man was killed after he opened fire at soldiers operating in Jenin, the military said, adding that 10 other Palestinians were arrested.

The Ramallah-based Palestinian health ministry said it had been informed by Zionist entity authorities "about the martyrdom of two citizens" who were shot dead on Tuesday morning. The ministry said that a Palestinian woman Fayza Ibrahim Abu Ghali, 58, was also "martyred due to occupation's aggression

national humanitarian aid groups, added the source involved in work in the Gaza Strip.

One official from the Gaza Electricity Company, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said Zionist entity attacks "destroyed 70 percent of the electricity distribution networks". At night, the territory is plunged into almost total darkness.

In the relatively few buildings left standing, the odd window is illuminated by a small square of white LED light. The war has displaced nearly all of Gaza's 2.4 million inhabitants and triggered widespread hunger, according to the UN, with hundreds of thousands living in tents as their homes were damaged or destroyed. "Cutting electricity will only worsen our suffering," said Jihan Khalil, 35, who has taken shelter in a school building in Nuseirat refugee camp.

### 'Went back to 50 years ago'

For 47-year-old Baha Al-Helou, living conditions were as if "we went back to 50 years ago". "We sleep without electricity, wash our clothes by hand, cook with wood, and there is no gas for cooking," he told AFP. "Now our lives depend on wood, fire and candles."

From apartment blocks to hospitals, fuel-powered generators have been a common alternative for years in Gaza, where the electricity supply was precarious even before the war, in part due to a crippling Zionist-led blockade. The Zionist entity's power supply to Gaza depended on payments from the Palestinian Authority — based in the occupied West Bank, a separate territory, and dominated by political rivals of Hamas.

The Palestinian Authority had previously withheld funds as a means of exerting pressure on Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007. Carpenter Hani Ajour said he had little choice but to use a public generator in the street.

But that option is expensive, and he can only afford to plug in his machines for a few minutes a day. Some Gazans rely on solar panels, but these are less efficient and sell for around \$2,000, a fortune in the impoverished territory. For the most destitute, street vendors offer to charge telephones on a multi-socket cable for a few Zionist shekels, the equivalent of several quarter dollars. — Agencies

## Syria's interim president signs deal to integrate Kurdish institutions

**CAIRO:** The Kurdish-led and US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, which controls much of Syria's oil-rich northeast, signed a deal with the Damascus government on Monday to join Syria's new state institutions, the Syrian presidency said on Monday. Photos showed interim President Ahmed Al-Sharaa and SDF commander Mazloum Abdi shaking hands in Damascus on the agreement that provides for SDF-controlled civilian and military institutions in northeast Syria to be integrated with the state.

The accord came at a critical moment as Al-Sharaa grapples with the fallout from mass killings of Alawite minority members in western Syria - violence that he said on Monday threatened his effort to unite Syria after 14 years of conflict. In December, insurgents toppled the regime of former President Bashar al-Assad, a member of the country's Alawite minority who fled to longtime supporter Russia.

The agreement signed on Monday calls for SDF-controlled border crossings, an airport and oil and gas fields in eastern Syria to become part of the Damascus administration. In his first official comment

following the signing of the accord, Abdi said in a post on X that the deal represents a "real opportunity to build a new Syria."

He said the SDF was working together with the Syrian administration at "such a critical period" to guarantee a transitional phase that reflects the aspirations of the Syrian people for justice and stability. Implementation is due by the end of the year, but the accord does not specify how SDF's military operation will be integrated into Syria's defense ministry, a major sticking point in talks thus far.

The deal also commits the SDF to combating remnants of Assad's regime. The authorities in Damascus have accused Assad loyalists of sowing civil strife in western Syria. The violence in the west was Al-Sharaa's biggest test since he seized power. A war monitor reported hundreds of civilians killed in Alawite villages since Thursday as government forces sought to crush what they described as an insurrection.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Sunday condemned the killings. "The massacres have weakened Al-Sharaa. He has a lot of trouble internally and with the United States. It could help him show that he is not hostile to all minorities," said Aron Lund, a fellow at US-based think tank Century International, describing the agreement as vague. In a Reuters interview on Monday, Al-Sharaa promised to punish those responsible, including his own allies if necessary. — Reuters

## International

# Ukraine fires largest drone barrage at Russia, killing 3

## Moscow says it retook 12 villages in its Kursk region from Ukrainian forces

**SAPRONOVO, Russia:** Ukrainian drones smashed into high-rise apartment blocks and hit parking lots on the outskirts of Moscow in the early hours of Tuesday, with both sides saying it was the largest attack on the Russian capital of the three-year conflict. The Kremlin condemned the attack, which came hours before top US and Ukrainian officials sat down for talks in Saudi Arabia and after three years of Russian aerial barrages on Ukrainian cities. The attack killed three people, Russian officials said.

Kyiv said the strikes should push Russian President Vladimir Putin to accept its call for a halt to long-range aerial strikes, a proposal Moscow has previously ruled out. Ukrainian and US diplomats were meeting for talks on ending the conflict, with Kyiv saying it would try to get Washington — which has resumed talks with Moscow under President Donald Trump — on board with the idea.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denounced Kyiv targeting “residential houses”, claiming Russia’s own forces only hit military infrastructure, despite near daily attacks on Ukraine’s civilian areas and thousands of Ukrainian civilians killed by its offensive. Moscow’s army said it intercepted 343 Ukrainian drones with some falling on “residential and economic infrastructure”. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin called it the “most massive enemy drone attack on Moscow”.

At the site of one attack, AFP journalists saw holes on the upper floors of an apartment block and broken glass and debris strewn across the asphalt. The drones hit areas surrounding Moscow, including Ramenskoye that is home to an air base, and an area near Moscow’s Domodedovo airport.

### ‘All the neighbors jumped’

“We were sleeping, there was an explosion, the children screamed,” Yevgenia Bakatuyeva, a 38-year-old who lives in one of the apartment blocks

that was hit in Saproonovo, south of Moscow, told AFP. “I opened my door, and all the neighbors jumped out. Somebody was in blood,” she added.

Artyom, a 34-year-old car sales manager also living in the building, said he had “only seen such things on TV” and that it was “scary when in real life.” The conflict in Ukraine often feels distant in the Russian capital, where life has continued as Moscow’s army advances and attacks Ukrainian cities. Ukraine has previously targeted Moscow, but deadly strikes so far away from the front lines are rare.

No air raid alert or siren was announced in the capital amid the attack. More than 90 drones were intercepted over the Moscow Region, which surrounds the heavily defended capital. The rest targeted regions surrounding Moscow as well as regions bordering Ukraine.

### Truce in the sky

Russian aviation officials temporarily closed the four main airports serving Moscow. Moscow Region Governor Andrey Vorobyov said a 50-year-old and a 38-year-old security guard were killed, with a local official later saying a third man died in hospital. The health ministry earlier said several people were in hospital, including a child.

Russia’s investigative committee called it a “terrorist attack” and opened a criminal investigation. In the Vladimir region, some 200 kilometers (125 miles) east of Moscow, a village of around 800 people was evacuated after two drones there were shot down, local authorities said.

Russia’s foreign ministry said it had taken OSCE Secretary General Feridun Sinirlioglu — in Moscow on Tuesday — to the site of one of the attacks.

### ‘Signal to Putin’

“This is an additional signal to Putin that he should also be interested in a ceasefire in the air,” said An-

The group “warned of severe consequences” if an attempt is made to rescue the hostages. The incident happened around 1:00 pm (0800 GMT) in rural Sibi district, near to a city station where it had been due to stop. “A passenger train called the Jaffar Express was stopped by armed militants,” said a senior government official in Sibi, who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to speak to the media. “The passengers are being held hostage, and the driver has been injured.”

The train had left Quetta for Peshawar, in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — a more than 30-hour journey — at around 9:00 am. An emergency has been imposed at hospitals in Sibi, according to the government official. A senior police official from the area bordering Sibi, who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to speak to the media, said that “the train remains stuck just before a tunnel surrounded by mountains”. The area is a mountainous region making it easier for militants to have hideouts and plan attacks.

Security forces have been battling a decades-long insurgency in impoverished Balochistan, which militant groups claim is being exploited by outsiders, with wealth from its natural resources siphoned off with little benefit to the local population.

Violence has soared in the western border regions with Afghanistan, from north to south, since the Taliban took back power in 2021. — AFP

Chief Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Sabah and KNG Undersecretary Lt Gen Hashim Al-Refai. He commended the National Guard’s decades of service and achievements, congratulating its personnel on Ramadan and acknowledging their dedication to defending the homeland, supporting security services, and protecting vital state institutions.

HH the Amir praised the Guard’s collaboration with key state entities such as the Ministry of Electricity and Water, the Ministry of Public Works, Kuwait Oil Tanker Company and Kuwait Aviation Fueling Company. He also lauded the Guard’s military exercises, including the Nasr 20 Command Center Exercise (CPX) conducted in cooperation with the UAE, Bahrain and the UK, as well as its commitment to good governance and social responsibility initiatives.

Reaffirming his support for military, security and civil institutions, HH the Amir urged the National Guard to integrate advanced technologies, enhance infrastructure, expand military training and incorporate helicopters into its operations. KNG Undersecretary Al-Refai expressed gratitude for HH the Amir’s support and pledged continued commitment to Kuwait’s security and stability. The visit concluded with the presentation of a commemorative gift to HH the Amir. — KUNA

rail peace talks, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov said: “There are no (peace) negotiations yet, so there is nothing to disrupt here.” He also declined earlier to comment on Russia’s stance on the proposed partial ceasefire. “It is absolutely impossible to talk about positions yet,” he said. “The Americans will find out only today, as they themselves say, from Ukraine to what extent Ukraine is ready for peace.” For its part, Russia has escalated strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure, and said it had retaken 12 settlements in its Kursk region that Ukraine had captured in a bid for bargaining leverage.

In the infamous White House meeting last month, Zelensky refused to bite his tongue in the face of criticism from Vice President JD Vance, with the Ukrainian leader questioning why his country should trust promises from Russia. He has since written a repentant letter to Trump. Faced with Washington’s pressure, Ukraine will lay out its support for a limited ceasefire in the sky and at sea, a Ukrainian official told AFP on Monday.

Rubio signaled that the Trump administration would likely be pleased by such a proposal. “I’m not saying that alone is enough, but it’s the kind of concession you would need to see in order to end the conflict,” he told reporters. “You’re not going to get a ceasefire and an end to this war unless both sides make concessions.” Rubio said he did not expect to be “drawing lines on a map” towards a final deal in the Jeddah meeting, but said he would bring ideas back to Russia. — AFP



RAMENSKOYE: A view shows a damaged apartment building following a drone attack in the town of Ramenskoye in the Moscow region on March 11, 2025. — AFP

driy Kovalenko, head of Ukraine’s National Security Council’s Center for Countering Disinformation. Kyiv was set on Tuesday to present the United States with a plan for a partial ceasefire with Russia, hoping to restore support from its key benefactor, which under Trump has demanded concessions to end the conflict. Russia has previously ruled out partial ceasefires. Russia’s defense ministry said the attack, hours before the talks, were designed to “demonstrate” Ukraine’s military capacity.

On the battlefield, Moscow said it retook 12

villages in its Kursk region from Ukrainian forces, territory Kyiv hoped to use as leverage in peace negotiations, but where it has been losing ground. Russia also said it captured the village of Dachne in eastern Ukraine. Russia’s military launched a ballistic missile and 126 drones at Ukraine overnight, Kyiv’s air force said. AFP journalists in Kyiv heard explosions overnight as air defense downed a wave of drones. A Russian bomb attack on the eastern Donetsk region killed one and wounded four, the regional governor said. — AFP

## Separatists hold 450 train passengers hostage in Pakistan

**QUETTA, Pakistan:** Armed militants held hundreds of train passengers hostage on Tuesday in a siege claimed by a separatist group behind rising violence in southwestern Pakistan. The militants wounded the driver as they took control of the train in a remote, mountainous area of Balochistan province which borders Afghanistan and Iran. “Over 450 passengers onboard are being held hostage by gunmen,” Muhammad Kashif, a senior railway government official in Quetta, the capital of the province, told AFP. “Passengers include women and children,” he added.

The attack was immediately claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) which is fighting for independence and accuses outsiders of profiting from the region’s wealth. In a statement, it said gunmen bombed the railway track before storming aboard the train. “The militants swiftly took control of the train and have taken all passengers hostage,” said the statement released to media.

## Amir commends armed forces...

Continued from Page 1

role in preparing national cadres, fostering loyalty, and enhancing coordination between state institutions, including security forces and emergency services. He highlighted Kuwait’s humanitarian contributions, particularly the air force’s role in delivering aid to war-affected countries. Stressing the significance of military education and cybersecurity, HH the Amir directed the armed forces to focus on digital safety and technological advancements in cybersecurity.

Deputy Chief of General Staff Sheikh Sabah, speaking on behalf of the defense minister and ministry personnel, extended Ramadan greetings to HH the Amir and praised the continued humanitarian efforts of the armed forces. The visit concluded with a recital of a poem by Maj Dhari Meshal Al-Boghan, which was well received by attendees.

Later, at the Kuwait National Guard headquarters, HH the Amir was received by KNG Chief Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, KNG Deputy

## Ukraine, US hold talks in Saudi as...

Continued from Page 1

in a ceasefire in the air,” said Andriy Kovalenko, a national security council official responsible for countering disinformation. Three people were killed in the attack, which both sides said was the biggest so far on Moscow. Russia’s army said it intercepted 337 drones around the country.

Zelensky, who met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah on Monday, left the White House late last month without signing an agreement pushed by Trump that would give the United States control over Ukrainian mineral resources. Zelensky has said he is still willing to sign, although Rubio said it would not be the focus of Tuesday’s meeting.

Rubio, who is accompanied by national security advisor Mike Waltz, said the aid suspension was “something I hope we can resolve” in the talks. “Hopefully, we’ll have a good meeting and good news to report,” Rubio said. Rubio said the United States had not cut off intelligence for defensive operations. “The meeting with the US team started very constructively, we continue our work,” Yermak said on social media Tuesday.

Asked whether the overnight drone attack could de-

## Uganda deploys troops in South Sudan capital

**NAIROBI:** Uganda has deployed special forces in South Sudan’s capital Juba to “secure it”, Uganda’s military chief said on Tuesday, as tensions between South Sudan’s president and first vice president stoke fears of a return to civil war. A Ugandan military spokesperson said the deployment was at the request of the South Sudan government. Tensions have risen in recent days in South Sudan, an oil producer, since President Salva Kiir’s government detained two ministers and several senior military officials allied with First Vice President Riek Machar. One minister has since been released.

The arrests in Juba and deadly clashes along the northern town of Nasir are widely seen as jeopardizing a 2018 peace deal that ended a five-year civil war between forces loyal to Kiir and Machar in which nearly 400,000 people were killed. “As of 2 days ago, our Special Forces units entered Juba to secure

it,” Uganda’s military chief, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, said in a series of posts on the X platform overnight into Tuesday. “We the UPDF (Ugandan military), only recognize one President of South Sudan, H.E. Salva Kiir ... any move against him is a declaration of war against Uganda,” he said in one of the posts.

Felix Kulayigye, the spokesperson for the Ugandan military, said the troops were there with permission from the South Sudan government. “Yes we did (deploy them) and they are there on the invitation of government of South Sudan. The situation will determine how long we’ll stay there,” he said. He declined to give details of troop numbers. South Sudan government information minister and the military spokesperson did not respond to calls seeking comment.

After the civil war erupted in South Sudan in 2013, Uganda deployed its troops in Juba to bolster Kiir’s forces against Machar. They were eventually withdrawn in 2015. Ugandan troops were again deployed in Juba in 2016 after fighting reignited between the two sides but they were also eventually withdrawn. Uganda fears a full-blown conflagration in its northern neighbor could send waves of refugees across the border and potentially create instability. — Reuters

## Anger over arrest of Palestinian, Trump...

Continued from Page 1

Some protests turned violent and saw campus buildings occupied, while students protesting the Zionist entity’s conduct were frequently pitted against pro-Zionist campaigners, many of whom were Jewish.

Trump and other Republicans have broadly accused the protesters of supporting Hamas. While the Trump administration moves to quickly deport Khalil, who has reportedly been moved to the southern state of Louisiana, a federal judge on Monday ordered authorities to halt proceedings. The order, seen by AFP, by Judge Jesse Furman of the Southern District of New York also called for a preliminary hearing on Wednesday. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) condemned Khalil’s arrest, calling it “unprecedented, illegal, and un-American”. “The government’s actions are obviously intended to intimidate and chill speech on one side of a public debate,” said Ben Wizner, director of the ACLU’s Speech, Privacy and Technology Project, in a statement.

## Manila arrests Duterte for crimes...

Continued from Page 1

The Hague tonight. This is not justice — this is oppression and persecution,” Duterte’s eldest daughter said in a statement. If transferred to The Hague, he could become Asia’s first former head of state to go on trial at the ICC.

The former president had earlier gone on Instagram live to say he believed the Philippine Supreme Court would step in and prevent his transfer to the international tribunal. “The Supreme Court will not agree to that. We do not have an extradition treaty,” he said after his lawyers filed a petition with the court. Duterte was arrested at the airport after “Interpol Manila received the official copy of the warrant of the arrest from the ICC”, the presidential palace said in a morning statement.

In an earlier video, Duterte had demanded to know the basis of his arrest. “So what is the law and what is the crime that I committed? Show to me now the legal basis of my being here,” he said. His arrest follows years of him rebuking and taunting the ICC since he unilaterally withdrew the Philippines from the court’s founding

On Monday afternoon, over 1,000 protesters gathered in New York to express their outrage at Khalil’s arrest. “This was essentially a kidnapping,” said 42-year-old Tobi, who declined to give her last name for fear of retaliation. “It seems like a clear targeting of activists, which is a really, really dangerous precedent,” she said.

According to his supporters, Khalil was arrested late Saturday night while returning with his pregnant wife to their residence in Columbia student housing. “This is a dismal moment in American history. We must not go down this authoritarian path one step further,” said Michael Thaddeu, one of around 50 professors who expressed their concern Monday at a press conference.

The Trump administration has particularly targeted Columbia over its handling of the protests, threatening to revoke billions in federal funding if more action is not taken. On Friday, four government agencies announced initial cuts of \$400 million. The arrest also prompted an outcry from the United Nations, with the spokesman for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres saying Monday “it is crucial to underscore the importance of respecting the right of freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly everywhere”. — AFP

treaty in 2019 as it started looking into allegations of systematic murders of drug dealers on his watch.

“Why will you bring me to the international body when we are no longer a member? Ponder on it seriously, because this will have implications,” Duterte told police while in custody according to a livestream on Instagram by his youngest daughter, Veronica Duterte. “If I committed a sin, prosecute me in Philippine courts, with Filipino judges and I will allow myself to be jailed in my own nation.”

Duterte’s former chief legal counsel, Salvador Panelo, slammed his detention as “unlawful”. “The (police) didn’t allow one of his lawyers to meet him at the airport and to question the legal basis for (the) arrest,” he said. China warned the ICC against “politicization” and “double standards” in the Duterte case, saying it was “closely monitoring the development of the situation”.

Reactions from those who opposed Duterte’s drug war, however, were jubilant. One group working to support mothers of those killed in the crackdown called the arrest a “very welcome development”. “The mothers whose husbands and children were killed because of the drug war are very happy because they have been waiting for this for a very long time,” Rubilyn Litao, coordinator for Rise Up for Life and for Rights, told AFP. — Agencies

## International

# Ships blaze, spill feared after North Sea crash

## Investigations underway into cause of collision; crew member missing

**GRIMSBY, United Kingdom:** Fires were raging on Tuesday after a cargo ship laden with toxic materials slammed into a tanker carrying flammable jet fuel in the North Sea, as questions mounted about how the accident happened. There were also growing fears that any spill from the collision could harm the local environment and coastline, home to seals, porpoises and some protected waders and waterfowl.



A damaged section of the hull of the MV Stena Immaculate is pictured, as the tanker lays at anchor in the North Sea, off the coast of Withernsea, east of England.

Images on the BBC Tuesday showed a large hole in the side of the Stena Immaculate tanker as huge plumes of thick, black smoke rose from the stationary ships with smaller boats dousing the vessels with water. The fires were "still going on" nearly 24 hours after the Portuguese-flagged Solong cargo ship ploughed into the Stena Immaculate tanker, anchored about 10 miles (16 kilometers) off the north-eastern port of Hull, nearby Grimsby port chief executive Martyn Boyers told AFP. One crew member was also still missing, he said.

The Stena Immaculate was on a short-term US military charter with Military Sealift Command, according to a spokesperson for the command that operates civilian-crewed ships for the US Defense Department. Crowley, the US-based operator of the tanker, said the crash had "ruptured" the ship's tank "containing A1-jet fuel" and triggered a fire, with fuel "reported released". The UK government's Marine Accident Investigation Branch has launched a probe into Monday's accident to determine the next steps.

The UK Coastguard halted search operations late on Monday after rescuing 36 crew members from both ships. It was not immediately clear if the search had resumed early on Tuesday. "One crew member of the Solong remains unaccounted for. After an extensive search for the missing crew member sadly they have not been found and the search has ended," said Matthew Atkinson, divisional commander for the Coastguard.

The Stena Immaculate was carrying around 220,000 barrels of jet fuel, according to the maritime information service, Lloyd's List Intelligence. The Solong was laden with 15 containers of sodium cyanide, it added, but authorities have not confirmed that and it is not known if any of the flammable compound had leaked. A spokesperson for Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who was hosting his weekly cabinet meeting on Tuesday, called the situation "extremely concerning". Quoting government sources, the Daily Telegraph said there was nothing so far to indicate that "foul play" had caused the crash, but it could not be ruled out.

### 'Toxic hazards'

A spokesman for the government's Marine Accident Investigation Branch said a team sent to Grimsby was "gathering evidence and undertaking a preliminary assessment". Dutch maritime servicing company Boskalis told the ANP news agency it had been tasked with salvaging the Stena Immaculate and was "fully mobilizing". Four ships with firefighting capacity were on their way to the site, a Boskalis spokesperson said, adding the tanker would need to be "cooled down" before the fire could be extinguished.

The investigation was being led by US and Portuguese authorities, as the ships were flagged from their



AT SEA: Smoke rises from the MV Solong cargo ship in the North Sea, off the coast of Withernsea, east of England, on March 11, 2025, after it collided with the MV Stena Immaculate tanker on March 10. — AFP photos

countries, housing minister Matthew Pennycook told Times Radio. "We're obviously very alive to the potential impact on the environment," he said, but added the Coastguard was well equipped to deal with any oil spills. "The good news is ... it's not like a crude oil spill," Ivor Vince, founder of ASK Consultants, an environmental risk advisory group, told AFP.

"Most of it will evaporate quite quickly and what doesn't evaporate will be degraded by microorganisms quite quickly," he added. Paul Johnston, a senior scientist at the Greenpeace Research Laboratories at Exeter University, said: "We are extremely concerned about the multiple toxic hazards." Sodium cyanide is "a highly toxic chemical that could cause serious harm", he explained.

### Humber traffic suspended

All vessel movements were "suspended" in the Humber estuary that flows into the North Sea, according to Associated British Ports (ABP), which operates in the Ports of Hull and Immingham in the region. The German Central Command for Maritime Emergencies said it was also dispatching a vessel capable of fire fighting and oil recovery. "It's more the nature, birds ... if it gets down to the nature reserve," one local woman, Laura Scrimshaw, 47, told AFP in Grimsby, which is located on the south bank of the Humber estuary, home to several nature reserves. "We don't want to see wildlife dying. It's a chain of events, it affects the wildlife which could then affect other" species, she added. — AFP

## Smog bound Indian cities dominate pollution rankings

**PARIS:** Despite an improvement in 2024, India again dominated global rankings for the cities with the most dangerous particle smog while Chad was the most polluted country, according to a report published Tuesday. The report by IQAir, a Swiss air technology company, said India's Byrnihat was the world's "most polluted metropolitan area of 2024". The Indian capital New Delhi was the world's most polluted capital, closely followed by Chad's N'Djamena. The Bangladesh capital Dhaka came third, ahead of Kinshasa and Islamabad.

Chad topped the rankings for the most polluted country overall, with readings 18 times higher than World Health Organization safe levels for concentrations of particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM2.5) It was followed by Bangladesh, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo and then India in fifth place. India was home to six of the world's nine most polluted cities. Byrnihat, an industrial town on the border of Meghalaya and Assam states, had a PM2.5 reading of 128.2 micrograms per cubic meter on average in 2024, more than 25 times the WHO recommended level of five micrograms. Concentrations across India were 50.6 micrograms per cubic meter, 10 times the WHO safe level, according to the report by IQAir, made with Greenpeace's support. The overall level was seven percent down from 2023, but Indian cities are still suffering badly from concentrations of small particles, which come from vehicles, agricultural burning, garbage and industrial waste.

South Asia's pollution skyrockets in winter months, and highlighting India's struggle, the report said that



NEW DELHI: A general view shows the Signature Bridge over the Yamuna River on a smoggy winter morning in New Delhi on December 20, 2024. — AFP

Baddi in Himachal Pradesh state had an average reading of 165 microns in January — 33 times the WHO safe level. It said that five Pakistani cities saw levels rise above 200 microns during November. The study was based on "more than 40,000 air quality monitoring stations across 8,954 locations in 138 countries, territories, and regions analyzed by IQAir's air quality scientists," it said. "Oceania is the world's cleanest region, with 57 percent of regional cities meeting the WHO PM2.5 annual guideline value," the report said.

Bosnia was the worst polluted country in Europe, with PM2.5 levels more than five times over the WHO limit. It was followed by North Macedonia and Serbia. Serbia's Novi Pazar was the most polluted city, the

report said. Burkina Faso, 5th in 2023, as well as Iran and Afghanistan, were not included in the report due to insufficient data. Only seven countries had concentrations below the WHO guidelines: Estonia, Iceland, Australia, New Zealand, the Bahamas, Grenada, and Barbados. However, 17 percent of cities studied met the WHO standard in 2024, compared with just nine percent in 2023, the report said. Air pollution — atmospheric and domestic — was the main environmental risk to health in 2021, responsible for 8.1 million premature deaths worldwide, according to estimates in the "State of Global Air 2024" report carried out by the Health Effects Institute and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. — AFP

## Dalai Lama says his successor to be born outside China

**NEW DELHI:** The Dalai Lama's successor will be born outside China, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism says in a new book, raising the stakes in a dispute with Beijing over control of the Himalayan region he fled more than six decades ago. Tibetans worldwide want the institution of the Dalai Lama to continue after the 89-year-old's death, he writes in "Voice for the Voiceless", which was reviewed by Reuters and is being released on Tuesday. He had previously said the line of spiritual leaders might end with him.

His book marks the first time the Dalai Lama has specified that his successor would be born in the "free world", which he describes as outside China. He has previously said only that he could reincarnate outside Tibet, possibly in India where he lives in exile. "Since the purpose of a reincarnation is to carry on the work of the predecessor, the new Dalai Lama will be born in the free world so that the traditional mission of the Dalai Lama - that is, to be the voice for universal compassion, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, and the symbol of Tibet embodying the aspirations of the Tibetan people - will continue," the Dalai Lama writes. Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, fled at the age of 23 to India with thousands of other Tibetans in 1959 after a failed uprising against the rule of Mao Zedong's Communists. China brands the Dalai Lama, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for keeping alive the Tibetan



NEW YORK: Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama is seen in 2024. — AFP

cause, as a "separatist". The Dalai Lama is a political exile who has "no right to represent the Tibetan people at all," said a spokesperson at China's foreign ministry when asked about the book at a regular news conference in Beijing on Tuesday. Beijing insists it will choose his successor, but the Dalai Lama has said any successor named by China would not be respected. "The lineage of the Dalai Lama living Buddha was formed and developed in China's Tibet, and his religious status and name were also determined by (China's) central government," said Mao Ning, the Chinese spokesperson. "The 14th Dalai Lama himself was identified in accordance with religious rituals and historical conventions, and this was submitted to the then central government to approve the succession."

### 'Repressive' Chinese rule

Beijing said last month it hoped the Dalai Lama would "return to the right path" and that it was open to

discussing his future if he met such conditions as recognizing that Tibet and Taiwan are inalienable parts of China, whose sole legal government is that of the People's Republic of China. That proposal has been rejected by the Tibetan parliament-in-exile in India. Supporters of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan cause include Richard Gere, a follower of Tibetan Buddhism, and Nancy Pelosi, the former speaker of the US House of Representatives. His followers have been worried about his health, especially after knee surgery last year. He told Reuters in December that he might live to be 110.

In his book, the Dalai Lama says he has received numerous petitions for more than a decade from a wide spectrum of Tibetan people, including senior monks and Tibetans living in Tibet and outside, "uniformly asking me to ensure that the Dalai Lama lineage be continued". Tibetan tradition holds that the soul of a senior Buddhist monk is reincarnated in the body of a child on his death. The current Dalai Lama was identified as the reincarnation of his predecessor when he was two.

The book, which the Dalai Lama calls an account of his dealings with Chinese leaders over seven decades, is being published on Tuesday in the US by William Morrow and in Britain by HarperNonFiction, with HarperCollins publications to follow in India and other countries. The Dalai Lama, who has said he will release details about his succession around his 90th birthday in July, writes that his homeland remains "in the grip of repressive Communist Chinese rule" and that the campaign for the freedom of the Tibetan people will continue "no matter what", even after his death. He expressed faith in the Tibetan government and parliament-in-exile, based with him in India's Himalayan city of Dharamshala, to carry on the political work for the Tibetan cause. — Reuters

## US capital scraps BLM mural after Trump pressure

**WASHINGTON:** Workers in Washington on Monday began removing a "Black Lives Matter" street mural installed during the height of 2020 racial justice protests, bowing to pressure from President Donald Trump. Large, yellow lettering reading "Black Live Matter" has been painted on a roadway near the White House since June 2020, when protests broke out across the nation following the police killing of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man. City officials in the US capital have credited the art installation with calming tensions near the White House, where violent clashes between protesters and security personnel had occurred in the days prior.

Trump, who was president at the time of the unrest, returned to office in January seeking to overturn so-called diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices which spread widely throughout the public and private sectors following the George Floyd protests. Congressional Republicans and Trump aides had eyed the mural as part of their move to force changes in the administration of Washington, an overwhelmingly Democratic city.

Mayor Muriel Bowser, a Democrat, has sought to establish a good working relationship with Trump, seeking to head off Republican calls for fully overturning the city's right to govern itself. She has also been worried that mass layoffs of federal workers by Trump and his billionaire adviser Elon Musk could wreak havoc on the city's finances. "We have bigger fish to fry than fights over what has been very important to us and to the history, and especially in our ability to keep our city safe during that time — that mural played a very important part," Bowser told reporters last week. "But now our focus is on making sure our residents and our economy survives." — AFP



WASHINGTON: People collect pieces of the "Black Lives Matter" street mural as crews begin work to remove it in Washington, DC, on March 10, 2025. — AFP

## Business

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2025

# Trump meets Corporate America as economic worries nip stocks

## Business Roundtable has pushed for an end to trade war



NEW YORK: A trader works on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) at the opening bell in New York City on March 10, 2025. — AFP

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump is meeting the CEOs of America's biggest companies, many whose market value has dipped in recent days as recession and inflation fears soured consumer and investor sentiment.

The Republican president is expected to speak with around 100 CEOs at a regular meeting of the Business Roundtable in Washington, an influential group of CEOs leading major US companies from Apple to JPMorgan Chase and Walmart. Trump met with technology company executives at the White House on Monday.

Trump's economic policies so far have centered on a blitz of tariff announcements - some of which have taken effect and others delayed or set to kick in later - that he has said will correct unbalanced trade relations, bring jobs back to the country and stop the flow of illegal narcotics from abroad.

Markets have been spooked by the prospect that the policies could raise prices for businesses, boosting inflation, and undermine consumer confidence in a blow to economic

growth. US stocks tumbled on Monday, putting the benchmark S&P 500 down nearly 3 percent since Trump's election in November last year and 4.5 percent underwater for the year overall. Meanwhile, a survey of American households showed consumers growing more pessimistic about their prospects. European and Asian stock markets diverged Tuesday after a sharp sell-off on Wall Street fuelled by fears about the US economy as President Donald Trump presses ahead with steep tariffs.

Traders had initially welcomed Trump's election win in late 2024, optimistic that his promised tax cuts and deregulation would boost the world's biggest economy and help equities push to further record highs. But there is now a growing pessimism that a recession could be on the cards amid warnings that tariffs imposed on key trading partners will reignite inflation, forcing the Federal Reserve to again start raising interest rates.

"Markets are jittery and volatility seems like the only certainty while the

White House pushes hard to usher in a new era, seemingly happy for stock markets to be collateral damage," said Matt Britzman, senior equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. The president's weekend comments that the economy was facing "a period of transition" and his refusal to rule out a recession did little to soothe investor worries. London's stock market dipped in morning deals Tuesday, while Paris and Frankfurt edged higher, helped by gains for infrastructure and defense stocks on European spending plans.

A new wave of US tariffs due this week will see levies of 25 percent on steel and aluminum imports.

Trump has imposed an additional 20 percent tariff on Chinese goods entering the United States, as well as 25 percent tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico, although he suspended most of the duties on US neighbors until April 2, when he plans to unveil a global regime of reciprocal tariffs on all trading partners.

Trump last month said the policies could cause "short-term, some little

pain" before delivering long-run benefits. In a Fox News interview aired over the weekend, he declined to predict whether his economic policies would cause a recession.

"Industry leaders have responded to President Trump's America First economic agenda of tariffs, deregulation, and the unleashing of American energy with trillions in investment commitments that will create thousands of new jobs," said White House spokesman Kush Desai, dismissing negative talk about the outlook. Until recently, investors have been buoyant that the Republican president's policies would tip towards stimulating more growth, for instance through lower taxes, or easing inflationary pressures, for instance by loosening regulation on fossil fuel production.

But tax cuts need congressional approval. And some economists see plans to increase deportations of undocumented immigrants increasing price pressures in the labor market, while cutting the federal workforce could raise unemployment. — Agencies

## 'No commitments' to tariff cuts after Trump claims: India

NEW DELHI: India says it has not committed to slashing import duties on US products, days after President Donald Trump announced that New Delhi had agreed to "cut their tariffs way down".

Only weeks into his second term, Trump has upended global trade, targeting friends and foes alike.

He has also blamed all trading partners of "unfair" practices, and has announced reciprocal tariffs on many countries, including India, to begin from next month. Trump once again railed at India's "massive tariffs" last week. "You can't sell anything into India, it is almost restrictive," Trump said.

"They have agreed, by the way, they want to cut their tariffs way down now because somebody is finally exposing them for what they have done," he added. But the Indian government told a parliamentary panel that "no commitments had been made to the US on the issue," a report in The Times of India newspaper said Tuesday. The government "has sought time until September to address the issue that is being repeatedly flagged by the American president," it added.

India's commerce secretary Sunil Barthwal "said that India and the US were working towards a mutually beneficial bilateral trade agreement, focusing on long-term trade cooperation instead of merely seeking immediate tariffs adjustments". Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who visited the White House last month, has an acknowledged rapport with Trump, who said he shares a "special bond" with the Indian leader. Modi said the world's largest and fifth-largest economies would work on a "mutually beneficial trade agreement" to be sealed "very soon".

While the United States is a crucial market for India's information technology and services sectors, Washington has made billions of dollars in new military hardware sales to New Delhi in recent years.

Trump could visit India later this year for a summit of heads of state from the Quad — a four-way grouping of Australia, India, Japan and the United States. — AFP

## Trump says will buy a Tesla to show support for Musk

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Tuesday he will buy a brand new Tesla to show support for his top campaign donor and advisor, Tesla CEO Elon Musk.

To Republicans, Conservatives, and all great Americans, Elon Musk is 'putting it on the line' in order to help our Nation, and he is doing a FANTASTIC JOB! Trump posted on his Truth Social platform just after midnight on Tuesday.

But the Radical Left Lunatics, as they often do, are trying to illegally and collusively boycott Tesla, one of the World's great automakers, and Elon's 'baby,' in order to attack and do harm to Elon, and everything he stands for, Trump said.

I'm going to buy a brand new Tesla tomorrow morning as a show of confidence and support for Elon Musk, a truly great American.

Why should he be punished for putting his tremendous skills to work in order to help MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN???

Musk, the world's richest person, responded on his X platform, thanking the president.

Since returning to the White House in January, Trump has empowered Musk to slash federal gov-



SHANGHAI: A Tesla Model X car is seen at a showroom for the US electric vehicle maker in the Jing'an district of Shanghai on March 11, 2025. — AFP

ernment spending and agencies' workforces as head of the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

But DOGE's cost-cutting campaign has faced increasing resistance, including protests, court rulings and some pressure from lawmakers.

While Musk enjoys Trump's confidence, polling shows the tech billionaire is deeply unpopular among ordinary Americans, and his cuts to government budgets have sparked angry confrontations between Republicans and their constituents at town halls. And Tesla investors have feared boycotts and buyer backlash over Musk's actions and close ties to Trump.

Some owners of Tesla's pioneering electric

cars have voiced buyers' remorse over Musk's foray into politics, and his sharing of conspiracy theories online. Unhappy Tesla owners have even slapped bumper stickers on their vehicles claiming they had purchased them before Elon went crazy.

### Slumping shares

Tesla shares closed down more than 15 percent on Monday, as uncertainty over Trump's import tariffs and threats have left US financial markets in turmoil.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq tanked four percent owing in part to the plunge in high-flying titans including Apple, Amazon and Tesla.

Tesla has also seen its sales drop across Europe in recent weeks following Musk's controversial support for far-right groups, including Germany's AfD during the country's recent election campaign.

Tesla sales in Germany - Europe's biggest auto market - plunged more than 76 percent year-on-year in February, official data showed. Overall sales in the European Union almost halved, on year, in January.

In early March, a dozen Teslas were torched at a dealership in France in what authorities treated as an arson attack, and the firm's facilities have also been vandalized in the United States. Tesla has lost more than one-third of its market value since mid-December as Musk deepens his association with Trump.

Meanwhile, Musk said his X platform was hit Monday by a major cyberattack, raising questions as to whether the politically divisive billionaire is being targeted or his decision to gut staff at what was once Twitter is haunting the social network. — AFP

## Musk says X hit by major cyberattack

SAN FRANCISCO: Elon Musk said X was hit Monday by a major cyberattack, raising questions as to whether the politically divisive billionaire is being targeted or his decision to gut staff at what was once Twitter

is haunting the social network. Reports of problems with X started early Monday, with users in Asia, Europe, and North America saying they could not access the platform, according to the Downdetector tracking site.

"There was (still is) a massive cyberattack against X," Musk said in a post on the platform, which was working sporadically as the day wore on. The SpaceX and Tesla boss also blamed a cyberattack, although he provided no evidence, for crashing the site last year when an interview with Donald Trump was about to be streamed

on it. Musk shared a post from an account called DogeDesigner suggesting that the latest cyberattack was another burst of animosity towards him, in line with recent protests against the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) that he leads and vandalization of Tesla facilities. Musk speculated that such an attack would take tremendous resources, and that it was the work of a country or large coordinated group.

During an interview on Fox Business, he alleged that computers used in the attack

appeared to have digital addresses in the Ukraine area and that X was still trying to figure out exactly what happened.

Cybersecurity experts say that it is difficult to assess the situation without being able to see into X operations, but the duration of the trouble is a sign of an attack. "It's cyberwar hitting at full force," said Chad Cragle of cyber defense platform Deepwatch. "With Musk in the spotlight and political tensions at a peak, these attacks bear all the indicators of nation-state aggression." — AFP



This combination of pictures shows SpaceX, X and Tesla CEO Elon Musk. — AFP





# Gulf Bank hosts 2-day fitness challenge with valuable prizes at Lose Gain gym

## Challenge part of bank's Ramadan program

**KUWAIT:** For the third consecutive year, Gulf Bank successfully organized an exhilarating fitness challenge at Lose Gain, a specialized group training gym. The event combined high-energy workouts with friendly competition, creating a vibrant and motivating environment under the expertise of professional trainers. The challenge consisted of a 25-minute team competition, with participants divided into groups of three. Through a series of running and floor exercises, they put their endurance, strength, and determination to the test, demonstrating teamwork and strategic planning to achieve success.

The first-place team received KD 1,500 and travel tickets, while the second-place winners earned KD 750. The third-place team was awarded KD 450, along with additional valuable prizes.

Participants thanked Gulf Bank for organizing the challenge and for its active role in promoting a culture of fitness and well-being. Gulf Bank takes pride in encouraging a healthy lifestyle during the holy month of Ramadan, aligning with the spiritual essence of the season



and encouraging positive lifestyle habits throughout the year. This initiative reflects Gulf Bank's ongoing commitment to corporate social responsibility, with a variety of community-focused programs held throughout the year, especially during Ramadan. Through these initiatives, Gulf Bank continues to strengthen its bond with the community, solidifying

its reputation as the Bank closest to the people.

Fitness is a key element of a healthy lifestyle, especially during Ramadan. Even while fasting, exercise can greatly improve overall health, increase energy levels, and enhance both physical and mental well-being. Gulf Bank aims to be Kuwait's leading bank, fostering a di-



verse and inclusive workplace to deliver exceptional customer service while contributing sustainably to the community. Through its extensive branch network and innovative digital services, the Bank empowers customers to conduct banking transactions conveniently and efficiently, ensuring a seamless experience.

In alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035,

"New Kuwait," and its commitment to fostering collaborative partnerships, Gulf Bank is dedicated to driving robust sustainability initiatives across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions. The Bank is committed to implementing strategically selected and diverse sustainability programs both internally and externally.

## Meta begins testing its first in-house AI training chip

**NEW YORK:** Facebook owner Meta is testing its first in-house chip for training artificial intelligence systems, a key milestone as it moves to design more of its own custom silicon and reduce reliance on external suppliers like Nvidia, two sources told Reuters. The world's biggest social media company has begun a small deployment of the chip and plans to ramp up production for wide-scale use if the test goes well, the sources said.



**PARIS:** A logo of US company's Meta is displayed during the Vivattech technology startups and innovation fair, at the Porte de Versailles exhibition center in Paris, on May 22, 2024. — AFP

The push to develop in-house chips is part of a long-term plan at Meta to bring down its mammoth infrastructure costs as the company places expensive bets on AI tools to drive growth.

Meta, which also owns Instagram and WhatsApp, has forecast total 2025 expenses of \$114 billion to \$119 billion, including up to \$65 billion in capital expenditure largely driven by spending on AI infrastructure. One of the sources said Meta's new training chip is a dedicated accelerator, meaning it is designed to handle only AI-specific tasks. This can make it more power-efficient than the integrated graphics processing units (GPUs) generally used for AI workloads.

Meta is working with Taiwan-based chip manufacturer to produce the chip, this person said. The test deployment began after Meta finished its first "tape-out" of the chip, a significant marker of success in silicon development work that involves sending an initial design through a chip factory, the other source said. A typical tape-out costs tens of millions of dollars and takes roughly three to six months to complete,

with no guarantee the test will succeed. A failure would require Meta to diagnose the problem and repeat the tape-out step.

Meta and TSMC declined to comment. The chip is the latest in the company's Meta Training and Inference Accelerator (MTIA) series. The program has had a wobbly start for years and at one point scrapped a chip at a similar phase of development. However, Meta last year started using an MTIA chip to perform inference, or the process involved in running an AI system as users interact with it, for the recommendation systems that determine which content shows up on Facebook and Instagram news feeds.

Meta executives have said they want to start using their own chips by 2026 for training, or the compute-intensive process of feeding the AI system reams of data to "teach" it how to perform.

As with the inference chip, the goal for the training chip is to start with recommendation systems and later use it for generative AI products like chatbot Meta AI, the executives said. "We're working on how would we do training for recommender systems and then eventually how do we think about training and inference for gen AI," Meta's Chief Product Officer Chris Cox said at the Morgan Stanley technology, media and telecom conference last week.

Cox described Meta's chip development efforts as "kind of a walk, crawl, run situation" so far, but said executives considered the first-generation inference chip for recommendations to be a "big success."

Meta previously pulled the plug on an in-house custom inference chip after it flopped in a small-scale test deployment similar to the one it is doing now for the training chip, instead reversing course and placing orders for billions of dollars worth of Nvidia GPUs in 2022. The social media company has remained one of Nvidia's biggest customers since then, amassing an arsenal of GPUs to train its models, including for recommendations and ads systems and its Llama foundation model series. The units also perform inference for the more than 3 billion people who use its apps each day. The value of those GPUs has been thrown into question this year as AI researchers increasingly express doubts about how much more progress can be made by continuing to "scale up" large language models by adding ever more data and computing power. Those doubts were reinforced with the late-January launch of new low-cost models from Chinese startup DeepSeek, which optimize computational efficiency by relying more heavily on inference than most incumbent models.—Reuters



**TOKYO:** (L to R) Makoto Uchida, President and CEO of Nissan motor corporation, Toshihiro Mibe, President and Representative Executive Officer of Honda, and Takao Kato, President and CEO of Mitsubishi Motors stand for a photo call after a joint press conference in Tokyo on December 23, 2024. — AFP

## Struggling Japanese automaker Nissan replaces CEO

**TOKYO:** Struggling Japanese automaker Nissan announced on Tuesday that chief executive Makoto Uchida would step down, a move that follows the failure of merger talks with rival Honda.

Ivan Espinosa, who will take the top job from April, told reporters he wanted to continue Uchida's work "to help Nissan shine again." "I sincerely believe that Nissan has so much more potential than what we are seeing today," Espinosa said, adding that he would work "closely with our talented team worldwide to bring stability and growth back to the company."

Nissan says it expects an annual loss of more than \$500 million this financial year, after announcing thousands of job cuts and reporting a 93 percent plunge in first-half net profit.

Moody's has downgraded Nissan's credit rating to junk, citing its "weak profitability driven by slowing demand for its ageing model portfolio". Fitch and S&P Global Ratings have also downgraded it to

a speculative category. Last month, Nissan and Honda said they were scrapping merger talks that would have created the world's third-biggest auto company by unit sales behind Toyota and Volkswagen.

The discussions—seen as a way to catch up to US titan Tesla and Chinese firms on electric vehicles—are believed to have unravelled after Honda proposed making Nissan a subsidiary instead of an initial plan to integrate under a new holding company.

However, media reports have since said Honda could be prepared to revive negotiations under a different Nissan boss. And Honda's president Toshihiro Mibe has said the two automakers would continue to seek "synergy" through a strategic partnership announced in August that also includes Nissan's junior partner Mitsubishi Motors.

Espinosa joined Nissan in Mexico in 2003 and held posts in Southeast Asia before becoming a director for Mexico and Latin America in 2010. "Given that I am unable to gain the confidence of some of our employees, and as the board made a request, I concluded that... making a fresh start will be in the best interests of Nissan," Uchida said. He described Espinosa as a "real car guy" who is "still in his 40s and full of energy".

"I am counting on him to overcome the difficulties and strongly drive Nissan to the

future," Uchida said. The Nikkei Business weekly magazine, citing unidentified Nissan sources, has reported Nissan would likely re-consider investment from Honda under its new leadership, but "not in the form of becoming its full subsidiary".

Nissan is also eyeing a four-way cooperation that would include Taiwanese chip behemoth Foxconn as well as Mitsubishi Motors, the Nikkei Business report said. Foxconn is the world's largest contract electronics manufacturer and builds devices for major tech companies, including Apple's iPhones. It has recently been pushing into areas ranging from electric vehicles to semiconductors and servers.

A source close to the matter told AFP on Tuesday that after the merger talks failed, Uchida had "called for opening new discussions with potential partners" to survive in the global market. "For Nissan to become stronger, it must find a partner in the markets that are its priority," the source said.

Tatsuo Yoshida, senior auto industry analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence, said that Nissan choosing a new CEO was a "key step" to address its urgent challenges. "Espinosa's product strategy expertise allows the firm to tackle its lack of competitive models. However, securing cash and financial stability remain critical, demanding swift action from the new leadership," he said.—AFP

## Business

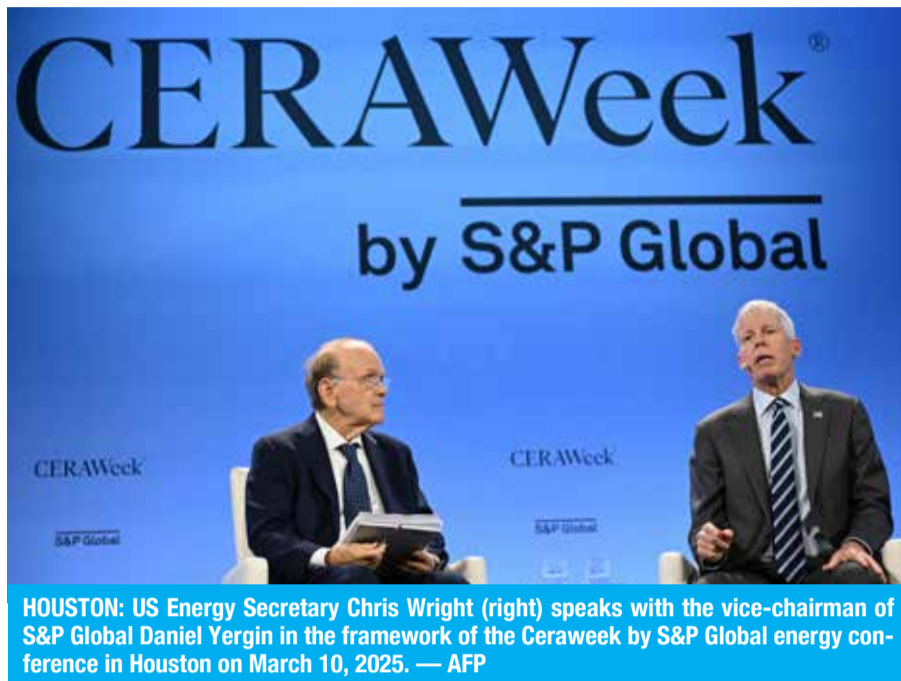
# Trump's energy secretary vows reversal of Biden climate policies

## New energy policy to favor fossil fuel, deprioritize climate change

HOUSTON: The US energy secretary vowed Monday to reset federal energy policy to favor fossil fuels and deprioritize climate change as industry leaders gathered at their biggest event since President Donald Trump returned to office.

In the conference's opening session, Energy Secretary Chris Wright cited the Trump administration's moves to cut red tape that is delaying oil projects and promote liquefied natural gas exports as examples of a pivot away from policies pursued under former president Joe Biden. "The Trump administration will end the Biden administration's irrational quasi-religious policies on climate change that imposed endless sacrifices on our citizens," Wright told a packed auditorium for the annual Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) conference.

Since returning to Washington seven weeks ago, Trump and his team have overhauled the existing economic order at a dizzying pace, launching trade wars against allies and hollowing government agencies the president and his allies dislike. Trump made energy policy a central part of his agenda with his day-one "Unleashing American Energy" executive order, promising during his inaugural address to "end the Green New Deal" in



HOUSTON: US Energy Secretary Chris Wright (right) speaks with the vice-chairman of S&P Global Daniel Yergin in the framework of the Ceraweek by S&P Global energy conference in Houston on March 10, 2025. — AFP

favor of "that liquid gold under our feet." But Mark Brownstein, senior vice president at the Environmental Defense Fund, said Wright's tone was "long on rhetoric," adding, "at some point the administration needs to get off the campaign stump speech and get on with the

business of governing." Brownstein described many CERA attendees as uncertain about investments, not only because of Trump's shifting position on energy and climate change, but also the nearly daily pivots on tariffs.

"The energy industry is a capital-in-

tensive business and what they need to deploy capital at scale is certainty and consistency," Brownstein told AFP.

CERA's opening day coincided with deep stock market losses after Trump over the weekend refused to rule out a US recession. Protesters held boisterous demonstrations outside the event in Houston. Advocacy group Oil Change International blasted the oil industry for pollution near industrial facilities and for fossil fuel investments that are worsening climate change.

Energy played a key supporting role in Trump's 2024 presidential campaign, in which he pointed to higher gasoline prices as a reason more production was needed, embodied by his slogan: "Drill, baby, drill." Trump's January 20 executive order represents a potentially wide-ranging attack on tax incentives which had been embraced by energy companies to advance billions of dollars of energy transition projects. These projects were connected to laws enacted under Biden to mitigate climate change.

Some pundits think Trump will stop short of actions canceling existing projects where workers have been hired, including many in conservative districts. Appearing just after Wright, Chevron CEO Mike Wirth warned that "swing-

ing from one extreme to the other" on policy is "not the right policy approach in a long cycle industry like this." Wirth welcomed Trump's executive orders on permitting reform, but said "we need to see some of this stuff put into legislation so that it's more durable and it's not at risk of being swung back in another direction by a future administration" with different priorities.

Wright downplayed the upheaval on trade policy after his remarks, noting Trump dropped many of his most impactful tariffs in his first term. It's "too early to say on tariffs, but I feel quite confident having a smart businessman every day working for America will large, not an interest group or a particular industry," Wright said. "I'm pretty optimistic about the outcome."

Wright said there were "vigorous" closed-door debates about tariffs within the administration, rejecting the idea that there was ideological uniformity on the issue.

He also suggested the Trump administration wouldn't challenge all Biden administration renewable energy projects, saying that while he wouldn't have picked some of the same projects for loans, "we inherit a loan book... and we follow the rule of law." — AFP

## South Korea's Kia denies responsibility for anti-Musk ad

SEOUL: South Korean automaker Kia told AFP on Tuesday it had not approved an advertising campaign that featured one of its electric vehicles with a bumper sticker denigrating rival Tesla owner Elon Musk. The advertisement, posted last month on the social media accounts of Kia Norway, features the company's entry-level electric car, the EV3, with a bumper sticker saying: "I bought this after Elon went crazy."

The sticker appears to riff on a viral trend of Tesla owners, unhappy with the world's richest person's recent foray into politics, slapping bumper stickers on their vehicles claiming they had purchased them "before Musk went crazy".

The advertisement was removed on Tuesday after AFP asked the South Korean company about the image. "Kia Corporation is aware of a social media post by Kia Norway, which has since been removed," a company spokesperson said in a statement provided to AFP.

"The post was an entirely independent local initiative that does not reflect the position of Kia Europe or Kia Corporation," it said. Musk responded with apparent incredulity as users on the social media site X, which he owns, shared images of the Kia advertisement.

"They really did that?" he asked, in response to a post calling out Kia Norway for running the promotion. Kia is an affiliate of South Korea's Hyundai, and combined they are the world's third-largest automaker by volume as of 2024, selling more than 7.2 million cars combined.

It has rolled out a range of EVs in recent years, from the EV3 -- Britain's 2025 car of the year -- to the large SUV EV9. Billionaire Musk, the boss of SpaceX and Tesla, has become a key backer of and adviser to US President Donald Trump. Musk has recently become the target of protests against the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) that he leads, including vandalization of Tesla facilities and an apparent cyberattack on X. While Musk enjoys Trump's confidence, polling shows he is deeply unpopular among ordinary Americans, and his cuts have sparked angry confrontations between Republicans and their constituents at town halls. Tesla has seen its sales drop across Europe in recent weeks following Musk's controversial support for far-right groups, including Germany's AfD during the country's recent election campaign.

Tesla sales in Germany—Europe's biggest auto market—plunged more than 76 percent year-on-year in February, official data showed. Overall sales in the European Union almost halved year-on-year in January. Investors are concerned about the potential for boycotts and buyer backlash over Musk's divisive behavior as an adviser to the US president.

Tesla has lost more than one-third of its market value since mid-December as Musk deepens his association with the polarizing US leader. — AFP

## Nigeria moves to tame Africa's biggest crypto market

LAGOS: Nigerian authorities are warily moving to regulate Africa's largest cryptocurrency market in long-delayed efforts to create legal certainty in a field still fraught with fraud and volatility.

For years, regulators and government officials have viewed cryptocurrencies and other digital assets with suspicion despite their popularity in the country. Nigeria ranked second globally after India in 2023 and 2024 on a crypto adoption index compiled by Chain-

## Lego posts record profit, CEO shrugs off US tariff threat

COPENHAGEN: Lego's CEO told AFP that US President Donald Trump's tariff threats do not keep him up at night, as the world's largest toymaker on Tuesday posted record earnings for 2024.

Sales rose 13 percent to 74.3 billion kroner (\$10.8 billion) last year, while net profit grew five percent to 13.8 billion kroner. "We are relevant and we have exciting passion points for many different consumer groups, and that has worked throughout the world," the Danish company's chief executive, Niels Christiansen, told AFP.

After a strong year, the head of the unlisted family-owned company aims to keep a cool head in response to geopolitical uncertainties and Trump's trade policies. Lego has a factory in Mexico that supplies the US market and is building another in the United States due to be operational in 2027.

Trump has paused tariffs on products made in Mexico until next month and he has threatened to impose duties on European Union products. "At this point in time, there are no tariffs. If they would come in and we would deem that they would be more of a permanent nature, then I think we will we will also find ways to deal with that," Christiansen said, adding it was "not what keeps me awake at night."

## Korean Air launches new branding after Asiana acquisition

SEOUL: Korean Air on Tuesday launched new aircraft livery and corporate branding that will be introduced across the company as it combines with South Korean rival Asiana Airlines to become one of Asia's biggest carriers.

South Korea's largest airline in December completed a \$1.3 billion acquisition of two-thirds of Asiana, which will be run as a subsidiary until Jan 1, 2027, when it will integrate under the Korean Air name and corporate identity. Korean Air planes will now sport the word "Korean", instead of "Korean Air", in a larger, modernized, simplified dark blue font, and the top half of the fuselage will be painted light blue, with a new metallic effect.

"The updated logo aligns with modern and global minimalist branding trends while preserving the airline's distinct identity," the company said. Since 1984, Korean Air planes have had distinctive sky blue and white bodies, and tails decorated with a stylized taeguk, a traditional blue and red Korean symbol for the harmony between opposing forces used on the country's flag.

The new tail design features a simplified taeguk in dark blue only. The first plane with the refreshed livery is a Boeing that was delivered last year. Korean Air, a founding member of the SkyTeam airline alliance, was established in 1969 when state-owned

analysis, a global crypto research firm.

Over the past year, a more regulated sector has slowly started to take shape, even as fraud remains a concern for police. The director-general of the country's Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Emomotimi Agama, confirmed to AFP in August that the regulator was pushing ahead with efforts to create clarity around the use of digital assets.

That month, the SEC announced that it had granted "Approval-in-Principle" to two exchanges to begin operations. The first licensed companies—Busha Digital Limited and Quidax Technologies Limited—have since launched. "We believe this regulatory move is a positive start that will benefit the market in the long run by building trust and stability," Buchi Okoro, co-founder and chief executive of Quidax, told AFP.

"The SEC approval sent a clear signal to potential crypto investors, emphasizing their focus on custom-



NEW YORK: People depart a Lego store in Manhattan in New York City on August 29, 2024. — AFP

ing it was "not what keeps me awake at night." "It's not the first time we see those fluctuations and every time we've been able to not overreact," he said. The chief executive added that for the company, gaining market share was "way more important than whether we get tariffs or not", which he stressed that the company has managed to do for the past five years.

Lego's success stands out in an otherwise sluggish toy market, as consumer sales increased by 12 percent, the company said, while the toy market contracted by one percent. "In a market that over the last five years has not grown or only grown a couple of percent, we've grown 12, 13, 14 percent every year," Christiansen said.

In 2024, Lego boasted a portfolio of 840 prod-

ucts, of which 46 percent were new. Franchises like Lego Star Wars and Harry Potter, along with partnerships—notably with the video game Fortnite—have cemented the Danish toymaker's brand among consumers. "We want to be relevant... with kids and adults," Christiansen said. "So we also need to be there with things that they're really excited about", whether it is sports or video games.

"The advantage we have with this strong Lego brand is that most other brands would really like to work with us," he said.

And that has won the group consumers worldwide. "It's not one particular country, it's not one particular product or product group. It is very broad-based," Christiansen said.

However, the group, whose name is a contraction of the Danish "play well" (leg godt), has seen stronger demand in the Americas, Europe and the Middle East than in Asia, where it has invested heavily in recent years. "In the US we gained more shelf space in stores and we have more consumers being excited about the Lego brand, so we can afford to take a couple of years to get China back to growth if that's what it takes," Christiansen said.

The company has for several years been trying to make its plastic bricks more environmentally-friendly, and said that half of the materials now used are sustainably sourced.

While the company did not disclose how much it has invested in its sustainability projects, it said they had increased by 68 percent from a year earlier. — AFP



NEW YORK: A Boeing 747 passenger aircraft of Korean Air and a Boeing 777 passenger aircraft of British Airways are seen at John F Kennedy Airport in New York City. — AFP

Korean Air Lines was taken over by South Korean conglomerate Hanjin Kal. The Asiana acquisition rescued the debt-laden carrier, which was struggling even before a plunge in travel demand during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The deal, finalized more than four years after it was first proposed, was hampered by competition concerns and became the longest-ever merger of airlines to complete.

A combined Korean Air group could account for just over half of South Korea's passenger capacity, and would become the world's 12th-largest carrier by international capacity, a Reuters analysis of air-

er protection." However, the government's regulatory push is being bogged down by skepticism and widespread fraud and investment scams, with many grifters in play. In December, Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) said it arrested 792 suspects—including scores of foreigners—in a single operation in the affluent Victoria Island area of Lagos "for their alleged involvement in cryptocurrency investment fraud and romance scams."

A romance scam is when a fraudster pretends to be in love with a target in order to fleece them. The previous month, the SEC issued an advisory against Marino FX Limited, which it said had falsely claimed to be registered by the commission as a cryptocurrency exchange. It was not the first time the SEC had published such a notice. Beyond approving the exchanges, Nigeria's parliament is considering an investment and securities bill that, if passed into law, would es-

establish a regulatory framework for digital currencies. In the run-up to the general election in February 2023, President Bola Tinubu, then as the candidate of the ruling All Progressives Congress, promised a regulatory environment that would encourage the healthy adoption of digital assets.

Many in the industry saw his breakaway from his predecessor's hardline stance against cryptocurrencies as a welcome development. However, months after taking office, Africa's economic powerhouse imposed a new set of restrictions on crypto exchanges in an attempt to halt the sliding value of the local naira currency. In February 2024, central bank governor Olayemi Cardoso singled out Binance for blame. Binance, the world's biggest digital asset exchange, was forced to shut down operations involving the naira. Many customers quickly offloaded their wallets, fearing their funds might be trapped. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2025



This combination of pictures shows (from left) Argentinian model Mica Arganaraz and models presenting creations by Louis Vuitton for the Womenswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2025/2026 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week in Paris.

## STARS HOP ABOARD FOR TRAIN-INSPIRED LOUIS VUITTON SHOW



Louis Vuitton invited a star-studded audience to its Fall-Winter 2025 show near the Gare du Nord train station on Monday in Paris, unveiling a collection packed full of its version of travel essentials. LV-branded luggage and bags, some in the form of musical instruments, thick-soled trainers for walking, hats, capes and trench coats to protect against the rain... the show was intended to evoke "the house's spirit of travel". Franco-Belgian chief designer Nicolas Ghesquiere was imagining "the bustling ambience of a Parisian train station — where fleeting moments are shared amongst strangers, weaving a tapestry of stories," the brand wrote on Instagram.

Models walked among tightly packed rows of guests in a large atrium intended to look like a rail station waiting hall, with the location kept secret until the last minute in order to avoid crowds of fans gathering outside. A-list attendees included actors Jennifer Connelly, Ana de Armas, Lea Seydoux and Emma Stone, as well as French first lady Brigitte Macron. The show featured a variety of looks and cuts, with much more tailored, tighter-fitting silhouettes than other brands. There were the season's classics, trench coats and leather jackets, but also a variety of patterns and colors, including red-and-white checkers, and a nod to the 1970s with some Ziggy Stardust-inspired jumpsuits. Born as a trunk and leather-goods maker, Louis Vuitton has grown into a global empire and is now the best-selling brand in the vast portfolio of labels owned by conglomerate LVMH.

### More fur

Paris Womenswear Fashion Week is set to wrap up on Tuesday with two more blockbuster shows from Chanel and Saint Laurent. The last nine days have seen brands look to catch consumers' attention and to boost sales in what



Models acknowledge the audience following the presentation of creations by Louis Vuitton for the Womenswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2025/2026 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week in Paris on March 10, 2025.

is an increasingly tricky luxury market. Some of the top trends include fur and leather, ever-expanding oversized shoulder pads, as well as splashes of yellow, which has been glimpsed in a number of collections. Fake fur has conquered catwalks and the high street over the last year and it has been showcased in almost every conceivable way over the last week, including in stoles, long luxuriant coats, or embellishments on jackets or accessories.

Several brands including Gabriela Hearst, who unveiled her collection on Monday, have used upcycled existing

skins with the Uruguayan designer saying she had used "repurposed vintage mink" in one of her coats. Elsewhere, Spanish brand Loewe presented a dual men's and women's collection, with an air of tribute and farewell to its star designer, Jonathan Anderson.

Anderson, who transformed Loewe into one of the most successful labels in recent years, may be departing for new opportunities within the powerful LVMH luxury group, according to industry observers. Monday's presentation reaffirmed his conceptual style with a homage to artist couple Josef and Anni

Albers, pioneers of modern art in the 20th century. Standout pieces included oversized multicolored wool coats, intricately woven in a patchwork style — a tribute to Anni Albers' (1899–1994) lifelong work in textiles. Meanwhile, young French designer Marine Serre presented a mixed-gender collection inspired by the world of David Lynch. A black leather dress with futuristic shoulders, a sleeveless cinched-waist fur coat, and a black leather corset worn over a sheer red lace bodysuit were among the standout looks. — AFP



This combination of pictures shows models presenting creations by Louis Vuitton for the Womenswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2025/2026 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week in Paris.





An artisan keeps the painted heads of dolls for drying at a toy manufacturing unit, in Channapatna in the Ramanagara district of India's Karnataka state. - AFP photos

# Indian artisans keep traditional toymaking alive



An artisan arranges wooden lacquerware in a tray at a toy manufacturing unit, in Channapatna in the Ramanagara district of India's Karnataka state.

The whirr of machines and smell of carved wood hangs in the air of the Indian toy workshop, a centuries-old art form still in the game despite cheaper plastic alternatives. India's town of Channapatna is famed for its wood and lacquer toys, carved from ivory wood from a local deciduous tree — and dipped in brightly colored dye from natural ingredients including turmeric and indigo. "I felt interest in learning toymaking after I saw people in my neighborhood doing it," said toy maker Rupa, who uses only one name. "I felt that I could also learn the craft."

duced toys, including cheap replicas made in China, has cast a shadow on the growth of the industry in the town — but it has endured.

The town's products saw a surge of interest in 2010 when former US first lady Michelle Obama bought several in the capital, New Delhi, during an official visit to India. Toys were once all hand-carved, but the use of electric lathes and other machinery has helped keep the industry economical. "In the old days, every work demanded artisans," said B. Venkatesh, who runs two small workshops in the town. "But now, with a few at hand, machines can help with different tasks."



An artisan paints wooden lacquerware at a toy manufacturing unit.



A boy collects crafted wooden pieces for lacquerware at a toy manufacturing unit in Channapatna.



An artisan keeps the painted wooden lacquerware to dry at a toy manufacturing unit.

Rocking horses, baby walkers and dancing dolls cut from wood are a common sight in workshops, which employ around 2,500 artisans in the town in the southern state of Karnataka. Channapatna's toymaking industry dates back to the 1700s when Tipu Sultan, ruler of the then kingdom of Mysore, asked artists from Persia to train the locals. Rising competition from mass-pro-

**'Sense of joy'**  
Business is not bad for the 53-year-old, with his factory getting orders for around thousands of from suppliers all around the country during peak months. He says people value the long-lasting quality of the toys. "When we dry the ivory wood properly, and apply lacquer and vegetable dyes, the toys will remain the same for hundreds of years," Venkatesh said. But he warned his trade would "perish in the long run" without more support.

Earlier this month, the government pledged a scheme aimed at making India a global hub for innovative and unique toys that showcased local culture. Venkatesh said authorities needed to go further by opening workshops to help cultivate a new generation of artisans. For those already in the business, their craft is more than a simple matter of livelihood. "Making toys gives me a sense of joy and happiness," Rupa said. — AFP



Artisan Kouser Pasha displays a wooden toy train at his toy factory in Channapatna.



A worker packs wooden toys for export at Venkatesh's toy store in Channapatna.



An artisan makes wooden lacquerware using a machine at a toy manufacturing unit in Channapatna.



An artisan makes wooden toys at a toy manufacturing unit in Channapatna.



A hand-painted Channapatna doll is displayed for sale at artisan Venkatesh's toy store in Channapatna.



Artisan Venkatesh looks on as he sits at his toy store in Channapatna.



Artisans make wooden toys at a toy manufacturing unit.



Duan Ruru, a founding member of the Emei Kung Fu Girls, demonstrating her martial art movements in Emeishan.



Liu Qiao (front) and Duan Ruru, a founding member of the Emei Kung Fu Girls, posing following a practice session in Emeishan. —AFP photos

# KUNG FU GIRL GROUP PUTS FRESH SPIN ON ANCIENT CHINESE ART



Children practicing Emei kung fu in Emeishan.



Duan Ruru (left), a founding member of the Emei Kung Fu Girls and Liu Qiao demonstrating their martial art movements at the Zhongfei temple.



Duan Ruru (left), a founding member of the Emei Kung Fu Girls and Liu Qiao demonstrating their martial art movements.



Women practicing Emei kung fu in Emeishan, China's southwestern Sichuan province.



Duan Ruru (left), a founding member of the Emei Kung Fu Girls and Liu Qiao demonstrating their martial art movements at the Zhongfei temple.

In front of a secluded temple in southwestern China, Duan Ruru skillfully executes a series of chops and strikes, practicing kung fu techniques she has spent a decade mastering. Chinese martial arts have long been considered a male-dominated sphere, but a cohort of Generation Z women like Duan is challenging that assumption and generating publicity for their particular school of kung fu. "Since I was little, I've had a love for martial arts... I thought that girls learning martial arts was super swaggy," Duan, 23, said.

The ancient Emei school where she trains in the mountains of Sichuan is thought to have historically welcomed a higher proportion of women and girls. But it has not achieved the same level of public fame as other kung fu schools, such as Shaolin. That is starting to change thanks in part to Duan's nine-woman troupe, Emei Kung Fu Girls, which meshes deft swordwork with social media savvy to help put the sect back on the map.

In slick videos, the troupe performs everything from combat scenes to flips in front of the Louvre in Paris, often backed by booming hip-hop beats. They also show off their moves alongside branded beverages or cars, though the group declined to comment on whether they make money from advertising. Since their debut last April, they have amassed more than 23 million views and over a million followers on Douyin, China's version of TikTok. The artform "has a place in history... so I think it's something worth spreading", Duan told AFP.

### Wider audience

Known across China for its misty peaks, Emeishan in Sichuan province has tried in recent years to cash in on its cultural bounty -- with mixed results. Local martial arts sects have their origins in ancient Taoist philosophy and evolved into a form of defense during China's frequent wars. The importance of the schools shrank as weapons modernized, and the ruling Communist Party later suppressed what it viewed as potential hotbeds of deviant thought. But those policies have since relaxed, and in 2008 Beijing listed Emei martial arts as intangible cultural heritage, opening up funds to develop the craft.

Progress has been uneven, with city officials admitting in 2023 that the discipline suffered from "a lack of recognition among tourists, and dissemination is not high". Kung fu master Wang Chao, a national-level representative of Emei martial arts, said the sect still re-



Ren Nianjie, who plans to study martial arts at university, demonstrating kung fu movements in Emeishan, China's southwestern Sichuan province.



Duan Ruru (left), a founding member of the Emei Kung Fu Girls and Liu Qiao posing at the Zhongfei temple in Emeishan, China's southwestern Sichuan province.



Duan Ruru (left), a founding member of the Emei Kung Fu Girls and Liu Qiao demonstrating their martial art movements in Emeishan, China's southwestern Sichuan province.

lies heavily on government money. But the Kung Fu Girls' videos have been "very good" at bringing the local art to a wider audience, he told AFP. "Publicity for Emei martial arts is much more powerful now," he said.

### Confidence boost

Founding member Duan, who has been training since she was 12 years old, said her generation "loves being independent and free-spirited". Some Emei students have been inspired to keep pursuing martial arts, including Ren Nianjie, who wants to study it at university. "I want to be an athlete... to win glory for the country," the 17-year-old told AFP after whirling a wooden staff. The popular image of Emei's women fighters comes largely from best-selling novels by Hong Kong author Louis Cha, who wrote under the pen name Jin Yong. In reality, boys still

outnumber girls -- though perhaps not as heavily as in other sects.

On a Friday evening in February, seven girls were present among a class of 17 primary school students at a nearby martial arts academy. Parent Zhu Haiyan, 41, said her daughter Guoguo had grown more assured since starting her course a year ago.

"When girls have self-confidence, they can be less timid when they go out," she said as Guoguo practiced on a mat a few meters (yards) away. Duan, from Kung Fu Girls, said she hoped the group would inspire more young girls to take up martial arts. "They might see me training and think it's super attractive and cool, and be drawn to learn it themselves," she said. —AFP



People visiting the Emei kung fu practice center at the Dafo Temple.

## Sports

# Kuwait's Mariam Dhiab shines at Special Olympics Winter Games

## Mariam brings a wealth of sporting achievements to Winter Games

**TURIN:** Amid the bustling atmosphere of the ice stadium in Pragliato, Turin, Kuwaiti athlete Mariam Dhiab's confident smile stands out as she takes part in the 12th Special Olympics World Winter Games (Turin 2025). Displaying remarkable determination despite the challenges posed by the snowy terrain, Mariam, a Kuwaiti athlete with Down Syndrome, embarks on her first experience in the Cross Country on Ice competition. Her participation follows intensive training camps in Dubai and Cairo, preparing her for fierce competition against 1,500 athletes from 100 countries.

Mariam brings a wealth of sporting achievements to the Winter Games. She previously competed in the Special Olympics Summer Games in Berlin (2023), where she held the prestigious role of official spokesperson for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. During her tenure, she played a crucial role in motivating fellow Kuwaiti athletes, contributing to the national delegation's success in securing 21 medals. Currently, Mariam serves as the Special Olympics Health Ambassador for the MENA region and is an active member of the Ambition Club for Intellectual Disabilities, demonstrating both athletic and administrative prowess.

Beyond her advocacy and leadership roles, Mariam has excelled in multiple sports, including athletics, equestrianism, swimming, and taekwondo. Speaking to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Tuesday, she reflected on her journey, aspirations, and her experience at Turin 2025. "I began my sports career in schools affiliated with the Public Authority for the

Disabled before joining the Kuwaiti Ambition Club in 2018," Mariam said. That same year marked her first international competition at the Jeddah Marathon, where she secured second place among 700 competitors. She later participated in the Down Syndrome World Championships in the Czech Republic, competing in the 100-meter run, shot put, and 100-meter walk events.

Mariam emphasized the profound impact of her athletic experiences, stating that each competition has strengthened her resolve to break barriers and achieve new milestones. Reflecting on her five-year tenure as the official MENA spokesperson for Special Olympics International, she highlighted how the role honed her ability to inspire fellow athletes. "I gained valuable experience in motivating my peers to work hard and set new sports records," she said.

Her advocacy extends beyond the field of competition. Mariam has attended numerous workshops, events, and meetings focused on the well-being of individuals with intellectual disabilities, covering aspects such as health, psychology, and physical fitness. She credited her success to the unwavering support of her family, the Kuwait Special Olympics, the Ambition Sports Club, and various official entities in Kuwait.

Stressing the importance of social inclusion, Mariam urged greater efforts to integrate individuals with intellectual disabilities into society. "It is vital to empower them and provide opportunities to achieve their goals," she said. Looking ahead, Mariam and her fellow Kuwaiti athletes, Hajar Al-Rashidi and Abdullah Al-Ali, are determined to leave their mark on the Special Olympics Winter Games in Turin. Despite the challenges posed by freezing temperatures and tough competition, they remain committed to showcasing the potential of athletes with intellectual disabilities on the global stage.



Champion Mariam Dhiab, a member of the Kuwaiti Special Olympics.

dullah Al-Ali, are determined to leave their mark on the Special Olympics Winter Games in Turin. Despite the challenges posed by freezing temperatures and tough competition, they remain committed to showcasing the potential of athletes with intellectual disabilities on the global stage.

Mariam concluded with two heartfelt messages. To parents, she said, "Support your children and encourage them to pursue their dreams and achieve excellence in all fields." To her fellow athletes and

talented individuals, she advised perseverance and self-confidence, urging them to adopt the Special Olympics motto: "Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." Through her journey, Mariam Dhiab exemplifies that true disability lies not in physical or intellectual challenges, but in the barriers of doubt, inaction, and lack of ambition. Her inspiring story serves as a testament to the power of determination, belief, and self-motivation in achieving greatness. - KUNA

## Kuwait beat UAE 4-1 in friendly futsal match

**DUBAI:** Kuwait Futsal team managed a 4-1 win against the UAE in a friendly match held on Monday in Dubai as part of the preparations for the upcoming continental events.

Saleh Al-Fadhel opened the score followed by Ahmad Al-Awadi who managed to score twice and Mohammad Al-Hazem scored the fourth, while only one goal was conceded. Both sides performed very well throughout the match but Al-Azraq come out on top refusing the UAE team from scoring any additional goals. This match comes as part of the Kuwaiti team's preparation for the upcoming continental competition where they will be matching up with other teams in order to better their physical and technical preparedness. — KUNA

## Bracewell leads depleted NZ in Pakistan T20 game

**WELLINGTON:** Michael Bracewell will captain New Zealand for the first time on home soil when they meet Pakistan in a five-game T20 series, leading a squad named Tuesday missing several key players because of the IPL. Bracewell starred as the Black Caps reached the final of the Champions Trophy and is one of seven players from that one-day team selected for the T20s. But a host of top names are not available due to Indian Premier League commitments, including regular skipper Mitchell Santner, along with Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson and Glenn Phillips. Kane Williamson also made himself unavailable for the series, which gets under way on Sunday in Christchurch. "It's a great honour and a real privilege to captain your country," said Bracewell, who led the side on their white-ball tour of Pakistan last year but has yet to take the reins at home. "Mitch Santner's done a great job since taking over as white-ball captain and I'll really just be trying to build on his good work and create an enjoyable environment for the guys to perform in. "Pakistan are always a dangerous short-form side with lots of power and pace and we know they'll be hurting after an early exit in the Champions Trophy," he added.—AFP

## N Korea taekwondo supremo that Austria can't kick

**VIENNA:** It is easy to miss the headquarters of the International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF), which is run by a North Korean from a modest house on the outskirts of Vienna, a city with a long reputation as a nest of spies. The oldest of the martial art's global bodies, it claims more than 100,000 members in "at least 100 countries". But court documents seen by AFP show that for four years Austria has been trying to kick out Ri Yong Son, who it suspects of breaking United Nations sanctions by funneling foreign currency to Pyongyang.

In a rare interview, an ITF official denied "any wrongdoing", telling AFP the body had "no contact with the North Korean state". Vienna—home to several international organizations including the Atomic Energy Agency, which has been blocked from inspecting North Korea's nuclear arsenal—has been trying to discreetly revoke Ri's work permit since March 2020, claiming he "could harm Austria's reputation". But judges were not convinced that Ri was involved in hidden financing, according to a court decision from



BELLEGARDE: Soudal Quick-Step's Belgian rider Tim Merlier (C) wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the 2nd stage of the Paris-Nice cycling race, 183.9 km between Montesson and Bellegarde. — AFP

## Speed king Tim Merlier doubles up at Paris-Nice

**PARIS:** Belgian Tim Merlier burnished his reputation as the man to beat in sprint finishes as he shot to a second straight Paris-Nice stage win on Monday. The Soudal Quick-Step rider had to overcome being trapped behind a crash 20km to go to get back in touch with the lead peloton, where he faced reduced competition at a finish line tailor-made to test the fast men. The 32-year-old Merlier also extended his overall lead in the standings after two stages of the race conceived as a mini Tour de France. "That's the first time I have won a stage when I was leading the standings," said Merlier, who claims to always sleep poorly after a stage win.

"It's a very special feeling." Two-time Tour de France winner Jonas Vingegaard finished safely in the pack again and is 20 seconds adrift of Merlier in the rankings due to win time bonuses. Stage two of eight was a flat 183.9km run from Montesson, just 20km west of Paris,

July seen by AFP, hearing that he earns a relatively modest 5,256 euros (\$5,702) a month. The ITF official, who talked to AFP in a Vienna cafe on condition of anonymity, insisted that "there is no circumvention of United Nations sanctions". He said it simply organized competitions and sent out taekwondo master certificates to teachers who follow the North Korean style.

### 'Agents'

But dissident Jihyun Park—who speaks out against Pyongyang after escaping to the UK—said the ITF president "is not an athlete". "He, his wife, and his son are agents" who help funnel funds to Pyongyang, she told AFP. Austria has not granted a visa to another North Korean who was due to join the Vienna office while Ri remains in Vienna, according to the ITF.

The federation was founded in 1966 by South Korean general Choi Hong-Hi, who later defected to the North. But it is not recognized by the International Olympic Committee, which instead chose its upstart South Korean rival World Taekwondo (WT). Park said it was all the more "urgent" for Austria to force the ITF out as North Korea deepens its cooperation with Moscow. Pyongyang has been sending thousands of troops to fight Kyiv, according to western intelligence agencies, under a defence accord between the two countries that came into effect in December, as well as supplying Moscow with ammunition.—AFP

to Bellegarde with the route heading down to the Loire Valley on Tuesday.

The crash split the peloton and ended the race for Luke Durbridge and Gorka Sorrañain. It also allowed Jonas Abrahamson to continue his slog out front on an escape for longer than expected, as he was caught just 5km from the line and took the day's combativity award.

Stuck behind the crash were some overall contenders such as Mattias Skjelmose (Lidl-Trek), Joao Almeida of UAE Team Emirates and Ben O'Connor of Jayco-Alula. Tuesday's stage, which begins at the Magny-Cours motor racing circuit, is a 28.4km team time trial using the new format where all team riders are given the same time as the fastest amongst them with no need to wait for their teammates over the closing section.

This is to encourage the top riders to attack and will be used at the Tour de France's opening stage in Barcelona in 2026. The following two stages on this Paris-Nice feature rolling hills as the race forges south and culminates with a pair of mountain stages in the Riviera backcountry this weekend. The action should go down to the wire with a chase up the fabled slopes of the Col d'Eze, offering a sweeping view of the French Riviera, before the peloton race full on to the denouement on Nice's Promenade des Anglais.—AFP



VIENNA: The information sign of the headquarters of the International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) showing the 22nd ITF Taekwon-Do World Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan in August 2023 is pictured on the outskirts of Vienna, Austria. — AFP

## Jokic dominates Thunder as Nuggets bounce back

**LOS ANGELES:** Nikola Jokic delivered a dominant 35-point performance as the Denver Nuggets bounced back to topple the Western Conference-leading Oklahoma City Thunder 140-127 in the NBA on Monday. Jokic had been forced to take a back seat to Thunder star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander in an emphatic 127-103 Denver loss to Oklahoma City on Sunday in the first game of back-to-back meetings between the two teams. But three-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic seized control of Monday's second instalment to snap Oklahoma City's seven-game unbeaten streak with a clinical victory. Denver's balanced offense proved too much for the Thunder, with six players finishing in double figures led by Jokic. Jamal Murray backed Jokic with 34 points as the Nuggets outscored Oklahoma City 73-54 in the second half, inflicting the heaviest points total conceded by the Thunder this season.

"We came out ready to play," Murray said afterwards. "We knew we were going to have to play 48 minutes of defense, so we wanted to have the right mindset. "It's always tough to play here—they've got a great crowd and a great team." But I've got the best player in the world on my team," Murray added, referring to Jokic. Luguentz Dort led the Thunder scorers with 26 points while Gilgeous-Alexander finished on 25. Oklahoma City remain in first place in the Western Conference on 53-12, while Denver moved up to second at 42-23, 11 games back from the leaders.

### Lakers lose, Curry on brink

Elsewhere Monday, the Los Angeles Lakers made a losing start to life without LeBron James, crashing to a 111-108 defeat against the lowly-ranked Brooklyn Nets in New York. James, who limped out of Saturday's defeat to Boston with a groin problem and faces up to two weeks on the injured list, watched from the sidelines as the Nets grabbed a deserved victory at the Barclays Center. The Lakers looked ready to put defeat to the Celtics behind them after opening up a 15-point lead early in the second quarter after outscoring Brooklyn 28-16 in the first. But Brooklyn stormed back to outscore Los Angeles 32-19 in the second to take a slender 48-47 advantage into half-time and held off the Lakers in the fourth to close out only their 22nd win of the season.

Noah Clowney led Brooklyn's scoring with 19 points from the bench, with Cameron Johnson and Keon Johnson both posting 18 points apiece. Gabe Vincent topscored for the Lakers with 24 points, with Luka Doncic posting a triple double of 22 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists. In San Francisco, the Golden State Warriors romped to their fifth straight victory to maintain their recent resurgence with a 130-120 win over the Portland Trail Blazers. The win left Warriors star Stephen Curry just two three-pointers shy of becoming the first player in NBA history to amass 4,000 triples. The 36-year-old four-time NBA champion—already the runaway all-time leader for threes—went into the game seven adrift of the 4,000 mark.

However after a 24-point contribution, Curry will now look to pass the milestone in Thursday's home game against the Sacramento Kings. In Boston, meanwhile, the Celtics extended their unbeaten streak to five games after holding off a spirited late rally from the Utah Jazz to win 114-108 at the TD Garden.

The Celtics looked to be cruising after opening up a 24-point lead late in the third quarter. Utah caught fire in the fourth quarter however, flirting with a miraculous comeback to pour in 39 points to the Celtics' 24. Brice Sensabaugh led the late charge for Utah with 17 fourth quarter points in a rally that came up just short.

Sam Hauser topped the Boston scoring with 33 points, with Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla electing to give Jayson Tatum a night off. In Chicago, Australian international Josh Giddey and Coby White scored 29 points each as the struggling Bulls dismantled the Indiana Pacers 121-103. The Atlanta Hawks kept up their unlikely pursuit of an automatic playoff slot with a 132-123 defeat of the Philadelphia 76ers.—AFP

## Sports

# Newcastle sink West Ham 1-0 to boost top four bid

## Top four berth will guarantee Newcastle return to the Champions League

**LONDON:** Newcastle reignited their bid to qualify for the Champions League as Bruno Guimaraes sealed a controversial 1-0 win at West Ham on Monday. Brazil midfielder Guimaraes struck in the second half as West Ham's claims for a foul in the build-up were ignored.

Eddie Howe's side are up to sixth place in the Premier League, level on points with fifth-placed Manchester City and two points behind fourth-placed Chelsea. A top four berth will guarantee Newcastle return to the Champions League after missing out this season.

Even finishing fifth could be enough to ensure qualification for Europe's elite club competition depending on the results of the remaining English clubs in continental action. After losing three of their last four matches, the Magpies' restorative victory was perfectly timed ahead of their second League Cup final appearance in three seasons.

Newcastle, beaten by Manchester United in the League Cup showpiece in 2023, face Premier League leaders Liverpool in the final at Wembley on Sunday. The Tyneside club are aiming to win their first major trophy since the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup and their first domestic prize since the 1955 FA Cup.

"One of our best wins of the season, not in terms of performance but desire and heart," Howe said. "I felt we were in need of a win to go into the final with a real boost. It will do us the world of good. Also for our league table position today was vital."

West Ham boss Graham Potter added: "We didn't do enough to win the game but we could have got something out of it." "The goal was disappointing, we felt there was a push on Max (Kilman). It's two hands

on the back. You can see from Isak's non celebration he thinks it's a push. Clear for us but I'm not VAR."

### Wembley audition

West Ham were lifted by the pre-match appearance of Michail Antonio on his first visit to the London Stadium since he was injured in a serious car crash in December. The 34-year-old striker, still recovering from the broken leg he sustained in the accident, was introduced to loud cheers from the crowd before kick-off.

Potter's men should have been ahead after just 43 seconds as they squandered the kind of chance Antonio feasts on. Mohammed Kudus's cross was missed by Newcastle defender Tino Livramento and Tomas Soucek blazed wildly over from six yards.

Despite the absence of suspended forward Anthony Gordon and injured defenders Lewis Hall and Sven Botman, Newcastle gradually found their rhythm. Auditioning to stand in for the banned Gordon at Wembley, Newcastle winger Harvey Barnes tried to stake his claim with a powerful effort that Alphonse Areola did well to keep out.

Barnes was denied again moments later when Kieran Trippier's corner was flicked on by Dan Burn to the forward, whose header was tipped away by Areola. Areola made a superb save to stop Max Kilman's miscued clearance looping into the net after the West Ham defender attempted to deal with Jacob Murphy's cross.

But Areola's heroics were in vain as Newcastle took the lead in the 63rd minute. Barnes' initial cross was blocked but he kept his composure to clip the ball into the West Ham area, where Guimaraes



**LONDON:** Newcastle United's English goalkeeper #22 Nick Pope punches the ball clear in the final minutes of the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Newcastle United at the London Stadium. — AFP

stretched to stab home from close-range.

West Ham claimed Alexander Isak pushed Kilman during the cross, but VAR did not review the incident.

The Hammers' frustration reached a crescendo as Newcastle held firm after Bowen appealed in vain for a penalty following Guimaraes's challenge. — AFP

## Atletico 'still alive' in battle against Real and history

**MADRID:** Atletico Madrid stare down both bitter city rivals Real Madrid and the weight of history as they aim to reach the Champions League quarter-finals on Wednesday. Los Blancos are the record 15-time champions, the current holders, and lead 2-1 Atletico in the last 16 tie as well as seemingly holding a decades-long jinx on Atletico.

The teams have been paired on five occasions in the history of the competition and Real Madrid have emerged triumphant every time. "History exists, and Madrid's history in the Champions League is extraordinary," admitted Atletico coach Diego Simeone before the first leg, with his side still waiting for a first European Cup.

Most painful for Atletico were the 2014 and 2016 final defeats in Lisbon and Milan respectively. Simeone's side led in stoppage time in the former, but Sergio Ramos's 93rd minute header forced extra-time, with Madrid running out 4-1 winners.

Two years later the final went all the way to penalties but Atletico defender Juanfran missed his spot-kick, allowing Cristiano Ronaldo to convert his and mark up another Madrid triumph. It was their third defeat at the last hurdle, after losing against Bayern Munich in the 1974 final, with then-president Vicente Calderon labelling his club "el pupas" - the cursed one.

Never does that feel more accurate than when Simeone's side face Real Madrid in Europe. In the 2017 semi-finals Atletico lost 3-0 at the Santiago Bernabeu in the first leg, but despite taking a two-goal lead in the return, came up short when Isco pulled one back for Madrid.

In 2015 it took an 88th minute strike in the second leg by Madrid striker Javier Hernandez to divide the sides in a tight contest. Madrid's upper hand was first placed as far back as 1959, when they beat Atletico 2-1 in a semi-final play-off, after the home and away ties left the teams level. However Atletico's motto is "courage and heart" and with nearly 70,000 fans behind them at their Metropolitan stadium, they will believe they can write a new chapter into the history books.

### 'Still alive'

This will be the first Champions League clash against Real Madrid at Atletico's new home, with their 2017 final

## Nathan MacKinnon hits 1,000 points in Avalanche's win

**DENVER:** Nathan MacKinnon had two assists to reach 1,000 points for his career and the Colorado Avalanche scored twice early in the third period to beat the Chicago Blackhawks 3-0 on Monday in Denver. Scott Wedgewood made 20 saves for his second shutout of the season and the eighth of his career as the Avalanche completed a 6-0-0 homestand. Martin Necas, Artturi Lehkonen and Joel Kiviranta scored. Spencer Knight turned away 18 shots and 19-year-old defenseman Artyom Levshunov made his NHL debut for Chicago.

### Senators 2, Red Wings 1

Linus Ullmark made 48 saves and Dylan Cozens' power-play goal with 5:04 remaining broke a tie to give host Ottawa a win over Detroit. David Perron also scored

## Ronaldo spot kick helps Al Nassr into AFC last eight

**RIYADH:** A Cristiano Ronaldo penalty and a double from Jhon Duran fired Al Nassr into the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League Elite on Monday, with a 3-0 second leg win over Esteghlal.



**MADRID:** (FILES) Real Madrid's French forward #09 Kylian Mbappe (L) vies for the ball with Atletico Madrid's Uruguayan defender #02 Jose Gimenez during the UEFA Champions League Round of 16 first leg football match between Real Madrid CF and Club Atletico de Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

four battle their last ever European game at their beloved Vicente Calderon stadium. Simeone said the first leg was "very tactical" for a Madrid derby, with both sides cautious in the second half after Brahim Diaz put Madrid 2-1 ahead in the 55th minute.

Rodrygo Goes gave the hosts the lead but Julian Alvarez's fine strike levelled for Atletico in the first half. Only one yellow card was shown, to Diaz for jumping into the crowd after scoring what proved the winner.

However that is unlikely to be repeated in the all-or-nothing second leg, with Atletico fans usually whipped into a frenzy by Simeone on the sidelines. "If it was difficult tonight, imagine what it will be like next Wednesday," said Carlo Ancelotti last week, fully aware of the pressure from the stands his side will face.

Simeone's team were cautious at the Bernabeu despite trailing because they believed that with a tight scoreline at the half-way point, they can capitalise at home. They did the same last season against Inter Milan

for the Senators, who have won four of their last five games. Dylan Larkin provided the lone goal for the Red Wings. Six straight losses have pushed Detroit outside of the Eastern Conference playoff picture. Cam Talbot stopped 21 shots in the defeat.

### Sabres 3, Oilers 2

Tage Thompson scored twice as Buffalo ended its six-game losing streak with a victory over visiting Edmonton. Alex Tuch also tallied for Buffalo, and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 32 saves in the victory that snapped an 0-5-1 skid. Evan Bouchard and Darnell Nurse scored for the Oilers, both off assists from Leon Draisaitl, who extended his point streak to a career-best 15 games. Stuart Skinner stopped 20 shots. Edmonton had won three of its previous four games.

### Maple Leafs 4, Utah Hockey Club 3 (SO)

Mitch Marner scored the shootout winner as Toronto edged Utah in Salt Lake City. William Nylander, Calle Jankrok and Simon Benoit scored in regulation for Toronto, which squandered a 3-0 lead but still snapped a three-game losing streak (0-2-1). Joseph Woll made 29 saves for the Leafs, who improved to 9-3-1 over the past

Ronaldo, the Al Nassr captain, was reportedly rested for last week's goalless draw in the first leg in Iran, however returned to lead the side at Al Awwal Park. Ronaldo scored from the spot midway through the first half.

Al Nassr, one of three Saudi Arabian sides to dominate the west region's group stage, needed only nine minutes to take the lead in Riyadh. Duran, a winter signing from English Premier League side Aston Villa, picked up a loose ball on the right edge of the Esteghlal penalty area and floated a superb chip over goalkeeper Hossein Hosseini. It marked the striker's first goal in the competition.

at the same stage, losing in Italy but winning the return on penalties at home.

"Our fans push us, they give us energy, they make putting in the effort not difficult, and we need them," said Simeone. "We are still alive and we may have a good night on Wednesday." Star Madrid forwards Vinicius Junior and Kylian Mbappe were kept extremely quiet in the first leg but both scored as they beat Rayo Vallecano on Sunday in La Liga to pull level with leaders Barcelona.

Ancelotti was able to take off some star names including Mbappe, Rodrygo and Jude Bellingham, who is back from suspension and set to start for Madrid. Atletico endured a more painful weekend with two late goals consigning them to a 2-1 defeat at Getafe, but Simeone said his team would recover in time to face Madrid.

"The players feel bad because we played a bad match," admitted the Argentine. "We have to try to be strong, united, with the hope of improving our game, and we can't imagine anything else." — AFP



**DENVER:** (FILES) Nathan MacKinnon #29 of the Colorado Avalanche skates past Rickard Rakell #67 of the Pittsburgh Penguins in the first period at Ball Arena in Denver, Colorado. — AFP

13 games and 19-11-2 on the road this season. Michael Carcone, Nick Schmaltz and Barrett Hayton responded for Utah, which has dropped back-to-back games, both of which went beyond regulation. Karel Vejmelka stopped 23 shots in the loss. — Reuters

Al Nassr doubled their advantage on 27 minutes after Sadio Mane, a UEFA Champions League winner with Liverpool, drew a foul from rival midfielder Zobeir Niknafs inside the Esteghlal box. Ronaldo casually stroked the spot-kick into the center of the net to take his tally in this year's Champions League Elite to seven goals in six appearances. The Portuguese star is the leading scorer in this season's Saudi Pro League, with 18 goals. Esteghlal's night got even worse just before half-time when they were reduced to 10 men when Mehran Ahmadi inadvertently caught Al Nassr defender Mohammed Al Fatil with a stray arm in the face while trying to shield the ball. — AFP

## Dortmund CL hopes in balance ahead of Lille return

**LILLE:** Borussia Dortmund may be relying on continued progress in the Champions League to keep their season alive, but they head to France for the return leg of their last-16 tie against Lille with work to do after a 1-1 draw last week.

Karim Adeyemi's first-half goal had given Dortmund the lead at home in the first leg, only for Hakan Haraldsson to fire in the equaliser which perhaps gives Lille the edge as the teams meet again at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy.

Dortmund are enduring a poor domestic campaign and a 1-0 home defeat against Augsburg at the weekend left them languishing in 10th place in the Bundesliga, seven points adrift of the top four and four points away from any European qualifying spot for next season.

There had been encouraging signs after Niko Kovac was appointed at the end of January to replace the sacked Nuri Sahin, with the new coach leading Dortmund past Portuguese champions Sporting in the play-off round.

But they have lost three of their last five matches in the Bundesliga, and the Augsburg setback was hardly ideal preparation for the visit to northern France. Lille have already beaten Real Madrid at home and put six goals past Feyenoord there as they exceeded expectations in the league phase. The Ligue 1 side are now dreaming of reaching the quarter-finals of Europe's elite club competition for the first time.

### Finding positives

For Dortmund, meanwhile, an exit at this stage would be a huge backwards step after last year's run to the final, which they lost to Madrid at Wembley. "I don't want to paint a bleak picture because of this match," Kovac said immediately following the loss to Augsburg.

"We played well in the previous two Bundesliga games and in the first half against Lille, so that gives me hope. "A coach needs to try to find positives, even in defeat," added Kovac, who returns to France for the first time since being sacked by Monaco in early 2022.

Dortmund, who beat PSG 1-0 in the semi-finals on their last visit to France last season, are without Swedish full-back Daniel Svensson after he came off injured late in the first leg. They will look to Serhou Guirassy to add to the 10 goals he has scored in this season's Champions League, as the striker once again comes up against the club he represented in the 2015/16 campaign. "I feel like we have the advantage now," Lille's Icelandic international Haraldsson said after the first leg. Lille have lost just twice in 20 games in front of their own fans this season, although that does not include a French Cup loss on penalties to second-tier Dunkerque.

This tie could also go all the way to penalties if there is no winner at the end of 90 minutes or extra time—Lille were also knocked out of the Europa Conference League on penalties last season by Aston Villa in the quarter-finals.

Lille's previous two appearances at this stage of the Champions League ended in elimination, against Manchester United in 2007 and Chelsea in 2022. Whoever emerges victorious on Wednesday will advance to a quarter-final against either Barcelona or Benfica. — AFP

## Manchester United to build new 100,000-seat stadium

**LONDON:** Manchester United on Tuesday announced plans to build a new 100,000-capacity stadium close to their historic Old Trafford stadium that co-owner Jim Ratcliffe said would be the "world's greatest" football ground. The momentous decision by the Premier League club comes after an extensive consultation process around whether to develop their creaking current ground or move, in conjunction with the Old Trafford Regeneration Task Force.

United have now confirmed their "intention to pursue a new 100,000-seater stadium as the centrepiece of the regeneration of the Old Trafford area". The club hopes the new stadium, which will cost a reported £2 billion (\$2.6 billion) can be finished in five years, though the start date remains uncertain. Scaled models and conceptual images for how the new stadium and surrounding area could look like were revealed on Tuesday at the London headquarters of architects Foster + Partners, appointed in September to design the stadium district.

"Today marks the start of an incredibly exciting journey to the delivery of what will be the world's greatest football stadium, at the centre of a regenerated Old Trafford," Ratcliffe said in a club statement. "Our current stadium has served us brilliantly for the past 115 years, but it has fallen behind the best arenas in world sport."

United said the stadium and a wider regeneration project had the potential to deliver an additional £7.3 billion per year to the UK economy, including the possible creation of 92,000 new jobs. "United is the world's favorite football club and the biggest in my opinion and it deserves a stadium befitting of its stature," Ratcliffe said in London on Tuesday. "It's more challenging to build a stadium of 100,000 but I think the UK needs a stadium of that kind of presence and the north of England I think is the best place to build it."

### Ferguson backing

The move to a new ground has been backed by former United boss Alex Ferguson, who won 13 Premier League



**LONDON:** Manchester United announced plans on March 11, 2025 to build a new 100,000-capacity stadium that co-owner Jim Ratcliffe said would be the "world's greatest" football ground. - AFP photos

titles during his reign of more than 26 years. "Manchester United should always strive for the best in everything it does, on and off the pitch, and that includes the stadium we play in," Ferguson said.

"Old Trafford holds so many special memories for me personally, but we must be brave and seize this opportunity to build a new home, fit for the future, where new history can be made." United, struggling on and off the pitch, are around £1 billion in debt and have yet to say how they will pay for the new stadium.

Regarding the financing of the project, chief executive Omar Berrada said Tuesday: "It's a very attractive in-

vestment opportunity so we're quite confident we'll find a way to finance the stadium." Old Trafford, England's biggest club ground with a capacity of around 74,000, has been United's home since 1910 but criticism of the stadium has grown in recent years, with issues including leaks from the roof.

Norman Foster has designed some of the world's most iconic buildings, including the HSBC Building in Hong Kong, London's "Gherkin" skyscraper and the reconstructed Reichstag in Berlin. Foster said the stadium would feature an umbrella design sheltering a public plaza that is "twice the size of Trafalgar Square" in London.

The design will feature three masts described as "Trident", which the architects say will be 200 metres high and visible from 40 kilometres (25 miles) away. The Manchester United Supporters' Trust said it was vital that fans were consulted throughout the process.

The group said in a statement: "Will it drive up ticket prices and force out local fans? Will it harm the atmosphere, which is consistently fans' top priority in the ground? Will it add to the debt burden which has held back the club for the last two decades? Will it lead to reduced investment in the playing side at a time when it is so badly needed?" — AFP

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