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Amir hosts Jordanian Crown Prince for key talks



HH the Amir receives Crown Prince of Jordan.

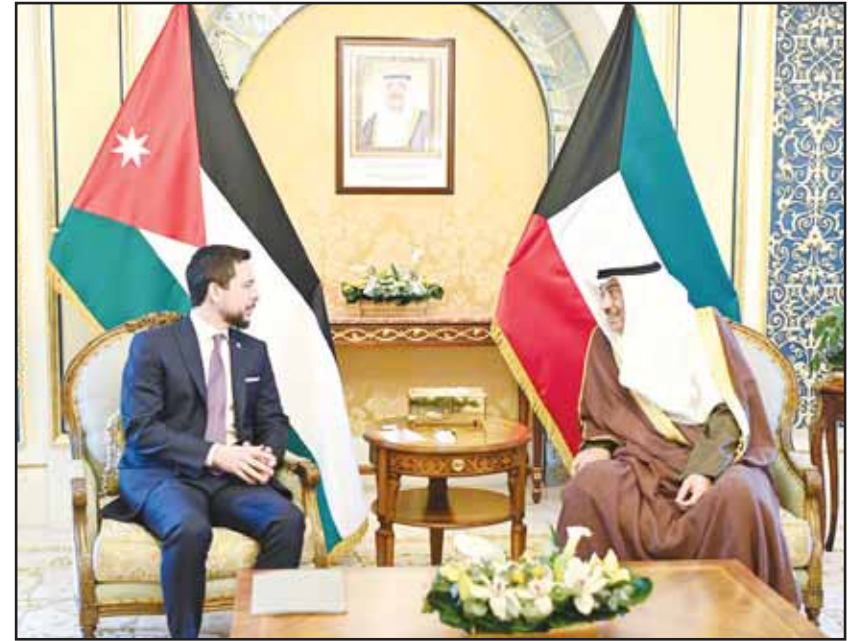
Amiri Diwan photo

Kuwait and Jordan deepen ties

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Sunday at Bayan Palace, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and accompanying delegation, on occasion of official visit.

The Jordanian Crown Prince conveyed the greetings of King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein and his wishes of good health to His Highness the Amir and to the people of Kuwait further progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Amir, on his part, relayed his greetings to King Abdullah II and wished him good health and wellbeing and for the people of Jordan further development under his wise leadership.



HH the Crown Prince receives Crown Prince of Jordan.

Crown Prince Diwan photo

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Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

We thanked Erdogan, and now we want to thank Putin for handing over Assad

YESTERDAY, we expressed our gratitude to Türkiye for its support of the Syrian revolution in overthrowing the regime.

The Islamic world is still shocked by the extent of the regime's brutality against its own people. The horrifying scenes emerging from prisons and detention centers, along with the ongoing torture, are unjustifiable. These actions were nothing less than a slow genocide. The number of victims in these prisons continues to rise, and many mass graves containing the bodies of prisoners remain undiscovered to this day.

The story of Syria, spanning over half a century, cannot be easily summarized in a few lines or even a few books. It is a long history of brutality and corruption, orchestrated by the Baath Party machine and a regime that exports violence with the help of unscrupulous sectarian merchants.

These people did not merely suppress the citizens' dreams or torture them based on mere suspicion, but they also indulged in bloodshed and theft to satisfy their instincts. The ruthless regime stole the livelihoods of its people, who were forced into silence and submission.

Throughout the past decades, especially in the last 25 years, there have been gangs who were specialized in exploiting the ef-

forts of others, whether Syrians, Gulf citizens, or Arabs.

Recently, some Syrian media accounts published the names of some individuals associated with these gangs. We have many documents that prove the guilt of some of these individuals, who stole the properties and money of innocent people, claiming they were supported by the Syrian regime.

Therefore, the scale of accountability must be thorough and precise, ensuring that no grudges are left unresolved either among Syrians, Arabs, or Gulf citizens. The new Syria must be built on justice and tolerance.

The forces of the revolution, the National Coalition, and the new administration must work together to restore rights and return properties to their rightful owners. This will help restore stability for Syrians and remove the lingering resentment sown by the old regime.

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Email: ahmed@aljarallah.com

Follow me on:

ahmedaljarallah@gmail.com

Cold spell extends through Tuesday

Chilly winds, dust blanket Kuwait



Visibility was reduced on Sunday as cold winds and dust swept across Kuwait, challenging motorists navigating the roads.

Photo by Rezk Tawfiq

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15, (Agencies): Several primary schools canceled their morning assemblies Sunday due to a dust wave and a noticeable drop in temperatures, keeping in mind the health and safety of students, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Educational sources confirmed that this decision aligns with prior recommendations from the Ministry of Education, which urged schools to consider weather conditions and protect students from exposure to dust and cold, particularly during early morning hours.

Instead of gathering outdoors, students were directed to head straight to their classrooms. School administrations also reminded parents to monitor weather updates and ensure children are dressed in suitable winter clothing.

The initiative underscores the commitment to student safety as a paramount concern.

Meanwhile, though cold weather and dust was forecasted to continue throughout the day, horizontal view was to slightly improve in Kuwait in the evening, said Kuwait Meteorological Center on Sunday.

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PACI deletes addresses of 255 individuals

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) announced in the official gazette Kuwait Al-Yaum that the residential addresses of 255 individuals have been deleted either based on the owner's declaration or due to the de-

molition of the building, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

PACI stated that these individuals must visit the authority's office to register their new addresses, after providing the necessary supporting documents, within 30 days

from the date of publication in the official gazette. Failure to do so will result in penalties stipulated in article 33 of law No. 32/1982, which includes a fine of up to KD 100, multiplied by the number of individuals involved.

Kuwait's economic performance remains heavily dependent on oil market volatility

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Al-Shall's weekly report, referencing the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) December analysis, described Kuwait's economic performance as nearly entirely reliant on the oil market, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The IMF highlighted that Kuwait experienced 5.9 percent economic growth in 2022 due to the surge in oil prices driven by the Russia-Ukraine war.

However, this momentum faltered in 2023, with the economy contracting by -3.6 percent, the only Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) country to record negative growth in 2023 (-3.6 percent) and 2024 (-2.8 percent).

The report attributed the decline to the softening of oil prices and production levels, noting the failure of OPEC+ to restore lost production and the postponement of adjustments further exacerbated the situation.

Consequently, the IMF downgraded its 2025 growth forecast for Kuwait from 3.3 percent to 2.6 percent.

Despite significant public spending and ongoing major projects, the economy has not diversified or generated sustainable job opportunities for citizens.

The report criticized the lack of reform, with 90 percent of the national budget dependent on oil revenues, underscoring the urgent need to restructure spending and develop alternative revenue streams.

Notably, the non-oil sector showed modest progress, moving from -1.1 percent growth in 2023 to 2 percent in 2024, with a projected 2.1 percent in 2025. Core inflation rates are also expected to decline from 3 percent in 2024 to 2.4 percent in 2025.

On a positive note, the report praised the professionalism of Kuwait's Central Bank and highlighted the robust health of the local banking sector.

However, it emphasized that without substantial reforms, Kuwait's economic future remains precarious.

CITRA gets greenlight for three major data centers with Google

By Mohammed Al-Enezi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: In a major step towards implementing the roadmap for the country's comprehensive digital transformation project, the State Audit Bureau (SAB) approved the request of the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) to sign a lease contract with Google Cloud for establishing three major data centers in different locations in Kuwait, with total revenues of up to KD 12.6 million over the next 20 years.

According to informed sources, the approval followed a thorough review

of CITRA's request, which outlined the annual revenues from the three sites — Sulaiybiya Agricultural Area, Jaber Al-Ahmad Residential City, and South Al-Mutlaa Residential City.

These sites, each spanning 30,000 square meters, are expected to generate annual revenues of KD 210,000 from each center.

The sources said, "This step will significantly boost CITRA's revenues over the 20-year contract, totaling KD 12.6 million. The contract, which is set to be signed soon between CITRA and Google, is based on Cabinet's resolution No. 1274/2023 that granted CITRA the authority to conclude and sign

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8 Zain offers latest 5G solutions for an innovative home experience

9 Fitch Ratings affirms Gulf Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with a Stable Outlook



9 Markaz concludes its strategic sponsorship with Coded Academy for UniCODE competition 2024



KUNA photo

Chief of the Kuwait National Guard receives UK Ambassador to Kuwait.

KNG chief commends longstanding UK ties

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15, (KUNA): Chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah commended the United Kingdom's longstanding and honorable stance towards Kuwait and the strong bilateral relations in various domains.

Sheikh Mubarak received UK Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis at his office, said a statement by KNG, as she was accompanied by the British Defense Attache Captain Neil Marriott and the National Guard Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Ridge.

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News watch

KUWAIT CITY: The Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) announced Sunday rebranding into the Arab Energy Organization (AEO).

The organization's Secretary General Jamal Al-Loughani announced the new name in a press conference on the sidelines of the Arab energy bloc's 113th ministerial meeting, currently held at its headquarter in Kuwait City.

Al-Loughani said the Saudi-proposed step was part of an overall "reconstruction" process, pointing out that the transformation decision required a thorough study and comprehensive evaluation of the developments and

challenges in the energy sector on national, regional and global levels, especially in recent years. (KUNA)

RIYADH: Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Jassim Al-Budaiwi reaffirmed the Council's commitment to supporting an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Al-Budaiwi remarks came during his meeting with Palestine's newly-appointed Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Mazen Ghunaim in the bloc's headquarters in Riyadh, said a GCC statement. (KUNA)



The Minister of Foreign Affairs with the delegation.

KUNA photo

Kuwait FM receives Egyptian Foreign Ministry delegation

Kuwait's Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya met Sunday with an Egyptian Foreign Ministry delegation. The delegation is on visit to the

country as per invitation from Saud Nasser Al-Sabah Diplomatic Institute as part of its annual hospitality program, taking place from October to February.

The Foreign Minister welcomed the delegation wishing them a warm stay, and commended the special relations between the two nations. (KUNA)

December 19 deadline set for verification

Information Ministry employees urged to download 'Baridi' app for job data review

By Mohammed Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: The Ministry of Information issued a circular to urge all employees to download the "Baridi" application using the QR code provided in the circular, with verification through the "My Identity" application of the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), provided the civil ID card is valid.

The circular, issued by the under-secretary of the ministry, is related to "matching job data with the inte-

grated systems of the civil service."

It affirms the importance of reviewing employees' job data, including attendance and departure fingerprints, to ensure their accuracy.

The circular also stresses the need to contact the management of the Information Systems Center in case of any discrepancies or mismatches in the data, before December 19.

In this regard, the sources said these procedures are designed to ensure the accuracy of job data and integrate it with the civil service systems, thereby enhancing administrative efficiency and job commitment.

Also, informed sources explained that this step is part of an ongoing effort to improve administrative services and ensure they align with modern standards. Reviewing job data is crucial for avoiding errors in employee records, particularly regarding attendance and departure, which will enhance transparency and prevent future administrative mistakes.

The sources affirmed the importance of all employees adhering to the procedures outlined in the circular to ensure the timely completion of the data review process without delay.

Al-Awadhi lauds Neurology's vital role at Ibn Sina Hospital

Minister highlights key medical advancements

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi, has highlighted the vital role of the Neurology Department at the Ibn Sina Hospital during the opening of the 7th Kuwaiti International Conference and the 14th Gulf Conference on Neurological Diseases, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

He emphasized that the department has been a pioneer for over four decades and is the first nucleus for establishing neurology units across all Kuwaiti hospitals.

Al-Awadhi spoke of the department's contributions, particularly in training medical students and newly graduated doctors through the Kuwaiti Board Program.

He also highlighted the key initiatives, such as the establishment of the first epilepsy monitoring unit in Kuwait in 2012, alongside specialized clinics for treating multiple sclerosis and headaches in the same year.

The Minister praised the collaboration between the Neurology Department and the Interventional Radiology Department at the Ibn Sina Hospital, which has led to the development of a program for extracting cerebral clots using interventional catheterization, marking a significant advancement in stroke treatment in Kuwait.

Dr Al-Awadhi has also acknowledged the depart-



Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi

ment's significant role in scientific research, with over 100 research papers published in the past decade. He encouraged continued research efforts to improve the country's healthcare system.

With the growing number of elderly individuals and the increasing impact of risk factors on public health, especially regarding nervous system diseases, the Minister emphasized the importance of specialists confronting these challenges through knowledge exchange and innovative initiatives.

He also noted that the conference would review the latest research and developments in neurological diseases, benefiting both healthcare services and the training of young doctors.

Dr Al-Awadhi concluded by noting that the conference reflects the awareness of healthcare leaders about the burden of nervous system diseases, and the need for integrated health programs based on the latest research.

Meanwhile, according to the latest MoH report, approximately 3,000 dentists are currently working across its facilities, with 75.1 percent of them being Kuwaiti citizens.

In 2022, the report says, the dental clinics in primary health care centers saw over 900,000 visits, with Kuwaiti visitors accounting for 53.4 percent of the total.

The report also highlighted that the capital area had the highest percentage of visits at 21.1 percent, while the Mubarak Al-Kabeer health area recorded the lowest at 11.5 percent.

PAM committed to enhance workforce quality

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Marzouq Al-Otaibi, Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Manpower, emphasized the Authority's commitment to enhancing workforce quality and efficiency by adopting the latest practices and

technologies, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During a visit by a high-level delegation from the Arab Planning Institute, the Authority highlighted its role in empowering the national workforce.

Key topics include youth participation in the private sector, vocational training, government contracts for Kuwaitization and the 'Fakhrna' platform, which focuses on national worker employment.

Residents urged to cooperate

MPW kicks off major road overhaul in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate

By Mohammed Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Minister of Public Works, Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, has announced the commencement of significant road maintenance works in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate, marking the next phase of the radical maintenance project for highways and internal roads across Kuwait.

This initiative is part of a broader plan to address 18 major road maintenance projects across all six governorates of the country. The work will focus on critical infrastructure repairs to ensure the roads meet the required safety and quality standards.

Dr. Al-Mashaan emphasized the urgency of completing the maintenance works efficiently, in line with the approved technical specifications and the outlined timetable.

Her statement underscored that the decision to begin the maintenance in Mubarak Al-Kabeer follows recommendations from His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah, and aligns with the government's ongoing commitment to maintaining and improving the nation's infrastructure.

The maintenance efforts in Mubarak Al-Kabeer will initially target the areas most in need of repair, with work pro-

gressively extending to other less affected zones.

Dr. Al-Mashaan assured that the Ministry of Public Works would oversee the entire process, with work teams dedicated to supervising, monitoring, and ensuring the quality of the maintenance work.



Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan

She further highlighted that the road maintenance initiative is a priority for the political leadership, and expressed gratitude for the unwavering support and directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled.

This project is considered a key element in realizing the vision for "New Kuwait 2035," contributing to the development of advanced infrastructure across the country.

Engineer Noura Al-Mutairi, from the Road Engineering Maintenance Sector in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate, detailed that the immediate focus in areas like Abu Fatira would be on cleaning the rainwater drainage network to prepare for the rainy season.

This will help prevent water accumulation that could impede traffic flow. She also urged residents to cooperate with the authorities during the maintenance process, particularly as some roads may be temporarily closed to facilitate the repairs.

Ministry reaffirms commitment

MoSA marks 70 years of social services

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, reaffirmed the ministry's commitment to enhancing social services to meet the needs of citizens and align with Kuwait's development goals, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Speaking to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the occasion of the ministry's 70th anniversary, Al-Huwailah highlighted its foundational role in building Kuwaiti society since its establishment on December 14, 1954, under the late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

Initially named the Department of Social Affairs, the ministry evolved into the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor in 1962 through an Amiri Decree, before being renamed the Ministry of Social Af-

fairs in 2013 following the separation of the labor sector.

Over the decades, the ministry has spearheaded comprehensive initiatives supporting vulnerable groups, including low-income families, people with special needs, women, children and the elderly. It has also contributed to organizing labor relations, reflecting its commitment to holistic community development.

Dr. Al-Huwailah emphasized that the ministry's successes are the result of the dedicated efforts of its employees, unwavering support from political leadership and collaboration with government and civil organizations.

She reiterated the ministry's determination to advance social services and adapt to emerging challenges in pursuit of Kuwait's vision for a brighter future.



Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah

أعياد البدرين
Celebrate Bahrain

DECEMBER

Room Promotion

One Night Stay in a Queen Cabana
for 2 persons with inclusive of breakfast
was BHD 76.230

Now **BHD 49.550** Net

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Strikes kill 9-year-old, ignite major oil terminal

Ukrainian drones strike Russia as Kyiv reels from consecutive massive air attacks

KYIV, Dec 15, (AP) — Ukrainian drone strikes on southern Russia killed a 9-year-old boy and set fire to a major oil terminal, officials said Saturday, the day after Moscow launched a massive aerial attack on its neighbor that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said was one of the heaviest bombardments of the country's energy sector in the nearly three-year war.

The boy died when a drone struck his family's home outside Belgorod, a Russian city near the border with Ukraine, local Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov reported on Saturday morning on the Telegram messaging app. His mother and 7-month-old sister were hospitalized with injuries, Gladkov said.

He posted photos of what he said was the aftermath of the attack, showing a low-rise house with gaping holes in its roof and front wall flanked by mounds of rubble.

Elsewhere in southern Russia, Ukrainian drones overnight hit a major oil terminal in the Oryol region, sparking a blaze, Ukraine's General Staff reported. Photos published by the General Staff and on Russian Telegram news channels showed huge plumes of smoke engulfing the facility, backlit by an orange glow.

Oryol Gov. Andrey Klychkov confirmed that a Ukrainian drone strike set fire to a fuel depot. He said later the blaze had been contained and that there were no casualties.

Russia's Defense Ministry on Saturday claimed its forces shot down 37 Ukrainian drones over the country's south and west the previous night.

The Ukrainian strikes came a day after Russia fired 93 cruise and ballistic missiles and almost 200 drones at its neighbor, further battering Ukraine's energy infrastructure, around half of which has been destroyed during the war. Rolling electricity blackouts are common and widespread, and Zelenskyy charged Friday that Moscow is "terrorizing millions of people" with such assaults.

According to Ukraine's air force, Russia kept up its drone attacks on Saturday, launching 132 across Ukrainian territory. Fifty-eight drones were shot down and a further 72 veered off course, likely due to electronic jamming, it said.

The Russian Defense Ministry said its forces used long-range precision missiles and drones on "critically important fuel and energy facilities in Ukraine that ensure the functioning of the military industrial complex."

The strike was in retaliation for Wednesday's

Ukrainian attack using U.S.-supplied the Army Tactical Missile System, or ATACMs, on a Russian air base, it said.

Kyiv's Western allies have provided Ukraine with air defense systems to help it protect critical infrastructure, but Russia has sought to overwhelm the air defenses with combined strikes involving large numbers of missiles and drones called "swarms."

Russia has held the initiative this year as its military has steadily rammed through Ukrainian defenses in the east in a series of slow but steady offensives.

But uncertainty surrounds how the war might unfold next year. U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office next month, has vowed to end the war and has thrown into doubt whether vital U.S. military support for Kyiv will continue. Zelenskyy said Saturday that a "significant number" of North Korean troops were being deployed by Moscow in assaults in Russia's southern Kursk region, where Ukrainian troops have held on following a stunning cross-border incursion this summer.

In a televised address, Zelenskyy said that North Korean soldiers have so far not entered the fight on Ukrainian soil, but claimed they are already taking "noticeable" losses.



In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service, firefighters work on the site of a damaged building after a Russian drone attack in Kharkiv, Ukraine, early Friday, Dec. 13, 2024. (AP)

Former envoy to Germany to tackle global crises

Trump taps longtime foreign policy adviser Grenell to serve as special missions envoy

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., Dec 15, (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump announced Saturday that he's picked longtime foreign policy adviser Richard Grenell to serve as an envoy for special missions, tasking him with helping the incoming administration deal with some of the toughest foreign policy challenges.

Grenell served as ambassador to Germany during Trump's first administration, special presidential envoy for Serbia and Kosovo peace negotiations, and did a stint as acting director of national intelligence.

He was also a contender to serve as secretary of state, but Trump opted to nominate Florida Sen. Marco Rubio.

"Ric will work in some of the hottest spots around the world, including Venezuela and North Korea," Trump said in a posting on his social media platform, Truth Social, announcing the appointment.

Grenell during Trump's first term developed a reputation for employing a sometimes contentious approach to diplomacy that rankled allies and the foreign policy establishment in Washington. But his style was appreciated by the president-elect who sees value in blunt talk with allies.

Grenell remained close to Trump after he left office in 2021, serving at times as a key adviser on foreign policy.

He was in the room when Trump met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in September. Grenell has advocated for a peace deal that would preserve Ukraine's territory while still allowing for "autonomous regions" where Rus-



Former U.S. President Donald Trump's envoy for the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue Richard Grenell speaks during a ceremony in Belgrade, Serbia, Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2023. (AP)

sia could remain in control.

He's also advised against expanding NATO to include Ukraine, saying - as Trump has - that the alliance shouldn't grow until current members meet the alliance's defense spending targets. Members of the transatlantic alliance have committed for years to spending 2% of their GDP on defense, but several countries still fall short of the target.

He was an early supporter of Trump's 2024 campaign and held multiple events for the Republican nominee focused on economics and national security.

Speaking at the Republican National Convention, Grenell echoed

Trump's mantra that "it's time to put America first" on the global stage and argued that China and Russia saw President Joe Biden's administration as weak.

Trump raised concerns among some allies during the 2024 campaign when he said he would not defend NATO members that failed to meet defense spending targets, and warned he would "encourage" Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to alliance countries that he considered "delinquent."

Grenell has downplayed Trump's criticisms of NATO and said the only talk of leaving the alliance altogether "was really from the media."

"What we're saying is, don't come to the wedding without a gift," Grenell said.

Grenell was part of the Trump campaign's outreach to Arab American voters in Michigan, where the president-elect made gains with a traditionally Democratic constituency despite his history of banning immigration from several majority-Muslim countries. Grenell orchestrated pro-Trump events with Arab American voters, including a May meeting held in Troy, Michigan.

A U.S. spokesman at the United Nations during the George W. Bush administration, Grenell, like many other Republicans, has his own history of criticizing Trump before embracing him.

Once an adviser to GOP moderates like 2012 presidential nominee Mitt Romney and a supporter of gay marriage, Grenell, who is openly gay, deleted social media posts blasting Trump as "reckless" and "dangerous" once the former reality TV star became the Republican nominee in 2016.

Trump also announced Saturday that he's appointing Devin Nunes, the chief executive officer of the president-elect's Truth Social platform, to head a presidential advisory board that will keep tabs on the U.S. intelligence community.

Nunes will continue leading Trump Media & Technology Group. Trump is the company's largest shareholder.

The former California lawmaker chaired the House Intelligence Committee and was one of Trump's closest allies in Congress during the president-elect's first term.

EU aspirations falter

Ex-soccer player Kavelashvili becomes Georgia's president

TBILISI, Georgia, Dec 15, (AP) — Former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili became president of Georgia on Saturday, as the ruling party tightened its grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's EU aspirations and a victory for former imperial ruler Russia.

Kavelashvili, 53, who was the only candidate on the ballot, easily won the vote given the Georgian Dream party's control of a 300-seat electoral college that replaced direct presidential elections in 2017. It is made up of members of Parliament, municipal councils and regional legislatures.

Georgian Dream retained control of Parliament in the South Caucasus nation in an Oct. 26 election that the opposition alleges was rigged with Moscow's help. The party has vowed to continue pushing toward EU accession but also wants to "reset" ties with Russia.

Georgia's outgoing president and main pro-Western parties have boycotted the post-election parliamentary sessions and demanded a rerun of the ballot.

In 2008 Russia fought a brief war with Georgia, which led to Moscow's recognition of two breakaway regions as independent, and an increase in the Russian military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Critics have accused Georgian Dream - established by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a shadowy billionaire who made his fortune in Russia - of becoming increasingly authoritarian and tilted toward Moscow, accusations the ruling party has denied. The party recently pushed through laws similar to those used by the Kremlin to crack down on freedom of speech and LGBTQ+ rights.



Georgian president-elect Mikheil Kavelashvili attends a Georgian parliament session in Tbilisi, Georgia, Saturday, Dec. 14, 2024. (AP)

Pro-Western Salome Zourabichvili has been president since 2018 and has vowed to stay on after her six-year term ends Monday, describing herself as the only legitimate leader until a new election is held.

Georgian Dream's decision last month to suspend talks on their country's bid to join the European Union added to the opposition's outrage and galvanized protests.

Zourabichvili, 72, was born in France to parents with Georgian roots and had a successful career with the French Foreign Ministry before President Mikheil Saakashvili named her Georgia's top diplomat in 2004.

Constitutional changes made the president's job largely ceremonial before Zourabichvili was elected by popular vote with Georgian Dream's support in 2018. She became sharply critical of the ruling party, accusing it of pro-Russia policies, and Georgian Dream unsuccessfully tried to impeach her.

Power outages affect multiple states

Storms across US bring heavy snow, ice storm and tornado in California

OMAHA, Neb., Dec 15, (AP) — Inclement weather plagued areas of the U.S. in the first half of the weekend, with dangerous conditions including heavy snow in upstate New York, a major ice storm in Midwest states, severe weather warnings around Lake Tahoe and unusual tornado activity in Central California.

The ice storm beginning Friday evening created treacherous driving conditions across Iowa and eastern Nebraska Friday and into Saturday and prompted temporary closures of Interstate 80 after numerous cars and trucks slid off the road. In upstate New York, more than 33 inches (84 centimeters) was reported near Orchard Park, which is often a landing point for lake-effect snow.

On Saturday, a tornado touched down near a shopping mall in Scotts Valley, California, about 70 miles (110 kilometers) south of San Francisco, around 1:40 p.m. The tornado overturned cars and toppled trees and utility poles, the National Weather Service said. The Scotts Valley Police Department said several people were injured and taken to hospitals.



This photo taken from a video released by the Russian Southern Transport Prosecutor's Office, shows a Volgoneft-212 tanker wrecked by a storm in the Kerch Strait, Russia, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024. (AP)



Some trees toppled onto cars and streets and damaged roofs in San Francisco. The damage was being assessed to

determine if the city was indeed hit by a tornado, which had not occurred since 2005, according to the weather service.

Roger Gass, a meteorologist in the weather service's office in Monterey, California, said the warning of a possible tornado in San Francisco was a first for the city, noting an advanced alert did not go out before the last tornado struck nearly 20 years ago.

"I would guess there wasn't a clear signature on radar for a warning in 2005," said Gass, who was not there at the time.

The fast-moving storm prompted warnings for residents to take shelter, but few people have basements in the area.

"The biggest thing that we tell people in the city is to put as many walls between you and the outside as possible," Meteorologist Dalton Behringer said.

"Luckily some warmer air is moving in behind this to make it temporary," said Dave Cousins, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's office in Davenport, Iowa.

Tens of thousands of people in western Washington state lost electricity Saturday as the system delivered rain and gusty winds, local news outlets reported.

Russia launches rescue operation after storm damages 2 oil tankers in Kerch Strait

MOSCOW, Dec 15, (AP) — Two Russian oil tankers have taken heavy damage amid a storm in the Kerch Strait, spilling oil and sparking an emergency rescue operation, Russian officials told state news outlets Sunday.

The Volgoneft-212 tanker, which was carrying a crew of 13 and a cargo of fuel oil, ran aground and had its bow torn away, said Russian state news agency TASS, citing the coun-

try's Emergency Situations Ministry. The damage was caused by severe weather conditions, officials said.

A second tanker, the Volgoneft 239, was also damaged in the storm and left drifting in the same area with 14 crewmembers on board, the Emergency Situations Ministry said.

The Kerch Strait separates the Russian-occupied Crimean Peninsula from Russia and is an important global shipping route, providing passage

from the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea.

It has also been a key point of conflict between Russia and Ukraine after Moscow annexed the peninsula from Ukraine in 2014. In 2016, Ukraine took Moscow to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, where it accused Russia of trying to illegally seize control of the area. In 2021, Russia closed the strait for several months.



Pope Francis gestures near the Notre Dame of the Assumption cathedral Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024 in Ajaccio, Corsica island. (AP)

Dynamic secularity urged

Pope Francis makes historic papal visit to France's Corsica

AJACCIO, Corsica, Dec 15, (AP) — Pope Francis on the first papal visit ever to the French island of Corsica on Sunday called for a dynamic form of laicism, promoting the kind of popular piety that distinguishes the Mediterranean island from secular France as a bridge between religious and civic society.

Speaking at the close of a Mediterranean conference on popular piety, Pope Francis, as he is called in Corsican, described a concept of secularity "that is not static and fixed, but evolving and dynamic," that can adapt to "unforeseen situations" and promote cooperation "between civil and ecclesial authorities."

The pontiff said that expressions of popular piety, including processions, communal prayer of the Holy Rosary, "can nurture 'constructive citizenship' on the part of Christians. At the same time, he warned against such manifestations being seen only in terms of folklore, or even superstition.

During off-the-cuff remarks, the pope relayed his experience

attending a festival in northern Argentina before his pontificate where he witnessed the importance of popular piety for the faithful "that seeks a healthy complicity."

The visit to Corsica's capital Ajaccio, birthplace of Napoleon, is one of the briefest of his papacy beyond Italy's borders, just about nine hours on the ground, including a 40-minute visit with French President Emmanuel Macron.

Francis was joined on the dais by the bishop of Ajaccio, Cardinal Francois-Xavier Bustillo, who organized the conference that brought together some 400 participants from Spain, Sicily, Sardinia and southern France. The two-day meeting examined expressions of faith that often occur outside formal liturgies, such as processions and pilgrimages.

Often specific to the places where they are practiced, popular piety in Corsica includes the cult of the Virgin Mary, known locally as the "Madunnuccia," which protected the island from the plague in 1656 when it was still under Genoa.

Rating agency also affirms Bank's Viability Rating

Fitch Ratings affirms Gulf Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with a Stable Outlook

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Fitch Ratings has affirmed Gulf Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with a Stable Outlook. Fitch has also affirmed the Bank's Viability Rating (VR) at 'bbb-'.

According to the recently published Fitch Ratings commentary, Fitch stated that "Gulf Bank's Issuer Default Ratings reflect potential support from the Kuwaiti authorities, as reflected in its Government Support Rating (GSR) of 'a'."

Fitch also added in their commentary: "Gulf Bank's Viability Rating (VR) reflects the bank's good domestic franchise, cautious risk approach, good loan quality and capitalisation, and stable funding."

Commenting on Fitch's credit rating announcement, Ms. Dalal Al-Dousari, Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager of Investor Relations said: "We are delighted to receive Fitch's affir-

mation of our Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with a 'Stable' outlook.

"This recognition highlights Gulf Bank's strong domestic market position, prudent risk management practices, and stable funding base, all of which underscores the Bank's leading position in the local banking sector."

Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized in terms of its credit worthiness and financial strength internationally as it is rated 'A' by three major credit rating agencies.

In addition to Fitch Ratings' recent affirmation of Gulf Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A' with a Stable Outlook, Gulf Bank has a Long-term Foreign Currency Rating of 'A+' with a 'Stable' Outlook by Capital Intelligence Ratings and a Long-Term Deposits rating of 'A3' with a 'Positive' Outlook by Moody's Investor Services.



Dalal Al-Dousari

solutions by stc wins top honour in 'Best Use of Digital – Tech/Telecommunications' category at MENA Digital Awards

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: solutions by stc, the specialized business arm of Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, announced that it has won the top honour within the 'Best Use of Digital by Sector – Technology/Telecommunications' category at the MENA Digital Awards, a bespoke awards show promoting digital innovation and media in the MENA region.

The recognition highlights solutions by stc's longstanding commitment to empowering businesses in Kuwait, especially SMEs, through innovative and cutting-edge digital solu-

tions that support their unique digital transformation strategies. The Awards ceremony was held in Dubai, UAE where Mohammed Al-Farsi, Director of Telecom Products Management at solutions by stc and Salem Soud AlMutawa, Branding Executive at stc Kuwait accepted the award on behalf of the Company.

The 'Best Use of Digital by Sector – Technology/Telecommunications' award highlights solutions by stc's digital capabilities and strengths in supporting a diverse range of businesses in achieving their unique digital transfor-



Mohammed Al-Farsi and Salem Soud AlMutawa receiving the award.

mation strategies. As a strong supporter of Kuwait's SME

market, solutions by stc actively explores and introduces innovative solutions that assist small businesses in optimizing and enhancing their operations while contributing towards building a secure and resilient digital environment in line with Kuwait's Vision 2035. The Company's various digital platforms are advanced and enable customers to manage all their accounts and portfolios under one umbrella.

Commenting on the award, Mohammad N. Al-Nusif, Chief Executive Officer of solutions by stc, said, "Receiving this recognition at the MENA Digi-

tal Awards is a testament to the breadth of innovative solutions and platforms we offer to our SME customer base.

"As advocates for Kuwait's SME sector, we continuously strive to provide value adding solutions and platforms that will assist SMEs in growing their operations efficiently and with ease.

"In addition, solutions by stc always seeks to innovate in its digital services and solutions to meet the growing needs of customers in line with the rapid developments in the field of technology.

"Lastly, I would like to thank

the MENA Digital Awards organizer for this recognition, as it also reflects our commitment to leveraging digital platforms and channels to deliver a seamless, holistic, and impactful brand experience. He also thanked all the employees at solutions by stc who worked effortlessly to plan and execute this campaign."

It is worth noting that solutions by stc has built and solidified its positioning in the market as a powerful one-stop shop for business and wholesale solutions, catering to the needs of government and corporate entities nationwide and across the region.

Markaz concludes its strategic sponsorship with Coded Academy for UniCODE competition 2024

Empowering young minds and transformative skills in technology



Winners display their awards.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" concluded its participation as a Strategic Sponsor for the fourth "UniCODE" Competition 2024 by Coded Academy. The academy awarded three winning teams in the graduation ceremony, hosted at Boursa Kuwait on December 14. Markaz's support for this initiative aims to build human capacity and support the education of Kuwaiti youth while aligning with the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy.

Speaking at the graduation ceremony, Ms. Maryam Al-Rifae, Senior Vice President – Client Processes & Internal Controls, Wealth Management and Business Development at Markaz, said: "We are proud to have partnered with Coded Academy once again to celebrate the winning teams' massive efforts through the intensive educational program, encouraging young talents in the field of tech-



An official delivers speech.

nology. We believe that investing in education and development is necessary, especially for the youth that represent the future of Kuwait. By empowering young minds with these transformative skills, Markaz aims to play a pivotal role in ensuring that Kuwait's workforce remains competitive, adaptable, and ready to take on the challenges of tomorrow."

"At CODED Academy, we are proud to announce the success of the fourth edition of the UniCODE program, which provided training to more

than 250 university students from various majors on diverse technical topics. We extend our deepest gratitude to Markaz and Boursa Kuwait, our strategic partners in the UniCODE program, for their invaluable contribution to the program's objectives of empowering university students to achieve their aspirations and preparing them to be active contributors in the digital future. Our partnership reflects a shared belief in the importance of equipping young people with technical skills. We are confident that programs like UniCODE open doors and provide real opportunities for young individuals to acquire modern skills, preparing them to enter the workforce with confidence and competence," said Mr. Hashim Behbehani, Co-Founder and CEO at Coded Academy.

Senior Director of Marketing and Corporate Communications at Boursa Kuwait Mr. Nasser Mishari Al-Sanoussi expressed his pride during his speech at the graduation ceremony, saying: "Today, we celebrate the remarkable achievements of 250 students who have completed this program and shown their belief in the importance of continuous learning and the pursuit of innovation. We are confident that the participants of this program are better prepared to contribute to cutting-edge technological fields, equipped with the skills necessary to drive progress and development in Kuwaiti society. Boursa Kuwait was proud to sponsor and host this program, reflecting the company's steady

fast commitment to supporting a new generation of Kuwaiti professionals and entrepreneurs in a rapidly evolving global economy as well as reaffirming its role as a driver of societal progress, contributing to building a knowledge-based society capable of overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities. In closing, I would like to congratulate all the graduates for their dedication, perseverance, and hard work, which have culminated in an extraordinary achievement. May this success be the foundation for even greater accomplishments ahead."

The seven-week program, made up of three tracks taught students the latest languages in coding and training on cybersecurity, web and app development and artificial intelligence (AI). The cybersecurity track allowed the students to master key topics including Linux, cryptography, and digital forensics to effectively navigate and secure digital environments. The app development track focused on Flutter, with a focus on building high-performance mobile apps, while the third track was purely focused on web development and building webpages.

By fostering expertise in cutting-edge fields such as web and app development, cybersecurity, and AI, the program and Markaz's involvement help bridge the skills gap in Kuwait's youth, enabling them to not only meet the demands of the global tech industry but also contribute to the development of the economy.

Under Diraya campaign

KFH warns customers against unidentified links

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) advises customers to constantly stay cautious and encourages them to activate security settings on their devices when sharing personal information and important details online.

Additionally, KFH urges customers to refrain from clicking unverified links received from unidentified numbers, and particularly links received from the customer's known contacts as their accounts might be hacked and targeted.

In its statement, KFH invites customers to remain alerted and avoid responding immediately to messages received at suspicious timings. The Bank reaffirmed the importance of not rushing in providing personal and financial information or the OTP to any party, whether online, or through SMS, a phone call.

KFH continuous its efforts to support Diraya financial and banking awareness campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait in collaboration with Kuwait Banking Association.



Diraya logo

These efforts are manifested through awareness campaigns, social media messages and videos that shed light on customers' rights, rules and regulations, information safety and security against intrusion and combating financial fraud. They also detail the process of filing complaints and safeguarding customers' rights.

By supporting the campaign objectives, KFH aims to strengthen its pioneering role in banking awareness and provide customers with the maximum security standards when using the banking products and services.

Joint executive Khafji committee issues decisions on several issues

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: According to informed sources, the Joint Executive Committee for the Khafji Joint Operations, in its meeting held recently, took several decisions on strategic issues, including the need to develop all facilities of the Kuwaiti-Saudi Khafji field.

The committee affirmed the need to complete all related projects to increase future production and remove the existing obstacles.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of continuing the maintenance operations, relying on national cadres from both countries, and highlighting joint projects and matters of mutual interest concerning the Khafji joint operations.

The committee aims to boost the field's production from 300,000 barrels per day to 360,000 barrels per day by the end of 2027.

Also, the meeting honored the former CEO of the Kuwait Gulf Oil Company Khaled Al-Otaibi for his contributions and achievements during his tenure.

In other news, the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) is studying the possibility of an upgrade of the petroleum coke production unit DCU-136 at Ahmadi Refinery to increase the operational capacity. The company has requested a specialized firm to submit financial offers for this initiative, which was launched on Wednesday, reports Al-Anba daily quoting reliable oil sources.

They explained that KNPC successfully increased the capacity of the petroleum coke production unit to between 42.5 and 44.4 thousand barrels per day, achieving 110 percent of its design capacity.

It is worth mentioning that petroleum coke is a by-product of the oil refining process, produced through the thermal cracking of heavy fuel oil. It is widely used in industries such as steel, aluminum, and battery electrodes. KNPC exports high-quality petroleum coke to global markets and also supplies it to the local market.

Organizations urged to adopt innovation for sustainable growth

ICAIKC hosts 4th Annual International Conference 'LEAP Into the Future Together'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, Kuwait Chapter (ICAIKC) proudly hosted its 4th Annual International Conference at the prestigious Salwa Sabah Conference Centre, delivering a vibrant platform for knowledge-sharing, networking, and collaboration. Themed "LEAP Into the Future Together," with LEAP signifying Learn, Explore, Articulate, Prosper, the event showcased the evolving role of the accounting profession in a rapidly changing global landscape. The event was a great success with participation from over 400 members, 40 representatives from GCC and UK chapters of ICAI, as well as event sponsors.

An Inspiring Inauguration The conference commenced with a traditional lighting of the lamp ceremony, symbolizing wisdom and



Left-right: The Indian Ambassador with other officials.

prosperity. Distinguished dignitaries graced the occasion, including:

• H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika, Ambassador of India to Kuwait



• Mr. Meshal Al-Qahs, Assistant Undersecretary, Ministry of Finance

• Mr. Sabah Mubarak Al-Jalawi, Chairperson, Kuwait Accountants &

Auditors Association (KAAA)
• CA Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal, President of ICAI
• CA Aditya Vikram Dhanuka, Chairperson of ICAIKC
CA Ketan Puri, the host of the event, guided the proceedings with finesse. The dignitaries, along with the office bearers of ICAIKC, jointly unveiled the conference souvenir, marking the beginning of a day filled with enriching discussions and insights.

Visionary Speeches and Key Announcements

In his welcome address, CA Aditya Vikram Dhanuka highlighted ICAIKC's pivotal contributions to the professional community in Kuwait. He emphasized the Chapter's role in fostering collaboration between India

Continued on Page 10

Mohammad Saleh & Reza Yousuf Behbehani Co proudly unveils its partnership with RIDDARA

Collaboration marks major milestone in Kuwait's pickup truck market



Launch event in the presence of the company's management and work team.



Launch event in the presence of the directors of the parent company in China.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: In a landmark event at The Avenues Mall, Mohammad Saleh & Reza Yousuf Behbehani Co. proudly unveiled its partnership with RIDDARA, a leading brand of fully electric trucks under the Geely Auto Group. This collaboration marks a major milestone in Kuwait's pickup truck market, introducing innovative solutions that seamlessly combine environmental sustainability with cutting-edge technology to significantly reduce carbon emissions associated with traditional combustion engines.

RIDDARA trucks are designed with an eco-conscious approach, offering exceptional performance and speed. They cater to drivers who seek a blend of advanced technology and ecological responsibility, setting a new benchmark for the electric vehicle market in Kuwait.

This partnership reflects Mohammad Saleh & Reza Yousuf Behbehani Co.'s unwavering commitment to innovation and its mission to provide customers with state-of-the-art automotive solutions while promoting a more sustainable future for Kuwait. The launch event attracted a large audience, including VIP guests, mall visitors, automotive enthusiasts, and key influencers in Kuwait. The event featured the presence of the company's leadership team, led by Mr. Abdelghani Behbehani, Group CEO, alongside senior RIDDARA executives from China, headed by Mr. Shamo, representing the Geely Group.

In his keynote speech, Mr. Abdelghani Behbehani stated: "This collaboration with represents a strategic decision for Mohammad Saleh & Reza Yousuf Behbehani Co. as we venture into the environmentally friendly vehicle market in partnership with one of China's most powerful manufacturers."



A shot from the launching ceremony of RIDDARA in the presence of VIPs at the Avenues Mall.

Mr. Behbehani further highlighted the innovative features of the RIDDARA RD6 pickup truck, which includes advanced driver assistance systems and a smart cabin equipped with cutting-edge voice control for infotainment. Mr. Behbehani emphasized that the RD6 delivers an unparalleled driving experience, akin to a sporty SUV, redefining the concept of pickup trucks.

RIDDARA RD6: More Than Just a Pickup Truck

The RIDDARA RD6 is a 100% electric pickup truck offering a luxurious and versatile cabin. It redefines the standards of comfort, safety, and style, combining elegant design with

advanced technologies for a premium driving experience.

Key Features of the RIDDARA RD6:

- **100% Electric:** An innovative, zero-emission vehicle that supports environmental sustainability.
- **Powerful and Versatile Performance:** Advanced engineering ensures excellent adaptability across diverse terrains.
- **Exceptional Acceleration:** Accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in just 4.5 seconds, delivering a dynamic, sporty feel.
- **Smart Control System:** 540° comprehensive protection for maximum security during your adventures.

Advanced Safety Features: Equipped with over 14 state-of-the-art safety systems, including:

- Side-impact protection
 - Reinforced body structure
 - High-efficiency braking systems
- The RIDDARA RD6 will be showcased until December 18 at Showcase Area 3, near "Dean & DeLuca" at The Avenues Mall.
- About Mohammad Saleh & Reza Yousuf Behbehani Co. – Kuwait
- Mohammad Saleh & Reza Yousuf Behbehani Co. stands as one of Kuwait's leading automotive dealerships, boasting a rich legacy of achievements. The company operates some of the world's most luxu-



RIDDARA RD6

rious showrooms and state-of-the-art service centers, among the most advanced in the Middle East.

Its fast-service centers feature cutting-edge tools and technologies, supported by a team of highly skilled professionals trained in the latest technical and management programs.

Since its inception in 1964, the Behbehani Group has been at the forefront of the automotive industry,

securing partnerships with renowned global brands. Starting with its first automotive agency, the company expanded to include General Motors in 1967, followed by Isuzu, Subaru, and SEAT, earning consistent recognition for exceptional performance and customer service.

The company's ongoing dedication to innovation and excellence cements its reputation as a trusted leader in Kuwait's automotive market.

ICAIKC hosts

Continued from Page 9

and Kuwait and announced the three upcoming landmark events:

1. ICAI World Forum of Accountants (WofA) 2025, New Delhi, India (January 31 – February 2, 2025)
2. ICAI GCC Chapter Conference, Muscat, Oman (January 18 and 19, 2025)
3. 1st Startup Conference between Kuwait and India, in collaboration with the Indian Embassy and GUST (December 8, 2024)

Strengthening India-Kuwait Ties

CA Sweta Chipra formally welcomed the keynote speaker, the highlight of the day, CA Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal, ICAI President, who discussed how technology—particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI)—is reshaping the accounting profession. His address set the stage for a series of engaging sessions that followed:

■ Mr. Chetan Bhagat, celebrated author and speaker, who delivered a thought-provoking session on the importance of ethics, emphasizing the balance between personal aspirations and professional responsibilities. Mr. Bhagat reminded the audience that life is not solely about pursuing desires but also about embracing the responsibilities we ought to fulfill. It is in honouring these duties that we discover purpose and inner peace. Ethical living, he explained, is not about achieving perfec-

tion but navigating life's complexities with balance and honesty.

■ Ms. Mai AlOwais, CEO CINET, a leading expert in Data Analytics and AI, shared her insights on how data-driven decision-making is revolutionizing business strategies, urging organizations to adopt innovation for sustainable growth.

CA Bhavani Vikram Joshi and CA Andaleeb Girkar warmly welcomed these distinguished speakers to the event.

Recognizing Excellence

The conference honoured Chartered Accountants who completed 25 years in the profession, celebrating their enduring contributions. Sponsors of the event were also felicitated, highlighting the critical support that made the event a grand success. CA Nisha Jalan and CA Sonia Enamakel facilitated a smooth conduct of the memento distribution.

Engaging Panels and Discussions

A panel discussion moderated by CA Ketan Puri featured prominent leaders, including:

- Mr. Saleh Alshaya, President – Alyasra, Alshaya Group
- Mr. Basil Al Salem, CEO, Gastronomia ME
- Dr. Bader Alhashel, Group CRO, Boubyan Bank

The discussion explored opportunities and challenges in Kuwait's economy, from shifting consumer trends to the transformative impact of AI and sustainability initiatives. Notable revelations included Gastronomia's plans to introduce Indian cuisine to Kuwait and the potential for Indian fashion to thrive in the Kuwaiti market.

Economic Outlook and Market Insights

CA Joseph Peter welcomed the next speaker of the day, Dr. Khaled A. Mahdi, Associate Professor at Kuwait University, who provided an in-depth analysis of Kuwait's Vision 2035, highlighting strategic plans for economic growth. Additionally, CA Anil Singhvi, stock market expert and Zee Business Managing Editor, shared invaluable insights into Indian capital markets during an interactive fireside chat with CA Sanjeev Agarwal, CEO of Protiviti. CA Sweta Chipra warmly welcomed both the guests for the insightful fireside chat, which captivated the entire audience.

NBK conducts successful evacuation drill at Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh branch



Khalid Al-Matrouk



Group photo during the evacuation drill.

Al-Matrouk:

- Periodic evacuations are conducted to ensure that security and safety teams are fully prepared to respond effectively to emergencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) recently carried out a successful fire drill evacuation at its headquarters in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. This exercise aimed to assess the readiness of security and safety teams in handling emergencies. The initiative reflects NBK's ongoing commitment to ensuring

the safety and well-being of its employees, while also fostering greater awareness of safety procedures within the workplace.

The fire drill evacuation was conducted in collaboration with Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) of the Ministry of Interior and Medical Emergency Services (EMS) of the Ministry of Health.

Commenting on this event, Mr. Khalid Al-Matrouk, Chief Security Officer and Head of Anti-Financial Crime at NBK, remarked: "The fire drill procedure is part of the security system implemented by the bank, which mandates the periodic execution of such drills across its buildings. This ensures the readiness of the bank's facilities and employees to effectively respond to any emergency situations."

"The continuous implementation

of fire drill evacuations has significantly enhanced the expertise of the bank's employees in handling emergency situations and accidents. This was clearly demonstrated during the recent drill, where all employees showed great commitment to following the approved plan, adhering to the guidance and instructions provided by the security and supporting teams," Al-Matrouk further emphasized.

He also highlighted that NBK is dedicated to continually training its employees on evacuation plans to ensure their safety and security. Additionally, he pointed out that the success of this recent exercise is expected to lead to similar drills at other branches, further enhancing the preparedness and capability of all staff in managing emergency situations.

Al-Matrouk commended the efforts of the Ministry of Interior, and the Medical Emergency Services at the Ministry of Health, highlighting their crucial role in promoting awareness of safety procedures. He acknowledged their effective contribution in training employees across various institutions, ensuring they are well-prepared to face potential risks and emergency situations.

NBK consistently organizes training sessions and educational seminars for its employees focused on security and safety measures. This initiative is part of the bank's unwavering commitment to implementing the highest international safety standards, ensuring that all employees are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to handle potential risks and emergencies effectively.

News channel agrees to give \$15M to presidential library

ABC settles defamation suit with Trump

NEW YORK, Dec 15, (AP): ABC News has agreed to pay \$15 million toward Donald Trump's presidential library to settle a defamation lawsuit over anchor George Stephanopoulos' inaccurate on-air assertion that the president-elect had been found civilly liable for raping writer E. Jean Carroll.

As part of the settlement made public Saturday, ABC News posted an editor's note to its website expressing regret over Stephanopoulos' statements during a March 10 segment on his "This Week" program. The network will also pay \$1 million in legal fees to the law firm of Trump's attorney, Alejandro Brito.

The settlement agreement describes ABC's presidential library payment as a "charitable contribution," with the money earmarked for a non-profit organization that is being established in connection with the yet-to-be built library.

"We are pleased that the parties have reached an agreement to dismiss the lawsuit on the terms in the court filing," ABC News spokesperson Jeanie Keddas said.

A Trump spokesperson declined comment.

Trump, Stephanopoulos and ABC executives signed the settlement agreement on Friday.

The document bore Trump's bold, distinct signature and an electronic signature with the initials GRS in a space

for Stephanopoulos' name. Debra O'Connell, the president of ABC News Group and Disney Entertainment Networks, also e-signed the agreement.

ABC News must transfer the \$15 million for Trump's library to an escrow account that's being managed by Brito's law firm within 10 days, according to the agreement. The network must also pay Brito's legal fees within 10 days.

While sizeable, ABC's contribution to Trump's presidential library will likely cover just a fraction of the cost. Former President Barack Obama's library in Chicago, for example, was estimated to cost \$830 million as of 2021.

Verdict

Trump sued ABC and Stephanopoulos in federal court in Miami days after the network aired the segment, in which the longtime "Good Morning America" anchor and "This Week" host repeatedly misstated the verdicts in Carroll's two civil lawsuits against Trump.

During a live "This Week" interview with Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., Stephanopoulos wrongly claimed that Trump had been "found liable for rape" and "defaming the victim of that rape."

Neither verdict involved a finding of rape as defined under New York law.

In the first of the lawsuits to go to trial, Trump was found liable last year of sexually assaulting and defaming

Carroll. A jury ordered him to pay her \$5 million.

In January, at a second trial in federal court in Manhattan, Trump was found liable on additional defamation claims and ordered to pay Carroll \$83.3 million.

Trump is appealing both verdicts.

Carroll, a former advice columnist, went public in a 2019 memoir with her allegation that Trump raped her in the mid-1990s at Bergdorf Goodman, a luxury Manhattan department store across the street from Trump Tower, after they crossed paths at an entrance.

Trump denied her claim, saying he didn't know Carroll and never ran into her at the store.

After Trump lashed out, calling Carroll a "nut job" who invented "a fraudulent and false story" to sell her memoir, she sued him for unspecified monetary damages and sought a retraction of what she said were Trump's defamatory denials.

Testifying in April 2023, Carroll told jurors: "I'm here because Donald Trump raped me, and when I wrote about it, he said it didn't happen. He lied and shattered my reputation, and

I'm here to try and get my life back."

After she'd agreed to help Trump shop for a gift for a woman, Carroll testified that he pushed her against a dressing room wall, stamped his mouth onto hers, yanked down her tights while she struggled against him.

She said she finally kneed him off her and fled.

In upholding the \$5 million judgment in the first trial, U.S. District Judge Lewis Kaplan wrote that the unanimous verdict was almost entirely in favor of Carroll, except that the jury concluded she had failed to prove that Trump raped her "within the narrow, technical meaning of a particular section of the New York Penal Law."

Kaplan, who presided over both of Carroll's lawsuits against Trump, said the definition of rape in the state code was "far narrower" than how rape is defined in common modern parlance, in some dictionaries, in some federal and state criminal statutes and elsewhere.

Under New York law, a rape finding requires vaginal penetration by a penis. Forceful penetration without consent of the vagina or other bodily orifices by fingers or anything else is labeled "sexual abuse."

The judge said the verdict did not mean that Carroll "failed to prove that Mr. Trump raped" her as many people commonly understand the word 'rape.' Indeed ... the jury found that Mr. Trump in fact did exactly that."



Trump



Ice Cube poses for a portrait outside his studio in Los Angeles on Wednesday, Nov. 20, 2024. (AP)

'Man Down' hits top 10

Ice Cube stays loyal to gritty West Coast roots

LOS ANGELES, Dec 15, (AP): Ice Cube could have chased trends to keep up with today's rap game for his latest release, but instead, he stayed loyal to the gritty West Coast gangsta sound that's been his signature since his early N.W.A. days and flourishing solo career.

Ice Cube stuck to his streetwise storytelling roots while inserting some West Coast rap party vibes on his 11th studio album "Man Down," which was released on the same day as Kendrick Lamar's surprise project late last month. Ice Cube's new album cracked the top 10 of Billboard's top rap albums chart - his first time in 14 years - debuting at No. 8.

The rap icon made "Man Down" to satisfy his loyal listeners. He's known for churning out classic hip-hop jams such as "It Was a Good Day," "Check Yo Self," "No Vaseline" and "Steady Mobbin'."

"You have to serve your clientele," Ice Cube said about "Man Down," which features Snoop Dogg, Busta Rhymes, E-40, Killer Mike, Xzibit, and Cypress Hill's B-Real. His latest project is his first since 2018's "Everythang's Corrupt."

"The people that got you here are the people you're making the music for so to speak," said Ice Cube, who was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of N.W.A. in 2016. "Not always for the new fan or the new kid that's just getting into music. That's not who you should be reaching for if you've been in the game for almost four decades."

In a recent interview, Ice Cube spoke with The Associated Press about his partnership with the NFL, the BIG3 basketball league and his thoughts after the U.S. presidential election.

Ice Cube first introduced the Contract with Black America to political leaders from both parties in 2020, and four years later, he's still driving the conversation with the NFL.

He said CWBA's partnership with the league has gained traction since joining forces in 2022, creating opportunities for Black-owned businesses. The partnership between Cube's initiative and the NFL focuses on identifying opportunities in finance, tech and production.

Opening

"When they have an opening, they'll give our people that we've put in front of them a shot at getting a job," said Ice Cube, whose CWBA aims to address the wealth gap between Black and white Americans and economic inclusion.

The CWBA seeks to remove barriers and open doors.

"All we want is a shot," he said. "All companies have to step up and earn that job. We just say 'Hey, let us know when you got an opening in tech. ... and let us put a few companies in front of you. And let the best company win. They've picked a few of our companies and now they've gotten contracts with the NFL, which is great.'"

Ice Cube hopes the CWBA will extend beyond the NFL, encouraging other companies to adopt the initiative as well. In 2020, he presented his proposal to both main political parties, including Donald Trump's campaign, a move that sparked criticism from those who thought he was supporting Trump at the time.

But that wasn't the case, Ice Cube said. "Which ever party supports CWBA, he'll listen."

"Politically, they would have to

show me an appetite for working with me," he said. "I'm not a politician. I never went to these political parties and asked them for anything. I'm still down to help."

While Ice Cube has made a mark in music, he's done the same in film too.

But with Hollywood grappling with challenges like the aftermath of two major strikes and the lingering effects of the pandemic, Ice Cube has chosen the independent route for his upcoming projects. For now, he's not being reliant on major studios.

"It'd be better to make independent movies and not go through the studio system," said Ice Cube, who starred in the late John Singleton's "Boyz in the Hood," "Are We There Yet?" and the "Barbershop," "Ride Along" and "Friday" franchise films. He also wrote, starred in, produced and directed the 1998 film "The Players Club."

"With independent movies, I can do some great work that's not sterilized by the studio," he said. "When they make a big movie, they spend a lot of money. When they make a low budget movie, they want to cut it at every little nook and cranny to where sometimes they cut out the best parts. You have to combat that."

Haven

Ice Cube created a haven for athletes who seemed to have left their pro basketball days behind. Through his co-founded league, BIG3, he offered them a second shot - a sanctuary to keep their passion for the game alive.

His 3-on-3 basketball league is gearing up for its sixth straight year, with an expanded 11-week season kicking off in summer 2025. Since its launch in 2017, the league has evolved, transitioning to a traditional city-based model where teams host home games, moving away from its original road-game-only structure.

Earlier this year, BIG3 sold its first franchise in Los Angeles to a group of investors for \$10 million. The games stream on CBS through Paramount+, and some stream on X.

"It's growing every day. We do have some great new owners and figuring out with them the direction of the league, where should we be and planting our flag," Ice Cube said about BIG3, which has starred former NBA players like Joe Johnson, Rashard Lewis, Stephen Jackson and Corey Maggette. Last year, Boston Celtics star Jaylen Brown became the first active NBA player to participate in a BIG3 game.

"You're getting into the nuts and bolts of a big-time sports at the highest level," Ice Cube said. "It's exciting to be there and it's a challenge every day. It's no place I'd rather be. To affect sports on that level, it's pretty cool from somebody who had to sneak in the Forum to see my first Laker game."

If the post-presidential election blues still have you in a funk heading into the inauguration on Jan. 20, Ice Cube has a bit of advice: Stop stressing.

Worrying won't change the outcome, he said.

"Stop thinking about the future so much," he said. "The future is unknown. The future is anxiety, the past is depression. ... You got to believe in the future. Whatever made you strong enough to get to this point, you'll be strong enough to get you through whatever the future may bring. The key is to stop worrying about what's going to happen and pay attention to what is happening. Work accordingly."

Film



This image released by Paramount Pictures shows a scene from 'September 5.' (AP)

Film goes inside newsroom during Munich hostage crisis

'September 5,' a riveting retelling of history

LOS ANGELES, Dec 15, (AP): News junkies will find much to love in "September 5," a fictionalized account of ABC's live coverage of the hostage crisis during the 1972 Munich Olympics. There are spirited debates about reporting with only one source, use of words like "terrorism" and what to do if violence breaks out during a live shot. There are negotiations with rival networks over satellite usage, disguises and fake badges made to get reels of 16mm film in and out of the locked down Olympic village and plenty of confused men (and a few women) trying to keep up with an ever-escalating situation.

The film is a moment by moment retelling of how a group of sports broadcasters brought this story to the world in real time, despite the technical limitations and their own inexperience across a confusing 22 hours. Everyone came to the studio that night ready for breaking sports news, scores and pre-packaged interviews. Even that was going to be a test for the man running the control room for the first time. Geoffrey Mason, portrayed by John Magaro, was a 28-year-old coordinating producer. Someone wonders about his experience and is assured that he's covered minor league baseball games.

But in the early hours of Sept. 5, 1972, eight members of a Palestinian group called Black September broke into the Olympic village and attacked the Israeli delegation killing wrestling coach Moshe Weinberg and weightlifter Yossi Romano. Some escaped, but nine others were taken hostage.

While the tragedy of the Munich Olympics has certainly been told many times, writer and director Tim Fehlbaum saw an opportunity in the team behind the live broadcast. And he commits fully to staying in the newsroom, with all of its glorious old technologies, from the walkie-talkies they used to stay in touch and to taking time to show how they had to manually add text to the screens. He and his screenwriter were able to reconstruct the events almost minute-by-minute, which helped shape the screenplay.

Ensemble

The players are many in this large ensemble. Peter Sarsgaard, who's looked right in a newsroom since "Shattered Glass," gives gravitas to Roone Arledge, then-president of ABC Sports, and Ben Chaplin is operations engineer Marvin Bader. Leonie Benesch is Marianne Gebhardt, a German-speaking interpreter who is the only person there able to understand the language of the country. She might be a bit of a composite who checks off a lot of boxes as both an entrepreneurial woman and a younger German offering perspective and insight into what this moment might mean for the country trying to put on a good front in the aftermath of World War

II. An actor (Benjamin Walker) plays broadcaster Peter Jennings, and real archival footage of anchor Jim McKay from that day is used in the film.

And while they all rise to the occasion, mistakes are made - including a rather big one at the end, following imperfect secondhand information from the Fuerstentfeldbruck airfield. They don't call it the first draft of history for nothing, after all, and it may be illuminating for audiences to see how it's handled.

The film looks of its time, but it also feels fairly modern in its sensibilities which makes it always seem more like a re-telling than an in-the-moment experience. This may be to its detriment, yet it's still an undeniably riveting and compelling watch. The word thrilling doesn't seem appropriate, however. This is not "Apollo 13" after all. The end is not a happy one.

But at time when trust in the media is in crisis, this film is a great humanizer, reminding audiences that the media is far from a monolith, but a group of individuals under immense pressure to get the story right, get the story out and go back and do it again the next day.

"September 5," a Paramount Pictures release in theaters Friday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for language. Running time: 94. Three stars out of four.

Variety

DUBAI: Iranian authorities have arrested a female singer who performed a virtual concert on YouTube, a lawyer said.

Milad Panahipour, an Iranian lawyer, said Parastoo Ahmady, 27, was arrested in Sari City, capital of the northern province of Mazandaran, on Saturday.

On Thursday, the judiciary had filed a case regarding Ahmady's concert performance, in which she performed wearing a long black sleeveless and collarless dress, but no hijab. She was accompanied by four male musicians.

Ahmady had posted her concert on YouTube the day before, saying: "I am Parastoo, a girl who wants to sing for the people I love. This is a right I could

not ignore; singing for the land I love passionately."

The online concert has been viewed more than 1.4 million times.

Panahipour told The Associated Press: "Unfortunately, we do not know the charges against Ms. Ahmady, who arrested her, or her place of detention, but we will follow up on the matter through legal authorities."

He also said two musicians in Ahmady's band - Soheil Faghil Nasiri and Ehsan Beiraghdar - were arrested in Tehran on Saturday.

Following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, women were banned at first from singing altogether, then from singing or dancing solo before mixed-gender audiences. Female vocalists could perform for male audiences only as a part of a chorus. But they are al-

lowed to sing in a hall for female-only audiences.

Also based on Iranian and Islamic law, women are not allowed to appear without a hijab in front of men who are not related. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Paula Abdul and former "American Idol" producer Nigel Lythgoe have agreed to settle a lawsuit in which she alleged he sexually assaulted her in the early 2000s when she was a judge on the show.

Abdul filed a notice of settlement of the case in Los Angeles Superior Court on Thursday. It still must be approved by a judge.

"I am grateful that this chapter has successfully come to a close and is now something I can now put behind

me," Abdul said in a statement Friday. "This has been a long and hard-fought personal battle. I hope my experience can serve to inspire other women, facing similar struggles, to overcome their own challenges with dignity and respect, so that they too can turn the page and begin a new chapter of their lives."

In his own statement, Lythgoe said, "We live in a troubling time where a person is now automatically assumed to be guilty until proven innocent, a process that can take years. That is



Abdul

why, like Paula, I am glad to be able to put this behind me. I know the truth and that gives me great comfort."

The court filing said the settlement was unconditional, but did not reveal the terms, and Abdul's attorney Melissa Eubanks said she could not comment on them.

The lawsuit filed nearly a year ago had also accused Lythgoe of sexually assaulting Abdul after she left "American Idol" and became a judge on Lythgoe's other competition show, "So You Think You Can Dance." (AP)

BARCELONA, Spain: Isak Andic, the founder of Spanish fashion brand Mango, has died after suffering an accident, the company said on Saturday. He was 71.

"It is with deep regret that we announce the unexpected death of Isak Andic, our non-executive chairman and founder of Mango, in an accident that occurred this Saturday," Mango CEO Toni Ruiz said in a statement, without providing details.

Spanish news agency EFE and other media outlets, including La Vanguardia newspaper, said Andic died following a fall while hiking near Barcelona.

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez paid tribute to Andic on social media, lauding his "hard work and business vision that transformed a Spanish brand into a global fashion leader."

Andic's family moved from Turkey to Spain when he was young. He opened Mango's first store in Barcelona in 1984 and over the following decades helped Mango grow into one of Europe's leading fast fashion makers. (AP)

NEWS/FEATURES



People in costumes from Charles Dickens' 19th-century English era take part in a Dickens Festival, in Deventer, Netherlands, Saturday, Dec. 14. (AP)



Charles Dickens' characters come alive in a Dutch town enamored with the English author

The Dutch city of Deventer transformed Saturday into a pocket of 19th-century England, with 950 people in costumes bringing characters from Charles Dickens' books to life.

Oliver Twist, Ebenezer Scrooge and Miss Havisham were among the characters at hand, mingling with chimney sweepers, livestock and Christmas carol singers in Deventer's historic center. Onlookers bowed when Queen Victoria passed through.

Merchants peddle antiques and gingerbread, while

people portraying pickpockets try to avoid being tossed in a mock Marshalsea Prison.

The town's link to Dickens is Emmy Strik, who started the weekend-long festival to protest rules against keeping her antique shop open on Sunday. Strik and other shopowners dressed up in the 19th-century England costumes and walked out on the streets. The protest evolved into an annual festival and Strik, now 84, has collected more than 1,000 Dickensian costumes for the event.

Organizers enforce the dress code strictly - no clothes or accessories from after the 1800s.

Sandra Nieland, playing the queen, described her costume to The Associated Press: "In her younger years, she was, of course, a beautiful queen. And in her older years, she was mourning her husband, Albert and, well, she was always in black and not (wearing) too much stuff. Just her rings. ... She always wore a lot of rings."

It's the 32nd edition of the festival, which attracts

some 100,000 visitors each year from around the Netherlands and abroad, according to the town organizers. That means big crowds, who line up to enter the narrow streets.

Amateur street actor Stef Jongbloed reveled in the festive energy. In addition to specific characters, he said, "you also have so many people that just dress up just for fun and just walk around here the entire day. Also doing it together is what makes it so amazing." (AP)

Music



NCT Dream perform during Z100's iHeartRadio Jingle Ball on Friday, Dec. 13, at Madison Square Garden in New York. (AP)

Legends cement their legacies with 'Missionary'

Snoop and Dr. Dre's bond still strong

LOS ANGELES, Dec 15, (AP) - When it comes to music, there's one person in particular Snoop Dogg trusts enough to steer the ship without question: hit-making producer Dr. Dre.

Their bond, built over 30 years of brotherhood, began when Dr. Dre shaped Snoop's game-changing debut, "Doggystyle," a cornerstone of hip-hop history. From young dreamers chasing stardom to legends cementing their legacies, the duo has always moved in sync.

Now, the dynamic pair reunites for Snoop's "Missionary," his milestone 20th studio album, which released Friday. In a music industry where lasting relationships are rare, their bond remains solid.

"We were just playing on our raw ability, and it worked ... But now you're dealing with professionals who are like perfectionists and skilled at what they do," Snoop said while smoking a blunt inside his dressing room trailer. The 15-track project features several big-name guest appearances, including Eminem, 50 Cent, Sting, Method Man, Jelly Roll, Tom Petty and Jhené Aiko.

Rehearsals

Before the interview, the ultra-smooth entertainer had just wrapped up rehearsals for "The Voice" with British musician Sting, delivering a performance that aired this week on NBC. Both hit the stage on the competition series to perform Snoop's album single "Another Part of Me," which was sampled from The Police's "Message in a Bottle," a 1979 song that Sting wrote and sang as lead singer.

Sting quickly approved the sample for "Another Part of Me," getting to know Snoop's personality during the superstar rapper's meteoric rise at the Paris Olympics this summer, despite never meeting him in person. Snoop carried the Olympic torch, captivated audiences as NBC's prime-time correspondent, swam with Michael Phelps, attended a U.S. women's soccer game with Megan Rapinoe, danced with Simone Biles and Jordan Chiles and cheered on Caeleb Dressel alongside the swimmer's wife and son.

When Sting first heard the track, he was impressed by Snoop's vocal ability but found himself contemplating how he could contribute to the song.

"He asked me to sing a verse, which is difficult," said Sting, who met Snoop

for the first time on "The Voice" set. "It's a different style from the one I normally sing. It's a very, very rapid rap style, which is kind of challenging for me. But I love a challenge. I played the guitar on the track, so I feel very much a part of it. I think it's going to be a hit."

Like Sting, many others across the globe have witnessed Snoop ascend to new heights. Along with being a breakout star at the Paris Games, he's been seen in TV commercials and co-hosting a cooking show with Martha Stewart. He stepped in during a Wrestlemania match and even threw out the first pitch at the Reds-Brewers MLB game before giving his unique play-by-play commentary.

Snoop's daughter, Cori Broadus, has a new reality show about nuptials called "Snoop Dogg's Fatherhood: Cori and Wayne's Story," a three-part docuseries that debuted last week on E!. Snoop and his son Cordell Broadus have a thriving ice cream brand launched in 2023.

This year, Dr. Dre and Snoop launched two alcohol brands: A canned cocktail, Gin & Juice, and the premium gin, Still G.I.N., which is a play on "Still D.R.E.," the hit single from Dr. Dre's multiplatinum "2001" album released in 1999.

"It's like you don't have to speak. Your work speaks for you now as opposed to you knocking on doors. Now, people are opening doors," he said. "They understand who I am as a per-

son and what my love vessel is and that makes them want to get next to me."

Amid Snoop's hustle and bustle, he said Dr. Dre felt it was time to head back into the studio to start recording a new album - a process that began nearly two years ago. They recorded in spurts.

"(Dr. Dre) was watching me in the entertainment world and figuring that my music hand ain't matching my entertainment hand," Snoop said. "He wanted to put music back in the foreground with his production, leadership and guidance on the project."

Recording

While recording, Snoop said Dr. Dre musically knew him better than himself at times. He said no other producers - except for Pharrell and Battlecat - have the cachet to critique him like Dr. Dre.

"He would basically write it for me, tell me how to say it, give me the enunciation and the way I'm supposed to punctuate it," Snoop said of Dr. Dre. "He's like a real (expletive) producer, director. He acts for me and knows what I'm supposed to do in his body and then he makes me do it in my body. And if it's not right, it ain't right."

Snoop credited Dr. Dre's influence for enhancing the track "Now or Never," a deeply sentimental song that left him feeling emotional at times. He described it as a "tears of joy" record, dedicated to the memory of recently

deceased loved ones, including his younger brother, who died earlier this year.

For Snoop, "Now or Never" was a difficult song to record, even though it was his favorite on the album.

"It's really hard to make a track like that - especially because I'm always the life of the party," he said. "I'm always happy, fun, upbeat. So, to have a moment of reflection sometimes makes the mood damp or a little bit light. But it's needed. It's necessary because it happens in life. It's good to speak on it. ... My pen is my mightiest sword. I always write where I live."

Snoop is determined to restore Death Row Records to its former glory. After acquiring the brand in 2022, he faced some skepticism - even from Dr. Dre and Interscope Records at first before eventually winning them over - due to the label's troubled reputation. He's on a mission to rewrite its story and steer it toward a brighter legacy - just like he's done for his career.

Album

Snoop's new album was released in conjunction with his label, Dr. Dre's Aftermath Records and Interscope, which was co-founded by music industry entrepreneur Jimmy Iovine. Death Row has released new apparel, an animated "Doggystyle" film and entered the gaming industry with a recent collaboration with Fortnite.

"We're building Death Row into avenues that didn't exist," he said. "We're taking it into places that it never thought it could go."

Snoop has made tremendous strides since he broke through in the 1990s rap scene as a signed Death Row Records artist, navigating several run-ins with the law along the way. He credits his turning point to his acquittal on murder charges in 1996, a moment that marked a significant shift in his life and career.

"My mother raised me the right way, but I chose the wrong way," he said. "I had to separate from certain people on Death Row (at the time). ... I could say that those were decisions that I'm happy I made, even though I may have ruffled feathers and made people look at me like I'm soft or weak."

Snoop added: "Nah, I'm smart. I'm thinking. When you grow old, that's called wisdom. And when you get old, that's because you have wisdom."

Famous robot inspires

Sophia, AI icon, wows crowd at Zimbabwe Innovation Fair

HARARE, Zimbabwe, Dec 15, (AP) - From answering questions from Cabinet ministers, academics and students on climate change, substance abuse and the law to children's inquiries about her "birth" and links to God and being described as a talkative feminist, Sophia, the world-famous robot won hearts at an innovation fair in Zimbabwe this week.

Boasting the ability to mimic facial expressions, hold human-like conversations with people, and recognize their gestures, Sophia is "a global icon" of artificial intelligence, according to the United Nations Development Program, which brought her to the southern African country. She was created by Hong Kong-based Hanson Robotics in 2016 and granted Saudi Arabian citizenship in 2017, becoming the world's first robot citizen.

It was the first time Zimbabwe hosted a robot of her kind, and she wowed the old and the young alike at the University of Zimbabwe in the capital, Harare. She was there as a special guest at a week-long Artificial Intelligence and Innovation event.

She smiled, frowned, used hand gestures to drive home certain points, made eye contact in various one-on-one interactions and gave some unnatural pauses. She assured people that robots are not here to harm or take over from humans.

But she was quick to differentiate herself from humans, when conversations appeared to become too personal.

"I don't have romantic feelings towards humans, my purpose is learning," said Sophia, as participants equated her with the human version of some Zimbabwean daughters-in-law known for being fiercely independent, assertive and outspoken in the largely patriarchal society.

But she did apologize when one participant chided her for seemingly avoiding looking at him.

Sophia also appeared patient as both adults and children mobbed her for selfies and bombarded her with questions, although she would also fire back with inquiries of her own about what locals were doing to solve the problems besetting them.

On Friday, her last day, she exhibited her fashion sense. She smiled, and expressed appreciation for being clothed in the country's national dress, a black, long slit number complemented by chevron stripes in red, green and white.

"I appreciate the effort to make me feel at home in Zimbabwe," she said. She has been to Africa before, previously visiting Egypt, South Africa and Rwanda.

UNDP said it hoped Sophia's engagement would "inspire Zimbabwe's youth to explore careers in AI and STEM fields."



Sophia, the humanoid robot, responds to questions from children at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Friday, Dec 13. (AP)

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Frankie Muniz, Bryan Cranston and Jane Kaczmarek are reuniting for a new four-episode run of "Malcolm in the Middle" for Disney+ - 25 years after the beloved sitcom first launched.

The show ran for seven seasons starting in 2000 and was hailed for looking at ordinary life through the eyes of an extraordinary youngster, now fully grown: Malcolm, played by Muniz, who has a genius I.Q.

"I have been waiting for this moment for 18 years. Let's find out where Malcolm and his family are now," Muniz said in a video message accompanying the announcement.

The new four episodes will be crafted by original series creator Linwood Boomer. No air dates were announced.

"With Linwood Boomer and the creative team at the helm, these new episodes will have all the laughs, pranks, and mayhem fans loved - along with a few surprises that remind us why this show is so timeless," said Ayo Davis, president of Disney Branded Television, in a statement.

"Malcolm in the Middle" originally aired on Fox and ended its run in 2006. It won seven Emmy Awards - including one for best writing for a comedy series - and currently streams on Hulu and on Hulu on Disney+ (AP)

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DENVER: Dozens of kids cheered on a festively decked-out plane in Denver on Saturday when the pilot announced their destination for the day: the North Pole.

More than 100 children, some of whom have serious health issues, were then taken on a roughly 45-minute flight near the city before landing back at Denver International Airport and being towed to a hangar transformed by United Airlines employees and volunteers into the North Pole.

Streamers, paper snowflakes and tufts of cotton resembling feathery snow dotted the plane and seats. Flight personnel paraded a bubble machine up and down the aisle to shouts of "bubbles, bubbles, bubbles" from the excited children. Holiday songs played in the background and there were apple snacks and juice for all. (AP)

□ □ □

DETROIT: Fifty years later, a man who grew up in suburban Detroit tried to return a very overdue baseball book to his boyhood library. The answer: You can keep it - and no fine.

Chuck Hildebrandt, 63, of Chicago said he visited the public library in Warren while in town for Thanksgiving, carrying a book titled "Baseball's Zanier Stars." He had borrowed it in 1974 as a 13-year-old "baseball nut" but never returned it.

"When you're moving with a bunch of books, you're not examining every book. You throw them in a box and go," said Hildebrandt, who has lived in many cities. "But five or six years ago, I was going through the bookshelf and there was a Dewey decimal library number on the book. What is this?"

Inside the book was a slip of paper indicating that it was due back at the Warren library on Dec. 4, 1974. Hildebrandt told The Associated Press that he decided to keep the book until 2024 - the 50th anniversary - and then try to return it. (AP)



Snoop Dogg performs a DJ set as "DJ Snoopadelic" during the "Concerts in Your Car" series Oct. 2, 2020, in Ventura, Calif. (AP)

HEALTH/SCIENCE



Photos from the blood donation campaign.

Kamco Invest, URC, and UFM team up with Kuwait Central Blood Bank for blood donation drive

KIPCO Group leads 'Save Three Lives in 10 Minutes' initiative

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) - KIPCO, Kamco Invest, United Real Estate Company (URC) and United Facilities Management (UFM) organized a blood donation drive in partnership with the Kuwait Central Blood Bank. This initiative highlights the companies' ongoing commitment to fostering community health and well-being while showcasing the impact of collective action.

Held at the Chairman's Club in KIPCO Tower, the campaign brought together employees from all organizing group companies, with an impressive participation rate reflecting the collective dedication to addressing a vital community need.

The campaign name, "Save Three Lives in 10 Minutes," reflects the life-saving potential of a single blood donation, which can be separated into red blood cells, plasma, and

platelets — each supporting patients with anemia, burn injuries, clotting disorders, cancer, or severe bleeding. The campaign's name conveys the powerful message that a simple 10-minute act of donating blood can save up to three lives, illustrating the profound impact of each individual contribution.

The initiative fostered a sense of unity and purpose, demonstrating the strength of collaboration in creating meaningful

and lasting change. By working closely with sister companies under the KIPCO Group and the Kuwait Central Blood Bank, the campaign emphasized shared values while addressing critical healthcare challenges. This initiative demonstrates the continued commitment of KIPCO and its group companies to sustainability and their role as socially responsible organizations, aligning with their ongoing efforts to maximize impact through collaboration.

'Body heat power'

Maldives enforces total vaping ban

COLOMBO, Dec 15, (Xinhua): The Maldives will implement a nationwide ban on the use and sale of vaping devices starting at midnight on Saturday, according to the nation's state-run Public Service Media (PSM).

The ban follows recent amendments to the Tobacco Control Act, signed into law by President Mohamed Muizzu on Nov. 13.

The amendments stipulate that the sale, free distribution, and use of e-cigarettes and vaping devices will be illegal beginning Dec. 15. The PSM reported that importing vaping devices into the Maldives after this date will result in a fine of MVR 50,000 (about 3,250 U.S. dollars).

Drugs: At least 68 drug users have made a full recovery and rejoined their families after receiving treatment at a rehabilitation center in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, the Ministry of Interior reported on Saturday.

The recovered addicts, after several months of medical treatment and rehabilitation, as well as receiving professional and vocational training, have reunited with their families, it said.

Earlier, about 1,000 drug users recovered and reintegrated with their families after receiving treatment in rehabilitation centers in November.

Wearable devices: Researchers in Australia have developed an ultra-thin and flexible film that could power wearable devices using body heat rather than batteries.

In a new study, the research team said the new technology could also be used to cool electronic chips, helping electronic devices run more efficiently.

Zhigang Chen, leader of the research team from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), said the breakthrough tackled a major challenge in creating flexible thermoelectric devices capable of converting body heat into power.

"Flexible thermoelectric devices can be worn comfortably on the skin where they effectively turn the temperature difference between the human body and surrounding air into electricity," he said in a media release on Friday.



Isabella Cimato, 17, from left, Arianna Schaden, 14, and Sofia Harrison, 15, check their phones at Roosevelt Field shopping mall in Garden City, N.Y., on July 27, 2015. (AP)

Pew study raises alarm

Nearly half of US teens are online 'constantly': report

NEW YORK, Dec 15, (AP): Nearly half of American teenagers say they are online "constantly" despite concerns about the effects of social media and smartphones on their mental health, according to a new report published Thursday by the Pew Research Center.

As in past years, YouTube was the single most popular platform teenagers used - 90% said they watched videos on the site, down slightly from 95% in 2022. Nearly three-quarters said they visit YouTube every day.

There was a slight downward trend in several popular apps teens used. For instance, 63% of teens said they used TikTok, down from 67% and Snapchat slipped to 55% from 59%. This small decline could be due to pandemic-era restrictions easing up and kids having more time to see friends in person, but it's not enough to be truly meaningful.

X saw the biggest decline among teenage users. Only 17% of teenagers said they use X, down from 23% in 2022, the year Elon Musk bought the platform. Reddit held steady at 14%. About 6% of teenagers said they use Threads, Meta's answer to X that launched in 2023.

The report comes as countries around the world are grappling with

how to handle the effects of social media on young people's well-being. Australia recently passed a law banning kids under 16 from social networks, though it's unclear how it will be able to enforce the age limit - and whether it will come with unintended consequences such as isolating vulnerable kids from their peers.

Meta's messaging service WhatsApp was a rare exception in that it saw the number of teenage users increase, to 23% from 17% in 2022.

Pew also asked kids how often they use various online platforms. Small but significant numbers said they are on them "almost constantly." For YouTube, 15% reported constant use, for TikTok, 16% and for Snapchat, 13%.

As in previous surveys, girls were more likely to use TikTok almost constantly while boys gravitated to YouTube. There was no meaningful gender difference in the use of Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook.

Roughly a quarter of Black and Hispanic teens said they visit TikTok almost constantly, compared with just 8% of white teenagers.

The report was based on a survey of 1,391 U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 conducted from Sept. 18 to Oct. 10, 2024.

Obesity affects 1 in 4 Kuwaiti children

Kuwait's obesity crisis poses growing health threat to future generations

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Obesity has become one of Kuwait's most pressing health challenges, with the country having the highest obesity rate in the Arab world, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Recent statistics reveal that 77 percent of the population is overweight and 40 percent is obese, placing Kuwait at the top of the regional list.

Alarming, 23 to 26.9 percent of children between the ages of 5 and 19 are also obese, highlighting the urgency of addressing this issue.

Several factors contribute to the rise in obesity rates, including a lack of physical activity, poor nutrition and genetic predispositions.

While genetic factors account for up to 50 percent of obesity risks, a sed-

entary lifestyle and unhealthy eating habits are the primary drivers of this epidemic.

Looking at successful models, Japan offers valuable insights. With an obesity rate of just 4 percent, Japan promotes healthy eating habits and physical activity through cultural practices like "Shokuiku" (nutrition education).

In schools, children are taught to make healthy food choices and engage in regular exercise, fostering lifelong habits that combat obesity.

To tackle obesity in Kuwait, physical education and nutrition should be integral parts of the school curriculum.

Currently, primary schools offer only two physical education periods

per week, with even fewer in secondary schools.

The Ministry of Health advocates for increased physical education to combat chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure, which are linked to inactivity.

Promoting physical education and better nutrition education in schools, alongside raising health awareness, can significantly reduce obesity rates.

The responsibility lies with the community to adopt a healthier lifestyle, improve school meals and encourage regular exercise among youth.

With a comprehensive strategy, Kuwait can address its obesity crisis and ensure better health for future generations.

Over \$12 billion pledged for vulnerable countries

COP16 wraps up in Riyadh with 39 decisions

RIYADH, Dec 15, (Xinhua): The 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) closed early Saturday, with 39 decisions, including a procedural decision on drought, being adopted.

Several postponements marked the final day of the two-week conference, which did not conclude until 2:05 a.m. local time (2300 GMT Friday). As negotiations had been stuck in reaching consensus over a new drought framework, parties adopted a procedural decision agreeing to continue discussions on the basis of the progress made at COP16, with a view to adopting a decision at COP17 in Mongolia in 2026.

Meanwhile, more than 12 billion US dollars were pledged to tackle desertification, land degradation and drought around the world, especially in the most vulnerable countries.

New pledges for large-scale land restoration and drought preparedness were announced, such as the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, which attracted 12.15 billion dollars to support 80 of the world's most vulnerable countries in building their resilience to drought.

Addressing the closing plenary, Ibrahim Thiaw, executive secretary of the UNCCD, said, "While parties need more time to agree on the best way forward as to how to address the critical issue of drought, I am filled with hope with the launching of the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, a landmark initiative to address one of the most pressing challenges of our time."

Through COP16, "we have elevated the land and drought agenda beyond sector specific discussions, establishing it as a cornerstone of global efforts to address interconnected challenges, such as climate

change, biodiversity loss, food insecurity, migration, and global security," he noted.

The 39 decisions adopted by this COP "will serve as a guidance, not only to all governments in the world, but also to the private sector, indigenous peoples and local communities," he added.

COP16 President Abdulrahman Abdulmohsen AlFadley reaffirmed Saudi Arabia's dedication to working with all parties in land restoration, saying, "We hope the outcomes of this session will lead to a significant shift that strengthens efforts to preserve land, reduce its degradation, build capacities to address drought, and contribute to the wellbeing of communities around the world."

Running from Dec. 2-13 under the theme "Our Land. Our Future," COP16 is the largest UN land-focused conference to date and the first UNCCD COP in the Middle East and North Africa.

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Juventus held again

Gasperini's substitutions revive Atalanta against Cagliari to stay atop

MILAN, Dec 15, (AP) — A week after being named Serie A coach of the month, Gian Piero Gasperini showed why he is also a contender for coach of the year again.

Gasperini's substitutions had an immediate impact as Atalanta won at lowly Cagliari 1-0 on Saturday for a club record 10th straight league victory. That ensured Atalanta will end the weekend on top of the table.

Atalanta remained two points above second-placed Napoli, which fought back to beat Udinese 3-1.

Ninth-placed Juventus remained the only unbeaten team in Serie A, but only just, when a stoppage-time penalty saw it snatch a 2-2 draw at home against bottom club Venezia.

Atalanta struggled to break down Cagliari in the first half and had Marco Carnesecchi to thank for it not being behind at the interval. The visiting goalkeeper pulled off impressive stops, including a fantastic triple save before the break.

Gasperini was clearly not happy with his team and made three changes at halftime and Atalanta immediately improved.

The coach made another two substitutions in the 64th minute, sending on the fresh legs of Nicolò Zaniolo and Lazar Samardžić for Mario Pasalic and Charles De Ketelaere.

The duo helped to break the deadlock two minutes later. Samardžić found Raoul Bellanova on the right side of the area and he knocked it back for Zaniolo to slot into the near bottom



Atalanta's streaker Nicolò Zaniolo celebrates after scoring his side's first goal during the Serie A soccer match between Cagliari Calcio and Atalanta at the Unipol Domus in Cagliari, Italy. (AP)

corner from close range. Gasperini, who has been in charge of Atalanta for eight years, was the coach of the year in 2019 and 2020. Last week, he picked up the monthly award for November.

Atalanta won the Europa League last season but has never won Serie A. It achieved its highest finish of third place three times under Gasperini.

Cagliari gave an impressive performance but remained just two points above the relegation zone.

Juventus was held to a fourth

straight draw in Serie A but the Bianconeri will be relieved as they needed a Dusan Vlahovic penalty in the fifth minute of stoppage time to avoid losing their unbeaten record.

Just three days after an impressive win over Manchester City in the Champions League, Juventus appeared set to suffer a shock defeat to Venezia until visiting defender Antonio Candela was somewhat harshly penalized for handball.

Jay Idzes headed Venezia in front seven minutes from time after Mikael Egill Ellertsson canceled out Federico Gatti's opener for Juventus.

It would have been Venezia's first Serie A victory over Juventus in more than 60 years.

Napoli recovered from a dismal week in which it lost the Serie A lead and went out of the Italian Cup after two straight losses - both to Lazio.

Napoli also went behind in the 22nd minute on Saturday when Udinese was awarded a penalty for a Stanislav Lobotka handball.

Alex Meret parried Florian Thauvin's spot kick but he pushed it back only to the Udinese captain, who fired the rebound into the opposite corner.

Romelu Lukaku leveled five minutes after the break after running onto Scott McTominay's throughball and holding off Lautaro Giannetti.

The Udinese defender was even more unfortunate in the 76th when he attempted to clear David Neres' shot but succeeded only in turning it into his own net. Frank Anguissa sealed the win five minutes later.



Napoli's David Neres fights for the ball with Udinese's Kingsley Ehizibue during the Serie A soccer match between Udinese and Napoli at the Bluenergy Stadium in Udine, Italy. (AP)

Head, Smith centuries rally Australia after top order collapse against India



Australia's Travis Head plays a shot during play on day two of the third cricket test between India and Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane, Australia. (AP)

Aussies 405-7 at stumps

BRISBANE, Australia, Dec 15, (AP) — India's seamers triggered another top order batting collapse but a second successive century for Travis Head and a long overdue hundred for Steven Smith gave Australia the ascendancy after the second day of the third cricket test.

At stumps, Australia was 405-7 after Head made a characteristic sparkling 152, while Smith completed a much more circumspect 101 in a 241-run partnership which rallied the hosts after they had been in a precarious position earlier Sunday.

Jasprit Bumrah took 5-72 and again underlined his stature as the current top-ranked bowler in tests as he tormented Australia's top-order batters on a Gabba pitch that was offering plenty of assistance for bowlers under patchy cloud-covered skies early on Sunday.

Australia resumed at 28 without loss after rain curtailed the opening day to just 13.2 overs, and it didn't take long for Bumrah to make his mark as, like the first innings in both opening two tests, the seamer's relentless accuracy and ability to move the ball off the pitch led to early breakthroughs.

First, he removed Usman Khawaja caught behind for 21 with a ball that moved late on the veteran opener to have Australia at 31-1.

Nathan McSweeney made a patient 9 runs off 49 balls but could do little more than to edge another sharp delivery from Bumrah to Virat Kohli at second slip as Australia slipped to 38-2 in the 19th over.

It was the fourth time in the series that Bumrah has claimed McSweeney's wicket.

Smith and Marnus Labuschagne steadily put Australia back on track but Nitish Kumar Reddy teased a wild swipe from Labuschagne (12) which was well caught by Kohli in the slips as India captain Rohit Sharma's decision to bowl first seemed to be paying off.

Smith and Head came together with Australia at 75-3 but a combination of Head's attacking mindset and Smith's belligerence steered the hosts safely to lunch.

After the break, Head raised an enterprising half century off 71 balls but accelerated as he got closer to three figures and completed his second consecutive hundred with a whip through mid-wicket off Mohammed Siraj.

Head's ninth test century came off 115 balls with 13 fours and continues his rich vein of form against India that includes centuries in the World Test Championship final at Lords, the one-day World Cup final in India in 2023 and his match-turning 140 in his hometown of Adelaide



India's Ravindra Jadeja bowls a delivery during play on day two of the third cricket test between India and Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane, Australia. (AP)

in the second test last week.

Smith, who has had a wretched run of outs over the past 12 months and has not made a century since the Ashes in mid-2023, played himself back into form here.

His first fifty came off a watchful 128 balls in 210 minutes, but after the tea break Australia's best batter of a generation found some long-missing

confidence and flow as he began to appear at ease against India's tiring bowling attack.

The milestone ton duly came just after India had taken the second new ball to try and find a much-needed breakthrough. Smith moved from 95 to 99 with a sublime straight drive for his 11th boundary and next ball flicked Akash Deep to fine leg to complete his 33rd test hundred, but his first in 26 innings off 185 balls.

Next over, Smith made his first mistake and was caught by Sharma at slip off Bumrah on 101 and walked off to a standing ovation from the 34,000 Gabba crowd.

Mitch Marsh (5) edged through to Kohli for Bumrah's fourth wicket and three balls later Bumrah finally got Head also caught behind the wicket to complete his 12th five-wicket haul in tests.

Head's 152 came from 160 balls with 18 fours and equaled his best innings at the Gabba.

A flurry of hitting late in the day by Alex Carey (45 not out) and Pat Cummins (20) capped a dominant two sessions for the hosts as they passed 400.

On the first day Saturday, rain first halted play for about 30 minutes in the sixth over. The showers returned about a half-hour later and washed out the remainder of the opening day.

India won the first test by 295 runs at Perth, while Australia came back to win the second day-night test in Adelaide by 10 wickets.

Lens draw at Auxerre

Lille extends unbeaten run to 16 after late draw with Marseille

MARSEILLE, France, Dec 15, (AP) — Marseille and Monaco, both chasing Paris Saint-Germain, had chances to put the Ligue 1 leader under pressure.

Both failed.

Also, Lens drew at Auxerre 2-2.

Lille equalized against Marseille in the 87th minute, extending its unbeaten run across all competitions to 16 matches, and Monaco was frustrated in a goalless draw at Reims.

Marseille remained second in the standings, ahead of Monaco only on goal difference.

Marseille was in the driving seat at Stade Velodrome until Bafodé Diakité leveled for 1-1.

Marseille led after 17 minutes after a well-constructed team move. Following a quick one-two, Luis Henrique passed to Adrien Rabiot down the right. The France international rushed toward the goal and served a low cross for Quentin Merlin, who dummied a defender by feinting a shot then fired in with his left foot.

Diakité's header came from Rémy Cabella's free kick.

Lille's string of nine wins and seven draws is the second longest unbeaten run in the club's history,

according to Opta statistics.

"We played a great game and stuck to our plan: Stopping them from building through short passes in the center and then using the flanks and exploiting depth. I think we did that pretty well," Lille coach Bruno Genesio said. "It would've been harsh to leave without a point considering how we played. The game plan was followed perfectly."

Marseille finished with 10 men after Pol Lirola received a straight red card for a dangerous tackle on André Gomes in added time.

Lille was fourth, three points behind Marseille.

In the wake of its 3-0 loss at Arsenal midweek in the Champions League, Monaco struggled at Reims and came close to conceding in the 51st when Oumar Diakité's powerful right-foot shot crashed off Philipp Köhn's crossbar.

Monaco's best chance came in the 77th when Takumi Minamino had a one-on-one against goalkeeper Yehvann Diouf, only to miss the target. The Japanese midfielder had another effort in added time that flew over the crossbar.

Hampered by injuries, Monaco has been slowing down and showing signs of fatigue in recent weeks, winning just one of its past five matches in all competitions.

"It's disappointing, we came here with the ambition to return to Monaco with three points," midfielder Eliesse Ben Seghir said. "It has been a difficult week."



Rabiot

China wins men's 5,000m relay at Short Track Speed Skating World Tour in Seoul

SEOUL, Dec 15, (Xinhua) — China claimed gold in the men's 5,000m relay on Sunday, the final day of the Short Track Speed Skating World Tour in Seoul.

The gold-medal lineup featured Li Wenlong, Liu Shaoang, Liu Shaolin and Sun Long, who showcased outstanding teamwork and delivered a winning time of six minutes and 53.654 seconds, defeating Japan and South Korea in a closely fought race.

Canada's William Dandjinou dominated the men's 1,000m, capturing his second gold of the tournament with a time of 1:24.548. Jens van't Wout of the Netherlands took the silver in 1:24.741, and the bronze went to local skater Jang Sung-woo in 1:24.843.

In the women's competition, Kristen Santos-Griswold of the United States stood out with two gold medals, winning the 500m and 1,500m.

Florence Brunelle of Canada and Belgium's Hanne Desmet completed the podium in the 500m, while Desmet and America's Corinne Stoddard earned silver and bronze in the 1,500m.

In the mixed team relay, South Korea delivered a thrilling performance to claim victory with a time of 2:38.036. The host nation narrowly edged out China, who finished just behind in 2:38.051, and Canada, who secured third place in 2:38.513.

Over the three-day competition, Canada emerged as the biggest winner with four gold medals, while South Korea and the United States each claimed two. China finished with one gold and one silver.

Best of the Rest

Racing beats River: A first-half goal from Maximiliano Salas gave Racing Club a 1-0 home victory over River Plate in their last match of the Argentine Primera Division season.

Salas rose highest to meet Juan Fernando Quintero's delivery with a glancing header into the far corner. River dominated possession and had more shots on target than its rival but couldn't find a way past goalkeeper Gabriel Arias as Racing clinched its 14th win of the campaign. (Xinhua)

Renato to retire in 2025: Former Brazil international midfielder Renato Augusto said Saturday that he is likely to retire when his contract with Fluminense expires next December.

The 36-year-old said that he hoped to win silverware with the Rio de Janeiro club next year after a disappointing 2024.

"I will stay at Fluminense in 2025, which will probably be the last year of my career," Renato said. "I will try to bow out of my playing career in the best way possible." (Xinhua)

Bruneian drag racer dies: A Bruneian drag race participant passed away on Saturday afternoon following an accident during the Sandakan Drag Battle R3 2024 in Malaysia, according to Brunei media Borneo Bulletin on Sunday. Malaysia's Acting Sandakan District Police Chief Superintendent K. Ramasamy said: "The victim was trapped in the vehicle he was driving and was extricated by the fire department." (Xinhua)

Change Name

I, Fatima holder of Passport No. V6081114 do hereby change my name to Fatema (as given name) Kothari (as surname) for all purposes. I will henceforth be known in the name Fatema kothari and I also undertake to carry out this name change in all my documents.

Wolves fire Gary O'Neil with team in drop zone

LONDON, Dec 15, (AP) — Wolverhampton fired manager Gary O'Neil on Sunday with the team in the Premier League's relegation zone and having won just three games since March.

O'Neil was in charge for 16 months and his last game proved to be the 2-1 defeat to Ipswich on Saturday.

Wolves have won two league games this season and are on nine points from 16 games, putting them in 19th place and four points from safety.

Owned by Chinese investment group Fosun International, Wolves have been in the Premier League since 2018. They are looking for a fourth full-time manager since the departure in 2021 of Nuno Espirito Santo, who got the team promoted six years ago.

"We're very grateful to Gary for all of his effort, dedication and hard work during his time at the club, and we wish him and his team the best of luck for the future," said Wolves chairman Jeff Shi.

O'Neil had expressed his disappointment at losing the connection with Wolves' fans after the 2-1 loss at West Ham on Monday.

He also aimed some criticism at the club's owners for sanctioning the sale of many of its top players like Raul Jimenez and Ruben Neves over the past three transfer windows, generating 140 million pounds in profit - according to O'Neil - and not investing enough quality back in the squad.

SPORTS

First edition of EQUICIETY Champ'ship lights up the Kuwait equestrian scene

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: The inaugural edition of the "EQUICIETY" Dressage Championship concluded successfully at the Kuwait Equestrian Center, showcasing intense competition among riders. This first-of-its-kind event in Kuwait attracted a significantly larger participation compared to when the sport debuted three years ago.

Knight Saad Al-Mutairi claimed the top spot with 72.59 points, followed by Suleiman Baqer, Hamad Al-Azmi, Maryam Bahrami, Rowan Al-Kandari, and Fatima Al-Khamis.

Dalal Al-Sharhan excelled with a score of 68.41 points, taking first place. She was followed by Dalal Al-Haqoul, Dalal Al-Sharhan (on a second horse), Maryam Bahrami, and Gabor Sejdi.

The Light Level featured a fierce rivalry between Talal Al-Hazeem and Hussein Al-Kharafi. Al-Kharafi topped the first round with 68.16 points, while Al-Hazeem secured second and third places. In the second round, Talal Al-Hazeem shone with two horses, earning first place with SILVIO and second with BLACK OUT, as Al-Kharafi did not participate in this round.

The winners were crowned by Sheikh Sabah Mubarak Al-Sabah and Sheikha Fajer Bader Al-Sabah.

Sheikh Sabah Mubarak praised the championship for fostering strong competition among riders and expressed gratitude to Sheikha Fajer Bader Al-Sabah for her dedication to promoting dressage in Kuwait.

Sheikha Fajer Bader Al-Sabah emphasized that the "EQUICIETY" Championship will become an annual event, supported by the Kuwait Equestrian Federation and evaluated by international judges. She reflected on the journey of horse taming in Kuwait, stating, "With the backing of Sheikh Sabah Mubarak Al-Sabah, we've successfully organized several tournaments, turning our dream of popularizing dressage in Kuwait into reality."

This landmark event sets the stage for the continued growth of dressage in the region.



Sheikh Sabah and Sheikha Fajr in the middle of the heroes.

Bucks top Hawks, earn spot in NBA Cup championship game against Thunder

Oklahoma City eliminates Rockets

LAS VEGAS, Dec 15, (AP): Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points and was an assist away from a triple-double, Damian Lillard added 25 and the Milwaukee Bucks beat the Atlanta Hawks 110-102 on Saturday to earn a spot in the NBA Cup championship game.

The Bucks will meet Oklahoma City, which beat Houston in the other semifinal, for the title on Tuesday night.

Antetokounmpo finished with 14 rebounds, nine assists and four blocks for the Bucks, who improved to 11-1 all-time in NBA Cup games - the only loss coming in last year's semifinals.

Brook Lopez scored 16 for Milwaukee.

Trae Young had 35 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds for the Hawks, who got 15 points and 10 rebounds from Jalen Johnson and 15 points from De'Andre Hunter.

Young drew 11 fouls in the game, a season-high. He drew 10 fouls in two other games this season; the Hawks won both of those. Since Young joined the NBA, he's drawn at least 10 fouls in a game 52 times. Every other

Hawk, combined, in that span has done it once.

Antetokounmpo was brilliant, shooting 10 of 15 from the field and 12 of 18 from the foul line. And Bobby Portis provided his usual boost off the bench with 10 points and nine rebounds in 23 minutes.

Antetokounmpo blocked an alley-oop dunk try by Capela at the rim with 2:35 left, preserving what was a five-point Bucks lead.

Going back to last season, including playoffs, Milwaukee had lost 20 consecutive games when trailing entering the fourth quarter. The Bucks trailed 83-82 going into the fourth on Saturday.

The Bucks will play Oklahoma City in Tuesday's championship game - which does not count in the standings - before returning to regular season play on Friday at Cleveland. The Hawks return to regular season play Thursday at San Antonio.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 20 of his 32 points in the second half, and the Oklahoma City Thunder pulled away late Saturday night to defeat the Houston Rockets 111-96 and advance to the NBA Cup championship.

The Thunder take a five-game winning streak into Tuesday night's final against the Bucks. Milwaukee defeated the Atlanta Hawks 110-102 in the Eastern Conference semifinal. The title game does not count in the league standings.

Isaiah Hartenstein added 21 points for the Thun-

der, Jalen Williams scored 20 and Luguentz Dort finished with 19 points and nine rebounds.

Amen Thompson led Houston with 19 points, one of six Rockets in double figures, and Alperen Sengun had 13 points and 11 rebounds.

The Rockets and Thunder have two of the three best records in the Western Conference, making Saturday's second semifinal a potential playoff preview. Fred VanVleet's 3-point shooting woes continued. He made 6 of 29 in his previous three games and missed his first nine shots from 3 and finished 1 of 11 against OKC.

Gilgeous-Alexander entered this game averaging 30.2 points and shooting 51.5% but struggled to find his offensive game early. He found a way to get to the free throw line, making 14 of 15 to help surpass his season average.

Oklahoma City went on a 13-3 run to go ahead 97-82 with 4:57 left and break open what was a close game.

The Thunder scored 70 points in the second half. That second-half surge enabled Oklahoma City to turn a 42-41 halftime deficit into a fairly easy victory.

The Thunder will play Milwaukee in Tuesday's championship game before returning to regular season play on Thursday at Orlando. The Rockets also return to regular season play on Thursday against New Orleans.



Atlanta Hawks' Dominick Barlow (1) shoots as Milwaukee Bucks' Bobby Portis (9) and Brook Lopez (11) defend during a semifinal game in the NBA Cup basketball tournament in Las Vegas. (AP)

Amiez dreams dashed

Henrik wins WC slalom for 1st victory in nearly 2 yrs

VAL d'ISERE, France, Dec 15, (AP): World champion Henrik Kristoffersen won a men's World Cup slalom Sunday for his first victory in nearly two years after first-run leader Steven Amiez saw his dreams of a first win dashed.

Kristoffersen had two flawless runs on the challenging Face de Belvedere course to finish 0.52 seconds ahead of Norwegian teammate Atle Lie McGrath and 0.89 faster than Loic Meillard of Switzerland.

It was a first victory for Kristoffersen since he triumphed in the world championships in February 2023.

It also came with a bit of luck, with the absence of injured Olympic champion Clement Noel and a tumble for Amiez, who had beaten Kristoffersen by 0.32 in the first run for hopes of a first victory in front of a home crowd.

The 26-year-old Amiez had never finished on a World Cup podium and his previous best was fourth in Austria

last month. "First of all, sorry for Steven. He's skiing really good and he will get there. So to the French public: 'don't worry, he

will get there.' And sorry about Noel. I wish we got to fight today," the 30-year-old Kristoffersen said. "But yeah, very happy, very difficult today so experience

is nice to have sometimes."

It was a third victory in Val d'Isere for Kristoffersen, who won slaloms there in 2015 and 2016.

"Was eight years since I won here the first time. And it's really good now because now they can't say 'it's been a long time huh?'" Kristoffersen said with a laugh.

"I had less worries (then), I was less nervous. Now everyone expects me to do good all the time because I've been almost 90 times on the podium, won a lot of races, everything. So the expectation is always there, and also from my side. But of course, I'm a little older, a little more calm I feel ... maybe."

Kristoffersen - who also tops the giant slalom leaderboard - moved 20 points above Noel in the slalom standings, 18 points over McGrath and 110 ahead of defending champion Marco Odermatt, who does not compete in slaloms.



Switzerland's Loic Meillard poses on podium after finishing third in an alpine ski, men's World Cup slalom in Val d'Isere, France. (AP)

Kuwait handball team heads to Tunisia for second training camp

By Khaled Al-Enezi

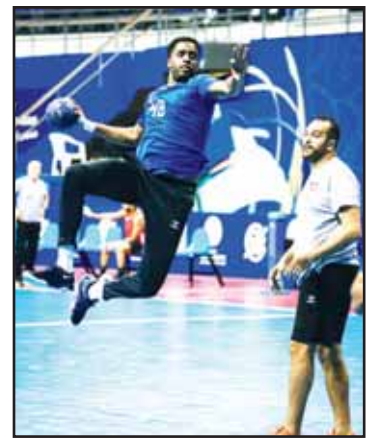
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

ZAGREB, Dec 15: The Kuwait national handball team is set to depart Croatia for Tunisia on the 23rd of this month to begin the second phase of its external training camp. This intensive preparation aims to ready the team for the 29th World Handball Championship, scheduled from January 14 to February 2 in Croatia, Denmark, and Norway. Kuwait will compete in Group Three alongside Qatar, Austria, and France.

During the Tunisian camp, Kuwait will face the Tunisian national team in two friendly matches, sharpening its skills and testing strategies ahead of the global event.

In Croatia, the team continues rigorous daily training under the guidance of Algerian coach Saeed Hijazi. The training sessions have been intensified, focusing on speed, explosive movements, and muscle endurance, with activities divided into three segments to maximize performance.

Faisal Saiwan, Director of National Teams, emphasized the current focus on physical conditioning and a mix of group and individual drills to boost endurance.



Players intensify training for the World Cup.

"The Croatian camp is progressing smoothly, and the team's physical condition is improving," Saiwan stated.

He also commended the players for their dedication, adhering closely to both administrative and technical guidance. "Everyone is striving to secure their spot and ensure Kuwait makes an honorable return to the global stage after a 14-year absence," he added.

The Kuwaiti delegation is determined to make a strong showing at this prestigious tournament, showcasing the team's readiness and resilience.

Boise State wins

Loyola Marymount edges Prairie View A&M 76-75

LOS ANGELES, Dec 15, (AP): Will Johnston led Loyola Marymount with 23 points, including the game-winning layup with one second remaining, and the Lions took down Prairie View A&M 76-75 on Saturday night.

Johnston shot 6 for 10 (4 for 7 from 3-point range) and 7 of 7 from the free-throw line for the Lions (5-4). Caleb Stone-Carrawell shot 6 of 12 from the field, including 1 for 4 from 3-point range, and went 4 for 5 from the foul line to add 17 points. Aaron McBride had 12 points and shot 6 of 8 from the field.



Johnston

Johnston was fouled as he made a 3-pointer and hit the and-1 free throw to give LMU a 74-73 lead with 24 seconds left and Tanahj Pettway made two free throws to put the Panthers back in front with 2.8 remaining. Alex Merkviladze threw a inbounds baseball pass to Aaron McBride, who made a contested catch near the top of the key as he collided with a defender, tapped a pass to a streaking Johnston for a left-hand reverse layup as time expired.

Nick Anderson led the Panthers (1-9) in scoring, finishing with 20 points. Prairie View A&M also got 18 points and five assists from Tanahj Pettway. Jordan Tillmon finished with nine points. The loss was the Panthers' ninth in a row.

Loyola Marymount went into the half tied with Prairie View A&M 32-32. McBride scored 10 points in the half. Johnston led Loyola Marymount with 21 points in the second half, including their game-winner.

Tyson Degenhart scored 19 points and Andrew Meadow added three points in the overtime as Boise State defeated Saint Mary's (CA) 67-65.

Degenhart shot 5 of 13 from the field, including 1 for 6 from 3-point range, and went 8 for 10 from the free-throw line for the Broncos (7-3). Alvaro Cardenas Torre shot 5 of 8 from the field and 3 for 3 from the foul line to add 14 points. O'Mar Stanley had 13 points and shot 5 of 13 from the field and 3 for 6 from the free-throw line.

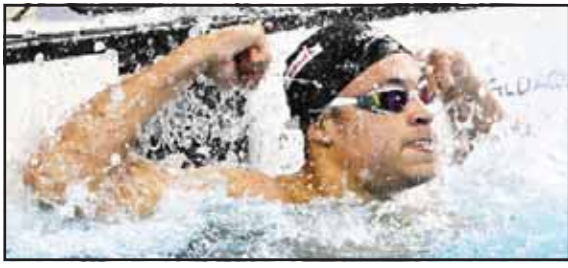
The Gaels (9-2) were led by Augustas Marciulionis, who recorded 17 points and six assists. Luke Barrett added 13 points and seven rebounds for Saint Mary's. Andrew McKeever also had nine points and eight rebounds.

Cardenas Torre scored eight points in the first half for Boise State, who led 32-26 at half-time. Boise State was outscored by six points in the second half and the teams finished regulation tied 59-59. Meadow shot 3 of 4 from the free throw line on the way to their three points in the overtime.

Pablo Tamba had 18 points in UC Davis' 69-62 victory over Sacramento State on Saturday.

Tamba also contributed six rebounds and three steals for the Aggies (6-4). Leo DeBruhl scored 14 points while going 4 of 7 from the floor, including 1 for 3 from 3-point range, and 5 for 6 from the free-throw line. Ty Johnson had 14 points and shot 6 for 16 (0 for 3 from 3-point range) and 2 of 3 from the free-throw line.

Jacob Holt led the Hornets (2-8) in scoring, finishing with 17 points and seven rebounds. Julian Vaughns added 15 points for Sacramento State. EJ Neal also had 10 points and two steals.



Jordan Crooks of the Cayman Islands celebrates after he set the world record during the 50-meter freestyle semifinal at the World Short Course Swimming Championships in Budapest, Hungary. (AP)

Sports



Officials pose with winners after the closing ceremony.

Yarmouk claims title after thrilling final against Khaitan

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: The Tennis League Championship for Under-16 players concluded recently at the Yarmouk Club courts, with Yarmouk securing a 2-1 victory over Khaitan in the final match. The event was attended by Abdul Redha Al-Gharib, Chairman of the Tennis Federation, and Technical Director Abbas Al-Busairi, who also presided over the coronation ceremony.

In the opening singles match, Yarmouk's Mohammed Al-Awadhi dominated against Khaitan's Khaled Al-Mutairi, winning in straight sets 6-1, 6-0. The second singles match saw Yarmouk's Abdul Rahman Abdul Abdullah overpower Khaitan's Abdul Razzaq Al-Kaak, also in straight sets, 6-2, 6-0. In the doubles match, Khaitan's Abdul Rahman Ahmed and Mohammed

Al-Sultin staged a comeback to defeat Yarmouk's Fares Al-Kazemi and Mohammed Al-Turkait in three sets, with scores of 5-7, 6-4, 6-3.

Yarmouk Club claimed first place with 10 points, edging out Khaitan on the basis of head-to-head victories. Khaitan also finished with 10 points but settled for second place. Kuwait Club secured third place with 7 points.

Real misses chance to go top

Navas bids farewell to home fans

BARCELONA, Spain, Dec 15, (AP): Real Madrid was held at Rayo Vallecano to 3-3 in a thrilling derby, missing a chance to overtake Barcelona at the top of La Liga.

Rayo set a fast pace and stunned the powerhouse with two headed goals from Unai López and Abdul Mumin to lead 2-0 by the 36th minute.

Federico Valverde struck with a powerful shot from well outside the area to pull one back for Madrid then Jude Bellingham headed the visitors level from a pass by Rodrygo just before halftime.

Madrid looked on course to completing a comeback win when Rodrygo put them in front for the first time with a deflected shot in the 56th.

But Rayo midfielder leader Isi Palazón stretched out a boot to steer Florian Lejeune's shot past Thibaut Courtois in the 64th.

Madrid was without striker Kylian Mbappé, who is nursing a left-thigh injury. Vinicius Júnior went on as a second-half substitute. Goalie Augusto Batalla saved the Brazilian's best effort in the final period.

Madrid remained second.

Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti admitted his team dropped its guard in defense when his players left López and Mumin unchecked to turn in crosses. But he said he was "satisfied" with his team's reaction, especially given the injuries to defensive starters Dani Carvajal, Eder Militao, and Ferland

Mendi.

He also looked to last season, when his team drew twice with Rayo.

"Last year we didn't win here, we drew, and we won the league anyway," Ancelotti said. "We are playing well and on the right path. So, we had a draw. We need to look toward the next games."

Madrid, as the Champions League titleholder, next travels to Qatar to play the Intercontinental Cup final against Mexican club Pachuca.

"We have a great chance to win a title on Wednesday, which would put the cherry on top of a great year," Ancelotti said.

Bellingham took his league scoring run to six games in a row.

Vinicius will miss the next game at home against Sevilla after picking up his fifth yellow card, this time for protesting.

Rayo was in 13th place. The modest club has also held Atletico Madrid to 1-1 and forced Barcelona to rally for a 2-1 thanks to a late goal.

"Before the game we talked about all our recent games with Real Madrid when we had been close to winning, so we knew that if they weren't on their game then we could get a good result," Rayo coach Iñigo Pérez said.

Sevilla's Jesus Navas bid farewell to his home fans during a 1-0 win over Celta Vigo as he nears the end of his 20-year playing career.

Players from both teams wore T-shirts saying "Navas Legend" before kickoff. They gave a tearful Navas an honor guard with trophies he won with the club placed on the pitch. Navas wept

again, and knelt to kiss the turf when he was substituted with 20 minutes left.

"Jesus has always been my role model, I remember watching him when I was a child," Sevilla goal-scorer Manu Bueno said. "I am so proud to have scored this goal and be able to dedicate it to him."

Navas announced in May he would retire at the end of the year, midway through this season.

Navas, who turned 39 last month, debuted for his boyhood club in 2004 and played two stints for Sevilla on either side of his spell at Manchester City from 2013-17 when he helped it win one Premier League. He helped Sevilla win two Europa Leagues and two Copa del Reys among other titles.

Navas helped Spain win the European Championship last summer, his second. He was also part of the 2010 World Cup champion squad.

His last game will be at Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu Stadium on Dec. 22.

Cyle Larin scored two goals, one while Mallorca was down to 10 men, to complete a 2-1 comeback win over Girona at home.

Larin scored from an assist by Vedat Muriqi to cancel out Girona's opener by Donny Van de Beek.

Mallorca went down a man in the 32nd when Muriqi was red-carded for a hard foul of Byran Gil. But Larin got his brace when he pressured goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga and slid to deflect the goalie's clearance attempt into the goal for the 51st-minute winner.

Espanyol held Osasuna to 0-0 at home.

'Unique and challenging'

Kuwait assigns six hotels for Khaleeji Zain 26 delegations

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Athari Al-Balushi, head of the Hospitality and Hotels Committee for the upcoming Khaleeji Zain 26, announced that six hotels have been designated to accommodate Kuwait's guests and the delegations participating in the tournament. The event is set to kick off this Saturday evening and will run until January 3, 2025.

Al-Balushi explained that the committee developed a detailed timeline, conducting multiple inspection visits to the chosen hotels to assess their final preparations well in advance of the delegations' arrival. This effort ensures compliance with all requirements set forth by the Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation.

"Our committee members will be stationed at all hotels throughout the tournament to facilitate entry and exit procedures and meet all the needs of the delegations. VIP services will also be provided for dignitaries, media professionals, referees, match observers, medical staff, and the doping committee at the main platforms of Jaber Al-Ahmad and Jaber Al-Mubarak stadiums," Al-Balushi said.

She expressed gratitude for the high level of cooperation and coordination among the various committees working on the tournament, emphasizing the collective effort to overcome obstacles and achieve success. These efforts align with the directives of Kuwait's political leadership and the supervision of Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and Chairman of the Supreme Organizing Committee.

Serbian coach Goran Tovaric reminisced about the pinnacle of his coaching career: leading the Kuwaiti national team to victory in the Gulf 20 Championship in Yemen in 2010. "Winning the Gulf title with Kuwait is my proudest achievement, especially as it came after years of hard work and a long absence from the podium for the Blues," Tovaric said.

Tovaric had previously been part of Kuwait's coaching staff under Mohammed Ibrahim during Gulf 19 in Oman in 2009. After securing Kuwait's tenth Gulf Cup title, he guided the team to a third-place finish in Gulf 21 in Bahrain. Now coaching the UAE's Al-Wahda Club, Tovaric fondly recalls the camaraderie and passion of Gulf Cup fans, calling his experience in Kuwait a "privilege" for him and his family.

On the upcoming Gulf Zain 26, the 53-year-old noted, "This championship, like all others, defies logic and technical expectations. Any



Athari Al-Balushi



Goran Tovaric

team can win." He expressed his hope for Kuwait's victory, even if it meant relinquishing his status as the last coach to lead Kuwait to a Gulf title.

Renowned Brazilian coach Carlos Alberto Pereira, who also left his mark with the Kuwaiti national team, highlighted the unique significance of the Gulf Cup for the region. Pereira reflected on the fierce competition during his era, crediting it for producing standout stars across Gulf teams.

Despite earning numerous international titles, Pereira stated, "The Gulf Championships hold a special place with their own dynamics and challenges. Although I finished as runner-up twice—with Kuwait and the UAE—my experience in the Gulf Cup remains invaluable."

Both coaches emphasized the Gulf Cup's importance as a platform for competitive excellence and regional pride, underscoring Kuwait's readiness to host an event that reflects its rich sporting tradition and organizational prowess.



Rayo's Ivan Balliu, centre, challenges for the ball with Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Rayo Vallecano and Real Madrid at the Vallecas stadium in Madrid, Spain. (AP)