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Kuwait and Jordan deepen ties

16 PAGES

Amir hosts Jordanian Crown Prince for key talks



HH the Amir receives Crown Prince of Jordan.

Amiri Diwan photo

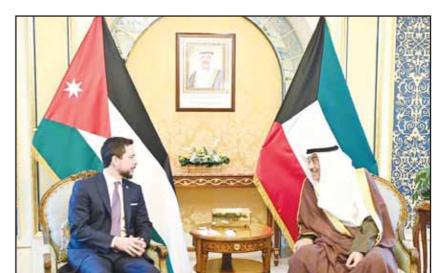
KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Sunday at Bayan Palace, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Crown Prince of Jordan Al-Hussein bin Abdullah II and accompanying delegation, on

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.

occasion of official visit.

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.

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HH the Crown Prince receives Crown Prince of Jordan.

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 efforts 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

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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Cold spell extends through Tuesday

Chilly winds, dust blanket Kuwait



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

CITRA gets greenlight for three

major data centers with Google

(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

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 out-doors, 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 Alyoum that the residential addresses of 255 individuals have been deleted either based on the owner's declaration or due to the demolition of the building, reports Al-Seyas-

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 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 per-

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.

map 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.

By Mohammed Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: In a major

step towards implementing the road-

According to informed sources, the approval followed a thorough review

of CITRA's request, which outlined the annual revenues from the three sites Sulaibiya 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 CI-TRA the authority to conclude and sign

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Chief of the Kuwait National Guard receives UK Ambassador to

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

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Newswatch

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)



Zain offers latest 5G solutions for an innovative home experience

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



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



Expected Weather for the next 24 hrs By Day: Rather cold with light to mo

By Day: Rather cold with light to moderate freshening at times over coastal areas northwesterly wind, with speed of 12 - 42 km/h and some light clouds will appear.

By Night: Cold to very cold with light to

moderate northwesterly wind, with speed of 12 - 35 km/h with a chance for frost forming over agricultural and desert areas. Stations Max Exp. Min Rec Kuwait City 16 08 Kuwait Airport 16 08 Abdaly 15 06

Bubyan 16
Jahra 16 0
Failaka Island 17
Salmiyah 17
Ahmadi 17
Jal Aliyah 16
Nuwaisib 16



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His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Minister of Finance and State Minister for Economic Affairs and Investment Noura Al-Fassam and Sheikh Saud Salem Abdulaziz Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace.

Amir receives Finance Minister, newly-appointed KIA manager

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Sunday at Bayan Palace, Minister of Finance and State Minister for Economic Affairs and Invest-

ment Noura Al-Fassam.

Minister Al-Fassam presented His Highness with Sheikh Saud Salem Abdulaziz Al-Sabah, on occasion of being appointed Managing Director of Kuwait Investment Authority.

Other Voices

The emergence of economic superpowers after war curbs

By Ahmad alsarraf

After their defeat in World War II, Germany and Japan were subjected to strict conditions and restrictions imposed by the Allied powers as part of their surrender agreements.

These restrictions included heavy control over both countries, particularly prohibiting them from engaging in offensive military actions, a provision enshrined in their constitutions.

In Japan's case, following its surrender and occupation, the United States appointed General Douglas MacArthur as the supreme authority.

He oversaw the dismantling of Japan's military industries and introduced a new constitution that explicitly forbade Japan from participating in any future wars. Addition-

ally, MacArthur



alsarraf

reformed the country's education system and revoked the Japanese Emperor's political powers.

While these measures effectively stripped both countries of their ability to protect themselves militarily, the Western powers, particularly the United States, pledged to guarantee their security.

This protection coupled with the

This protection, coupled with the lack of military obligations, allowed Japan and Germany to redirect their efforts and vast financial resources into rebuilding their economies and improving the standard of living for their citizens. They focused heavily on developing education, healthcare, industries, and research.

Within three decades, this strategic shift transformed both nations, enabling them to emerge as some of the most powerful economies in the world, second only to the United States.

What if two of our countries were in the same situation as Germany and Japan after World War II, particularly when looking at the current situation with Syria? The question might seem simple, but the answer is far more complex.

Had our countries been in the place of Germany and Japan, we would have struggled to harness the financial savings required to rebuild and strengthen our economies.

We would likely not have directed these resources toward research and development, nor would we have prioritized the improvement of our education systems or the encouragement of industrial growth. Instead, our nations, especially the larger ones, would have remained stagnant, as these are not considered pressing priorities for many of

our governments.

Our societies have long been shaped by a belief in destiny -- a belief that life on earth is transient and the afterlife is eternal. This view, passed down through generations, encourages the accumulation of spiritual rewards rather than material or intellectual progress.

While this belief offers comfort, it also hinders growth. It provides individuals with solace and resilience in the face of personal or family tragedies, as the mindset becomes one of acceptance: "It is fate, and we must endure."

"It is fate, and we must endure."

However, in contrast, societies that do not hold this fatalistic view actively seek to understand and prevent disasters, taking practical steps to secure a better future. They believe that this world is not just a temporary stage, but a place to prepare for eternity, which motivates them to develop their abilities and address challenges head-on.

This difference in mindset is why Western societies often examine the causes of their problems and seek ways to avoid them. They are driven by a belief that the world is not a mere passing phase but a realm for making lasting progress. Meanwhile, our focus on faith and acceptance of fate may leave us less prepared for the challenges we face.

While this deep faith can provide comfort and inner peace, the result of relying too heavily on fate without addressing our own shortcomings can be disastrous. History has shown us countless examples where failure to prepare -- militarily, economically, or intellectually -- has led to weakness.

This vulnerability has made us susceptible to external forces that can dominate or even eliminate us entirely.

For example, the current mindset of Israel, despite its small size and population, is to plan for expansion. Israeli writers, commentators, clerics, and military personnel openly discuss their country's plans to invade and occupy Arab lands, believing it is their divine right

The reason they feel emboldened is because they understand our profound weaknesses. They know that, materially, militarily, economically, and even intellectually, we are ill-prepared to defend ourselves.

This reality reflects our ongoing failure to act on the lessons of history, resulting in a situation where our enemies perceive us as vulnerable and easy to

In conclusion, while faith and acceptance of destiny can provide personal peace, they must be balanced with proactive efforts to strengthen our societies -- economically, militarily, and intellectually. Without this balance, we risk falling further into a cycle of weakness and vulnerability.

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12-month project begins in Jan 2025

PART plans to improve rain drains

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: The Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) is set to launch a project in early 2025 to enhance the efficiency of the rainwater drainage systems in residential areas in various parts of Kuwait, reports Al-Anba daily.

The project, which will take 12 months to complete, is designed to address the main challenges in rainwater management, including the regular drainage of water, the establishment of reservoirs for water collection, and the reduction of water pooling in the main areas. It will also focus on replacing old pipes, expanding network capacities, and improving outlets connected to the sea to mitigate the impact of high tides on

flow rates during rainfall.

According to sources from the Ministry of Public Works, the project will be put up for public tender on January 5, 2025. It will utilize innovative global engineering solutions and will provide advanced services to citizens, particularly in existing residential areas, by enhancing the performance and capacity of the rainwater drainage networks.

works.

The project prioritizes the regular drainage of rainwater with the aim of reducing water pooling and protecting the quality of rainwater drained into dedicated networks. It will also address critical sites that have experienced persistent rainwater accumulation in recent years.

PM receives OAPEC chief, member states' oil ministers

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Sabah on Sunday received the Ministers of Oil and Energy from member states of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), along with the organization's Secretary General Jamal Issa Al-Loughani, on the occasion of their visit to Kuwait for the 113th OAPEC Council of Ministers meeting.

The meeting highlighted the strong relations between Kuwait and the member states, focusing on enhancing Arab cooperation in the energy sector to achieve shared goals and mutual interests.

Also in attendance were Head of His Highness the Prime Minister's Office Abdulaziz Dakheel Al-Dakheel, Minister of Oil Tareq Suleiman Al-Roumi, and Undersecretary of the Ministry of Oil Sheikh Dr. Nimr Fahad Al-Malik Al-Sabah.



PM Diwan p

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Sabah receives the OAPEC Secretary General and Ministers of Oil and Energy from the member states.

Mol evicts tenants from gov't property as deadline expires

Eligible military personnel to replace residents

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: In a significant step toward implementing the decision to reclaim rented government housing in Al-Sulaibiya and Taima, the Ministry of Interior has initiated the evacuation of some residences following the expiry of previously granted deadlines, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to informed sources, committees from the ministries of Interior, Defense and State ministry for Housing Affairs are assessing tenant conditions while setting new

deadlines for those whose services in the ministries of Interior and Defense have concluded to vacate the premises. Last September, the Ministry of Interior clari-

aligns with regulations of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare which stipulate that a rented house must be reclaimed under three circumstances:

If a Kuwaiti tenant has received alternative

fied that the decision to recover public housing

housing care from the state

■ Upon the end of military service for non-Kuwaiti beneficiaries

■ When the reasons for granting housing benefits no longer apply

The Ministry also reported numerous violations during inspections, including sub-leasing houses, converting them into bachelor accommodations, prolonged absences from the country and Kuwaiti beneficiaries retaining homes despite having received alternative housing care.

Consequently, the authorities are reclaiming such properties to allocate them to eligible military personnel currently on waiting lists.

Moreover, the ministries of Defense and Interior consider humanitarian cases when providing housing for individuals whose service ended due to death or injury during military operations.



KUNA photo Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Toutounchi in his office on Sunday.

Deputy FM, Iran envoy meet

Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Sunday Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Toutounchi, discussing

with him ways to enhance bilateral relations.

The two officials also discussed issues of mutual interest. (KUNA)

French university team visits KU

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: The acting Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Dr. Abrar Al-Hassan, and the Director of the Student Exchange Program Prof. Dr. Kamal Rouibeh welcomed a delegation from the French University of Université Polytechnique Hauts-De-France, led by the university's Director Prof. Dr. Abdul

Hakim Artiba.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait University, the delegation included the Head of International Relations Dr. Jonathan Brindle, the International Cooperation Coordinator Prof. Dr. Mohammed Jumai, Information Technology expert Dr. Marcia Peixoto; and the Attaché for University Cooperation at the French Embassy in Kuwait Dr. Saeed Muammar.

During the meeting, Dr. Al-Hassan welcomed the delegation and affirmed the importance of signing student exchange agreements with academically accredited universities.

She highlighted the College of Administrative Sciences' efforts to strengthen its partnerships with international universities to achieve its academic goals.

Dr. Al-Hassan stressed the need for

curriculum coordination to ensure the successful implementation of these agreements.

Meanwhile, Prof. Dr. Rouibeh pro-

vided a brief history of the Student Exchange Office at the college, noting its leadership in this field within the Arab region and the Gulf.

He explained that the college has signed 27 agreements with prestigious, AACSB-accredited universities in America, Europe, Asia, and Australia, Since

AACSB-accredited universities in America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. Since 2008, a total of 207 students have benefited from the program, including 122 scholarship students and 85 guest students. France is the college's largest partner, with 67 students sent to France and 47 students received from France.

Furthermore, the Director of the French



Members of the delegation

University Prof. Dr. Abdul Hakim Artiba affirmed the importance of actively implementing agreements to include student exchange, faculty exchange, and joint research projects.

In addition, Dr. Jonathan Brindle highlighted the potential for concluding agreements within the European ERAS-MUS+ program, which facilitates the exchange of students and faculty members between European universities and institutions outside the European Union.

He also proposed organizing specialized seminars for graduate students in collaboration with partner universities.

At the end of the meeting, both parties highlighted the importance of strengthening the academic partnership between the College of Administrative Sciences and the French University. They agreed on expanding student exchange opportunities and developing joint projects in education and scientific research.

Huge dip in cost of oil for power, water use

By Mohammad Ghanem Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Sources from the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy have revealed a decrease in the cost of oil used for operating electricity production and water distillation plants during the 2023/2024 fiscal year by approximately KD 844.2 million. The total expenses amounted to KD 2.496 billion, compared to KD 3.348 billion during the 2022/2023 fiscal year.

They explained that the budget item allocated for oil consumption in operating power stations holds a high priority within the ministry's annual budget, accounting for approximately 75 percent of it.

The decrease in fuel costs is attributed to several factors, including the decline in global oil prices, the ministry's rationalization policy, and improved debt collection mechanisms.

Notably, the ministry has established stronger coordination with the Ministry of Interior and streamlined the payment processes through platforms such as the ministry's website and the Sahel application.

Meanwhile, the sources explained that the ministry is cur-

rently implementing two projects aimed at developing and upgrading fuel networks, particularly natural gas and liquid fuel lines, by establishing the necessary pipelines for all types of fuel.

The first project involves designing and developing the in-

The first project involves designing and developing the infrastructure for the liquid fuel and gas fuel supply systems for power and water distillation plants under the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy. This project is considered one of the most important in Kuwait, as it addresses the aging of power and water distillation plants, particularly the systems responsible for receiving gas and liquid fuel. These outdated systems have impacted the efficiency of fuel transmission and reception systems for electricity production and water distillation at the Shuwaikh, Doha West, Subiya, and Al-Zour South stations.

The second project is related to supervision of the implementation of supply projects, as well as the initial operation and maintenance of infrastructure developments for fuel reception systems at five power generation and water distillation stations affiliated with the ministry. This project aims to improve the efficiency of fuel systems at the Shuwaikh, West Doha, Subiya, and South Al-Zour stations. It also includes overseeing the establishment of fuel lines to supply the Khairan Thermal Power Plant.

Furthermore, the ministry issued an internal memorandum

outlining the fingerprint mechanism to track attendance during official working hours for ministry employees, in accordance with Civil Service Commission (CSC)'s circular No. 9/2024 and administrative circular No. 18/2024, which specify the official working hours for employees from 7:00 am to 8:00 am (flexible hours) and require employees to register their fingerprint attendance within 60 minutes after two hours of initial arrival.

The memorandum clarifies that, if an employee arrives at 7:00 am, the time for recording their third fingerprint will be between 9:01 am and 10:00 am, with a 30-minute grace period that is not counted as part of the actual working hours. If an employee arrives between 8:01 am and 8:30 am, the fingerprint attendance window is from 10:01 am to 11:00 am.

Al-Huwailah vows to boost social services for citizens

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15, (KUNA): Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, on Saturday affirmed the dedication to enhance social services in Kuwait as her department marks 70th anniversary since its founding by the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem in 1954.

Initially established as the Department of Social Affairs, it became a critical institution focusing on low-income families and individuals with special needs. In 1962, it was officially renamed from the Department of Social Affairs to the Ministry of Social Affairs and reverted to its current title after a reorganization in 2013.

Dr. Al-Huwailah highlighted the ministry's significant role in social development, particularly in rehabilitating individuals with special needs. Over the past 70 years, the ministry has achieved essential milestones through its dedicated staff, support from political leaders, and partnerships with various organizations, as it aims to align with Kuwait's developmental goals for a brighter future.

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A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Syria likely to recover from misery despite challenges

"AT 9 pm on Saturday, December 7, I called Dr. Radwan Ziadeh, executive director of the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Washington and a visiting scholar at the Carr Center for Human Rights at Harvard University, to ask him about the military and political situation in Syria," columnist Dr. Hamed Al Hamoud wrote for Al-Qabas daily.

"He confided that even he was astonished by the rapid collapse of the regime's forces. He reassured me that the opposition forces in Aleppo were managing the city

far better than the Americans had governed Baghdad following the fall of Saddam's

regime. "When I asked about the treatment of minorities in Aleppo, he shared a remarkable anecdote: on Sunday, November 30, fighters



from Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham had attended a church mass and even helped the pastor set up the Christmas tree.

"When I inquired about the broader situation on the ground, he confidently predicted that Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham forces would enter Damascus within hours. Sensing his optimism might be excessive, I decided not to challenge him further and we ended the call.

"When I woke on Sunday morning, December 8, I expected to hear of intensified fighting near Homs. To my surprise, news broke that forces from Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham had actually entered Damascus. I was not alone in misjudging the situation -- American intelligence had also underestimated the regime's fragility.

"The New York Times reported on December 9 that as recently as Friday, December 6, US intelligence assessed there was a 50 percent chance Assad could defeat the opposition, even suggesting he might resort to chemical weapons.

"Eager to understand this unexpected collapse, I began cautiously contacting friends in Damascus, despite previously avoiding political discussions with anyone still inside Syria. On Monday, December 9, I reached out to Yasser, a distinguished architect and professor specializing in restoring historic Damascene homes near the Umayyad Mosque.

"Yasser revealed he had fled Damascus with his family to Beirut on December 7, fearing imminent battles and shelling. To his astonishment, he awoke in Beirut on Sunday to discover that Damascus had already been liberated. He lamented that he had once believed his children would grow up in a Syria still ruled by Hafez Bashar al-Assad.

"While many had overestimated the Assad regime's resilience, analyzing the factors behind its rapid collapse is relatively straightforward and can be attributed to the following reasons:

"1. The Collapse of the Syrian Economy -- Between 2010 and 2023, Syria's economy contracted by an estimated 84 percent. Although precise data is scarce due to international isolation, the World Bank relied on satellite imagery of nighttime lighting to assess economic activity. Even the lucrative Captagon trade, worth billions and controlled by Maher al-Assad's circle, was not integrated into the official economy.

"2. October 7 Events -- The October 7 conflict resulted in approximately 50,000 Palestinian casualties and the displacement of two million people from Gaza. It also inadvertently catalyzed the fall of the Assad regime. Israeli strikes on Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria crippled its ability to support Assad. While Israel did not aim to topple Assad, the dynamics of war often defy expectations and the regime's reliance on external allies backfired.

"3. The Alawite Sect's Deterioration -- Despite the regime's dependence on Alawites for key military and intelligence roles, the benefits were confined to a privileged few -- primarily the Assad, Makhlouf and al-Akhras families. The broader Alawite community, which suffered heavy losses defending Assad, gained little economically. By 2016, the sect had lost over 100,000 members in the conflict.

"On December 4, 2024, Zaman Al-Wasl reported on an Alawite citizen's open letter to Assad, expressing existential concerns and accusing the regime of leading the community to genocide.

"4. Turkish Support for the Opposition -- Turkey's rulers have long viewed instability in Syria as a threat to their own security, particularly following the influx of 4 million Syrian refugees and after repeated failed overtures to negotiate with Assad, Turkey ramped up logistical and intelligence support for the opposition groups like Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and the Free National Army.

"5. Russia's Waning Support -- While Russian military intervention had previously sustained Assad, Moscow became increasingly disillusioned with the regime's incompetence. Despite advising Assad to negotiate seriously with the opposition, his refusal strained relations. Russia eventually limited its military support, anticipating the regime's downfall and evacuating Assad and his family to Moscow.

"6. Iranian Disillusionment -- Iran and Hezbollah's deep involvement in Syria proved a costly strategic error. Early on, even then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad acknowledged that Assad's survival was unlikely. Over time, Iran's commitment waned as the Syrian army disintegrated and the cost of propping up the regime became untenable. Revolutionary Guards commander Hossein Salami admitted they were the 'last to leave,' but their initial decision to support Assad remains highly contentious.

The above points illustrate the primary causes of the regime's collapse, which few anticipated would occur so swiftly.

"Although Syria faces a long and uncertain path toward stability and development, the fall of the Assad regime has shattered a pervasive wall of fear, reconnecting individuals with each other and the outside world. There is hope that, despite the challenges ahead, Syria is on the road to recov-

Also:

"Many verses of the Holy Quran have explained the fate of people who were unjust in previous nations. God has forbidden injustice for Himself. The events that unfolded in Syria after years of injustice serve as a vivid example of Divine justice becoming apparent. Our brothers in Syria have breathed a sigh of relief and we ask God to guide them toward what is best for their country and its people," columnist Dr Turki Al-Azemi wrote for Al-Rai daily.

"Reflecting on history, the fate of ancient peoples such as Aad, Thamud and other oppressive tyrants reminds us of the inevitability of their downfall.

"Across both ancient and modern history, we have witnessed how such unjust nations met their tragic ends and how God ultimately granted victory to the oppressed.

"From this point of view, the seriousness of injustice and corruption becomes undeniably clear. God Almighty says in the Quran: 'And when We desire to destroy a city, We command its affluent ones, but they defiantly disobey therein; so the word comes into effect upon it and We destroy it with [complete] destruction.' (Surah Al-Isra: 16)

"The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, was once asked about the Hour and he responded, 'When the matter is entrusted to those who are not worthy of it.' This prophetic statement resonates deeply in today's world, where the repercussions of corruption and the lack of competent leadership are apparent in many institutions.

"During a television interview on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day, I spoke about the Corruption Perceptions Index and the global fight against corruption. The issue stems largely from a lack of qualified individuals in positions of

"Saudi Arabia's approach to addressing corruption stands as a commendable example. Through decisive measures, such as the Ritz-Carlton initiative, the Kingdom successfully recovered looted funds and placed capable individuals in leadership roles within its institutions.

"The fight against corruption must leave no room for exceptions. Legal procedures should be applied equally to all, ensuring justice and fairness. In the same interview, I emphasized that Kuwait, being a relatively small country, has the potential to eliminate corruption and hold corrupt individuals accountable within months. As a Saudi expert once said, Kuwait could surpass Rwanda in this regard.

However, the consequences of corruption are not limited to financial losses. A recent personal experience highlights this reality. I visited a friend suffering from cancer, who requires a specific type of Xray that is unavailable in Kuwait.

"He is now waiting for a report and a committee decision. Is it acceptable to delay such urgent medical cases? This reflects broader issues stemming from corruption and inefficiency that affect critical sectors like healthcare.

"Such examples illustrate the urgent need to prioritize justice and efficiency in governance. These issues are interconnected and require immediate and decisive action. By addressing them, we can pave the way for a brighter future where the well-being of citizens is truly prioritized."

"We speak to everyone with honesty and transparency, and highlight a reality that some may try to ignore, but is true. One individual claimed to be a political activist and assumed an identity that was not his own. This person flooded Kuwait



Al-Saeed

No one was spared from his attacks, and if you dared to respond, he would file a lawsuit demanding compensation. This became his profession," columnist Talal Al-Saeed wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

served his interests.

"Eventually, he transformed into a tool for some powerful individuals who used him to target their opponents, and offered him protection in exchange for his loyalty. He involved himself in conflicts far beyond his capabilities for the sake of money and fame. Every social media post had a price, and the payments flowed, swelling his greed. As the forbidden money poured into his hands, he was consumed by the consequences of his actions. But once he fell from grace, his "benefactors" and financiers abandoned him, as if they never knew him. After using him to attack their rivals, they left him to face the repercussions alone, and refused to acknowledge his existence. In the end, he was sentenced to prison, deportation, and the loss of the false identity he had long held. Is there anyone who will learn from this?

"We share this not to gloat, but to warn all those with common sense to take heed. To those who are still being used as tools by others, learn a lesson from this case and the many others similar to it. Some are now in prison, while others are on their way there.

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes/ **Mahmoud Attiyeh**



The Kuwait Fire Force delegation visits the GCC pavilion at the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center.

GCC pavilion showcases history, success

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: A delegation from the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) recently visited the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) pavilion at the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center, upon the invitation of the organizers of the pavilion.

According to a press release issued by KFF, the delegation toured the pavilion's exhibition, which showcased the achievements and history of cooperation among the GCC countries, and reflected the bright side of the Gulf community's civilization and its development in various fields.

At the end of the visit, Director of the Public Relations Department at KFF Brigadier General Mohammed Bader Al-Ghareeb thanked the Chairman and members of the Board of Directors, as well as the Head of the pavilion team Waleed Bin Fahad Al-Hamoud, and all those involved in the pavilion.

He also praised the professional work that distinguished the pavilion and wished them success in this

Woman dies in fall from roof

By Munif Nayef Al-Seyassah/Arab Times

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: A Nepalese woman died after falling from the top of a house in Mutla'a

According to security sources, when the Operations Room of the Ministry of Interior received information about the incident, security personnel and paramedics immediately rushed to the location and they confirmed she had died.

Her body was referred to the Forensic Medicine Department, and legal procedures are underway.

1 dead in mishap: A tragic accident on Artal Road led to the death of one person and left another seriously injured. reports Al-Seyassah daily. The Kuwait Fire Force said the Arifjan Fire Center responded to the scene early this morning after receiving information about the collision

After managing the situation, the fire brigade handed the site over to the relevant authorities for further investigation and necessary actions. The authorities are looking into the cause of the collision while managing the aftermath of the incident.

4 Iranians get life in jail for smuggling 152 kg of drugs

Sports club chief jail term suspended

By Jaber Al-Hamoud Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: The **Criminal Court has sentenced four** Iranians to life imprisonment for attempting to smuggle 152 kilograms of hashish and psychotropic substances on Kubbar Island.

They were arrested by a trap set by officers from the Drug Control General Department and the General Department of Coast

The defendants confessed to the charges, stating that they are heroin addicts. They explained that they left the Abadan area aboard a 21-foot boat after loading different quantities of drugs onto it. They admitted to taking a dose of heroin before departing Abadan and stated that they did not personally know the boat's owner. According to them, the boat was rented by fishermen from the Abadan area.

The drugs were loaded onto the boat, and they set off toward Kuwait based on an agreed-upon location marked on a map. However, they were arrested.

Jail term suspended: The Misdemeanor Circuit of the Court of Cassation has decided to suspend

the imprisonment of Al-Arabi Club Chairman Abdulaziz Ashour for three months without bail in his second case, in which he is charged with insulting a judge on social media. The court has set a session on January 12 to join the case file and consider the appeal.

The Misdemeanor Circuit of the Appellate Court had previously sentenced Ashour to threemonth imprisonment for insulting a judge on social media, after canceling the one-year imprisonment sentence issued by the Court of First Înstance against him.

Ashour's defense counsel Lawyer Abdul Mohsen Al-Qattan said he would request the cancellation of the conviction and seek Ashour's acquittal.

CARSIR suspends plans to issue KD 20 million 'Salmi Road'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: In accordance with the directives issued by the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef, the Central Agency for the Remedy of the Situation of Illegal Residents (CARSIR) has announced the temporary suspension of receiving applications from individuals whose nationalities have been withdrawn, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This suspension will remain in place until a new approach is developed to streamline the procedures for obtaining the new card.

This decision is part of ongoing efforts to improve the process and ensure a more efficient system for those affected.

Earlier, it was said that the Central Agency for the Remedy of the Situation of Illegal Residents (CARSIR) has outlined the required documents for issuing a card to individuals whose Kuwaiti nationality have been revoked, reports Al-Anba daily. In an announcement posted on its official X account, the agency detailed the necessary documents, including a receipt from the Nationality Department acknowledging the submission of documents, two personal photos, and proof of completion

The card will be issued once the transaction procedures are completed, and it can be collected from Al-Sawaber Complex. Individuals with other nationalities are instructed to visit the main building "Naif Palace" and those who were previously illegal residents should go to the East Al-Sawaber Complex's Department of Status

cards to 'no nationality' persons maintenance in full swing

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Director General of the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport, Khaled Al-Asimi, inspected the comprehensive maintenance project of Al-Salmi Road to monitor progress.

The authority announced that the project, which spans from the Salmi border crossing to Kuwait City, is advancing at an accelerated pace. The project, valued at 20 million Kuwaiti dinars, is being executed by an international company and is expected to be completed within

The key components of the project include enhancing highway infrastructure efficiency, upgrading safety systems, maintaining asphalt and

addressing potholes, repairing bridge expansion joints and cleaning the

The maintenance work commenced on November 12, as previously announced by the Ministry of Public Works.

This initiative underscores the government's commitment to improving road infrastructure and ensuring safer travel for all.

Kuwaiti woman absolved in drugs possession case

By Jaber Al-Hamoud Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: The Court of Appeal overturned the verdict issued by the Court of First Instance, which

had sentenced a Kuwaiti woman to two-year imprisonment with hard labor, and acquitted her of charges of possessing two types of psychotropic substances (amphetamine and methamphetamine) due to the illegality of the arrest and search procedures, and the lack of sufficient evidence to convict



of the biometric process.

Al-Alanda

The Public Prosecution had charged the woman with possessing psychotropic substances with the intent to use them, without providing proof that she had a legal license to

Lawyer Abdullah Al-Alanda, who represented the accused before the Court of Appeal, insisted that the arrest and search procedures were unlawful and that the incident officer's

reports contained contradictions. In the grounds for its ruling, the court addressed the contradictions in the statements made by the incident of-

The officer initially stated that he picked up a bag and found the seized items inside. He then approached the accused, claiming that the first accused handed him another bag, and that the second accused admitted to possessing the items.

The court rejected this narrative, concluding that the incident officer had omitted crucial details to legitimize the arrest and search. As a result, the court dismissed the officer's testimony and the statements made by the accused, finding them unreliable.

The court ruled that the arrest and search procedures were illegal, and the evidence presented in the case was insufficient to support a conviction. Consequently, the court acquitted the accused and annulled the earlier imprisonment sentence.



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KUNA photo

The Minister of Foreign Affairs with the delegation.

Kuwait FM receives Egyptian Foreign Ministry delegation

Kuwait's Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya met Sunday with an Egyptian Foreign Ministry delega-

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

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 undersecretary of the ministry, is related to "matching job data with the integrated 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

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 Neuro**logical 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

Dr Al-Awadhi has also acknowledged the depart-

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 With the growing number of elder-

ly 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

challenges faced by the healthcare system, especially concerning 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

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

Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi

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

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

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



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

Residents urged to cooperate

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 progressively extending to other less affect-

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.

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 Mishaal 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 infrastruc-

ture 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

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 re-

Ministry reaffirms commitment

Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan

MoSA marks 70 years of social services

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, reaf-

firmed 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 (KUNA) Agency on the occasion of the ministry's 70th anniversary, Al-Hu-wailah highlighted its foundational role in building Kuwaiti society since its establishment on De-

cember 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 Afthe labor sector. Over the decades, the ministry has spearheaded compre-

fairs in 2013 following the separation of

hensive 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, unwa-

vering 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.



Celebration of poetic brilliance under patronage of His Highness Amir

Al-Babtain 19th Poetry Creativity Awards ceremony kicks off

patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation kicked off the activities of the 19th edition of the Poetry Creativity Awards ceremony, held at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center, honoring the creative poets and critics who have won the Foundation's awards.

During the opening speech, Representative of His Highness the Amir, Minister of Information and Culture, and State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi welcomed the attendees, saying that this celebration reflects the greatness of Arabic literature.

He added that the visionary perspective of Al-Babtain went beyond words, becoming a comprehensive project that upholds the Arabic language, strengthens its presence, and reinforces the values of cultural dialogue and human communication.

For his part, Chairman of the Foundation's Board of Trustees, Saud Al-Babtain expressed his appreciation to His Highness the Amir for his kind patronage of the 19th session of the Foundation's awards.

Al-Babtain recalled the legacy of the late poet Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, highlighting his



KUNA photo

Group photo during the 19th edition of the Poetry Creativity Awards ceremony.

contributions to poetry and the Arabic language, his humanitarian efforts, dedication, and

During the ceremony, Al-Babtain announced doubling the prize amounts in recognition of the poets' efforts and in honor of this exceptional session named after the late poet Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain.

He also invited Abdulaziz Al-Surayaa, a

close companion of the late Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, to deliver a speech on behalf of the Foundation, in acknowledgment of his efforts,

support, and dedication to the late poet. In his speech, Al-Surayaa shared heartfelt words about his late colleague, recounting moments from their meetings, the late poet's contributions, and his commitment to promoting culture and highlighting the role of poets and

The award-winning poet, Dr. Khalifah Al-Wugayyan, who received the honorary award for his contributions to enriching the Arabic poetry movement, delivered a speech on behalf

He expressed his gratitude to the Foundation and for being recognized by such distinguished institution with a unique Arab and global imprint in the fields of culture, literature, and po-

This edition will also include panel discussions and cultural seminars addressing issues related to poetry and literary creativity, featuring several academics and critics participants.

The event will continue for three days, and will offer valuable opportunities for the exchange of insights and experiences among individuals interested in Arabic poetry.

Kuwait University holds workshop on 'Self-Service Technical System'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: The Technical Support Department at Kuwait University organized a workshop titled "Launching the Self-Service Technical System", which was presented by Eng. Al-Batoul Hussein from the depart-

According to a press release issued by Kuwait University, the workshop, which was aimed at developing and improving university services, was held in the lobby of the Roman Theater at the College of Life Sciences in the presence of Administrative Director of the College of Life Sciences Saleh Al-Muslim, and Director of the Technical Support Department Eng. Sondos Ashkanani. The workshop also included a session for questions and inquiries.

Eng. Sondos Ashkanani explained that the Technical Support Department at Kuwait University introduced the BMC Helix IT Self Services system, which is an integrated platform designed to facilitate the process of submitting and receiving technical requests for Kuwait University affiliates, including academic staff and em-



Group photo from the event.

ployees.

The system is available 24/7 to receive issues, and allows users to track their requests through the platform. It offers a range of services, including requesting technical support, reporting malfunctions, managing user accounts, and accessing a knowledge base with articles and guides to help resolve common problems.

The system features an intui-

users to access support services and submit requests quickly and efficiently.

She concluded by stating that

tive interface, making it easy for

the system enhances the user experience, reduces dependence on technical support teams for simple inquiries, and contributes to improving the overall efficiency of the university's technical services management.

Kuwait, Microsoft advance Al-driven financial systems

Smart finance roadmap unveiled

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ministry of Finance signed on Sunday, a memorandum of understanding with Microsoft, focusing on digital transformation, financial systems development, administrative enhancement training and artificial intelligence (AI)

The Ministry stated in a press release that the memorandum was singed in Seattle, US, by Kuwait's Finance Undersecretary Aseel Al-Menifi and Microsoft's Vice President for Public Sector Angela Heise.

The agreement aims to outline a timeline for upgrading financial systems and services, advancing digital transformation through global technologies, especially AI and cloud ser-

The Ministry emphasized that this initiative aligns with its efforts to develop financial systems linked to government bodies and improve services



Kuwait's Finance Undersecretary Aseel Al-Menifi and Microsoft's Vice President for Public Sector Angela Heise signing a memorandum of understanding.

Microsoft reaffirmed its full readiness to provide technical support to achieve the Ministry's goals.

Al-Menifi also met with Microsoft Director of Business Strategies for Government Sector Kirk Arthur who outlined the corporate's strategies for governments' partnerships world-

The Ministry mentioned that joint workshops would be held between a ministry team and Microsoft to develop a detailed collaboration plans that would define the required action, expertise, and technical support to achieve the ministry's objectives.

ABK announces A+ Student account winner

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is excited to announce the successful completion of its A+ Student account third quarterly draw, where one lucky winner, Mohammad Marzoug Alsmait, has won KD 700 worth of Apple gadgets. This event exemplifies ABK's commitment to rewarding its A+ Student customers while providing valuable benefits to enhance their banking experience.

Johair Marafi, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK, expressed her enthusiasm, stating, "We are thrilled to celebrate the success of our draw and congratulate Mohammad Alsmait on his win. The A+Student account not only rewards our customers but also enriches their experiences."

ABK announced that there will be a final draw scheduled for March 2025. In this draw, one for-



Ms. Johair Marafi - General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK

Johair Marafi:

■ We strive to create a holistic banking experience that supports our customers beyond traditional financial services

tunate winner will have the chance to win a trip to their preferred destination including air tickets, accommodation, and petty cash. To be eligible for this exciting opportunity, A+ Student accountholders need to simply transfer their educational allowance.

In addition to the draws, customers can take advantage of exclusive benefits that add significant value to their banking experience. These perks include a 30% discount on orders from Talabat throughout the weekend (Thursday to Saturday) and a 25% discount at Trolley stores located in Mubarak Al Abdullah and Eqaila, available all week long. More exclusive discounts can also be found on eahli.

ABK invites all A+ Student accountholders to take part in the final draw and enjoy the many benefits designed to support them.

Minister of Education leads major revisions for 2025 nat'l curriculum

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: Senior sources have confirmed that Kuwait's Minister of Education, Jalal Al-Tabtabaei, has directed major revisions to the national curricula for all education stages, reports Al-Jarida daily.

These changes are under review for possible implementation in the 2025/2026 academic year.

During an expanded meeting last week, the Ministry discussed adopting curricula developed previously by specialists in collaboration with the technical directives and the curricula administration.

Seven of the Ministry's technical directorates approved the proposed curricula, while four raised concerns, requesting key revisions before their potential rollout.

Minister Al-Tabtabaei emphasized the need for incorporating the necessary amendments to ensure the curricula's readiness by the next academic year. The Minister also instructed that the curricula be sent to specialists at Kuwait University's College of Education for their assessment, with the final decision on whether to proceed or design new cur-

ricula depending on the feedback. In a related development, Minister Al-Tabtabaei confirmed the Ministry's commitment to appointing all recent graduates of the College of Basic Education who have not been employed for a full calendar year as teachers. He clarified that all graduates of physical and technical

education have already been appointed and are now working in the Ministry, ensuring that qualified individuals are placed in public education roles. The Ministry has also completed the formation of a new committee to oversee the security measures at the Central

Secret Printing Press, which handles the preparation and printing of exams. This committee has begun a comprehensive review of the devices, technologies and security systems in place to ensure

the confidentiality and accuracy of the exam process. Under Minister Al-Tabtabaei's supervision, the Ministry is committed to the highest standards of security and confi-

dentiality, ensuring the integrity of exams across all grades. The printing process is proceeding according to plan, with new

models for secondary school exams already being prepared. The Minister has emphasized full adherence to security

protocols to enhance public trust in the educational system.

We thanked

Continued from Page 1

However, this mission cannot be completed unless the senior leaders of the Syrian regime are held accountable. This is where Russia's role comes into play, along with President Vladimir Putin, who must have witnessed some of the atrocities committed by the fugitive butcher Bashar al-Assad.

Bashar must be handed over to the Syrian authorities in Damascus to face punishment. He should be imprisoned in Sednaya Jail, and forced to spend time in each cell for experiencing the terror, suffering, hunger, thirst, and disease that thousands of Syrians and Arabs who fell victim to his regime's intelligence services had endured.

Yes, all of this was happening under the watch of international organizations, which dealt with Assad with a certain level of courtesy, hoping that he would reform but he instead only became more brutal.

That is why the focus today is on Russia, which is a great nation that is governed by law, and whose president Vladimir Putin is loved by his

Russia cannot turn a blind eye to the atrocities committed by Bashar al-Assad. Just as Türkiye believed in the Syrian cause and supported it, Russia must atone for its support of the butcher and ensure Assad is held accountable by returning him to Da-

The great Syrian people need all the support they can get today. The stability of Syria and the region hinges on holding the fugitive president

and his army accountable for the crimes they have committed.

There is no doubt that the world has changed since the start of the Ukraine-Russia war and the conflicts witnessed in the Middle East. The results have proven that justice is the key, not revenge. This is what Syrians and Arabs hope from President Putin, so that the fires of revenge do not ignite in Syria and spread throughout the region.

Will he take this step, so that Russia will be thanked for its actions like Türkiye?

Amir hosts

Continued from Page 1

During the meeting, the two talked of the sturdy relations tying the two nations, and discussed issues of common interest as well as latest developments on regional and international fronts and mechanisms boosting common interests on a vari-

Attending the meeting were His Highness the Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah and other top officials.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received on Sunday Crown Prince of Jordan Al-Hussein bin Abdullah II and accompanying delegation, on occasion of official visit.

Official talks were held and His Highness the Crown Prince headed Kuwait delegation accompanied by



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received Crown Prince of Jordan Al-Hussein bin Abdullah II and the

accompanying delegation. Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya, head of the mission of honor accompanying the guest Governor of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Gov-

ing officials. The Jordanian delegation was headed by Crown Prince Al-Hussein bin Abdullah II and top ranking of-

ernorate sheikh Sabah Bader Sabah

Al-Salem Al-Shabah and high rank-

The talks were held in a friendly atmosphere, reflecting the spirit of brotherhood that characterizes the relationship between the two brotherly countries and their common desire for more cooperation and coordination at various levels.

Earlier, Crown Prince of Jordan Al-Hussein bin Abdullah II and the accompanying delegation arrived in Kuwait, on Sunday, on an official

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah were among those receiving the Jordanian Crown Prince and the accompanying delegation at the international airport.

Senior state officials and diplomats from both countries also were

Crown Prince Al-Hussein bin Abdullah II heads a delegation that includes Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Al-Safadi and senior state officials.

Meanwhile, Jordanian Ambassador to Kuwait Sinan Al-Majali affirmed on Sunday the deep-rooted ties with the State of Kuwait, stressing that the two fellow Arab countries were looking at more venues to

expand relations. Speaking to KUNA, Al-Majali indicated that the visit by the Jordan's Crown Prince Al-Hussein bin Abdullah II to Kuwait would help bolster ties, reaffirming that the leadership of both countries were eager to further relations on all possible domains.

Chilly winds,

Continued from Page 1

Acting head of the center Dhrar Al-Ali told KUNA that Kuwait was affected Saturday evening by high-pressure area cold winds from the northwest at speeds of 60 km/h, which caused low horizontal view visibility under a thousand meters due to dust.

He indicated that gradual improvement on horizontal field of view might occur this evening as cold weather continues with light to moderate winds speed.

He revealed that lowest tempera-

ture would reach under three degrees Celsius in agricultural and open areas, adding that cold weather would persist until probably Tuesday.

CITRA gets

Continued from Page 1

properties related to facilities, land, and uses allocated to the authority." They affirmed that SAB approved

contracts for private state real estate

the contract with Google Cloud Services, under the condition that CITRA coordinates with the relevant ministries to ensure the lands are delivered free of obstacles before finalizing the agreements, and SAB has set a maximum approval period of 90 days.

The sources highlighted that this project represents a strategic move to strengthen cloud infrastructure in Kuwait and reflects the collaboration between the government and international companies to enhance digital transformation, in line with the state's vision for digitalization.

KNG chief

Continued from Page 1

Captain Marriot and Lieutenant Colonel Ridge congratulated Sheikh Mubarak for being appointed as Chief of the National Guard and earning the political leadership's trust, the statement added.

In return, Sheikh Mubarak expressed his gratitude and appreciation to Ambassador Lewis and her accompanying delegation.

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

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

"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 estab-lishment 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

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 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

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 b 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+



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

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,

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, Papa Francescu, 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



ing 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



A large tree branch crashed into a garage near Coe Avenue in Seaside, Calif., Saturday, Dec. 14, 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.

Russia launches rescue operation after

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.

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)

storm damages 2 oil tankers in Kerch Strait MOSCOW, Dec 15, (AP): Two Rustry's Emergency Situations Ministry. sian 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 Sun-

day.
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 counThe 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 It has also been a key point of con-

flict 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.

Court urged to rule swiftly

South Korean leaders seek to reassure allies, markets after Yoon impeached

SEOUL, Dec 15, (AP): South Korea's opposition leader offered Sunday to work with the government to ease the political tumult as officials sought to reassure allies and markets, a day after the opposition-controlled parliament voted to impeach conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol over a short-lived attempt to impose martial law.

Liberal Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung,

whose party holds a majority in the National Assembly, urged the Constitutional Court to rule swiftly on Yoon's impeachment and proposed a special council for policy cooperation between the government and parliament.

Yoon's powers have been suspended until the court decides whether to remove him from of-fice or reinstate him. If Yoon is dismissed, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

Lee, who has led a fierce political offensive against Yoon's embattled government, is seen as the

frontrunner to replace him. He lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon by a razor-thin margin.

He told a televised news conference that a swift court ruling would be the only way to "minimize national con-

fusion and the suffering of people."

The court will meet to discuss the case Monday, and has up to 180 days to rule. But observers say that a court ruling could come faster. In the case of parliamentary impeachments of past presidents - Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 and Park Geun-hye in 2016 - the court spent 63 days and 91 days respectively before determining to reinstate Roh and dismiss Park.

Lee also proposed a national council where the government and the National Assembly would work together to stabilize state affairs, and said his party won't seek to impeach Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, a Yoon appointee

who's now serving as acting president.
"The Democratic Party will actively cooperate with all parties to stabilize state affairs and restore international trust," Lee said. "The National Assembly and government will work together to quickly resolve the crisis that has swept across the Republic of Korea."

It's unclear if Lee's proposed council will be realized. In a meeting with the parliament speaker, who touched upon Lee's idea, Han said he will closely cooperate and communicate with the National Assembly but didn't specifically say whether the government intends to join the council. Kweon Seong-dong, floor leader of the ruling People Power Party, separately criticized Lee's proposal, saying that it's "not right" for the opposition party acting

like the ruling party.

Kweon, a Yoon loyalist, said that his party will use existing PPP-government dialogue channels "to continue to assume responsibility as the governing party until the end of President Yoon's term.

The Democratic Party has already used its parliamentary majority to impeach the justice minister and the chief of the national police over the martial law decree, and had previously said it was also considering impeaching the

Upon assuming his role as acting leader, Han ordered the military to bolster its security posture to prevent North Korea from launching provocations. He also asked the foreign minister to inform other countries that South Korea's major external policies will remain unchanged, and the finance minister to work to minimize potential negative impacts on the economy from the political turmoil.

On Sunday, Han had a phone call with U.S. President Joe Biden, discussing the political situation in South Korea and regional security challenges including North Korea's nuclear program. Biden expressed his appreciation for the resiliency of democracy in South Korea and reaffirmed "the ironclad commitment" of the United States, according to both governments.

Yoon's Dec. 3 imposition of martial law, the first of its kind in more than four decades, lasted only six hours, but has caused massive political tumult, halted diplomatic activities and rattled financial markets. Yoon was forced to lift his decree after parliament unanimously voted to overturn it. Yoon sent hundreds of troops and police officers to the parliament in an effort to stop the vote, but they withdrew after the parliament rejected Yoon's decree. No major violence occurred.

Opposition parties have accused Yoon of rebellion, saying a president in South Korea is allowed to declare martial law only during wartime or similar emergencies and would have no right to suspend parliament's operations even in those cases.

Yoon has rejected the charges and vowed to "fight to the end." He said the deployment of troops to parliament was aimed at issuing a warning to the Democratic Party, which he called an "anti-state force" that abused its control of parliament by holding up the government's budget bill for next year and repeatedly pushing to impeach top



A U.S. Air Force KC-135 Stratotanker refueling tanker aircraft takes off from the Kadena Air Base airfield in Kadena Town, west of Okinawa, southern Japan, Wednesday, Aug. 30, 2023. (AP)

US Marines start partial transfer from Okinawa in Japan to Guam

TOKYO, Dec 15, (AP): The partial transfer of U.S. Marines from Okinawa to Guam began on Saturday, 12 years after Japan and the United States agreed on their realignment to reduce the heavy burden of American troop presence on the southern Japanese island, officials said.

The relocation started with 100 members of III Marine Expeditionary Force stationed on Okinawa moving to the Pacific island for the initial logistical work, the U.S. Marine Corps and Japan's Defense Ministry said in a joint statement.

Under the plan agreed between Tokyo and Washington in April 2012, about 9,000 of the 19,000 Marines currently stationed on Okinawa are to be moved out of Okinawa, including about 4,000 of them to be moved to Guam in phases. Details, including the size and timing of the next transfer, were not immediately released.

The Marine Corps is committed to the defense of Japan and meeting operational requirements to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific, and it will maintain presence in the region "through a combination of stationing and rotating Marines in Japan, Guam and Hawaii," the joint statement said.

Japan has paid up to \$2.8 billion for the building of infrastructure at the U.S. bases on Guam, and the U.S. government will fund the remaining costs. The two governments will continue to cooperate on the development of Camp Blaz, which will serve as the main installation for Marines stationed in Guam.

The Marines and Japan Self Defense Forces will conduct joint training in Guam, the statement said.

Okinawa, which was under U.S. postwar occupation until 1972, is still home to a majority of the more than 50,000 American troops based in Japan under a bilateral security pact, while 70% of U.S. military facilities are on Okinawa, which accounts for only 0.6% of Japanese land.

Many Okinawans have long complained about the heavy U.S. military presence on the island, and say Okinawa faces noise, pollution, aircraft accidents and crime related to American troops.

Storm barrels toward eastern Africa

Cyclone Chido claims several lives in French territory of Mayotte

MORONI, Comoros, Dec 15, (AP): Cyclone Chido caused extensive damage on the French territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, leaving several people dead, officials said Saturday, as the storm roared toward the east coast of Africa.

French Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau said a "very provisional" tally shows there are at least "a few people" who have died. He said he would not yet provide any precise numbers of people killed and injured given rescuers have not yet been able to assess the situation on the ground.

"We're afraid the toll will be high, but for the moment I can't give any figures," Retailleau told reporters following an emergency meeting at the interior ministry in Paris. "The island seems devastated.'

Chido brought winds in excess of 220 kph (136 mph), according to the French weather service, ripping metal roofs off houses in Mayotte, which has a population of just over 300,000 spread over two main islands that lie about 800 kilometers (497 miles) off Mozambique.

France's new Prime Minister François Bayrou, who was appointed Friday, said public facilities have been "severely damaged or destroyed" including at the prefecture, the hospital and the airport. He said many people living in precarious shacks in slum areas have faced "very serious risks."

French President Emmanuel Macron said he was closely monitoring the situation.

"Our island is being hit by the most violent and destructive cyclone



This undated photo provided by NGO Medecins du Monde on Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024, shows a devastated hill on the French territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, after Cyclone Chido caused extensive damage with reports of several fatalities. (AP)

since 1934. Many of us have lost everything," Mayotte prefect François-Xavier Bieuville said in a Facebook post Saturday. He said the highest alert had been lifted so that rescuers

can help after the worst of the cyclone had passed.

The French Interior Ministry said 1,600 police and gendarmerie officers have been deployed to "help the population and prevent potential

Some 110 rescuers and firefighters sent to Mayotte from France and the nearby territory of Reunion have been deployed and an additional reinforcement of 140 people will be

sent on Sunday.

France's poorest island, Mayotte has previously struggled with drought and underinvestment.

French Transport Minister François Durovray said Mayotte airport was "badly damaged, particularly the control tower" by the cyclone in a message on X. He said infrastructure on the island had been heavily impacted and air traffic will first be reopened to military aircraft only. Ships are being used to provide sup-

Mayotte is still under red alert for the ordinary population and people were asked to "remain confined in a solid shelter," prefect Bieuville said. Only emergency and security services were allowed to go out.

Local broadcaster Mayotte la 1ere said that thousands of homes were without power, tin huts and other small structures had been blown away and many trees had been blown over.

The nation of Comoros, a group of islands north of Mayotte, also was being battered by Chido and the highest alert had been announced in some areas. Authorities said they were concerned for a group of 11 fishermen who had gone out to sea on Monday and had not been heard

Comoros authorities have ordered all ships to remain anchored in harbors and have closed the main airport and government offices. Schools were ordered closed on Friday so that people could prepare for

Chido was expected to continue its eastern trajectory and hit Mozambique on the African mainland late Saturday or early Sunday, forecasters said. Mozambique's disaster agency has warned that 2.5 million people might be affected in the northern provinces of Cabo Delgado and Nampula.

And further inland, landlocked Malawi and Zimbabwe were also preparing. Malawi's Department of Disaster Management Affairs said it was expecting flooding in some parts and urgently advised some people to move to higher ground. In Zimbabwe, authorities said some people should prepare for evacuation.

December through to March is cyclone season in the southeastern Indian Ocean and southern Africa has been pummeled by a series of strong ones in recent years.

Cyclone Idai in 2019 killed more than 1,300 people in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Cyclone Freddy left more than 1,000 dead across several countries last year.

The cyclones bring the risk of flooding and landslides, but also stagnant pools of water may later spark deadly outbreaks of the waterborne cholera disease - as happened in the aftermath of Idai - as well as dengue fever and malaria.

Studies say the cyclones are getting worse because of climate change. They can leave poor countries in southern Africa, which contribute a tiny amount to climate change, having to deal with large humanitarian crises.

Council cites increasing erosion of human rights

UN slams Taliban ban on women's medical studies

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 15, (AP): The U.N. Security Council said it was deeply concerned about the recent decision by Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to ban women from medical education, which could leave millions of women and girls without health care in the future.

The council criticized "the increasing erosion" of human rights under the Taliban, especially for women and girls who have been denied access to education beyond the sixth grade, economic opportunities, participation in public life, freedom of movement and other basics

Authorities previously had not

confirmed reports that Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada ordered educational institutions to stop providing medical courses for women. In Afghanistan, women and girls can only be treated by female doctors and health professionals.

In a resolution adopted unanimously Friday, the Security Council criticized not only the medical education ban but the Taliban's "vice and virtue" directive issued in August that further restricts women's rights, including prohibiting their voices from being heard

The resolution also extends the mandate of the U.N. expert team

monitoring sanctions against the Taliban for 14 months.

The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in 2021 as U.S. and NATO forces withdrew following two decades of war. No country officially recognizes them as Afghanistan's government.

The U.N. has said that recognition is almost impossible while bans on female education and employment remain in place and women can't go out in public without a male guard-

U.N. special envoy for Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva, told the council this week that women and girls are "facing progressive erasure from almost all walks of life.

She said the Taliban announcement in early September that female students would be barred from attending medical institutes and classes of higher education will have serious consequences.

"If fully implemented, this would have deadly implications for women and girls in particular, but also for men and boys, entire communities and the country as a whole - by denying Afghans a functioning health care system that is open to all.'

"Î have strongly urged the de facto authorities to reconsider," Otunbayeva said.

Subcontinent

Yunus

Martyred intellectuals honored: In a befitting manner, Bangladesh here Saturday observed Martyred Intellectuals Day in commemoration of the martyrdom of the members of the intelligentsia who were assassinated at the end of the country's

liberation war in 1971. Bangladeshi President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Chief Adviser **Muhammad Yunus** paid tributes

to the martyred intellectuals Saturday morning by placing wreaths at the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial at Mirpur in the capital.

They stood in solemn silence for a while as a mark of profound respect to the memories of "Bangladesh's illustrious sons". A contingent of the Bangla-

desh Armed Forces gave a state salute.

Later, the president and the chief adviser spoke with war-wounded freedom fighters and family members of the martyred intellectuals.

The memorial was covered with floral wreaths placed by thousands of people from all strata of life and hundreds of political, social and cultural organizations. (Xinhua)

Officer dies in Pakistan gunfight: A policeman was killed and another injured in an exchange of fire in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police officials said on Friday. The incident happened in Mingora area of Swat district of the province when unknown terrorists attacked a police party deployed for security in the

area, killing a police officer on the spot while injuring another officer, Swat In retaliatory fire by the police, an assailant was also killed, said police.

Following the incident, an additional contingent of police along with rescue teams reached the scene and shifted the injured to a nearby hospital.

Sri Lanka's speaker resigns: Sri Lanka's Parliament Speaker Asoka Sapumal Ranwala resigned on Friday in the wake of controversy over his educational qualification.

Earlier, the opposition parties have accused the speaker of lying about holding a PhD from a Japanese university.

In a statement, Ranwala clarified that he had never lied about his educational qualification, but admitted that he currently lacks documentary proof of his academic achievements. (Xinhua)

Brazilian President Lula awaiting medical discharge

SAO PAULO, Dec 15, (Xinhua): Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is "alert and oriented" following Tuesday's emergency surgery for an intracranial hemorrhage, according to a medical bulletin Saturday morning.

The 79-year-old president is eating normally and walking at the Sirio-Libanes Hospital in Sao Paulo and will undergo further blood tests, but no additional diagnostic imaging tests are scheduled.

According to his doctors, Lula is recovering in intermediate care and is expected to be discharged soon to return to work next week.

On Friday, the president shared a video on social media showing him walking in the hospital hall,

talking with a doctor and chatting with his wife, Rosangela da Silva. In a post on X, he wrote that he feels "strong and well." After complaining of a severe

headache, Lula was admitted for emergency surgery when a hematoma was found between his brain and meningeal membrane.

Doctors confirmed that there

were no injuries or other consequences from the hematoma.

The issue was linked to Lula's fall at the presidential residence, the Palacio da Alvorada, in late October when he hurt the back of his head and received five stitches, forcing him to cancel several commitments, including his trip to the BRICS summit in Russia.

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Business

Company platinum sponsor of Mirzam Expo for fifth year running

Zain offers latest 5G solutions for an innovative home experience

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: For the fifth consecutive year, Zain has announced its platinum sponsorship of the latest and largest edition of Mirzam Expo, Kuwait's top interior design and home decoration gathering. This year's event featured participation from over 200 local and international companies, where Zain showcased its latest 5G solutions, offering customers an innovative home experience.

Zain's continued support for this one-of-a-kind annual event reflects its commitment to supporting outstanding local initiatives that highlight national talent and foster entrepreneurship in Kuwait. The exhibition also serves as a platform for Zain to connect with customers and showcase its portfolio of world-class connectivity solutions.

Over the course of six days at its dedicated booth, Zain presented the latest solutions, including ad-

vanced routers powered by 5G, enabling customers to enjoy superior speed and stability both inside and outside their homes. The company also introduced visitors to its latest sustainability initiatives.

On the sidelines of the exhibition, Zain hosted a special session titled Empowering the Digital Future with Zain, which spotlighted cutting-edge future technologies and the innovative solutions within Zain's portfolio. The session emphasized how Zain leverages innovation to enhance modern digital lifestyles and empower customers with the latest in connectivity.

In addition, Zain's booth showcased the company's latest initiatives and programs related to its sustainability strategy. Highlights included efforts to reduce Zain's environmental footprint, minimize carbon emissions, and promote eco-awareness campaigns within



Farah Al-Humaidhi with Zain's team at the company's booth.

the community, contributing to the achievement of sustainability goals.

Mirzam is the leading gathering

of its kind for interior design and home decoration. Its fifth edition was the largest in its history, fea-



Recognizing Zain for its continued support to Mirzam.

turing participation from over 200 local and international companies across 300 booths, covering 55

categories related to interior and exterior design, décor, furniture, and home essentials.

KPC aims to be largest supplier of jet fuel in Europe and Asia

KPI plans to expand network of fuel stations in various regions of Europe

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: According to informed sources from the oil sector, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) is working towards becoming the largest supplier of jet fuel in Europe and Asia. This follows KPC's achievement of securing the top spot as the leading supplier of jet fuel for the European market last year, due

to its success in signing several export contracts.

In a related development, Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI), a subsidiary of KPC, plans to expand its network of fuel stations in various regions of Europe.

The sources indicated that KPC's strategy focuses on exploiting all available resources to streamline costs and enhance revenues through its investments.

Regarding strengthening the role of the private sector in the oil sector, the sources

affirmed that KPC is studying the feasibility of establishing an oil industrial zone project, which aims to enhance cooperation and partnership with the private oil sector.

They said the project is related to localizing industries related to the oil sector, and complementary and oil-related services, to contribute to the services sector and boost investments around the oil industry in Kuwait.

The sources added that this project will not only strengthen the private sector's role in the oil services sector but also create job opportunities for national cadres.

Kuwait real estate market shows mixed trends in November 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 15: The latest Al-Shall report reveals that the real estate market in Kuwait saw a slight decrease in liquidity in November 2024, compared to October, but still experienced growth compared to the same month in 2023, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The total value of real estate transactions for November 2024 reached approximately 322.2 million dinars, a 2.7 percent decline from October's 331.1 million dinars, but an 11.6 percent increase compared to November 2023's 288.8 million dinars.

The report highlights that all trades in November 2024 were contracts, with a total of 479 deals. Al-Ahmadi Governorate led the transactions with 202 deals (42.2 percent of the total), followed by Hawalli Governorate with 93 deals (19.4 percent), while Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate recorded the fewest deals, with only 32 (6.7 percent).

The following are the key segments in the market showing varying trends:

Private Housing Activity -- Transactions in this sector amounted to 143.5 million dinars, marking a 13.3 percent decrease from October.

This segment contributed 44.5 percent of total real estate trading, down from 50.0 percent in October. Despite the decline, the value was 16.4 percent higher than the 12-month average of 123.3 million dinars.

Investment Housing Activity -- This

crease, with transactions totaling 116.4 million dinars. Its share of the total market liquidity rose to 36.1 percent, compared to 27.4 percent in October.

The number of deals in this segment increased by 11.8 percent and

sector saw a significant 28.1 percent in-

the average value of deals rose by 14.6 percent.

Commercial Activity -- Transactions in commercial real estate fell by 9.9 percent to 62.3 million dinars,

tions in commercial real estate fell by 9.9 percent to 62.3 million dinars, contributing 19.3 percent of the total market activity, down from 20.9 percent in October.

US Consumer Price Index climbs to 2.7% y/y in November

Director says cut: Central Banks navigate a shifting global economic landscape

By National Bank of Kuwait

Market Commentary

 \mathbf{T} his week, global markets witnessed significant developments shaped by economic data releases and central bank decisions. ŪS inflation ticked up to 2.7% in November, in line with expectations, whilst jobless claims increased to 242K, reflecting a cooling labour market. These indicators strengthen expectations that the Federal Reserve will implement another rate cut in its upcoming meeting to support growth. USD has strengthened significantly since late September, driven by expectations of trade tariffs, and looser fiscal policy under US president-elect Donald Trump. Meanwhile, the Bank of Canada reduced its policy rate by 50bps to 3.25%, citing subdued economic momentum and signalling more gradual monetary easing going forward. In Europe, the ECB lowered its deposit rate by 25bps to 3% amidst lowered growth forecasts for the Eurozone and recent EUR depreciation, while the Swiss National Bank surprised markets with a larger-than-expected 50bps rate cut, responding to falling inflation. Elsewhere, the UK economy contracted by 0.1% in October, adding pressure to the Labour government's efforts to revitalise growth amidst lingering challenges. In the Asia-Pacific region, China's CPI fell to 0.2% y/y in November, a five-month low, whilst PPI declined by 2.5% y/y, prompting authorities to adopt a "moderately loose" monetary policy stance. Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank of Australia held its cash rate steady at 4.35% but hinted at potential rate cuts in 2025, supported by an improved unemployment rate of 3.9%. These events prompted recalibrations in global growth expectations and monetary policy trajectories, influencing market sentiment across regions.

United States and Canada

Trump Says He Will Not Remove Jay Powell as Fed

Chair Amidst Plans for Aggressive Economic Policies
President-elect Donald Trump announced he would not seek to remove Federal Reserve Chair Jay Powell before his term ends in May 2026, easing concerns about the Fed's independence. Trump, however, outlined plans to enact sweeping tariffs, mass deportations, and tax cuts upon assuming office in January. Economists warn these measures could heighten inflationary pressures, constraining the Fed's ability to lower interest rates overall. The Fed has already reduced its benchmark rate by 75bps across two cuts since September and hinted a slower pace of cuts in 2025. Trump has reiterated his intentions to curtail aid to Ukraine, reduce government spending, and deport undocumented immigrants while negotiating pathways for some. DXY was last seen at 107.003.

US Consumer Price Index Climbs to 2.7% y/y in November as Markets Expect Rate Cut Next Week

US inflation rose to 2.7% y/y in November, slightly up from October's 2.6%, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Core inflation, excluding food and energy, increased 3.3% y/y. The Federal Reserve is expected to make an additional quarter-point interest rate cut next week, which would lower rates to a target range of 4.25-4.5%. However, officials remain cautious about the pace of future rate adjustments to balance inflation control with labour market stability. November saw robust jobs growth, but the unemployment rate rose to 4.2%. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned that President-elect Trump's proposed tariffs could undermine control on prices and increase costs for households. Markets are currently pricing 73bps of cuts to the US benchmark rate through 2025 year-end.

US Producer Price Index Rises to 3% y/y, A Stronger Than Expected Pace
The US Producer Price Index (PPI) rose 3% y/y in No-

vember, up from 2.6% in October, significantly outpacing

the forecasted 2.6%, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. On a monthly basis, the index increased by 0.4%, following gains of 0.3% in October and 0.2% in September. This marks a sustained upward trend in wholesale inflation, underscoring heightened producer costs. Analysts view the data as a potential precursor to increased consumer inflation. Indeed, the surge in PPI reflects rising input costs across sectors, with potential implications for monetary policy as the Federal Reserve evaluates the inflation trajectory ahead of its decision next week. Businesses may increasingly pass costs on to consumers, intensifying inflationary pressures.

LIS Jobless Claims Rise to 242K as Labour Market

US Jobless Claims Rise to 242K as Labour Market Shows Signs of Cooling

Initial jobless claims in the US increased by 17K to a seasonally adjusted 242K for the week ending December 7, exceeding economists' forecast of 221K, according to the Labor Department. Continued claims, representing individuals receiving benefits after an initial week of aid, rose by 15K to 1.886 million, suggesting longer durations of unemployment for some workers. The unemployment rate edged up to 4.2% in November after holding steady at 4.1% for two months, reflecting a cooling labour market. This easing increases the likelihood of a Fed rate cut next week, despite limited progress in lowering inflation, as the central bank's benchmark rate remains at 4.50-4.75%.

Bank of Canada Cuts Policy Rate by 50 Basis Points, Signals More Gradual Easing Going Forward

The Bank of Canada reduced its key policy rate by 50bps to 3.25%, marking its fifth consecutive cut in six months, totalling 175bps. Governor Tiff Macklem signalled a shift toward a more gradual approach to future rate adjustments. Canada's economy has been shrinking per capita for six consecutive quarters, with limited growth driven by population increases. Inflation is now at the 2% target, but growth slowed to 1% annualised in Q3. Additional risks include planned immigration reductions, federal tax rebates, and potential US tariffs on Canadian exports. Currency markets now price a 74% chance of a 25bps rate cut in January, with the bank's policy rate near the so-called neutral range. Macklem noted that the central bank would prioritise long-term trends over temporary factors in future decisions. USD/CAD was last seen at 1.4234.

Europe and the United Kingdom

European Central Bank Cuts Interest Rates to 3%, and Lowers Growth Forecasts Amidst Economic Concerns

The European Central Bank (ECB) reduced its benchmark deposit rate by 25bps to 3%, marking its fourth rate cut since June. This move, reflecting softened hawkish language, comes amidst lowered growth forecasts, with the Eurozone economy now projected to grow just 1.1% in 2025, down from 1.3% previously. Additionally, the 2026 and 2027 growth forecasts were reduced to 1.4% and 1.3%, respectively. ECB President Christine Lagarde indicated that while some officials had supported a 50bps cut, a unanimous agreement was reached for the quarter-point reduction. The ECB's stance now suggests a potential for further borrowing cost reductions, with markets anticipating a total of 118bps of cuts through year-end 2025.

Swiss National Bank Implements 50bps Rate Cut

Amid Easing Inflationary Pressures
The Swiss National Bank (SNB) rec

The Swiss National Bank (SNB) reduced its key policy rate by 50bps to 0.5%, exceeding market expectations of a 25bps cut. Inflation in Switzerland continues to decline, with consumer price inflation falling from 1.1% in August to 0.7% in November, remaining within the SNB's price stability range of 0-2%. Inflation forecasts for 2025 were revised downward to 0.3%, with expectations of 0.2% by Q2 2025. The SNB cited the appreciating Swiss franc, import price

pressures, and economic uncertainty as contributing factors. While negative interest rates remain unlikely, the probability has increased. The euro briefly strengthened against the franc following the announcement but faces downward pressure in the property of the control of the property of the proper

sure moving forward. USD/CHF was last seen at 0.8927.

UK GDP Contracts 0.1% in October, Second Con-

The UK economy unexpectedly shrank by 0.1% in October, following a similar contraction in September, according to the Office for National Statistics. The decline, falling short of economists' expectations for a modest 0.1% expansion, signals a challenging start to the fourth quarter. Output in the services sector stagnated, while production and construction contracted by 0.6% and 0.4%, respectively. The OECD recently downgraded the UK's 2024 growth forecast to 0.9% from 1.1%, citing weaker data, though a recovery to 1.7% growth is projected for 2025. Chancellor Rachel Reeves reaffirmed the government's commitment to long-term growth, despite the setback to Labour's promise of delivering the highest sustained growth in the G7. GBP/USD was last seen at 1.2619.

UK Staff Demand Falls to Four-Year Low Amidst Tax Hikes and Rising Costs

Demand for staff in the UK declined to its lowest level in four years in November, with the vacancies index dropping from 46.1 to 43.9, reflecting the sharpest contraction since August 2020, according to a KPMG and Recruitment and Employers Confederation survey. October 30's £40B taxraising Budget's £25B increase in employer national insurance contributions, combined with low consumer confidence and rising labour costs, has significantly dampened hiring activity. Seasonal job postings fell 39% compared to 2023, while overall vacancies in retail declined by 27% y/y between August and October. Employers are favouring existing staff over temporary hires, with flexible contracts becoming more prevalent. Meanwhile, supermarket chains such as Tesco and Sainsbury's reported scaling back seasonal hiring compared to last year, citing cautious hiring strategies.

Asia-Pacific

China: CPI at 0.2% y/y in November, PPI Declines by 2.5% y/y as Growth Outlook Weakens

In November 2024, China's consumer price index increased by 0.2% y/y, slowing from 0.3% in October and below the forecasted 0.4%, due to a 2.7% drop in fresh food prices from favourable weather. Core inflation edged up to 0.3% from 0.2%, indicating limited impact from stimulus measures. Meanwhile, the producer price index fell 2.5% y/y, extending a 26-month deflationary trend, though easing from October's 2.9% decline. Beijing's recent debt package of 10 trillion yuan (\$1.37 trillion) aims to address local government financing strains but has yet to yield significant economic benefits. Economists anticipate subdued inflation into 2025 amidst overcapacity, weak domestic demand, and

expected US tariff hikes. Fitch Ratings downgraded China's 2025 growth forecast to 4.3%, citing persisting economic challenges. USD/CNY was last seen at 7.2736.

China Adopts "Moderately Loose" Monetary Policy

for First Time Since 2008

China's Communist Party shifted its monetary policy stance to "moderately loose" from "prudent" marking the first such adjustment in 14 years. The decision, announced during a politburo meeting this week, aims to bolster domestic demand amidst persistent deflationary pressures and economic challenges. The announcement emphasised "extraordinary countercyclical adjustments" and prioritised boosting consumption alongside improving investment efficiency, and expanding domestic demand. Following the policy shift, 10-year bond yields fell to a record low of 1.77%, whilst the Hang Seng China Enterprises Index rose before retreating after the Central Economic Work Conference which did not offer sufficient details on stimulus measures. Economists note that implementation will be crucial in determining the success of

stimulus, as private sector confidence remains fragile.

RBA Holds Cash Rate at 4.35%, Signals Possible Cuts in Early 2025 Amidst Slowing Inflation

The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) maintained its cash rate at 4.35% in its December meeting, softening its hawkish tone and indicating a closer likelihood of rate cuts in 2025. Weaker Q3 GDP growth of 0.3% q/q and subdued wage growth have added to the case for easing, with markets now assigning a 53% probability of a February cut. Headline inflation slowed to 2.1% y/y in October, within the 2-3% target, but the trimmed mean ticked up to at 3.5%. RBA Governor Michele Bullock emphasised that further decisions would depend on upcoming labour market, inflation and consumption data. Market analysts noted the statement marked a deliberate shift in response to softer economic conditions. Bond futures rallied on the dovish signals. AUD/USD was last seen at 0.6362.

Australia's Labour Market Surpasses Expectations with 3.9% Unemployment

Australia's employment surged by 35.6K in November, surpassing forecasts of a 29.6K increase. Full-time roles grew by 52.6K, offsetting a decline of 17K part-time jobs. The unemployment rate fell to 3.9%, down from 4.1%, beating the projected 4.2%, while the participation rate eased slightly to 67.0% from 67.1%. The employment-to-population ratio rose to 64.4%, sustaining levels 2.2% higher than pre-pandemic figures. Monthly hours worked showed no growth, reflecting stable workforce activity. Statisticians attributed the sharp unemployment drop to a high transition of unemployed individuals into jobs, supported by population growth, which balanced employment expansion with labour supply.

Kuwait

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30735. FX Rates – December 15, 2024

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	Forward
EUR	1.0568	1.0453	1.0594	1.0502	1.0215	1.0600	1.0544
GBP	1.2744	1.2609	1.2799	1.2619	1.2390	1.2740	1.2613
JPY	150.00	149.69	153.80	153.70	151.90	156.20	151.97
CHF	0.8788	0.8759	0.8946	0.8926	0.8820	0.9190	0.8836

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

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 affirmation 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 In-



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 digi-

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-

tal innovation and media in the

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

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 Digital 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

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 Uni-CODE 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-Sanousi 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 steadfast 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 knowledgebased 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 cuttingedge 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 on-

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 maximumsecurity 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 mainte-

nance 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 Compa-

ny 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.

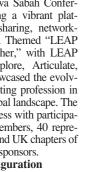
It is worth mentioning that petroleum coke is a by-product of the oil refining process, produced through the thermal cracking of heavy fuel oil. It is widely used in industries such as steel, aluminum, and battery electrodes. KNPC exports high-quality petroleum coke to global markets and also supplies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



prosperity. Distinguished dignitaries



• H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika, Ambas-

Left-right: The Indian Ambassador with other officials. • Mr. Meshal Al-Qahs, Assistant

• 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 enrich-

ing discussions and insights.

Visionary Speeches and Key Announcements

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

Continued on Page 10

graced the occasion, including sador of India to Kuwait

Undersecretary, Ministry of Finance

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

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 RID-DARA 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-theart 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 & De-

luca" 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 securing partnerships with renowned 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, 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,

3. 1st Startup Conference between Kuwait and India, in collaboration with the Indian Embassy and GUST (December 8, 2024)

Strengthening India-Kuwait Ties

CA Rohit Agarwal, Vice-Chairperson of ICAIKC, welcomed H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika, who, in his address, lauded ICAIKC's dynamic efforts in strengthening India-Kuwait relations. Reflecting on the conference's theme, he remarked on its relevance in the current global context and expressed optimism about the growing synergy between the two nations. Similarly, Guest of Honor Mr. Meshal Al-Qahs and Special dignitary, Mr. Sabah Mubarak Al-Jalawi underscored the importance of professional collaborations and the

akel and CA Umesh Soni were privileged to welcome these dignitaries for Insightful Sessions and Keynote

integral role of accountants in Kuwait's

economic landscape. CA Sonia Enam-

Addresses 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 fulfil. It is in honouring these duties that we discover purpose and inner peace. Ethical living, he explained, is not about achieving perfection but navigating life's complexities

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.

Andaleeb Girkar warmly welcomed these distinguished speakers to the event.

Engaging Panels and Discussions A panel discussion moderated by CA Ketan Puri featured prominent leaders,

- including:

 Mr. Saleh Alshaya, President –
- Alyasra, Alshaya Group
- Dr. Bader Alhashel, Group CRO,

Boubyan Bank

thrive in the Kuwaiti 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

NBK conducts successful evacuation with balance and honesty.

■ Ms. Mai AlOwaish, CEO CINET,

CA Bhavani Vikram Joshi and CA

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 distri-

- Mr. Basil Al Salem, CEO, Gastro-
- nomica ME

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 Gastronomica's plans to introduce Indian cuisine to Kuwait and the potential for Indian fashion to

Economic Outlook and Market

the entire audience.

drill at Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh branch



Khalid 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.

Group photo during the evacuation drill.

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.

Al-Matrouk:

Features



MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2024



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 BÎG3 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

He said CWBA's partnership with the league has gained traction since joining forces in 2022, creating opportunities for Blackowned 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 inclu-

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. Whichever 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 po-

anything. I'm still down to help.' While Ice Cube has made a mark in music, he's done the same in film too.

litical parties and asked them for

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" fran-chise 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.

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

"We are pleased that the parties have reached an agreement to dismiss the lawsuit on the terms in the court filing," ABC News spokesperson Jeannie Kedas 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 OConnell, 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

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

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

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

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 ver-

dicts. Carroll, former advice columnist, went public in a 2019 memoir with her allegation that Trump raped her in the mid-1990s at Bergdorf Goodman,

Trump

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. Forcible 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.'

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-byminute, 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

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 Fuerstenfeldbruck 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

DUBAl: 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 Faghih 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 mixedgender audiences. Female vocalists could perform for male audiences only as a part of a chorus. But they are allowed to sing in a hall for female-only

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

Abdul

and begin a new chapter of their lives.' In his own statement, Lyth-goe 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

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

why, like Paula, I am glad to be able to put

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.

"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 Sánchez 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)







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

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

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.

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: hitmaking producer Dr. Dre.

Their bond, built over 30 years of brotherhood, began when Dr. Dre shaped Snoop's game-changing de-but, "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 ultrasmooth 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

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 cohosting 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: Ā 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 person 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

"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

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



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

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

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, Al 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 Ro-botics 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 hu-

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

"Î 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 was and hailed for looking

genius I.O.

ordinary life

through the eyes of an extraordinary youngster, now fully grown: Malcolm, played by Muniz, who has a

"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)

 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 Zaniest 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)







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

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 ecigarettes 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 ultrathin and flexible film that could power wearable devices using body heat rath-

er 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,

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.

Alarmingly, 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

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 comparison of the compari

munity to adopt a healthier lifestyle, improve school meals and encourage regular exercise among youth.

With a comprehensive strategy, Ku-

wait 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 Samardzic for Mario Pasalic and Charles De Ketelaere.

The duo helped to break the deadlock two minutes later. Samardzic 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)

MARSEILLE, France, Dec 15, (AP):

Marseille and Monaco, both chasing

Paris Saint-Germain, had chances to

put the Ligue 1 leader under pres-

Also, Lens drew at Auxerre 2-2. Lille equalized against Marseille

in the 87th minute, extending its unbeaten run across all competi-

tions to 16 matches, and Monaco

was frustrated in a goalless draw at

Marseille remained second in the

standings, ahead of Monaco only on

move. Following a quick one-two,

Luis Henrique passed to Adrien Ra-

biot down the right. The France in-

ternational 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

Diakité's header came from Rémy

Lille's string of nine wins and seven draws is the second longest

unbeaten run in the club's history,

Both failed.

goal difference.

was in the driv-

ing seat at Stade Velodrome

Diakité leveled

Marseille

well-con-

led after 17 minutes after

structed team

Marseille

Bafodé

Reims.

until

for 1-1.

left foot.

Cabella's free kick.

Lens draw at Auxerre

Lille extends unbeaten run to 16

after late draw with Marseille

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 Gen-

esio said. "It would've been harsh to leave without a point considering

how we played. The game plan was

Marseille finished with 10 men af-

ter Pol Lirola received a straight red

card for a dangerous tackle on André

Lille was fourth, three points be-

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

77th when Takumi Minamino had a

one-on-one against goalkeeper Yeh-

vann Diouf, only to miss the target.

The Japanese midfielder had another

effort in added time that flew over

Hampered by injuries, Monaco

has been slowing down and showing

signs of fatigue in recent weeks, winning just one of its past five matches

"It's disappointing, we came here

with the ambition to return to Monaco with three points," midfielder

Eliesse Ben Seghir said. "It has been

Monaco's best chance came in the

followed perfectly.'

Gomes in added time.

hind Marseille.

Köhn's crossbar.

the crossbar.

in all competitions.

a difficult week.

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

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 matchturning 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.

two. China finished with one gold and one silver.

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

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

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.

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

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.

win of the campaign. (Xinhua)

way possible." (Xinhua)

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. 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

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 firstof-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 Sejidi.

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 Šabah 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

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

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

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

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.

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 trainivng 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

"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

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 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 freethrow 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 halftime. 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.



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 Bellevarde course to finish 0.52 seconds ahead of Norwegian teammate Atle Lie Mc-Grath 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

"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-yearold Kristoffersen said. "But yeah, very happy, very difficult today so experience



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)

is nice to have sometimes." It was a third victory in Val d'Isère

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. He remained top of the overall standings, 18 points over McGrath and 110 ahead of defending champion Marco Odermatt, who does not compete in slaloms.



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)



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

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 midfield 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. Vinícius 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

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 ames in a row.

Vinícius 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 Íñigo 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 kneeled 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

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 dig-nitaries, media professionals, refer-ees, 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

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

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)

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