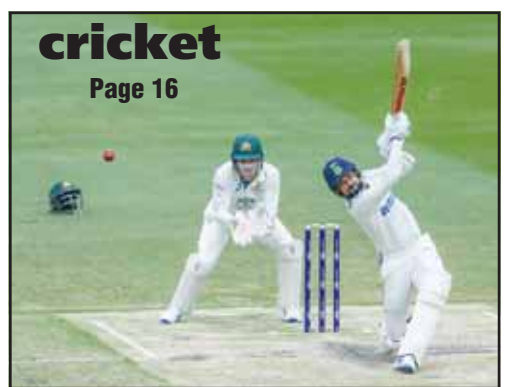




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# KUWAIT AIRPORT GEARS UP FOR 30,000 GULF CUP FANS

## Cabinet reviews Khaleeji Zain 26 prep



### MEW fully prepared

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18:** The Council of Ministers convened for its weekly meeting, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Jaber International Stadium, where they received updates on preparations for the 26th Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 26).

During the meeting, His Highness the Prime Minister listened to a presentation from the Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of Youth, and Chairman of the Organizing Committee for the Championship, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, along with officials from the Sports Authority regarding the readiness of sports facilities.

Meanwhile, Kuwait International Airport is preparing to welcome 30,000 fans for the 26th Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 26), hosted by Kuwait from December 21 to January 3, said a Kuwaiti aviation official on Wednesday.

Acting Deputy Director General for Aviation Safety, Air Transport, and Civil Aviation Security, and spokesperson for the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Abdullah Al-Rajhi



The Council of Ministers convenes for its weekly meeting, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Jaber International Stadium, where they received updates on preparations for the 26th Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 26).

stated to KUNA that they are coordinating with relevant authorities to facilitate the fans entry process arriving from GCC countries.

Al-Rajhi noted that a comprehensive plan has been set to ensure smooth operations, provide necessary support to visitors, and simplify all procedures.

He explained that the anticipated number of fans arriving at Kuwait Airport by additional flights, excluding regular scheduled flights, during this period is almost 30,000 with 75 expected flights.

Al-Rajhi stressed that DGCA has allocated special teams in the arrival halls to guide fans and provide necessary support, adding that spe-

cial reception areas for large groups have been set up, equipped with screens displaying transportation information.

He affirmed DGCA's commitment to delivering top-tier services to Kuwait's guests during the tournament, praising the efforts of the airport's staff, including the Ministry of Interior, the General Administration of Customs, airlines, ground service providers, and the Gulf Cup organizing committee.

Kuwait is gearing up for a historic football event by playing host to the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup titled "Khaleeji Zain 26", making it the fifth time the championship is held in Kuwait.

The Arabian Gulf Cup, which began in 1970,

has solidified its place as one of the most prominent sporting events in the region, obviously reflecting unity, deep-rooted relations, and shared heritage of Gulf nations.

The Arabian Gulf Cup is held every two years, rotating among the member states of the Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation, which comprises Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Yemen.

The matches of this Kuwait-hosted tournament will be played at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium and Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium.

Kuwait leads in tournament victories, having won the title 10 times, followed by Iraq with four titles, Saudi Arabia and Qatar with three

each, Oman and the UAE with two each, and Bahrain with one title.

In related news, Assistant Undersecretary for Technical Services at the Ministry of Electricity and Water Eng. Falah Al-Subaie says the ministry has successfully completed its assigned tasks in preparation for Kuwait to host the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup "Khaleeji Zain 26", which will run from December 21 to January 3.

In a press statement issued Wednesday, he highlighted the coordinated efforts of the ministry's sectors in completing the necessary work for this major sporting event, which will take place at Jaber Stadium and Sulaibikhat Club Stadium.

Al-Subaie explained that the infrastructure works, including the installation and operation of the entire lighting network (50 light poles and 360 LED spotlights), were completed in record time for the external parking lots at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, which can accommodate approximately 12,500 cars. Also, 28 light poles and 54 LED spotlights have also been installed at Sulaibikhat Club Stadium, which can accommodate approximately 2,500 cars. In addition, all newly established entrances and exits have been fully illuminated. These efforts were closely monitored by senior officials from the ministry for ensuring the use of the latest technical specifications, including energy-saving and eco-friendly LED lighting.

The installation of LED spotlights, designed to be energy-efficient and environmentally friendly, has been completed at the Nuwaiseeb port and the surrounding area to ensure the safety of visitors. Work is ongoing to complete the related infrastructure at the Salmi and Abdali borders.

Continued on Page 5

### 1st Deputy PM launches Kuwait Surgical Gov't Hospital in Basra

**BASRA, Dec 18, (KUNA):** Kuwaiti First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, accompanied by Iraqi Minister of Health Dr. Saleh Al-Hasnawi and Basra Governor Asaad Al-Eidani, inaugurated the Kuwait

Surgical Government Hospital in Basra Wednesday.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef conveyed the greetings and appreciation of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the leadership and people of Iraq.

Continued on Page 5



KUNA photo

Kuwait First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah during the inauguration of Kuwait Surgical Government Hospital in Basra Governorate, Iraq, on Wednesday.

### Amir, Crown Prince, PM congratulate Qatar on Nat'l Day

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA):** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday a cable of congratulations to the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on the occasion of Qatar's National Day and the anniversary of Qatar's founder, Sheikh

Jassim bin Mohammad Al-Thani's assumption of office.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal lauded firm fraternal relations between both royal families, countries and peoples, stressing keenness on promoting and developing aspects of

existing cooperation in various fields.

His Highness the Amir also commended Qatar's notable development achievements, while wishing the Amir of Qatar good health and Qatar and its

Continued on Page 5

### Minister highlights 'Ya Hala' festival as economic catalyst

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18:** Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and Chairman of the Permanent Committee for Celebrating National Holidays and Occasions, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, emphasized the significance of the 'Ya Hala' marketing festival in showcasing the strength of public-private partnerships in enhancing Kuwait's economy, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement from the Ministry of Information, the minister highlighted the festival's role during his meeting with the event's organizers.

He noted that the 'Ya Hala' initiative underscores the country's efforts to position Kuwait as a prominent tourist and commercial hub within the region. Minister Al-Mutairi commended the festival's innovative approach to promoting national products and supporting the local business sector.

He stated, "These initiatives reflect Kuwait's dedication to developing the tourism sector, aligning with our national strategy to diversify income sources and stimulate economic growth."

The festival serves as a platform for fostering economic vitality by supporting commercial activities and providing opportunities for entrepreneurs and small to medium enterprises (SMEs) to showcase their products and services. This, in turn, bolsters their competitiveness and creates new job opportunities for Kuwaiti youth.

Minister Al-Mutairi called for continued collaboration between government entities and private sector stakeholders to ensure the success of initiatives like the 'Ya Hala' festival, which highlight Kuwait's cultural and civilizational achievements.

Continued on Page 5

### Mol cracks down on illegal exam information networks

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18:** The Ministry of Interior has issued a warning against joining groups that promote unauthorized access to information about exams, whether through social media platforms or any internet programs, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The Ministry emphasized that such actions expose individuals to legal consequences.

In a statement, the Ministry cautioned students not only against joining these groups but also warned against simply sharing their content.

Engaging in any form of participation or dissemination of illegal exam-related information will be subject to legal accountability.

Following a warning from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Education has also cautioned students against joining or responding to groups that

promote illegal access to exam information through social media or internet programs.

The Ministry stressed that engaging with such groups could lead students to fall victim to fraud and deception.

In a statement, the Ministry has encouraged students to rely on their own efforts, emphasizing that "seriousness, hard work and perseverance are paths to achieving success."

The Ministry also confirmed its full readiness to begin the first semester final exams for male and female students in the intermediate stage and tenth and eleventh grades.

A total of 161,644 middle school students, 45,428 tenth graders, 11,593 eleventh grade literary students, and 30,197 eleventh grade scientific students are expected to take the exams starting tomorrow.

### NewsWatch

#### Modi's Kuwait visit to cement relations

**NEW DELHI, Dec 18, (KUNA):** The Indian government announced on Wednesday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Kuwait on Dec 21-22.

His planned visit was publicized in a statement released by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. It will be the first visit of an Indian Prime Minister to Kuwait in 43 years.

During the visit, Modi will hold discussions with the leadership of Kuwait and will also interact with the Indian community in Kuwait. "India and Kuwait share traditionally close and friendly relations which are rooted in history and have been underpinned by economic and strong people to people linkages."

### Day by Day

**PRINCE** Sultan bin Saad Al-Saud, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Kuwait, is warmly welcomed in every diwaniya (gathering) in Kuwait. His visits enrich these gatherings with his high level of culture, making the discussions rich and insightful on various matters concerning the world today.

Ambassador Prince Sultan enhances the conversation, whether it is about economics, politics, or history.

The ambassador is well-versed in the history of Saudi Arabia and possesses a wealth of knowledge about its economy, as well as the economies of the Gulf countries.

Thus, his presence in these diwaniyas is comfortable and engaging, as these spaces are open to the ambassadors of friendly nations and to anyone seeking knowledge.

The diwaniyas function as public parliaments, offering freedom of opinion and are a global historical phenomenon. ... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

### Kuwaiti, Jordanian troops conclude joint drill



Ministry of Defense photo

Part of the Kuwaiti-Jordanian exercise.

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA):** The Ministry of Defense declared on Wednesday conclusion of a drill between the army special force/25 and Jordanian troops, code-named "the arrows of justice" (rimah al-haq), that had started on December 8th.

The drill was carried out as part of Kuwait Army's schedule of training with forces from sisterly and friendly states.

It was designed to elevate combat performance and readiness, exchanging expertise for maximum mutual benefit.

The conclusion ceremony was attended by the commander of elite squad/25, Staff Brigadier Anas Al-Fozan, and senior Kuwaiti and Jordanian officers.

### 8 Zain dominates 12th Kuwait Creativity Award with five accolades



### 9 Gulf Bank's year of distinction with 13 global and regional awards in 2024



## Prayer Timings

Fajr	05:11	Asr	14:34
Sunrise	06:36	Maghrib	16:53
Zohr	11:44	Isha	18:15

# Local

## Expected Weather for the Next 24 hrs.

**By Day:** Rather cold and partly cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speed of 12-35 km/h.

**By Night:** Cold to very cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 08-30 km/h and

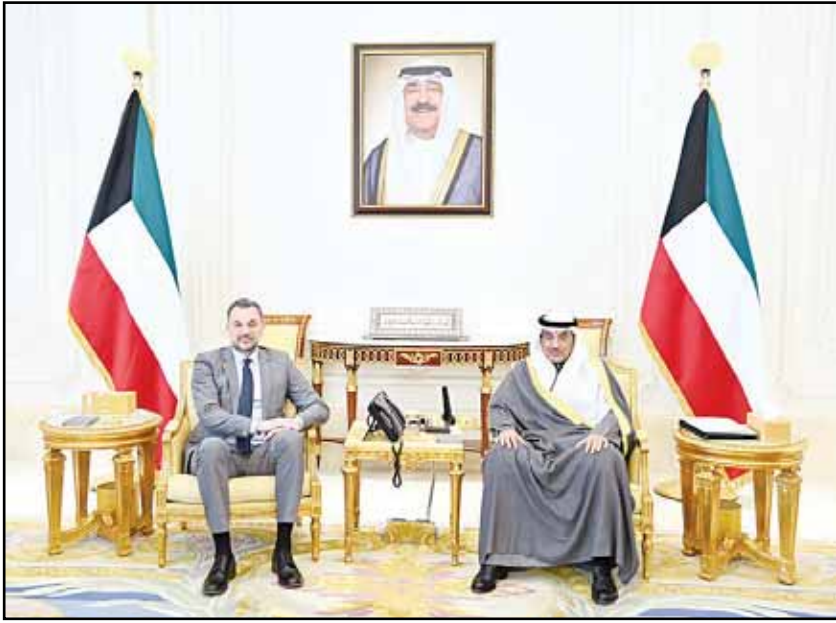
## Weather

some scattered clouds will appear and a chance for frost forming over agricultural and desert areas.

## Station

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	18	08
Kuwait Airport	19	05
Abdaly	19	02

Bubyan	18	02
Jahra	20	07
Falaka Island	18	09
Salmiyah	17	11
Ahmadi	17	03
Jal Aliyah	19	05
Nuwaisib	20	07



Crown Prince Diwan photo  
His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives visiting Bosnian Foreign Minister Elmedin Konakovic.

## Bosnian FM invites more Kuwaitis to visit his country

### Bosnia eyes Kuwait investments, help in projects

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received visiting Bosnian Foreign Minister Elmedin Konakovic and his accompanying delegation at Bayan Palace on Wednesday.

Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya, His Highness the Crown Prince's Office Chief retired Lieutenant General Jamal Al-Thayab, Undersecretary of His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan Mazen Al-Essa and Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs Mohammad Hayati were present at the reception.

Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received on Tuesday at Kuwait International

al Airport the Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina Elmedin Konakovic and his accompanying delegation.

The Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina Elmedin Konakovic said Tuesday that his visit to Kuwait aims at tackling common interests, investment opportunities and future projects between the two countries.

In a statement to journalists on the sidelines of his meeting with economic and investment public figures, and members of the Kuwaiti Businessmen Council Association in Bosnia, Minister Konakovic expressed his thanks to Kuwait for its support and assistance to his country in the past.

The Bosnian minister stressed

on the need for support in projects and investments during the current period.

He called on Kuwaiti tourists to visit his country, revealing a significant annual increase in the number of tourists from the GCC countries, which "broke records during the past year" to enjoy Bosnia's various tourist attractions and diverse nature of coasts and mountains.

The minister noted that his country had obtained the green light to start negotiations to join the European Union (EU), which is considered a great opportunity for investors to enter the European market through Bosnia and Herzegovina and benefit from skilled labor and low energy costs.

For his part, the Ambassador of

the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the State of Kuwait, Nusret Cancar, said that Kuwait was one of the first countries to invest in Bosnia immediately after the war through the Public Investment Authority, specifically in a very large iron and steel factory.

He added that Kuwaiti private sector investments have exceeded government investments in recent years, calling on Kuwaiti investors to seize the various opportunities in his country, especially in the fields of agriculture and renewable energy.

Earlier, Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received at Kuwait International Airport Konakovic and his accompanying delegation.

# Uncertainty over ownership of property, future outlook

Law protects rights of revoked nationality persons: lawyer

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff  
**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Amid ongoing discussions, informed sources confirmed that the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) has yet to make a decision regarding the potential recovery of properties from individuals whose Kuwaiti citizenship has been revoked.**

The institution is still studying the issue, considering both legal and humanitarian dimensions.

Attorney Khaled Al-Kandari clarified that under current law, individuals whose nationality is withdrawn have one year from the date of the revocation decree to manage their private properties.

This includes options such as transferring ownership or selling the properties through public auctions. While this law remains in effect, any future amendments or special decisions could alter the approach to this issue.

Al-Kandari highlighted a key exception for naturalized women

under Article 8 of the law. He noted that if such women donate their properties, the transfer of ownership remains valid and cannot be rescinded, as the donation constitutes a legally binding contract.

In a related perspective, lawyer An'am Haidar emphasized that current legislation protects the ownership rights of individuals with residential units, even if their Kuwaiti citizenship is revoked.

She asserted that those with valid ownership documents cannot have their properties confiscated. However, she pointed out that cases involving forged citizenship documents require different treatment.

Haidar called for the formation of a legal government committee to address such situations and to propose amendments to the existing law.

This would enable the withdrawal of properties from individuals involved in forgery through a decision by the Council of Ministers. Additionally, she noted that current laws allow the transfer of ownership to a Kuwaiti family member if a property is subject to withdrawal for any reason.

As the legal and humanitarian study continues, the situation remains complex, with no immediate resolution in sight.

## Move to uplift scientific, medical research

### Medical university city key to development: Al-Awadhi

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): Kuwait's medical university city project is a strategic move to develop education and back healthcare, two ministers said on Tuesday.

A joint meeting was held by Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal, and Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi to discuss the project, within the framework of enhancing cooperation between the two sectors to achieve an ambitious development plan.



Dr. Al-Awadhi

Al-Jalal said the step would contribute to preparing and rehabilitating national cadres in medicine and scientific research, in line with world-class standards.

The medical campus includes a university hospital that will offer high-quality medical services and train medical students in a developed practical environment, he noted. In addition, the project will help tangibly develop healthcare and medical education, said Al-Jalal.

Meanwhile, Al-Awadhi said the scheme is a paradigm shift in improving the academic and health sectors.

It will further provide an outstanding practical training environment keeping pace with world-class standards in a manner that con-

tributes to rehabilitating national medical cadres efficiently capable of facing health challenges, he elaborated.

Integration among academic education, scientific research and practical implementation in this project opens new horizons to boost medical innovation and scientific research in a way that promotes health sector sustainability, he pointed out.

Al-Awadhi stressed the Ministry's commitment to offering all types of support to carry out this strategic project; a pivotal key for Kuwait developmental vision.

The project's visual display was by head of Kuwait University construction program Dr. Sheikha Ruqaiya Al-Sabah.

## 'Kuwait police role model in bid to maintain security & stability'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): Kuwaiti First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah affirmed that Kuwait Police serve as a role model in security, traffic and humanitarian efforts within a system that strives to protect the country.

In a press release, issued by the Ministry of Interior, Sheikh Fahad stated, in a statement on the occasion of the Arab Police Day, which falls on December 18th each year, that the role played by police forces is respected and appreciated.

He added that they presented the highest levels of dedication and loyalty in fulfilling their national duties, pointing out their firm commitment to confront violators that threaten the country's stability.

Sheikh Fahad expressed his appreciation to the police forces for their efforts, driven by national and humanitarian values in fac-



Sheikh Fahad

ing threats. He also reminded them of their responsibility to work for the stability, security, and safety of Kuwait, under the care of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, and His Highness the Prime Minister.

**2,237 camping permits issued:** The Public Relations Department of Kuwait Municipality has announced that 2,237 spring camp licenses were issued during the first month of the current camping season from November 15 to December 15, following the opening of reservations and issuance of temporary licenses, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Of these, 1,780 licenses were issued through the special link on the municipality's website for booking and licensing spring camps, and 457 licenses were issued via the Sahel application.

The municipality stated that it will continue to receive reservation requests and issue temporary licenses for the official camping period, which spans four months, through its official website <http://www.baladia.gov.kw> or the Sahel application.

## CSC rejects MoE request for rehiring retiree as 'advisor'

By Abdulrahman Al-Shimmari  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) has rejected the Ministry of Education's request to appoint a retiree to the position of educational advisor in the administrative affairs sector, offering a monthly salary of 2,000 dinars for a one-year term.

The decision, outlined in a letter from the CSC dated Dec 4, 2024, was based on the fact that the retiree's practical experience totals only 23 years, whereas Cabinet Resolution No. (844) of 2005 requires a minimum of 25 years of experience for hiring personnel in both the government and private sectors.

The CSC emphasized that the decision is in line with Cabinet Resolution No. (1095) of 2014 regarding the appointment of consultants, and it called on the Ministry of Education to comply with the regulations and ensure future applications meet the necessary criteria.

In confirmation of the report published by the daily on December 7 under the headline "One fingerprint for those assigned to monitor exams", the acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education Mansour Al-Dhafiri, issued a decision for the implementation of only a "single fingerprint" during official working hours for those assigned to the examination committees for transfer classes of the intermediate level and for the tenth and eleventh grades.

He also decided to exempt those assigned to the examination committees for the 12th grade, both in the scientific and literary sections, from the fingerprint requirement.

## MPW announces start of radical road repairs in Jabriya

By Mohammad Ghanem  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan has announced the start of comprehensive road maintenance in Jabriya as part of ongoing efforts to complete road maintenance work in Hawally Governorate, as part of the new radical maintenance contracts for highways and internal roads, which include 18 major road maintenance projects across various areas of Kuwait's six governorates.

In a press statement issued yesterday, Dr. Al-Mashaan stated that the maintenance efforts will begin in the most affected areas, followed by less

impacted areas, under the strict oversight and supervision from Ministry of Public Works' supervisors.

She affirmed the importance of completing all maintenance work promptly with the highest standards of quality and efficiency, in line with the approved technical specifications and the scheduled timeline, in implementation of the directives of His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah and based on the government's keenness to improve and maintain the country's infrastructure.

Dr. Al-Mashaan said road maintenance and repair are top priorities for Kuwait's political leadership.

She expressed gratitude for the high-level directives of His Highness

the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, who are committed to supporting and executing road maintenance projects for achieving an advanced infrastructure pillar as part of the New Kuwait 2035 vision.

Meanwhile, Eng. Hussein Al-Saleh, the supervisor of the Hawally Project's Second Zone, indicated that the ongoing maintenance work includes cleaning the rainwater and sewage networks in preparation for asphalt repairs.

He urged residents of the area to cooperate with the relevant authorities to ensure the timely completion of the work, adding that some roads

would be temporarily closed during the maintenance process.

In addition, informed sources revealed that the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) has extended the deadline from December 24 to January 14 for the submission of bids for the project to study and design the Juvenile Court building in Sulaibiya.

They explained that the competing companies will submit their bids on this revised date for technical evaluation within a month. CAPT will then issue a decision to award the contract to the best bidder.

The sources said this project is considered a vital construction project for minimizing the time required to handle court cases.

## Kuwait Amir congratulates Niger's leader on Nat'l Day

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday a cable to the President of Niger General Abdourahmane Tchiani on the occasion of his country's national day.

His Highness the Amir wished President Tchiani all the success and the people of Niger welfare and progress.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent a cable of con-

gratulations to the President of Niger General Abdourahmane Tchiani, congratulating him on his country's national day.

His Highness the Crown Prince expressed wishes of welfare and progress to President Tchiani and his people.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to the President of Niger General Abdourahmane Tchiani on his country's national day.



KUNA photo  
His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh Prince Edward and his accompanying delegation left Kuwait after a short trip.

## Link between two peoples strong: Prince Edward

### Duke of Edinburgh hopes for enduring ties in Kuwait visit

By Paulo Francisco X. Fernandes  
Arab Times/Al-Seyassah Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh Prince Edward expressed his joy at visiting Kuwait for the first time and reflected on the deep, enduring relationship between the United Kingdom and Kuwait.

Speaking at the reception hosted in his honor by the British Embassy in Kuwait he said, "I am delighted to visit Kuwait for the first time as our two countries continue celebrations to mark 125 years of official diplomatic relations and prepare to mark 250 years of trading ties in 2025.

"Our cooperation," he said, "covers a range of areas including defense, with the UK coming to Kuwait's aid during the First Gulf War and continuing close collaboration in this space to this day – and education, which is an area of particular interest to me as patron of the Duke of Edinburgh Award, which my late father, Prince Philip, started.

"That being said, our relationship is -- at its very heart -- about the links between our two peoples, our shared values, and our mutual respect for one another's cultures.

"This is what has bound us together in the past and what makes me confident that our two countries will enjoy many more years of close, friendly partnership," he added.

The British Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, HE Belinda Lewis, added: "The Duke's visit was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the warm and historic ties between the UK and Kuwait, underpinned by the longstanding friendship between our respective Royal and Ruling Families.

"It was an honor to meet the leadership of Kuwait, and also to hear from some inspiring young people about their contribution to society.

"Our visit to Dickson House brought our diplomatic history to life while the garden reception was a chance to acknowledge many different groups who work hard to enhance our bilateral relations and support the British community in Kuwait," she added.

The Duke's visit has evoked fond memories of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's visit to the Kuwait Towers during her 1979 State Visit.

A dinner hosted by His Excellency Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Minister of Al-Diwan Al-Amiri Affairs, provided an opportunity for the Duke to engage with representatives from the Kuwait Olympic Committee, the Public Authority for Youth, the Public Authority for Sport, as well as youth leaders, including several recipients of the Kuwait Award for Youth Excellence and Creativity.

Known for his passion for empowering young people, the Duke discussed the potential for even stronger ties between the youth of Kuwait and the United Kingdom.

During his visit, The Duke had individual audiences with several key figures, including HH the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

These discussions centered around the strong ties between the UK's Royal Family and Kuwait's ruling family, as well as opportunities for further enhancing bilateral cooperation.



## Hunt for ideal Hebrew state

"THERE are two prevailing perspectives regarding the concept of a 'happy millennium' and the establishment of a Hebrew Jewish state," columnist **Abdullah Khalaf** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"Some Jews believe that the creation of the Jewish Zionist state must precede the arrival of the Jewish Messiah, as per their religious beliefs. Others, however, argue that such a state will only come into existence after the Messiah's arrival and his fulfillment of their prophecy.

"The question remains: what does the future hold for the Iranian project? Meanwhile, regional transformations continue -- Syria has been liberated, marking the end of a deeply emotional chapter.

"In the 19th century, an alternative vision was proposed by Mordecai Noah, an American Jew and former US consul in Tunisia.

"Noah advocated for the establishment of a Jewish state not in Palestine but in the United States. He envisioned Grand Island, located on the Niagara River near Buffalo, New York, as the ideal location for a Jewish homeland.

"With approval from the Jewish Legislative Council, he named the proposed state 'Ararat' and symbolically laid its foundation stone.

"Noah's vision differed significantly from traditional Zionist aspirations, as he did not support the establishment of a permanent state for Jews in a single location. Instead, he dreamed of a global state uniting Jews across the world.

"This concept of 'Ararat' reflected broader aspirations, including the belief among some Jews that their destiny extended beyond Palestine. They viewed their state as a stepping stone to broader horizons, potentially encompassing global influence.

"After the ceremonial foundation of 'Ararat' on Grand Island, the site was renamed 'Panallo,' representing another layer of belief -- that the Jewish state could serve as the nucleus of a broader vision of leadership and expansion.

"Some Jews held the view that their future state in Palestine would grow to encompass far-reaching territories, embodying a grander mission.

"These differing interpretations and historical initiatives reflect the diverse beliefs and aspirations within Jewish communities regarding their identity, statehood, and global role."

### Also:

"The last of the statues that symbolized decades of dictatorship and oppression in the Arab world has finally fallen," columnist **Sultan Musaed Al-Jazzaf** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"These statues, scattered across squares, streets, villages, and schools, were not mere works of art but stood as ominous representations of tyrannical regimes that ruled with an iron fist for over 60 years.

"Under their shadow, millions of Arab citizens endured a dark era marked by oppression, torture, corruption, displacement, and the theft of national wealth, stripped of their basic rights to a decent life.

"These statues embodied the injustice and tyranny of their creators, serving as a constant reminder of the authoritarian grip that stifled freedom and terrified onlookers.

"Despite the abundant natural resources in these countries, these regimes funneled wealth into the pockets of rulers and their corrupt circles.

"Instead of building schools, hospitals, and infrastructure, they erected prisons, purchased tools of torture, and fortified security apparatuses to suppress their people. Innocent lives filled these prisons, where women and even children faced unimaginable brutality.

"Meanwhile, the majority of the population languished in poverty, ignorance, and homelessness, watching their national wealth squandered on the rulers' whims and tools of oppression.

"The eventual collapse of these tyrants was inevitable for regimes founded on injustice and terror. They fled in fear under the cover of darkness, haunted by the reckoning of their oppressed people. What they left behind were nations ravaged by chaos, economic ruin, and social fragmentation.

"Their ends mirrored the legacies

they left behind: some fled in humiliation, some were captured and hidden in disgraceful conditions, others were killed during their escape, and many faced imprisonment. Their downfalls became a testament to the ultimate fate of injustice.

"With the fall of the final statue, the illusion of eternal power and control these tyrants cultivated has been shattered.

"They believed their reign would be timeless, that fear would forever bind the people under their rule. Yet, history has proven that no matter how long the people endure suffering, their patience and resilience are not infinite. When their moment came, they rose to reclaim their freedom and erase the symbols of tyranny.

"Today, a new chapter begins for the Arab world, authored by those who have endured decades of hardship. This moment serves as an opportunity for reflection, a chance to learn from the mistakes of the past and avoid the conflicts that hinder progress.

"As the path forward unfolds, it promises to be challenging yet rich with potential to rebuild societies that honor their cultural and historical legacies.

"Through justice, development, and resilience, the people can work toward restoring dignity and creating a future worthy of their sacrifices and aspirations."

□ □ □

"We urge all Kuwaiti people not to blame Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef or the government for the decision to withdraw citizenships. We specifically address those who have reservations about the withdrawal of citizenship from women naturalized under Article 8 of the Nationality Law, an article that has not brought us any benefits, despite some people's concerns," columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"To those who are unaware of the full situation, and what the government has not publicly disclosed, we must reveal that there are at least 3,000 commercial licenses registered under individuals benefiting from Article 8. With few exceptions, these licenses are for fictitious companies involved in residency trading and bringing in marginal labor for a fee. The exploitation does not end there, as these individuals also pay sums annually to renew the residency of these workers. Can anything be worse than such exploitation?"

"Also, there is the case of a naturalized woman who, after divorcing a Kuwaiti man and obtaining citizenship, returned to her home country, married a man of her own nationality, and brought him to Kuwait. She claimed him as the husband of a Kuwaiti woman, and their children as the children of a Kuwaiti woman, allowing them to enjoy all the privileges of a Kuwaiti citizen.

"Do not be surprised if someone asks you to prove your accent as a soldier, or if you see children of Kuwaiti women entering the police force. This is just a small part of a larger issue. While we are not generalizing, there are many surprises yet to be revealed in the coming days regarding the drawbacks of overly broad naturalization.

"It is truly unfortunate that the government, which possesses the correct information and data, does not release all the details it has. Instead, it leaves room for political activists, celebrities (whose nationalities were withdrawn in the past), and others in similar positions to rally support, while the rightful parties remain silent. How long will this silence continue, especially since revealing the full facts would justify the withdrawal of nationalities and undermine those who seek to manipulate the situation for their own gain?"

"Furthermore, the relevant authorities must intervene to prevent further discussion of this matter, especially since the esteemed Court of Cassation has already expressed its opinion and concluded the debate. This is a matter of sovereignty that concerns only the government. So, what is the point of continuing the discussion, particularly when the authorities are already moving forward with the process of withdrawing nationalities?"

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



Al-Saeed



Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army Air Marshal Sheikh Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation meet in Ankara with the head of the Turkish Defense Industries Authority and his team. Turkiye Ambassador to Kuwait Toubha Nur Sonmez is also present at the meeting.

## Army Deputy Chief, team visit Turkish defense agency

ANKARA, Dec 18, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Army Deputy Chief of Staff, Air Marshal Sheikh Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation visited the Turkish

Defense Industry Agency (SSB) in the capital Ankara on Wednesday, where he met the agency's President Haluk Gorgun.

The two sides discussed joint cooperation in

defense industry and technology, as well as enhancing partnership between the two countries in the defense field, said the Ministry of Defense in a statement received by KUNA.

# Al-Muwaizri released on bail

European, two Bedoun hurt in traffic brawl

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff & Agencies

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Criminal Court has released former MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri on bail of KD 1,000 and decided to reopen the pleadings in the session scheduled for December 25, 2024 on charges of broadcasting false news about the internal situation in Kuwait.**

The accusation is based on a number of posts by Al-Muwaizri on his X account regarding the biometric procedure before and after his arrival in Kuwait.

Al-Muwaizri's defense team had submitted a request to the court to reopen the appeal and sought the release of their client on any guarantee the court deemed appropriate.

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**Injuries in traffic brawl:** Two Bedoun residents and a European national were detained following a brawl on the shoulder of the Fifth Ring Road near Andalous, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to informed sources, when the Operations Room of the Ministry of Interior received information about the brawl, a patrol

team was dispatched to the location. Upon arrival, they discovered that two vehicles were parked on the side of the Fifth Ring Road and three individuals - a European of Arab origin and two Bedoun residents - were involved in a brawl and had sustained injuries. They were taken to Farwaniya Hospital for treatment and later detained at the Andalous Police Station pending further investigation. Medical reports were submitted by the three individuals to indicate the injuries they sustained in the brawl.

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**Co-op cashier assaulted:** An investigator from Shamiya Police Station has instructed security personnel to investigate an incident in which a cashier at a cooperative society was allegedly beaten and threatened by a security officer for performing the Maghrib prayer while on duty, reports Al-Anba daily.

The investigator ordered them to detain the security officer, check for any criminal record, review surveillance footage if available, and gather witness statements.

These instructions were issued after a 1991-born expatriate lodged a complaint at Shamiya Police Station, explaining that he works as a cashier at a cooperative society, and he was beaten and threatened by a security officer for praying while working. He also provided a medical report issued by a government hospital to indicate the injuries he sustained in the attack.

tal to indicate the injuries he sustained in the attack.

He explained that the incident occurred two days ago at 5:05 pm during the time of Maghrib prayer. The accused threatened him by saying: "I will stomp on your head and your father's head", and asked him not to repeat the act.

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**Selling used tires as new:** During a surprise inspection tour in the Amghara scrapyard, led by Director of the Commercial Control and Consumer Protection Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Faisal Al-Ansari, the Jahra Emergency Team seized 1,860 used or unfit tires that were being illegally displayed, and sold, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a press statement, Al-Ansari explained that the operation resulted in the confiscation of 1,247 used tires from a warehouse, and 613 additional tires from another. Two notices were issued for operating without a license and for violating regulations regarding the possession and display of unfit tires.

These inspections are part of the ministry's ongoing efforts to regulate markets and combat violations that endanger consumer safety. They are in line with the ministry's strategy to protect the health and safety of both citizens and residents by monitoring products sold in the market and enforcing consumer protection laws.

## Five liquor bottles found on man caught driving drunk

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: A 1994-born Gulf national was arrested on suspicions of being under the influence of liquor, reports Al-Anba daily.

At the time of his arrest, five liquor bottles were found, of which two were empty. He has been referred with the seized items

to the Drug Control General Department (DCGD) for necessary legal action.

According to sources, a patrol team had noticed the driver of a vehicle not wearing a seat-belt. When the vehicle was stopped, the driver appeared to be in an abnormal state. A search of the car revealed the liquor bottles.

Meanwhile, Hawally emergency personnel arrested a 1988-born Bedoun on Restaurant Street in Salmiya for the possession of a bag containing traces of heroin and drug paraphernalia. He too was referred to DCGD for necessary legal action.

## KFF shuts down 67 shops for violating regulations

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) announced the administrative closure of 67 shops and facilities across all governorates as part of a rigorous campaign targeting establishments that failed to comply with fire safety regulations, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

These closures were executed against facilities that had not obtained the necessary fire safety licenses and neglected to meet safety and fire prevention requirements, despite prior warnings issued by the authorities.

The campaign is part of the ongoing efforts of the KFF to ensure public safety and reduce fire-related risks in commercial and residential areas.

The targeted establishments were given ample time and notice to rectify their violations, but their failure to address these issues led to administrative action.

A spokesperson for the KFF reiterated the importance of adhering to fire safety regulations, which are designed to protect lives and property.

The spokesperson emphasized that the enforcement of these rules is non-negotiable and that the force will continue to monitor and inspect facilities to ensure compliance.

The closures included a variety of establishments, from small shops to larger facilities, underscoring the force's commitment to applying regulations equally across all sectors.

The spokesperson also highlighted that these actions are not punitive but preventive, aimed at mitigating potential dangers posed by non-compliant facilities.

Facility owners are urged to prioritize obtaining the necessary licenses and implementing fire prevention measures to avoid similar actions in the future.

The KFF has pledged to intensify its inspection campaigns and work closely with relevant authorities to ensure that all facilities meet the required standards.

The move has been widely regarded as a critical step in safeguarding public safety and promoting a culture of compliance with fire prevention measures throughout Kuwait.

## Trade license tied to training

# Conscription must for jobs: CSC

By Enaas Awad

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Civil Service Commission has reaffirmed that priority for appointments to both government and non-government jobs -- as well as for obtaining licenses to practice liberal professions -- will be granted to individuals who have completed their national military service.

In a circular addressed to government agencies and public institutions, the Commission emphasized adherence to Article 3 of National Military Service Law No. 20 of 2015.

The law stipulates that, "For appointment to any government or non-governmental position, the applicant must submit a certificate of active service performance, postponement of service, or exemption from service, in accordance with the provisions of this law.

"Nonetheless priority in appointment shall be given to those who have completed the service."

This directive highlights the importance of national military service compliance as a key requirement for employment or professional licensing.

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# MoSA launches global forum on orphan care

Stakeholders pledge to enhance welfare

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

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Supervisor of the Department of Charitable Organizations and Donor Associations at the Ministry of Social Affairs Assem Al-Failakawi says Kuwait has become a true model in providing support and relief to those in need around the world, affirming that Kuwait, under its wise leadership, believes in the importance of humanitarian work.**



Dr. Al-Huwailah

He said this in the speech he delivered on behalf of the Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah at the opening of the forum titled "Our Orphans, Commitment and Pledge", which was organized by the Union of Kuwaiti Charitable Societies and Foundations under the minister's patronage yesterday at the Radisson Blu Hotel.

Al-Failakawi expressed his honor in inaugurating the forum, highlighting the participation of charity and humanitarian organizations from more than 16 countries that chose Kuwait as the host country due to its longstanding history in international humanitarian efforts.

He also highlighted the United Nations' recognition of Kuwait's prominent role in humanitarian work by granting it the title of "Global Humanitarian Center", and honoring the late Amir His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad (May God bless his soul) with the title of "Global Humanitarian Leader".

Al-Failakawi explained that the State of Kuwait, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness Crown

Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, continues to prioritize humanitarian work. This leadership, supported by both governmental and civil institutions, has solidified Kuwait's position as a global leader in humanitarian efforts. Kuwait has launched many initiatives that promote transparency and sustainability in the charitable and humanitarian sectors.

He also praised the role of Kuwaiti charity societies and foundations, which have been instrumental in delivering aid to those in need in over 70 countries worldwide, adding that this reflects the bright humanitarian face of Kuwait, its leadership and people.

Meanwhile, the Chairman of the Union of Kuwaiti Charity Societies and Foundations Saad Al-Otaibi affirmed that caring for orphans is not merely a charitable obligation but a profound humanitarian duty and noble mission that requires collective efforts to ensure a dignified life and a bright future for them.

He said, "This forum serves as a pledge and charter in which we reaffirm our commitment to continue our work and development toward achieving our shared goals. It ensures the empowerment of orphans through high-quality education, psychological and social support, and comprehensive care that enables them to overcome challenges."

In addition, the Secretary-General of the Orphan Care Union Salah Al-Jarallah stated that the institutions responsible for caring for orphans serve as a bridge of generosity that connects benefactors and philanthropists with orphans in desperate need of care and support.

He said, "Orphans represent a trust upon us, and their responsibility lies with all of us. The institutions you represent are the cornerstone that transforms this responsibility into tangible care for orphans. Therefore, this forum and the accompanying exhibition reaffirm our steadfast commitment to serving orphans and supporting the institutions responsible for their care, so that they can continue their noble mission."

Today, we also come together to set an ambitious goal, which is to issue the Global Charter for Orphan Care."

Al's impact on future

## Kuwait highlights roles to preserve, promote Arabic

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18. (KUNA):** Kuwait is participating on Wednesday, in celebrating the International Arabic Language Day, honoring a language spoken across 22 countries and by hundreds of millions worldwide.

Arabic is distinguished for its unique features and holds the status of one of the oldest languages in the world.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is dedicating the celebration to highlight the valuable contributions of the Arabic language under the theme: Arabic Language and AI: Advancing Innovation while Preserving Cultural Heritage.

The event gathers top scholars, industry experts, and cultural leaders to explore how AI can bridge this digital gap, enhancing Arabic representation online and fostering both innovation and heritage preservation.

The event starts with opening remarks from distinguished speakers, leading into sessions on Arabic AI innovation, cultural and linguistic preservation, and digital empowerment, and concludes with a captivating light calligraphy show.

The UN recognizes Arabic as a gateway to a world rich in cultural diversity, reflecting varied origins, beliefs, and traditions, and it has inspired extraordinary creations in art, literature, poetry, philosophy, architecture, and music.

For centuries, Arabic served as the primary language of politics, science, and literature, leaving an indelible mark on human history.

Arabic helped in promoting the dissemination of Greek and Roman sciences and philosophies to Renaissance Europe, and it has enabled a dialogue of cultures along the silk roads, from the coast of India to the Horn of Africa.

UNESCO aims to highlight Arabic's role in fostering intellectual growth, expanding human understanding, and advancing knowledge, and how the language's grammar and phonetics have also played a critical role in broadening linguistic capabilities and enabling the articulation of new sounds.

Kuwait plays an active role in supporting and preserving the Arabic language, as enshrined in its Constitution. Arabic is the country's official language, used in government correspondence and widely promoted through academic institutions, cultural organizations, and public initiatives.

Kuwait's contributions to Arabic are evident through various cultural and literary publications, events, and institutions, notably, Al-Arabi magazine, a Kuwaiti initiative, stands as a cultural gift to the world, alongside renowned works by Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters.

The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) has also contributed significantly to Arabic through encyclopedias, educational books, and magazines.



KUNA photos  
First Deputy Prime Minister with a number of ambassadors.

Ambassadors praise Kuwait's role

## First Deputy Prime Minister hosts envoys to enhance security co-op

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18, (KUNA):** First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Saud Al-Sabah discussed with a number of ambassadors accredited to the country, means of enhancing cooperation.

An interior ministry statement said that Sheikh Fahad Al-Yusuf received on Tuesday Mexican Ambassador Edward Haller, the Ambassador of Bangladesh Maj. Gen. Syed Tariq Hussain, Ambassador of Uzbekistan Ayoub Khan Yunusov and Ambassador of Romania Mugurel Stanescu.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yusuf reaffirmed Kuwait's keenness to strengthen relations with these countries to contribute to security and stability, praising the role of diplomatic cooperation in achieving common goals.

Views on issues of common interest, and the latest developments on regional and international arenas were reviewed.

For their part, the ambassadors expressed appreciation to Sheikh Fahad Al-Yusuf for the warm reception, praising the pivotal role of Kuwait in enhancing regional security.

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## Capital Committee pushes for swift dev't in Mirqab and Sawaber areas

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18:** The Capital Committee of the Municipal Council has recommended expediting the development of Mirqab and Sawaber areas, in coordination with the executive body of Kuwait Municipality, the Public Authority for Housing Welfare, the Public Institution for Social Security, and other relevant government agencies.

In its 11th meeting of the third session held yesterday and chaired by Dr. Hassan Kamal, the committee approved two out of six items on its agenda. These included the

approval of a project to subdivide plot No. 42 in Bneid Al-Gar, Block 2, and a request from some citizens to add an area adjacent to plot No. 9 in Qibla, Block 1.

Regarding Dr. Hassan Kamal's inquiry about Kuwait Municipality's vision for the development of Failaka Island, the committee recommended expediting the implementation of plans outlined in the state's structural plan, as prepared by the executive body of Kuwait Municipality.

The committee also withheld the request submitted by Al-Salihiya Real Estate Company for approval to develop their property, the JW Marriott Hotel (formerly the Meridian), located in Kuwait City, Qibla, Block 3.



Farwaniya governor welcomes honorable guests.

Governor and experts engage residents

## Farwaniya hosts diabetes awareness meet

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18:** Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received Monday morning at the general diwan of the governorate office some citizens residing in Farwaniya Governorate in an open meeting, with the cooperation of the Dasman Diabetes Institute, to promote health awareness on diabetes.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the meeting was attended by representatives of a number of medical associations, specialist doctors, and residents of Farwaniya Governorate.

The governor welcomed the honorable guests, listened to their opinions and grievances, and took note of the citizens' demands.

Sheikh Athbi affirmed that he will spare no effort in providing the best possible services for the development of the governorate, and fulfillment of the needs and aspirations of the residents of Farwaniya Governorate.

Dr. Fahd Al-Ajmi from Farwaniya Hospital, and Tareq Aleryan, Dr. Najla Misbah, and other specialists from the Dasman Diabetes Institute also participated in the meeting.



Farwaniya governor during the health awareness meet on diabetes.

They highlighted the causes for the widespread diabetes in Kuwait, including obesity, lack of physical activity, and genetic factors.

Citizens' questions were answered during the open meeting, and the session concluded with medical examinations for diabetes conducted at the mobile clinic of the Dasman Institute inside the governorate building.

The doctors were informed of the citizens' needs and reassured about the services provided to them.

## CSC introduces enhanced security authentication for MoE employees

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18:** The Civil Service Commission has implemented a new mechanism for accessing the integrated system for employees of the Ministry of Education, effective Tuesday, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The update aims to bolster data privacy and improve information security across the ministry's digital platforms.

The new system requires employees to authenticate their identities electronically through the "My Identity" application, replacing the traditional username and password method. This shift aligns with Ministerial Resolution No 1/2020, which

emphasizes the use of the digital civil card as an official identification tool.

The CSC highlighted the benefits of this updated approach, including streamlined access and enhanced protection of personal and professional information.

The employees can now log into the integrated system only after their identities are electronically verified. The authentication process involves registering the civil number via the "My Identity" application, followed by a short verification period. Users only need to repeat the process if their session times out due to inactivity.



## Ambassador highlights strong Kuwait partnership and military cooperation

# Bangladesh celebrates Armed Forces Day; pays tribute to martyrs

By Paulo Francisco X. Fernandes

Arab Times/Al-Seyassah Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: "The relationship and bond between Kuwait and Bangladesh are inseparable and have been linked historically," said the Bangladesh Ambassador to Kuwait HE Major-General Syed Tareq Hussain.

He was speaking at a reception organized by the Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait, to mark the Armed Forces Day of Bangladesh.

In his speech, he highlighted the deep historical ties between the two nations and expressed his gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the government of Kuwait for their continued efforts to strengthen the relationship between the two nations.

He also paid tribute to the contributions of the soldiers, both men and women, who fought in the War of Liberation for Bangladesh. The Ambassador reiterated his commitment to further enhancing the already strong ties between Kuwait and Bangladesh.

The reception began with a welcome address by Brigadier General Rakibul Karim Chowdhury, ndc, afwc, psc, Defence Attache of Bangladesh in Kuwait.

In his speech, he expressed gratitude to Major General Ahmad Rashed Al-Shanfa for attending and thanked all the distinguished guests. Brigadier General Chowdhury emphasized the significance of Armed Forces Day, which is celebrated on 21st November in Bangladesh, noting that it represents the values of comradeship, unity, and collective strength in the face of adversity.

He also paid tribute to the war heroes and martyrs of Bangladesh and highlighted the importance of the day in inspiring the Armed Forces to renew their commitment to protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bangladesh.

Further reflecting on the development of the Bangladesh Armed Forces, Brigadier General Chowdhury spoke about the ongoing modernization efforts under the "Forces Goal-2030" initiative. He proudly noted that Bangladesh is among the top contributors to UN peacekeeping missions.

He also acknowledged the long-standing partnership between the Bangladesh Military Contingent and the Kuwait Armed Forces, which has been in place since 1991. This collaboration has seen Bangladesh's forces actively engaged in supporting Kuwait's development efforts.

Brigadier General Chowdhury praised the Bangladesh Armed Forces for their vital role in nation-building, disaster management, and internal security, all of which are highly appreciated by the people of Bangladesh.



Bangladesh Ambassador to Kuwait, HE Major-General Syed Tareq Hussain, along with dignitaries, celebrates Armed Forces Day, honoring the historical ties and military cooperation between Kuwait and Bangladesh.

Photos by Mohammad Morsi

ated by the people of Bangladesh.

The Guest of Honor, Major General Ahmad Rashed Al-Shanfa, commended the Bangladesh Military Contingent's contributions to Kuwait and extended his best wishes for the

continued success of Bangladesh's Armed Forces.

The celebration concluded with a heartfelt expression of hope for the enduring friendship between Kuwait and Bangladesh, with attendees

wishing for the lasting prosperity of this special relationship.

The event was attended by a wide range of dignitaries, including Major General Ahmad Rashed Al-Shanfa, President of National Military Ser-

vice, Kuwait Armed Forces, who graced the occasion as the Guest of Honor and representative of the Chief of General Staff of the Kuwait Armed Forces.

The reception also saw the partici-

pation of ambassadors, members of the diplomatic corps, civil society representatives, defense attaches, officers from the Bangladesh Military Contingent in Kuwait, and members of the Bangladesh community.

## Al-Awadhi underscores vital role of doctors

# Ministry of Health honors graduates of Kuwaiti Board of Dermatology Program

By Marwa Al-Bahravi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The Ministry of Health recently honored the graduates of Kuwaiti Board of Dermatology Program, bringing the total number of graduates to 94 dermatologists.

This is one of several programs under the umbrella of Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations (KIMS).

During the honoring ceremony, Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi said the ministry is committed to fostering an environment that supports the aspirations of doctors, while addressing the health needs of society. He explained that the role of doctors extends beyond providing treatment; thereby, embodying hope, care and humanity for every patient they serve.

He urged the graduates to continue pur-

suage excellence and development in their field, striving to be role models in professionalism and mastery. He reminded them that knowledge and ethics are the foundations of a successful medical career.

Addressing the graduates, he stated "Kuwait, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, prioritizes the health sector and is dedicated to supporting it with all available resources. The nation believes that investing in people is the key to sustainable development."

He added that the day marks the culmination of years of hard work and dedication; which could not have been achieved without the collective efforts of the graduates, experienced supervisors, and the distinguished administrative teams who have contributed

to raising the standards of specialized medical education and training.

He proudly recalled the significant role of the Kuwaiti Board of Dermatology Program, which was established in 2003, as a pioneering model for training specialized doctors at the highest standard. Since its inception, the board has been playing a vital role in producing exceptional national medical professionals who have made substantial contributions to dermatology both locally and regionally.

Director of the Kuwaiti Board of Dermatology Program Dr. Abeer Al-Badali asserted that the ceremony marked a new chapter in the graduates' professional careers -- one that is filled with responsibility and a noble mission. She acknowledged that the health minister's support for the event reflects the ministry's commitment to promoting national talent and advancing the health sector.

## Continued from Page 1

## Cabinet reviews

It is worth noting that the ministry has provided diesel generators for both Jaber Stadium and Sulaibikhat Club, and it continues to oversee the maintenance and operation of all related equipment through its various sectors to ensure the successful hosting of the tournament.

## 1st Deputy

He highlighted the deep-rooted ties between the two nations, emphasizing Kuwait's commitment to cooperation and future joint projects.

The Kuwait Surgical Hospital is a grant from Kuwait to Iraq, featuring various medical facilities, including patient wards, operating rooms, an endoscopy center, and advanced ICU and emergency units.

## Minister highlights

He assured that the Permanent Committee for Celebrating National Holidays and Occasions is ready to offer full support for projects that enhance Kuwait's image and contribute to its economic development.

The minister expressed gratitude to the sponsors, Kuwaiti companies, and all participants supporting the festival, acknowledging their role in making the event a success.

Through initiatives like 'Ya Hala,'

Kuwait reaffirms its commitment to fostering creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship as part of its broader economic vision.

## Amir, Crown Prince,

people more progress and development under the country's wise leadership.

Similarly, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent on Wednesday a cable of congratulations to the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on the occasion of Qatar's National Day and the anniversary of Qatar's founder, Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammad Al-Thani's assumption of office.

In the cable, His Highness the Crown Prince praised Qatar's development achievements, wishing more progress and development for Qatar under the country's wise leadership.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent a cable of congratulation on Wednesday to the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on the occasion of his country's National Day and the anniversary of Qatar's founder, Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammad Al-Thani's assumption of office.

Kuwaiti First Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Sabah sent Wednesday a congratulatory cable to Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and State Minister for Defense Af-

fairs Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani and Interior Minister Sheikh Khalifah bin Hamad Al-Thani, on Qatar's national day.

A statement by the Kuwaiti Defense Ministry mentioned that Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef affirmed the depth of the historic relations between the two Gulf nations, wished the Qatari people prosperity and their armed forces further strength under guidance of Qatari Prince Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani.


As for the Interior Ministry's statement, it relayed Sheikh Fahad's sincere congratulations and his pride in the sturdy relations, wishing Qatar long-lasting stability and development. Qatar has made huge leaps in development since independence under the guidance of its leadership, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Qatar Khaled Al-Mutairi said on Wednesday.

Speaking to KUNA on the advent of Qatar's national day, the Ambassador lauded the strong relations with the fellow Arab country, saying that leaderships of both countries were eager to pursue all venues for collaboration and cooperation.

The strength of ties between the two GCC countries were also reflected in the joint stances they both shared on the regional and international scenes, he indicated.

The Kuwaiti diplomat expressed gratitude to Qatar's chairmanship of the 44th GCC Summit, saying that it helped bolster inter-GCC cooperation.

Ambassador Al-Mutairi renewed his congratulations to the Qatari leadership and people, wishing them more progress and development.



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Engineer II, Materials	B.Sc. in Aeronautical Engineering or Mechanical Engineering or Electrical/Electronics Engineering OR Licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineer (B1 or B2 Approvals) with equivalent technical knowledge.	4 years' experience in Airline Material, inclusive of 1-2 years in supplies activities with experience in computerized materials management systems.

**General Terms:**

- For Kuwaiti Nationals Only.
- The applicant is required to be proficient in English (Reading & Writing & Speaking) and proficient in computer applications.
- A minimum of 70% is required to pass the English language test.
- The applicant must successfully pass a set of tests with specified success rates in order to qualify for a personal interview.
- The applicant must have performed the mandatory military service or be postponed, excluded, or exempted from it in accordance with Law No. 20/2015 and submit a Completion Certificate of the mandatory military service.
- Compliance with Cabinet Resolution No. 914 issued on 29/06/2010, which includes: (Retired persons are only permitted to apply in the narrowest of limits. For the categories of pilots and flight engineers, they shall be requested, as needed, to ensure continued safe operations).
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- Applications shall be submitted on the website: [careers.kuwaitairways.com](http://careers.kuwaitairways.com). This shall be within 15 days from the date of publishing this announcement.
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  - Copy of Civil ID, Passport, Nationality and Birth Certificate.
  - To whom it may concern certificate from The Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS) and Career Progression.
  - Experience Certificates
  - To whom it may concern certificate from military service for service completion, or postponed, excluded or exempted (If applicable).
- Applications that do not meet the requirements or incomplete applications shall be excluded, and this exclusion in itself is considered an official apology without the need to notify the applicant.

Kuwait Airways  
19 December 2024



## Scholz battles to stay in power as Merz and others lay out plans

## Germany's election contenders clash over economy and migration

BERLIN, Dec 18, (AP) — Leading contenders in Germany's upcoming election presented their programs, setting out contrasting visions of how to put new vigor into Europe's biggest economy and tackle other issues such as migration.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz, a center-left Social Democrat, will seek a second term in the parliamentary election expected on Feb. 23 — more than three months after his unpopular three-party coalition collapsed in a dispute about how to revive the stagnant economy. He hopes for a come-from-behind victory against center-right challenger Friedrich Merz, whose Union bloc leads all recent polls.

Also seeking the top job are Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck of the environmentalist Greens, Scholz's remaining coalition partner; and Alice Weidel of the far-right Alternative for Germany, which is polling strongly but has no realistic chance of governing because other parties refuse to work with it.

The Social Democrats, Union and Greens all hope to implement as much as they can of their programs presented Tuesday, but any new government will almost certainly be a coalition and require extensive compromises.

The Union is pledging tax cuts for individuals and companies and wants to raise the level at which the highest level of income tax, 42%, kicks in. It wants to make working overtime more financially attractive. It also wants to abolish a tax once paid by everyone to finance the costs of integrating the former East Germany, now levied only on higher earners. It hopes to free up money by reforming the benefit system for the long-term unemployed and getting more people into jobs. It also wants to cut the value-added tax rate on dining out.

Scholz's Social Democrats pledge a lower income tax burden for 95% of earners. They want to reduce value-added tax on groceries. The Social Democrats and Greens want to increase the national minimum wage, which will be 12.82 euros (\$13.47) per hour on election day, to 15 euros — reprising an issue both par-



Opposition leader Friedrich Merz, right, of CDU speaks as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, center, looks on during a plenary session at the German parliament Bundestag where he faces a vote of confidence, Berlin, Germany, Monday, Dec. 16, 2024. (AP)

ties campaigned on in 2021. Scholz's party wants a "made in Germany bonus" to encourage investment in new plants and equipment. It also wants to set up a

"Germany fund" to invest public and private money in energy networks, innovative companies and building new homes. The Greens propose something similar to finance spending on infrastructure and want the "super-rich" to make a bigger contribution, for example to help finance education. All the contenders have proposals to reduce electricity prices.

The Social Democrats and Greens want to reform Germany's self-imposed restrictions on borrowing — the "debt brake," introduced more than a decade ago, which allows new borrowing to the tune of only 0.35% of annual gross domestic product, though it can be suspended for emergencies that are out of the state's control. The two center-left parties, which are vague about how exactly they would modify it, argue that it has become a barrier to investment.

The "debt brake" played a part in the collapse of Scholz's coalition in November. The chancellor's former coalition partners, the pro-business Free Democrats, insisted on upholding it strictly. The Union wants to hang on to it, arguing that it already has proven its flexibility in times of crisis and prevents Germany from burdening future generations with debt. But Merz has signaled that he might eventually be open to a future reform.

The Union wants Germany to turn back at its border migrants trying to enter from other countries in Europe's free travel zone and seek asylum. It wants to increase deportations of migrants who aren't entitled to stay and designate more "safe countries of origin," allowing authorities to speed up asylum proceedings. It is pledging to reverse legislation approved under Scholz that eased the rules on gaining citizenship and ended restrictions on holding dual citizenship.

The Social Democrats argue that measures the government has taken, including border controls, are already reducing irregular migration significantly. The Greens want a "fair" and "binding" distribution of asylum-seekers in Europe.



Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, joined from left by GOP Conference Vice Chair Blake Moore, House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, and Majority Whip Tom Emmer, tells reporters they are working on a final version of a spending bill before federal agencies run out of money at midnight on Friday night, at the Capitol in Washington, Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2024. (AP)

## Shutdown averted, recovery efforts boosted

## US Congress unveils funding deal with over \$100 bln in disaster aid

WASHINGTON, Dec 18, (AP) — Congressional leaders have unveiled a stopgap spending bill that will keep the federal government funded through March 14 and provide more than \$100 billion in emergency aid to help states and local communities recover from Hurricanes Helene and Milton and other natural disasters.

The measure would prevent a partial government shutdown set to begin after midnight Friday. It would kick final decisions on this budget year's spending levels to a new Republican-led Congress and President-elect Donald Trump. The continuing resolution generally continues current spending levels for agencies.

Passage of the measure is one of the final actions that lawmakers will consider this week before adjourning for the holidays and making way for the next Congress. It's the second short-term funding measure the lawmakers have taken up this fall as they struggled to pass the dozen annual appropriations bills before the new fiscal year began Oct. 1, as they typically do.

The bill will provide \$100.4 billion in disaster relief, with an additional \$10 billion in economic assistance for farmers struggling with low commodity prices and high input costs.

"We have to be able to help those who are in these dire straits," said House Speaker Mike Johnson told reporters.

Net farm income is projected to decline 4.1% this year after falling 19.4% the year before from the record highs reached in 2022. Johnson indicated more farm aid could be delivered in the next Congress, saying "we can't do all it right now."

"Congress is doing the best it can under difficult circumstances, and I think it will be a big boost for the industry," Johnson said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said the agreement was "free of cuts and poison pills," and would provide money for Democratic priorities like child care, workforce training and job placement.

"With this agreement, we are now on our way to avoiding a government shutdown," Schumer said.

Rep. Glenn Thompson, the Republican chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, said he was hoping for more economic relief for farmers, but "it's a great start."

"I think it's going to send the right signal to the markets that most farmers and ranchers are going to be able to get eligible for the credit they need to borrow in order to plant a crop or raise a herd," Thompson said.

President Joe Biden has sought about \$114 billion in disaster aid, submitting a \$99 billion request in November, telling lawmakers the funding was "urgently needed." The administration subsequently updated its request to include funding to repair federal facilities damaged due to natural disasters.

The largest share of the money, about \$29 billion, will go to the main disaster relief fund at the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The fund helps with debris removal, repairing public infrastructure and providing financial assistance to survivors. About \$21 billion goes to help farmers who have experienced crop or livestock losses.

Another \$8 billion will go to help rebuild and repair highways and bridges in more than 40 states and territories. And some \$12 billion would go toward helping communities recover through block grants administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. About \$2.2 billion would go to low-interest loans for businesses, nonprofits and homeowners trying to rebuild after a disaster.

## Canada ready for border action

## Ontario Premier warns of 'disaster' as Trump moves toward 25% tariffs

TORONTO, Dec 18, (AP) — The premier of Canada's most populous province said Tuesday President-elect Donald Trump's plan to impose sweeping 25% tariffs on all Canadian products would be a "disaster" that would hurt U.S. stock markets.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford also said in an interview with The Associated Press that he's "extremely worried" about Trump's plan to launch a mass deportation of millions of undocumented people. Ford said he has a plan to send hundreds of police officers to the border if they come north.

Ford said tariffs won't work considering how integrated the U.S. and Canadian economies are. He noted that in the auto sector alone parts and go back and forth between Canada-U.S. border seven or eight times before being assembled in Ontario or Michigan.

"It is so integrated, I don't even know how you separate that in the supply chain. It would be a disaster," Ford told the AP. "It will affect the market. The market will drop and we have every CEO saying that is not the way to go."

Ford said the market consequences

will get Trump's attention.

"I know he has many scorecards, but one is the stock market. It will affect the market, the market will drop," Ford said.

Brian Hughes, a Trump-Vance transition spokesperson, said in response to Ford's comments that "President Trump has promised tariff policies that protect working Americans from the unfair practices of foreign companies and foreign markets."

Ford said he's also very worried about Trump's mass deportation plan. Trump has talked about creating "the largest mass deportation program in history," calling for using the National Guard and mobilizing domestic police forces.

"I am extremely concerned," Ford said. "We do have a plan ready. We have hundreds of provincial police officers that are ready within hours, if not immediately, to hit the borders."

Ford said a combination of local police, provincial police and the federal government will all be working together. "We'll make sure that we tighten up that border like we've never seen before," he said.

Trump has threatened to impose 25% tariffs on all Canadian goods if Canada and Mexico do not stem the flow of migrants and fentanyl from entering the U.S. border — even though far fewer of each crosses into the U.S. from Canada than from Mexico.



Ford



This image released Monday, Dec. 19, 2024 by the Italian Soccorso Alpino (Alpine Rescue) shows the final rescue operation of Ottavia Piana, a caver blocked in a deep inside the Buono Fonteno cave, near Bergamo, Italy, after falling some 5 meters (16 feet) Saturday evening during an expedition. (AP)

## Injured spelunker carried to safety

MILAN, Dec 18, (AP) — An injured cave explorer in northern Italy was carried to safety Wednesday, 75 hours after she fell while attempting to map an unexplored branch of the Buono Fonteno cave, alpine rescuers said.

The last leg of the rescue operation proceeded more smoothly than expected, and workers carrying 32-year-old Ottavia Piana strapped into a stretcher reached the cave's mouth in the early morning hours. It was her second time in 17 months to be rescued from the cave near Lago d'Isèo northeast of Bergamo.

Piana suffered multiple fractures, including to her face, ribs and knee, when she fell 5 meters (13 feet) while exploring an uncharted part of the cave on Saturday, doctors said.

## Partnership reshaping America

## Musk, Trump viewed roughly same by Americans, AP-NORC poll finds

WASHINGTON, Dec 18, (AP) — Elon Musk, clad in tuxedo and black tie, took the stage at President-elect Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort shortly after the election with all the swagger of the winning candidate himself.

"The public has given us a mandate that could not be more clear, the clearest mandate. The people have spoken. The people want change," Musk told the audience of Trump's biggest donors, campaign leaders and appointment seekers. "We are going to shake things up. It's going to be a revolution."

Musk's attachment to Trump has created an alliance between America's most powerful politician and its richest businessman — and roughly the same percentages of Americans have favorable views of each, according to a new poll from the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Experts are split on whether that overlap in public opinion is a good or bad thing for Musk's businesses or for Trump's politics. But it could have far-reaching effects in both realms.

Musk, whose net worth tops \$400 billion, oversees six businesses while continuing to work closely with Trump: electric car manufacturer Tesla, the X social media platform, space technology company SpaceX, brain link company Neuralink, the startup xAI and tunneling operator The Borings Co.

"Even though there's a negative impact, in terms of potentially alienating some of their customers that might not be fans of Trump, the benefits far outweigh any negatives when it comes to having a right-hand seat next to Trump in the White House," said Dan Ives, an analyst at Wedbush Securities.

Ross Gerber, CEO of Gerber Kawasaki Wealth and Investment Management, identified himself as an investor in Musk's Tesla and a



President-elect Donald Trump listens to Elon Musk as he arrives to watch SpaceX's mega rocket Starship lift off for a test flight from Starbase in Boca Chica, Texas, Nov. 19, 2024. (AP)

driver of Tesla's new Cybertruck, the futuristic pickup that has gotten huge amounts of attention but also been the subject of safety concerns and multiple recalls.

"Having your CEO not working at your company and working at the job of having to fire government employees... as a shareholder, I'm paying someone to not work for my company," he said. "As a Cybertruck owner with self-driving that sucks and doesn't work, I'm like, 'Dude, this isn't fair.'"

But despite his skepticism, Gerber said he won't stop investing in Musk's businesses.

"I've made a lot of money with Elon," he said. "I'm not in the business of investing based on the popularity of CEOs."

Musk doesn't appear to give Trump much boost with people who don't back the incoming president.

He is no more popular with the U.S. public than the president-elect himself, and viewed unfavorably by about half of Americans, according

to the AP-NORC poll. About 4 in 10 Americans have a somewhat or very favorable view of the world's richest person, very similar to the percentage who view Trump positively. Likewise, about half of adults have a somewhat or very unfavorable view of Musk — again, similar to Trump.

Instead, said one political strategist, Musk is the ideal validator for someone who cultivates an image of success in business and who has stocked his Cabinet and key adviser roles with billionaires.

"Trump has always pushed this narrative that he's a successful developer and a very successful businessman. I think having Musk with him is his double-down on this business success, good-for-the-economy, good-for-everybody-making money kind of persona," said Christine Matthews, a national political pollster who has worked for Republicans. "In this case, Musk is seen as this successful, innovative, tech entrepreneur, frontier-buster."

## Georgia's outgoing president urges EU to use more leverage to back protesters

BRUSSELS, Dec 18, (AP) — Georgia's outgoing president on Wednesday appealed to the European Union to press her country's pro-Russia government to hold a new election amid a police crackdown on peaceful opposition protesters.

Tens of thousands of people have filled the streets regularly in recent weeks since the governing Georgian Dream party decided to suspend negotiations on joining the 27-nation EU. Police have increasingly used force and intimidation in their attempts to break up the rallies.

"Europe needs to find the leverage to act. If Europe cannot exert leverage on a country of 3.7 million, how can it expect to compete with the giants of the 21st century?" Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili told EU lawmakers in Strasbourg, France.

The EU granted Georgia candidate status for membership in December



Georgian outgoing President Salome Zourabichvili delivers her speech at the European Parliament and appealed to the European Union to press her country's pro-Russia government to hold a new election amid a police crackdown on peaceful opposition protesters, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024 in Strasbourg, eastern France. (AP)

2023, but put the accession bid on hold and cut financial support in June after

the passage of a "foreign influence" law that was widely seen as a blow to democratic freedoms.

On Monday, EU foreign ministers agreed to impose visa restrictions on Georgian diplomats and government officials. They also weighed a list of Georgian representatives to impose sanctions on, but no agreement could be reached.

Zourabichvili suggested that this wasn't enough, and she urged the world's biggest trading bloc to use its weight as Georgia's biggest donor, biggest economic market and home to the South Caucasus country's biggest diaspora.

"If we are honest, Europe so far has not fully lived (up) to the moment. Europe has, so far, met the challenge halfway," she said. "Where Georgians have been fighting day and night, Europeans have been slow to wake up and slow to react."

## Killing an act of terrorism

## UnitedHealthcare CEO killer charged

NEW YORK, Dec 18, (AP) — The man accused of killing UnitedHealthcare's CEO has been charged with murder as an act of terrorism, prosecutors said Tuesday as they worked to bring him to a New York court from a Pennsylvania jail.

Luigi Mangione already was charged with murder in the Dec. 4 killing of Brian Thompson, but the terror allegation is new.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg said Thompson's death on a midtown Manhattan street "was a killing that was intended to evoke terror. And we've seen that reaction."

Mangione's New York lawyer, Karen Friedman Agnifilo, declined to comment.

Thompson, 50, was shot while walking to a hotel where Minnesota-based UnitedHealthcare — the United States' biggest medical insurer — was holding an investor conference.

The killing kindled a fiery outpouring of resentment toward U.S. health insurance companies, as Americans swapped stories online and elsewhere of being denied cov-

erage, left in limbo as doctors and insurers disagreed, and stuck with sizeable bills.

The shooting also rattled C-suites, as "wanted" posters with other health care executives' names and faces appeared on New York streets and some social media users extolled Mangione's deed as payback.

New York Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said Tuesday that "any attempt to rationalize this is vile, reckless and offensive to our deeply held principles of justice."

A New York law passed after the Sept. 11 attacks allows prosecutors to charge crimes as acts of terrorism when they're "intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, influence the policies of a unit of government by intimidation or coercion and affect the conduct of a unit of government by murder, assassination or kidnapping."

Prosecutors have applied the statute to various contexts. Some related to international extremism, but the law was first used against a Bronx gang member after a hail of gunfire killed a 10-year-old girl and paralyzed a man outside a Christmas party in 2002. The state's highest court later said the conduct didn't amount to terrorism, and a retrial produced convictions on other charges.



Mangione



## INTERNATIONAL

## No water ... unclear death toll

## Rescuers dig for survivors of Vanuatu 7.3 earthquake

WELLINGTON, Dec 18, (AP): Vanuatu's capital was without water on Wednesday, a day after reservoirs were destroyed by a violent magnitude 7.3 earthquake that wrought havoc on the South Pacific island nation, with the number of people killed and injured expected to rise.

The government's disaster management office said early Wednesday that 14 deaths were confirmed, but hours later said nine had been verified by the main hospital. The number was "expected to increase" as people remained trapped in fallen buildings, a spokesperson said. About 200 have been treated for injuries.

Frantic rescue efforts that began at flattened buildings after the quake hit early Tuesday afternoon continued 30 hours later, with dozens working in dust and heat with little water to seek those yelling for help inside. A few more survivors were extracted from the rubble of downtown buildings in Port Vila, also the country's largest city, while others remained trapped and some were found dead.

A near-total telecommunications collapse meant people struggled to confirm their relatives' safety. Some providers began to reestablish phone service but connections were patchy.

Internet service had not been restored because the submarine cable supplying it was damaged, the operator said.

The earthquake hit at a depth of 57 kilometers (35 miles) and was centered 30 kilometers (19 miles) west of the capital of Vanuatu, a group of 80 islands home to about 330,000 people. A tsunami warning was called off less than two hours after the quake, but dozens of large aftershocks continued to rattle the country.

The Asia-Pacific head of the Interna-

tional Federation of Red Cross, Katie Greenwood, speaking to The Associated Press from Fiji, said it was not clear how many people were still missing or killed.

"We have anecdotal information coming from people at the search and rescue site that are fairly confident that unfortunately those numbers will rise," she said.

The capital's main medical facility, Vila Central Hospital, was badly damaged and patients were moved to a military camp. Clement Chipokolo, Vanuatu country director at the Christian relief agency World Vision, said health care services, already strained before the quake, were overwhelmed.

While power was out in swathes of Port Vila, the biggest fear among aid agencies was the lack of water. Two large reservoirs serving the capital were totally decimated, the National Disaster Management Office said.

Resident Milroy Cainton said people were joining large queues to buy water in stores, but could only purchase two or four bottles at a time. "People are not really concerned about electricity, they're just concerned about water," he said.

UNICEF was recording a rise in diarrhea among children, a sign that they had begun to drink tainted water, said the chief of the Vanuatu office, Eric Durpaire. Officials told residents of areas where water had been restored to boil it.

At least 10 buildings sustained major damage, many in a busy downtown area full of lunchtime shoppers when the quake hit. An unknown number of people were trapped inside, and Cainton, the resident, said rescuers had been forced to target their efforts to where they believed people could be saved.



Mary Jane Veloso, center, a Filipino woman who spent almost 15 years in an Indonesian prison for drug trafficking and was nearly executed by firing squad in 2015, is reunited with her family as she arrives at the Correctional Institution for Women in Mandaluyong, Philippines Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024. (AP)

From death's door to warm homecoming

## Veloso back in Philippines after death row reprieve

MANILA, Dec 18, (AP): A Filipino woman who spent years on death row in Indonesia for drug trafficking, and who was nearly executed by firing squad in 2015, said Wednesday she's happy to be back in the Philippines but is asking its president to set her free.

Mary Jane Veloso spent almost 15 years in prison but won a last-minute reprieve that allows her to serve the rest of her sentence in the Philippines and will lead to her testimony exposing how a criminal syndicate duped her into being an unwitting accomplice and drug courier.

"What's important is I be given clemency so that I can be with my family," she told reporters at a prison facility where she was brought to after arriving in Manila, and where she had a tearful reunion with her family.

"I have been imprisoned for fifteen years in Indonesia for a crime that I did not do," she added, fighting back tears as her arm was draped on her

mother's shoulder and her two sons stood close by.

Her transfer removes the possibility of execution. The Philippines, Asia's largest Roman Catholic nation, has long abolished the death penalty.

Veloso was moved late Sunday from a female prison in Yogyakarta to Indonesia's capital of Jakarta, then escorted Tuesday night to a flight to Manila. Her repatriation was made possible by a "practical arrangement" for the transfer of prisoners signed between the two countries on Dec. 6.

Relatives and a small group of supporters, including Veloso's two sons who were 1- and 6-years old when she was arrested in 2010, welcomed her with cheers and tears upon her arrival at Manila's airport.

"Welcome home Mary Jane," read a huge banner carried by relatives and supporters who were clapping flowers.

Cries rang out and the crowd

waved as Veloso was escorted by a security cordon out of Manila's airport into a waiting van. Her parents wiped away tears.

"We take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to the Indonesian government and to all who have extended assistance for the welfare of Ms. Mary Jane Veloso," President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said in statement Wednesday.

The government will ensure Veloso's safety and welfare as she continues to serve her sentence in the country, the statement added. Marcos did not mention clemency, and presidential palace officials earlier said there has been no decision about the family's appeal.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo also said Wednesday that Veloso's transfer "is a significant achievement for the bilateral relations between the Philippines and Indonesia, a mark of the trust and friendship between our two nations."

Veloso told a group of reporters

outside the Pondok Bambu female prison in eastern Jakarta that she was overwhelmed by a variety of emotions, before getting into the car that took her to the airport.

"Thank you, Indonesia. I love Indonesia," Veloso said.

She said that she brought many souvenirs given to her Indonesian fellow inmates and friends, including a guitar, books, knittings and rosaries.

Veloso, who will turn 40 next month, was arrested in 2010 at an airport in the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta, where officials discovered about 2.6 kilograms (5.7 pounds) of heroin hidden in her luggage. The single mother of two sons was convicted and sentenced to death.

Her case caused a public outcry in the Philippines. She traveled to Indonesia in 2010, where her recruiter, Maria Kristina Sergio, reportedly told her a job as a domestic worker awaited her. Sergio also allegedly provided the suitcase where the drugs were found.

## Vote falls short of required two-thirds majority

## India's simultaneous poll plan hits roadblock in lower Parliament



Muslims stand in queues to cast their votes in the seventh and final phase of national elections, in Varanasi, India, Saturday, June 1, 2024. (AP)

NEW DELHI, Dec 18, (AP): A controversial legislation submitted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to change India's voting system failed to pass Tuesday in the country's lower house of Parliament.

Law minister, Arjun Ram Meghwal, presented the legislation which proposed allowing elections for state assemblies and the national parliament to be held simultaneously. However, it was not approved as the vote fell short of the required two-thirds majority; only 269 lawmakers voted in favor of the proposal while 198 were against it.

The government says simultaneous polls will result in higher economic growth and pave the way for better governance as they will reduce the frequency of election campaigns and expenses and allow politicians to focus on their work.

However, India's opposition has strongly objected to the legislation, which has been under review for over a year. Critics say the proposed system will undermine federalism and risks shifting India toward a presidential election model and could give unfair poll advantage to the governing parties at the federal level in state elections.

The South Asian country of more than 1.4 billion people has 28 states and eight federal territories. Currently, staggered state and parliamentary elections are held at different times across India, with few state polls scheduled

almost every year.

India's last national election was held in seven phases over 44 days.

Meghwal said on Tuesday the government was willing to send the legislation to a parliamentary committee for wider consultation.

As per the draft, the legislation if approved as a law can be put into action in "the first sitting" of the lower house of the parliament after a national election - which implies it can't be implemented until 2029 when the current government's term ends.

Modi's government has long advocated for the proposed system and appointed a nine-member panel last year to look into whether it was feasible. The panel recommended the plan in March, saying it would help reduce wasting public funds and increase voter turnout.

The legislation must be approved by both houses of the parliament by a two-thirds majority in each before it becomes law. The new system, if approved, would also require amendments to India's Constitution and approval from all states and federal territories, experts say.

Unlike its two previous terms, Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party does not have a majority in the lower house of the parliament and banks on its partners from the National Democratic Alliance and friendly parties to get laws passed.

## Chinese FM addresses symposium on foreign relations

## China ready to maintain dialogue with US: top diplomat

BEIJING, Dec 18, (Xinhua): China is ready to work with the United States to maintain dialogue, manage differences, enhance mutual trust, dispel misgivings and expand cooperation in order to explore the right way for the two major countries to get along, said Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Tuesday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks while addressing a symposium on the international situation and China's foreign relations in 2024.

Wang noted that the relationship between China and the United States concerns not only the well-being of the people of both countries but also the future and destiny of the entire world. Over the past year, guided by head-of-state diplomacy, China has been working towards overall stability in bilateral relations, focusing on implementing the "San Francisco Vision," said Wang.

Mentioning cooperation in such fields as counter-narcotics, law enforcement, climate change, science and technology, artificial intelligence and youth exchanges, Wang said relevant progress has been widely welcomed by various sectors in both countries and the international community at large. It fully shows that as long as China and the United States join hands, great things can be accomplished, said Wang.

China firmly safeguards its sovereignty, security and development interests, and resolutely opposes the illegal and unreasonable suppression of China by the United States. In particular, regarding the U.S. gross interference in China's internal affairs such as issues relating to Taiwan, China must make unequivocally forceful response, resolutely defend its legitimate rights and interests, and uphold the basic norms governing international relations, he added.

Wang went on to point out in recent

interactions with relevant U.S. leaders, President Xi Jinping has provided important strategic guidance at an important juncture for the development of bilateral ties, summarized seven points of experience and inspirations from the recent years of exchanges and clearly identified the four red lines that brook no challenge, namely the Taiwan question, China's path and system, democracy and human rights, and China's development right.

Xi stressed that China's goal of a stable, healthy and sustainable China-U.S. relationship remains unchanged; its commitment to mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation as principles for handling China-U.S. relations remains unchanged; its position of resolutely safeguarding China's sovereignty, security and development interests remains unchanged; and its desire to carry forward the traditional friendship between the Chinese and American peoples remains unchanged.

## Lat/Am

## Venezuelan opp'n honored:

The European Union's legislature on Tuesday celebrated the bravery and staunch resistance of Venezuelan opposition leaders Maria Corina Machado and Edmundo González Urrutia while awarding them the EU's top human rights honor, the Sakharov Prize.

European Parliament President Roberta Metsola said it was "in recognition of your tireless efforts to restore freedom and democracy in Venezuela and ensure a fair, free and peaceful transition of power - risking everything for the values that millions of Venezuelans and this parliament hold so dear."

Machado was set to run against the incumbent president, Nicolás Maduro, in Venezuela's election this year, but the government disqualified her. González took her place. He had never run for office before. (AP)

## US dedicates new embassy:

The U.S. government on Tuesday

dedicated its more than \$1 billion new embassy in Mexico, some two years after it was scheduled to be completed.



Salazar

Outgoing U.S. Amb. Ken Salazar said that the largest embassy the U.S. has in the world "highlights the singular relationship between our nations and countries."

The government broke ground on the new embassy in February 2018. The U.S. will leave its current building on the Mexican capital's grand Paseo de la Reforma boulevard, which has been a regular site of marches and protests over the years.

The new embassy is on a former industrial site that required extensive toxic cleanup. The area known as New Polanco includes modern museums and other upscale projects

developed by Carlos Slim, one of the world's wealthiest men.

The new building is still not open to the public, however. That likely won't come before late next year as work continues. (AP)

**Vuteff gets 30 months:** The son-in-law of a prominent Venezuelan opposition leader was sentenced Tuesday to two and a half years in prison for his role in a vast conspiracy to siphon \$1.2 billion from the state-owned oil company, some of which allegedly landed into accounts controlled by President Nicolás Maduro's stepsons.

Fernando Vuteff, 53, was arrested on a U.S. warrant in 2022 in Switzerland while on a visit to retrieve a valuable watch from a safe deposit box held at a bank in Zurich. The Argentine asset manager is the son-in-law of former Caracas Mayor Antonio Ledezma, a fierce Maduro opponent. He was charged in Miami federal court with laundering bribes and illicit proceeds from a fake foreign currency exchange scheme involving senior Venezuelan officials. (AP)



SAUDI	TASI	Change	Closing pts	UAE	DFMGI	Change	Closing pts
↑		+0.10	11,961.05	EGYPT	EGX	-0.84	5,037.07
				JAPAN	NIKKEI	-0.32	30,503.07
				PAKISTAN	KSE 100	-0.72	39,081.71
				PHILIPPINES	PSEI	-3.41	111,082.94
						-0.50	6,469.08

# Business

## Company recognized for excellence in advertising, media, and community engagement in 2024

# Zain dominates 12th Kuwait Creativity Award with five accolades

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Zain was honored with five prestigious awards during the 12th edition of the Kuwait Creativity Award. The accolades highlighted the company's exceptional media campaigns, impactful commercials, and continued efforts to create positive change through its awareness initiatives and community programs throughout 2024.

The awards were presented during a ceremony held by the Arab Media Forum under the patronage of H.E. Abdulrahman Bedah Al-Mutairi, Minister of Information, Culture, and State Minister for Youth Affairs. The event was attended by Dr. Nasser Muhaisen, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information, alongside a distinguished gathering of guests, media professionals, artists, content creators, and influencers.

Zain secured awards across five categories: Creativity in Awareness, for its Ramadan TVC; National Campaigns, for its National Day TVC; Advertising Creativity, for its Eid Al-Fitr TVC; and Creativity in Social Responsibility, for the company's annual Zain Alshuhoor Ramadan campaign. In addition, Zain received Best PR Personality, awarded to Waleed Al-Khashti, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer.

The Creativity in Awareness award was presented in recognition of Zain's Ramadan TVC, which highlighted the Palestinian cause. Featuring a cast of talented children and the iconic Palestinian caricature figure, Handala, the



Dr. Nasser Muhaisen and Madhi Al-Khamees with Zain's team during the ceremony.

campaign garnered over 16 million views since its launch. The project was produced in collaboration with advertising agency Joy Productions, with lyrics by Heba Hamada, music by Ihab Abdulwahed, music composition by Michael Fadel, and direction by Samir Aboud. The TVC was produced by publishing house VIP Films.

Zain also received the National Campaigns award for its National Day TVC, which celebrated the nation's heritage, unity, and achievements, amassing nearly 7 million views to date. It featured the iconic voice of Kuwaiti artist Sanaa Al-Kharraz, with lyrics by poet Salem Sayer Al-Enzi, music by Suliman Ghannam Al-Daikan, and production by Joy Productions.

In the Advertising Creativity category, Zain was recognized for its Eid Al-Fitr TVC, which has ac-

cumulated over 19 million views. Inspired by Al-Mutanabi's famous poem, the campaign was executed

under the direction of Joy Productions, with music by Ihab Abdulwahed, music composition by



The accolades reflect Zain's excellence in advertising, media, and community engagement.



Recognizing Waleed Al-Khashti.

Ahmed Tarek Yahya, mixing and mastering by Hani Mahrous, direction by Khaled Al-Rifai, and production by All Over Group.

The Creativity in Social Responsibility award celebrated the company's Zain Alshuhoor annual Ramadan campaign. As one of Kuwait's largest and longest-running community-driven initiatives, this campaign has been a cornerstone of Zain's social outreach for over a decade. It offers a wide range of volunteer, humanitarian, and community programs throughout the holy month of Ramadan and into Eid Al-Fitr.

Zain's advertising and creative content consistently reflect the values of its brand and resonate with societal trends. By addressing meaningful issues and celebrating significant moments, Zain aspires to be more than a provider of digi-

tal innovations—striving instead to be a brand that enriches all aspects of life and shares in its community's most impactful events.

The recognition at the Kuwait Creativity Award underscores Zain's dedication to excellence in marketing and advertising. As one of Kuwait's leading economic institutions, Zain understands the pivotal role of both traditional and modern media in connecting with society and influencing positive change.

The Kuwait Creativity Award aims to elevate advertising standards across Kuwait and the Arab world by fostering a spirit of healthy competition and encouraging innovation. It seeks to refine the skills of professionals in the advertising industry while promoting constructive and positive ideas in creative materials.

# CMA completes legislative framework for local investment funds, REITs to list on Gulf markets

## New system paves the way for inter- and dual listings

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Local investment funds and Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) will soon be able to officially apply for listing on the local market and, later, on other Gulf markets that have completed their legislative procedures, reports Al-Jarida daily quoting informed sources.**

The Capital Markets Authority (CMA) has now completed all the legislative requirements necessary

for the listing of investment funds.

Funds wishing to list in Gulf markets must first obtain approval for listing in Kuwait, and then proceed to the markets that are ready for listing, based on their respective schedules.

The CMA's regulatory framework allows the listing and marketing of investment funds established in any of the GCC financial markets.

This new system paves the way for inter- and dual listings, allowing investment funds to be listed across multiple financial markets without needing to submit new applications.

The regulatory conditions for this process include meeting minimum standards as specified in the inter-registration

regulations, which govern financial products across different jurisdictions.

These regulations ensure that funds meet high standards of transparency and governance, with clear obligations for the fund manager and agents involved in promotion.

Moreover, they provide the authority to remove funds from the list if they fail to comply with the specified conditions. The regulations also protect the rights of fund unit holders, ensuring that the funds comply with financial and legislative standards.

The cross-listing of investment funds offers several benefits, including providing investors with opportunities to

diversify their portfolios, especially in sectors not readily available in local markets.

For companies, cross-listing can help expand their investor base, promote their products, and boost liquidity, which in turn increases trading volumes and commissions.

This process can also create opportunities for continuous trading across markets, taking advantage of differences in holiday schedules, and potentially enabling transactions in different currencies.

This development is expected to provide new investment opportunities, especially in sectors that are not available on the Kuwait Stock Exchange.

## Academy affirmed commitment to social responsibility and community dev't

# CMA launches 8th program for training and qualifying fresh Kuwaiti graduates

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: As part of the Capital Markets Authority's ongoing efforts to develop society and strengthen national human resources in collaboration with the Capital Markets Academy, the Eighth Program for Fresh Kuwaiti Graduates was launched on Monday, December 12 in the presence of members of the Board of Trustees of the Capital Markets Academy and a number of stakeholders at the Capital Markets Authority (CMA).

In his speech, the Deputy Chairman of the Board of Commissioners Othman Al-Essa expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted by the Capital Markets Academy in preparing and implementing this program.

He explained that this marks the first time the program is being held under the supervision and management of the academy. The program offers fresh graduates the opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to work in the capital market through an intensive training course, which will enhance the trainees' experience and prepare them to work with high efficiency.

Al-Essa also affirmed the importance of commitment and diligence to ensure maximum benefit from the program.



Above and below: Some photos from the event.

Meanwhile, Director General of the Capital Markets Academy Abdulaziz Al-Rashid Al-Bader stated that the training and qualification program for newly graduated Kuwaitis has been carefully designed to equip participants with the basic scientific, professional, and technical skills. It also aims to familiarize them with the local and global financial markets, thus preparing them to work in international and local financial markets.



## Premier Market Index lost 0.14%

# Boursa ends trading with mixed results across indices

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18. (Agencies): Boursa Kuwait concluded Wednesday's trading session with mixed results across its indices. The general index edged up slightly by 0.89 points, or 0.01 percent, closing at 7,282.96 points. Trading volume was substantial, with 311.54 million shares exchanged through 16,123 cash transactions, valued at KD 51.51 million (USD 157.10 million).

The main market index experienced a decline of 16.73 points, or 0.25 per-

cent, settling at 6,649.99 points. This index saw 224.3 million shares traded through 9,696 transactions, worth KD 26.3 million (USD 80.2 million).

In contrast, the premier market index showed a modest increase of 5.61 points, or 0.07 percent, closing at 7,802.42 points. It recorded 87.2 million shares traded through 6,427 transactions, with a total value of KD 25.12 million (USD 76.6 million).

The Main 50 index also fell, losing

8.94 points, or 0.14 percent, to end at 6,515.31 points. This index saw 145.5 million shares traded through 5,318 cash transactions, worth KWD 17.3 million (approximately USD 52.7 million).

On Tuesday, Boursa Kuwait experienced a continuation of declines in its main indices during the fourth session of the week, though the drops were limited to less than a quarter of a percentage point.

The General Market Index fell by 0.16

percent, or 11.92 points, while liquidity significantly decreased to 58.7 million dinars, with approximately 353 million shares traded across 18,715 transactions. Out of the 127 shares traded, 58 gained, 53 lost, and 16 remained unchanged.

The Premier Market Index lost 0.14 percent, or 10.95 points, closing at 7,796.81 points, with liquidity reaching 31.6 million dinars and 100.6 million shares traded through 7,968 transactions.

## KPC: Kuwait oil price down 63 cents to USD 74.15 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18. (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 63 cents to USD 74.15 per barrel (pb), compared with USD 74.78 pb the previous day, said the Kuwait Petroleum

Corporation (KPC) on Wednesday. At the global level, the Brent crude fell by 72 cents to USD 73.19 pb, and the West Texas Intermediate also went down by US 63 cents to USD 70.08 pb.

## Kuwait's Nov trade surplus with Japan down 15.3 pct

TOKYO, Dec 18. (KUNA): Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan in November narrowed 15.3 percent from a year earlier to JPY 69.9 billion (USD 435 million), down for the third consecutive month due to slow exports, government data showed.

However, Kuwait remained in black ink with Japan for 16 years and 10 months, as exports still outpaced imports in value, the Finance Ministry said in a preliminary report.

Overall Kuwaiti exports to Japan shrank 13.9 percent year-on-year to JPY 94.5 billion (USD 594 million) for the third straight month of decline, while imports from Japan also fell 9.8 percent to JPY 24.5 billion (USD 149 million), down for the first time in two months, it said.

Middle East's trade surplus with Japan also narrowed 45.5 percent to JPY 480.8 billion (USD 3.1 billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region sliding 23.7 percent from a year earlier.

Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and other natural

resources, which accounted for 93.8 percent of the region's total exports to Japan, plunged 25.0 percent. The region's overall imports from Japan surged 29.0 percent on robust demand for automobiles and machinery.

The world's third-biggest economy logged a global trade deficit in November for the fifth straight month at JPY 117.6 billion (USD 745 million), but its size plummeted 85.5 percent from a year earlier.

Exports rose 3.8 percent from the year before, buoyed by sales of semiconductor production equipment, non-ferrous metal and food. Exports marked the largest amount for the month of November since comparable data became available in 1979.

Imports dropped 3.8 percent on lower bills of crude oil, electronics parts and coal. China remained Japan's biggest trade partner, followed by the US.

The trade data are measured on a customs-cleared basis before adjustment for seasonal factors.

## Local bank financing to public services and trade sector shows strong growth

By Mahmoud Shendi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: In October 2024, local banks in Kuwait provided significant financing to the public services sector, increasing by 34.7 million dinars (85.2 percent) to reach 75.4 million dinars compared to 40.7 million dinars in September 2024.

This marked an impressive annual increase of 100 percent, up by 75.3 million dinars from 0.1 million dinars

in October 2023. Over the first 10 months of the year, the total financing for the sector reached approximately 450 million dinars.

The accumulated balance of financing provided to the public services sector also increased by 1.4 percent, or 10.5 million dinars, bringing the total to 759.5 million dinars, compared to 749 million dinars in September 2024. On an annual basis, this financing surged by 187.7 percent, up by 495.6 million dinars from 263.9 million dinars in October 2023.



Ranked among Forbes' Top 100 Regional Companies and named one of Best Arab Banks by The Banker

# Gulf Bank's year of distinction with 13 global and regional awards in 2024



- Ranked among Forbes' Top 100 Regional Companies and named one of the Best Arab Banks by The Banker.
- Recognized for serving next-generation affluent clients and holding Kuwait's largest tokenized debit portfolio
- Awarded for its exceptional digital platform implementation, effective compliance, and regulatory technological solutions
- AlDanah Millionaire Account secures Guinness World Records for the second time.
- Celebrated for its excellence in digital transformation, social responsibility, sustainability, and women empowerment
- Enhanced customer experience through cutting-edge technology, personalized services, and streamlined operations.



Salma Al-Hajjaj and Najla Aleisa receive two awards from MEED.



Najla Aleisa receives an award from Euromoney.



Mohammed Taqi receives an award from MasterCard.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Gulf Bank has marked a stellar year in 2024, achieving remarkable success across multiple fronts, from strategic initiatives and global recognition to groundbreaking innovations. As a leading financial institution, Gulf Bank reaffirmed its long-term vision by announcing its strategic shift to Islamic banking and exploring a merger with Boubyan Bank—reflecting its commitment to transformative growth in the banking sector.

This year, Gulf Bank was recognized among the \*Top 100 Listed Companies in the Region\* by Forbes, while The Banker named it one of the "Best 100 Arab Banks for 2024". The bank's consistent performance earned it an 'A' credit rating from the world's leading agencies, with total assets surpassing KD 7.5 billion as of Q3 2024.

### A Year of Transformative Achievements with a Focus on Customer Experience

Gulf Bank's successes include the completion of the second phase of its core banking system, the launch of its upgraded mobile banking app, and the introduction of its 2030 ESG strategy. The new app was designed with customer needs at the forefront, providing seamless navigation, faster transactions, and enhanced personalization.

Reflecting its environmental commitment, Gulf Bank initiated a transition to eco-friendly branches. The bank has implemented a series of sustainable practices aimed at reducing its environmental footprint and promoting green banking solutions. Gulf Bank's eco-friendly branches are designed with energy-efficient technologies, including LED lighting systems, automated energy management, and solar energy solutions to power select branches. Additionally, the bank is introducing digital-first approaches to reduce paper usage.

By adopting these initiatives, Gulf Bank is not only improving operational efficiency but also leading by example in supporting Kuwait's environmental goals and Vision 2035.

Additionally, Gulf Bank remained closely connected to the community, organizing a wide variety of programs and events that cater to the aspirations of its customers and employees. The bank also raised the grand prize for its AlDanah Millionaire Account to KD 2 million.

In recognition of these accomplishments, Gulf Bank garnered 13 prestigious awards across diverse categories:

### 1. Best Next-Generation Offering Award

Gulf Bank proudly received the prestigious Best Next-Generation Offering Award at the 2024 Private Banker International Global Wealth Awards held in Singapore. This accolade is a testament to Gulf Bank's exceptional commitment to attracting, engaging, and serving the next generation of affluent clients. By understanding the unique preferences and evolving financial goals of younger wealth holders, Gulf Bank has successfully delivered tailored wealth management solutions that align with their dynamic lifestyles.

The Bank's forward-thinking approach combines personalized financial advice with a suite of innovative investment products, providing clients with customized strategies to build, preserve, and grow their wealth. Gulf Bank remains proactive in anticipating the changing needs of this important demographic, leveraging cutting-edge tools and insights to offer seamless experiences that empower next-generation clients to take charge of their financial futures.

This award highlights Gulf Bank's role as a trusted partner for wealth creation across generations, reaffirming its leadership in the competitive wealth management landscape.

### 2. Highest Tokenized Debit Portfolio in Kuwait Award

Presented by Mastercard, this award highlights Gulf Bank's leadership in digital payment security through advanced tokenization technology. By enhancing transaction safety and convenience, Gulf Bank has redefined customer trust and satisfaction in digital banking.

### 3. Best Digital Platform Implementation Award

At the IBSi Global Financial Innovation Awards 2024 in Mumbai, Gulf Bank's digital transformation program was recognized for revolutionizing banking operations with innovative platforms that enhance customer experiences. The platform's intuitive design allows users to manage their finances effortlessly.

The IBSi Financial Innovation Awards are internationally renowned for celebrating financial institutions, technology providers, and developers who deliver groundbreaking solutions that improve banking operations and financial services.

### 4. Best Program Vision Award

Gulf Bank received this

award for its forward-thinking approach to digital transformation, emphasizing innovation-driven solutions to simplify processes for customers and improve satisfaction.

### 5. Excellence in Compliance and Technological Regulation: 'Digital Blueprint' Program Award

Gulf Bank's implementation of the Digital Blueprint Program by Geiom Business Solutions earned it recognition for streamlining policy management, governance, and regulatory compliance, ensuring smooth, hassle-free banking experiences for all.

### 6. Guinness World Record for AlDanah Millionaire Account

For the second time, the AlDanah Millionaire Account grand prize of KD2,000,000 (for one winner) entered the Guinness World Records as the largest cash prize linked to a bank account globally. This customer-centric initiative further elevated Gulf Bank's reputation for rewarding loyalty and enhancing savings culture.

### 7. Best Implementation of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives Award

In recognition of its leadership in implementing impactful initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion both within the bank and in the broader community, Gulf Bank was awarded the "Best Implementation of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives" by MEED magazine for the



Al Dana Millionaire grand prize enters Guinness for the second time.

Middle East and North Africa region.

This award highlights the bank's commitment to sustainability, creating a diverse and inclusive work environment, and ensuring equal opportunities for all. Gulf Bank believes that fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion enhances its positive reputation, boosts performance, supports employee development, creativity, and innovation, and strengthens connections among staff, encouraging them to share ideas and experiences with one another.

### 8. Best in Empowering Women Award

Gulf Bank was honored with the \*\*Best in Empowering Women Award\*\* in recognition of its remarkable progress and commitment to fostering gender diversity and inclusion. Through strategic initiatives and forward-thinking policies, the Bank has successfully increased \*\*female representation in leadership roles\*\* from \*\*10% to 30%\*\*.

This achievement reflects Gulf Bank's dedication to breaking barriers, providing equal opportunities, and nurturing female talent across all levels

of the organization. Women now make up \*\*42% of Gulf Bank's workforce\*\*, underscoring the Bank's inclusive work culture that values diversity and actively invests in the professional growth and development of female employees. In addition to its internal efforts, Gulf Bank has also demonstrated a strong focus on empowering its \*\*female customer base\*\* by offering tailored financial solutions, specialized products, and educational programs designed to support women in achieving their financial goals and aspirations.

This award highlights Gulf Bank's unwavering commitment to driving meaningful change, championing gender equality, and positioning itself as a leading advocate for women's empowerment in the financial sector and beyond.

### 9. Best in Kuwait for Social Responsibility Award

Euromoney magazine has named Gulf Bank as the best in Kuwait for Social Responsibility at the 2024 Excellence Awards ceremony, attended by a large gathering of major companies, banks, and institutions in the region.

### 10. Best in Sustainable Workplace Development Award

Gulf Bank participated in the Second Gulf International Conference on Corporate Social Responsibility 2024 in Bahrain, organized by the Bahrain CSR Society. The event, held under the theme "Strategic Practices for a Better Tomorrow" was held on June 26 and 27, 2024, and was attended by His Excellency the Minister of Social Development in the Kingdom of Bahrain, Osama bin Ahmed bin Khalaf Al Asfour.

At the conference, the Gulf International Corporate Social Responsibility Awards 2024 were announced. Gulf Bank was honored with the esteemed "Best in Sustainable Workplace" award in recognition of its exceptional initiatives.

### 11. Best Bank in Marketing and Social Media Services Awards

Global FinanceMagazine has recognized Gulf Bank as the "Best Bank in Marketing and Social Media Services", acknowledging the bank's success in engaging with customers through digital channels. This award highlights the significant digital transformation the bank has achieved and its effective use of social media to improve the customer experience.

### 12. Gold Award for Best Campaign in Kuwait

In recognition of its commitment to delivering innovative and impactful marketing campaigns, Gulf Bank was awarded the Gold Award for Best Campaign in Kuwait by the Middle East Public Relations Association (MEPRA) for the campaign "From Hesitation to Confidence: Promoting Responsible Credit Card Usage in

media and social media channels. Gulf Bank is committed to organizing and sponsoring numerous community events and initiatives that align with the aspirations of its customers and the public.

### 13. Silver Award for Best Campaign in Kuwait

The Middle East Public Relations Association (MEPRA) also awarded Gulf Bank the Silver Award for Best Campaign in Kuwait for the "Rose Gold Credit Card: Empowering the Modern Kuwaiti Woman" campaign. This recognition highlights the campaign's focus on empowering Kuwaiti women by celebrating their personal aspirations and conveying a message of independence and individuality. The campaign successfully showcased the unique features of the Rose Gold Credit Card, aligning it with the values that represent the modern Kuwaiti woman's personality.

### Additional Notable Achievements:

■ Mrs. Najla Aleisa Appointed President of the International Advertising Association (IAA) Kuwait

■ Mrs. Najla Aleisa, Chief Marketing Officer at Gulf Bank, has been appointed as the President of the International Advertising Association (IAA) in Kuwait. She is the first woman in Kuwait to hold this position, following the annual meeting held by the organization in Malaysia recently.

The International Advertising Association is the only global organization dedicated to all aspects of advertising and marketing, as well as issues related to clients and advertising agencies. It is the sole entity with a clear vision aimed at developing the advertising industry.

■ Gulf Bank Mobile App Ranked #1 in Kuwait

Gulf Bank's mobile banking app received the highest rating in Kuwait, with a 5-star rating on both the Apple Store and Google Play.

■ Fastest in Customer Response in Kuwait's Banking Sector

Gulf Bank's automated response services are some of the most advanced and fastest in the banking sector, providing a customer call response time of under 20 seconds, ensuring prompt and efficient handling of inquiries.



Ahmed Al-Fuwaires receives an award from Private Banker International.





The company's executive management with the winners of the inspireU Kuwait program participating in the graduation ceremony.



Eng. Olayan Alwetaid, Group CEO, with the executive management at stc Kuwait.

Over 40 businesses and entrepreneurs have completed the program with 5 startups from Kuwait

## stc celebrates 'inspireU' participants during graduation ceremony

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, celebrated the graduates of the “inspireU” program, an entrepreneurial state-of-the-art incubator and accelerator designed to support startups and SMEs. The graduation ceremony held by stc Group in Saudi Arabia recognized 44 businesses and startups that completed the inspireU program, including 5 startups from Kuwait. This marked the successful conclusion of the program's 10th and 11th intakes, as well as the first season of the advanced inspireU program.

This year, the inspireU program focused on several areas including fintech, cybersecurity, Artificial Intelligence (AI), IoT, and online gaming. These initiatives led to signing commercial agreements with stc Group, showcasing the Company's dedication to empowering start-ups and entrepreneurs to play a key role in driving economic growth.

### AlJasem:

- stc strongly supports the growing SMEs market in Kuwait, recognizing their significant role in stimulating the economy

neers to play a key role in driving economic growth.

A total of 5 Kuwaiti startups from the 10th and 11th takes of the program were featured in the graduation ceremony who shared their inspiring experiences. They highlighted the significant growth they experienced in their comprehensive journey throughout the inspireU program. These startups witnessed substantial success in their operations and hold great potential to contribute to the digital economy in line with the Kuwait Vision 2035.

The ceremony showcased some of the achievements and inspiring stories from entrepreneurs, emphasizing the significant growth they managed to achieve for their business through

out their journey within the program. The Chief Strategy Officer, Khalid AlSudairy, Chief Transformation & Synergy Officer Anowd Muthaib and General Manager of Corporate Communications, Danah AlJasem, attended the ceremony on behalf of stc Kuwait.

The five Kuwaiti startups included Khalid Al Busairi – Delicon Logistics Solutions, Ali Abbas and Mahdi Al Mousawi – Sparts, and Rami Jaber – Verality from the 10th intake. Startups from the 11th intake included Abdullah Al Ateeqi and Mohammed Al Abdulsalam – Motery, and Reem Al Farhan – Central Trade Company.

Danah AlJasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, “We would like to congratulate

all those who participated and graduated from the inspireU program held by stc Group. A special recognition goes out to the 5 Kuwaiti startups who we believe contribute greatly to supporting the local economy, drive sustainable growth and enable the digital transformation in Kuwait. stc strongly supports the growing SMEs market in Kuwait and throughout the region, recognizing their significant role in stimulating the economy. Programs that aim to educate and empower the entrepreneurial and startup ecosystem to thrive in an evolving digital world are essential tools that can assist entrepreneurs in their journeys to success.”

AlJasem added, “We remain dedicated to supporting SMEs by presenting and identifying opportunities in which they can accelerate business growth. This commitment aligns with the Company's comprehensive corporate social responsibility program, with a strategic focus on empowering the younger generation, while

promoting digital innovation in line with Kuwait Vision 2035. Having said that, we look forward to launching the 3rd season of inspireU Kuwait to continue this journey of innovation and empowerment. Our goal is to contribute to building an integrated digital ecosystem that connects startups with markets and investors both locally and internationally, driving the economy through digital and sustainable initiatives.”

It is worth noting that “inspireU” provides entrepreneurs with workspaces in both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and assists in obtaining permits and licenses for winning projects in addition to providing practical guidance and targeted trainings. Participants with winning projects will also have access to several networking opportunities through participation or visiting international conferences such as (MWC - Silicon Valley - LEAP). In addition, inspireU provides financial support, to enable startups to realize their ideas and dreams.

### inspireU program Achievements at stc group level in the past years

**Inspiring success since inception**  
Since its launch in 2015, the inspire program has supported more than 130 startups, many of which have grown into prominent brands that expanded regionally and internationally. These achievements reflect stc's pivotal role in fostering innovation and enhancing the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### Regional and global expansion

Over the past three years, inspire has established itself as a key player in the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem. It has broadened its reach to attract startups from GCC countries and across the world, while continuing to enhance its support in empowering local ventures.

### A hub for venture capital

Due to its successful impact, inspireU has become one of the leading platforms for local and international venture capital funds. The platform serves as an innovative bridge that connects aspiring entrepreneurs with global investment opportunities.

### The Conversation

## Customers rebel against 'hard-to-return' policies

By Huseyn Abdulla

University of Tennessee

The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.

In 2018, L.L. Bean ended its century-old “lifetime” return policy, limiting returns to one year after purchase and requiring receipts. The demise of this popular policy sparked backlash, with several customers filing lawsuits.

It also inspired my team of operations management researchers to study how customers respond when retailers make their return policies more strict. Our key finding: Whether they often or rarely return products they've purchased, consumers object - unless those retailers explain why.

I work with a group of researchers examining product return policies and how they affect consumers and retailers.

As we explained in an article published in the Journal of Operations Management, we designed experiments to study whether and why return policy restrictions irk customers. We also wanted to understand what retailers can do to minimize backlash after making it harder for customers to return stuff.

We conducted three experiments in which we presented scenarios to 1,500 U.S. consumers who played the role of loyal customers of a fictional retailer. We examined their reactions to the fictional retailer's return policy restrictions, such as charging a 15% restocking fee and limiting open-ended return windows to 365, 180 and 30 days.

### Less willing

Participants became less willing to buy anything from the fictional retailer after it restricted its long-standing lenient return policy. They also said they would become less willing to recommend the retailer to others.

This occurred because the customers began to distrust the retailer and its ability to offer a high-quality service. The backlash was stronger when the restriction was more severe. Even those consumers who said they usually don't return any products often reacted negatively.

When the fictional retailer announced its new, harsher return policy using official communication channels and provided a rationale, there was less backlash. Consumers found the changes more justified if the retailer highlighted increased “return abuse,” in which custom-

ers return products they've already used, or the high cost of processing returns.

You might presume that making it harder and more costly to return stuff could drive some shoppers away. Our research shows that the concern is valid and explains why. It also shows how communicating return policy changes directly with customers can help prevent or reduce backlash against retailers.

Americans returned products worth an estimated US\$890 billion to retailers in 2024. Processing a single item typically costs \$21 to \$46. Most of this merchandise ends up in landfills.

The rise of e-commerce and other technological changes have contributed to this trend. Another factor is the ease with which consumers may return stuff long after making a purchase and get a full refund.

Many other retailers besides L.L. Bean have done away with their long-standing lenient return policies. Over the past decade, for example, Macy's, a department store chain, and Kohl's, a big-box clothing store chain, have shortened the time frames for returns.

### Returns

Macy's restricted its open-ended return window to one year in 2016, further winnowed it to 180 days in 2017, then to 90 days in 2019. It then stopped accepting returns after 30 days in 2023. Kohl's didn't have any time limit on returns it would accept until 2019. Then it imposed a 180-day limit. Others, such as fast-fashion giants Zara and H&M, now charge their customers fees when they return merchandise.

However, research shows that customers value no-questions-asked return policies and see them as a sign of high-quality service. And when these arrangements become the industry standard, customers can get angry if retailers fail to meet it.

Interestingly, most retailers that restricted their policies didn't tell customers directly. Instead, they quietly updated the new policies on websites, store displays and receipts. Although not drawing attention to bad news might appear prudent - as most customers wouldn't notice the changes that way - dozens of threads on Reddit about these changes suggest that this isn't always true.

We focused on restrictions on refunds and how long after a purchase customers could return merchandise. Other restrictions, such as retailers making heavily discounted items ineligible for returns, could also be worth investigating. (AP)



Kuwait Prize 2023 winners in a group photo with NBK's executive management.

## NBK honors Kuwait Prize 2023 winners

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) recently honored Dr. Dina Katabi, winner of the Kuwait Prize in Emerging Specialized Sciences, in a ceremony at the bank's headquarters. The event was attended by NBK's executive management, including Mr. Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group CEO of NBK, Mr. Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO of NBK-Kuwait, Mr. Sulaiman Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO, NBK-Kuwait, Mr. Faisal Al-Hamad, CEO of NBK Wealth Group, and Mr. Emad Al-Ablani, General Manager, Head of Human Resources Group at NBK, along with several senior leaders and officials from Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). This recognition celebrated Dr. Katabi's exceptional scientific and intellectual contributions. The award follows her earlier recognition by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, further acknowledging her remarkable achievements.

NBK's executive management presented a commemorative shield to Dr. Katabi, along with another to Dr. Khalil Amin, winner of Kuwait Prize in Applied Sciences. Dr. Amin, who heads the battery technology group at the U.S. Department of Energy's Argonne National Laboratory, was recognized for his significant contributions to technological advancements. This gesture reflects NBK's deep commitment to honoring scientists, particularly in technological fields, and its dedication to fostering a culture of research and innovation. The bank continually seeks to inspire young researchers to develop innovative solutions that support societal and economic progress.

Dr. Katabi delivered an insightful lecture in collaboration with KFAS, focusing on strategies to enhance the use of technology across various sectors. During the session, she showcased presentations and shared real-world experiences to emphasize the transformative role of modern technologies in improving the



Mr. Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group CEO of NBK, honors one of the Kuwait Prize 2023 winners.

**NBK Reinforces Commitment to Supporting Scientists and Researchers in the Scientific and Technical Field**  
**Kuwait Prize: A Prestigious Annual Recognition for Outstanding Arab Scientists by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences**

quality of services in diverse fields.

The Bank also organized a panel discussion attended by its employees, where Dr. Katabi addressed several pivotal topics, including the importance of motivating individuals to pursue excellence and innovation, fostering creativity, and building resilience. Drawing from the experiences of prominent figures who have made significant contributions in their respective fields, Katabi shared her own journey, discussing the challenges she faced, the lessons she learned, and the strategies that helped her achieve success and distinction.

The Kuwait Prize is one of the most distinguished awards granted annually by KFAS. It recognizes Kuwaiti and Arab scientists who have made significant and exceptional contributions to

their research fields on a global scale. The awardees are selected based on recommendations from specialized panels comprising esteemed figures in the scientific community.

NBK strongly believes in fostering a culture of innovation and creativity. It remains committed to launching and supporting pioneering initiatives across various fields and sectors, collaborating with state institutions and strategic partners to positively impact society and create an inspiring environment for the next generation.

Committed to its role as the largest contributor to social responsibility in Kuwait, NBK consistently supports scientists and researchers in scientific and technical fields. The bank also provides opportunities for participation in

scientific conferences, workshops, and panel discussions to showcase achievements and inspire younger generations to develop and innovate intellectually.

NBK serves as a role model in fostering innovation and supporting scientific and cultural initiatives. The bank prioritizes the development of national talent through specialized educational and training programs designed to enhance competencies and skills, reinforcing its role as a key contributor to sustainable development.

Dr. Katabi is a leading researcher specializing in emerging sciences and wireless networks. Her groundbreaking work bridges computer science and electrical engineering, significantly advancing the speed, reliability, and security of data transfer in Wi-Fi and cellular systems. Moreover, her innovative research in wireless sensing for medical applications has revolutionized non-invasive health monitoring, improving patient care and enabling early detection and management of various medical conditions.

She holds a bachelor's degree from Damascus University and earned both her master's and doctoral degrees from the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). She is currently a professor of electrical engineering and computer science at MIT, where she also leads the Center for Wireless Networks and Mobile Computing.

Kuwait Prize, established in 1979, aims to honor distinguished scientific achievements by Kuwaiti and Arab scientists at a global level. Over the years, the award has gained significant recognition and popularity among Arab researchers. It is presented in five fields: basic sciences, applied sciences, economics and social sciences, arts and literature, and emerging interdisciplinary sciences. The first four fields are awarded annually, while the fifth field, focusing on emerging interdisciplinary sciences, is announced biennially.



## 20 customers win cash prizes worth KD 1,500 each

### Kuwait Finance House announces Al-Rabeh draw winners

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the winners of the AlRabeh draw with 20 customers winning cash prizes worth KD 1,500 each for the 48th and 49th weeks of 2024, additionally, KFH announced Imad Al-Mahmeed as the monthly winner of 1 kilo gram of KFH Gold for the month of November 2024.

The winners of KD 1,500 are: Ali Al-Daihani, Wafaa Al-Jassim, Faisal Al-Najjar, Mohammad Al-Assaf, Abdullah Al-Adwani, Mohammad Bin Dhaif, Khalaf Al-Dosari, Nawal Al-Hajri, Aseel Al-Saeed, Hebah Al-Zanki, Tariq Al-Mutairi, Hammad Allahou, Hisham Muhanni, Munqeth Hammoud, Faris Al-Enezi, Tariq Al-Kandari, Sana'a Al-Saad, Ab-

dullah Khalaf, Zahraa Abbas, and Shaqha Al-Harbi.

The AlRabeh campaign provides prizes and draws that offer customers several chances of winning "weekly, monthly and quarterly". The campaign crowns 536 winners throughout the year.

The draw took place under the supervision of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The campaign is part of KFH's ongoing efforts to offer exceptional products and services that meet customers' aspirations, enhance the Bank's leadership in the local and global markets, as well as reflect its excellence in offering innovative banking solutions as per the highest quality standards.

The Al-Rabeh account is a salary account available to customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts. Customers can open Al-Rabeh account in any of KFH branches in Kuwait, or through the Bank's online channels. The account can be opened in the Kuwaiti Dinar and is targeted for customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts. Salary transfer is a prerequisite for customers to enter the draw provided that the transfer of salary to Al-Rabeh account is constant.

Regarding the terms and conditions of the prizes and draws, a customer can deposit 3 salaries during the 3 months prior to the draw, and the minimum bal-

ance of the account should not be less than KD 50 at the end of each month during the 3 months prior to the draw. Ten draws take place on a weekly basis for K.D 1,500 for 10 winners each, 1 KG of KFH gold will be drawn monthly for one winner and K.D 25,000 for one winner every quarter, reaching a total number of 536 winners during the year.

KFH is keen to further meet customers' requirements and aspirations and their increasing needs as well as offer innovative and modern services, therefore achieving customer satisfaction, which is one of the fundamentals at KFH. The Bank has achieved a qualitative shift in the level of financial services by utilizing technology.



The campaign visual



Malabar Gold & Diamonds' ribbon cutting ceremony during the launch of new showroom in Atlanta, Georgia in US.

### Exclusive jewellery collection offered

## Malabar Gold expands in the US with its new showroom in Atlanta

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 375 showrooms across 13 countries, has launched its 6th showroom in the USA at Atlanta, Georgia. This significant addition strengthens the brand's presence in North America, offering customers in Georgia access to an extensive collection of exquisite jewellery combined with world-class service.

The showroom was inaugurated by Mr. L. Ramesh Babu, the Consul General of India at Atlanta in the presence of Mr. Joseph Eapen, Regional Head of North America, Malabar Gold & Diamonds; Mr. Jasar R., Branch Head at Malabar Gold & Diamonds, other community leaders, management team members from Malabar Gold & Diamonds, customers, media and well-wishers.

Commenting on the occasion, Malabar Group Chairman M.P. Ahammed said: "The launch of our 6th showroom in the USA is a moment of immense pride for all of us at Malabar Gold & Diamonds. North America has been pivotal in driving our international growth, and our newest showroom in Atlanta is a testament to our commitment to this market. Taking forward our long-held legacy of providing an exceptional jewellery shopping experience to jewellery lovers, we shall continue with the ambitious expansion plan we have charted for North America. The launch of our Atlanta showroom marks yet another step forward on our journey to becoming the world's largest jewellery retailer. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our customers, team members, shareholders, and stakeholders for their unwavering support in making this vision a reality."

Located in Atlanta's bustling community, the showroom spans 5,400 sq. ft. and features over 30,000 jewellery designs from 20 countries. From stunning bridal jewellery to elegant daily wear, the collection includes gold, dia-



mond, and precious gemstone pieces catering to every occasion and taste. A customized jewellery design facility is available in the showroom, enabling customers to bring their unique visions to life with expert guidance from Malabar Gold & Diamonds' skilled artisans. The showroom also has a luxurious customer lounge, facilitating a comfortable jewellery shopping experience.

"Atlanta's rich cultural diversity and vibrant community made it the perfect choice for our 6th showroom in the USA. As a thriving metropolitan hub with a significant Indian-subcontinental population, the city presents an incredible opportunity for us to bring our wide-ranging portfolio of exceptional jewellery and impeccable services to a discerning audience.

### Distinction

Following the overwhelming success of our flagship showroom in Los Angeles, we are confident that the Atlanta showroom will uphold our track record of excellence and become a cherished destination for jewellery lovers in Georgia. We have also charted an ambitious expansion plan for North America, which will include new showrooms in cities like San Francisco, Seattle, Austin, Tampa, Virginia, Detroit, Houston, Charlotte, Phoenix, New York, and San Diego. In Canada, the brand will extend its footprint into British Columbia and Alberta.", commented Mr. Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

"We are thrilled to expand our operations into Atlanta. Uphold-

ing the ethos of 'Make in India; Market to the World', our goal is to seamlessly blend the artistry of traditional Indian jewellery with modern, contemporary designs, ensuring that Malabar Gold & Diamonds is a universal jewellery brand that resonates with all. At Malabar Gold & Diamonds, sustainability is at the heart of everything we do. Similar to all our other showrooms, our Atlanta outlet is a testament to our vision of growing responsibly while meeting the diverse needs of our customers. Every piece of jewellery reflects our promise of quality, purity, and ethical craftsmanship, ensuring a lasting legacy for future generations," commented Mr. Abdul Salam K.P., Vice Chairman of Malabar Group.

### Convenience

Malabar Gold & Diamonds is renowned globally for offering an unparalleled jewellery buying experience with convenience and customer-friendly policies along with the 'Malabar Promise' of incomparable quality and service assurance. Apart from this, the Malabar Promise also includes transparent pricing, assured lifetime maintenance from any of the showrooms across 13 countries, guaranteed buyback, tested and certified diamonds, 100% value on diamond and gold jewellery exchange, 100% hallmarked jewellery, responsible sourcing, fair price policy, and fair labour practices.

ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) initiatives have been a key component of Malabar Group's operations throughout the years, with a focus on Health, Housing, Hunger Eradication, Women empowerment, Education and Environment. The group ensures that all stakeholders continue to benefit from the growth of the business and contributes 5% of its profit to CSR/ESG initiatives in the same country of operation. As part of the Malabar National Scholarship Programme (launched in 2007), the group has announced that it will be awarding 21,000 scholarships for female students worth USD 1.9 Million. The Group has also opened 247 micro learning centers in India with the aim of promoting basic education amongst the impoverished.

sub-committee, along with Reju Daniel John (Secretary), Biju Samuel (Treasurer), and other committee members, is making all necessary arrangements to ensure the program's success.

We invite everyone to join us for this blessed celebration of the birth of Christ.

### Bank rewards loyal customers

## Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait announces Rasha A Gomaa as Alfouz weekly draw winner

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is excited to announce Rasha A Gomaa as the winner of the Alfouz KD 10,000 weekly draw on Monday, 16 December 2024. The draw took place in the presence of a Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative, ensuring transparency.

From the highly coveted mega annual draw of a KD 5,000 monthly salary for 10 years to its KD 10,000 weekly prize, the account has attracted significant attention in the Kuwaiti market. Based on the account's great success, ABK decided to go above and beyond to reward customer loyalty.

With a KD 100,000 quarterly draw, in addition to an exciting KD 20,000 monthly draw, the Alfouz account continues to surpass expectations and deliver even more customer satisfaction.

To top it off, ABK has simplified the ability to open the account and win! Customers can enter the draws and get extra entry chances for every KD 10 deposited. The more you save, the higher your chance to be the next Alfouz winner!

ABK encourages everyone to open an Alfouz draw account or in-



crease their balance to participate in the upcoming draw, which is scheduled to take place on Monday, 23 December 2024.

Open an Alfouz account today and enjoy increased opportunities to win the lifestyle you've been waiting for!

To learn more about the Alfouz account and its range of exciting draws and prizes, please follow ABK's Instagram account @abk\_kuwait, visit eahli.com, contact Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899 or visit one of the Bank's branches across Kuwait.



Photos from the event.

### Tug O' War competition held

## Thanima Kuwait hosts Onathanima

By Paulo Francisco X. Fernandes  
Arab Times/Al-Seyassah Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Thanima Kuwait hosted its signature event, Onathanima 2024, featuring the Tug O' War competition and the prestigious APJ Abdul Kalam Pearl of the School Award ceremony.

The event, attended by over 80,000 students from Indian schools in Kuwait, recognized 27 exceptional students for their academic achievements.

The function began with the inauguration of the Raju Zachariah Nagar ground by Suresh Karthik, followed by a cultural procession showcasing Indian traditions.

The event was chaired by D K Dileep, Convener of Onathanima 2024, with notable guests including Joel Jacob, Executive Admin Manager of United Group of Schools, Dheeraj Bharadwaj, CEO of City Group, and Miss Shivani Chauhan, an international volleyball player, who flagged off the Tug O' War Championship.

Other dignitaries included business leaders from various sectors, who also participated in the Pearl of the School Award ceremony.

The event was highlighted by the presence of award recipients and their families, who received the APJ Abdul Kalam Pearl of the School Award.

Suresh Karthik unveiled Thanima's official logo, and the event was further enhanced by the vibrant participation of the expat community.

The ceremony also featured captivating performances by Kuttithanima members and a prayer song. The awards

were meticulously compered by Serafin Freddy, Amaya Jogi, Angela Rose Savio, and Diya Sangeeth.

**Onathanima 2024 results:**

**Winner (Sanselia Ever Rolling Trophy):** Global International Friends of Rajeeesh

**Runner-up (Blue Line Ever Rolling Trophy):** Bosco Jewellery & Printers Friends of Kuwait

**3rd place (Nest N' Mist Ever Rolling Trophy):** ULC KKB Red

**4th place (Life Fitness Gym Ever Rolling Trophy):** ULC KKB Blue

**Quarter-finalists:** Seven Star Canada Friends of Kuwait; "Q" Point Solutions Aha Kuwait Brothers; Brothers of Idukki and AJPAK Friends of Rajeeesh

**Individual awards:**

**Best Upcoming Player:** Binu Biju ("Q" Point Solutions Aha Kuwait Brothers)

**Best Back:** Sanoop (Global International Friends of Rajeeesh)

**Best Front:** Ajas (Bosco Jewellery & Printers Friends of Kuwait)

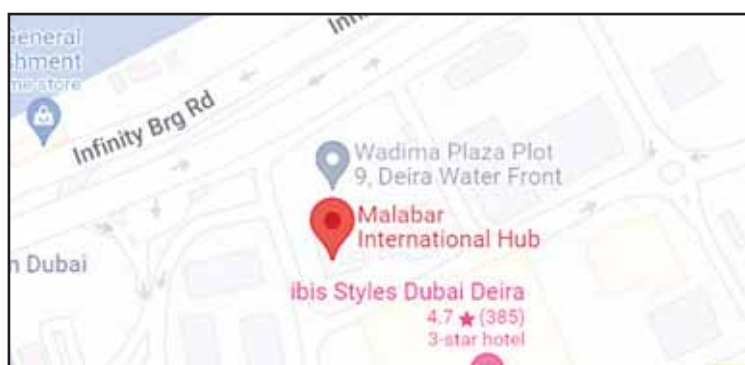
**Best Coach:** Rasheed (Mani) (Bosco Jewellery & Printers Friends of Kuwait)

**Best Captain:** Manoj (Global International Friends of Rajeeesh)

**Thanima Sports person of the Year:** Siljo George (Brothers of Idukki)

**Fairplay Team:** Euro Diesel Center Kuwait KKDA

**Player of the Tournament:** Ashish Thankappan (Global International FRunner of Rajeeesh)



### A delightful and melodious program

## STECI to hold Christmas Carol Service on Dec 20

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India, Kuwait Parish, will host its annual Christmas Carol Service on December 20th at the N.E.C.K. Church and Parish Hall. This year's theme is 'Snehapiravi' (The Birth of Love).

The program promises to be a de-

lightful and spiritually uplifting event. The parish choir, led by Choir Master Linu P. Manikunju, will present melodious songs, while special performances by the Sunday School children will add charm and excitement to the evening.

Under the guidance of Rev. Sibi P.J. (Parish Vicar), the organizing



## Selena Gomez's ballad closer to Oscar nomination

### 'Emilia Pérez' and 'Wicked' advance in Oscars shortlists

LOS ANGELES, Dec 18, (AP): The Selena Gomez ballad "Mi Camino," the Will Ferrell and Harper Steele road trip documentary "Will & Harper" and Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross's pulsating "Challengers" score are one step closer to an Oscar nomination. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences unveiled shortlists in 10 categories Tuesday, including for documentary, international feature, best song and score.

Two musicals, "Emilia Pérez" and "Wicked," were well represented in the categories. Netflix's audacious transgender drug-lord drama "Emilia Pérez" was most named, advancing in international feature, original score, two original songs including "Mi Camino" and "El Mal" (performed by Zoe Saldana), sound and hair and makeup.

"Wicked" also moved forward in several categories, like hair and makeup, original score,

sound and visual effects. The adaptation of the Broadway musical did not include original songs and therefore wasn't eligible in that category. The song semifinalists include several notable artists, like Pharrell Williams for "Piece by Piece," Lainey Wilson for her "Twisters" song "Out Of Oklahoma," Elton John and Brandi Carlile for "Never Too Late" and Robbie Williams for "Forbidden Road" from "Better Man." Diane Warren may also be heading for a 16th nomination for her song from "The Six Triple Eight." Nicholas Britell's "Winter Coat," performed by Saoirse Ronan in "Blitz," was also included.

Among the 15 documentaries eligible for nominations are "The Bibi Files," "Daughters," "Eno," "Frida," "The Remarkable Life of Ibelin," "Dahomey," "Union," "Porcelain War" and "No Other Land."

International features advancing include "I'm Still Here" (Brazil), "Universal Language"

(Canada), "The Seed of the Sacred Fig" (Germany), "Kneecap" (Ireland), "Vermiglio" (Italy), "Flow" (Latvia) and "Dahomey" (Senegal).

As most of the shortlists are in below-the-line categories celebrating crafts, there are also films that aren't necessarily the most obvious of Oscar contenders. "Deadpool & Wolverine" was singled out for both sound and visual effects, as was "Alien: Romulus" which also got a nod for score.

For the most part, shortlists are determined by members in their respective categories, though the specifics vary from branch to branch: Some have committees, some have minimum viewing requirements.

These lists will narrow to five when final nominations are announced on Jan. 17. The 97th Oscars, hosted by Conan O'Brien, will be held on Sunday, March 2, broadcasting on ABC and streaming live on Hulu.



This image released by Netflix shows Selena Gomez in a scene from 'Emilia Pérez.' (AP)

## Film

### Filmmaker takes bold leap into the digital world

## Barry Jenkins on why he made 'Mufasa'

NEW YORK, Dec 18, (AP): Over the four years he's spent working on "Mufasa: The Lion King," Barry Jenkins estimates that he's been asked why he wanted to make it at least 400 times.

The question of why Jenkins, the filmmaker of "Moonlight" and "If Beale Street Could Talk" and "The Underground Railroad," would want to jump into the big-budget, photorealistic animated Disney world of lions and tigers has bedeviled much of a film world that reveres him.

Countless other directors had made leaps into CGI-heavy blockbuster-making before. But Jenkins' decision was uniquely analyzed - perhaps because there's no more heralded, or trusted, filmmaker today under the age of 50 than Jenkins.

"It just thought it was something I could not deny," Jenkins says. "I had to do it."

"Mufasa," which opens in theaters Friday, brings together movie worlds that ordinarily stay very far apart. On the one hand, you have the Oscar-winning, 45-year-old director of some of the most luminous and lyrical films of the past decade. On the other, you have the intellectual property imperatives of today's Hollywood. What happens when they collide?

The result in "Mufasa," about the lion cub's orphaned upbringing set both before and after the events of Jon Favreau's 2019 remake of "The Lion King," is an uncommonly textured and thoughtfully rendered spectacle that, Jenkins maintained in a recent interview, has more in common with "Moonlight" than you'd think. Made with virtual filmmaking tools, "Mufasa" essentially plopped one of the most groundbreaking filmmakers working today into an all-digital playground, with a budget more than a hundred times that of "Moonlight."

Often in "Mufasa," you can feel Jenkins' sensibility warming and enhancing what can, in other less sensitively commanded films, feel soulless. With songs by Lin-Manuel Miranda, "Mufasa" works as a big-movie entertainment and, even more surprisingly, as a Barry Jenkins film.

"My head was spinning when this started," Jenkins says. "It actually reminded me of when I first got into filmmaking. This felt oddly enough very similar to that first experience. You can sort of run away from that newness and be intimidated by it, or you can embrace it, learn the things you don't know and then start to bend it."

It's also an experience that has quite evidently changed Jenkins, exponentially expanding his filmmaking tool kit while opening his eyes to new ways of making movies. "It was almost like learning a new language," Jenkins says of the process. These are edited excerpts from the conversation.

**AP:** How many times have you been asked why you did this movie?

**Jenkins:** At least 400 times. But it came down to the spirit and the warmth of Jeff Nathanson's script and also the spirit and the warmth I always found in the story. I came to "The Lion King" by babysitting my nephews way, way back in the 1990s. My sister was a single mom and I'd be at home watching with the kids. You'd put on different VHSs and "The Lion King" was always the one that stuck. I just thought: Wouldn't it be interesting to, coming out of something like "The Underground Railroad" to step into this thing that's so full of light?

**AP:** Had you been actively seeking something lighter after those projects?

**Jenkins:** Maybe warmer, lighter but still just as deep, just as spiritual. This idea of family legacy, of finding your place in the world, those are things that are very present in "Moonlight" and "The Underground Railroad." If I was telling you, "I'm going to make this film about this kid who has this almost biblical experience involving water and a parent figure that he then gets displaced from, and has to find his place in the world, I could be talking about "Moonlight" or I could be talking about "Mufasa."

**AP:** Were you motivated by expanding yourself as a filmmaker? Or the notions people have of you as a filmmaker?

**Jenkins:** It wasn't about the notions of who people thought I was. But I was looking to expand just the kind of filmmaking I was doing at that point. This



This image released by Disney shows characters Afia, voiced by Anika Noni Rose, (left), Mufasa, voiced by Braelyn Rankins, center, and Masego, voiced by Keith David, in a scene from 'Mufasa: The Lion King.' (AP)



Filmmaker Barry Jenkins poses for a portrait to promote the film 'Mufasa' on Monday, Dec. 9, 2024, in Los Angeles. (AP)

came right in the thick of pretty much a seven-year cycle, from beginning "Moonlight" to being in post on "The Underground Railroad," the way this movie is made, with this virtual production, it's just a very new way of making films. There's maybe been five or six movies made with this technology.

**AP:** Did you find you could carry your sensibility into virtual filmmaking?

**Jenkins:** I did. We evolved this process to the point where we could create so much of all the world and the movement in virtual space, and we could then take our virtual cameras into virtual production. We evolved the animation to the point where we could create the light, we could create the set, we could create the environment. (Cinematographer) James (Laxton) would be there and I would be there, and we're blasting the voices of the actors into the room and the animators are moving through and I'm directing the blocking, and the camera is responding to the blocking in real time.

**AP:** It seemed like you were putting particular emphasis on close-ups. In the virtual space, were you playing with where to put the camera?

**Jenkins:** Absolutely. Look, I'm a filmmaker who was on set with "Moonlight." I've got 25 days and the sun is going down. Yeah, you're trying

to find a place for the camera, you have ideas, but those ideas aren't practically achievable. In this sense, the camera could be anywhere. It could be everywhere. It's sort of the same questions but the possibility of answering is so immediate and direct.

**AP:** You recently told Vulture, though, that the digital process was "not your thing." Are you eager to return to physical filmmaking?

**Jenkins:** I want to unpack what you just said. We've been talking, and I've been talking about using these tools to create a very physical, in-person experience. I don't consider this a project that's all digital and all computer animated. If I made this movie again right now, it wouldn't take me four years. It'd probably take me two and a quarter. If I was going to do another one of these films, I would have such a stronger foundation. It wouldn't feel like something that's alien or something that's other or that's all digital. It would just feel like filmmaking.

**AP:** So you see "Mufasa" more as part of a continuum for you personally?

**Jenkins:** One thousand percent. I love through this process I've learned so many other ways of making a film that I just could not learn making something like "The Underground Railroad." What I love now is the overlap between the two of them. When I began this process,

I talked to Matt Reeves because I had heard he had used some of these tools to pre-vis "The Batman." He said, "Do you know that shot where the Penguin is in his car and Batman is walking upside down? I discovered that in the volume." I said, "Of course you did." I was like, "Oh my God, we could have pre-vised "Moonlight" with this technology."

**AP:** Do you think it's necessary for a filmmaker today to be aware of these techniques?

**Jenkins:** One thousand percent. The light can be anywhere in this film and the camera can be anywhere. That doesn't mean it should be everywhere. The next time I go out to make a film whether it's something like "The Underground Railroad" or "Beale Street," James and I are probably going to incorporate these tools as well. Because figuring out the light is half the battle, as they say in "G.I. Joe."

**AP:** So do you feel changed as a filmmaker by this experience?

**Jenkins:** This is all new. It's all being developed right now. We went down to "Avatar" and spoke to the engineers there. They heard what we were trying to do and sent some people to embed with us and they helped us evolve our process, so we could have these animators with two legs move as if they have four legs. What I'm saying is: This is the wild, wild West.

## Variety

LOS ANGELES: Megan Thee Stallion asked a court on Tuesday to issue a restraining order against Tory Lanez, who she says is harassing her from prison through surrogates as he serves a 10-year sentence for shooting her in the feet.

The petition filed by the hip-hop star in Los Angeles Superior Court asks the judge to prevent the Canadian rapper Lanez, whose legal name is Daystar Peterson, from using third parties to continue the same online harassment of Megan, whose legal name is Megan Pete, that he engaged in and encouraged before his imprisonment.

"Even now, while behind bars, Mr. Peterson shows no signs of stopping," the petition says. "Despite being sentenced to 10 years in prison for shooting Ms. Pete, Mr. Peterson continues to subject her to repeated trauma and revictimization."

The petition says prison call logs from Lanez at the California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi show that he is coordinating attacks on Megan's credibility.

An email seeking comment from Lanez's lawyers was not immediately returned. A court hearing on the order is scheduled for Jan. 9.

The filing says bloggers acting on Lanez behalf continue to cast doubt on her allegations, making false claims including that the gun and bullet fragments in the case are missing.

The petition says the protective order issued to prevent the previous harassment is no longer in effect, which it calls a loophole and flaw in the criminal justice system.

In December 2022, Lanez was convicted of three felonies: assault with a semiautomatic firearm; having a loaded, unregistered firearm in a vehicle and discharging a firearm with gross negligence.

A judge rejected a motion for

a new trial from Lanez's lawyers, who are appealing his conviction. (AP)

SYDNEY: Retired Sydney radio broadcaster and former Australian national rugby coach Alan Jones denied all allegations after he appeared in court on Wednesday charged with multiple sex crimes against 10 males over two decades.

The 83-year-old made his first court appearance in Sydney's Downing Center Local Court following his arrest last month.

Jones was not asked to enter pleas to the 34 charges of aggravated indecent assault, indecent assault, sexually touching without consent and common assault. But he told media outside the court he would fight all charges in a jury trial.

"I am certainly not guilty and I'll be presenting my account to a jury," Jones said. "These allegations are all either baseless or they distort the truth."

"I have never indecently assaulted these people. I am emphatic that I'll be defending every charge," he added.

Two more alleged victims have come forward since police charged Jones on Nov. 18 with 24 offenses relating to eight complainants aged as young as 17. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: "Vanderpump Rules" star James Kennedy says he is determined to make changes and seek sobriety after he was arrested on suspicion of misdemeanor domestic violence for allegedly throwing his girlfriend to the ground.

"I am committed to making meaningful changes in my life," he said Tuesday via Instagram, in his first public statement since the arrest. "I am taking time to focus on my sobriety, personal growth, and being present for my loved ones. Navigating challenging moments is not easy, but I am determined to learn, grow, and move forward."

Late on the night of Dec. 10, officers in Burbank, near Los Angeles, were sent to a residence after a report of a man and woman arguing, according to police records. A woman told officers that her boyfriend lifted and threw her to the ground. (AP)

## Role model for young creators

### Pharrell Williams is named a UNESCO goodwill ambassador

PARIS, Dec 18, (AP): Pop star and fashion designer Pharrell Williams was named UNESCO's goodwill ambassador for artistic education and entrepreneurship in Paris, continuing his cultural dominance of the French capital as Louis Vuitton menswear artistic director and performer at Notre Dame Cathedral's reopening earlier this month.

Williams said he hoped to "deepen that sense of unity and togetherness" in work that "evens the odds for marginalized communities."

He also spoke about his impoverished youth, adding: "Growing up in Virginia, never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be given an opportunity like this one."

The role of goodwill ambassador for the Paris-based UN cultural agency involves promoting its initiatives that include protecting Indigenous cultures, advancing education and health care for women, raising awareness about genocide prevention and safe-

guarding cultural heritage.

The UN agency said Williams will be "a mentor and role model for young creators, particularly in Africa, where UNESCO supports the development of cultural industries."

Williams joins a list of goodwill ambassadors that includes US jazz musician Herbie Hancock, Brazilian artist Vik Muniz and Japanese filmmaker Naomi Kawase.

Williams has been particularly visible in Paris this year. Shortly before the Paris Olympics, his role as Louis Vuitton menswear designer took center stage during a star-studded event at UNESCO's headquarters. The show, celebrating the beauty of human skin, featured models wearing garments in shades representing the diverse hues of humanity.

UNESCO leaders hope that Williams' global influence and deep connections to fashion and music will draw fresh attention to the agency's work.



Pharrell Williams gestures as he speaks after he was named UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Arts, Education and Entrepreneurship at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, Tuesday, Dec. 17. (AP)



77% of Americans suffer from workplace stress

# Meditation can reduce stress, but work pressure remains

By Jaime L Kucinkas  
Hamilton College

The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. The Conversation is wholly responsible for the content.

Overwork and burnout are affecting many Americans. The American Psychological Association's 2023 Work and Well-being Survey found that 77% of Americans suffered from workplace stress. Over half of the respondents reported symptoms of burnout, which ranged from emotional exhaustion to wanting to quit.

Many Americans feel under constant pressure to get ahead and are not able to take a break. Employees report that their workplaces do not encourage mental health or work-life balance.

As a result, an increasing number of Americans have turned to meditation. Some use it to take a break at work, others to refocus, or more generally to promote better mental health.

In my book "The Mindful Elite," I tracked the growth of the mindfulness movement from 1979 until 2015. I spoke with over 100 meditators who run 61 mindful programs and organizations that bring mindfulness to secular workplaces and schools across the country.

Many of them told me how meditation helped them approach their work and lives with more patience, empathy and self-reflection. Meditation, they said, helped alleviate stress and increased their attention and self-awareness. Other studies also affirm mindfulness can help people cope with anxiety, depression and pain. However, it remains worth asking: Are there limits - or even downsides - to bringing meditation to work?

Early mindfulness leaders were remarkably successful in spreading meditation across America. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a molecular biologist, began his mindfulness-based stress reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in 1979 to

provide a complementary and alternative model of care for the chronically ill. He hoped to share the "essence of Buddhist mindfulness," as he has written, within "mainstream medicine." Over 25,000 people have completed his mindfulness-based stress reduction program, and it continues to be taught around the world.

By 2022, meditation had become the most prevalent relaxation practice in the United States, with 18% of Americans adopting it. Many people use meditation to address a health issue, or turn to it in the absence of access to conventional medical care.

Meditation has become popular in offices and schools across North America and Europe. To fit into workweeks of busy professionals, meditation teachers often offer shorter entry-level practice sessions tailored to host organizations' goals and busy schedules. Some schools even offer short 15-minute lessons.

**Mindfulness**

Meditation instructors secularize and justify mindfulness as aiding health and performance in a cost-effective manner that serves the bottom line.

They also adapt it to make it appeal to those they work with. A trainer for law enforcement and the military explained: "It's very mission-oriented in terms of my experiences in combat. ... We basically designed a curriculum that would speak to these kinds of folks." In his program, he did not talk about meditation or do "anything that they would consider weird or unusual." He said he did not even use the word mindfulness.

These approaches have led to some critiques that the primarily white and Western teachers are wrongfully appropriating the practices to support aims antithetical to Buddhist tenets of nonviolence or nonattachment to worldly outcomes.

Leaders of the early mindfulness movement said they wanted to transform society for the greater good through the practice. Their goal was to spread meditation practices across science, health care, prisons, schools and other institutions.

Kabat-Zinn wanted to foster greater "awareness" through mindfulness so people would become more conscious of what motivated their actions. For example, it could help them understand if they were driven by their own sense of self-aggrandizement or greed and inspire them to change.

Saki Santorelli, the former leader of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program, similarly hoped that embedding mindfulness in secular institutions would force practitioners to understand the essential reality of interconnectedness. This reality draws on a Buddhist belief that all life is interdependent and connected with each other, rather than existing independently on its own. Through mind-heart training, he hoped they would realize their universal responsibility to others and help create more inclusive economic systems.

Yet in most of the organizations I studied, contemplative practice did not reach the organizational core and transform the larger workplaces they were a part of. Instead, employees reported that mindfulness was seen as marginal to core missions and workplace expectations.

Companies might offer recreational yoga in their fitness room for employees, but it was often not being used to address the underlying cause of stress, such as extremely high workloads and the emphasis on the economic bottom line at the core of corporate culture.

Even though some programs may benefit highly stressed-out workers, they struggle to bring lessons learned from meditation into competitive work cultures beyond their meditation groups.

Mindfulness teacher and scholar Cathy-Mae Karelse questions whether because mindfulness programs so closely mimic typical business and educational structures, they have lost the "emancipatory potential" some founders hoped for.

In her book "Work, Pray, Code," Carolyn Chen shows how some Silicon Valley tech firms have adapted spiritual practices to such an extent that they have come to be used to support corporate ends, rather than individual liberation.

For example, one company even put their logo in the center of their labyrinth. Walking the circular maze of a labyrinth to end up in a place that emphasizes corporate loyalty seems to co-opt the liberational purpose of doing the practice. This is a far cry from many spiritual practitioners' goals of using the practice as a transcendent metaphorical journey to a place of deeper personal insight.

I fear mindfulness is all too often becoming a Band-Aid that helps sustain overburdened employees on an endless quest for more productivity. (AP)

**Sweet protein trial**

## Many factors distort blood pressure reading: research

NEW YORK, Dec 18, (Xinhua): More often than not, patients and even nurses and doctors are skipping steps that help paint an accurate portrait of someone's blood pressure -- how someone sits and positions their arm, whether they just had a cup of joe or chit-chat with their practitioner during the measurement, and other factors can produce readings that are higher or lower than normal blood pressure.

"To really make a dent at improving people's cardiovascular health, we need to screen and treat people for hypertension, but we need to do it correctly," Tammy Brady, a pediatric nephrologist at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center in Baltimore who studies blood-pressure measurement and cardiovascular health in children and adults, told The Wall Street Journal.

"Getting the right reading is important for preventing heart attacks, strokes and other potentially fatal conditions," noted the newspaper on Monday.

What does it take to get the reading right? The patient should sit with both feet on the ground, legs uncrossed, back straight and your arm supported on a table or other surface, according to guidelines from the American Heart Association and other organizations.

"A cuff should be positioned over your bare arm at the level of your heart. You shouldn't talk or scroll on your phone while it is being measured, and your bladder should be empty. And you should take your blood pressure at least a couple of times in a sitting," added the report.

**Blood glucose:** Amai Proteins, a scale-up designer of novel proteins that answer the needs of consumers and industry, has successfully completed world's first double-blind, random clinical trial on the effects of their proprietary hyper-sweet protein, sweelin, on blood glucose and insulin levels in humans.

The study demonstrated that sweelin neither raises blood glucose nor blood insulin levels in healthy adults even after consuming an amount equivalent to the sweetness of 75 grams of sugar (in the form of glucose).

Although not required by regulatory authorities, Amai Proteins decided to

conduct this study to boost consumer and market confidence in the safety and health profile of sweelin. The study provides validated evidence of the beneficial effects of sweelin® on consumer's health. sweelin can help consumers globally who are trying to reduce added sugars in their diet but don't want to compromise on taste or health.

The study was conducted at the Phase 1 Clinical Research Center (CRC) of Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center, under strict Good Clinical Practice (GCP) standards. Twenty eligible healthy volunteers completed the screening process and participated in the study.

All participants made three visits to the medical center. During each visit, the participants consumed one of three test beverages sweetened by either sweelin®, glucose, or stevia in a crossover double-blind, randomized controlled manner. All beverages were matched for sweetness intensity, with their dosage aligned to the sweetness equivalent of 75 grams of glucose, as used in a standard Oral Glucose Tolerance Test (OGTT). The study monitored the participants' response to the test beverages for 120 minutes after consumption, measuring postprandial blood glucose and insulin levels.

**Virus:** A Chinese research team from the Shenzhen Institutes of Advanced Technology (SIAT) under the Chinese Academy of Sciences has uncovered a new pattern in virus transmission through synthetic biology techniques, said the SIAT.

The study, published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, focuses on the movement patterns of E. coli bacteria and a bacteriophage, M13, that can infect it.

Previous studies generally believed that animal migration accelerates the spread of viruses. However, new research has found that certain animals, like monarch butterflies, have a reduced probability of disease infection during long-distance migration.

To understand the underlying patterns, researchers used E. coli as the host and M13 bacteriophage as the virus, constructing a system in the lab where the host and virus interact.

**Japan startup scraps 2nd sat launch post-liftoff**

## NASA's 2 stuck astronauts hit with new delay until at least late March

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla., Dec 18, (AP): NASA's two stuck astronauts just got their space mission extended again. That means they won't be back on Earth until spring, 10 months after rocketing into orbit on Boeing's Starliner capsule.

NASA announced the latest delay in Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams' homecoming on Tuesday.

The two test pilots planned on being away just a week or so when they blasted off June 5 on Boeing's first astronaut flight to the International Space Station. Their mission grew from eight days to eight months after NASA decided to send the company's problem-plagued Starliner capsule back empty in September.

Now the pair won't return until the end of March or even April because of a delay in launching their replacements, according to NASA.

A fresh crew needs to launch before Wilmore and Williams can return and the next mission has been bumped more than a month, according to the space agency.

NASA's next crew of four was supposed to launch in February, followed by Wilmore and Williams' return home by the end of that month alongside two other astronauts. But SpaceX needs more time to prepare the brand new capsule for liftoff. That launch is now scheduled for no earlier than late March.

NASA said it considered using a different SpaceX capsule to fly up the replacement crew in order to keep the flights on schedule. But it decided the best option was to wait for the new capsule to transport the next crew.

NASA prefers to have overlapping crews at the space station for a smoother transition, according to officials.

Most space station missions last six months, with a few reaching a full year.

**Space:** A Japanese space startup said its second attempt to launch a rocket carrying satellites into orbit had been aborted minutes after liftoff Wednesday and destroyed itself again, nine months after the company's first launch attempt ended in an explosion.

Space One's Kairos No. 2 rocket lifted off from a coastal site in the mountainous prefecture of Wakayama



This image made from a NASA live stream shows NASA astronauts Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore during a press conference from the International Space Station on Friday, Sept. 13, 2024. (AP)

in central Japan.

The company said it had aborted the flight after concluding that it was unlikely to complete its mission.

"We are very sorry that we could not achieve as far as a final stage of the mission," Space One President Masakazu Toyoda told a news conference Wednesday. "We don't consider this a failure because we are getting valuable data that will help our pursuit toward a next challenge."

**Problems**

He said he hoped to find the cause to address the problems as soon as possible to achieve a success next time.

Company executive and space engineer Mamoru Endo said the abnormality in the first stage engine nozzle or its control system is likely to have caused an unstable flight of the rocket, which started spiraling in midflight and eventually destroyed itself about three minutes after liftoff, using its autonomous safety mechanism.

The rocket, which rose higher than 100 kilometers (60 miles) above ground, entered space entered space before it was destroyed, officials said.

Space One aims to be Japan's first company to put a satellite into orbit, hoping to boost Japan's lagging space industry with a small rocket for an affordable space transport business.

Wednesday's flight, postponed twice

from Saturday because of strong winds, came nine months after a failed debut flight in March, when the rocket was intentionally exploded five seconds after takeoff. The flight was carrying a government satellite that was intended to monitor North Korea's missile launches and other military activities.

Kairos No. 2 rocket was carrying five small satellites, including one from the Taiwanese space agency and several from Japanese startups.

Space One said it had fixed the cause of the debut flight failure, which stemmed from a miscalculation of the rocket's first-stage propulsion.

Japan hopes the company can pave the way for a domestic space industry that competes with the United States.

Tokyo-based Space One was set up in 2018 with investments from major Japanese companies, including Canon Electronics, IHI, Shimizu and major banks, to commercialize space delivery services at lower costs and regular flights as many as 20 times a year, compared to six currently planned by the government-led space program.

Japan's space development programs are led by Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA, and industry leaders such as Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and IHI, as they develop two main flagship rockets, the large H3 rocket and the much smaller Epsilon, to cater to the growing satel-

**Mpox cases**

## Pakistan delays anti-polio drive

QUETTA, Pakistan, Dec 18, (Agencies): Pakistani authorities on Wednesday postponed a polio vaccination campaign in the country's restive southern Balochistan province after health workers boycotted it to oppose a proposed privatization of hospitals.

Authorities on Monday launched the final nationwide polio vaccination campaign for the year, aiming to protect 45 million children. According to the World Health Organization, Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan remain the only two countries where the potentially fatal, paralyzing virus has not been eradicated.

Anwarul Haq of the National Emergency Operation Center for Polio Eradication, said the polio vaccination campaign in Balochistan was delayed until Dec. 30 for "better preparedness." He provided no further details.

However, other health and government officials said the campaign in Balochistan was postponed after health workers refused to join it and demanded that the government stop plans to privatize state-run hospitals where they work.

Representatives of health workers have also urged the government not to employ unqualified workers to carry out the campaign.

**Mpox:** The Philippines' Department of Health (DOH) has detected 52 mpox cases this year, Health Secretary Teodoro Herbosa said Tuesday. Herbosa said the DOH tallied only one death from the highly infectious disease.

"Forty-seven out of the 52 are male, leaving only five females," he told a press conference, adding that the ages range from as young as six months to as old as 66 years.

"All 52 cases are not epidemiologically linked," Herbosa said. "What's good is that whenever we identify a case, none of their contacts from our tracing efforts test positive."

Meanwhile, the cumulative number of confirmed mpox cases in Uganda has surpassed 1,000, with six deaths reported since the outbreak was declared five months ago in the East African country, the Ministry of Health said on Monday.

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## From jeers to cheers

## Juventus wins back fans with rout of Cagliari in Italian Cup

TURIN, Italy, Dec 18, (AP): Juventus got fans back on its side with a 4-0 rout of Cagliari in the Italian Cup.

The Bianconeri, who are the defending champions, will play Empoli in the quarterfinals in February. Empoli eliminated Fiorentina on penalties earlier this month.

Juventus beat Manchester City in the Champions League last week but had drawn four straight league matches and

was booed off the field after a dismal draw at home to bottom club Venezia on Saturday.

Juventus survived an early scare from Cagliari and broke the deadlock on the stroke of halftime. Kenan Yıldız found Dusan Vlahovic in the center of the area with a delightful pass and, although he was closed down by four players, the Bianconeri forward managed to turn on the spot

and fire in off the inside of the right post.

Teun Koopmeiners struck a fantastic free kick into the top left corner shortly after the break and Francisco Conceição, who had been a threat all night, scored in the 80th minute.

Juventus capped the night with a wonderful goal as Nico González raced from his own half and lobbed Cagliari goalkeeper Simone Scuffet.



Juventus' Kenan Yıldız, left, and Cagliari's Alessandro Decolla, center, challenge for the ball during the round of sixteen Coppa Italia soccer match between Juventus Turin and Cagliari Calcio in Turin, Italy. (AP)



Chelsea's Mayra Ramirez, left, controls the ball by the Real Madrid's Maria Mendez, right, during the women's Champions League, group B soccer match between Real Madrid and Chelsea at the Alfredo Di Stefano stadium in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

## Chelsea holds off Real to finish top of its Women's Champions League group

Lyon wraps up group play with maximum 18 points

MADRID, Dec 18, (AP): United States striker Catarina Macario entered as a halftime substitute and converted two penalties for Chelsea in a 2-1 win over Real Madrid that helped the English club finish top of its Women's Champions League group with a 100% record.

Madrid was already sure of qualifying for the quarterfinals along with Chelsea, but needed a win at Estadio Alfredo Di Stefano to go through as the Group B winner.

The Spanish team was on course for victory when Caroline Weir opened the scoring in the seventh minute after her shot could only be parried onto the post by Chelsea goalkeeper Hannah Hampton and



Real Madrid's Signe Bruun, left, and Maria Mendez jump for the ball during the women's Champions League, group B soccer match between Real Madrid and Chelsea at the Alfredo Di Stefano stadium in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

into the net.

Macario was brought on at halftime and made a huge difference,

with her incisiveness leading to a penalty when she was tripped by Olga Carmona.

The Brazil-born Macario curled a right-footed shot high into the net in the 51st minute and converted a second penalty into almost exactly the same spot in the 56th after Chelsea midfielder Wieke Kaptein flicked the ball into the outstretched left hand of Carmona.

Chelsea won all six of its group games and has yet to lose this season under new coach Sonia Bompastor. In the Women's Super League in England, Chelsea has won nine games and drawn the other.

Another team to wrap up group play with a maximum 18 points was Lyon, the eight-time champion, after a 1-0 victory at home to two-time winner Wolfsburg. Danielle van de Donk scored in the 81st.

Both teams had already qualified, with Lyon guaranteed to win Group A. Roma beat Galatasaray 3-0 in the other Group A game, while Twente defeated Celtic 3-0 in Group B. All four of those teams had already been eliminated.

## Amorim says, Man U needs 'big talents' like Rashford

MANCHESTER, England, Dec 18, (AP): Manchester United head coach Ruben Amorim said Wednesday the club needs players like Marcus Rashford after the forward was quoted as saying he was ready for a new challenge.

Rashford was dropped from United's squad for its 2-1 win against Manchester City on Sunday.

It has led to widespread speculation about his future and Rashford discussed the possibility of leaving in an interview on Tuesday.

"For me, personally, I think I'm ready for a new challenge and the next steps," journalist Henry Winter reported him saying. "When I leave it's going to be 'no hard feelings.'"

Amorim was diplomatic when asked if he wanted to keep Rashford at the club.

"Of course, because this kind of



Manchester United's Marcus Rashford, right, challenges for the ball with Viktor Plzen's Pavel Sulc during the Europa League soccer match between Viktoria Plzen and Manchester United at the Doosan Arena in Plzen, Czech Republic. (AP)

club needs big talents and he's a big talent," he told a news conference. "So, he just needs to perform at the highest level and that is my focus. I just want to help Marcus."

The 27-year-old Rashford is under contract until 2028.

He is a graduate of United's famed academy, which has produced many of its greatest players like Bobby Charlton, George Best, Ryan Giggs and David Beckham.

But he has struggled for form since signing his new deal in 2023 - scoring just eight goals last season and losing his place in the England team.

He has scored three goals in six games since Amorim was appointed in November, but was substituted after 56 minutes of his last appearance against Viktoria Plzen last week and then left out of the squad against City.



Leganes' Sergio Gonzalez, left, and Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski challenge for the ball during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Barcelona and Leganes at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

## Will giants join Unify League?

The group behind a new European soccer competition has resurfaced

LONDON, Dec 18, (AP): The group behind a proposed breakaway European soccer competition is back.

They have a new name for their tournament, too, calling it the Unify League this time.

The latest idea for an elite competition for the biggest teams in Europe is being put forward by Madrid-based A22 Sports Management, which is seeking to change the face of the sport in its most lucrative market by creating a rival for the Champions League and other UEFA tournaments.

It comes nearly four years after the initial plan of a European Super League was ambitiously launched and then quickly quashed. It's been a rocky journey, to say the least, and there's still a long way to go before a breakaway league comes to fruition - if it ever does.

Late one Sunday night in April 2021, a dozen of Europe's biggest clubs rocked the soccer world by announcing plans to create a breakaway European Super League, which would have effectively replaced the Champions League - Europe's elite club competition. The 12 rebel teams were Real Madrid, Barcelona, Atlético Madrid, Juventus, AC Milan, Inter Milan, Manchester United, Manchester City, Liverpool, Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham. They proposed a 20-team elite tournament that was largely closed because 15 were protected from relegation. The plan collapsed within 48 hours after the six English clubs pulled out and issued apologies amid a backlash from their own fans and the government. Three others - AC Milan, Inter and Atlético - also quickly backed out.

Well, it never quite went away. Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus carried on the fight behind the scenes, seemingly forlornly. Juventus withdrew midway through 2023 but the two Spanish powers held out, and scored a win in December of that year when the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that UEFA and world governing body FIFA acted contrary to EU competition law by blocking plans for the breakaway league. Emboldened, A22 - formed to assist the creation and promotion of the Super League - immediately announced new proposed competitions for men and women, saying young fans are "turning away" from soccer. More details about these competitions came on Tuesday.

A22 said Tuesday it has submitted proposals to UEFA and FIFA for official recognition of its proposed midweek competition, which would contain 96 men's teams across four leagues - Star, Gold, Blue and Union - and 32 women's teams in two leagues - Star and Gold. Eight teams would qualify for the knockout stage in each league. All teams involved in the Unify League are being guaranteed a minimum of 14 matches per season. Qualification will not be automatic but "based on annual performance" in the domes-

tic European leagues, A22 said. A key part of the new format would be free streaming of games on a branded "Unify" platform to, in A22's words, "directly connect clubs to their global fan bases" and "improve the viewing experience at home by eliminating the need for multiple subscriptions." There would also be a premium subscription offered without adverts. If the plans get the green light, it in theory gives Europe's clubs a choice: Stay with the existing European competitions run by UEFA or join a breakaway competition.

No team has publicly backed the Unify League, strengthening the existing skepticism about the project. A22 said its plans had come after discussions with clubs, leagues and "other parties" but didn't go into more details. Not even Barcelona or Madrid - the remaining holdouts from the original Super League - have commented, though the Spanish league has. As expected, the league's reaction was scathing, saying the project "threatens the governance of European football" and would "destroy the economy of national leagues." "The project continues to lack support from clubs, federations, players, fans, national governments and European institutions," La Liga said. There was no official response from any other major league, or from UEFA or FIFA.

It still seems a non-starter at this stage - and the outcry caused by the original rebellion would likely make most clubs retain the status quo. That is especially the case in England, with the popular and lucrative Premier League having said last year it "continues to reject any such concept" of a Super League. Part of the Premier League's owners' charter states that clubs "will not engage in the creation of new competition formats outside of the Premier League's Rules" and a proposed U.K. government bill would block English teams from trying to join a breakaway league. Financial details about the Unify League remain sketchy - for example, who is funding this? - and the latest plans come at a time when there has been a redrawing of the power dynamic in European football.



Carlo Ancelotti, Head Coach of Real Madrid, receives the Best FIFA Men's Coach Award during the FIFA Football Awards 2024 in Doha, Qatar. (AP)

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## Depay: I feel at home at Corinthians

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 18, (Xinhua): Dutch striker Memphis Depay has praised Brazilian football after a successful start to his spell with Corinthians.

The 30-year-old former Manchester United and Barcelona forward has scored seven times in 14 matches for the Sao Paulo club, whom he joined on a free transfer in September.

"Corinthians are a great team in Brazil, the biggest," he said. "So far, we've been doing very well, and I feel like I'm at home. The people in Brazil are very enthusiastic and full of energy. The country is beautiful, and the food is good. The training facilities are incredible." Depay helped Corinthians finish a disappointing

2024 season with nine consecutive victories in the Brazilian Serie A championship.

The winning run saw it rise from the relegation zone in October to seventh in the 20-team standings, enough to secure them a place in the Copa Libertadores qualifying rounds.

"I felt I needed to do something different [in my career], and I like challenges," he said of the decision to leave European football for Brazil. I didn't know anything about the Brazilian Championship. I only knew that Brazil is the Mecca of football. All the talent comes from there. I wanted to see that, and they convinced me," he added.



# Bahrain aims to repeat 2019 Gulf Cup glory in Kuwait

Saudi Arabia opener looms

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18:** The Bahraini national football team aims to replicate its 2019 Arabian Gulf Cup triumph as it gears up for the 26th edition of the tournament, scheduled to take place in Kuwait from December 21 to January 3.

Known as the "Pearl Divers," Bahrain will participate in the Gulf Cup for the 24th time, having skipped only the 1972 edition, which it withdrew from. The team faces tough competition in Group Two, where it will play against Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Iraq.

Bahrain kicks off its campaign against Saudi Arabia on December 22 at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, followed by a clash with Iraq on December 25 at the same venue.

The group stage concludes with a match against Yemen on December 28 at Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium.

Since debuting in the 1970 Gulf Cup hosted in Bahrain, the national team has played 111 matches in the tournament, securing 34 wins, 35 draws, and 42 losses, with 118 goals scored and 139 conceded. Bahrain's notable achievements include winning the title in 2019, finishing as runners-up four times (1970, 1982, 1992, and 2003), and achieving third place three times (1990, 1994, and 2004).

At the continental level, Bahrain reached its best Asian Cup finish in 2004 under Croatian coach Yuri Srecko, placing fourth after a semi-final loss to Japan and a defeat to Iran in the bronze medal match.

The team has qualified for the Asian Cup eight times, advancing to the second round in 2019 and 2023 but never qualifying for the World Cup.

This year, the Bahraini squad is led by Coach Drajan Talajic, who hopes to guide the team to its second Gulf Cup title. Talajic is familiar with Gulf football, having coached in the UAE, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, as well as managing Kuwait Club in 2011, where he won the Kuwait Federation Cup.



A file photo of Bahraini celebrating with fans.

The Bahraini national team relies on key players like veteran goalkeeper Ismail Mohammed Jaffar, captain of Al-Muharraq Club, with 135 international appearances. Other standout players include Abdullah Youssef Hilal, Salem Adel Hassan, and Ali Madan, whose collective market value

highlights their importance to the team.

With a market valuation of €9.83 million according to Transfermarkt, Bahrain enters the 26th Gulf Cup as a formidable contender, eager to build on its rich footballing legacy.

## Team secures WRC manufacturers' title for 4th consecutive year

### TGR-WRT dominates Rally Japan with 1-2 victory

**TOKYO, Dec 18:** TOYOTA GAZOO Racing World Rally Team (TGR-WRT) has claimed an outstanding one-two finish on home soil at Rally Japan. The masterful driving of Elfyn Evans and co-driver Scott Martin in the No. 33 GR YARIS Rally1 Hybrid Electric Vehicle, who claimed top podium position and sealed the team's victory, as well as the second-place finish of Sébastien Ogier and Vincent Landais, in their No. 17 GR YARIS Rally1 Hybrid Electric Vehicle, also allowed Toyota to end the 2024 season with its well-deserved fourth consecutive FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) manufacturers' title.

Akio Toyoda, TGR-WRT Chairman, commented: "We hate to lose". With this slogan, we kept fighting until the very end without giving up. I would like to celebrate sincerely with all the TGR-WRT members today. Jari-Matti, Kaj, Tom, Elfyn, Scott, Seb, Vincent, Taka, Aaron, Kalle, Jonne, and everybody in the team, thank you so much!"

Toyoda added: "Congratulations also to Sami and Enni! WRC 2024 became really exciting as we were able to fight against each other until the final round, the final day and the final stage. I

believe it is significant for us as Asian car manufacturers to show fans the sound and smell of the rally cars on the roads of East Asia. Let's continue to boost motorsports in Asia together, and let's have a good fight again next year!"

Rally Japan, held on the challenging asphalt roads near Toyota City, provided a fitting stage for this season-defining event. TGR-WRT entered the final day with a tight battle for the championship. However, the No.33 and No. 17 crews were able to out-manuever the competition and move into first and second overall.

As the teams entered the rally-ending Power Stage tied on points, the championship hung in the balance. Ogier delivered an electrifying performance, setting the fastest time and earning five bonus points, while Evans finished third in the stage. These critical results secured Toyota the manufacturers' title after 13 rounds of competition, which also marks Toyota's eighth WRC manufacturers' title.

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these

events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established TGR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand. Representing Toyota's belief that "the roads build the people, and the people build the cars," TGR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making "ever-better" cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, TGR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.

Race Notes:

■ No. 33 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1 Hybrid Electric Vehicle (Elfyn Evans and Scott Martin)

■ Position: 1st

■ Time: 3 hours, 23 minutes, and 41.0 seconds

■ No. 17 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1 Hybrid Electric Vehicle (Sébastien Ogier and Vincent Landais)

■ Position: 2nd

■ Time: 3 hours, 25 minutes, and 8.3 seconds



TOYOTA GAZOO Racing World RallyTeam celebrates.

## Head named man of the match

### Aussies and India test ends in draw

**BRISBANE, Australia, Dec 18, (AP):** Persistent rain over all five days forced umpires to finally pull the plug on the third cricket test between Australia and India, calling play about two hours before the scheduled end of the match Wednesday as it ended in a soggy draw.

Australia declared its second innings at 89-7 and set India 275 runs to win in 54 overs and about a session and a half before stumps Wednesday. But play only ensued for less than three overs before bad light stopped play and an early tea was taken with India at none for 8 and needed 267 runs to win.

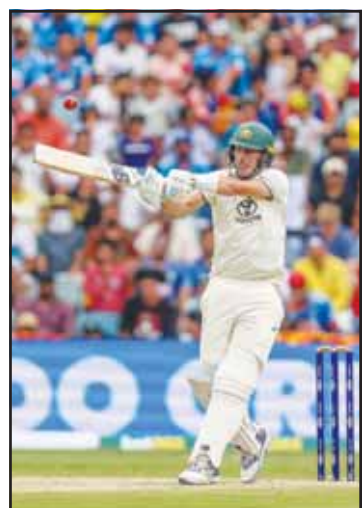
But the rain came again and that was the end of play in the test.

Earlier Wednesday, Travis Head, named man of the match for his 152 runs in the first innings, dismissed India tailender Akash Deep to end India's first innings at 260 and secure an 185-run lead for Australia.

After the test, veteran allrounder Ravichandran Ashwin announced his retirement from cricket.

With the five-test series level at

1-1 and Brisbane touted as being a pivotal test in the series, it has turned out to be anything but. Rain delay



Australia's captain Pat Cummins hits a six during play on day five of the third cricket test between India and Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane, Australia. (AP)

after rain delay spoiled the Gabba match and forced Cricket Australia to refund tickets to about 35,000 spectators who attended the first day because not enough overs were bowled.

"Obviously to have interruptions like that wasn't great, but going to Melbourne at 1-1 is great and gives us confidence that we can go to Melbourne and pull something off there," India captain Rohit Sharma said.

Jaspri Bumrah went past India legend Kapil Dev for the most test wickets in Australia by an Indian player when he had Marnus Labuschagne caught behind for 1 on Wednesday. Bumrah is now on top of the list with 53 wickets, two ahead of Kapil on 51.

After helping save India from the follow-on with a valuable 10 not out in a crucial last-wicket stand of 47 with Deep, the 31-year-old Bumrah returned to doing what he does best at the bowling crease - he took nine wickets in Brisbane and now has 21 wickets for the series at an average

of 10.9.

Australia will likely be a bowler down for the remainder of the series after Josh Hazlewood suffered calf soreness ahead of the fourth day's play and was only able to send down one over before leaving the field.

Hazlewood, who missed the second Adelaide test due to side soreness, was late entering the field at the start of play and then looked labored when he came into the attack.

"Josh passed all assessments before he was selected for the third test and was fully fit entering the match," Cricket Australia's high-performance director Ben Oliver said. "Unfortunately Josh suffered a new, unrelated calf injury during the warm-up on day four."

Scott Boland, who replaced Hazlewood in Adelaide and took five wickets, will likely be back for Australia for the Melbourne Cricket Ground test starting Dec. 26.

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.

## A mixed year

### Iraq bids to defend Gulf Cup title



Iraq eyes title defense despite a mixed year.

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18:** The Iraqi national football team is determined to defend its title in the Arabian Gulf Cup, following its victory in the 2023 edition hosted in Iraq. Entering the 2024 tournament as the reigning champion on home soil in January 2023, it faced early elimination in the round of 16 at the Asian Cup in Qatar and dropped crucial points in the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup. However, Iraq is currently in second place in its World Cup qualifying group, trailing only South Korea with 11 points.

Under the guidance of Spanish coach Jesús Casas, who led Iraq to the Gulf Cup title last year, the team boasts experienced players such as Ayman Hussein, a striker for Al-Khor in Qatar, and Zidane Iqbal, a midfielder for Utrecht in the Netherlands, who is enjoying an impressive season. Casas, who took charge of the Iraqi national team in 2022, has extensive experience, having previously coached at Cadiz Club and worked with Spain's national team staff from 2018 to 2022.

The team also features top talents playing in Europe and the Arab leagues, including Ali Jassim (Como, Italy), Amin Al-Hamawi (Sandviken, Sweden), Ibrahim Bayesh (Al-Riyadh, Saudi Arabia), and Youssef Amin (Al-Wahda, Saudi Arabia).

Historically, Iraq has won the Gulf Cup four times (1979, 1985, 1988, and 2023), and secured second place twice (1976 and 2013). The team's proudest achievement came in 2007 when they claimed the AFC Asian Cup title, defeating Saudi Arabia with a memorable header from Younis Mahmoud in the final.

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## Al-Dossari, Al-Buraikan set to travel for Cup despite injuries

**RIYADH, Dec 18:** Reports from Saudi press outlets have confirmed that Salem Al-Dossari and Firas Al-Buraikan will be included in the Saudi national team squad traveling to Kuwait for the Khaleeji Zain 26.

According to Al-Riyadh newspaper, both players will join the Green Falcons for the tournament despite their injuries. However, their participation in the matches is still uncertain, as French coach Hervé Renard will make a final decision based on their

medical evaluations.

Al-Dossari is dealing with minor fractures to his face, while Al-Buraikan is recovering from an ankle injury. Neither player featured in Saudi Arabia's recent friendly match, where they defeated Trinidad and Tobago in preparation for the tournament.

The Khaleeji Zain 26 will kick off on Saturday, December 21, and run through January 3, 2025. Saudi Arabia is placed in Group Two alongside Bahrain, Yemen, and Iraq.



Salem Al-Dossari





Vinicius Junior of Real Madrid is awarded as the Best Men's FIFA Player during the FIFA Football Awards 2024 in Doha, Qatar. (AP)

# Sports

Bahrain lands in Kuwait for the Championship

## Minister Al-Mutairi inaugurates Khaleeji Zain 26 Media Center

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Kuwait's Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and Chairman of the Supreme Organizing Committee for Khaleeji Zain 26, to officially open the tournament's main media center at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Farwaniya today.

The center is equipped with state-of-the-art technology, including advanced computers, high-speed internet, and dedicated spaces for photography and press interviews. These facilities aim to streamline the work of media professionals covering the Gulf Football Championship. Additionally, the center features a dedicated "Diwaniya" for media personnel, complete with a large TV screen for live event coverage and a robust Wi-Fi network. Shuttle buses have also been arranged to transport journalists from the center to the tournament's stadiums.

Pre-match press conferences will take place at the main media center, while post-match conferences are scheduled at Jaber International Stadium and Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium, both of which are equipped to provide comprehensive services to journalists throughout the championship.

### Committees Strive for Excellence

Faisal Al-Yateem, Chairman of the Quality Control Committee, emphasized the meticulous planning behind the tournament. The Supreme Organizing Committee has carefully selected specialized committees to oversee various responsibilities before and during the event. A dedicated Quality Control Committee has been established to monitor and evaluate all activities, ensuring high standards and efficiency.

"The committee submits daily reports on the progress and accomplishments of all subcommittees," Al-Yateem explained. "This approach not only enhances operational efficiency but also sets a benchmark for hosting future international tournaments in Kuwait."

Al-Yateem expressed gratitude to the members of the organizing committees, highlighting their commitment and daily progress. Regarding ticketing, he assured that tickets are accessible to everyone through multiple platforms, including the "Hayakom" app, official social media accounts of the Gulf and Kuwait Football Associations, and physical sales points at Avenues and 360 malls.

He also teased an exceptional opening ceremony, aligned with the tournament's slogan, "The Future is Gulf." International experts in event planning have been brought on board to deliver a world-class spectacle, set to take place Saturday evening.

The Bahraini national football team landed in Kuwait ahead of the Gulf Zain 26 Championship, which begins this Saturday and runs until January 3.

The team checked into the Jumeirah Hotel and later held their first training session at Mohammed Al Hamad Stadium, under the auspices of Al Qadisiya Club.

Team manager Mahmoud Riyadh expressed optimism about the tournament, noting the absence of defender Ali Haram due to injury. "The Gulf Championship is a significant event for us—a regional competition that fosters unity and holds great importance for Bahraini sports," he said.

Media coordinator Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar shared the team's aspirations to secure a second title, following their maiden victory in 2019. "Our fans are eager for another championship," he remarked, acknowledging the challenges ahead, particularly in matches against Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Bahrain's tournament campaign kicks off with a match against Saudi Arabia on Sunday evening at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, followed by encounters with Iraq on December 25 and Yemen on December 28 to conclude the group stage.



Khaleeji Zain 26 Media Center.

### 'A lot of psychological pressure on the Kuwait team'

## Al-Houti: Anything can happen at Khaleeji Zain 26

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: One of Kuwait's greatest ever players has said that he is looking forward to supporting his beloved national team at the Khaleeji Zain 26 (Arabian Gulf Cup) which gets underway on Saturday evening at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

Saad Al-Houti captained Kuwait to Asian Cup glory in 1980, and also led his team to the FIFA World Cup finals in Spain two years later, establishing himself as one of the continent's all-time greats with more than 70 appearances for The Blues.

Speaking ahead of the start of the prestigious regional tournament, Al-Houti shared his thoughts on Kuwait's chances, who he thinks could be eventual champions and also some insights into his glorious career.

"There will be a lot of psychological pressure on the Kuwait team which they will have to overcome," said the 70-year-old. "They are playing at home and in front of their own fans, which they need to use as an advantage."

"The first match against Oman on Saturday will be crucial as it will show us what we have to offer and how ready we are to compete. The team needs to be prepared both physically and mentally and we, as fans, have a



Saad Al-Houti in his home with the Asian Cup 1980 ball and winner's medal.

role to play in supporting and making the home advantage count.

"The Argentine coach, Juan Pizzi, has only been in his position for two months so it is hard to judge progress in such a short space of time. It needs two years to make a difference."

But Al-Houti shared his own expe-

riences of being up against the odds, remembering the difficult build-up to their 1980 Asia Cup title win and also the challenges they faced in qualifying to the 1982 World Cup.

While hoping that The Blues can advance from a tough Group A, Al-Houti believes that the UAE will be favourites after beating Qatar 5-0 in

their World Cup qualifier last month.

"They (UAE) looked very strong in their win over Qatar and must be considered as one of the teams who can win the title here," he said.

Looking ahead to the tournament, which runs through to January 3, Al-Houti offered some wise advice to the Kuwaiti class of 2024 and reassured them that he will be their biggest supporter in the stadium.

"You must not give in to the psychological, public and media pressure," he said. "Never give up. The Gulf Cup is your gateway to the world of stardom and professionalism so be patient, keep going and if you suffer defeat, recover and bounce back in the next match. We are all right behind you."

Formerly known as the Arabian Gulf Cup, the Khaleeji Zain 26 will also see matches played at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium.

Tickets are now on sale through the Hayakom application, and also through a ticket box office located on the ground floors of the 360 Mall and Avenues Mall.

The Khaleeji Zain 26 sees hosts, Kuwait, in Group A with Oman, UAE and Qatar, while reigning champions Iraq join Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in Group B.

## Milwaukee seals NBA Cup victory

Giannis named MVP

**LAS VEGAS, Dec 18, (AP): Everyone has a lucky number in Las Vegas. For the Milwaukee Bucks, it was 3.**

And the NBA Cup was their prize. Tournament MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 26 points to go along with 19 rebounds and 10 assists. Damian Lillard added 23 points and the Bucks connected on 17 3-pointers on the way to beating the Oklahoma City Thunder 97-81 in the NBA Cup title game Tuesday night.

Brook Lopez and Gary Trent Jr. each scored 13 for the Bucks, who joined the Los Angeles Lakers as the only champions of the 2-year-old event. A 19-5 Milwaukee run in the second half turned what was a five-point game into a 19-point game early in the fourth, and the Bucks kept control the rest of the way.

"It's great, it's great for our team," Antetokounmpo said. "We're getting better. ... We know we're leaving Vegas as a better team. I'm so proud of this group. Man, I'm so proud of this group."

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 21 and Jalen Williams added 18 for the Thunder, who had scored at least 99 points in every game this season. But they sputtered in plenty of ways Tuesday, getting outscored 51-15 from beyond the arc and shooting only 34%.

Isaiah Hartenstein had 16 points and 12 rebounds for Oklahoma City, which was held to 31 points after halftime.

It's a game that only counted for tournament purposes. There was about \$300,000 in additional bonus money for Bucks players - they got \$514,971 apiece, while the Thunder players got \$205,988 each - but the win, the loss and the statistics from the game won't count toward the regular season.

Mired toward the bottom of the NBA after a 2-8 start, the Bucks have been on a tear since. This was their 13th win in their last 16 games, even though it won't be part



Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo (34) yells while lifting up the NBA Cup after his team's victory in the championship game of the NBA Cup basketball tournament against the Oklahoma City Thunder in Las Vegas. (AP)

of the official record. No matter: When the Bucks emptied their bench with 1:37 left, Antetokounmpo pumped his fists like it was a true championship moment.

He's won bigger games - he and the Bucks captured the 2021 NBA title, after all. But they said from the outset of this tournament that the NBA Cup was a priority. And they left no doubt in the end.

"We struggled coming out of the gates," Bucks coach Doc Rivers said. "No one here doubted what we can be and who we can be and we just hung in there. We stuck together and this is the byproduct of a team sticking together. But we still have work to do." Antetokounmpo was even more succinct: "Job's not done," he said.

Bucks' Milwaukee played without guard Khris Middleton (non-COVID illness) and still improved to an NBA-best 12-1 all-time in NBA Cup games, including a perfect 7-0 this season. The Bucks' only in-season tournament loss was to Indiana in last year's semifinals.

### Al-Hajri describes the draw as balanced

## Kuwait Club drawn in Group Two of 41st Gulf Handball Championship

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 18: The draw for the 41st Gulf Clubs Handball Championship, conducted in the Sultanate of Oman, placed Kuwait Club in Group Two alongside the host team Oman Club, Qatar's Al-Arabi Club, and Dibba Al-Hisn Club from the UAE. Group One features the defending champion, Al-Rayyan Club of Qatar, Saudi Arabia's Al-Noor Club, Bahrain's Al-Najma Club, and Oman's Al-Seeb Club.

The tournament is scheduled to run from February 15 to 24 at the Sultan Qaboos Complex Hall in Oman, hosted by Oman Club.

Sameh Al-Hajri, Director of Handball at Kuwait Club, described the draw as balanced and announced plans for an external training camp in Qatar to prepare for the competition. He also revealed ongoing evaluations of several foreign players' CVs to select a circle player who will bolster "Al-Ameed" during the championship.

Chairman of the Oman Handball Association, Musa bin Khamis Al-Balushi, praised Oman Club's efforts in organizing the tournament. "We welcome all our brothers from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to the Sultanate of Oman," he said. "Gulf championships have a unique charac-



A file photo of players in action.

ter due to the strength, experience, and exceptional talent of the teams, which have firmly established their place at the pinnacle of Asian handball."

Al-Balushi anticipates intense competition in both the preliminary

and subsequent rounds, with the event reflecting the advanced level of Omani handball. He expressed hopes for a successful tournament for all participating clubs.

In the previous edition, held at

Al-Duhail Sports Hall in Doha, Qatar, Al-Rayyan Club claimed the championship title, narrowly defeating Kuwait Club 33-32 in the final. Kuwait Club had won the title in the 39th edition.

## Júnior and Bonmati win FIFA best player of the year awards

DOHA, Qatar, Dec 18, (AP): Real Madrid star Vinicius Júnior finally got his hands on a big global player award.

Vinicius was named the men's player of the year at the FIFA's "The Best" awards, where Barcelona playmaker Aitana Bonmati continued to clean up in the prizes for women's soccer.

The 24-year-old Vinicius was so disappointed to lose out to Manchester City midfielder Rodri for the Ballon d'Or in October that he and his Madrid team snubbed the ceremony in Paris in protest.

This time Rodri ended up second to Vinicius by five points. The Brazil forward was at the FIFA ceremony to collect his award having travelled to Doha on Monday with Madrid for the Intercontinental Cup final against Pachuca.

"I don't even know where to begin," Vinicius said in Portuguese. "It was so far away that it seemed impossible to get here. I was a kid who only played football barefoot on the streets of São Gonçalo, close to poverty and crime."

"Getting here is something very important to me. I'm doing it for many children who think that everything is impossible and who think they can't get here."

Vinicius echoed those sentiments in an Instagram post, where he took a thinly-disguised dig at presumably the Ballon d'Or voters - journalists from the top 100 countries in the FIFA rankings.