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His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Kuwait prospers in first year of HH Amir's reign

New era of development under visionary leadership

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: A year after His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah assumed power, the State of Kuwait has embarked on a new era of development, based on a strategic vision that reflects the steadfast commitment of its

wise leadership to continue the nation's growth and prosperity. This year has been filled with major events, milestones, and initiatives that have placed the interests of the nation and its citizens at the forefront, crowned with enlightened values, national unity, and a drive to enhance development in various sectors. Kuwait made a historic leap with the assumption of power by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad, who began a new era by reinforcing the principles that have always

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Kuwait's Central Bank affirms strength in financial systems

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) affirmed that its current assessment of the available local economic and financial data underscores the soundness and resilience of monetary and financial stability in Kuwait.

In a statement on the Local Economic, Financial and Banking Development, the CBK noted that this as-

essment comes in line with its ongoing efforts to monitor all economic and monetary indicators, as well as geopolitical developments and their impact on global economic conditions and its subsequent effects on the performance of the local economy.

The CBK noted that on a global economic front, inflationary pressures have

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Performers receive a warm applause during the inauguration of China's new embassy building in Mishref. Photo by Rezk Tawfiq

FM hails strong relations

China opens new embassy in Kuwait

By Fares Al-Abdan
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya has announced upcoming high-level visits between Kuwait and China, emphasizing that "these visits are ongoing",

while describing the Chinese-Kuwaiti relations as "excellent".

In a press statement after attending the inauguration of the new embassy building of the People's Republic of China in Mishref diplomatic district with a number of diplomats, ambassadors and citizens

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Citizenship pulled from 2,899 people

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): The Supreme Committee to Investigate Kuwaiti Citizenship held a meeting on Thursday under the chairmanship of First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, who is also head of the committee.

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6 Cabinet remembers late Amir Sheikh Nawaf, celebrates Sheikh Meshal's first anniversary



8 NBK educates BSK students on common fraud schemes and protection measures

NewsWatch

BAGHDAD: Iraq has begun repatriating Syrian troops who had fled to the country amid fall of Bashar Al-Assad regime that was ousted by armed opposition factions recently.

Brigadier Muqdad Meri, spokesperson of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, said in a statement, on Thursday, that the competent authorities started, today, extraditing the Syrian soldiers via the border Al-Qaem checkpoint, noting that the process was coordinated with "the concerned Syrian authorities." (KUNA)

Our Pride and Strength

The first anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's accession to power

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رأي سديد ورؤية للتجديد

عام من العطاء على تولي حضرة صاحب السمو أمير البلاد

الشيخ مشعل الأحمد الجابر الصباح

حفظه الله ورعاه مقاليد الحكم في دولة الكويت



Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:12 Asr 14:35
 Sunrise .. 06:37 Maghrib .. 16:53
 Zohr 11:45 Isha 18:15

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Mild and partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speed of 12-35 km/h with a chance for scattered rain later on..

By Night: Cold to very cold and cloudy to partly cloudy with light

Weather

to moderate southeasterly wind	Abdaly	19	04
to light variable wind, with speed	Bubyan	20	05
of 08-30 km/h with a chance for	Jahra	19	07
scattered rain.	Fallaka Island	21	09
	Salmiyah	18	11
	Ahmadi	18	05
	Jal Aliyah	18	05
	Nuwaisib	21	08

Ambassadors congratulate HH the Amir on 1st 'versary of assuming power



Osama Shaltout



Mohammad Totonji



Vladimir Zheltov



Ioannis Plotas



Belinda Lewis



Dr Saleh Al-Kharousi



Rami Tahboub



Chitim Tenzin

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: A number of ambassadors to Kuwait congratulated His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of the first anniversary of his assumption of power.

They praised the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, highlighting its reflection of Kuwait's rich historical legacy and national vision aimed at fulfilling the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people for stability and continued development of the country.

They affirmed that His Highness's leadership serves as an exemplary model for developing friendly relations and cooperation between Kuwait and their countries, as these relations are built on solid foundations of mutual respect and shared interests.

Below are some of their statements:

The British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis extended her warmest congratulations to His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on behalf of the British government on the occasion of the first anniversary of his assumption of power as the Amir of the State of Kuwait.

She said, "His Highness the Amir, who shares a strong connection with the UK, especially having studied at the Hendon Police College, has significantly strengthened British-Kuwaiti relations over the past year.

His invaluable support for the 2024 joint celebrations, marking 125 years of formal diplomatic relations between Kuwait and the UK, has been greatly appreciated."

Ambassador Lewis concluded by wishing His Highness the Amir continued health, happiness, and success in the years ahead.

Meanwhile, the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Kuwait Vladimir Zheltov conveyed his heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of the first anniversary of his assumption of power.

Ambassador Zheltov affirmed that the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir reflects the depth of Kuwait's historical legacy, and his insightful vision serves as a national pillar for achieving the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people for ensuring stability and advancing the development of the country.

He explained that the ties between Russia and Kuwait represent a distinguished model of friendship and cooperation, founded on mutual respect and common interests. Over the decades, relations between the two nations have witnessed remarkable growth in various areas to benefit both countries.

In conclusion, the Russian Ambassador said, "Under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait will continue its path of growth and development, undeterred by the regional and international tensions and conflicts that the world is currently experiencing."

He wished His Highness the Amir continued health and well-being, and further progress and prosperity for the friendly State of Kuwait.

In this regard, the Omani Ambassador to Kuwait Dr. Saleh Al-Kharousi congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the anniversary of his assumption of power.

He wished Kuwait further progress and prosperity under his leadership, as well as further growth in Oman-Kuwait relations.

Prosperity

Furthermore, the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to Kuwait Osama Shaltout expressed his sincere congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people on the occasion of the first anniversary of His Highness's ascension to power. He wished continued progress and prosperity for Kuwait under His Highness's wise leadership.

He affirmed that the first year of His Highness's reign was filled with accomplishments that strengthened Kuwait's position both regionally and internationally, and contributed to the welfare of the Kuwaiti people and the development of various sectors.

Ambassador Shaltout also highlighted the remarkable development of Egyptian-Kuwaiti relations over the past year, especially following the historic visit of

His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad to Egypt in April.

He said, "During this visit, His Highness engaged in fruitful discussions with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, which culminated in President el-Sisi awarding the Amir the Nile Necklace (Egypt's highest honor) as a gesture of Egypt's deep appreciation for the Amir of Kuwait, the Kuwaiti people, and the longstanding fraternal and distinguished relations between the two nations"

Ambassador Shaltout explained that one of the key outcomes of this historic visit was the establishment of the Egyptian-Kuwaiti Joint Higher Committee in Cairo, along with its subcommittees, under the high patronage of both His Highness the Amir of Kuwait and the Egyptian President. The work of the Joint Higher Committee represents an important step in addressing the political and strategic challenges facing the region today.

Pride

Shaltout expressed pride in the successes of the Egyptian-Kuwaiti partnership over the past year, highlighting that the relations between the two countries reflect a deep understanding and mutual respect, and these ties will continue to serve as a model for Arab cooperation.

In conclusion, Ambassador Shaltout prayed for continued success for His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in leading Kuwait toward greater prosperity, and for the enduring growth and development of the brotherly ties between Egypt and Kuwait, for the benefit of their peoples.

For his part, the Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub expressed great honor in extending, both on his behalf and on behalf of the Palestinian community residing in Kuwait, the highest congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of the first anniversary of his assumption of power.

He explained that the past year has been filled with achievements that reflect the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people. Since the very first day of his reign, His Highness Sheikh Meshal has been dedicated to fulfilling these aspirations for the advancement and strength of the State of Kuwait and its people.

On this joyful occasion, Ambassador Tahboub prayed to God Almighty to grant His Highness the Amir continued health and well-being, and for the beloved Kuwaiti people to experience further prosperity, progress, and success under the esteemed leadership of His Highness the Amir, his faithful Crown Prince and supporter His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the wise government.

Meanwhile, the Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Totonji expressed his pleasure in congratulating the brotherly Kuwaiti people on the first anniversary of His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's assumption of power.

He highlighted that Kuwait has witnessed significant developmental and economic progress during the past months, which strengthened the country's regional and international position.

Ambassador Totonji affirmed that relations between their two neighboring countries, and between their brotherly peoples, have grown tighter and more unified, with the aim of serving the future of their nations and the Islamic community.

Furthermore, the Ambassador of the Republic of Greece to Kuwait Ioannis Plotas extended his sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the people of Kuwait on the first anniversary of His Highness's assumption of power.

He highlighted the deep historical ties between the two friendly nations. Ambassador Plotas said, "The first year of His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad's rule has demonstrated a remarkable leadership vision, reflected in Kuwait's progress in various sectors.

In Greece, we hold Kuwait, its leadership, and its people in high regard, and we eagerly look forward to further strengthening our bilateral relations based on mutual respect and productive partnership.

The Greek-Kuwaiti relations have significantly developed over the past year, particularly in the economic, investment, and cultural fields, with close cooperation between the two countries at various levels, which contributed to achieving shared interests and fortifying the friendship between the peoples."

Ambassador Plotas highlighted that Kuwait serves as a model for international cooperation and wise diplomacy, and praised its prominent role in supporting

regional stability and peace.

He concluded by saying, "We greatly value our partnership with Kuwait and look forward to further strengthening this relationship in the future.

On this occasion, I wish His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad continued health and success, and the Kuwaiti people continued progress and prosperity under his wise leadership."

Also, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bhutan to Kuwait Chitim Tenzin expressed his sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of the first anniversary of His Highness's assumption of power.

He praised the wise leadership that has shown a strong commitment to the welfare of the Kuwaiti people and has strengthened Kuwait's position both regionally and internationally.

"From the time His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah assumed power, Kuwait has become a model of comprehensive development with a balance between tradition and modernity.

This year, Kuwait has emerged as a country that inspires others, and we in Bhutan deeply appreciate the accomplishments achieved under His Highness's leadership.

The relations between Bhutan and Kuwait are founded on mutual respect and a shared vision to promote peace and development. The first year of His Highness the Amir's rule has further strengthened these relations, particularly through the exchange of expertise and cooperation in sustainable development and environmental conservation. Our partnership with Kuwait reflects the shared values that unite us, and we are grateful for this deep friendship."

Ambassador Tenzin affirmed that Bhutan values Kuwait's effective role in supporting humanitarian and environmental causes, indicating that Kuwait has always been a strong advocate for diplomacy and international cooperation.

He concluded his statement by saying, "We in Bhutan consider our relations with Kuwait a source of pride and honor. We look forward to further cooperation in the future to strengthen the ties between our two countries.

I wish His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah continued health and success, and further progress and prosperity for the beloved people of Kuwait. I pray to God to preserve Kuwait as a prosperous nation that enjoys peace and well-being."

In addition, the Ambassador of the Republic of Peru to Kuwait Carlos Jimenez extended his sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of the first anniversary of His Highness assuming power. He also congratulated the generous Kuwaiti people, expressing his wishes for continued progress and prosperity for the State of Kuwait under His Highness's wise leadership.

Development

He said, "The first year of His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad's rule has been marked by remarkable achievements, as His Highness has guided his country with steady steps towards development and stability. Today, Kuwait serves as a model for building an advanced state that harmonizes ancient traditions with a future vision.

Relations between Peru and Kuwait have seen remarkable growth over the past year, reflecting a shared commitment to strengthening the bonds of cooperation and friendship. We aim to collaborate in various fields, including the economy, education, and culture, and look forward to expanding this partnership to include more initiatives that serve the mutual interests of our two countries."

Ambassador Jimenez highlighted that the State of Kuwait plays an influential role on the international stage, not only in promoting peace and stability but also in the field of humanitarian work, which is globally recognized and appreciated.

Concluding his statement, he said, "On this joyful occasion, I would like to reaffirm Peru's commitment to further strengthening our distinguished relationship with the State of Kuwait.

We pray for the continued success of His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad in his leadership career, and for the lasting security and prosperity of Kuwait and its people.

We in Peru consider this relationship a model of friendship between peoples of the world, and look forward to more fruitful cooperation in the future."

Other Voices

India and Kuwait: long-standing history and ongoing partnership

(Dr. Khaled Mahdi is Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (2016-2024). He currently presides over the National Committee for the Implementation of Agenda 2030.)

By Dr. Khaled Mahdi

In a historic move coinciding with the new era under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and following a meeting between His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the Indian Prime Minister on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in September, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to visit Kuwait on December 21-22.

This marks the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to the Gulf state in 43 years, highlighting the deep-rooted historical ties between the two countries, which have seen significant growth in recent years across all levels.

On the economic front, the total bilateral trade between India and Kuwait reached \$10.479 billion in the fiscal year 2023-24. Indian exports to Kuwait amounted to \$2.1 billion, showing a growth of 34.78% year-on-year, while Kuwait's exports to India, primarily crude oil, gas, and petrochemicals, totaled \$15 billion in 2022.

The relationship between India and Kuwait is not limited to economic ties alone. With a vibrant Indian community of over a million people residing in Kuwait, the highest among non-Arab expatriates, they add significant economic value to the labor market with skilled and specialized workers in various fields such as finance and engineering.

It is worth noting that the relationship between India and Kuwait dates back several centuries, with India being a major destination for trade and education for Kuwaiti families and commercial elites. In the 20th century, the city of Bombay (now Mumbai) was a significant commercial hub for Kuwaitis, many of whom owned homes and businesses there.

Trade relations included spices, horses, pearls, wood, and more. Kuwaiti

researcher Hessa Awad Al-Harbi excelled in her comprehensive illustrated encyclopedia on the history of Kuwaiti-Indian relations (1896-1965), which confirms the economic and social integration between the two communities.

Kuwaiti drama has also highlighted this relationship in the series "Mohammad Ali Road," the famous street in Mumbai bustling with offices and shops of Kuwaiti traders in India. It is also well known that India is the birthplace of several Kuwaiti personalities.

Prime Minister Modi's visit comes at a highly strategic time, with Kuwait currently presiding over the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), enhancing its active role in achieving regional security and peace.

This visit is expected to pave the way for a new era of cooperation between India, Kuwait, and the Gulf system, promoting mutual growth and prosperity. There is also a golden opportunity to build advanced partnerships, especially under the current leadership of India. Prime Minister Modi has 25 years of experience in governance, first as Chief Minister of Gujarat and then as Prime Minister of India.

He is known for his extensive experience and great popularity, being one of the few leaders to win a third term to lead the Indian people towards high economic growth, making India the fifth-largest economy from the eleventh under his supervision. He is committed to further accelerating growth with the aim of making India the third-largest economy in the next five years and a developed economy by 2047.

Additionally, he is distinguished for his anti-corruption efforts on all fronts in India. Under his leadership, India has managed to establish friendships with various countries and groups of countries despite their contradictions. He is also the driving force behind improving India's relations with the Gulf countries.

Kuwaiti economic diplomacy has always proven its positive impact and mutual benefit in establishing international security and peace.

This is achieved through high-level visits, especially with countries experiencing rapid economic growth, such as the Republic of India under its current leadership.

Thousands of Iraqi fans pouring in to see 'Khaleeji 26' Gulf Cup

Talks on border demarcation on right track: Al-Safi

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: Iraqi Ambassador to Kuwait Al-Manhal Al-Safi confirmed that the seventh meeting of the technical committee on maritime border demarcation between Kuwait and Iraq, chaired by Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad, was conducted in a positive atmosphere in Baghdad.

In a press statement Thursday at the office of Bahraini Ambassador to Kuwait Salah Al-Maliki, Al-Safi disclosed "there is an agreement to continue as previously planned. God willing, everything is progressing well. The committee will meet every two months."

He underscored the importance of the recent visit of Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Defense Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousuf to Basra Governorate. He considers the visit a significant step that reflects the strength of bilateral relations and the commitment of both countries' leadership to develop ties.

He pointed out that the opening of the Kuwait Government Surgical Hospital, funded by Kuwait through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), is a milestone in fostering fraternal relations between the two nations. He said Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousuf's visit helped unlock new opportunities for trade and economic exchange.

He praised the strong coordination between Kuwait and Iraq on political matters and the growing momentum toward investments in Iraq, supported by the Iraqi government. He credited the current stability in Iraq, under the leadership of Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani, as a key factor in fostering this positive environment for investment and bilateral cooperation.

He also emphasized the strategic importance of Basra, referring to it as an asset shared by Kuwait and Iraq. "With its rich history, Basra serves as a key commercial gateway to Iraq and a vital link between the two nations," he asserted. He expressed confidence that both countries will continue to build on this foundation to improve their economic and trade relations.

Regarding the entry of Iraqi fans into Kuwait by land (with their cars) to support their national team, Al-Safi stressed that the process is ongoing, with thousands of Iraqi fans crossing the border to enjoy the Gulf's brotherly and festive atmosphere. He affirmed the deep affection Iraqi fans have for Kuwait and its heritage.

The number of fans attending events will be determined by the seating capacity allocated to Iraqi supporters in the stadiums, though Al-Safi emphasized that no limit has been set. He lauded the robust arrangements in place to facilitate their entry, particularly the 'Hayak App' -- a welcoming electronic platform that has seen high registration numbers from fans eager to visit Kuwait.



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Paramedics and medical emergency technicians pose for a photo with the Governor of Jahra. Jahra Governorate photo

Jahra Governor lauds medical teams for exceptional service

Jahra Governor Hamad Al-Habashi emphasized the crucial contributions of medical, nursing and technical teams in delivering health services to the public, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During a meeting with Dr. Ahmed Al-Shatti, Director of the Medical Emergency Department, Abdullah Al-Nafees, Head of the Operations Department, and a group of paramedics and medical emergency technicians, Al-Habashi underlined the need for continued efforts to maintain an efficient workflow, ensure fully integrated equipment readiness, and uphold safety measures to respond to accidents, crises, and emergencies effectively.

The governor called for collaboration among stakeholders to en-

hance operations, overcome obstacles, and establish additional emergency centers to meet the needs of the growing population in Jahra Governorate.

He also stressed the importance of improving the skills and efficiency of paramedics and medical staff through robust training programs and developing plans to handle emergencies. Furthermore, Al-Habashi encouraged the public to acquire first aid skills through professional training courses.

At the end of the meeting, Governor Al-Habashi honored Dr. Al-Shatti, Al-Nafees, and several paramedics and emergency technicians for their exceptional service in Jahra Governorate.

6 PAAET faculty researchers listed among Stanford's top 2% cited scientists globally

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) announced the inclusion of six faculty researchers from the College of Technological Studies in Stanford University's 2024 list of the top 2 percent of the most cited scientists globally.

In a statement on Thursday, PAAET listed the researchers from the College of Technological Studies according to their ranking: Dr. Abdullah Al-Rashid from the Department of Automotive and Marine Engineering, Dr. Ahmad Shafi from the Department of Laboratory Technology, Dr. Abdulwahab Al-Naqi from the Department of Automotive and Marine Engineering, Dr. Nabil Ahmad from the Department of Electrical Engi-

neering, Dr. Bader Al-Taweel from the Department of Electrical Engineering, and Dr. Adel Ghunaim from the Department of Laboratory Technology.

PAAET highlighted its efforts to provide specialized programs and innovative initiatives to support researchers and encourage creativity and innovation, aligning with its vision to foster scientific research, develop national competencies, and enhance global competitiveness in various scientific fields.

The recognition of its researchers in this list reflects the PAAET's continuous efforts to support research and enhancing international collaboration as part of its strategic plan to achieve academic excellence and improve its global

competitiveness, it noted.

This achievement, the statement added, marks a significant step toward realizing PAAET's vision of becoming a leading academic and research model both locally and globally, while reinforcing its commitment to making a distinctive mark on the international scientific stage.

Stanford University's list serves as a global reference for ranking scientists based on the impact of their research.

This year, it included 66 scientists from Kuwait, showing the high quality of the country's scientific output and its dedication to advancing academic and research programs.

Ambassador Reem Al-Khaled presents her credentials to Germany's President

BERLIN, Dec 19, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Ambassador Reem Al-Khaled, presented her credentials to Germany President Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Wednesday, as an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Kuwait to the Republic of Germany.

The ceremony took place at the Republican Palace in the German capital, Berlin. Ambassador Al-Khaled told KUNA that she conveyed to President Steinmeier greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah.

Ambassador Al-Khaled praised the historical and deep-rooted relations between Kuwait and Germany at all levels, marking in celebration 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations this year. She asserted on her keenness and aspiration on behalf of Kuwait to bolster bilateral relations and move them to broader horizons in order to achieve everything that serves the peoples of the two countries.



KUNA photo Ambassador Reem Al-Khaled and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier during the presentation of credentials in Berlin.

Municipal Council OKs agri-livestock revisions

New regulations set building limits

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: The Technical Committee of the Municipal Council, during its 16th meeting of the third session held yesterday chaired by Munira Al-Amir, approved the final amendments to schedule No. 6, which pertains to the requirements and specifications for agricultural and livestock development areas under the construction works regulation.

The approved amendments included a redefinition of agricultural areas included in the schedule as state-owned lands divided into regulatory plots, and allocated to various government agencies such as the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR), the Public Authority for Sports, the Public Authority for Manpower, or any other relevant government entity. These areas are designated for agricultural cultivation, fish farming, poultry, livestock, horse and camel breeding, as well as services related to these activities. In addition, the amendments cover the training of racehorses and camels by hunting and equestrian clubs and camel clubs, including storage plots in Abdali and Wafra areas.

The committee approved amendments to the building percentages in agricultural areas of Wafra, Abdali, Sulaibiya by allowing a building percentage of ten percent of the plot area, with a maximum of 10,000 square meters.

The buildings must include a residence and a family rest house for the plot owner, with a total area not exceeding 1,000 square meters.

There should also be a residence for workers and a guard room, with a total area not exceeding 2,000 square meters.

All buildings on the plot must be one floor, constructed using light materials or reinforced concrete. The residence and family rest house are allowed only one floor, with a maximum height of six meters.

The workshops and warehouses can have a maximum height of ten meters. The setback for buildings must be no less than five meters from all sides of the plot borders, except for the area designated for garbage containers and the guard room, which may be attached to one of the facades.

Regarding cattle and milk production farms in all areas of Kuwait, the committee agreed to allow construction in varying proportions of the plot area.

The approved percentages include five percent for feed stores and a feed grinding unit, one percent for a repair workshop and spare parts stores, three percent of the plot area for automated milking parlors and their annexes, and four percent to ten percent for workers' housing, administrative buildings, and their annexes. A veterinary clinic and family housing for the plot owner are also permitted, with the family housing not exceeding 1,000 square meters.

The remaining plot area should be used for its designated purpose. For these farms, the building must be a single floor, with a maximum height of five meters for the building, and ten meters for pens, workshops, and warehouses.

The table also specifies that 15 percent of the permitted building percentage applies to Arabian horse breeding plots.

It stipulates that all buildings on the plot should be a single ground floor, with a height limit of five meters for administration buildings, workers' housing, guardhouses, and rest areas, and a maximum height of seven meters for horse stables and showrooms.

For animal production projects in the Kabd, Jahra, and Wafra areas allocated by PAAAFR, where plots range from 1,250 to 2,500 square meters, the Technical Committee approved 16 percent of the total plot area for housing buildings, warehouses, veterinary rooms, and guard services, with a maximum building area of 300 square meters.

The remaining empty space is to be used for the plot's designated purpose, with only animal canopies permitted. However, the shaded area of these canopies must not exceed 40 percent of the total plot area.



Munira Al-Amir

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Farwaniya Governor with the delegation of coordinators for the Middle East Conference on Medical Physics 2025.

Farwaniya Governor welcomes Mideast Medical Physics Conference delegation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: Farwaniya Governor of Farwaniya Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser Al-Sabah, received this morning at the general diwan of Farwaniya Governorate a delegation of coordinators for the Middle East Conference on Medical Physics 2025, which will be held from February 8-10, 2025.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the delegation included the following members:

- Dr. Mishari Al-Naimi, Head of the Department of Radiation Physics and Head of the Middle East Organization for Natural Physics
- Dr. Iman Al-Tawhid, representative of the Kuwait Medical Association
- Dr. Sheikha Al-Obaidli, Head of the Radiotherapy Unit at the Kuwait Cancer Center
- Dr. Hassan Kharita, representative of the International Federation of Medical

- Physics
- Dr. Rabie Hamoud, an expert from the International Atomic Energy Agency
- Dr. Hadi Fayyad, representative of the Middle East Federation of Medical Physics
- Counselor Alaa Malallah, coordinator of the Women's Health Association.

The governor commended the efforts exerted to organize such voluntary conferences, which target youth, university students, and professionals in the health sector.

He said the conference would be a valuable addition to the medical system by contributing to the development of the health sector in Kuwait and aligning it with global medical advancements.

In conclusion, Dr. Iman Al-Tawhid and the accompanying delegation expressed their gratitude to the governor for the warm reception.

diwaniya

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

The Assad era ends after 60 years: what's next for Syria?

"THE Assad family's six-decade reign in Syria has concluded, marking the end of an era that reshaped the country's political, social and economic landscape," columnist **Dr. Noura Saleh Al-Maji** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"While many view this as a significant step forward, the critical and daunting question remains: What comes after Assad?"

"Syria's future in the post-Assad era is shrouded in uncertainty, influenced by the country's unique geopolitical significance, the involvement of various international stakeholders, the positions of major global powers like the United States and the unexpectedly rapid fall of Bashar al-Assad. Below, we explore three potential scenarios for Syria's future in this new chapter.



Dr. Noura Al-Maji

"In the short term, this scenario refers not to the creation of independent states but rather to dividing Syria into zones of influence, which could eventually pave the way for a more permanent partition.

"While the notion of Syria's division has often been dismissed as a conspiracy theory or media exaggeration, the country's distinct circumstances make this possibility more credible.

"The swift and unexpected advance of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Aleppo, led by Abu Mohammad al-Julani with little resistance, hints at a coordinated effort by external powers to reorganize Syria following Assad's ouster; while no concrete evidence or maps detail such plans, the likely beneficiaries offer significant clues such as:

"Israel: Following Assad's fall, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu declared that the Golan Heights would remain under Israeli control indefinitely.

"The Israeli forces demolished much of Syria's military infrastructure, advanced into the buffer zone and expanded their reach to include Druze-majority areas such as Suwayda.

"Notably, some Druze leaders have advocated aligning with Israel, fearing the control of HTS, led by a figure they associate with extremist ideologies.

"Turkey: Turkey has long claimed historical ties to Aleppo and, more recently, has expressed interest in regions like Idlib and parts of Homs.

"This potential division could result in four distinct zones of influence, reportedly backed by the United States -- a Druze-controlled region under Israeli influence; a Kurdish region; a Turkish-influenced area and a Sunni-majority region in central Syria.

"This scenario is already unfolding. HTS, a coalition of headline opposition factions, has established control over Damascus and formed a transitional government under Mohammad al-Bashir, with backing from external actors, particularly the United States.

"The rise of an Islamist government is plausible due to several factors -- the Sunni majority, which suffered under decades of minority rule, views this as a restoration of their rightful position; HTS's dominance and the leadership of al-Julani, who has garnered both power and popularity and Al-Julani's assurances on human rights, minority protections and a focus on reconstruction, alongside a commitment to avoid conflicts with Israel, have resonated with both local and international audiences.

"External powers may tolerate a Taleban-like regime in Syria as long as it maintains stability, respects minority rights to a minimum degree and does not jeopardize key international interests.

"While a pluralistic democracy is an aspirational vision for Syria, it remains an unlikely outcome. The dominance of extremist factions, the self-serving agendas of external powers and deep-rooted sectarian divides accumulated over decades all hinder the establishment of a democratic system.

"Syria's path forward remains uncertain, with possibilities ranging from division to headline governance or an improbable democratic transition.

"The country's fate will ultimately be determined by internal dynamics and the interests of influential external players, leaving Syrians to navigate a complex and challenging future."

Also:

"If you want to destroy a nation, all you need to do is appoint rulers drawn from its most unfit and corrupt elements."

ments," columnist **Talal Abdul Karim Al-Arab** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"These individuals, rather than serving as stewards of their country's prosperity, become its downfall, fostering environments of corruption, injustice and ignorance.

"They distract the populace with trivial pursuits, superstitions and endless, sterile debates, all while systemic decay takes root.

"Tragically, this blueprint has been realized in several Arab nations that were once powerful, influential and globally respected.

"Today, countries such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen have become shadows of their former selves -- failed states teetering on the edge of collapse and subject to the whims of hostile external powers.

"The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria exposed a horrifying level of brutality. Hundreds of thousands were killed and millions more displaced, turning a once-thriving nation into a breeding ground for corruption and despair.

"To maintain its fragile grip on power, the regime handed over Syria's sovereignty to foreign actors whose only concern was advancing their own interests.

"Russia gained airbases and access to Mediterranean ports it could never have dreamed of securing otherwise.

"Turkey established control over border regions, using loyal factions to combat Kurdish groups. Meanwhile, the United States set up bases and seized control of key oil fields.

"Iran, however, emerged as the dominant force, leveraging its influence over the Syrian government to turn the country into an arena for settling its historical grievances.

"The sectarian militias and armed factions, brought in under Iranian auspices, inflicted unspeakable crimes on the Syrian people. Mass graves, prison torture and survivor testimonies have unveiled the extent of these atrocities. What has been revealed in Syria is horrifying, but similar revelations may soon emerge from Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon.

"In Iraq, WikiLeaks exposed the criminal actions of figures like Nouri al-Maliki, whose tenure was marked by treachery and violence.

"Documents revealed his complicity in providing the names of scientists and military personnel to execution squads affiliated with Israel and Iran. These squads systematically assassinated individuals vital to Iraq's intellectual and military fabric.

"Maliki's reign also saw rampant torture and killing, acts that human rights organizations have deemed sufficient for prosecution under international law.

"Notably, Maliki's role in the emergence of ISIS remains a critical point of scrutiny. The extremist group appeared during his time in power, armed and organized, targeting everyone except Iranian-backed militias and affiliated groups.

"Prime Minister Mohammad Shia' Al-Sudani's demands for Syria's government to cease terrorist activities against its neighbors ring hollow.

"His own country's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), officially aligned with Iran, have engaged in terrorist acts against Syrians and others. Before advising others, Al-Sudani must address the foreign interference that continues to undermine Iraq's sovereignty and stability.

"The recent diplomatic overtures suggest Syria may reintegrate into the Arab League, but the path forward remains uncertain.

"The current leadership's rhetoric offers little assurance of meaningful change. Fanatical attitudes and unjustified hostilities persist, raising doubts about the prospects for an open, liberal and inclusive Syria. Without a transformative approach, the hesitancy to rebuild relationships with the wounded nation will endure.

"The decline of these nations serves as a cautionary tale about the catastrophic consequences of corrupt and self-serving leadership.

"The crimes committed in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon have left deep scars, while foreign powers exploit their vulnerabilities for strategic gain.

"For these nations to reclaim their dignity and sovereignty, they must confront the injustices of the past, prioritize governance that serves the people and resist the influence of external actors seeking to perpetuate their suffering."

— **Compiled by PFX Fernandes**



KFF photo
Kuwait Fire Force chief Major General Talal Al-Roumi and Brigadier Dr. Rashed Al-Marri being briefed on a new project.

KFF, GCC center discuss cooperation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): Chief of Kuwait Fire Force Major General Talal Al-Roumi on Wednesday held talks with the head of the GCC center for emergency management, Brigadier Dr. Rashed Al-Marri, on mutual cooperation in the spheres of catastrophes, crises and emergencies.

The KFF said in a statement that Maj. Gen. Al-Roumi received Brig. Al-Marri and his accompanying delegation, lauding the cooperation between the force and GCC center. He also expressed readiness to put all resources at disposal of the center in the fire dousing and civil protection spheres.

Court acquits TV compere, blogger in separate State Security lawsuits

Ruling Feb 25 in 3 constitutional cases

By **Jaber Al-Hamoud**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: The Court of Appeals, during its session headed by Counselor Nasr Salem Al-Haid, along with counselors Saud Al-Sanea and Tariq Metwali, upheld the acquittal of TV presenter Fajer Al-Saeed and blogger Fahad Muzal against whom a State Security case each was filed.

In the first case, the Court of Appeals upheld the verdict issued by the Criminal Court which acquitted Al-Fajer Al-Saeed of charges of offending the Amir in a video clip broadcasted during the reign of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad. The court stated that the phrases used in the video cannot be criminalized.

In the second case, the Court of Appeals up-

held the verdict issued by a lower court which acquitted blogger Fahad Muzal of charges of broadcasting false news and challenging the rights and authority of His Highness the Amir in June 2024.

Meanwhile, the Court of Appeals adjourned for two weeks the case filed against an employee of the Ministry of Communications who is accused of embezzlement.

The Criminal Court had earlier sentenced the employee to seven-year imprisonment for embezzling KD 6 million from his employer over a period of four years. He had collected sums owed to the state by companies and deposited them into his personal bank account instead of the ministry's account. The court also ordered him to return the stolen amount, imposed a fine of KD 12 million, totaling KD 18 million, and mandated his dismissal from public office for a period of five years.

Ruling set for Feb 25: The Constitutional Court has decided to adjourn to February 5, 2025 the pronouncement of the verdict in three

direct constitutional appeals.

The first appeal was filed by Mohammad Nasser Al-Sayer & Sons Company against the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Competition Protection Authority, in his official capacity. The company is seeking a ruling on the constitutionality of article 1/320, clause 3, items 1 and 2 of law No. 72/2020 on the protection of competition, as well as the unconstitutionality of articles 1, 46, 50, and 120 of decision No. 14/2021, which pertains to the issuance of the executive regulations for the aforementioned law.

The second appeal, filed by the same company, requests a ruling on the constitutionality of article 34 and 35 of the law, and articles 87 to 99 of chapter 8 of decision No. 14 regarding the issuance of its executive regulations.

The final appeal was filed by the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies and others against the Fatwa and Legislation Department, seeking a decision on the constitutionality of the Competition Protection Law No. 72/2020 and its executive regulations.

2 Kuwaitis in street fight over traffic 'obstruction'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: A 1966-born citizen has accused a 1988-born citizen of insulting and physically confronting him in Maidan Hawally over a traffic issue, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to the investigation report, the vehicle of the accused was following that of the victim when a half-lorry stopped in front of them in Maidan Hawally. The accused thought the victim was deliberately obstructing traffic, so he got out of his vehicle, slapped the victim in the face and insulted him by saying, "You are not a man." The victim fell to the ground after the slap, but he managed to get back up and hit the defendant in self-defense.

Investigations are ongoing with both individuals, and necessary steps will be taken in this regard.



KFF photo
Major General Talal Al-Roumi and his team during the tour.

KFF conducts checks on stadium safety, security

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: Head of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) Major General Talal Mohammed Al-Roumi conducted an inspection of the security points at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium to review the preparations, operations, and the overall plan implemented to ensure the safety of the audience of Khaleeji Zain 26 championship.

According to a press release issued by KFF, Major General Al-Roumi conveyed the greetings of the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Al-Saud Al-Sabah to the firefighters, emphasizing the importance of adhering to the security and organizational plans to ensure the smooth and safe running of the matches.

During the visit, he received a detailed briefing from the committee responsible for securing the Khaleeji Zain 26 Cup. The presentation covered the security plan, the distribution of security points, firefighting mechanisms, rapid intervention strategies, prevention measures, and the safety systems in place, including firefighting, alarm, and ventilation systems.

Major General Al-Roumi expressed his appreciation for the relentless efforts exerted by the firefighters, and praised the committee's preparations and coordination with the relevant authorities.

He commended the collective efforts aimed at enhancing Kuwait's reputation in hosting major sporting events.



Kuwait Municipality officials supervising the arrangements at the stadium.



Photos by Samer Shaqair
Municipality workers (left and right) in final touches before the tournament begins.

Historic event starts Dec 21

50 state-of-the-art ambulances, 400 medics deployed for 'Cup'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): Kuwait is making proper medical arrangements and preparations for the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup, better known as "Khaleeji Zain 26", by means of deploying nearly 50 advanced ambulances and 400 staffers for the historic sports event, said a health official.

The ambulances and medics are to be stationed at the stadiums that will host the fixtures of the most significant Gulf football championship, Chief of the Health Ministry's Medical Emergency Department Dr. Ahmad Al-Shatti told KUNA.

Ambulance workers have been properly trained in handling soccer injuries, the health official boasted, reassuring that ambulance lanes would be secured in order to get easy access to nearby hospitals.

Furthermore, medical teams are to be deployed at all hotels where the participating Gulf sports teams would stay, Al-Shatti underlined, noting that evacuation plans have been set out to ensure immediate response to any looming emergency.

Kuwait is gearing up for a his-

toric soccer event by playing host to the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup titled "Khaleeji Zain 26" from December 21, 2024, to January 3, 2025, 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.

This marks the second time the tournament will carry the "Khaleeji Zain" name, following the previous edition, "Khaleeji Zain 25", held in Basra, Iraq, in 2022-23.

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.

Test driver vanishes with car

Asian found dead in Wafra campsite

By **Munif Nayef**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff & Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: An Asian expatriate in his forties was found dead in a tent in Wafra due to unknown reasons, and his body has been referred to the Forensic Medicine Department to determine the cause of his death.

According to security sources, when the Operations Room of the Ministry of Interior received information about an unresponsive Asian individual inside a tent at a camp in Wafra, security personnel and paramedics rushed to the location and discovered that the individual - an Asian man - had died. His body was transferred to the Forensic Medicine Department, and a case was reg-

istered.

Test driver vanishes: An arrest order has been issued for a Bedoun resident who deceived a car owner by requesting for a test drive and then fled with the vehicle, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

A 1967-born Kuwaiti citizen lodged a complaint at Kaifan Police Station against a 1990-born Bedoun resident, explaining that he had handed over his 2000-model gray-colored Nissan Pathfinder to the accused for a test drive after he expressed interest in purchasing the vehicle. He gave a down payment of KD 100 and promised to pay the remaining KD 600 after the transfer of ownership. However, instead of returning the car, the suspect fled with it.

Cabinet remembers late Amir Sheikh Nawaf, celebrates Sheikh Meshal's first anniversary

Key decree for Kuwait-China port and water desalination projects approved

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): The Cabinet held its regular weekly session on Wednesday at the conventions hall at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium under chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Following the session, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Shareedah Al-Mousherji stated that the ministers at start of the session recalled the first anniversary of the late Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's demise falling on December 16th.

They expressed grief for the late Amir's death, lauding him for the good traits which will live forever to guide the coming generations namely with respect of sacrificing everything precious for sake of Kuwait's promotion, security and stability.

On the occasion of the first anniversary of proclaiming His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as the Amir of the State of Kuwait, on December 16, the ministers invoked His Almighty to back up his tasks for Kuwait's promotion and renaissance, bestow upon him good health and grace him with long life.

The ministers lauded the official visit by the Jordanian Crown Prince Al-Hussein bin Abdullah II to the country during which he met with Their Highnesses the Amir and the Crown Prince, respectively Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, discussing issues of common interest, latest developments on the regional and international arenas and means of promoting the mutual interests at various levels.

On sidelines of the session, His Highness the Prime Min-



Photo taken during the Cabinet meeting under chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

ister toured the stadium to examine preparations for hosting Khaleeji 26 tournament due between December 21 and January 3.

He and the accompanying ministers were briefed by the Minister of Information, Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Chair of the tournament steering committee, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, and officials of the Public Authority for Sports, about preparedness of the installations to host the games and details of the planned inauguration ceremony.

The Cabinet approved a decree-into-law regarding the memorandum of understanding between the State of Kuwait Government and its counterpart of the People's Republic of China on cooperation in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Mina (port) project and the affiliate protocol that included various issues such as specifying the executive parties in the two sides. Kuwait will be represented by the Ministry of Public Works and China by the Ministry of Transports.

The ministers were informed that the Chinese govern-

ment, namely "the national committee for development and reforms," affiliated to the Chinese Presidency, nominated a Chinese company to partake in executing the venture of the water desalination plants in Kuwait.

In this respect, the Cabinet decided to task a commission to follow up on the executive status of the agreements and memoranda of understanding, signed by Kuwait and China, under chairmanship of the Minister of Public Works Dr. Nora Al-Meshaan, and ensure speedy and adequate measures in the project execution.

On the 53rd anniversary of Bahrain's National Day and the 25th anniversary of King Hamad bin Salman al-Khalifa's taking of the helm of power, the ministers extended congratulations to the monarch, the brotherly Bahraini people on the two occasions, lauding the noticeable accomplishments made during his era, wishing the monarch good health and his gracious people further progress and prosperity.

As to the National Day marking the founder of Qatar Sheikh Jassem bin Mohammad Al-Thani's taking of power, falling on December 18, the ministers expressed congratulations to Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, wishing him good health, the state of Qatar and the gracious people utmost promotion and prosperity.

In response to a proposal by the Minister of Social Affairs, Family Affairs and Childhood Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, the cabinet agreed to dissolve a number of public welfare societies for their failure in abiding by standing laws.

The ministers examined a number of topics in the agenda, approved some and referred others to the ministerial committees for studying and preparing reports to complete the necessary measures.

They endorsed minutes of the higher committee for authenticating the Kuwaiti citizenship including the cases of losing or withdrawing the citizenship, involving a number of persons who had acquired it through fraud and counterfeiting, in line with the decree-into-law Number 15/1959.

Kuwaiti & Uzbek FMs discuss bilateral ties

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya and his Uzbek counterpart Bakhtiyor Saidov discussed bilateral ties in a phone call on Thursday.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that the two sides also tackled

boosting cooperation in different fields, as well as the recent regional and international developments.



Al-Yahya

Lulu joins 125-year celebration of Kuwait & UK diplomatic relations

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: Lulu Kuwait Director Muhammed Haris had the honor of attending a prestigious reception hosted by the British Embassy to commemorate the 125th anniversary of official diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and the State of Kuwait.

The event was graced by the esteemed presence of His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Edward, and Her Excellency Belinda Lewis, the British Ambassador to Kuwait.

This milestone celebration reflects the depth of the strong and enduring relations between the two nations, including in defense and military cooperation, showcasing a legacy of trust and

mutual respect.

We are honored to have participated in this remarkable ceremony, a testament to 125 years of friendship and partnership between Kuwait and the UK. Lulu Kuwait proudly supports this enduring relationship through our extensive range of imported products from our sourcing center in Birmingham, UK, bringing our customers the finest British quality and tradition.

LuLu also take immense pride in being a key and strategic partner, as initiated by the British Embassy in Kuwait, to promoting and supporting the exports of Palestinian products to the market.



Lulu Kuwait's Director Muhammed Haris, with His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Edward, at the British Embassy reception.

Continued from Page 1

China opens

in attendance, Al-Yahya extended his congratulations to Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jianwei on the occasion. He commended the strong cooperation between the two nations and expressed optimism over advancing bilateral ties, in line with the aspirations of both countries' leaders and peoples.

He pointed out that the opening of the embassy in Mishref marks a significant step in enhancing Kuwait-China relations. He affirmed that the two countries have started taking steps to implement their agreements, expressing satisfaction with such progress. He assured that Kuwait is ready to accelerate the implementation of vital projects; acknowledging that while some of these projects may take time due to the need for preparatory work, others could proceed more swiftly.

On the other hand, Jianwei underscored the strategic importance of the Mubarak Port project for Kuwait, since it is an integral part of the agreements made during His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visit to China last year. He explained that the first phase of the port project took more than 10 years and it requires a thorough reassessment of designs to adapt to current conditions. He expressed confidence in overcoming challenges, citing the experience of the large Chinese government company involved in the project and the strong coordination between both sides. "We are optimistic about the future of this project, but it will require patience and continuous effort," he said.

He also thanked Al-Yahya and the other attendees, recognizing the deep-rooted friendship between the two countries. He highlighted the importance that Kuwait's leadership places on the development of Chinese-Kuwaiti relations.

On the occasion of the first anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal's ascension to power, Jianwei extended his heartfelt congratulations and best wishes for His Highness' health, success and continued leadership. He hopes for further progress and prosperity for Kuwait.

Reflecting on the significance of the year 2024 for Sino-Kuwaiti relations, he stated that the opening of the new embassy marks a milestone in the diplomatic ties between the two countries. "Despite the diplomatic relations dating back to 1971, the continued growth of these relations made the embassy's previous rented facilities unsuitable. The new headquarters, which began construction in 2019 and was completed in 2024, reflects the strong and ongoing partnership between the two nations," he revealed.

He put the spotlight on the support of Kuwaiti government agencies like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Kuwait Municipality;

as well as the Chinese companies and Chinese community in Kuwait. He expressed deep appreciation for everyone who contributed to the embassy's construction.

He added that 2024 is an important year for Sino-Kuwaiti relations, considering the significant progress of projects stemming from the consensus between Chinese President Xi Jinping and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal. "Trade relations between the two countries remain strong, with China continuing to be Kuwait's largest trading partner and the people-to-people exchanges are flourishing," he stressed.

Before the inauguration ceremony, Jianwei held a press conference, during which he praised the strengthening of Chinese-Kuwaiti relations throughout 2024; particularly in terms of trade, cultural exchange and deepening mutual political trust.

Citizenship pulled

The Ministry of Interior said in a press release that the committee had decided to strip 2,899 individuals of Kuwaiti citizenship, pending referral to the Cabinet.

Kuwait's Central

eased, albeit unevenly, due to the implementation of monetary tightening policies across many advanced and emerging economies since March 2022.

"This has prompted a trend among major central banks towards recalibrating the monetary policy cycle and gradually reducing interest rates throughout 2024," reads the statement.

"While economic growth rates are anticipated to stabilize significantly in 2025, growth prospects remain affected by prevailing uncertainties stemming from numerous risks and challenges, including the persistence of geopolitical tensions and the potential resurgence of supply chain disruptions."

With regard to monetary policy developments in the State of Kuwait, the statement emphasized that CBK has adopted a gradual and balanced approach in adjusting the discount rate, ensuring alignment with the local economic conditions, maintaining macroeconomic stability, and enhancing sustainable growth.

"Therefore, CBK cut its discount rate by 25 basis points, reducing it to 4.00 percent as of September 19, 2024," it pointed out.

At the macroeconomic level, the CBK's statement highlighted that inflation rate has slowed from about 4.71 percent in April 2022 to 2.44 percent in October 2024, with the average inflation rate reaching about 3.00 percent during the period of January-October 2024, compared to 3.64 percent in 2023.

Weekend rain

between 20 and 22 degrees Celsius. The sea will remain light to moderate, with waves rising between 2 and 6 feet.

Friday night will turn cold to very cold, with cloudy to partly cloudy conditions, southeasterly to variable winds at 8 to 40 km/h, and a chance of scattered, potentially thundery rain. Minimum temperatures will range from 10 to 12 degrees Celsius, with sea conditions remaining light to moderate.

Saturday will be cold with northwesterly winds of 12 to 45 km/h, potentially causing dust in exposed areas. Maximum temperatures will drop to 17-19 degrees Celsius, with light to moderate sea conditions.

Saturday night will be cold to very cold, with northwesterly winds of 12 to 42 km/h. Minimum temperatures are expected to range between 7 and 9 degrees Celsius, with light to moderate sea waves.

Kuwait prospers

defined Kuwait such as adherence to the law and the Constitution, advancing the wheel of development, and ensuring the security and stability of the nation.

Wise Leadership

His Highness the Amir has demonstrated wise leadership, and has been steadfast in protecting Kuwait's achievements and consolidating its prominent role in various sectors. Guided by his vision, Kuwait will continue to be a model state that relies on established values and is driven by limitless aspirations toward a brighter future.

Constitutional Oath

After His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad took the constitutional oath on December 20, 2023, he delivered the Amiri speech in which he outlined Kuwait's future vision.

In his speech, His Highness affirmed the importance of upholding national and constitutional principles in order to combat corruption and further strengthen Kuwait's leadership role both within the Gulf region and on the global stage.

Performance of the Two Authorities

His Highness the Amir affirmed the importance of protecting the unity of the nation and working to advance Kuwait in line with the aspirations of its people.

In his speech, he criticized the performance of both the legislative and executive authorities, particularly regarding issues that have negatively impacted the country's interests, such as unfair appointments, the national citizenship file, and amnesty.

His Highness firmly rejected any form of quid pro quo between the two

authorities for personal gain. He also announced sovereign decisions, including the temporary suspension of appointments, promotions, and transfers, to ensure justice and fairness in a manner that serves the best interests of the country.

Gulf Visits

One of the most prominent milestones in the first year of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad's leadership was the strengthening of joint Gulf action and visits that enhance integration among Gulf countries.

In February and March 2024, His Highness the Amir undertook official visits to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, marking a key milestone in Kuwait's foreign policy. These visits were met with warm receptions, both officially and by the public, which reflect the high regard in which His Highness the Amir and Kuwait are held by their Gulf brothers. The visits featured military parades, technical exhibitions, and cultural displays, with His Highness being awarded the highest honors by the GCC leaders in recognition of the deep fraternal ties between the nations. They reaffirmed His Highness's commitment to a renewed vision for Gulf integration, positioning it as a safety valve against regional challenges in a way that enhances Kuwait's role in consolidating cooperation among Gulf nations. This vision builds on the legacy of Kuwait's previous leaders and strengthens its role in regional unity.

The Last Ten Days of Ramadan

On April 1, 2024, as the National Assembly elections drew near, His Highness the Amir delivered a speech marking the last ten days of the month of Ramadan. His message called for a renewal of national values and emphasized the collective responsibility toward Kuwait's future.

He urged everyone to spread love and optimism, and cautioned against practices that threaten national unity.

The Amiri speech included a strong appeal to the people to vote for candidates who prioritize the public interest over personal agendas. His Highness the Amir said, "We hope the elections will result in a distinguished council composed of enlightened individuals who draw on previous parliamentary lessons and experiences, and who are committed to fulfilling their national responsibilities."

Dissolution of the National Assembly

On May 11, 2024, His Highness the Amir took the decision to dissolve the National Assembly and suspend certain articles of the Constitution for a period not exceeding four years, with the aim of reviewing and correcting the democratic process.

The day following the dissolution, he delivered a historic speech that addressed the country's current reality and the challenges faced in the previ-

ous era.

In his speech, His Highness the Amir highlighted key issues concerning the nation's true status and the necessary steps to move forward.

The speech - a roadmap for Kuwait's future

His Highness the Amir's speech was a clear roadmap for Kuwait's future, and had the following prominent points:

■ The unhealthy atmosphere Kuwait has faced in recent years, which allowed corruption to spread in most state institutions, including security, economic, and even the judiciary, which should be the people's refuge for the protection of their rights and freedoms.

■ Some MPs threatened to file interpellations simply because a minister returned to the government, while others objected to the nomination of certain individuals for ministerial positions. They either ignored or overlooked the fact that choosing the prime minister and Cabinet members is the exclusive constitutional right of the head of state, and no one has the authority to infringe upon this right.

■ His Highness the Amir said, "I will never allow democracy to be exploited to destroy the state, because the interests of the people of Kuwait are a trust upon us, and we have a duty to protect them. Just as our previous rulers were committed to establishing its foundations and entrusted us with its banner, our responsibility is to hand over the banner of democracy to those who come after us, high and proud."

■ His Highness expressed deep concern about certain government actions that resulted in serious violations due to parliamentary pressure or misguided efforts. These actions have harmed the public interest, to the point where individuals convicted of treason remain free due to unacceptable practices. He firmly declared, "I will never allow this to happen again under any circumstances."

■ The progress down the wrong path has reached unacceptable limits, dismantling constitutional values and wasting democratic principles that everyone accepted as the foundation for achieving the public interest.

■ His Highness highlighted the unacceptable interference by some in Amir's powers, particularly in the selection of the Crown Prince. He reminded that this is a clear constitutional right of the Amir, and other authorities' roles come into play only as defined by the Constitution.

■ Security is a top priority, and His Highness affirmed that the government would focus on reviewing social security laws first, particularly addressing issues such as people who entered the country unlawfully, assumed Kuwait's nationality without right, or falsely claimed lineages. He also highlighted concerns over individuals holding dual citizenship or using forgery to gain privileges that rightfully belong to Ku-

waiti citizens.

■ His Highness criticized the state of Abdullah Al-Salem Hall, which has become a platform for unusual, undesirable, and unacceptable statements from some MPs. Furthermore, the abuse of the grilling motions, which were originally a sophisticated tool for accountability, had turned into a means of blackmail, threats, and personal gain.

His Highness the Amir made it clear that the next stage would involve a thorough evaluation of the Kuwaiti democratic experience, with a concerted effort to correct its course and ensure it serves the true interests of the nation.

The New Government

On May 15, 2024, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah and the new ministers took the constitutional oath before His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad.

In his speech, His Highness the Amir stressed that the upcoming stage requires hard work and unwavering dedication to achieve the interests of the country and citizens.

He called for diligent efforts and tangible achievements that would enhance Kuwait's position both locally and internationally.

On December 1, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad inaugurated the 45th Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit held in Kuwait, which was attended by the leaders of the GCC countries.

In his speech at the summit's opening session, His Highness the Amir highlighted that the meeting in Kuwait symbolized the unity and strength of GCC cohesion and integration.

He reaffirmed the firm belief in the necessity of strengthening and unifying joint Gulf action, and urged for an acceleration of efforts toward achieving Gulf economic integration.

The Palestinian Issue

In the Arab affairs, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah, representing His Highness the Amir, delivered a speech during the 33rd Arab League Summit, where Kuwait reaffirmed its stance on Arab issues, particularly the Palestinian cause.

He called for urgent international action to alleviate the humanitarian suffering in the Gaza Strip.

Kuwait affirmed that the region is facing serious challenges and increasing risks that need enhanced coordination and joint action.

Riyadh Summit

On November 11, 2024, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad's representative, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, delivered a speech at the extraordinary Arab and Islamic summit held in Riyadh. His speech addressed a range of issues of common concern among Arab and Islamic nations.

French president arrives to survey Cyclone Chido damage

Like end of days ... survivors recall fury of Mayotte's apocalyptic cyclone

MAMOUZOU, Mayotte, Dec 19, (AP) — They clustered around water taps, rare sources of electricity and each other. Four days after the strongest cyclone in nearly a century ripped through the French island territory of Mayotte off the coast of Africa, survivors recalled the horror of the storm that caught many by surprise.

Streets were lined with the rubble of informal settlements whose migrant populations complicated the efforts to count the dead.

"We lived something very apocalyptic," said Samuel Anli, 28, who rode out Saturday's storm in a windowless office for hours as shrieking wind gusts exceeding 220 kph (136 mph) tore away doors and walls.

He and others held the door to their small office shut, fearing for their lives. "We thought if it lasted one or two hours more we'd all be dead," he said. His home was partly destroyed and three of his relatives were injured by flying metal.

On Wednesday, French authorities described the storm as a "catastrophe of exceptional intensity."

"The island is devastated," they said, putting the confirmed death toll at 31 but noting that it could be much higher, partly because of the Muslim practice of burying the dead within 24 hours.

Some survivors and aid groups have described hasty burials and the stench of bodies.

Mayotte, located in the Indian Ocean between mainland Africa's east coast and northern Madagascar, is France's poorest territory and is a magnet for migrants hoping to reach Europe.

The cyclone devastated entire neighborhoods as many people ignored the warnings, thinking the storm wouldn't be so extreme.

Days after it passed and destroyed or damaged even sturdy structures such as health centers, residents were left to pick their way through a landscape in search of food. Phone and internet service remained spotty.

Among the damaged and destroyed homes in Mayotte's capital, Mamoudzou, people lined up with jugs to get water Wednesday or waited to charge their phones. Other lines stretched for hours at working gas stations.

The French government deployed gendarmes and other security forces Wednesday to secure food distribution points and assure order in areas where crowds were massing to find fuel or phone signals, the Interior Ministry said in a statement, noting also that more than 8,800 people were being housed in emergency shelter.

Dozens of French military personnel set up camp at the



A young girl walks in the Kaweni slum on the outskirts of Mamoudzou, in the French Indian Ocean island of Mayotte, Thursday, Dec. 19, 2024, after Cyclone Chido. (AP)

primary airport on Mayotte's main island, Grand Terre, which remained closed due to damage, leaving most residents with little hope of going anywhere soon. Roads were also widely damaged.

French Prime Minister François Bayrou has said more than 1,500 people were injured, more than 200 critically. But authorities fear hundreds or even thousands of people have died. Authorities said 100,000 were living in a "precarious situation."

On the French island of Reunion, about a three-hour flight away, loved ones gathered to donate aid to Mayotte's survivors. Some said their families in Mayotte had no food or water and that it had taken days to contact them.

"It is difficult because I feel helpless," said 19-year-old

Khayra Djoumoi Thany.

Anrafa Parassouramin said she feared for her relatives in Mayotte. "We are also afraid of disease outbreaks, because people are drinking water from wherever they can get it, and it's not necessarily potable water," she said.

French Health Minister Geneviève Darrieussecq has raised concerns about the risk of a cholera epidemic on the archipelago, which had an outbreak of a highly drug-resistant strain earlier this year.

Meanwhile, France's President Emmanuel Macron arrived Thursday to the Indian Ocean archipelago of Mayotte to survey the devastation that Cyclone Chido wrought across the French territory as thousands of people tried cope without the bare essentials such as water or electricity.

"Mayotte is demolished," an airport security agent told Macron as soon as he stepped off the plane.

The security agent, Assane Haloi, said small children are without water or electricity and have nowhere to go because "everything is demolished."

"There's no roof, there's nothing. No water, no food, no electricity. We can't even shelter, we are all wet with our children covering ourselves with whatever we have so that we can sleep," she said, asking for emergency aid.

Macron went on an helicopter for an aerial appraisal of the damage. He then headed to the hospital in Mamoudzou, Mayotte's capital, to meet with medical staff and patients. He will then visit a destroyed neighborhood.

French authorities said at least 31 people have died and more than 1,500 people were injured, more than 200 critically.

But it's feared hundreds or even thousands of people have died after the strongest cyclone in nearly a century ripped through the French territory of Mayotte off the coast of Africa on Saturday.

Ahamadi Mohammed said Macron's visit "is a good thing because he'll be able to see by himself the damage."

"I think that we'll then get significant aid to try and get the island back on its feet," the 58-year-old said.

A navy ship was due to arrive in Mayotte on Thursday with 180 tons of aid and equipment, according to the French military.

People living in a large slum on the outskirts of Mamoudzou were some of the hardest hit from the cyclone. Many had lost their houses, some had lost friends.

Nassirou Hamidouni sheltered in his house when the cyclone hit.

His neighbor was killed when his house collapsed on him and his six children. Hamidouni and others dug through the rubble to reach them.

The 28-year-old father of five is now trying to rebuild his own house, which was also destroyed.

He believes the death toll is much higher than what's officially being reported given the severity of what he lived through.

"The 30 deaths are too small for how the situation happened, it was very hard," he said.

Mayotte, located in the Indian Ocean between mainland Africa's east coast and northern Madagascar, is France's poorest territory.

The cyclone devastated entire neighborhoods as many people ignored the warnings, thinking the storm wouldn't be so extreme.



Chinese President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, and his wife Peng Liyuan greet the welcoming crowd in Macao, south China, Dec. 18, 2024. (Xinhua)

Xi arrives in Macao for anniversary celebrations

Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Macao on Wednesday afternoon on a special plane.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, will attend a gathering celebrating the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland and the inauguration ceremony of the sixth-term government of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) on Friday.

He will also inspect the Macao SAR. In a brief speech delivered at the airport, Xi said that over the past 25 years, the practice of "one country, two systems" with Macao characteristics has achieved success widely recognized by the world, showcasing great vitality and unique charm.

Describing Macao as "a pearl on the palm" of the motherland, he expressed confidence in the promising future of Macao. "This is the glo-

ry of Macao residents and the pride of all Chinese people," he said.

"Every visit to this beautiful place has been very delightful for me," Xi said.

On behalf of the central government and Chinese people of all ethnic groups, he extended sincere greetings and best wishes to all Macao residents, adding that Macao's development and the well-being of Macao residents have always been on his mind. (Xinhua)



Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, left, and Republican presidential nominee former President Donald Trump attend a campaign event at the Butler Farm Show, Oct. 5, 2024, in Butler, Pa. (AP)

White House warns of looming shutdown consequences

Trump, Vance halt budget deal as Musk rallies opposition to excessive spending

WASHINGTON, Dec 19, (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump delivered a likely death blow to bipartisan congressional budget negotiations on Wednesday, rejecting the measure as full of giveaways to Democrats after billionaire ally Elon Musk whipped up outrage toward the bill and cheered on Republican lawmakers who announced their opposition.

Trump's joint statement with Vice President-elect JD Vance, which stopped the bill in its tracks, punctuated a day-long torrent of social media posts by Musk attacking the legislation for what he described as excessive spending.

"Stop the steal of your tax dollars!" Musk wrote on his social media platform X as he dangled primary challenges against anyone who voted for the budget deal, a threat Trump later echoed in a post of his own.

The episode showcased the growing political influence of Musk, whom Trump has selected alongside entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy to spearhead the Department of Government Efficiency, a nongovernmental task force formed to find ways to fire federal workers, cut programs and reduce regulations.

Rep. Andy Barr, a Republican from Kentucky, said his office was flooded with calls from constituents.

"My phone was ringing off the hook," he said. "The people who elected us are listening to Elon Musk."

In his statement with Vance, Trump said Republicans

should restart negotiations over the legislation, arguing that "anything else is a betrayal of our country." He also called for including an extension of the debt ceiling while President Joe Biden is in office.

"Increasing the debt ceiling is not great but we'd rather do it on Biden's watch," they said. "If Democrats won't cooperate on a debt ceiling increase now, what makes anyone think they would do it in June during our administration? Let's have this debate over the debt ceiling now."

Trump's opposition to what was considered must-pass legislation reinjected a sense of chaos and political brinkmanship that was reminiscent of his first term in office. It was a dramatic turn of events for House Speaker Mike Johnson, who negotiated the bill and has been undermined by Trump as he faces reelection for his post in just a couple of weeks. Republicans have a slim majority, raising the possibility of a replay of leadership disputes that paralyzed the House a year ago.

Many lawmakers were in the middle of holiday and year-end celebrations with staff when Trump came out against the legislation.

"I've been here 14 years, OK? So nothing up here surprises me anymore," said Rep. Steve Womack, a senior Republican appropriator from Arkansas. "We shouldn't be in this mess." The Biden administration criticized the possibility of a shutdown.

France's highest court upholds corruption conviction of ex-President Nicolas Sarkozy

PARIS, Dec 19, (AP) — France's highest court has upheld an appeal court decision which had found former President Nicolas Sarkozy guilty of corruption and influence peddling while he was the country's head of state.

Sarkozy, 69, faces a year in prison, but is expected to ask to be detained at home with an electronic bracelet - as is the case for any sentence of two years or less.

He was found guilty of corruption and influence peddling by both a Paris court in 2021 and an appeals court in 2023 for trying to bribe a magistrate in exchange for information about a legal case in which he was implicated.

"The convictions and sentences are therefore final," a Court of Cassation statement on Wednesday said.

Sarkozy, who was France's president from 2007 to 2012, retired from public life in 2017 though still plays an influential role in French conservative politics. He was among the guests who attended the reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral earlier this month.

Sarkozy, in a statement posted on X, said "I will assume my responsibilities



Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy leaves the Elysee Palace after a lunch with heads of states and officials, on Sept. 30, 2019 in Paris. (AP)

and face all the consequences."

He added: "I have no intention of complaining. But I am not prepared to accept the profound injustice done to me."

Sarkozy said he will seek to bring

the case to the European Court of Human Rights, and hopes those proceedings will result in "France being condemned."

He reiterated his "full innocence." "My determination is total in this case as in all others," he concluded.

Sarkozy's lawyer, Patrice Spinosi, said his client "will comply" with the ruling. This means the former president will have to wear an electronic bracelet, Spinosi said.

It is the first time in France's modern history that a former president has been convicted and sentenced to a prison term for actions during his term.

Sarkozy's predecessor, Jacques Chirac, was found guilty in 2011 of misuse of public money during his time as Paris mayor and was given a two-year suspended prison sentence.

Sarkozy has been involved in several other legal cases. He has denied any wrongdoing.

He faces another trial next month in Paris over accusations he took millions of dollars from then-Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi to illegally finance his successful 2007 campaign.

India Navy speedboat, ferry collision kills 13 off Mumbai

NEW DELHI, Dec 19, (Xinhua) — At least 13 people were killed Wednesday after a speedboat belonging to the Indian Navy crashed into a passenger ferry off Mumbai.

According to the Indian Navy, the speedboat was undergoing engine trials in the sea when it lost control and collided with the passenger ferry.

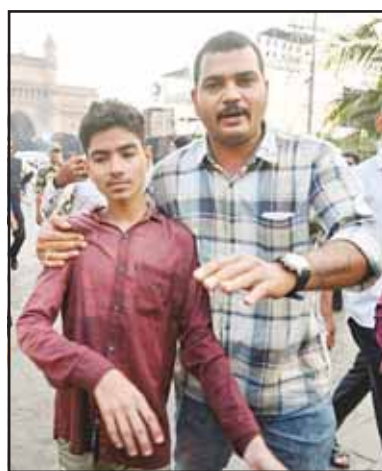
A statement issued by Indian Navy said that an Indian Navy craft "lost control while undertaking engine trials in Mumbai Harbour due to engine malfunction."

"As a result, the boat collided with a passenger ferry which subsequently capsized. 13 fatalities have been reported so far," it added.

Officials said 99 survivors have been sent to different hospitals.

"Survivors rescued from the incident site are being shifted to nearby hospitals. Search and rescue efforts have been immediately launched wherein four naval helicopters, 11 naval crafts, one Coast Guard boat and three marine police crafts have been pressed in action for recovering the survivors. 99 survivors have been rescued when reports last came in," Navy further said.

A video aired on television shows the speedboat carrying four men zig-zagging in the water before ramming into the ferry carrying passengers. The boat was sailing from the Gateway of India to Elephanta Island, which houses famous Gharपुरi caves, a tourist destination.



A passenger, left, is accompanied by the police after being rescued following an incident in which an Indian Navy speedboat lost control and crashed into a ferry carrying 100 passengers off the Mumbai coast, in Mumbai, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024. (AP)

Lat/Am

Morales slams 'lawfare': Former Bolivian President Evo Morales said that he is the target of a "lawfare" campaign to prevent his candidacy in next year's presidential elections.

The allegation came a day after the prosecutor's office issued an arrest warrant when Morales failed to appear to testify as part of an investigation into charges of human trafficking and aggravated statutory rape.

Morales, who was president from 2006 to 2019, denied the charges and said his constitutional rights, including being presumed innocent until proven guilty, were being violated.

Bolivian Attorney General Roger Mariaca on Monday said authorities will request a six-month detention of the ex-president while the investigation continues. (Xinhua)



Mexico praises migrants: Mex-

ico's president on Wednesday unveiled a bilingual "hymn" to Mexican migrants living in the United States, even as migrants from other countries continue to suffer abuses, delays and hostility in Mexico.

President Claudia Sheinbaum used her morning news briefing to present the song "Migrant Hymn." The lyrics, a mix of English and Spanish, include lines like "where we are from, no nos rajamos" (we don't give up).

Sheinbaum called Mexican migrants "heroes," in part because they sent \$63 billion back home to relatives in Mexico last year. Stressing migrants' loyalty to Mexico, the song says "Cambiamos de lugar, no de bandera" (we change our location, not our flag).

While about 11 million Mexicans live in the United States - including about 5 million without proper documents - many had to flee Mexico because of violence or lack of opportunities, and it remains unclear how loyal or closely tied they remain to the government.

It also remains unclear how much

the Mexican government is able - or willing - to do in the face of threats by U.S. president-elect Donald Trump to carry out mass deportations of migrants. Israel Concha, director of New Comienzos, a group in Mexico City that helps returning migrants fit back into society in Mexico, said "The challenges don't stop when we return to Mexico. Once again we face uncertainty about whether our own government is willing to accept us back in a dignified way and help us."

On the same day the hymn was unveiled, a migrant shelter in the northern border city of Reynosa announced it could no longer accept newcomers, because gangs were kidnapping so many migrants from its doorstep.

Rev. Héctor Silva, who runs the Senda de la Vida (Path of Life) in Reynosa, across from McAllen, Texas, said the situation is so dangerous in the cartel-dominated border city that police escort migrants to appointments for their U.S. asylum applications. (AP)

Market Movements 19-12-2024

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts		
UAE	-DFMGI	+0.19	5,046.55	SAUDI	-TASI	-0.57	11,892.44
EGYPT	-EGX	+0.08	30,526.71	JAPAN	-NIKKEI	-0.69	38,813.58
				PAKISTAN	-KSE 100	-4.37	106,228.56
				PHILIPPINES	-PSEi	-1.14	6,395.60

Business

Deal to help finance power plant

KFAED signs loan agreement with Republic of Tajikistan

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): A loan agreement was signed on Wednesday between Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), and the Republic of Tajikistan worth in total KD 5.2 million (estimated USD 16.9 million) to contribute to financing the Rogan Hydroelectric Power Plant project.

In a press release, KFAED said that the project aims to

enhance electricity production in Tajikistan by establishing a hydroelectric power plant with an installed capacity of 3,780 megawatts, which provides a sustainable and reliable source of energy.

The project will also help meet the growing local demand, enhance energy security, reduce carbon emissions and support the country's efforts to achieve sustainable development.

The Fund added that this project is in line with the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, indicating that Tajikistan seeks to reduce gas emissions by 40 to 50 percent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, which supports its efforts to transition to a low-carbon economy and achieve environmental sustainability.

KFAED noted that this is the sixth loan provided by

them to the Republic of Tajikistan after financing five projects in vital sectors such as road development and water network improvement with a total of 24.9 million dinars (about 80.9 million dollars).

KFAED Acting Director General Waleed Al-Bahar and the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Tajikistan Faiziddin Qahhorzoda signed the agreement.

Communication authority inks land leasing deal with Google



KUNA photos
Minister of State for Communications Affairs Omar Al-Omar mediates with the Acting Chairman of the Communication Authority Eng. Abdullah Al-Ajmi and Director of Google Cloud in Kuwait Shaima Al-Turkait.

Minister affirms significance of deal

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): The Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority signed a land leasing contract with the international conglomerate Google.

The deal, inking of which was attended by the Minister of State for Communication Affairs Omar Al-Omar, aims at setting up centers for updated data for clouding services in Kuwait.

The authority said in a statement that the deal is a crucial step in the efforts to update the digital infrastructure, back up digital transformation in the public and private sectors with advanced and safe clouding services.

It also provides flexible solutions, backs up innovation and business leadership through enabling startups and business leaders to depend on an advanced digital infrastructure, the statement affirmed.

The deal was inked on part of the authority by the acting chairperson Abdullah Al-Ajmi and Shaima Al-Turkait, the director of Google Kuwait.

Minister of State for Communication Affairs Omar Al-Omar said

that the establishment of advanced data center for safe and progressed clouding services is "a prime part of our vision for bolstering Kuwait's status as a credible regional hub in the field."

The minister, speaking to KUNA



Signing the contract by Acting Chairman of CITRA Eng. Abdullah Al-Ajmi and Director of Google Cloud in Kuwait Shaima Al-Turkait.

after the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Au-

thority signed a land leasing contract with the international conglomerate Google, said inking the contract is a qualitative step for enhancing the digital infrastructure and supporting the digital transformation plans in the private and public sectors. He

commitment to evolve its technological and innovative potentials.

The project will enable startups and business leaders to attain flexible technological solutions that in turn would boost the innovation and push forward national and regional economies.

Such a strategic partnership is a foundation for supporting the state efforts for attaining comprehensive digital transformation, strengthening technological leadership at the regional level, in tandem with "the country's vision to build a sustainable and diversified digital economy," he added.

The deal, inked earlier today with attendance of minister Al-Omar, aims at setting up centers for updated data for clouding services in Kuwait.

The authority said in a statement earlier that the deal is a crucial step in the efforts to update the digital infrastructure, back up digital transformation in the public and private sectors with advanced and safe clouding services.

It also provides flexible solutions, backs up innovation and business leadership through enabling startups and business leaders to depend on an advanced digital infrastructure, the statement affirmed.

Third phase to be completed by the end of April 2025

CMA advances development of Kuwait's capital market system

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: The Capital Markets Authority (CMA) is working closely with its partners to implement strategic plans aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the capital markets and the companies operating within them, supporting the vision of New Kuwait 2035, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

A key initiative in this development is the "Development of the Capital Market System" program, which aims to overhaul the market's operating system, particularly the post-trading system, based on principles set by the Payments and Settlements Committee.

Since its inception, the program has been executed in stages: the first stage was completed in

May 2017, the second in April 2018 and the first part of the third stage in April 2019.

These stages focused on improving trading and post-trading systems, boosting investor confidence, ensuring transparency in clearing and settlement processes and reducing operational risks.

Key changes included the introduction of a three-day settlement cycle and aligning shareholder entitlement dates with international standards.

The CMA aims to complete the third phase by the end of April 2025, which includes upgrading the financial brokerage model to the "qualified broker" system.

This change will allow brokers to manage cli-

ents' funds and assets and conduct settlement operations under the supervision of the Kuwait Clearing Company.

The new model provides brokers with expanded responsibilities, including the ability to offer more comprehensive financial services in line with international best practices.

Additionally, the CMA has amended provisions regarding margin trading, enabling licensed qualified brokers to expand the scope of services provided.

The Authority stressed that these developments are critical to improving the overall functioning of Kuwait's financial markets and achieving the country's broader economic goals.

Kuwait crude oil edges four cents higher to USD 74.19 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): Kuwait crude oil edged four cents higher during Wednesday's trading to reach USD 74.19 per barrel compared with USD 74.15 pb the day be-

fore, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said. Brent crude rose 20 cents to USD 73.39 pb and West Texas Intermediate (WTI) gained 50 cents to USD 70.58 pb.

Iranian rial hits historic low amid economic challenges

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: The Iranian rial has dropped to its lowest value ever, losing more than 10 percent of its worth since the election of US President-elect Donald Trump in November, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Traders in Tehran reported that the rial was trading at 777,000 to the dollar, compared to 703,000 on the day Trump won the presidency.

This sharp decline underscores the increasing economic challenges facing Tehran, which is already grappling with ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.

Iran's central bank governor, Mohammad Reza Farzin, reassured the public in an interview with state television that foreign exchange supplies will increase and the exchange rate will stabilize.

He noted that \$220 million has been injected into the currency market in an

attempt to address the decline.

However, the rial has continued to weaken, with concerns that Trump may reinstate a "maximum pressure" policy on Iran, intensifying sanctions and possibly allowing Israel to target Iranian nuclear sites.

The rial's depreciation accelerated after the International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors approved a resolution proposed by European countries against Iran, raising the risk of further sanctions.

The fall of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a close ally of Iran, also contributed to the weakening of the currency.

Since the US withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal and the reimposition of sanctions in 2018, the Iranian rial has lost more than 90 percent of its value, severely impacting Iran's economy.

Bid to enhance financial awareness

NBK educates BSK students on common fraud schemes and protection measures

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continued its consistent efforts to promote financial and banking awareness among all sectors under the umbrella of the "Let's Be Aware" campaign introduced by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwait Banking Association (KBA).

In this context, the bank delivered a presentation on common fraud schemes and protection measures for the students of the British School of Kuwait (BSK). The session was presented to 250 students aged 12-15, specifically targeting this group as recent NBK studies show they are most prone to fraud and least aware of online dangers.

The session tackled many key topics related to common fraud schemes and protection measures to keep banking and personal accounts secure, emphasizing social media safety, guiding students on identifying potential threats in a digital world that is becoming increasingly complex for young users.

During the presentation, NBK team shared real-life fraud cases, illustrating how fraudsters operate and emphasizing the importance of awareness to avoid becoming victims. This wasn't just about raising awareness, but also about empowering students to be vigilant and proactive in protecting their assets and personal data.

The session was designed to be interactive, allowing students to ask questions, discuss online scenarios, and engage directly with NBK representatives, making the information more relatable and memorable.

NBK team advised students to avoid clicking suspicious links, whether those appearing on social media or received via e-mail from scammers who impersonate well-known banks, telecom or other companies by using their logos, as these messages and communications target stealing banking or personal information.

NBK team also advised students to use strong passwords to protect different personal accounts online, create different passwords and not to use the same password for all accounts, highlighting that each account should have a unique password as when computer or smartphone is hacked, using the same password may expose all online accounts to hacking as well.

Students were advised to use long passwords that contain at least 8 characters with a mix of letters, numbers, and symbols, as the longer the password, the more difficult it is to hack. They were also warned against using personal information in passwords, such as birth date, family names, and simple number sequences.

"We always strive to promote financial culture and banking awareness among the youth by organizing awareness sessions and seminars in schools and universities to



Farah Bastaki

educate them on the latest fraud trends and protection measures. These visits reinforce our efforts to protect all sectors from fraud, and help raise banking awareness among the public," commented Farah Bastaki, Manager, Digital Communications at National Bank of Kuwait.

"Educating customers is instrumental in our strategy, as we believe proactive education on scams and preventive measures can minimize potential risks and promote financial stability," she emphasized.

"We call the students to follow the tips provided across the bank's digital platforms, as scammers tend to employ new methods using AI techniques. Therefore, we intensify the awareness content published on our social media accounts, in addition to reposting CBK's related communications," she added.

"NBK employs its strong customer communication capabilities as well as all its sector-leading digital channels to maximize the reach of the "Let's Be Aware" campaign's objectives among the public," she concluded.

Introduced by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks and Kuwait Banking Association, the "Let's Be Aware" campaign is the largest across the GCC region focusing on raising banking and financial awareness among banks' customers. The campaign covers a variety of crucial topics including: anti-fraud tips, raising awareness on high-risk investments, maximizing benefit from banking services, promoting savings and investment culture, as well as other related topics.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key supporter and partner in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives to increase financial and banking awareness among different sectors. As the leading financial institution in Kuwait, the bank frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector.



An official delivers a presentation on common fraud schemes and protection measures

It's a problem across sub-Saharan Africa

Nigerians press for solar jobs and electricity, with little success

BAKU, Azerbaijan, Dec 19, (AP): In sun-drenched Nigeria, 14 new solar farms were supposed to jumpstart a meager solar industry and generate huge amounts of power, about one-fifth as much as the country's entire electric grid offers on a good day.

"We were very excited because we were pioneers," said Najim Animashaun, managing director of Nova Solar Power, who was working on one of the projects in 2016.

But that ambition collapsed when Nigeria's government wouldn't provide critical guarantees to developers. It's not that demand is low for clean power - the smallest solar systems for homes have exploded in popularity and created jobs - but big developers haven't been able to overcome Nigeria's reputation as a risky place to do business.

It's a problem across sub-Saharan Africa, where 83% of the people in the world who lack electricity live. Despite tremendous solar potential, very little of it has been installed.

"Many of your countries face sky-high borrowing costs, runaway debt, and inadequate climate finance and investment," said António Guterres, the United Nations secretary-general, at a panel on Africa's green transition at this year's global climate negotiations in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The result, he said, is: "your clean energy revolution held back."

Nigeria may be the problem's epicenter. More Nigerians live without electricity than citizens of any other country. Their numbers have even grown compared to a decade ago: Africa's most populous country, with more than 220 million people, grew faster than its power sector expanded. Even those connected to the grid live with frequent outages. Millions are forced to rely on wood for cooking and noxious, noisy diesel generators for sporadic electricity.

At the climate talks in Baku, at least \$300 billion annually was pledged to help developing countries like Nigeria transition away from fossil fuels and

cope with a warmer world and its more extreme weather. It was blasted by many developing nations as far too little.

Having enough funds will be vital for Nigeria, which is facing an enormously challenging energy transition. It is an oil state, a major petroleum exporter that runs its government largely on oil revenue. It burns natural gas for most of its electricity. It is trying to simultaneously expand its economy to pull tens of millions of people out of poverty and transition to net-zero by 2060. To do so, there will need to be a flood of new renewable projects like solar and hydropower.

Animashaun of Nova Solar Power said in the years before the 14 solar projects were announced, Nigeria opened its electric sector to attract more private investment and made it easier for new producers to sell power. There was strong investor backing, too. He was optimistic.

"There was a proliferation of projects and that proliferation of projects created

competition among ourselves," he said. Everybody wanted to be first to finish.

But Nigeria has high interest rates and is considered a financially problematic place to do business and the deal never closed. As the solar industry matured and prices dropped, the government tried to get out of an agreement to pay what it viewed as too high a price for solar power. Developers couldn't get the guarantees they wanted from officials and international development banks. Animashaun said he knew the deal was in serious jeopardy when the government proposed a deal in local currency instead of dollars.

"The currency has lost 90% of its value since I started this project," he said. "So, Nigeria isn't really bankable."

With the Nigerian grid providing only a fraction of the electricity that people need, some employ a solar solution that provides at least some power. Micro-solar systems that power only lights and perhaps charge a cell phone tripled from 2016 to 2023, according



A man displays solar panels for sale outside a shop in Abuja, Nigeria, June 17, 2023. (AP)

to GOGLA, an off-grid energy industry association. Sales of small rooftop systems that can run some appliances

increased even more, although sales did fall off some when a subsidy program ended this year.



A view of the offices of the Guardian and its sister newspaper, The Observer, on Aug. 19, 2013. (AP)

World's oldest Sunday newspaper

UK's Observer sold in face of journalistic opposition

LONDON, Dec 19, (AP): The owner of Britain's Guardian newspaper confirmed Wednesday that it has sold The Observer, the world's oldest Sunday newspaper, to Tortoise Media for an undisclosed fee.

The Scott Trust, which owns the Guardian Media Group, said in a statement that Tortoise Media is purchasing The Observer through a combination of cash and shares.

The Observer, which was founded in 1791 and became part of the Guardian Media Group in 1993, is a bastion of liberal values in Britain's media landscape. Tortoise has promised readers that it will honor the paper's historic values.

Tortoise was launched in 2019 by James Harding, a former editor of the London Times and director of news at the BBC, and the former U.S. ambassador to London, Matthew Barzun.

"The Observer has a historic place in the world of journalism and a special place in the heart of its readers," said Harding. "We're excited to put all we have into making sure its values, interests and passions reach even more people in the many years to come."

As part of the deal, Tortoise has agreed a five-year commercial agreement with GMG, which will see it pay

for both print and distribution services, as well as marketing through the Guardian.

The Scott Trust will also take a 9% stake in Tortoise Media and commit 5 million pounds (\$6.3 million) into Tortoise Media as part of the 25 million-pound investment, much of which will be focused on establishing The Observer's own digital identity - currently its online presence is very much secondary to that of the Guardian's.

"This deal secures fresh investment and ideas for the Observer that will take the title to new audiences and enhance the role liberal journalism plays in our society," said Ole Jacob Sunde, chair of the Scott Trust.

Tortoise said that the first Observer edition under its ownership is expected to be published in the spring.

It was also announced that Lucy Rock has been appointed the print editor of the Observer, the first woman to oversee the newspaper in 100 years. She will work alongside a digital editor, as the Observer builds its own online brand. Rock will report to Harding, who will be editor-in-chief.

The proposed sale has been opposed by journalists across the Guardian Media Group, culminating in a 48-hour strike earlier this month.

Fed cuts its key rate by a quarter-point but envisions fewer reductions next year

Reduction the 3rd this year vs 2 envisaged in '25

WASHINGTON, Dec 19, (AP): The Federal Reserve cut its key interest rate Wednesday by a quarter-point - its third cut this year - but also signaled that it expects to reduce rates more slowly next year than it previously envisioned, mostly because of still-elevated inflation.

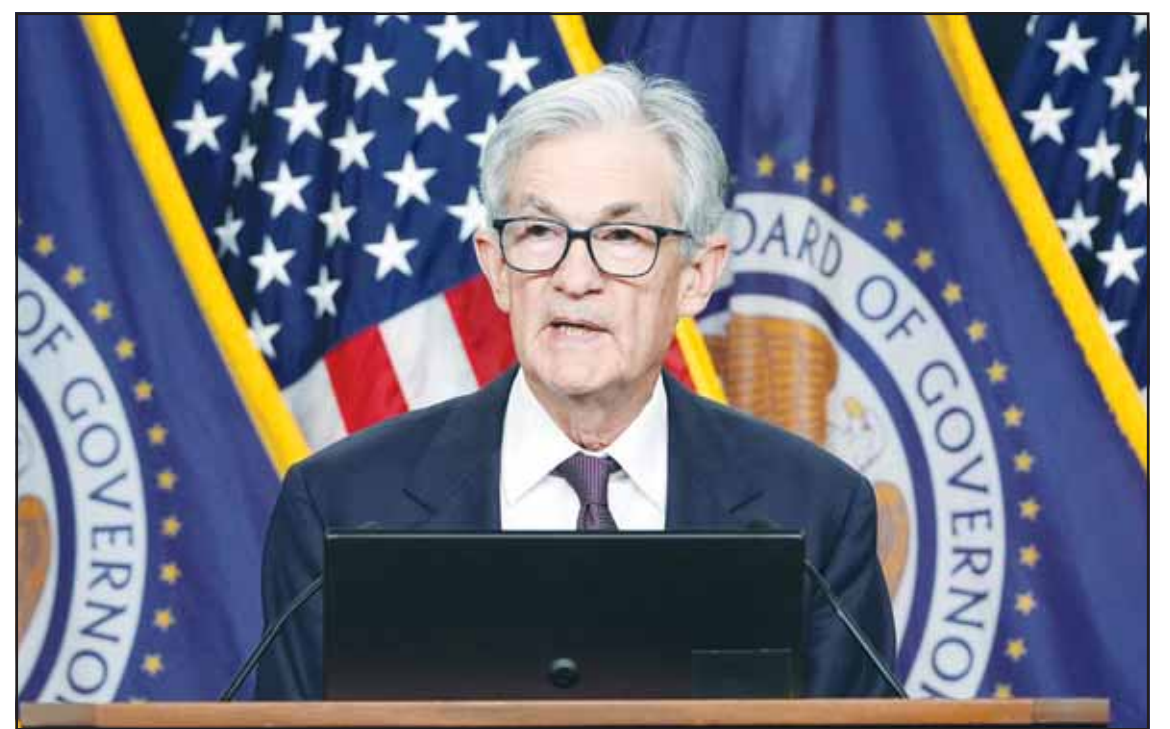
The Fed's 19 policymakers projected that they will cut their benchmark rate by a quarter-point just twice in 2025, down from their estimate in September of four rate cuts. Their new projections suggest that consumers may not enjoy much lower rates next year for mortgages, auto loans, credit cards and other forms of borrowing.

The central bank's expectation of just two rate cuts in 2025 rattled Wall Street, sending stock prices plummeting in the worst day for the market in four months. The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed down more than 1,100 points, roughly 2.5%. The Nasdaq composite was hit worse: It sank about 3.5% Wednesday. Higher interest rates can slow business expansion.

Speaking at a news conference, Chair Jerome Powell underscored that policymakers are slowing their rate reductions as their benchmark rate nears a level that policymakers refer to as "neutral" - the level that is thought to neither spur nor hinder the economy.

Wednesday's projections suggest that the policymakers think they may be close to that level. Their benchmark rate stands at 4.3% after the latest rate cut, which followed a steep half-point reduction in September and a quarter-point cut last month.

"I think that a slower pace of (rate) cuts really reflects both the higher inflation readings we've had this year and the expectations that inflation will be higher" in 2025, Powell said. "We're closer to the neutral rate, which is another reason to be cautious about further moves."



Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell speaks during a news conference at the Federal Reserve, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024, in Washington. (AP)

Blerina Uruci, chief economist at T. Rowe Price, said the tone of Powell's news conference was surprisingly "hawkish," meaning that it seemed to favor maintaining relatively high rates.

Uruci noted that Powell said the Fed's decision Wednesday to reduce its benchmark rate by a quarter-point was a "closer call," indicating that there was opposition to the move. Indeed, four officials supported keeping rates unchanged Wednesday, according to the projections. Not all 19 policymakers have a vote at each meeting. One - Beth Hammack, head of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland - voted against the rate cut because she favored keeping rates unchanged.

"The committee might be quite divided at this point," Uruci said. "And we have a growing hawkish contingent."

At his news conference, Powell acknowledged that at least some Fed of-

ficials have begun to assess the potential effects of President-elect Donald Trump's policies on the economy and inflation. The Fed chair noted that some policymakers think that since the election, the future path of inflation has become harder to gauge. Trump's threats to impose tariffs on all imports and to engage in mass deportations of migrants could worsen inflation next year.

"It's kind of common-sense thinking that when the path is uncertain, you go a little bit slower," Powell said. "It's not unlike driving on a foggy night or walking into a dark room with furniture. Just slow down."

This year's Fed rate reductions have marked a reversal after more than two years of high rates, which largely helped tame inflation but also made borrowing painfully expensive for American consumers.

But now, the Fed is facing a variety of challenges as it seeks to complete

a "soft landing" for the economy, whereby high rates manage to curb inflation without causing a recession. Chief among them is that inflation remains sticky: According to the Fed's preferred gauge, annual "core" inflation, which excludes the most volatile categories, was 2.8% in October. That is still persistently above the central bank's 2% target.

At the same time, the economy is growing briskly, which suggests that higher rates haven't much restrained the economy. As a result, some economists - and some Fed officials - have argued that borrowing rates shouldn't be lowered much more for fear of overheating the economy and re-igniting inflation.

On the other hand, the pace of hiring has cooled significantly since 2024 began, a potential worry because one of the Fed's mandates is to achieve maximum employment.

Inflation moves further above target

BoE warns of 'heightened uncertainty' as it keeps interest rates on hold

LONDON, Dec 19, (AP): The U.K.'s central bank warned Thursday of "heightened uncertainty" as it kept interest rates on hold after inflation moved further above target, even at a time when the British economy is flattening at best.

The Bank of England's nine-member Monetary Policy Committee kept its main interest rate unchanged at 4.75% with new data showing inflation rising to 2.6%, further above the bank's 2% target.

In response the rate-setting panel, which last cut its key rate in November, is taking a cautious stance because lower borrowing costs could potentially stoke inflation even further.

The decision was widely anticipated in financial markets yet surprisingly, as many a quarter of the members voted for a three-point cut. That could hint

at a further reduction at the next policy meeting in February if there are no big inflation surprises.

"We need to make sure we meet the 2% inflation target on a sustained basis," said Bank Gov. Andrew Bailey, who voted to keep rates on hold. "We think a gradual approach to future interest rate cuts remains right, but with the heightened uncertainty in the economy we can't commit to when or by how much we will cut rates in the coming year."

Struggling sectors in the U.K. economy and homeowners are hoping for more cuts next year that would provide some relief. The British economy has now contracted for two months in a row.

"The bank's decision to keep interest rates on hold, while expected, will still come as a palpable blow to households battling with burdensome

mortgage bills and businesses facing a jump in costs following the autumn budget," said Suren Thiru, economics director at the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

The bank's decision arrives a day after the U.S. Federal Reserve reduced interest rates, but Chair Jerome Powell signaled that the Fed would be slowing the pace of rate cuts going forward after inflation forecasts were revised higher.

The minutes to the Bank of England's decision shows that rate-setters cautioned over the economic outlook in the wake of the new Labour government's first budget and the outcome of the U.S. presidential election.

Critics argue that the budget in October has both elevated inflation pressures while also damping growth. A big increase in business taxes may prompt companies to offset higher

costs by raising prices or cutting down on hiring. The government argues that it needed to raise taxes to shore up public finances and inject money into cash-starved public services.

And with Donald Trump returning to the White House in January, there's uncertainty as to whether the incoming U.S. administration will impose tariffs on imports, an economic strategy that could lead to a tit-for-tat response that stokes inflation and lowers growth.

Still, inflation in the U.K. and across the world is far lower than it was a couple of years ago, partly because central banks dramatically increased borrowing costs from near zero during the coronavirus pandemic when prices started to shoot up, first as a result of supply chain issues and then because of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine which pushed up energy costs.

Nissan's share price soared nearly 24%

What a merger between Nissan & Honda could mean for the automakers and the industry

BANGKOK, Dec 19, (AP): Japanese automakers Nissan Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co. confirmed Wednesday that they are discussing closer collaboration but denied reports they have decided on a merger.

Nissan's share price soared nearly 24% in Tokyo after reports citing unnamed sources said it might merge with Honda to form the world's third-largest automaking group. Honda's share price fell as much as 3%. Nissan alliance member Mitsubishi Motors Corp. is also part of the talks.

Trading in Nissan's shares was suspended but then resumed after the companies jointly issued a statement saying they were "considering various possibilities for future collaboration, but no decisions have been made."

The ascent of Chinese automakers is rattling the industry at a time when manufacturers are struggling to shift from fossil fuel-driven vehicles to electric. Relatively inexpensive EVs from China's BYD, Great Wall and Nio are eating into the market shares of U.S. and Japanese car companies in China and elsewhere.

Japanese automakers have lagged behind big rivals in EVs and are now

trying to cut costs and make up for lost time.

Nissan, Honda and Mitsubishi announced in August that they will share components for electric vehicles like batteries and jointly research software for autonomous driving to adapt better to dramatic changes in the auto industry centered around electrification. A preliminary agreement between Honda, Japan's second-largest automaker, and Nissan, third largest, was announced in March.

A merger could result in a behemoth worth about \$55 billion based on the market capitalization of all three automakers.

Joining forces would help the smaller Japanese automakers add scale to compete with Japan's market leader Toyota Motor Corp. and with Germany's Volkswagen AG. Toyota itself has technology partnerships with Japan's Mazda Motor Corp. and Subaru Corp.

Nissan has truck-based body-on-frame large SUVs such as the Armada and Infiniti QX80 that Honda doesn't have, with large towing capacities and good off-road performance, said Sam Fiorani, vice president of AutoForecast Solutions.

No other country has reported a higher burden to the International Energy Agency.

Not only that, but Ireland is still heavily reliant on burning fossil fuels to generate electricity, despite a growing number of wind farms sprouting across the countryside. Further data center expansion threatens Ireland's goals to sharply cut planet-warming emissions.

Ireland is a "microcosm of what many countries could be facing over the next decade, particularly with the growth of AI," said energy researcher Paul Deane of University College Cork.

Twenty-six-year-old activist Darragh Adelaide lives in a working-class Dublin suburb just across a busy motorway from Grange Castle Business Park, one of Ireland's biggest

data center clusters. It could get even bigger were Adelaide not a thorn in the side of Google's expansion plans.

"It's kind of an outrageous number of data centers," Adelaide said. "People have started to make the connection between the amount of electricity they're using and electricity prices going up."

Ireland has attracted global tech companies since the "Celtic Tiger" boom at the turn of the 21st century. Tax incentives, a highly skilled, English-speaking workforce and the country's membership in the European Union have all contributed to making the tech sector a central part of the Irish economy. The island is also a node for undersea cables that extend to the U.S., Britain, Iceland and mainland Europe.

Nearly all of the data centers sit on the edge of Dublin, where their proximity to the capital city facilitates online financial transactions and other activities that require fast connections. Data center computers run hot, but compared to other parts of the world, Ireland's cool temperatures make it easier to keep them from overheating without drawing in as much water.

Still, buildings that for years went mostly unnoticed have attracted unwanted attention as their power demands surged while Irish householders pay some of Europe's highest electricity bills. Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency has also flagged concerns about nitrogen oxide pollution from data centers' on-site generators - typically gas or diesel turbines - affecting areas near Dublin.

Ireland embraced data centers that the AI boom needs. Now they're consuming too much of its energy

CLONDALKIN, Ireland, Dec 19, (AP): Dozens of massive data centers humming at the outskirts of Dublin are consuming more electricity than all of the urban homes in Ireland and starting to wear out the warm welcome that brought them here.

Now, a country that made itself a computing factory for Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft and TikTok is wondering whether it was all worth it as tech giants look around the world to build even more data centers to fuel the next wave of artificial intelligence.

Fears of rolling blackouts led Ireland's grid operator to halt new data centers near Dublin until 2028. These huge buildings and their powerful computers last year consumed 21% of the nation's electricity, according to official records.

Business Plus



Prioritize mental health, good habits such as resting well and exercising

How to avoid financial stress during the holiday season



Shoppers walk on the Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024. (AP)

‘The idea that one is on the hook for buying gifts for all their friends and families adds an enormous amount of stress on someone trying to have a perfect holiday’

NEW YORK, Dec 19, (AP): The holidays are meant to be a time of celebration with family and friends. But they can also bring pressure to spend money on gifts, gatherings and plane tickets home, exacerbated by brand emails, social media influencers and family expectations.

With credit card debt rising and prices for many items still high due to inflation, overspending during the holiday season can add to the financial stress many Americans are already experiencing, said Dr. Marketa Wills, CEO and medical director of the American Psychiatric Association.

“The idea that one is on the hook for buying gifts for all their friends and families adds an enormous amount of stress on someone trying to have a perfect holiday,” Wills said.

But there are ways to get through the holidays without spending more than you can afford. From setting expectations with your family to making

a budget to gifting experiences rather than things, here are expert recommendations to avoid financial stress this holiday season:

To avoid overspending on gifts for family and friends, set a specific goal, said Matt Watson, CEO of Origin, a financial planning app. Ask yourself what your spending limit is before you start shopping.

“People get into ‘justification mode’ where you have a general sense of what you want to spend but then you see this really nice thing and all of the sudden you’ve done that a few times and you spend twice as much as you thought you might,” Watson said.

Watson also recommends that you include in your budget calculations how much you’ll pay for taxes and shipping.

In many families, the holidays mean going all out with gift-giving. But this can quickly become stressful if your finances make it hard to keep up. Managing

expectations is key.

“You can avoid feeling inadequate, or like you’re not doing a good job, by having an honest conversation about where your finances are,” Watson said.

Being open about your money can be difficult, but sharing if you are struggling with debt or other financial issues can help family and friends understand that they should prioritize low-cost gifts or activities.

Planning your holiday shopping ahead of time can make it easier to stick to your budget.

“When people feel rushed, oftentimes they’re going to buy more expensive things,” said Watson, who also pointed out that shipping costs increase closer to Christmas.

As you budget for the holidays, make a list of the items you want to purchase and slowly start buying them. This way, you divide your costs among several paychecks and avoid relying on credit for last-minute expenses.

Wills recommends that people opt for homemade gifts if they want to show appreciation for their loved ones without overspending. Homemade gifts don’t always have to be crafts, they can also be actions.

“I will do babysitting for you, I will cook a meal for you,” Wills said. “Those kinds of things take a financial pressure off and make for a more joyous holiday season.”

In recent years, shopping expert Trae Bodge has noticed that younger people prefer to gift each other experiences rather than items. She recommends finding affordable, fun activities to do with your loved ones.

Examples include going ice skating, hiking or hosting a potluck. You could also gift a photoshoot or framed pictures or digital albums to commemorate happy experiences.

Expectations or traditions you grew up with, such as buying expensive gifts for every mem-

ber of your extended family, can cause stress during the holidays. This is what Bodge refers to as “keeping up with the Joneses,” which refers to trying to keep up with the expectations of other people rather than what is realistic for you to spend.

“Sometimes you may have a family member that is very financially well-off and they love to treat you to big, extravagant things. If you’re not in that same financial position, you should not feel compelled to return the favor,” Bodge said.

When creating your own new traditions, Watson recommends sharing the financial goals you have, such as saving for a house or paying off debt. This will help your loved ones understand why you’re looking to limit expenses during the holidays.

Wills also recommends cutting costs by being selective with your expenses. For example, when it comes to hosting, even having a small group of people can be very expensive if you’re expected to pay for everything. If you’re in this situation, you could propose that everyone brings a dish.

“Think about having a potluck meal for the holiday. Have everybody bring something to the event to help share the cost,” she said.

If you are having financial difficulties, it can help to talk about it with your family and friends.

“Sharing about stress can in and of itself be therapeutic for the individual who may be having concerns for that during the holiday season,” Wills said.

Making room to listen to your loved ones’ feelings is equally important, she said.

And if the holidays are a tough time for you, Wills recommended that you prioritize your mental health and good habits such as resting well and exercising.

It’s the season where social events are happening every weekend but if they are causing you too much financial stress or hurting your mental health, it’s okay to be selective.

Additionally, if you start feeling uncomfortable about certain conversations with your family, Wills recommends you take some time for yourself by taking a walk or removing yourself from the conversation.

If you are experiencing mental health struggles, there are several resources you can use to find professional help.

In the U.S., you can dial 211 to speak with a mental health expert, confidentially and for free.

Other mental health resources include:

Veterans Crisis Line: call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Crisis Text Line: Text the word ‘Home’ to 741-741

Several elements emerge as critical to success

How cities are reinventing public-private partnership

By Debra Lam

Georgia Institute of Technology

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

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Cities tackle a vast array of responsibilities - from building transit networks to running schools - and sometimes they can use a little help. That’s why local governments have long teamed up with businesses in so-called public-private partnerships. Historically, these arrangements have helped cities fund big infrastructure projects such as bridges and hospitals.

However, our analysis and research show an emerging trend with local governments engaged in private-sector collaborations - what we have come to describe as “community-centered, public-private partnerships,” or CP3s. Unlike traditional public-private partnerships, CP3s aren’t just about financial investments; they leverage relationships and trust. And they’re about more than just building infrastructure; they’re about building

resilient and inclusive communities.

As the founding executive director of the Partnership for Inclusive Innovation, based out of the Georgia Institute of Technology, I’m fascinated with CP3s. And while not all CP3s are successful, when done right they offer local governments a powerful tool to navigate the complexities of modern urban life.

Together with international climate finance expert Andrea Fernández of the urban climate leadership group C40, we analyzed community-centered, public-private partnerships across the world and put together eight case studies. Together, they offer valuable insights into how cities can harness the power of CP3s.

Although we looked at partnerships forged in different countries and contexts, we saw several elements emerge as critical to success over and over again.

1. Clear mission and vision: It’s essential to have a mission that resonates with everyone involved. Ruta N in Medellín, Colombia, for example, transformed the city into a hub

of innovation, attracting 471 technology companies and creating 22,500 jobs.

This vision wasn’t static. It evolved in response to changing local dynamics, including leadership priorities and broader global trends. However, the core mission of entrepreneurship, investment and innovation remained clear and was embraced by all key stakeholders, driving the partnership forward.

2. Diverse and engaged partners: Successful CP3s rely on the active involvement of a wide range of partners, each bringing their unique expertise and resources to the table.

In the U.K., for example, the Hull net-zero climate initiative featured a partnership that included more than 150 companies, many small and medium-size.

This diversity of partners was crucial to the initiative’s success because they could leverage resources and share risks, enabling it to address complex challenges from multiple angles.

Similarly, Malaysia’s Think City engaged community-based organizations and vulnerable

populations in its Penang climate adaptation program.

This ensured that the partnership was inclusive and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

3. Robust governance structure: Effective governance is key to ensuring that CP3s operate smoothly and achieve their objectives.

For example, in Melbourne, Australia, the City Professorial Chair in Urban Resilience and Innovation includes representatives from the city and a university. It has a formal communication structure where research informs policy and vice versa.

It aims to harness the research to better inform and guide policymaking and in turn advance research by putting it into city practice.

In South Africa, the Gauteng City-Region Observatory bridges academia and government to drive urban development. Its governance structure, which includes a diverse board appointed by the province’s premier, ensures that the partnership remains focused and effective. It means that it goes beyond any one organization’s evolving agendas and leadership for longer-term commu-

nity gains.

4. Commitment to innovation and growth: While we found that securing funding and in-kind support is important, demonstrating economic impact is crucial for the sustainability of CP3s.

Dublin’s Smart Docklands initiative is a prime example of this. By leveraging technology to address community needs, the partnership attracted over 3 million euros (US\$3.1 million) in investments and quadrupled the project’s funding.

The initiative not only boosted Dublin’s connectivity and tech infrastructure but also addressed public safety through solutions such as smart ring buoys. The buoys are life preservers with sensors to alert the city when its buoys are tampered with or stolen.

The case studies show that CP3s can be a globally applicable model for urban development, not merely a passing trend. By fostering collective action, sharing risks and leveraging multiple sources of funding, CP3s can be a powerful tool for cities navigating the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. (AP)

‘Unlike traditional public-private partnerships, CP3s aren’t just about financial investments; they leverage relationships and trust’

Moore and Swinton shine in Almodóvar's death drama

'Room Next Door' explores death with heart

LOS ANGELES, Dec 19, (AP): Films that are straightforward about death are rare, but movies that are about both death and intimacy are rarer, still.

In Pedro Almodóvar's "The Room Next Door," the Spanish director's first English-language feature film, Julianne Moore plays Ingrid, a celebrated author who's just written a book about death. She's at a book signing in New York when she hears that an old friend, a war correspondent named Martha Hunt (Tilda Swinton), has been diagnosed with cancer.

Ingrid rushes to Martha in the hospital, and the two friends, who haven't seen each other in years, quickly get reacquainted. Soon, Martha's cancer worsens and she asks Ingrid to assist her in self-euthanasia. "The cancer can't get me if I get the cancer first," she says.

Why not ask someone she's closer with? Well, she has, Martha says, but for various reasons none of them are willing. With an illegal pill bought from, as she says, "the dark web" and a slight conspiratorial vibe that they're committing a crime together, they travel to a modernist house in upstate New York where Martha plans to end her life. She'll be comforted, she believes, having Ingrid just down the hall. Martha doesn't want any fuss, just a nice

time. "As if we were on vacation," she says.

"The Room Next Door," the title of which plays off Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own," is about finding dignity and contentment with death as a natural part of life, and, perhaps, the mystery of the relationships that end up mattering the most. The one thing Martha and Ingrid share is a former lover (played by John Turturro), who turns up again in clandestine meetings with Ingrid. He's preoccupied with environmental disaster and the death of the planet, but fondly recalls sleeping with Martha as "like having ... with a terrorist - it always felt like the last time."

Melodrama

No one besides Almodóvar can get away with lines like this, in any language. A less fevered austerity has crept into some of his fine late-period movies (particularly "Pain and Glory" but also "Parallel Mothers"), but within them still beats a passionate, melodramatic heart. Death is everywhere in "A Room of One's Own." The movie is very much in dialogue with other works like James Joyce's "The Dead." (They watch John Huston's 1987 adaptation one night.) But it's not an especially dour film, and you sense, in its boldly colorful designs and lush storytelling that Almo-

dóvar is as concerned with life as he is with death.

"I still think sex is the best way to fend off looming thoughts of death," Martha tells Ingrid.

Not all of this works, even if every bit of "The Room Next Door" feels conjured - as is typical of Almodóvar's thickly layered films - from a fully fleshed-out emotional terrain. (Here, he adapts Sigrid Nunez's 2020 American novel, "What Are You Going Through.") There's an awkward and overdone flashback early in the film when Martha recalls her painful history with the father to her estranged daughter. Some of the dialogue can sound stilted.

But what absolutely, undoubtedly does work is Moore and Swinton together. If some of the more melodramatic or crime-movie flourishes feel forced, the central relationship of "The Room Next Door" is consistently provocative. Swinton, in particular, is extraordinarily deft at finding Martha's singular equilibrium: on the brink of death but still alive to so much - books, movies, the conversation of a friend. Death is coming, so best to spend what's left in good company.

"The Room Next Door," a Sony Pictures release in theaters Friday, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for thematic content, strong language and some sexual reference. Running time: 110 minutes. Three stars out of four.



This image released by Sony Pictures Classics shows Julianne Moore, (left), and Tilda Swinton in a scene from 'The Room Next Door.' (AP)

Variety

NEW YORK: Jay-Z's lawyers asked a judge Wednesday to speedily extract the rapper from a lawsuit in which a woman alleges she was sexually assaulted by Jay-Z and Sean 'Diddy' Combs when she was 13.

The unidentified woman recently added Jay-Z, whose legal name is Shawn Carter, to her lawsuit against Combs in Manhattan federal court, alleging that she was attacked by the singers in 2000 after Combs' limo driver offered her a ride to an MTV Video Music Awards after-party.

In their court filing Wednesday, Jay-Z's lawyers cited a recent television interview in which the woman acknowledged inconsistencies in her story.

The filing came before Combs appeared for a pretrial hearing in his criminal case. After lawyers discussed evidentiary deadlines, prosecutors told Judge Arun Subramanian



Jay-Z

that any new charges against the hip-hop mogul before a May trial would require minimal new evidence to be shared among lawyers.

In the criminal case, Combs has pleaded not guilty to charges that the Bad Boy Records founder coerced and abused women for years with help from associates and employees. Combs, who has been jailed without bail for three months, hugged his lawyers and touched his heart as he acknowledged his children among spectators.

In the civil case, one of several filed against him, the woman originally asserted that she was raped by Combs at the after-party but did not mention Jay-Z.

In the newly filed court papers, Jay-Z's lawyers wrote that the allegations "have caused incalculable harm to Mr. Carter, his family, his businesses, his employees, and his legacy."

Buzzbee told The Associated Press via email that the plaintiffs' lawyers planned to respond in court to the latest filing. (AP)

PERTH, Australia: A British YouTuber and rapper known as Yung Filly admitted in an Australian court on Thursday to reckless driving while he was awaiting trial on charges of raping a woman three months ago.

The 29-year-old, whose real name is Andres Felipe Valencia Barrientos, appeared briefly in the Perth Magistrates Court charged with speeding at 158 kilometers (98 miles) per hour in a 100 kph (62 mph) zone in the Western Australia state capital last month. Speeding becomes reckless driving at 45 kph (28 mph) above the speed limit.

His lawyer Joanne Oliver told the court he would plead guilty to a reckless driving charge at his next court appearance on Jan. 30.

Barrientos faces potential penalties of 9 months in prison, a 6,000 Australian dollar (\$3,750) fine and a disqualification from driving for at least six months.

Dressed in a white T-shirt and jeans, Barrientos did not speak to news media as he walked from the court to a waiting van.

Barrientos first appeared in the same court in October when he was charged with raping and choking a woman in a hotel room after a performance during a national tour. (AP)

NEW YORK: A popular social media influencer has issued an apology after a Swedish tabloid published a report saying she created a "work environment filled with fear and psychological pressure" at her fashion brand, Djerf Avenue.

In an Instagram post on Tuesday, Matilda Djerf said she was "genuinely sorry" to anyone she has "hurt or let down" after the tabloid, Aftonbladet, reported employees at her company had experienced or saw public berating, bullying and a "culture of favoritism and control."

The tabloid's report, which was published last week, cited 11 anonymous former and current workers at the Swedish brand, several of whom said they experienced panic attacks, anxiety and sleep problems while working for Djerf. (AP)

Film

Brody's riveting performance elevates Corbet's film

Epic ambition meets grandeur in 'Brutalist'

LOS ANGELES, Dec 19, (AP): "The making of a good building," observed architect Frank Lloyd Wright, "is a great moral performance."

Like many notable quotes about architecture, it speaks to grandeur, permanence, scale. One imagines Lázló Tóth, the visionary Hungarian architect who escaped the Holocaust and sailed to the United States to find his American Dream, would heartily agree.

But don't go looking on Wikipedia. Tóth, played with deep soul and unrelenting intensity by Adrien Brody in "The Brutalist," is actually fictional, though you could be forgiven for thinking otherwise, so richly realized is his story in director Brady Corbet's audacious new film. Though not for everyone, it's a film that can justifiably be described as "epic" in ambition and design. And, wouldn't you know, ambition and design are precisely what the movie's about.

Of course, that's not all. "The Brutalist," which takes its name from the raw style of architecture that Tóth creates, is also about the incalculable trauma that followed World War II. It's about the immigrant experience, and it's about what happens when the American Dream beckons, then fails. It also explores a different dream: the artist's dream, and what happens when it meets opposing forces, be they geographic displacement or cold economic calculus.

Parallels

Not to mix our arts metaphors, but it's fair to say a story like this needs a pretty big canvas. Corbet, working with co-writer Mona Fastvold, definitely gives himself that, shooting in VistaVision, with its expansive field of view; dividing his film into movements like a symphony; and finally, allowing himself a whopping three hours and 35 minutes, including a built-in intermission. The parallels with architecture here seem clear. Make a building, or make a movie - but if you're thinking small, go home.

"The Brutalist" spans 30 years in the life of Tóth, whom we first meet in a terrific sequence, darting through darkness. It soon emerges these are the chaotic alleys of an immigrant ship. He's been left with nothing, but still lucky: unlike more than half of fellow Hungarian Jews, he's survived the Holocaust. His first view of the United States is the Statue of Liberty towering above the deck - filmed upside down, a choice we'll understand better later.

Tóth heads to Philadelphia, where he's greeted by cousin Attila (Ales-



This image released by A24 shows Adrien Brody in a scene from 'The Brutalist.' (AP)

sandro Nivola), who'll let him work at his furniture store. Attila also bears monumental news: Lázló's beloved wife, Erzsébet (Felicity Jones) has survived her own ordeal in the camps, and is alive in Europe. (Just watching Brody receive this news is a vision hard to shake - the actor, himself the son of a Hungarian refugee, is doing his best work here since his Oscar-winning performance in "The Pianist.")

A fortunate break comes when Harry Lee Van Buren (Joe Alwyn), the haughty, aristocratic son of industrialist Harrison Lee Van Buren, comes looking for help renovating a library for his father. The perfectionist Tóth begins creating a modernist gem, with daylight shining from above onto a single elegant reading chair and lamp (at moments, this movie's a great advertisement

for architecture school).

Character

But then Dad himself - an impeccably clad, impossibly dapper yet explosive and ultimately monstrous character played to the hilt by Guy Pearce - shows up too early, infuriated that his library's been torn up. He expels the cousins and they don't get paid. Tóth ends up in a church shelter, shoveling coal by day.

But the elder Van Buren comes to see his error, especially when the press picks up on his library. Soon, Tóth is dining with the wealthy at Van Buren's palatial Doylestown estate, and learning that Van Buren has tapped him to build a vast community center atop a hill to honor his mother.

The film's second part opens with Erzsébet arriving in America, along

with Tóth's niece Zsófia (Raffey Cassidy). Erzsébet, given a sensitive, intelligent portrayal by Jones, is suffering deeply from the physical effects of the war. She also quickly sees the darker side of the Van Burens. But Tóth is stuck, mired in a project that will take years, a living hostage to the Van Burens on their estate, fighting for every phase of the project and darned near going mad - on top of a drug addiction stemming from the war - as Van Buren demands cuts and compromises, including the height of his building.

A beautiful - and horrible - sequence comes in the exquisite marble quarries of Carrara, in Italy, where Tóth travels with Van Buren to choose a final piece. The beauty is in the filmmaking. The horror is in what transpires between the men - and it's arguably an uncomfortably

jarring note, given how suddenly it seems to arrive out of the blue.

A coda, decades later in Venice, reveals something profound about why Tóth was so insistent about the measurements of his Doylestown creation. And so, yes, it takes more than three hours for us to learn the full truth about Tóth's vision.

Not all directors can pull off such a feat and make it worth our while. "The Brutalist," like its protagonist, is not without flaws or incongruities or indulgences. But it hardly seems accidental that one of the film's key lines tells us it's the destination, not the journey, that matters. Corbet went big here - really big - and it paid off.

"The Brutalist," an A24 release, is unrated by the Motion Picture Association. Running time: 215 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four.

'Christa' celebrates space pioneer

Docu focuses on McAuliffe's impact as a teacher

CONCORD, N.H., Dec 19, (AP): Before Christa McAuliffe was an astronaut, she was a vibrant teacher in New England keen on showing her students how everyday people left extraordinary marks on US history.

Nearly four decades later, a new documentary focuses on how she still inspires others and less on her fate aboard the space shuttle Challenger.

"Christa: From Ordinary to Extraordinary" from New Hampshire PBS explores her close relationship with the state and its capital, Concord, where she was picked from more than 11,000 applicants to be the nation's first teacher in space.

"You say 'Christa' in New Hampshire, everyone knows exactly who you're talking about," Gov. Chris Sununu says in the film. Its release on Thursday comes three months after a bronze statue of McAuliffe was unveiled at the Statehouse, on what would have been her 76th birthday.

The documentary features interviews with community members, footage of scenes such as a Main Street parade for McAuliffe, and some of her comments - including her parting speech to Concord High School seniors in 1985. It reflects the pride and joy felt by residents then and now for an enthusiastic teacher who loved learning and telling stories.

McAuliffe was 37 when she was killed, one of the seven crew members aboard the Challenger when the space shuttle broke apart on live TV on Jan. 28, 1986. The documentary briefly touches on the tragedy.

"We all want to be remembered for who we were, what we cared about, what we loved, what we did, and not how we died," Jeanne Gerulskis, the recently retired executive director of the McAuliffe-Shepard Discovery Center, says in the film.

McAuliffe taught social studies at Concord High School beginning in 1983. She created

a course devoted to the history of American women that's still taught there today. People in the documentary said she wanted students to see the role that ordinary people, particularly women, can play in history.

McAuliffe saw herself as one of them. A lover of field trips, she looked forward to bringing back her thoughts and journal from the shuttle mission "like a woman on the Conestoga wagon pioneering the West," she had said in an interview.

Holly Merrow, a former student of McAuliffe's in the women's history class, feels the documentary embodies her spirit of wanting to inspire children.

"We felt like we were going to space, as well," Merrow, now a teacher in Maine, recalled about McAuliffe at a recent screening of the film.

The documentary also talks about the importance of telling children who McAuliffe was.



A poster of NASA's first teacher in space Christa McAuliffe displayed on the wall of one of the classrooms where McAuliffe taught at Concord High School, Monday, Dec. 16, in Concord, N.H. (AP)

'New Blue Sun' is now up for Grammys

André 3000's alt-jazz, 'no bars' solo album stunned fans

NEW YORK, Dec 19, (AP): No one was expecting it. Late last year, André 3000 released his debut solo album, "New Blue Sun," 18 years after his legendary rap group Outkast's last studio album, "Idlewild."

But "New Blue Sun" has "no bars," he jokes. It's a divergence from rap because "there was nothing I was liking enough to rap about, or I didn't feel it sounded fresh. I'm not about to serve you un-fresh (expletive.)"

Instead, he offered up a six-track instrumental album of ambient alt-jazz - with special attention paid to the flute.

"The sound, that's how I got into it," he says of the instrument. "The portability, too. You can't tote around a piano and play in Starbucks."

He's also invested in the flute's history - like learning about Mayan flutes made from clay, a design he had re-created in cedarwood. "There's all kinds of fables and, you know, indigenous stories that go along with playing the flute - playing like the birds or playing your heart like the wind - it kind of met (me) where I was in life," he says.

"Flutes - wind instruments in general - are the closest thing you get to actually hearing a human," he



This cover image released by Epic Records shows 'New Blue Sun' by Andre 3000. (AP)

continues. "You're actually hearing the breath of a person."

"New Blue Sun" is a stunning collection, one that has earned André 3000 three new Grammy Award nominations: album of the year, alternative jazz, and instrumental composition. Those arrive exactly 25 years after the 1999 Grammys, where Outkast received their first nomination - for "Rosa Parks," from their third album, "Aquemini" - and 20 years after the group won album of the year for "Speakerboxxx/The Love Below."

"It matters because we all want to be acknowledged or recognized," André 3000 says of his new Grammy nominations. "It's a type of proof of connection, in some type of way ... especially with the Grammys, because it's voted on by a committee of musicians and people in the industry."

He's a bit surprised by the attention, too, given the type of album he created. "We have no singles on the radio, not even singles that are hot in the street," he says. "When you're sitting next to Beyoncé and Taylor Swift, these are highly, hugely popular music artists, I'm satisfied just because of that ... we won just to be a part of the whole conversation."

He theorizes that it may be because popular music listening habits are broadening. "A lot of artists are just trying different things. Even, you know, the album that Beyoncé is nominated for, it's not her normal thing," he says of her country-and-then-some record, "Cowboy Carter." "We're in this place where things are kind of shifting and moving."

For André 3000, "New Blue Sun" has allowed him to "feel like a whole new artist," but it is also an extension of who he's always been. "Being on the road with Outkast and picking up a bass clarinet at a pawn shop in New York and just sitting on the back of the bus playing with it - these things have been around," he says.

He's also always embraced "newness," as he puts it, experimenting creatively "even if it sounds non-masculine."

"Even producing for Outkast, I was just learning these instruments. If I ... put my hands down and play 'Ms. Jackson,' I'm not knowing what I'm playing. But I like it," he says.

As for a new Outkast album, "I never say never," he says. "But I can say that the older I get, I feel like that time has happened."

'Djese' series completed

Collier enlists 100,000 voices on his way to Grammy nods

LONDON, Dec 19, (AP): Six-time Grammy Award winner **Jacob Collier**, a fresh voice in contemporary jazz, took an unexpected approach to the final installment of the four-part album series, "Djese Vol. 4."

Each volume features collaborations with artists across the globe. But this time, the 30-year-old also harnessed voices of the audience at his shows to create harmonies for the album. Collier often acts as a conductor at his concerts, directing different sections of the crowd to sing segments of his songs, placing microphones around the venue to record their contributions.



Collier

One track on "Djese Vol. 4" is titled "100,000 Voices," and it quite literally features that many singers.

"There's like over 100,000 people on the album," he says. "Over 100 of those are established artists or members of groups like orchestras and choirs and things that I really love and respect, from every single continent of the world. But yeah, most of 100,000 voices are the audience members from tour."

His inventive approach to composition has scored him three Grammy nominations for the 2025 award show, including album of the year, global music performance and best arrangement, instrumental or a cappella.

He's also the first British artist to win a Grammy for each of his first four albums. Not bad for an artist that began his career posting on YouTube, later to become men-

tored by the late-great producer Quincy Jones and release a number of critically acclaimed records.

Still, Collier can't believe he's once again up for album of the year, the show's top prize. ("Djese Vol. 3" was nominated in 2021 but lost to Taylor Swift's "folklore.") In 2025, the other nominees include Swift, Beyoncé and Billie Eilish.

"It's thrilling and wild," he says of the honor.

"The album is in some ways like a celebration of the human voice," he says of "Djese Vol. 4." "I'm almost more proud of what that means philosophically than I am for, like, these specific songs on the record be recognized (for awards). But it's a really thrilling predicament."

Collier believes that everyone can sing and considers himself to be "a leader of a choir," in his audience improvisations and onstage collaborators. "I really try to make space for all these different kinds of people to just feel welcome," he says. "And if they can feel welcome, then they're a part of the music."

"Djese Vol. 4" contains collaborations with artists across genres, including Brandi Carlile, Camilo, aespa, Shawn Mendes, Stormzy, John Legend, Tori Kelly and Coldplay's Chris Martin.

But now that Collier has completed the "Djese" series, what's next?

"I don't have a clear idea of exactly what's coming next, which I love, actually. Sometimes in life you need those moments of question marks," he says.

"I've got like about a billion ideas, but I haven't committed to any yet because I think I need a moment just to sort of recalibrate and see."

"I am satisfied on the balance of probabilities that they have engaged in long-standing, deliberate conduct in order to evade their tax," Golspring said in his ruling.. (AP)

THE HAGUE: The Dutch Data Protection Authority (DPA) on Wednesday imposed a 4.75-million-euro fine (about 4.98 million U.S. dollars) on U.S. streaming service provider Netflix for failing to provide customers sufficient information about what the company did with their personal data between 2018 and 2020.

Netflix collects various types of personal data from customers, including email addresses, telephone numbers and payment details, as well as information about what and when customers watch on the platform, the DPA said in a press release.

An investigation started by the Dutch DPA in 2019 revealed that Netflix failed to inform customers clearly in its privacy statement about what exactly the company does with those data. (Xinhua)

Variety

LONDON: A British court ruled Wednesday that police can seize more than 2.6 million pounds (\$3.3 million) to cover years of unpaid taxes from influencer **Andrew Tate** and his brother Tristan.

The Devon and Cornwall Police force went to court to claim the money, held in seven frozen bank accounts, from the Tates and a woman identified only as J.

At Westminster Magistrates' Court, Chief Magistrate Paul Golspring ruled that financial transactions by the brothers, including transferring almost \$12 million into an account in the name of J, were a "straightforward cheat" of the tax authorities.



Tate

Announcement of bankruptcy judge's decision to open restructuring procedures and call for creditors to submit claims

In accordance with Article 105 of the Bankruptcy Law, the Restructuring Trustee Sabah Mubarak Al-Jalawi announces the decision issued by the bankruptcy judge in request No. 1 / 2024 on restructuring, as follows:

The request has been accepted, and the restructuring procedures for Al-Ma'rouf and Al-Barjas Joint General Trading Company (LLC) have been officially opened. The Restructuring Trustee has been appointed.

Creditors of the company are hereby called upon to submit their claims along with the necessary supporting documents within thirty days from the date of this announcement. Claims should be sent to the secretary's office at the following address:

Kuwait Association of Accountants and Auditors

Maidan Hawally, Salmiya Block II

Abdullah Al-Faraj Street

For inquiries, please contact:

• Phone: 99744026 • Email: info@kwaaa.org

Music



(Pic B) Mariah Carey performs on Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2024, at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, N.Y. (AP)

Mariah Carey's 'Christmas Time' comes to an end

Mariah Carey is the Queen of Christmas for a reason - and not just because "All I Want for Christmas Is You" tops the charts seasonally.

Carey has turned the song into an event, regularly hosting Christmas concerts to celebrate her undisputed smash and long career as a holiday icon. This year, she embarked on the "Christmas Time" tour, a variety show that kicked off on Nov. 6 in Highland, California, hitting many major North American cities, before concluding on Tuesday night at Barclays Center in Brooklyn.

It came to an end in front of a crowd donning shimmering Santa hats and red sequin party dresses. Carey descended onto the stage in a snowflake-shaped throne, leading the audience into a few church staples: "Silent Night" and "O Holy Night" among them.

Her children, twins Roc and Roe, joined in on the fun. At one point, Carey detoured into a medley of her biggest hits: "Emo-

tions," "Hero," "Fantasy," and "We Belong Together" among them.

The latter moment came with an unexpected surprise: the elusive Rihanna was in the audience, and Carey signed her chest during an arena-wide sing-a-long of "Always Be My Baby." Ri disappeared as quickly as she emerged, but Carey kept the momentum up, concluding the only way she could - with a spirited rendition of "All I Want for Christmas Is You."

Earlier this year, Carey's first Christmas album, 1994's "Merry Christmas," turned 30. She told The Associated Press she originally felt apprehensive to record a holiday album and then gave in to the festive spirit.

"I was very young and was just starting out and I felt like people do Christmas albums later in their lives. But now people have started to do them whenever, like right at the top of their career," she said. "And I decorated the studio and just had the best time." (AP)

Obituary

Influencer of Japan's postwar politics

Japanese newspaper boss Watanabe dies at 98

TOKYO, Dec 19, (AP): **Tsuneo Watanabe**, the powerful head of Japan's largest newspaper who had close ties with the country's powerful conservative leaders, has died, his company said Thursday. He was 98.

Watanabe, the editor-in-chief of the Yomiuri Shimbun for over 30 years, died of pneumonia at a Tokyo hospital on Thursday, the Yomiuri said.

Watanabe joined the newspaper in 1950 and covered politics throughout his career, attending editorial meetings until last month. He was still checking copy in his hospital room days before his death, the newspaper said.

Watanabe cultivated close ties with conservative leaders who governed the country across decades, like Yasuhiro Nakasone and Shinzo Abe, and to help form Japan's conservative public opinion. Abe was also known as a loyal reader and once told reporters all his opinions could be found in the Yomiuri when he was asked a question about a proposed constitutional revision.

Watanabe stirred controversy in 1994 when the Yomiuri published a draft revision to the pacifist

constitution calling for a clear reference to the Self Defense Force, Japan's de facto military, and other changes at a time when such ideas were taboo.

Born in Tokyo in May, 1926, Watanabe studied philosophy at the University of Tokyo, which was interrupted during the World War II when he was drafted into the Imperial Army, before joining the Yomiuri in 1950.

Watanabe, in a number of media interviews, criticized the wartime military for its abusive treatment of soldiers and wasteful deaths. He was also known for his opposition to the inclusion of war criminals among those worshipped at Tokyo's controversial Yasukuni shrine, and criticizing conservative lawmakers who visited the shrine.

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said he has met

Watanabe a number of times and "learned a lot from him about the war and perspectives on Japanese wartime history." He said he also recently reread one of Watanabe's books on the governing Liberal Democratic Party and was impressed by his insights.

Ishiba, embattled and heading a minority government after his party's election loss in October, said "Under the current political situation, I wish we could seek his advice about our party, the democracy and the future of Japan as a peace-loving nation."

Watanabe served as Washington bureau chief and head of the political news section for the paper before becoming president and editor-in-chief of the Yomiuri Shimbun in 1991. He became chairman of the company in 2004.

Despite his brief affiliation with the communist party as a student, Watanabe converted to staunch anti-communism.

Watanabe also owned the Yomiuri Giants, Japan's most popular baseball team, and served on an advisory panel for sumo wrestling.



Watanabe

California declares emergency

US health officials confirm first severe human case of bird flu

NEW YORK, Dec 19, (AP): Health officials have confirmed the first known severe illness in the US caused by bird flu, and California's governor declared a state of emergency as the virus rages through dairy cattle in that state.

A person in Louisiana is hospitalized in critical condition with severe respiratory symptoms caused by a bird flu infection, state health officials said. The person, who is over 65 and has underlying medical problems, had been in contact with sick and dead birds in a backyard flock.

It's the first human case in the U.S. linked to exposure to backyard birds, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Since March, more than 60 bird flu infections in people have been reported in the U.S., but previous illnesses have been mild and most have been detected among farmworkers exposed to sick poultry or dairy cows. In two cases - and adult in Missouri and a child in California - health officials have not

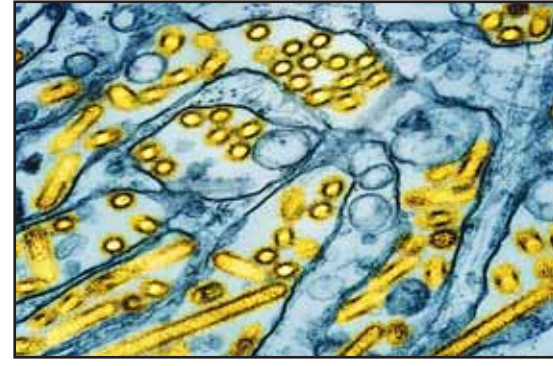
determined how they caught it.

CDC officials said that bird flu is still mainly an animal health issue and that the risk to the general public remains low. There has been no documented spread of the virus from person to person, said the CDC's Dr. Demetre Daskalakis.

The Louisiana illness comes weeks after Canadian officials reported that a teen in British Columbia was hospitalized with a severe case of bird flu. In both instances, the illnesses were caused by a strain of the virus found in wild birds, not in cattle, officials said.

On a call with reporters, CDC officials did not answer a question about whether the new US case and the Canada case had any similarities or differences.

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom declared the state of emergency as cases of the virus were detected in dairy cows on Southern California farms. Previously, the virus had been detected in state's Central Valley.



This colored electron microscope image released by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases on March 26, 2024, shows avian influenza A H5N1 virus particles (yellow), grown in Madin-Darby Canine Kidney (MDCK) epithelial cells (blue). (AP)

"This proclamation is a targeted action to ensure government agencies have the resources and

flexibility they need to respond quickly to this outbreak," Newsom said in a statement.

The virus has been detected in 865 dairy herds in 16 states, with nearly 650 of them in California. Raw milk from infected cattle was recalled late last month after the virus was found in samples sold in California stores.

On Wednesday, Los Angeles County health officials confirmed the deaths of two cats from bird flu infections after drinking the recalled raw milk.

Flu experts said the trajectory of the virus in people remains unclear, but they urged people who have contact with sick and dead birds to take precautions, including wearing respiratory and eye protection and gloves when handling poultry.

"We may see more cases of severe disease in the U.S. since cases seem to be growing more frequent," said Angela Rasmussen, a virus expert at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada.

NHS misses more than 50% of cases

New at-home test delivers accurate gestational diabetes detection: study

OXFORD, England, Dec 19: New research published in this week found that the standard NHS procedures for processing gestational diabetes blood sugar tests were leading to more than 50% of cases being missed. If undiagnosed or untreated gestational diabetes is associated with serious complications for the mother, such as the development of preeclampsia, and for the baby an increased risk of admission to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for breathing difficulties, low blood sugar and in some severe cases, a risk of major complications including stillbirth and death. These risks can be reduced with timely diagnosis and intervention during the pregnancy.

The study, carried out by Professor Claire Meek of the University of Leicester and colleagues at the University of Cambridge with funding from the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) found that processing the blood sugar test of mothers at risk of gestational diabetes more quickly could lead to more accurate diagnosis of this serious condition.

A new world-first at-home oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT), developed by British digital clinical diagnostics company Digostics (GTT@home), analyses the blood sugar tests immediately, with results instantly shared with the requesting antenatal care team for diagnosis and clinical review. This overcomes the problems with sample processing and delayed testing carried out in hospital or community-based OGTTs as identified by Professor Meek's study. The GTT@home test is already being successfully used by NHS trusts.

Using standard NHS sample processing procedures, 9% of women in the study were diagnosed with gestational diabetes. The researchers found that when blood was processed more quickly, 22% of women in the study were found to have gestational diabetes, a difference of 13%. Without faster sample processing, more than half the women found to have gestational diabetes would have gone undiagnosed.

Professor of Chemical Pathology and Diabetes in Pregnancy, Claire Meek said: "Gestational



New revolutionary at-home test improves gestational diabetes detection.

diabetes, which affects women in pregnancy, is very common in the UK and causes complications at the time of birth, affecting both mother and child. Fortunately, most complications can be prevented by accurate diagnosis and access to treatment. However, if the diagnosis is not accurate, then affected mothers cannot access the treatment they need."

The Digostics GTT@home test not only avoids the false negative results issues identified in Professor Meek's study but is also more convenient and accessible as the patient doesn't have to travel, especially as the test must be carried out first thing in the morning. Travelling to take the test means patients must arrange childcare, take time off work, or manage transportation, and studies have shown that women from socio-economically deprived groups, black ethnicity, or with mental health issues are less likely to attend or complete OGTT appointments. With at-home testing women who may have struggled to attend clinic-based tests can take the test in comfort on the day most convenient for them.

James Jackson, Founder and CEO of Digostics, commented, "Professor Meek's research definitively shows that in the UK standard OGTT testing is failing to diagnose more than 50% of women who have gestational diabetes during pregnancy. Without a diagnosis, the risks of gestational diabetes cannot be mitigated and mothers and babies are being left at risk of serious, lifelong, and life-threatening health complications."

"The at-home OGTT we have developed avoids the sample processing delays identified in Professor Meek's research, and we're identifying a higher rate of gestational diabetes than in-clinic OGTTs. Patients find the test easy to use and we're extending access to screening to women from underserved patient groups frequently marginalised by in-clinic OGTT provision. The GTT@home test is in use across a number of NHS Trusts in England, and we are in discussions with many more to make this important new technology available to more expectant mothers who are at risk of gestational diabetes."

Pancreatic cancer hope

Experts find way to 'halt' aggressive cancer growth

SYDNEY, Dec 19, (Xinhua): Australian researchers have found a way to silence cancer-causing gene mutations.

In a new study, researchers from Melbourne's Peter MacCallum Cancer Center demonstrated that it was possible to use the powerful gene editing tool CRISPR to silence the gene mutations KRAS G12, NRAS G12D, and BRAF V600E that drive aggressive pancreatic, colorectal and lung cancers.

The team used the protein Cas13 to enable CRISPR technology used by scientists to target, disable or edit specific DNA in cells, to target ribonucleic acid (RNA) rather than DNA.

They found that CRISPR-Cas13 was able to selectively degrade mutant RNA transcripts while sparing normal, unmutated versions of the genes found in healthy cells.

All of the gene mutations targeted in the study are single-nucleotide variants (SNVs), small changes in the genetic code that cause uncontrolled cell growth.

Mohamed Farah, a co-author of the study, said that the SNVs have been notoriously difficult to target with regular drugs.

"With further development, this platform could transform the way we treat cancers driven by hard-to-target mutations," he said.

"The precision and adaptability of this system also opens new doors to personalized cancer treatments tailored to an individual's unique genetic profile," he said.

He said that the method was found to silence the SNVs with an unprecedented level of accuracy and flexibility in lab conditions but that more work was needed before it could be tested in people.

Pancreatic tumor: HistoSonics, the developer and manufacturer of the Edison Histotripsy System, has announced that the first patients with pancreatic tumors were successfully treated in the company sponsored Gannon trial. The feasibility trial is designed to evaluate the safety of histotripsy, a novel non-invasive technology that destroys targeted tumor tissue using focused ultrasound, in up to 30 patients with inoperable pancreatic adenocarcinoma tumors diagnosed with unresectable locally advanced disease (Stage 3) or those where a small number of tumors have spread to other parts of the body (Stage 4).

The Gannon trial is being conducted at Sant Pau Hospital in Barcelona, Spain, led by Dr. Santiago Sánchez

Cabús, Clinical Head of Hepatopancreatobiliary Surgery at the Hospital de Sant Pau and Professor of Surgery at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

Pancreatic tumors are one of the most difficult to treat, affecting over 510,000 people globally each year, and an estimated 66,440 patients diagnosed in the United States alone in 2024. With the highest mortality rate of any major tumor type, pancreatic tumors are currently the third leading cause of tumor-related death in the United States, following lung and colon, and is expected to become the second by 2030.

With a five-year relative survival rate of 13% across all stages of disease progression and limited surgical options for most patients, new treatment modalities such as histotripsy are urgently needed. Fewer than 20% of patients suffering from pancreatic tumors are eligible for surgery due to progression of disease at the time of diagnosis. Pancreatic tumors are often surrounded by dense, impenetrable fibrotic tissue that limits the effectiveness of systemic or pharmacologic therapies, due to lack of penetration to effectively reach and target the tumor cells.

"Histotripsy has the potential to revolutionize treatment for patients with pancreatic tumors that were previously considered to be untreatable with traditional approaches. Its novel mechanism of action targets both the tumor and surrounding fibrotic tissue, offering new hope for patients with advanced disease, who represent the majority of cases," said Joan Vidal-Jove, M.D., Medical Director, HistoSonics.

"Most patients with pancreatic tumors face limited treatment options and are ineligible for surgery due to advanced stage of disease," said Mike Blue, HistoSonics CEO and President. "We believe histotripsy provides a non-invasive option to target tumors that were previously considered untreatable," said Mike Blue, HistoSonics CEO and President.

"Our goal is to expand the potential of histotripsy in multiple tumor types, delivering meaningful improvements in outcomes for patients and families. Our early research from the Gannon trial will inform us and our physician partners in optimizing histotripsy to make a significant impact on patient lives."

The use of the Edison System in pancreatic application is limited to investigational use.

Digital addiction

'Virtual autism' on rise in youth

ISTANBUL, Dec 19, (Xinhua): The increasing digital dependency among children and youth in Türkiye is causing psychological issues such as "FOMO" (fear of missing out) and "virtual autism," officials warn.

Deniz Guler, deputy chair of Türkiye's Radio and Television Supreme Council, the authority responsible for regulating broadcasting and media services in Türkiye, said excessive use of digital devices, constant connectivity, screen addiction, and FOMO are leading to psychological challenges in children, including disrupted sleep patterns, heightened anxiety, and damaged self-esteem, reported Hurriyet daily news.

In response to these concerns, Türkiye is exploring potential regulations for social media use among individuals under 16.

Radiye Sezer Katircioglu, chair of the parliament's children's rights subcommittee, also raised alarm over the rising cases of "virtual autism." This condition, characterized by delayed communication skills, reduced emotional responsiveness, and limited connection to the outside world, is attributed to early and excessive screen exposure in young children.

According to the 2023 Türkiye Youth Study, conducted by the United Nations Population Fund and Hacettepe University's Institute of Population Studies, 92 percent of young people aged 15-24 use social media. The survey covered nearly 1,300 participants across 67 of Türkiye's 81 provinces.

Depression: Almost three-quarters of adolescents in Australia experience clinically significant symptoms of depression or anxiety, research has found.

The research, published on Wednesday by Melbourne's Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), found that 74 percent of Australians reported experiencing clinically significant symptoms of depression or anxiety at least once across their adolescent years between the ages of 10 and 18.

Over 1,200 children from Melbourne enrolled in the study and had their symptoms of depression and anxiety tracked between 2012 and 2019.

Among the participants, 64 percent suffered from chronic depression or anxiety, which means they reported symptoms three or more times during their adolescence.

Girls were at increased risk, with 84 percent reporting depression or anxiety symptoms at least once compared to 61 percent of boys.

Ellie Robson, the lead author of the study from MCRI, described the results as concerning because mental health problems in adolescence can have serious lifelong health consequences.

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Arsenal, Liverpool and Newcastle progress

Powerful lineup for League Cup semis

LONDON, Dec 19, (AP): Arsenal, Newcastle and Liverpool advanced in the English League Cup to ensure a heavyweight lineup for the semifinals.

Gabriel Jesus scored a hat trick - including a crucial second goal from an offside position - as Arsenal beat Crystal Palace 3-2 to reach the last four for the first time since the 2021-22 season.

Liverpool kept alive its title defense by winning 2-1 at Southampton, with Darwin Nunez and Harvey Elliott the scorers in the first half for the leaders of the Premier League and Champions League.

Newcastle defeated Brentford 3-1 mainly thanks to two first-half goals by Italy midfielder Sandro Tonali and progressed to the semifinals for the second time in three seasons. The Saudi-controlled club from the north east, which hasn't won a major trophy since 1955, lost in the League Cup final to Manchester United in 2023.

United visits Tottenham on Thursday in the remaining quarterfinal match, guaranteeing that the semifinals will feature four of the biggest teams in the country.

Jesus had previously only scored one goal in 20 appearances in all competitions this season - and that was also in the English League Cup at second-tier Preston in October.

So the Brazil striker's first hat trick for Arsenal came as something of a surprise, as did the standard of his finishing.

There was luck for Jesus, too, as replays showed that he was offside when running through to score his goal that made it 2-1 in the 73rd minute at Emirates Stadium. However, there is no video review until the semifinals of the competition so the goal wasn't ruled out.

Jesus, who had equalized in the 54th with an excellently taken chip over goalkeeper Dean Henderson, completed his hat trick in the 81st by running through unmarked and smashing a low strike past Henderson.

That gave his team a two-goal cushion but former Arsenal striker Eddie Nketiah ensured a nervy finish by heading home a cross in the 85th to make it 3-1. Jean-Philippe Mateta had put Palace ahead in the fourth minute.

Liverpool has now gone 20 games unbeaten within a single season in all competitions for the first time since 1996, according to Premier League stats supplier Opta.

Things could hardly be going any better for Arne Slot, who fielded a weakened, heavily rotated team - featuring Japan midfielder Wataru Endo at center back - that still had too much for Southampton.

Nunez particularly enjoyed his goal, which came after he had been jeered



Arsenal's Gabriel Jesus, second right, heads the ball during the English League Cup quarterfinal soccer match between Arsenal and Crystal Palace at Emirates stadium, in London. (AP)

by Southampton fans for missing an early chance. After putting Liverpool ahead, he put his finger to his mouth in a "shush" gesture to the home crowd. Interim coach Simon Rusk took charge of Southampton, the last-place team in the Premier League, following the dismissal of manager Russell Martin on

Sunday - hours after a 5-0 loss to Tottenham.

Slot sat in the stands for the match at St. Mary's stadium as he was serving a touchline suspension after getting booked for the third time this season last weekend.

Dembélé scores 2, Donnarumma injured

PSG opens 10-point lead at top league

MONACO, Dec 19, (AP): Runaway leader Paris Saint-Germain opened a 10-point lead at the top of the French league standings before the year-end break with a 4-2 defeat of Monaco on Wednesday in a match marred by Gianluigi Donnarumma's injury.

Ousmane Dembélé scored a brace and striker Goncalo Ramos put PSG back in the lead with seven minutes left as he headed in a corner after coming in as a substitute in the lively encounter at the Stade Louis II.

Monaco remained in third place, level on points with second-place Marseille, which has one match in hand.

Donnarumma's face was bloodied after being hit by an opponent's cleat. The Italy international took the studs of Wilfried Singo's cleat in the 17th minute. Singo, whose shot had been blocked, tried to jump



Ousmane Dembélé

over the sliding Donnarumma but instead struck his face.

Pictures showed that Donnarumma was cut below his right eye. Sin-

go, who had already been warned, was lucky to avoid a red card.

Donnarumma was left lying on the pitch while receiving treatment. He finally stood up and walked away to be replaced by Matvey Safonov.

Désiré Doué had put PSG in front in the first half before Eliesse Ben Seghir leveled from the penalty spot after the interval and Brel Embolo gave Monaco the lead at the hour mark.

Dembélé then scored his first goal of the evening from a rebound in the 64th minute. He added more luster to PSG's win deep in stoppage time when he completed his brace.

The match was brought forward because of a scheduling conflict with the Trophée des Champions between the two clubs on Jan. 5 in Doha during the weekend that the French league resumes.

Juventus beats Valerenga 3-0

Bonmati helps Barcelona qualify as group winner in Women's Champions League along with Arsenal

MADRID, Dec 19, (AP): Fresh off capturing her latest global award, Spain playmaker Aitana Bonmati scored a goal that helped to send defending champion Barcelona into the Women's Champions League quarterfinals as the winner of its group. In the other Group D match, Swedish club Hammarby beat St. Polten 2-1 in Vienna and finished in third place.

Juventus beat Valerenga 3-0 to place third in Group C behind Arsenal and Bayern.

Bonmati raced through and poked a finish between the goalkeeper's legs for Barcelona's second goal in a 3-0 victory over Manchester City in their Group D closer on Wednesday.

The score matched City's win

in the reverse fixture between the teams in Manchester in October and meant they finished group play tied on 15 points. Barca progressed in first place courtesy of a superior goal difference.

Bonmati, who has won the last two Ballon d'Or awards in women's soccer, was named the women's player of the year at the FIFA's "The Best" awards on Tuesday - the second straight year she earned that prize.

Arsenal became the fourth group winner - and the second from England - after beating Bayern Munich 3-2 thanks to a match-clinching penalty by Spain striker Mariona Caldentey in the 86th minute.

The other group winners were record eight-time winner Lyon and

Chelsea.

Man City and Bayern had already secured qualification to the knock-out stage and will advance as second-place finishers.

Clàudia Pina drove a low finish into the corner to put Barcelona ahead in the 44th against City, and Bonmati doubled the lead in the 57th.

Alexia Putellas scored from outside the area in the 67th to make it 3-0 as the Spanish champions made a strong statement of intent with a dominant performance.

Barcelona - filled with players from Spain's World Cup-winning squad - has won the last two Champions League titles, and three of the last four.



Barcelona's Ona Battle controls the ball next to Manchester City's Aoba Fujino, left, during the women's Champions League group D soccer match between FC Barcelona and Manchester City at the Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

Kane poised to return against Leipzig

Is Neuer too old? Bayern goalkeeper faces extra scrutiny because of his age

BERLIN, Dec 19, (AP): Bayern Munich goalkeeper Manuel Neuer isn't getting any younger and his age is prompting a debate about his performances.

The 38-year-old Neuer was sent off for the first time in his long career on Dec. 3 when Bayern was knocked out of the German Cup by defending champion Bayer Leverkusen. He was also at fault during Bayern's first loss of the season, 1-0 at Aston Villa in the Champions League on Oct. 2.

Neuer still enjoys the full confidence of Bayern's powerbrokers, with sporting director Max Eberl saying on Thursday the club and player were making progress on talks to extend his contract.

"Now there are only the last details to clear," Eberl said. But the club also needs to think of a future without Neuer, sooner or later.

Bayern has been linked with a move for Cologne goalkeeper Jonas Urbig, 21, while Alexander Nübel, 28, is still biding his time at Stuttgart. Nübel is a Bayern player who has been loaned out to Monaco and now Stuttgart because Neuer was always first choice at Bayern.

Nübel will battle with Barcelona keeper Marc-André ter Stegen for the position as Germany No. 1 since Neuer announced his international retirement in August.

Israel goalkeeper Daniel Peretz replaced Neuer after his sending off against Leverkusen and has retained his place in the goal while Neuer is out with a broken rib.

"He probably won't play again this year," coach Vincent Kompany said.

It means Neuer will miss Bayern's suddenly important game against Leipzig on Friday. Bayern lost its first Bundesliga game of the season 2-1 at Mainz last weekend and will be looking to

bounce back with a positive performance to avoid any uncertainties creeping in over the winter break.

Another loss could allow defending champion Leverkusen to cut Bayern's lead to just a point if it beats visiting Freiburg on Saturday. Leverkusen is buoyant after seven straight wins across all competitions.

Neuer is expected to make a full recovery from his rib injury and could return when the league resumes on Jan. 11 at Borussia Mönchengladbach.

Two years ago, Neuer broke his leg while skiing after the 2022 World Cup. He returned nearly a year later in October 2023 and showed no lasting ill effects from the injury.

But Bayern ended the season without winning a trophy for the first time since 2012. Leverkusen dominated the Bundesliga, and Bayern lost to eventual champion Real Madrid in the semifinals of the Champions League.



Bayern's goalkeeper Manuel Neuer stretches himself during warm up before the Champions League opening phase soccer match between FC Bayern and Paris Saint Germain, at the Allianz Arena in Munich, Germany. (AP)

Bayern had Neuer to thank for keeping his team in the game with terrific saves in the second leg of the semifinal in Madrid - until he dropped an easy ball for Joselu to score a late winner.

"A mistake he wouldn't make in another 100 years," said then-Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel, who said Neuer "had been exceptional in saving us all night."

At 38 - Neuer will be 39 in March - every mistake prompts a fresh round of scrutiny.

Harry Kane could make a timely return for Bayern Munich against Leipzig in the Bundesliga on Friday.

Bayern coach Vincent Kompany said Thursday that the striker was back training after returning from a hamstring injury sustained in the 1-1 draw at Borussia Dortmund on Nov. 30.

"I'm not going to say if he'll start or not. The final training session is still important today. If everything goes well, he'll definitely play a role tomorrow," Kompany said.

Alphonso Davies has also returned to training, and Serge Gnabry was working on his return from a knee injury.

Without Kane, Bayern was knocked out of the German Cup by defending champion Bayer Leverkusen, while it suffered its first Bundesliga defeat of the season last weekend to Mainz.

"We've already said that we can't replace Harry one for one. Harry has this unbelievable feel for where he should be in the box," Kompany said. "He has also helped us a lot defending. He's one of the best in the world in the box - that's where he makes the difference. There are not many players who can do that."

Kane has 20 goals in 19 games for Bayern in all competitions.

Best of the Rest

behind champions Botafogo. (Xinhua)

Argentina tops rankings: Soccer world champion Argentina finished 2024 as the top-placed men's team in the FIFA rankings for a second straight year.

There were only limited changes in the rankings published Thursday with just 21 international matches taking place since the previous standings were released in November.

Argentina signed off the year in top spot ahead of France, with Spain, the European champion, completing the podium.

The rest of the top 10 was unchanged: In order, England, Brazil, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Germany.

FIFA said that Angola, which played the most matches in 2024, registered the biggest progression over the last 12 months, going up 32 spots to reach 85th.

The next rankings will be published in April. (AP)

Brenno joins Fortaleza: Olympic gold medalist goalkeeper Brenno Fraga has joined Fortaleza on a free transfer, the Brazilian top-flight club said on Wednesday.

Brenno will be tied to the club until December 2027 with the option of extending his contract for another year.

"He is a well-trained athlete with good international and national experience," Fortaleza CEO Marcelo Paz said. "He has impressed the coaching staff and has been approved by the entire football department."

Brenno was a member of the Brazil squad that won gold at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

Fortaleza finished the 2024 Brazilian Serie A season in fourth place with 68 points from 38 games, 11 points

Muniain on Botafogo radar: Former Spain international winger Iker Muniain could leave Argentine side San Lorenzo to join Brazil's Botafogo, according to media reports.

The 31-year-old is tied to the Buenos Aires outfit until December next year but has a clause in his contract that would allow him to leave in January, Infobae reported on Wednesday.

It said that San Lorenzo could be tempted to accept the offer to help ease growing financial difficulties.

Botafogo, who also won Brazil's Serie A title this year, views Muniain as an ideal option to bolster the team's attacking options, the report added.

Muniain has made 14 appearances and scored three goals for San Lorenzo since joining the club from Athletic Bilbao in September. (Xinhua)

Lawson picked as Max teammate: Liam Lawson will partner world champion Max Verstappen at Red Bull in 2025, the Formula 1 team said on Thursday. Lawson, a New Zealander, replaces Sergio Perez, who was dropped on Wednesday after months of poor results. The 22-year-old Lawson will switch from Racing Bulls, Red Bull's sister team, after racing as a replacement driver in 2023 and this year. He started in Red Bull's junior program.

"There's no doubt that racing alongside Max, a four-time champion and undoubtedly one of the greatest drivers ever seen in F1, is a daunting task," Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said, "but I'm sure Liam can rise to that challenge and deliver some outstanding results for us next year."

Lawson said it was a "lifelong dream" to be racing with Red Bull. (AP)

Sheikh Khaled extends congratulations to HH the Amir on his first anniversary

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: President of the Kuwaiti and Asian Aquatics Federations Sheikh Khaled Al-Badr Al-Sabah, on behalf of himself, the Board of Directors, and all members of the aquatics federations, extended his warmest congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (May God protect him) on the occasion of the first anniversary of His Highness assuming power in the country.

In a press release, Sheikh Khaled stated that all members of the Aquatics Federation in Kuwait reaffirm their loyalty to His Highness the Amir. He prayed to God Almighty for the continued protection of Kuwait, its leadership, and its people, and for the nation to remain a haven of security and safety under His Highness's wise leadership.

He stressed that His Highness the Amir's constant directives on the importance of supporting athletes have posed a significant challenge to those responsible for Kuwait's sports movement.

Sheikh Khaled urged all involved to work diligently to translate the Amir's vision of prioritizing youth issues into tangible results.

He called on everyone to exert greater efforts and dedication to achieve

the aspirations of elevating and advancing Kuwait.

Sheikh Khaled explained that the Water Sports Federation works closely with all relevant institutions and organizations to transform the dreams and aspirations of the Kuwaiti people into reality. The federation is dedicated to nurturing creative talent and adopting ambitious visions and ideas to build an aware generation capable of safeguarding and advancing the country through science and education. The federation is committed to overcoming all challenges faced by water sports athletes, ensuring they have the necessary support and resources to engage in their activities without obstacles.

He expressed his hope that everyone will meet the expectations of the political leadership, which has consistently insisted on the importance of working to fulfill the aspirations and hopes of the youth.

Sheikh Khaled affirmed that the federation's Board of Directors will continue to work as a unified team to develop and improve water sports under the generous care of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Sheikh Khaled Al-Badr Al-Sabah

Khaleeji Zain 26 embodies Gulf unity: Minister



Al-Mutairi inaugurates the media center for the Khaleeji Zain 26.

Kuwait eyes 2031 Asian Cup

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, emphasized that Kuwait's hosting of the "Khaleeji Zain 26" symbolizes the strong and brotherly bonds that unite the Gulf nations, offering a beautiful and competitive sports atmosphere for youth.

In a statement to the media following the opening of the main media center for the championship at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Minister Al-Mutairi, who also leads the Supreme Organizing Committee, highlighted that the Gulf Cup, since

its inception in 1970, has been a beacon of youth sports throughout its rich history.

He expressed deep appreciation for the unwavering support of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Their commitment played a vital role in ensuring the championship's success.

The minister stressed that the organizing committee took great care in equipping the media center with the latest technology and resources, ensuring that media professionals from Kuwait and other Gulf countries can effectively cover the event, reaching a global audience.

Al-Mutairi also explained that the



Media Center Opening Ceremony.

committee worked tirelessly to ensure a flawless event, with a special emphasis on organizing a distinguished opening ceremony fitting for

such a prestigious Gulf sports forum. He commended the hard work of all committees and the valuable contributions of young volunteers in preparing for the tournament.

He further noted the Gulf Cup's significant role in enhancing the Gulf region's sports framework, contributing to the successful organization of major international events such as the Qatar 2022 World Cup and various continental tournaments. He pointed to Saudi Arabia's upcoming hosting of the 2034 World Cup and the 2027 Asian Cup, which aligns with the tournament's theme, "The Future is Gulf." This achievement, he said, is a direct result of the leaders' vision and commitment to supporting youth development.

Minister Al-Mutairi revealed plans, in coordination with the Kuwait Football Association, to sub-

mit a bid to host the 2031 Asian Cup, as part of efforts to host more international tournaments in the coming years, highlighting Kuwait's skilled workforce and organizational expertise.

Additionally, he mentioned the formation of a Quality Committee to develop a procedural guide and institutional memory for future sports events, ensuring efficient and well-planned organization.

Finally, Al-Mutairi expressed his excitement in welcoming fans and visitors to Kuwait to enjoy the tournament, with matches taking place at Jaber International Stadium and Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium. The organizing committee has also included the "Hayakum" app, which guides visitors to key tourist attractions in Kuwait, allowing them to explore the country alongside the tournament.

Equestrian action heats up at Mesilla Equestrian Club

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: The second round of the fourth edition of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation League Championship kicks off today at 8:00 am at Al-Mesilla Equestrian Club in Subhan. Knights from all local clubs will compete for a share of the total cash prizes, with 10,000 Kuwaiti dinars awarded to the winners of the first-place finishes.

The first day of competition will feature jumps at heights of 90, 105, 115, 125, and 135 cm. On Saturday, four more rounds will take place, with heights set at 110, 120, and 130 cm, along with the prestigious Grand Prix round at 140 cm.

Secretary of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation, Ghazi Al-Jariwi, highlighted that the coming months will see the organization of several international championships in the two-star and three-star categories, under the supervision of the International Federation. Al-Jariwi emphasized the Federation's dedication to continuing the development of Kuwaiti equestrianism.

The current board of directors, led by Masoud Jawhar Hayat, was elected by acclamation to guide the Kuwait Equestrian Federation

for the 2018-2024 electoral cycle. Ghazi Al-Jariwi, who succeeded Kuwaiti international referee Nabila Al-Ali as Secretary, plays a pivotal role in the Federation's ongoing efforts.

The referees' committee is chaired by international referee Nadar Al-Mustafa, and includes knight Raghad Al-Dubos and Ibtisam Al-Aroui. Course design is by Michel Esmalon, assisted by Muhammad Al-Saeed, while Dr. Yahya Al-Hadban and Badr Al-Haifi serve as arena referees.



Ghazi Al-Jariwi and Nabila Al-Ali

Arab Elite Tennis Championship kicks off in Bahrain

MANAMA, Dec 19: The fourth Arab Elite Tennis Championship commenced the day before yesterday, featuring a selection of the finest Arab players who hold rankings with the Professional Tennis Association and the International Tennis Federation's Junior division.

Engineer Ali Al-Mutairi, Secretary-General of the Arab Tennis Federation, announced that the championship's opening day saw 16 players from nine Arab nations—Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia—compete in eight matches.

Al-Mutairi commended the players' high skill levels and the outstanding competitive spirit displayed during the first round of matches, hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain at the courts of the Bahraini Public



A participant returns a shot to an opponent (unseen) during the singles match.

Security Officers Club.

He acknowledged the active involvement of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Arab Tennis Federation's Board of Directors, highlighting his dedication to organizing such events that promote tennis and provide opportunities for elite players to enhance their skills.

Al-Mutairi also extended his heartfelt gratitude to the Kingdom of Bahrain for its warm hospitality and successful hosting of the championship. He praised the Chairman and Board members of the Bahrain Tennis Federation for their collaboration and commitment to the event's success and expressed appreciation to the Bahraini Ministry of Interior for their meticulous organization and support at the Public Security Officers Club facilities.

Atalanta dominant again with 6-1 win over Cesena in Italian Cup

MILAN, Dec 19, (AP): Serie A leader Atalanta continued its domination of domestic soccer this season with another hefty victory in the Italian Cup albeit against second-division Cesena.

Charles De Ketelaere and Lazar Samardzic both scored twice as Atalanta cruised to a 6-1 win to book a place in the quarterfinals against Bologna. Roma also eased through against lower-league opposition, beating Sampdoria 4-1 to secure a last-eight match against AC Milan.

The quarterfinals will be played in February. Fresh from a club record 10th straight league victory, Atalanta - which lost the cup final to Ju-

ventus last year - showed no signs of easing up, even against lower league opposition.

Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini opted for a surprisingly strong starting lineup and Atalanta was 2-0 up in less than 10 minutes and 4-0 up by halftime following goals by Davide Zappacosta, De Ketelaere's double and Samardzic's first.

Marco Brescianini added a fifth early in the second half and Atalanta finally eased off the gas, although Samardzic doubled his tally in the 71st.

Substitute Joseph Ceesay netted a consolation goal in the final minute for Cesena.

Roma coach Claudio Ranieri steered his side to a

morale-boosting victory over one of his many former clubs and avoided a potential upset against Sampdoria, which had already knocked out two Serie A teams.

Roma had lost in the league 2-0 at Como, which was one of the top-flight teams Samp had beaten on its cup run - the other being city rival Genoa.

However, an early double from Artem Dovbyk and a delightful solo effort from Tommaso Baldanzi had Roma 3-0 up inside 25 minutes.

Gerard Yepes pulled one back for Samp in the 61st but Roma restored its three-goal advantage through substitute Eldor Shomurodov, moments after he replaced Dovbyk.



The Khaleeji Zain 26 trophy.

Sports

Kuwait eyes Khaleeji Zain 26 glory on home turf



Kuwait players hold their final training session.



The Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium

Unmatched record in the championship

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19, (KUNA): Kuwait enters the Khaleeji Zain 26 with a track record that made it the dominant record holder in the tournament's history, with 10 titles.

The tournament, hosted by Kuwait from December 21, 2024, to January 3, 2025, presents an opportunity for the Kuwaiti team to reclaim the championship it last won during the 20th Gulf Cup in Yemen in 2010, where it beat Saudi Arabia 1-0 in the final.

Kuwait's dominance of the tournament began with the inaugural Gulf Cup in Bahrain in 1970, where it emerged victorious, securing four consecutive titles by 1976—a record unmatched by any other Gulf nation.

Kuwait won the 6th, 8th, 10th, 13th, 14th, and 20th editions of the tournament, and Kuwaiti football legend Jassem Yaqoub remains the Gulf Cup's all-time top scorer with 18 goals.

The Gulf Cup, held once every two years, initially featured only four nations—Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, and was expanded to include Oman, UAE Iraq, and Yemen, now eight competing teams.

The first edition of the tournament was held in Bahrain in 1970 with the participation of Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, and its first title was won by Kuwait.

In 1972, the second edition was held in Saudi Arabia with the participation of five teams after the UAE joined, and Kuwait won the championship title on goal difference, Kuwait has scored 12 goals compared to 8 for Saudi Arabia.

The number of teams reached six after Oman joined the third edition in 1974, which was hosted by Kuwait for the first time, in which Kuwait won the championship for the third time in a row.

In the next edition, the Iraqi national team joined, bringing the number of participating teams to seven teams, and Kuwait won its fourth consecutive trophy in the 1976 edition in Qatar.

Kuwait won the title after a playoff match for the first time in the tournament with Iraq, which ended with a victory (4-2), after drawing (2-2) in its first match and equalizing it with ten points each.

Kuwait also won the tournament for the fifth time in the sixth edition held in the UAE in 1982, during which it succeeded in defeating Bahrain (2-0), the UAE (2-0), Saudi Arabia (1-0) and Oman (2-0) and lost against Qatar (1-2).

Kuwait's Saleh Zakaria was the first Gulf coach to lead his country to the title in the eighth edition hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain in 1986, and the Kuwaiti team won the podium for the sixth time after achieving five wins and a single draw with Bahrain (1-1).

In Kuwait for the second time, under Brazilian coach Luiz Felipe Scolari

in the 10th edition in 1990 and with the participation of the seven countries, the Kuwaiti team won the title for the seventh time without any loss.

In the 13th edition in Oman in 1996, with the participation of six teams, the Kuwaiti team won the title for the eighth time after defeating Bahrain (1-0), Oman (2-1), Saudi Arabia (1-0), and Qatar (2-1) and suffering a single loss to the UAE (1-2).

The Kuwait national team won the title for the ninth time in its history in the 14th edition of Bahrain in 1998 under the leadership of Czech coach Milan Machala. Striker Jassim Al-Huwaidi was crowned the top scorer for this edition with nine goals.

In 2010, in the 20th edition hosted by Yemen, Kuwait won the tournament for the last time after winning against Saudi Arabia in the final match with a clean goal scored by Waleed Juma.

In the 10th edition of the tournament, the Kuwaiti national team also dominated many awards, including Bader Al-Mutawa winning the title of top scorer of the tournament with three goals, Fahad Al-Enezi as the best player, and Nawaf Al-Khalidi as the best goalkeeper.

The Kuwaiti team remains a symbol of excellence in Gulf football, embodying a rich legacy and the hope of rekindling its golden era, and the Gulf Cup remains a celebrated event, fostering unity and fierce competition across the Gulf region.

Ancelotti wins record 15th title with Madrid

Real routs Pachuca for Intercontinental Cup



Real Madrid's players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Intercontinental Cup soccer final match against CF Pachuca at the Lusail Stadium in Lusail, Qatar. (AP)

LUSAIL, Qatar, Dec 19, (AP): Real Madrid beat Mexican team Pachuca 3-0 in the Intercontinental Cup final, making Carlo Ancelotti the most decorated coach in the club's history.

Ancelotti lifted his 15th title with the Spanish powerhouse, surpassing the 14 trophies that he and Miguel Muñoz had won. Muñoz coached the team in the 1960s and 70s.

"Very happy, it's a triumph," said the 65-year-old Ancelotti, who on Tuesday was named men's coach of the year at the FIFA's "The Best" awards. "We didn't get off to a good start but finished well, showing great attitude."

Kylian Mbappé, Rodrigo and Vinicius Júnior scored a goal each as Madrid became the most successful club in the competition with four titles. It also won in 1960, 1998 and 2002.

Pachuca has never won the tournament, which brings together the champions of all six soccer confederations.

The competition is being played in a new format after FIFA expanded

the Club World Cup to 32 teams for 2025.

Madrid won the annual Club World Cup five times - in 2014, 2016, 2017-18 and 2022.

Eleven of Ancelotti's titles with Madrid have come in his second stint with the club, which began in 2021. Four of them, including a Champions League title, came during his time with Madrid from 2013-15.

Mbappé, who started after recovering from a left-thigh injury, opened the scoring after an assist by Vinicius in the 37th. Rodrigo added to the lead with a shot into the corner in the 53rd and Vinicius, named the men's player of the year on Tuesday, sealed the victory by converting an 84th-minute penalty kick.

Madrid made it straight to the final without having to play any matches as the European champion, while Pachuca advanced by defeating South American champion Botafogo and Al Ahly of Egypt in the preliminary rounds of the tournament taking place in Qatar.

American stars power Kuwait Club to victory

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 19: The Kuwait Club basketball team secured a hard-fought victory over Al-Qurain with a score of 94-85 in a match held at the Union Hall in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex as part of the Merger League. This win elevated Kuwait Club's tally to 10 points, while Al-Qurain now stands at five points.

In another thrilling encounter, Al-Nasr edged Al-Arabi 106-100 in a closely contested game that remained competitive until the final moments. The quarters were evenly matched, with Al-Arabi taking the first set 21-19, followed by Al-Nasr dominating the second with a 57-43 lead. Al-Nasr maintained its edge in the third quarter, 83-69, ultimately closing the game ahead by six points to raise their total to 8 points, while Al-Arabi reached six points.

The Kuwait Club versus Al-Qurain game showcased technical prowess, with Kuwait Club maintaining a slight advantage in all quarters despite Al-Qurain's determined efforts. The first quarter ended with Kuwait Club leading by three points (23-20). Al-Qurain then turned the tables,



Al-Arabi player drives the ball away from Al-Nasr player during the league match.

scoring 25 points to take a narrow three-point lead (45-42) at halftime. The third quarter saw Al-Qurain holding on to its advantage, leading 69-65. However, Kuwait Club's experience, technical skill, and deep bench strength proved decisive in the final quarter. Kuwait Club outscored Al-Qurain 29-16, sealing the win.

American players Jakar Sampson and Brent Weber were stand-out performers for Kuwait Club, scoring 26 and 24 points, respectively. For Al-Qurain, Austin was the top scorer with 18 points, delivering an impressive performance despite the loss.

Texas-based Friedkin Group completes Everton purchase

LONDON, Dec 19, (AP): Half of the Premier League is under majority American ownership after Texas-based Friedkin Group completed its 98.8% purchase of Everton on Thursday.

The takeover ended Farhad Moshiri's turbulent eight-year tenure at the storied English club, which joins the Friedkins' wide-ranging portfolio of investments that includes Italian team Roma. The size of the deal was undisclosed but the BBC and other British media valued it in excess of 400 million pounds (\$500 million).

Fronted by Dan Friedkin - who has a net worth of \$6.4 billion, according to Forbes - and his son Ryan, the group

has investments in the automotive industry, entertainment, hospitality and sports. The Friedkins made a fortune distributing Toyotas in Texas.

"I take immense pride in welcoming one of England's most historic football clubs to our global family," Dan Friedkin said. "Everton represents a proud legacy, and we are honored to become custodians of this great institution."

Everton is a nine-time English champion which has been an ever-present in the top division since 1954 but is without a major trophy since 1995 and has been battling relegation in recent years.