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Opinion

God deters by authority whoever is not deterred by the Holy Quran

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

KUWAIT and its people have supported the insightful vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah regarding the cleansing of the national identity. We all heard and obeyed his call in this matter. This decision brought happiness to everyone from all segments of society, as we believe

that whatever the ruler decides is for the benefit of the nation.

Indeed, God Almighty deters by authority those who are not deterred by the teachings of the Holy Quran.

His Highness the Amir possesses the wisdom for handling this complex and sensitive issue, and ensuring no one is wronged. As the guardian of the nation, His Highness is fully aware of the needs of his country and is the most knowledgeable about all aspects of this matter.

In this regard, everyone is closely following the developments, particularly concerning those who forged documents, hold dual citizenship, and took what is

not rightfully theirs through deceit. Such individuals cannot be trusted to safeguard the nation's supreme interests.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to avoid mistakes that could harm individuals who are not relevant to the matter, given that the guardian, His Highness the Amir, has taken it upon himself to ensuring that no one in his country is wronged, and that no injustice is done to a woman who has raised a generation that Kuwait is proud of. This generation of Kuwaiti citizens has dedicated itself to the service of their country and knows no other homeland but Kuwait.

Therefore, we urge the Council of Min-

isters to ensure clarity on this issue, so that executive officials are not confused. There are mothers who have dedicated their lives to their husbands and children, and obtained Kuwaiti citizenship legally, in accordance with the laws that were in effect at the time. These women followed their husbands' wishes, and willingly gave up their original nationalities to obtain Kuwaiti citizenship. They have lived as citizens alongside their Kuwaiti children, many of whom have become doctors, professors, lawyers, university professors, officers in high positions, as well as ambassadors, ministers, under-secretaries, and senior officials.

I fear that some of these women may face the same fate as those who obtained Kuwaiti citizenship through forgery.

These women raised elite, loyal, and trustworthy children who work diligently to serve their country, thanks to the efforts exerted by their mothers who brought them up to love Kuwait.

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The grandchildren of Reda Abu Zarada sit by a fire at a camp by the sea in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, Thursday, Dec. 19, 2024. (AP)

Gaza faces harsh winter

KRCS reaffirms dedication to Palestinian relief efforts

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (Agencies): Chairperson of Kuwait Red Crescent Society Ambassador Khaled Al-Maghames on Monday affirmed keenness on offering all kinds of support for the Palestinian brothers - particularly the injured.

Ambassador Al-Maghames, in a statement on the heels of a meeting with the State of Palestine Ambassador to Kuwait, Rami Tahboub, said the State of Kuwait has resolve to back the Palestinian brothers since onset of the war, lauding the great efforts exerted by the Kuwaiti official institutions, welfare societies and NGOs to secure medical and relief to help them.

He and the envoy examined during the meeting the KRCS latest efforts in Palestine namely in Gaza and the aid program for the Palestinian people.

Meanwhile, winter is hitting the Gaza Strip and many of the nearly 2 million Palestinians displaced by the devastating 14-month war with Israel are struggling to protect themselves from the wind, cold and rain.

Shortage

There is a shortage of blankets and warm clothing, little wood for fires, and the tents and patched-together tarps families are living in have grown increasingly threadbare after months of heavy use, according to aid workers and residents.

Shadia Aiyada, who was displaced from the southern city of Rafah to the coastal area of Muwasi, has only one blanket and a hot water bottle to keep her eight children from shivering inside their fragile tent.

"We get scared every time we learn from the weather forecast that rainy and windy days are coming up because our tents are lifted with the wind. We fear that strong windy weather would knock out our tents one day while we're inside," she said.

With nighttime temperatures that can drop into the 40s (the mid-to-high single digits Celsius), Aiyada fears that her kids will get sick without warm clothing.

When they fled their home, her children only had their summer clothes, she said. They have been forced to borrow some from relatives and friends to keep warm.

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KUWAIT AMENDS NATIONALITY LAW WITH NEW DECREE

No Kuwaiti citizenship for foreign wives of nationals

Sheikh Fahad to meet with editors-in-chief of local dailies



KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (KUNA): The official gazette (Kuwait Alyoum) published in its latest edition released on Monday the decree-into-law 116/2024, amending provisions of the Amiri Decree 15/1959 regarding the Kuwaiti citizenship.

Kuwait's 1st Deputy PM visits security facilities in Saudi

Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah on Monday visited several security facilities in Saudi Arabia as part of an official visit.

The Ministry of Interior said in a statement,

received by KUNA, that Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef toured the Saudi National Center for Security Operations (911) during the second day of his visit to Riyadh, where he was received upon arrival by Saudi Minister of Interior Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Abdulaziz.

The ministry added that the First Deputy Premier was detailed with the role of the center in providing security services to citizens and residents, in addition to the advanced

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Some excerpts stipulate that a foreigner who seeks the Kuwaiti citizenship is not eligible to file for the nationality for his wife. His minor children are considered Kuwaitis however, they are entitled to choose another nationality, such as their original one, in adulthood.

A foreign woman who marries a Kuwaiti is not eligible to acquire the nationality. In line with a decree endorsed by the Minister of Interior, the citizenship can be rescinded from persons who had obtained it through fraud, counterfeiting or false statements. Individuals who acquired it for being relatives to him lose it in such case, as well.

■ In case where he (she) has been convicted for crimes of honor, trust, state security crime, cases of offending the sanctity of His Almighty, the prophets or His Highness the Amir.

■ In case he is dismissed from his job in the public sector for cases related to honesty and trust during ten years after granting him the citizenship.

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NewsWatch

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs **Abdullah Al-Yahya** held a phone call on Monday with European Commission Vice President and High Representative for the Union's Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, **Kajia Kallas**.

The discussions focused on strengthening bilateral relations across various fields, as well as addressed recent regional and international developments. (KUNA)

KABUL: Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry on Monday welcomed the reopening of **Saudi Arabia's** Embassy in Kabul for the first time since the Taliban returned to power in 2021.

On Sunday, the Saudi Embassy in Kabul said on X that it was resuming the mission's activities "based on the government's keenness to provide all services to the brotherly Afghan people."

A deputy spokesman for Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry, **Zia Ahmad Takal**, said: "We welcome the reopening of the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Kabul and assure them that the ministry will cooperate in all matters and pay close attention to their safety." (AP)

Project evaluates new tech in real-world conditions

KISR redefines desalination with solar innovation

By **Abdulrahman Al-Shammari**
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) has completed an innovative research project titled, "Developing Performance Features for Using Integrated Solar-Powered Air-Gap Membrane Distillation Technology for Desalination of Seawater in Kuwait."

This project focused on developing and testing a

solar-powered air-gap membrane distillation system for seawater desalination. A test unit was installed at the KISR-affiliated desalination research station, equipped for experimental purposes.

Led by scientific researchers Dr. Garudachari Bhadrachari and Dr. Mansour Ahmed, alongside the director of the Water Desalination Technologies Program at the Water Research Center affiliated with KISR; the project includes the assessment of the technology's performance under real-world conditions in Kuwait. The

system utilized Arabian Gulf seawater as feedwater for the pilot unit.

The project met its objectives by establishing a comprehensive knowledge base on the performance of the pilot unit under realistic operating conditions. Experimental results demonstrated that the membrane distillation system could produce 23.42 liters of fresh water per day.

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PAM suspends 15 domestic labor recruitment licenses

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Public Authority for Manpower in Kuwait has released its latest report on domestic labor office licenses and graduate services, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

As of November, the Authority reported 15 suspended licenses for domestic labor offices, while 468 offices remained actively registered. The report also noted 409 complaints filed against these offices during the same period. In terms of licensing activity, 19 licenses were renewed, 13 were suspended, and 6 new licenses were issued.

Additionally, the Authority announced a new feature in its "Sahel" application called the "Graduates' Reward Transaction" service. This service, accessible through the "Fakhrna Platform" within the app, allows recent graduates to apply for rewards and file grievances related to these transactions.

This update reflects the Authority's efforts to streamline services for both the domestic labor sector and recent graduates in Kuwait.

Kuwait Higher Education clarifies freeze on study missions abroad

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (KUNA): The Ministry of Higher Education in Kuwait announced on Monday the specific circumstances under which students are allowed to freeze their study missions abroad. Key points from the announcement include:

Pre-Mission Freezes: Students cannot freeze scholarships before the mission begins.

Postponement for up to one academic year is allowed if:

- a) The student fails to obtain a travel visa.
- b) Health reasons, supported by an approved medical report.
- c) Other reasons deemed acceptable by the

Ministry.

Post-Mission Freezes:

Scholarships can be frozen after recommendation from the Cultural Office and Ministry approval in cases such as:

Compelling circumstances requiring the student to leave the place of study.

Failure to obtain acceptance at a recommended university for reasons beyond the student's control.

University refusal to allow repeating a failed year, with a maximum freeze of one year or two semesters.

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5 Arab Times Editor-in-Chief receives Sudanese Ambassador

8 NBK introduces 'AFAQ' - GCC's unified payment system on Mobile Banking



9 Zain supports 'The Gulf Cup ... A Chronicle of History and Memories' book

Prayer Timings

Fajr	05:14	Asr	14:37
Sunrise ..	06:39	Maghrib ..	16:55
Zohr	11:47	Isha	18:17

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Mild and partly cloudy to cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speed of 08-28 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain.

Weather

By Night: Cold to very cold with light variable wind, with speed of 06-22 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	17	10
Kuwait Airport	18	07

Abdaly	20	06
Bubyan	19	07
Jahra	19	09
Failaka Island	18	11
Salmiyah	17	12
Ahmadi	18	06
Jal Aliyah	18	06
Nuwaisib	18	09



PM Diwan photo
His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets the visiting Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Qais bin Mohammad Al-Yusuf.

Kuwait FM, GCC chief hold talks on regional scenario

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (KUNA): Kuwait Foreign Minister Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya met on Monday with Secretary General of The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Mohammad Al-Budaiwi discussing latest developments at the regional and international levels.

A press release by the Foreign Ministry said that the discussions tackled means of enhancing all efforts to elevate the joint GCC action and solidarity in all fields.

The two officials also discussed latest developments both in the region and on the international level.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Communications Minister Omar Al-Omar received Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jassem Al-Budaiwi, where they discussed ways to enhance joint cooperation that supports and develops digital transformation.

In a statement to KUNA on Monday, Al-Omar said the meeting reviewed regional and international developments in the field of communications and technology, praising the distinguished relations between Kuwait and the GCC countries.

For his part, Al-Budaiwi expressed his thanks and appreciation for the warm reception, praising the role of Kuwait in supporting joint Gulf work, especially in the fields of digital transformation and future technologies.

This visit comes within the framework of ongoing efforts to strengthen relations between the GCC countries and enhance integration in various vital fields to achieve the aspirations of the Gulf people for sustainable development and prosperity.



KUNA photo
Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya during his meeting with the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Jassem Al-Budaiwi.

Kuwait PM receives Omani minister

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, with attendance of the Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaleefa Al-Ajeel, received on Monday the visiting Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Qais bin Mohammad Al-Yusuf. The Omani official is in Kuwait along with a delegation to attend the Kuwaiti-Omani Economic Forum.

1,300 new staff up count to 23,000 nurses in MoH

22 int'l experts to feature in 'health care' confab

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Director of the Nursing Services Department at the Ministry of Health Dr. Iman Al-Awadhi revealed an increase of approximately 1,300 male and female nurses in the Ministry of Health this year, which brings the total number of nursing staff in the health sector to around 23,000 nurses of various nationalities.

In a press statement, Dr. Al-Awadhi said the number of male and female graduates with a bachelor's degree or diploma from the

College of Nursing and the Nursing Institute in the 2023/2024 academic year was approximately 229.

She indicated that the total number of nursing staff in 2023 was about 21,796.

Announced

Also, Dr. Al-Awadhi announced the launch of the conference titled "Innovation in Nursing Care: Transforming the Future of Health Care", which will run for two days and is being held under the patronage of the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi. It will feature 22 experts and specialists from the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Council of Nursing (ICN), the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Jordan, Malaysia, and Egypt.

She explained that the conference aims to strengthen the role of nursing in improving

healthcare services through the effective use of modern technology and techniques. It also seeks to encourage nurses to adopt a culture of innovation that aligns with developments in the healthcare field and improves the quality of healthcare services in Kuwait.

The scientific papers presented at the conference will cover several key areas, including the introduction of modern technologies in the nursing profession, creating an innovative culture in nursing practices, promoting scientific research, and integrating evidence-based practices to improve the quality of healthcare.

Dr. Al-Awadhi revealed that two workshops will be held alongside the conference to discuss important topics such as effective communication and collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the promotion of creativity and leadership within the nursing profession.



Indian Embassy photo
From left to right: Aseem Mahajan, Joint Sec (Gulf); Arun Kumar Chatterjee, Secretary (CPV & OIA), Randhir Jaiswal, JS (XP) & Spokesperson and Dr Adarsh Swaika, Indian Ambassador to Kuwait

Four major MoUs signed

Kuwait, India nod upgrading ties to 'strategic partnership'

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The historic visit of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Kuwait on Dec 21-22, has culminated in the signing of four major bilateral documents between both friendly nations. Kuwait and India have agreed on raising their bilateral ties to a 'strategic partnership', based on the deep-rooted and cordial relations between the two countries.

This was disclosed by Arun Kumar Chatterjee, Secretary (CPV & OIA) during a press briefing at the Bayan Palace, Sunday, which was also attended by Aseem Mahajan, joint Sec (Gulf); Randhir Jaiswal, JS (XP) & Spokesperson and the Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Adarsh Swaika.

The following are the details of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs):
■ Defense Cooperation Agreement -- This includes training exchanges, joint exercises, defense industry collaboration, and supply of defense equipment, along with research and development initiatives.

■ Cultural Exchange Program (2025-2029) -- This agreement will promote cultural exchanges between India and Kuwait, focusing on art, music, literature, theater, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

■ Executive Program for Sports Cooperation (2025-2028) -- This program aims to enhance bilateral cooperation in sports, including the exchange of sports leaders, expertise in sports medicine, management, media and sports science.

■ International Solar Alliance Membership -- Kuwait has joined the International Solar Alliance, which focuses on scaling up the use of solar energy and addressing key challenges in developing low-carbon growth trajectories.

Contributions

Chatterjee said, both countries have acknowledged the significant contributions of the Indian community in Kuwait's economic development, particularly in sectors like health and education, oil industries to engineering, medical, IT and finance professionals and to further strengthen cooperation, separate working groups in these sectors will meet regularly to explore new avenues for collaboration, he added.

He said, during meetings with Kuwait's leadership that focused on the shared historical and cultural ties between India and Kuwait have reaffirmed both nations' commitment to elevate

their relationship to a strategic partnership.

Modi's visit marks the deep-rooted ties between the two countries and laid the groundwork for enhanced bilateral cooperation across various sectors.

India has been thriving and contributing to the country's development since the 1940s. Considering this, there should have been more high-level engagements between our two countries. With Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kuwait, following his visits to other Gulf nations, we believe it will bring about many positive changes and open up new avenues of cooperation," he added.

Share

"India and Kuwait," he said, "share a deep history, with many commonalities -- whether in our cultures, our functioning democracies, or our longstanding relationship. Modi's visit also offers an opportunity to address some perceptions here in Kuwait.

"The Middle East is increasingly looking eastward, and India is well-positioned to play a key role in this shift, as it has done successfully in other Gulf nations, particularly the UAE.

He went on to say, the labor force in Kuwait is diverse, and its members have helped shape the economic landscape over the years. While incidents do occur from time to time, including unfortunate losses, it is important to highlight that Kuwait has a robust legal and labor framework to address such issues.

"In fact," he added, "Kuwait's labor laws are designed to protect workers, and violations are handled with due process."

He disclosed, in the area of manpower, a dedicated joint working group will address issues related to Indian workers in Kuwait, ensuring their well-being and addressing any challenges they may face.

India's growing engagement with Kuwait goes beyond being a source of labor supply and is increasingly being seen as a key partner in Kuwait's broader vision for 2035. This evolving relationship highlights India's expanding role in Kuwait's economic development, especially in light of the country's massive funds and substantial investment plans, he added.

He said, Modi is optimistic about the future of India-Kuwait ties, highlighting the role of the Indian community in shaping the relationship and the promising opportunities for further cooperation in the years ahead.

Meanwhile, the Indian Embassy in Kuwait disclosed Prime Minister Modi has extended an invitation to His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of Kuwait to visit India.

Minister opens art fair to celebrate Gulf unity, heritage

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Minister of Education Jalal Al-Tabtabaei inaugurated the art exhibition 'With My Pen I Draw Our Gulf', emphasizing its role as more than a creative space but as a platform to revive the Gulf spirit and connect the region's rich heritage with its present, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The event, organized by the Arab Center for Educational Research for the Gulf States in collaboration with Kuwait's Ministry of Education, witnessed participation from diplomats, cultural leaders and educators.

In his speech, Minister Al-Tabtabaei highlighted the pivotal role of teachers in fostering Gulf identity among students. "Creative teachers, es-

pecially in art, open windows to learners on their heritage and encourage them to express their pride in national and Gulf identity through artistic creations that embody unity and shared values," he stated.

The exhibition, showcasing 175 paintings by Kuwaiti art teachers, captures the essence of Gulf heritage, including traditional professions, landmarks and lifestyles. It also aims to strengthen cultural awareness and critical thinking skills among students, underscoring the integration of art and education in promoting Gulf unity.

Dr. Mohammed Al-Sharika, Director of the Arab Center for Educational Research for the Gulf States, commended the exhibition as a celebration

of vibrant Gulf creativity.

He described art as a universal language bridging cultures and fostering identity. Al-Sharika reaffirmed the center's commitment to supporting educational initiatives that enhance cultural exchange and knowledge sharing across Gulf countries.

The exhibition not only highlights the aesthetics of Gulf heritage but also serves as an educational and cultural message, emphasizing the strong ties and shared destiny of Gulf Cooperation Council members.

The event continues to inspire educators, students and visitors, reflecting the region's unified aspirations through creative expressions.

Holders of false disability docus to face law; 'must return cash'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Public Authority for the Disabilities Affairs (PADA) has initiated a comprehensive review of all disability certificates that have been issued to ensure that recipients meet the eligibility criteria as defined by the law and associated regulations, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Acting Director General of PADA, Wafaa Al-Muhanna, informed the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that this measure is part of efforts to uphold the law following the discovery of numerous cases where individuals acquired disability certificates and associated benefits without justification.

Al-Muhanna highlighted that individuals found to have secured disability certificates through false information or forged documents will face legal consequences.

This includes recovering all financial benefits obtained unlawfully. The PADA's review will be conducted in collaboration with relevant authorities using a robust database integrated with modern electronic systems to enhance transparency and accuracy in evaluating eligibility.

The Acting Director General emphasized PADA's commitment to enforcing the law with transparency and rigor, aiming to build a society rooted in justice and equality. She reiterated that full support would be directed to those who are legally entitled to these benefits.

This initiative reflects a proactive approach to addressing fraudulent claims while ensuring that resources are allocated to individuals who genuinely qualify under the law.

Gharib congratulates Amir on 1st anniversary of rule

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Archimandrite Boutros Gharib, the Patriarchal Vicar of the Greek Melkites in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, extended heartfelt congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the first anniversary of his leadership, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Gharib emphasized His Highness's inclusive approach, stating, "His Highness embraced my church and all churches in Kuwait, reflecting his humanity and tolerance towards everyone." In a statement on behalf of the Catholic Church and its parishioners, Gharib expressed admiration for Sheikh Meshal's leadership, saying, "I am honored to extend my warmest congratulations on this occasion. We ask God Almighty to protect him, guide his steps and grant him success in leading Kuwait towards continued development and prosperity."

Gharib also acknowledged Kuwait's significant role under His Highness's vision in addressing humanitarian issues worldwide and wished him good health and success in his duties for the benefit of the nation and its people.

UK issued 95,381 e-travel visas to Kuwaitis: envoy

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis says 2024 has been a special year for both the United Kingdom and Kuwait, as the governments of the two countries jointly celebrated 125 years of official diplomatic relations.

In a press statement, she revealed that 95,381 electronic travel permits had been issued to Kuwaiti citizens since February 2024.

Ambassador Lewis affirmed that cooperation in trade, investment, defense, and security has long been the foundation of the strong relationship between the two countries.

She said, "What truly binds us is the special bond between our peoples." Ambassador Lewis explained that the first major announcement of the year was the launch of the Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) system in February, which made short trips to the United Kingdom easier and more flexible for Kuwaiti citizens. The demand for the system's services was high, with 47,142 permits issued to Kuwaitis from July to September, bringing the total to 95,381 permits since the launch of ETA.



Belinda Lewis



Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah meets officials from various departments.

New projects, repair works discussed

Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received at his office this morning the acting Assistant Undersecretary for the Sanitary Engineering Sector at the Ministry of Public Works Eng. Abdulrahman Al-Enezi, Head of the Permits Department at the General Traffic Department Eng. Mansour Al-Shammari, and former mayor of Ardiya Abdullah Al-Haifi.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, they discussed the projects and maintenance works be-

ing implemented in the governorate. During the meeting, the governor stressed the importance of coordination among various parties to ensure the completion of projects according to the highest standards in a way that meets aspirations, and contributes to improving the quality of services provided.

Sheikh Athbi praised the fruitful cooperation between the various parties, and stressed the importance of joint efforts to ensure the sustainability of projects and achieve the desired development.

'Democracy played vital role to curb political citizenships'

"WE thank the brothers who supported those affected by the ill-considered cancellation of the nationalities of some 'Kuwaiti men and women,' and we support everyone who objected to the injustice suffered by the victims of the recent procedures to withdraw nationalities," columnist **Abdullatif Al-Duaij** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"However, the matter should not be limited to the humanitarian or social aspect, despite its importance and seriousness, as the political aspect of the legitimate and necessary question remains: Why is there this laxity in Kuwaiti citizenship? And why did sister countries, whose circumstances are similar to those of Kuwait, not suffer from this matter? Why only Kuwait?"



Al-Duaij

"It is democracy... the democracy that is unique to Kuwait, but it is not democracy itself, but rather its 'opposition' and resistance to the inevitable political changes that Kuwait society was going through."

"Since the adoption of the democratic system in Kuwait, some members of the ruling family have been working hard to confront and sabotage the democratic system."

"Unfortunately, they have succeeded in doing so and today we, not them, are the ones who are unfortunately paying the heavy price for that."

"These parties rigged the 1967 elections, but when the late Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad corrected this path in his bloodless coup on June 24, 1970, these parties resorted to tampering with the demographic structure through 'political naturalization.'"

"I prefer this name to 'random naturalization,' because this naturalization was not a coincidence and did not occur as a result of an administrative error or negligence."

"Rather, it was a political act that was studied, required and planned by the influential parties from the family's poles, for a specific and clear goal, which was to falsify the will of the Kuwaiti people, by reducing the votes or political influence of the Kuwaiti democratic forces that lined up behind the national commercial leaderships, which persistently carried the banner of political reform and civilizing the state."

"Reducing this influence, or in the language of direct elections, if we want to simplify, reducing the Kuwaiti democratic majority by adding 'Kuwaitis' or new electoral votes with tribal and clan affiliations, beliefs and traditional heritage, linked and suspended to authority and subject to the upbringing and influence of the 'Abkhaz sheikhs.'"

"In short, the naturalization of thousands from outside Kuwait and their inclusion in the electoral lists, so that they constitute the majority loyal and biased to the authorities, against development and democratic progress, against the 'relatively' politically aware Kuwaitis, who have imbibed openness and tolerance through contact with other peoples through trade and travel."

"This was the beginning and the tampering, incitement and forgery of the Kuwaiti national identity was carried out by parties hostile to democracy and political development by some leaders of the ruling family and launched or gave the signal to start the forgery, fabrication and tampering with the Kuwaiti identity."

Also:

"The phrase 'The return of the spirit' perfectly encapsulates the emotions that surged within me as I watched the opening ceremony of the Gulf Cup unfold. It was more than an event; it was a collective revival of hope, pride and self-assurance for the people of Kuwait," columnist **Walid Al-Jassim** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"After years of setbacks that tested

our confidence in the present and stirred anxieties about the future, this celebration on the soil of Kuwait brought a renewed sense of purpose and joy."

"Though the ceremony may not rank among the most spectacular globally, it stands out as Kuwait's finest in recent years -- a testament to our ability to organize a smooth, dazzling and heartfelt event."

"The presence of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah added a touch of reverence and unity, reminding us of the creativity and excellence that have always been part of Kuwait's legacy."

"This moment was not just a triumph for Kuwaitis but a shared joy for our Gulf and Arab brothers and sisters. Their happiness and support were palpable at Jaber Stadium and we felt a renewed sense of pride in answering their long-standing question, 'Where are you, people of Kuwait?' with a resounding, 'Here we are, back and stronger than ever.'"

"We owe a debt of gratitude to the Minister of Information and Youth, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi and the countless individuals and volunteers who worked tirelessly to make this event a success."

"Their efforts have not only restored a sense of unity but have paved the way for Kuwait's return to distinction and leadership on the regional and global stage."

"As we prepare to host the Asian Cup, let this milestone inspire us to achieve even greater accomplishments and solidify Kuwait's position as a beacon of creativity and excellence in the Arab world."



"Thus, the curtain has fallen on the final chapter of the drama on heroism and sacrifice, which embodied the struggle of the free and proud Kuwaiti people who refused to accept fingerprinting, irrespective of the cost," columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Yes, this was the path of struggle, and the path of brave fighters who rejected fingerprinting. Unfortunately, the play's conclusion came unexpectedly, thus ending the struggle with all the statements and back-and-forth that accompanied it."

"There was no need for such drama, as it was much simpler than a story of struggle. The majority of the Kuwaiti people, led by His Highness the Amir (May God protect him), underwent fingerprinting without any issue. The matter was resolved, and no problems arose. No one was swayed by the deliberate escalation, and it was not a popular issue from which those seeking heroism profited. The patriotism of the simple citizens who underwent fingerprinting at the very start was unshaken; they felt relieved and comforted. The popularity of those who tried to make this an issue to fight against and to turn it into a cause to break free from did not increase."

"We have stated that the Kuwait train is moving full speed ahead toward broader horizons, God willing. Whoever wishes to ride with the survivors must join them, and those left behind will find themselves alone at a station that the train has already passed."

"Now is not the time for heroism, as the situation around us calls for solidarity and cooperation. True heroism lies in preserving our homeland and prioritizing its well-being. It is not appropriate to seek heroism by challenging measures designed to secure and strengthen our internal front."

Today, as the fabricated storm has passed, we have the right to ask: Who truly benefited from this unjustified escalation, and who lost in the end?"

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



Deputy Chief of Staff of the Kuwaiti Army Major General (Pilot) Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and respective delegations during the meeting.

Kuwait, Pakistan seek to enhance military ties

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (KUNA): Major General (Pilot) Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Kuwaiti Army, held discussions on Monday with Lieutenant General Sahir Mirza, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The talks focused on key issues of mutual interest, particularly in the military domain, and explored ways to enhance and

develop cooperation between the two friendly nations.

According to a press statement issued by the General Staff, Major General Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad hosted Lieutenant General Mirza and his accompanying delegation during their official visit to Kuwait. The visit included an official reception ceremony to welcome the Pakistani delegation.

As part of his visit, Lieutenant General Mirza toured Mubarak Al-Abdullah College for Command and Joint Staff. He received a comprehensive briefing on the college's role in training and preparing military leaders, as well as its academic and training programs designed to strengthen leadership skills and improve the operational capabilities of officers.

Aluminum, wood shops raided to curb overpricing, violations

Expatriate perishes under wheels of truck

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff & Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Commercial Control and Consumer Protection Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry recently conducted an inspection tour of wood and aluminum shops in Al-Rai as part of its ongoing efforts to monitor prices and ensure compliance with the ministry's regulations and laws.

Director of the department Faisal Al-Ansari informed the newspaper that the inspection teams of the ministry visited wood and aluminum shops in Al-Rai in response to multiple complaints from consumers.

The complainants reported that some traders demanded advance payment of about 25 to

50 percent — ranging from KD 2,000 to KD 3,000 — without completing the agreed-upon work.

Al-Ansari explained that some shop owners collected substantial amounts before moving to other areas without fulfilling their obligations, prompting consumers to file complaints.

During the inspection tour, the teams reviewed contracts signed by consumers and issued nine notices to shop owners; instructing them to visit the department and comply with the regulations.

He said the goal of the inspection tour was to make sure that shop owners and workers adhere to ministerial decisions and avoid violations.

He confirmed the continuation of such inspection tours to safeguard consumers' rights and strictly enforce the laws and regulations.



Expatriate crushed by truck: An unidentified expatriate died after being run over by a truck while he was working in the Sulabiya Indus-

trial area. The body has been transferred to the Forensic Medicine Department, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to a security source, the truck driver has been detained pending investigation and he confirmed that he did not know the victim.

In a separate incident, a vehicle overturned on Salmi Road, resulting in minor injuries to the driver, who was taken to Jahra Hospital. The vehicle was removed from the road.



Brother assaulted: A 1992-born man accused his older brother of assaulting him at their family home in Al-Waha area, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

He filed a report in this regard with the Northwest Sulabikhat Police Station, and provided a medical report detailing the injuries and bruises he sustained on various parts of his body.

By order of the Capital Prosecutor, the case has been classified as "domestic violence."

'Mandoob' taking bribe to expedite work arrested

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: An expatriate, who works as a correspondent (mandoob) in a government agency, has been referred to the Public Prosecution on charges of requesting a bribe in exchange for expediting end-of-service payment procedures for retirees and those whose services have ended, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to security sources, the Capital Investigations Department received information about the expatriate requesting bribes from retirees to complete the payment of their financial dues within three weeks instead of the usual three months. Immediately, the department launched investigations, which revealed that the suspect had a history of such illegal behavior.

An undercover agent was sent to the suspect and he requested the expatriate's help in

expediting the end-of-service payment. Upon receiving the bribe, the expatriate was caught red-handed, and he admitted to his actions, claiming he considered the bribe merely as a "tip" for speeding up the process.

The Capital Investigations Department referred him to the Public Prosecution, which has decided to detain the accused in the Central Prison, pending the case.



Wanted in financial cases: An expatriate of Arab nationality was arrested in Farwaniya, as he was wanted by law for a number of financial cases and was reported as absconding, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

During a routine patrol by Farwaniya police officers recently, they became suspicious of a

car with an expatriate inside, and stopped it. Upon inquiry, it was revealed that the driver, an Arab national, was wanted for financial cases and had an absconding case registered against him. He was subsequently referred to the concerned authorities.

In a separate incident, Jahra police officers arrested a young Gulf man in Saad Al-Abdullah for drug abuse and for the possession of the narcotic substance "shabu" and drug paraphernalia.

At a checkpoint set up by security forces in Saad Al-Abdullah, they stopped a car driven by the young man, and checked his details to discover he was a Gulf national. A search of his belongings uncovered a bag of shabu and drug paraphernalia. He was taken into custody and referred to the Drugs Control General Department.

Court acquits 7 persons in fraud and forgery lawsuit

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Criminal Court has acquitted seven individuals accused of money laundering, forgery and defrauding a citizen by promising financial profits through digital currency investment schemes, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

According to the case papers the complainant reported the unauthorized withdrawal of 3,300 Kuwaiti dinars from his account.

Investigations alleged that the seventh defendant received this amount, purchased digital currency on the Binance platform, and transferred it to a criminal group operating abroad.

The group, comprising the first six defendants and others unidentified, reportedly managed call centers to deceive victims into fake investment opportunities.

The group allegedly contacted the complainant, convinced him of guaranteed profits, and tricked him into downloading the "AnyDesk" application.

Through this software, they accessed his account without consent and facilitated the transfer of funds.

The funds were routed through various accounts before reaching the seventh defendant, who converted them into digital currency.

Attorney Ali Al-Ali, representing the seventh defendant, argued that the charges lacked sufficient evidence and that the investigations were flawed and inconclusive.

The court ruled that the case lacked definitive evidence to convict the accused. The court stated that the Prosecution's case relied heavily on speculation and unsubstantiated detective reports, which failed to establish a direct connection between the defendants and the alleged crimes.

As a result, all seven defendants were acquitted of the charges, with the court emphasizing the absence of concrete evidence and the prevalence of doubt in the case.



Traffic police checking in progress.

Moi photo

35 boys caught driving without license; cars, bikes confiscated

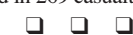
By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The General Traffic Department continued its traffic campaigns in all governorates last week, which resulted in the issuance of 36,245 traffic citations. They also referred 35 juveniles to the Juvenile Prosecution for driving without a valid license.

The department also seized 217 vehicles and 28 motorcycles, detained 24 individuals in traffic custody, and confiscated 35 vehicles wanted by the judiciary. Furthermore, 29 people wanted in connection with legal cases were arrested, along with seven individuals found in an abnormal condition. The depart-

ment also responded to 979 traffic accidents, which resulted in 269 casualties.



49 illegals arrested: Based on directives from the Assistant Undersecretary for Traffic Affairs and Operations Major General Yousef Al-Khudah, the rescue patrols have been continuing with their extensive security campaigns in all governorates.

The latest campaigns resulted in the arrest of 34 individuals in possession of suspected narcotics or intoxicating substances, 69 wanted in connection with legal cases, 35 reported as absconding, and 12 individuals convicted by court rulings. Also, 39 vehicles were seized.



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The Kuwaiti and Omani Ministers of Commerce attended the opening of the exhibition held alongside the forum, featuring participation from 70 small and medium enterprises.



Kuwaiti, Omani ministers pledge deeper bilateral cooperation at economic forum

Agreement signed to foster partnerships

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel affirmed the keenness of Kuwait to align its efforts with the noble goal of strengthening cooperation and trade exchanges with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

In his opening speech at the Kuwaiti-Omani Economic Forum yesterday, Al-Ajeel explained that the forum was held in line with the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad during the Gulf Summit to unify policies, facilitate trade and investment, support local industries, and enhance innovation and entrepreneurship among Gulf nations to promote prosperity and advancement for the countries and peoples of the Arabian Gulf region.

He highlighted the long-standing and deep-rooted relationship between Kuwait and Oman, which is evident in their historical maritime trade.

Al-Ajeel affirmed that Oman was an important stop for Kuwaiti ships heading to the Indian subcontinent and other countries, which marked the beginning of historical trade relations that continue to thrive today. He explained that the ties between the



Oman and Kuwait signed a cooperation agreement to strengthen collaboration across various fields.

Kuwaiti and Omani peoples extend far beyond trade and are rooted in a deeper, long-standing bond. The Sultanate of Oman has consistently been a generous and welcoming country, with both its people and rulers showing unwavering support.

Al-Ajeel shared a personal anecdote, recalling how he studied in Omani schools during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, when Oman stood as Kuwait's second supporter after the invasion.

He also highlighted the strengthening of economic relations between the two countries following the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the signing of the United Economic Agreement for the Council States on November 11, 1981. This agreement laid the foundation for regulating economic and trade relations between Kuwait and Oman.

Al-Ajeel praised the successful outcomes of the tenth session of the Kuwaiti-Omani Joint Committee that was held in Kuwait in

October, during which a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of consumer protection was signed.

Meanwhile, the Omani Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed Al-Yousef stated that the conference reflects the deep fraternal ties between the two countries, highlighting that the sisterly State of Kuwait is a strategic partner of the Sultanate of Oman.

He affirmed his commitment to strengthening economic relations in line with the directives of the leaders of both nations and to expanding areas of joint trade and investment cooperation, with the goal of increasing trade exchange and sharing expertise.

Al-Yousef stressed the importance of building strategic partnerships between businesses and entrepreneurs in both countries, discussing developments in exports, introducing investment opportunities, and enhancing cooperation in sectors such as industry, tourism, logistics, and food security.

He also stressed the need to work towards greater integration between the two nations to achieve the goals of Oman 2040 vision and New Kuwait 2035 vision, particularly in trade, industry, and investment sectors.

Al-Yousef highlighted the mutual visits between Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad that coincided with the opening of the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Project in the Special Economic Zone, which is the largest joint investment venture between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Kuwait.

KISR opens registration for 36th spring training course

By Abdulrahman Al-Shimmari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, through its Manpower Development Department, has announced the opening of registration for its 36th spring student training course.

The course, slated to be held from Jan 19 to 30, 2025, is available for eighth and ninth-grade students.

Mona Al-Fulajawi, Director of the Manpower Development Department, stated that the registration is open until January 11 via the institute's website.

The training will include scientific programs such as 'A Journey into the World of Creativity', 'Young Scientists', 'The World of Waves', 'Basics of Robotics', 'Programming and Control', and 'Flutter Mobile Application'.

The registration is open exclusively for Kuwaiti students from public and private schools with an academic average of at least 75 percent in the 2023/2024 school year, and who successfully pass a personal interview with a specialized committee.

Strict selection process set

113 supervisory positions open in Islamic Studies

By Mohammed Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: According to informed sources at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, there are currently 113 vacant educational supervisory positions in the departments of Islamic Studies and Quran Sciences in all six governorates of Kuwait. These positions are available in the Al-Siraj Al-Munir and Islamic Studies Supervision, and are open to both men and women working in the ministry.

The sources explained that the process of filling these positions is based on the regulations set by the Civil Service Commission (CSC), in addition to the specific criteria outlined by the ministry for each role. Applicants will be required to undergo tests and personal interviews, which will be conducted based on strict standards.

Meanwhile, the Assistant Undersecretary for Quran and Islamic Studies Affairs Dr. Bandar Al-Nusafi recently conducted an inspection tour of the sites where tests for candidates applying for educational supervisory and technical guidance positions were being conducted.

The sources explained that the purpose of the tour was to monitor the progress of the tests and ensure the selection of qualified candidates who will contribute to the development of the educational process and help achieve the ministry's goals.

The ministry adheres to the comparison rules set out in CSC's resolution No. 18/2011. Applicants are evaluated based on specific criteria, and the concerned committee submits its recommendations to the Personnel Affairs Committee to complete the promotion process.

In addition, the sources affirmed that the ministry grants applicants the right to appeal final administrative decisions in line with general regulations. They highlighted the ministry's commitment to enhancing the educational process in the Islamic Studies and Quran Sciences sectors, filling supervisory vacancies, and ensuring the smooth operation of the workflow.

19 diplomats engage with youth workshops

Red Palace hosts diplomatic delegation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Kuwait Environment Protection Society welcomed a delegation of 19 ambassadors and diplomatic mission representatives to its environmental awareness campaign at the Red Palace in Jahra, which has been held for the third consecutive week, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The aim of the event was to educate the youth of Jahra Governorate.

According to the Society's Public Relations Officer, Maali Al-Okab, the visiting delegation included the Ambassador of Eswatini, Nkholiiko Dlamini; the Ambassador of Mexico, Eduardo Patricio Peña Haller and his wife, Maria Laura Duclode Villaris; the Chargé d'Affaires of the Nigerian Embassy, Murtala Jimoh; the Ambassador of Burkina Faso, Asani Tambora; the Minister-Counselor at the Myanmar Embassy, Nyan Lin Aung; the Minister-Counselor and Deputy Head of Mission at the Ghana Embassy, Niamato Zebli Adam; and the Consul and Deputy Head of Mission at the Bulgarian Embassy, Anatoly Ivanov Minkov.

Al-Okab praised the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, as well as the Red Palace administration, for facilitating the diplomatic visit, which allowed the diplomats to engage with the local heritage.

The delegation also included the Consul of Tajikistan, Feroz Guibov; the First Secretary of the Nepali Embassy, Prem Raj Gautam; the Personal Assistant to the Turkish Ambassador, Shaima Mustafa; the Educational Officer at the

French Embassy, Safa Lahrud; the Deputy Head of Mission and Consul at the Maltese Embassy, Mary Louise; Ramadhani Hayishi representing the Tanzanian Embassy; Farouk Mustafa from the Turkish Embassy; the First Secretary at the Malawi Embassy, Melik Chidzanja; the Social Affairs Secretary at the French Embassy, Asma Boujendar; the Head of Mission at the Vatican Embassy, Ambassador Eugene M. Nugent; and Father Fernando Grandy Freias, Deputy Head of Mission at the Vatican Embassy.

Al-Okab highlighted the diplomats' active participation and engagement with the bird monitoring and protection team, the youth environmental team, and the Friends of the Environment team.

The Society invests significant time, effort, and training into these groups to equip them with the necessary skills to disseminate environmental information to the community.

Through this, they have contributed to the practical aspects of the various technical workshops held during the event.

Additionally, the visiting diplomats recorded an environmental message titled "A Message from the Community to the Community" and expressed their interest in organizing environmental events in collaboration with the Society, specifically for their respective communities in Kuwait.

This initiative aligns with the Society's long-standing success in engaging the diplomatic community in such projects.



Group photo of diplomatic delegation with youth and members of the Environmental Protection Association.

Seventh aid flight arrives in Lebanon

Lebanese minister expresses gratitude for Kuwait's humanitarian support amid crisis



Chargé d'Affaires of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Lebanon, Counselor Yassin Al-Majed, with the Lebanese Minister of Environment, Dr. Nasser Yassin, during the reception of the Kuwaiti Air Force plane loaded with aid.

BEIRUT, Dec 23, (KUNA): Lebanon's Minister of Environment Dr. Nasser Yassin expressed his gratitude on Sunday for Kuwait's efforts in helping Lebanon in these difficult circumstances.

This came during the reception of Minister Yassin, accompanied by Chargé d'Affaires of Kuwaiti Embassy in Lebanon Counselor Yassin Al-Majed, of an aid-loaded Kuwaiti Air Force plane, provided by the Lebanese Embassy in Kuwait, at Beirut's Rafic Hariri International Airport.

In a statement to KUNA, Yassin praised Kuwait's humanitarian efforts in supporting Lebanon during the Israeli occupation's aggression and the resulting displacement of residents.

On behalf of the Lebanese government, its Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Health Minister Firas Al-Abiad, he thanked the Lebanese Embassy and the Lebanese community in Kuwait for providing this aid, which comes with the support and solidarity of Kuwaiti government.

There are still a small number of shelters for the displaced, said Yassin, indicating that there are about 600,000 displaced citizens who are in need of this support. For his part, Counselor Al-Majed told KUNA that this is the seventh plane, loaded with medical supplies and materials, as part of a donation campaign launched by the Lebanese Embassy in Kuwait, from December 6 to 8.

MEW nears decision on new shift work system

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy is close to finalizing a new shift work system, aligning with the decisions of the Civil Service Bureau, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The ministry sources have revealed that the new system, primarily focused on the power and water stations and operation sectors, will adopt a 12-hour

shift schedule followed by 24 hours of rest.

This system is designed to ensure both employee comfort and operational efficiency, particularly in vital sectors like power generation and water production, where continuous oversight is essential for providing high-quality services.

In line with the Bureau's regulations, the ministry is also considering a flexible approach,

which includes discussions on an 8-hour shift system, with evaluations ongoing to determine which arrangement best balances employee needs with the demands of work. The final decision will be made soon, following thorough consultations.

The new shift system is expected to be implemented early next year after the necessary preparations are completed to ensure a smooth transition.

الهيئة العامة للتطوير الاقتصادي العربي
Kuwait Fund For Arab Economic Development

INVITATION FOR PREQUALIFICATION FOR INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING OF WORKS & GOODS (ICB) N° 01 MSP/SE/SG/PNLCC/2024

CONSTRUCTION AND EQUIPPING OF THE CENTER FOR CANCER TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF IN NDJAMENA, CHAD

The Government of the Republic of Chad has received financing from the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development towards the cost of the construction and equipping of the Center for Cancer Treatment and Control (CECTaC) Project in Ndjamena, Chad. The beneficiary invites eligible contractors to apply to prequalify for an international competitive bidding of the construction, handover, and maintenance of all temporary and permanent facilities for a hospital building in Ndjamena, Chad. Temporary works include site fencing, engineer's offices, vehicles, car parks, paving, detours, signage, and other preliminary requirements detailed in the specifications and drawings. permanent works encompass complete civil, structural, architectural, electrical, and mechanical works. The entire construction must be completed within the stipulated period and maintained for one year for all civil and mechanical, electrical, plumbing (MEP) works. The project involves the construction of a hospital building consisting of four floors, namely Basement, Ground, First, and Roof Floor, covering a built-up area of approximately 11,000 m2 along with a residential unit of an approximate build-up area of 2,100 m2 along with sundry buildings.

Important Dates & Address:

Amount for qualification document	500 000 CFA
Pre-qualification submission date & time	22 January 2024, 12 00
Pre-qualification opening date & time	22 January 2024, 13 00
Name & Address of the office	Ministère de la Santé Publique Project Implementation Unit Secretariat (R+214) BP 440 Rondpoint Hamama Quartier Ndjari, Ndjamena Chad Phone: +235 66 66 65 98 Email: fatimahaggar@gmail.com

Bidders Requirements :

- Minimum average annual construction turnover of 10 million (\$10,000,000) USD calculated as total certified payments received for contracts in progress and/or completed within the last ten (10) years.
- Experience under construction contracts as prime contractor, joint-venture member, sub-contractor, or management contractor for at least the last ten (10) years.
- At least two (2) similar contracts executed as a prime contractor, joint venture member, management contractor, or subcontractor with values of USD 10,000,000 or more.
- Experiences in construction and equipping medical & non-medical equipment of 100 plus Beds regionally and internationally, maintenance of hospital buildings, construction of more than 10,000 m2 buildings, engaging in DB contracts in the last ten (10) years.



Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah with Ambassador Awadel Karim Elrayah Balla.



During the meeting attended by Deputy Editor-in-Chief Suleiman Al-Jarallah and Saud Al-Farhan.

Photos by Rezk Taufiq

Arab Times Editor-in-Chief receives Sudanese Ambassador

Ahmed Al-Jarallah, Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers, received His Excellency Awadel Karim Elrayah Balla, the Sudanese Ambassador to Kuwait, at the Dar Al-Seyassah headquarters on Monday.

During the meeting, which was attended by Deputy Editor-in-Chief Suleiman Al-Jarallah and Saud Al-Farhan, the two parties discussed various current issues and developments in Sudan, and highlighted the importance of objective media coverage on these matters.

The ambassador expressed his gratitude to Al-Jarallah for the warm reception and praised his dedication to strengthening cooperation with the Sudanese Embassy in providing an accurate and realistic portrayal of the situation in Sudan.

Continued from Page 1

God deters

Moreover, some of these children sacrificed their lives for the sake of Kuwait by participating in the Kuwait Liberation War. During that challenging time, they did not think of privileges or money, as their sole concern was the security of their nation and the safety of their rulers.

Indeed, the Kuwaiti people were pleased when the head of state, His Highness the Amir, the protector of justice, issued directives to open the citizenship file and purify it from any instances of forgery.

On the other hand, people know well that His Highness the Amir will never tolerate injustice to anyone, as Kuwait, throughout its history, has never been unjust to anyone. It is the nature of its rulers, through the ages, to reject injustice, regardless of its reasons.

It is true that everyone supports punishing the forgers and the corrupt individuals who facilitated such crimes, in order to cleanse the national identity file. However, there is a group of people who feel that injustice has befallen them, specifically the wives of Kuwaitis who obtained citizenship under the laws that were prevalent at the time.

Therefore, it is advisable to consider amending the law to address this issue for ensuring that it does not negatively affect a segment of citizens. This matter is in the hands of the Council of Ministers.

Countries work to strengthen patriotism and national loyalty, which are rooted in psychological and social stability. Citizens feel they are defending their own existence when they defend their homeland. This is achieved by forming a positive, solid relationship between them and their country, which is reflected in their daily lives. In doing so, they will not feel frustrated or disillusioned.

Here, we reaffirm that God deters by authority those who are not deterred by the teachings of the Holy Quran.

No Kuwaiti

In case authorities see an infringement on the state higher interest or external security. Relatives will be also stripped of the nationality in such a case.

■ In case the competent authorities acquired information about subversive acts or affiliations to a foreign political entity. Relatives lose it too.
■ Upon a resolution by the Minister

of Interior, the minor of a Kuwaiti mother and whose father is a prisoner, divorcee or demised, is treated as a Kuwaiti until adulthood.

Meanwhile, First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior and the Chairman of the Supreme Committee for the Investigation of Kuwaiti Nationality, Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, will hold an open meeting on Wednesday with editors-in-chief of daily newspapers and heads of public welfare societies at 10:30 a.m. at Seif Palace.

The interior ministry said in a statement to KUNA on Monday that the meeting aims to clarify the most prominent features of the new Kuwaiti Nationality Law amendments and discuss the files of dual and "forged Kuwaiti nationals" who acquired it based on fraud, false statements or incorrect certificates according to Article (21) and the files of Article Eight (wives of Kuwaitis).

It added that the open meeting will be attended by a number of relevant ministers and members of the Supreme Committee for the Investigation of Kuwaiti Nationality.

KISR redefines

Furthermore, a conceptual design for large-scale production was developed, using the experimental results along with mathematical modeling and simulations to evaluate the technical and economic feasibility of scaling the technology at various operating capacities.

The system offers several social and economic benefits; such as the development of local expertise, enhanced water security, and reduced environmental impacts. It is especially well-suited for remote areas and can be scaled up to meet growing water demands.

The researchers recommended further pilot-scale testing of the technology in conjunction with renewable energy and waste heat recovery to reduce energy consumption.

The technology demonstrated promising results in reducing blockages, salt deposits and corrosion; which can extend the life of membranes and reduce the need for chemical additives compared to traditional reverse osmosis systems.

KRCS reaffirms

The United Nations warns of people living in precarious makeshift shelters that might not survive the winter. At least 945,000 people need winterization sup-

plies, which have become prohibitively expensive in Gaza, the U.N. said in an update Tuesday. The U.N. also fears infectious disease, which spiked last winter, will climb again amid rising malnutrition.

The U.N. Agency for Palestinian Refugees, known as UNRWA, has been planning all year for winter in Gaza, but the aid it was able to get into the territory is "not even close to being enough for people," said Louise Wateridge, an agency spokeswoman.

UNRWA distributed 6,000 tents over the past four weeks in northern Gaza but was unable to get them to other parts of the Strip, including areas where there has been fighting. About 22,000 tents have been stuck in Jordan and 600,000 blankets and 33 truckloads of mattresses have been sitting in Egypt since the summer because the agency doesn't have Israeli approval or a safe route to bring them into Gaza and because it had to prioritize desperately needed food aid, Wateridge said.

Kuwait Higher

University suspension due to failure, allowing the student to take only final exams.

Academic Performance-Related Freezes:

After receiving three consecutive warnings or four separate ones, with one academic year left until graduation.

Exhausting continuation opportunities in the annual system due to failure, with one academic year remaining.

GPA drop leading to university suspension, until acceptance at another recommended university is obtained.

Time-Limited Freezes:
Upon expiration of the legal scholarship period and exhaustion of the extension period, unless further extension is approved by the Ministry.

The Ministry emphasized that these policies aim to provide clear guidelines for scholarship students while maintaining academic standards and efficient use of resources.

Kuwait's 1st

technologies used to receive reports and direct authorities to deal with them.

He continued his tour by visiting the Saudi National Cybersecurity Authority in the presence of Acting Head of the Kuwaiti National Cybersecurity Center, and King Fahd Security College and the Reform and Rehabilitation Center, then concluded his tour by visiting the General Directorate of Border Guard. (KUNA)

Municipality 'tightens' real estate agencies guidelines

Acting Director General issues new circular

By Enaas Awad

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Acting Director General of Kuwait Municipality, Manal Al-Asfour, has issued an administrative circular aimed at regulating real estate agencies based on recommendations from the Legal Department.

The circular, a copy of which has been obtained by Al-Seyassah daily, permits parties involved in non-revocable or irrevocable real estate agencies active at the time of the issuance of Law 125/2023 to obtain a building description certificate and survey books to identify properties in violation.

This is subject to the following four conditions:
■ Application Deadline: Applications must be submitted by one of the agency parties to the Director General of the

Municipality before the close of business on December 31, 2024.

■ Violation Removal Pledge: The person benefiting from the agency must submit a pledge to remove any violations after completing the property transfer.

■ Procedural Compliance: The beneficiary must pledge to complete all financial and administrative requirements related to any organizational, division, or public benefit decisions associated with the property, with the successor assuming the predecessor's commitments.

■ Limited Validity: The building description certificate and survey books must explicitly state they are valid for one-time use only.

This measure seeks to ensure compliance with legal requirements while addressing violations in real estate practices.



Al-Asfour

MoJ grants 1-year period for real estate agencies to rectify irrevocable contracts

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Ministry of Justice has announced that Law No. 2023/125, which regulates real estate agencies, grants a one-year period for parties involved in irrevocable real estate agencies to rectify their situations, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This grace period will end on January 31, 2025. If the parties fail to resolve their situations within this period, the real estate agency agreement will be treated as a "final sales contract."

The Ministry urges those involved

in irrevocable real estate agencies to address and settle their situations before the deadline. It also clarified that properties under such agencies may be issued a description certificate, even if they are in violation, as long as this occurs within the specified deadline.

Conditional approvals granted for South Saad Al-Abdullah sewage treatment plant

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Jahra Municipality Governorate Committee in the Municipal Council has granted approval for the Ministry of Public Works' request to allocate a site for a sewage treatment station for the South Saad Al-Abdullah Housing City, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The project is set to occupy an area of approximately 550,000 square meters in the Amghara area. However, several parties have issued conditional approvals due

to overlapping concerns with the workers' housing site in South Umm Al-Ghara.

The conditional approvals highlight the need for coordination between various authorities. The Survey Department of the Kuwait Municipality expressed no objection, provided that the services ministries approve and the workers' housing site be relocated.

The Ministry of Public Works outlined that the existing services in the area must

be maintained and that no damage be done to manhole covers and drainage chambers during construction. Coordination with the Roads and Networks Maintenance Department of Jahra Governorate is required before any work begins. Additional approvals came from the General Authority for Roads and Land Transport, the Ministry of Transport's Telephone Network Maintenance Department and the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy.

Civil ID required

CSC stricter adherence to children's allowance

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Civil Service Commission has issued a circular to all government agencies, public bodies and institutions, emphasizing the importance of complying with the Cabinet's decision made during its meeting on November 27.

The directive mandates that all state agencies must provide clear justifications for requesting the disbursement of the "children's allowance" for citizens.

This includes obtaining a certificate of proof of nationality and a civil ID card for the newborn before processing the allowance.

The move aims to ensure accountability and transparency in the disbursement process.

Housing Affairs carries out routine inspections

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Head of the Women's Housing Affairs Team, Sheikha Bibi Al-Yousef, emphasized that inspections of rented housing units under the Public Authority for Housing Care are routine and aimed at ensuring eligibility compliance, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

She explained that the inspections focus on verifying that beneficiaries adhere to the law and addressing any violations or transgressions.

Temporary road closure

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport, in cooperation with the General Traffic Department, announced a temporary daily closure of the two left (fast) lanes on the Fifth Ring Road for those going from Salmiya towards Jahra, starting from the top of Airport Road (55) with a security lane on the other side, starting this morning until next Thursday morning, from 12:00 am until 5:00 am, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

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Move prevents Trump's plans for executions

Biden gives life in prison to 37 of 40 federal death row inmates

WASHINGTON, Dec 23, (AP): President Joe Biden announced Monday that he is commuting the sentences of 37 of the 40 people on federal death row, converting their punishments to life imprisonment mere weeks before President-elect Donald Trump, an outspoken proponent of expanding capital punishment, takes office.

The move spares the lives of people convicted in killings, including the slayings of police and military officers, people on federal land and those involved in deadly bank robberies or drug deals, as well as the killings of guards or prisoners in federal facilities.

It means just three federal inmates are still facing execution. They are Dylann Roof, who carried out the 2015 racist slayings of nine Black members of Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, 2013 Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and Robert Bowers, who fatally shot 11 congregants at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue in 2018, the deadliest antisemitic attack in U.S. history.

"I've dedicated my career to reducing violent crime and

ensuring a fair and effective justice system," Biden said in a statement. "Today, I am commuting the sentences of 37 of the 40 individuals on federal death row to life sentences without the possibility of parole. These commutations are consistent with the moratorium my administration has imposed on federal executions, in cases other than terrorism and hate-motivated mass murder."

The Biden administration in 2021 announced a moratorium on federal capital punishment to study the protocols used, which suspended executions during Biden's term. But Biden actually had promised to go further on the issue in the past, pledging to end federal executions without the caveats for terrorism and hate-motivated, mass killings.

While running for president in 2020, Biden's campaign website said he would "work to pass legislation to eliminate the death penalty at the federal level, and incentivize states to follow the federal government's example."

Similar language didn't appear on Biden's reelection website before he left the presidential race in July.

"Make no mistake: I condemn these murderers, grieve for the victims of their despicable acts, and ache for all the families who have suffered unimaginable and irreparable loss," Biden's statement said. "But guided by my conscience and my experience as a public defender, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, vice president, and now president, I am more convinced than ever that we must stop the use of the death penalty at the federal level."

He took a political jab at Trump, saying, "In good conscience, I cannot stand back and let a new administration resume executions that I halted."

Indeed, Trump, who takes office on Jan. 20, has spoken frequently of expanding executions. In a speech announcing his 2024 campaign, Trump called for those "caught selling drugs to receive the death penalty for their heinous acts." He later promised to execute drug and human smugglers and even praised China's harsher treatment of drug peddlers. During his first term as president, Trump also advocated for the death penalty for drug dealers.

There were 13 federal executions during Trump's first term, more than under any president in modern history, and some may have happened fast enough to have contributed to the spread of the coronavirus at the federal death row facility in Indiana.

Those were the first federal executions since 2003. The final three occurred after Election Day in November 2020 but before Trump left office the following January, the first time federal prisoners were put to death by a lame-duck president since Grover Cleveland in 1889.

Biden faced recent pressure from advocacy groups urging him to act to make it more difficult for Trump to increase the use of capital punishment for federal inmates. The president's announcement also comes less than two weeks after he commuted the sentences of roughly 1,500 people who were released from prison and placed on home confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic, and of 39 others convicted of nonviolent crimes, the largest single-day act of clemency in modern history.

Panama's president balks at suggestion

Trump threatens to try to take back Panama Canal

PHOENIX, Dec 23, (AP): Donald Trump suggested that his new administration could try to regain control of the Panama Canal that the United States "foolishly" ceded to its Central American ally, contending that shippers are charged "ridiculous" fees to pass through the vital transportation channel linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Panama's conservative president José Raúl Mulino, who was elected in May on a pro-business platform, roundly rejected that notion as an affront to his country's sovereignty.

The Republican president-elect's comment came during his first major rally since winning the White House on Nov. 5. He also basked in his return to power as a large audience of conservatives cheered along. It was a display of party unity at odds with a just-concluded budget fight on Capitol Hill, where some GOP lawmakers openly defied their leader's demands.

Addressing supporters at Turning Point USA's AmericaFest in Arizona, Trump pledged that his "dream team Cabinet" would deliver a booming economy, seal U.S. borders and quickly settle wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

"I can proudly proclaim that the Golden Age of America is upon us," Trump said. "There's a spirit that we have now that we didn't have just a short while ago."

His appearance capped a four-day pep rally that drew more than 20,000 activists and projected an image of Republican cohesion despite the past week's turbulence in Washington with Trump



A cargo ship traverses the Agua Clara Locks of the Panama Canal in Colon, Panama, Sept. 2, 2024. (AP)

pulling strings from his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida as Congress worked to avoid a government shutdown heading into the holidays.

House Republicans spiked a bipartisan deal after Trump and Elon Musk, his billionaire ally, expressed their opposition on social media. Budget hawks flouted Trump's demand that they raise the nation's debt ceiling, which would have spared some new rounds of the same fight after he takes office on Jan. 20, with

Republicans holding narrow control of the House and Senate. The final agreement did not address the issue and there was no shutdown.

Trump, in his remarks in Phoenix, did not mention the congressional drama, though he did reference Musk's growing power. To suggestions that "President Trump has ceded the presidency to Elon," Trump made clear, "No, no. That's not happening."

Rare Kremlin visit sparks controversy

Putin holds talks with Slovakian PM

MOSCOW, Dec 23, (AP): Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday hosted Slovakia's prime minister, Robert Fico, in a rare visit to the Kremlin by an EU leader since Moscow's all-out invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Fico arrived in Russia on a "working visit" and met with Putin one-on-one on Sunday evening, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russia's RIA news agency. According to Peskov, the talks were expected to focus on "the international situation" and Russian natural gas deliveries.

Russian natural gas still flows to some European countries, including Slovakia, through Ukraine under a five-year agreement signed before the war that is due to expire at the end of this year. At a summit in Brussels on Thursday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told EU leaders that Kyiv has no intention of renewing the deal, something Fico insisted will harm his country's interests.

Fico said on Facebook after meeting with Putin that he informed European Union leaders about his trip on Friday.

He said the talks in Moscow were a reaction to what Zelenskyy told him on Thursday in Brussels, that he is against any gas transit to Slovakia through Ukraine. Fico also said that Zelenskyy is in favor of sanctions against Russia's nuclear program, which he said was unacceptable and against the interest of his country that relies on nu-



Russian President Vladimir Putin, right, and Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico greet each other during their meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, Sunday, Dec. 22, 2024. (AP)

clear energy.

Fico said Putin confirmed to him that Russia is still ready to deliver gas to the West. He said the two also discussed the military situation in Ukraine, chances for a peaceful solution to the war and the bilateral relations between their two countries which Fico said they will seek to "standardize."

His trip was condemned by the major Slovak opposition parties.

Slovakia last month signed a short-term pilot contract to buy natural gas from Azerbaijan, as it prepares for a possible halt to Russian supplies through Ukraine. Earlier this year, it struck a deal to import U.S. liquefied natural gas through a pipeline from Poland.



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People lay flowers and lit candles in front of the Johann church close to the Christmas market, where a car drove into a crowd on Friday evening, in Magdeburg, Germany, Sunday, Dec. 22, 2024. (AP)

Fears swirl of deeper social divisions

Magdeburg grieves market attack victims

MAGDEBURG, Germany, Dec 23, (AP): Mourners laid flowers near the scene of the deadly Christmas market attack on Monday as investigators puzzled over the motive of the suspect and fears swirled that the rampage could deepen divisions in German society.

The Johanniskirche, a church a short walk from the scene of the attack, has become a central place of mourning since the suspect drove a car into the busy market on Friday evening, killing five people and injuring 200. A carpet of flowers now covers the broad sidewalk in front of the church.

Authorities have identified the suspect as a Saudi doctor who arrived in Germany in 2006 and had received permanent residency. They say he does not fit the usual profile of perpetrators of extremist attacks.

The man described himself as an ex-Muslim who was highly critical of Islam and in many posts on social media expressed support for the far-right. A picture has emerged of someone who had come to authorities' attention in the past for threatening behavior and been the subject of tipoffs, but was not known to have committed any violence.

German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser

said Sunday that "the views and statements that the perpetrator expressed are being investigated, as are the tipoffs and proceedings with various authorities and the justice system." She said "the right conclusions" will then have to be drawn.

The country's vice chancellor voiced fears that the attack will fuel online misinformation ahead of a national election expected in late February. He urged people to "take time for the truth" and said: "Don't let yourselves be infected by hatred."

"There is still a lot we don't know and a lot is unexplained, including the exact motive," Robert Habeck said in a video posted Sunday. "All the same, I fear that the distrust that was immediately propagated on the net against Muslims, foreigners and people with a history of immigration will entrench itself deeper in society."

On Sunday night, police in the port city of Bremerhaven said they detained a man who threatened crimes at a Christmas market there in a TikTok video. German news agency dpa reported that he had said he would stab any people of Arabic appearance there on Christmas Day.

America

Governor hospitalized: Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen was injured Sunday after being bucked off a horse and is expected to be hospitalized for several days.

Pillen, a first-term Republican, was with his family when he was thrown off a new horse and injured, according to the governor's office. He was taken to a hospital in Columbus, Nebraska, and then transported to the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha.

The governor's office said Pillen is conscious and alert and has been in touch with his staff. He is expected to remain at the Omaha hospital for several days. (AP)

NYPD apprehends suspect: New York City police announced Sunday they have in custody a "person of interest" in the early morning death of a woman who they believe may have fallen asleep on a stationary subway train before being intentionally lit on fire by a man she didn't know.

Transit police apprehended the suspect after receiving a report from three high school students who had recognized the man. They had seen images of the suspect taken from surveillance and police body cam video and widely distributed by police. (AP)

Europe

Protest hits Belgrade Square: Tens of thousands of people streamed into a central square in Serbia's capital on Sunday for a rally against populist President Aleksandar Vucic and his government, whose tight grip on power has been challenged by weeks of street protests led by university students.

The rally at Belgrade's Slavija Square, one of the largest in recent years, was called by students and farmer unions. It was part of a wider movement demanding accountability over the Nov. 1 collapse of a canopy at a railway station in the country's north that killed 15 people.

"We are all under the canopy," read one of the banners displayed at the main Belgrade square. (AP)

PM defends TikTok ban: Albania's prime minister said Sunday the ban on TikTok his government announced a day earlier was "not a rushed reaction to a single incident."

Prime Minister Edi Rama said Saturday the government will shut down TikTok for one year, accusing the popular video service of inciting violence and bullying, especially among children. (AP)



Kuki tribal children play in a relief camp in Kangpokpi, Manipur, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024. (AP)



A Kuki tribal woman and her daughter rest in a relief camp in Kangpokpi, Manipur, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024. (AP)



Flowers are placed at a burial ground of Kuki victims died during Kuki and Meitei clashes in Kangpokpi, Manipur, Sunday, Dec. 15, 2024. (AP)

Struggles of living in a relief center are taking a toll on health

Tens of thousands in squalor after northeast India ethnic violence

KANGPOKPI, India, Dec 23, (AP): Phalnevah Khonsai ran for her life when violence struck her neighborhood in India's restive northeast, carrying just the bare essentials in the hope that she and her family could return soon.

Khonsai, her husband and three children left behind their house, which was torched by a mob, and made for the hills, where thousands of people from their community headed for safety.

That was in May last year. Almost 19 months later, Khonsai, 35, is still away from home, living in a government building that was turned into a relief center with squalid conditions and little privacy.

The relief camp is in Kangpokpi, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) from Imphal, the capital of India's northeastern Manipur state, which has been wracked by ethnic violence since last year. In the building's damp and dark interior, fabric partitions separate at least 75 families like hers driven away from their homes.

"It is very difficult to live here," Khonsai said, as women went about their daily chores such as washing clothes and dishes.

The violent ethnic clashes erupted last year between

the majority Meitei community and the minority Kuki-Zo tribes in Manipur. The conflict has claimed more than 250 lives and displaced at least 60,000 people.

The state remains divided into two ethnic zones, one controlled by the Meiteis and the other by the Kuki-Zo community. The factions have formed armed militias that patrol roads checking for signs of their rivals. Borders and buffer zones guarded by security forces separate the two regions. Youths spend nights guarding vulnerable villages.

Khonsai, a Kuki, said the struggles of living in a relief center are taking a toll on the family's health but they can't go back home because they fear for their lives.

"If we go back, they will kill us. There is no hope for going back," she said.

The Meiteis, who are predominantly Hindus, live in the Imphal Valley and nearby districts, while the Kuki-Zos live in hilly areas. The violence began last year when Meiteis demanded that they be listed by the government as a Scheduled Tribe, which would bring them more benefits such as quotas in jobs and educational institutions. That categorization would also bar non-Meiteis from buying land in the Meiteis' strongholds in the Imphal Valley.

The Kukis opposed this, saying such benefits should be given only to tribal groups that are less developed economically and less educated.

Soon, protests by both sides turned violent. Each side rampaged through villages, torching houses, massacring civilians and driving tens of thousands from their homes. Violence had receded in recent months, except for occasional flareups, but returned in November when 10 people were killed by paramilitary soldiers.

The Kuki-Zo community has been particularly hit hard by the violence. They accuse state Chief Minister N. Biren Singh of siding with the Meiteis and have sought his removal. They now seek federal rule over the state and administrative autonomy for the community.

Singh, a Meitei, has denied the accusations. His administration says people from the hills tribes - who share ethnic lineage with Myanmar's Chin tribe - are using illegal drugs to finance a war against the Hindu community. Manipur's government is led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

The displacement crisis has, however, impacted both communities. While most of the displaced from the

Kuki-Zo community have gone to the hills, the Meiteis have taken shelter in refugee camps in Imphal. The mistrust between the two communities is far from over, with people from each side unable to venture into the other's zone.

Yengsom Junksom Memi, a Meitei, used to live in Kangpokpi until attackers rampaged her home and forced her family to run for their lives. Memi first took refuge in a police station before moving to a relief center in Imphal where she lives with 600 other displaced Meiteis. She said her house has been taken over by the attackers.

"We have no future left. It is difficult to even manage food in the morning and evening," Memi said.

Ngaminlun Kipgen, spokesperson for the Committee on Tribal Unity, which represents Kukis, blamed the federal government for failing to end the violence.

"I think the prime minister needs to intervene," Kipgen said.

India's opposition parties have been urging Modi to visit Manipur. Modi has not visited the state since the violence started but has instructed his home minister, Amit Shah, to find a solution.



Refugee children try to catch relief goods tossed from an Australian military helicopter in a rice paddy in Lampaya, outskirts of Banda Aceh, Indonesia, Jan. 17, 2005. (AP)

Indonesians mark two decades since tragic tsunami that killed hundreds of thousands

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia, Dec 23, (AP): Two decades after a catastrophic tsunami destroyed her village, Tria Asnani still cries when she recalls how she lost her mother while trying to escape the giant waves.

Asnani, now a school teacher, was only 17 at the time. Her father, who was a fisherman, never returned home from sea. She doesn't know how she survived. "I cannot swim. I could only rely on dhikr (Islamic prayer)."

On Dec. 26, 2004, a powerful 9.1-magnitude earthquake off the coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra triggered a tsunami that killed around 230,000 people across a dozen countries, reaching as far as East Africa.

But Indonesia's Aceh province, located closest to the earthquake's epicenter and with 18 of 23 districts and cities located in the coastal line in the Northern side of Sumatra, bore the brunt of the disaster with more than half of the total death toll reported.

The worst-hit areas were in Aceh Besar and Banda Aceh, according to the Aceh Disaster Management Agency.

Asnani's Lampuak village lies in a fishermen's community in Aceh Besar, known for its white sandy beaches and turquoise waters. However, on that day, it was among the hardest hit, with waves more than 30 meters (98 feet) high which changed the coastline in Aceh and led to land subsidence after the earthquake.

Buildings by the coast were flattened to the ground except for Rahmatullah Mosque, 500 meters (1,600 feet) from the shore, and about 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) from Asnani's

house. The photo of the place of worship, left pretty much unscathed, later became iconic for juxtaposing fact

After the disastrous event, thousands, including Asnani, had to relocate to start afresh. She moved with her uncle to another region in Aceh to continue her studies. After she got married, she returned in 2007 to her parents' house which was rebuilt with assistance from the Turkish government and lived there for 10 years.

Many international donors and organizations poured in money to help rebuild the affected areas that lost schools, hospitals and basic infrastructure, made stronger than before the tsunami hit.

Tsunami and Disaster Mitigation Research Center at Syiah Kuala University in Aceh recorded more than 1,400 wrecked schools and about 150,000 students had their education process disrupted by the destructive waves in a report published in 2019.

Three "escape buildings" were also constructed in a relatively safer area to accommodate thousands of people if an earthquake and tsunami strike.

Across the province, memories of the tsunami can be felt almost everywhere.

The Aceh Tsunami Museum in Banda Aceh houses photos of the aftermath and vehicle debris, serving as a constant reminder of what was lost that day. Local authorities have also turned a former floating diesel-powered power plant barge that washed about 6 kilometers (about 4 miles) inland by the tsunami into another memorial place.



This handout photo taken on Dec. 11, 2024 by the Imperial Household Agency of Japan and released on Dec. 23, 2024 shows Japan's former emperor Akihito, left, and former empress Michiko as they pose for photos at their residence in Tokyo. Japan's former emperor Akihito turned 91 on Dec. 23. (AP)

Japan's former Emperor Akihito marks his 91st birthday

Japan's beloved former Emperor Akihito marked his 91st birthday on Monday, as he continues to pursue his lifetime research into goby fish, care for his wife and pray for peace.

Akihito, who abdicated in 2019 and handed over the Chrysanthemum throne to his son, Emperor Naruhito, now holds the title of Emperor Emeritus.

Akihito has since receded from official duties and enjoys his time quietly while caring for his 90-year-old wife, former Empress Michiko, who broke her leg bone in October and is still recovering, according to the Imperial Household Agency.

Akihito's daily routine includes reading newspapers in the morning and evening, and watching the news with Michiko over meals, the IHA said.

The former Emperor was to celebrate his birthday on Monday with his relatives and other guests.

This year, Akihito has been particularly concerned about people who were affected by a fatal New Year earthquake and heavy rains in autumn in Japan's northcentral region of Noto, the IHA said.

Akihito continues to actively research the classification of Japanese freshwater goby fish at a palace laboratory and his residence, officials said.

Under Japan's Constitution, the emperor is a symbol without political power. Wartime militarist governments worshipped the emperor as a living god and fought the war in his name until Akihito's father renounced that status after the country's 1945 war defeat. (AP)

Migrants shun safe havens over deportation risk

Cyclone unearths deep divisions in Mayotte

MAMOUZOU, Mayotte, Dec 23, (AP): When Cyclone Chido ravaged Mayotte's fragile infrastructure, it also exposed deep-seated tensions between the island's residents and its large migrant population.

Thousands of people who have entered the island illegally bore the brunt of the storm that tore through the Indian Ocean archipelago - France's poorest territory. Authorities in Mayotte said many migrants avoided emergency shelters out of fear of deportation, leaving themselves and the precarious shantytowns they inhabit even more vulnerable to the devastation.

Meanwhile, anger simmered among residents who accused the government of diverting the island's already scarce resources to migrants at their expense.

"We are the legitimate population of this island," said Amada Salime. Standing in the rubble of his home on Saturday, he added, "If there is help from the government - water or something to eat or money to make houses - Mahorais people will not have it. Migrants are more numerous than us, and we will be left behind."

Mayotte, a French department located between Madagascar and mainland Africa, has a population of 320,000. French authorities have estimated another 100,000 migrants also live there, most of whom have arrived from the nearby Comoros Islands, just 70 kilometers (43 miles) away.

The island's fragile public services, designed for a much smaller population, are buckling under the strain. According to the French statistics agency INSEE, around three-quarters of Mayotte's population live in poverty, with a median annual disposable income just one-eighth that of the Paris met-

ropolitan area. "The problems of Mayotte cannot be solved without addressing illegal immigration," French President Emmanuel Macron said during his testy visit this week, acknowledging the challenges posed by the island's rapid population growth. "Despite the state's investments, migratory pressure has made everything explode," he added.

The cyclone further exacerbated the island's issues after destroying homes, schools and infrastructure. Though the official death toll remains 35, authorities say that any estimates are likely major undercounts, with hundreds feared dead.

The migrants' shantytowns, known as "bangas," have long been an issue in Mayotte. "Can we solve the issue of shantytowns today? The answer is no. We will address it during the stabilization and rebuilding phase," Macron said.

For many migrants, like Nazza Antoiy, a Comorian who has lived in Mayotte for a decade, the cyclone has heightened fears of displacement. "I heard that people were told not to reconstruct new houses. So we need to worry about that," she said, reflecting a widespread concern that authorities may use the disaster to expedite demolitions of informal settlements.

Such concerns are not unfounded. Last year, France launched Operation Wuambushu, a controversial campaign to demolish shantytowns and deport migrants who entered illegally. Macron hinted that similar policies could resume but stressed reconstruction efforts would take precedence.

The storm has left many residents struggling to meet basic needs. "I can't take it anymore. Just to have water is complicated," said Fatima, a 46-year-old mother of five whose family has been without clean water since the storm ravaged Mayotte last weekend. Fatima, who only gave her first name because her family is known locally, also said she felt the island could not support the current population, let alone more.

Most migrants have family links in Mayotte and speak the same language. They seek a better life on the island rather than aiming to reach the European continent.

Subcontinent

Pakistan battles terrorism:

Pakistani Chief of Army Staff Asim Munir said on Sunday that the country's army and law enforcement agencies (LEAs) have been working towards eliminating terrorism and extremism in all their forms, ensuring the restoration of lasting peace and stability in the South Asian country.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the Pakistan Army, said the army chief visited South Waziristan district of northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where he underscored that the resilience and determination of Pakistan's security forces to eliminate terrorism are the cornerstone of the nation's sovereignty. (Xinhua)

4 Pakistan troops killed:

Four troops were killed and 15 others injured during a clash between security forces and terrorists in Pakistan's northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, official sources said.

The incident happened on Sunday in the rugged Tirah Valley area of

Khyber tribal district of the province, where security forces conducted a search operation, and intermittent exchanges of fire were reported throughout the day, the sources told Xinhua on anonymity.

Immediate medical assistance was provided to the injured people at the site before they were sent to a nearby military hospital, the sources added. (Xinhua)

Sri Lanka targets bus safety:

Sri Lanka's police have begun inspecting passenger buses nationwide following a spate of accidents involving buses in recent months, a senior police officer announced on Sunday.

Acting Inspector General of Police Priyantha Weerasooriya stated that investigations into several se-



Asim



Mahinda

rious bus accidents have revealed various mechanical and structural defects in the vehicles.

He also noted instances of bus drivers operating vehicles under the influence of alcohol.

While police have launched random bus inspections across the country, Weerasooriya urged the public to report reckless driving by bus operators by calling 119 or 1997. (Xinhua)

Sri Lanka exits default:

Sri Lanka's Secretary to the Treasury Mahinda Mahipala said on Saturday that the country officially exited sovereign default.

Siriwardana said in a post on X that there is no room for repeating past policy mistakes driven by rigid ideologies, dogmatic beliefs, or misleading narratives, which often result in unsustainable and unrealistic policies.

With economic stability now achieved, Siriwardana stressed the need to focus on measures that promote inclusive and sustainable growth.

He said these efforts are crucial for creating jobs and generating income to help rebuild the lives of all Sri Lankans. (Xinhua)

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts
SAUDI	+0.84	11,948.79	UAE	-0.02	5,056.33
JAPAN	+1.19	39,161.34	EGYPT	-0.84	30,118.38
PAKISTAN	+2.01	114,098.25			
PHILIPPINES	+2.01	6,534.91			

Business

To enhance customer banking experience by providing top-notch innovative digital services

NBK introduces 'AFAQ' – GCC's unified payment system on Mobile Banking

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: In line with its commitment to enhancing customer banking experience and providing them with top-notch innovative digital services that cater to their needs and allow quick and easy transactions, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has announced introducing AFAQ - GCC's unified payment system on Mobile Banking, allowing financial transfers in local GCC currencies.

'AFAQ' is a regional payments system provided by the Gulf Payments Company to execute financial transactions in GCC local currencies in a real-time basis, with low fees, and within a safe, secure, and stable ecosystem through ensuring the privacy and continuity of communication by linking the 'AFAQ' system and the national central banks through a highly secure private network.

'AFAQ' provides elevated lev-

els of protection and data security in the payments system through the provision and management of digital certificates and the provision of the Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) service. This service allows for the secure issuing and managing of digital certificates to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data transmitted through 'AFAQ' payments.

On this occasion, Abdullah Al-Mutawaa, Head of Funds Transfer & Wealth Management Operations at National Bank of Kuwait said, "'AFAQ' implements operating rules and regulations in accordance with professional practices and advanced international standards, which aligns with NBK's continuous endeavors to keep pace with customers' evolving needs and growing expectations and preferences, as part of its constant dedication to providing top-notch



Abdullah Al-Mutawaa

and highly advanced products and services."

"The 'AFAQ' service is available through NBK Mobile Bank-

ing App at a competitive exchange rate, allowing transferring from the customer's Kuwaiti Dinar account to another GCC currency (the currency of the receiving country), provided the beneficiary bank is on the list of GCC banks participating in the service, and currencies included are KWD, AED, BHD, SAR, OMR," he mentioned.

"NBK is one of the first banks to introduce cutting-edge technologies in fast payments and transfers in Kuwait through its digital channels, which include NBK Mobile and Online Banking as well as NBK Corporate Online Banking, thus helping increase the volume of cross-border transactions.

It is worth mentioning that NBK strengthened its footprint across key regional markets by offering innovative banking services that cater to the needs of customers regardless of their geographical location, which

Al-Mutawaa:

- We strive to keep pace with customers' evolving needs and growing expectations
- The system facilitates fast processing of financial transfers in local GCC currencies
- Transfers are made to the currency of the receiving country, provided the beneficiary bank is on the list of GCC banks participating in the service

helped solidify the bank's position as a highly trusted brand.

Through the NBK Mobile Banking App, NBK is dedicated to of-

fering customers a secure and seamless platform for managing their finances with utmost convenience. This advanced app enables users to perform a wide array of banking transactions, including opening new accounts, reviewing account and credit card transactions, and monitoring NBK Miles and NBK Rewards Program points. Additionally, customers can effortlessly pay credit card dues and various electronic bills, locate NBK Branches, ATMs, and CDMs across Kuwait, across Kuwait, submitting requests for account statements, updating personal information, as well as toll-free numbers for customers when abroad to reach the bank for any help or inquiry.

The NBK Mobile Banking App is available for download on the App Store, Google Play, and Huawei AppGallery.

CMA issues new regulations

Changes made to Sukuk Issuance Law

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: The Capital Markets Authority (CMA) has announced new amendments and decisions to improve the functioning of the financial markets and governance standards, reports Al-Seyasah daily.

Amendment to Decision No. 104 of 2024 -- The CMA issued Decision No. (164) of 2024 to correct its previous decision regarding the participation mechanism in general

assemblies of companies listed on the Boursa Kuwait.

The new decision specifies that the "date of the right to attend" general assemblies should be set for the tenth day prior to the assembly. If this date falls on a day off or holiday, it will be moved to the next working day. This applies to general assemblies and any postponed assemblies.

Amendments to Sukuk Issuance Law -- The CMA also issued Resolution No. (165) of 2024, which includes amendments to the regulations surrounding the issuance of sukuk.

These amendments affect the Sharia contracts involved in sukuk issuance, requiring a special

subscription prospectus if the invitation is limited to professional clients or a specific group.

Key changes include the requirement for a Sharia opinion on compatibility and the inclusion of a summary of the sukuk structure and external Sharia audits.

Integrity Standards for Board Members -- In Resolution No (168), the CMA updated the regulations on corporate governance, focusing on the integrity standards for members of the board of directors and executive management of companies listed on the Kuwait Stock Exchange.

The amendments set forth conditions such as no conviction for

crimes related to money laundering, terrorism, capital market crimes, or corruption unless the individual's reputation has been restored (a requirement for good reputation and conduct).

Restrictions on individuals who have been previously dismissed or declared bankrupt, unless their reputation has been restored.

These integrity standards will apply to unlicensed listed companies from January 1, 2025, with a transitional period granted until June 30, 2025.

The new regulations aim to improve governance, transparency and financial stability within Kuwait's capital markets.

Boursa Kuwait experiences marginal decline in trading

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait concluded Monday's trading session with a minimal overall decline, as the general index dropped 0.79 points or 0.01 percent to close at 7,290.25 points. The trading session saw robust activity with 318 million shares exchanged through 16,091 transactions, valued at KD 56.6 million (approximately USD 172.6 million).

The main market index fell 28.22 points or 0.43 percent, closing at 6,603.25 points. This segment traded 214.2 million shares through 10,247 transactions, worth

KD 27.5 million (USD 83.8 million).

The premier market index showed slight resilience, rising 6.44 points or 0.08 percent to reach 7,824.37 points. Trading in this segment involved 103.8 million shares through 5,844 transactions, valued at KD 29.13 million (USD 88.8 million).

The Main 50 index declined 15.93 points or 0.25 percent, settling at 6,451.34 points. This segment saw 92.6 million shares traded through 4,432 transactions, worth KD 13.9 million (about USD 42.3 million).

Boursa Kuwait wins prestigious sustainability award at MEIRA '24

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Boursa Kuwait has been honored with the "Best Sustainability Report and Governance, Social and Environmental Responsibility Initiatives" award at the Middle East Investor Relations Association (MEIRA) Awards, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The award was presented at the annual IR Awards ceremony held in Abu Dhabi, UAE, on November 11-12, 2024. This prestigious recognition underscores Boursa Kuwait's commitment to sustainability and corporate governance.

The MEIRA Awards celebrate excellence in investor relations across the Middle East, bringing together over 800 participants, including representatives from 150 issuers, 33 exchanges, financial markets, regulators and global financial market professionals.

Boursa Kuwait's win in this category highlights its leadership in governance, social responsibility and environmental initiatives, positioning the company as a frontrunner in corporate sustainability in the region.

Boursa Kuwait's 2023 Sustainability Report, which won the award, reflects the company's dedication to high standards of disclosure and transparency.

The report documents the

company's non-financial performance and progress in sustainability, outlining key initiatives and achievements for the year.

It also emphasizes the creation of long-term sustainable value for shareholders and stakeholders and the company's commitment to aligning with globally recognized standards.

The report was prepared in line with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards, Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) guidelines and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring that it meets international sustainability benchmarks.

It also highlighted Boursa Kuwait's ongoing social responsibility efforts, including partnerships with esteemed organizations like the United Nations, the Middle East Investor Relations Association, the CFA Institute, the CFA Society, the Kuwait Red Crescent Society and the Kuwait Society for the Care of Children in Hospitals.

Boursa Kuwait's continued recognition in the field of sustainability is a testament to its leadership in driving sustainable growth and economic development in Kuwait's financial market, reflecting its alignment with the standards of leading global capital markets.

KOC: 90 years of excellence in energy leadership

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (KUNA): Today marks the 90th anniversary of establishing Kuwait Oil Company (KOC). This national establishment attained leadership in oil and gas exploration and production, surviving hard times such as the Second World War, the 1990 Iraqi invasion and the pandemic outbreak.

For nine decades, the KOC has dedicated efforts to boost the State of Kuwait's reserves of petroleum resources and hike the output, thus putting weight behind the national economy and contributing to development.

It has devoted particular attention to overhaul skills of the cadres, both in the company and the society, with a keenness on conserving the environment and achieving sustainable development.

The company has opted to stand by the sagacious leadership, supporting its development process, amid faithful efforts by the personnel whose dedication proved fruitful, thus rendering it an example to follow with regard of work and productivity.

The KOC was set up on December 23, 1934, as a result of a partnership between the Iranian-English Petroleum Company, currently known as British Petroleum and the American Oil Company, now named Chevron.

In 1936, it drilled the first well in Bahra, and in 1938 it discovered oil in the Burgan Al-Kabeer field which has remained the second-largest oil field



KOC logo

globally. Later on, eight wells were drilled.

World War II caused the company's halt of operations, but it resumed work after the end of the war in 1945, and on June 30, 1946, it exported the first shipment of crude oil.

The KOC had built al-Ahmadi town and after settling there, it started expanding operations. In 1951-1953, explorations expanded to Al-Muqawaa where production began there. In December 1955, it discovered a new field in Alrawdatain north of Kuwait.

In 1956, it launched an exhibition displaying its history and operations, and on April 27, 1950, the KOC inaugurated Al-Ahmad Hospital to offer medical services for its staff and their families.

In 1974, the company shifted 60 percent of the concessions to the State

of Kuwait. The remaining 40 percent were divided equally between British Petroleum and the Gulf company.

In March 1975, the KOC was fully nationalized. Later in November 1976, the cornerstone of the gas project was laid at Al-Ahmadi refinery.

The year 1977 witnessed the drilling of a deep well, reaching 20,000 feet, at Burgan Field.

The August 2, 1990, Iraq invasion hampered the company's regular operations, however, the personnel exerted tremendous efforts to preserve the oil wealth. After the liberation, it rapidly responded to the major environmental catastrophe, when the retreating Iraqi forces set afire 727 oil wells. Although the challenge was huge, it successfully extinguished the fires in 240 days.

On July 27, 1991, it exported the first crude oil shipment and resumed drilling at Al-Muqawaa on September 14 the same year.

On November 6, 1991, the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah put out the last fire at the smoldering wells -- Burgan 18.

Since its inception, the KOC has established seven natural reserves and oases in line with its policy to conserve the environment on a sustainable basis. In 2005, it established the first marine colony as part of the efforts at the environmental conservation level.

In October 2012, it opened the Kuwait Center for Integrated Smart

Fields, taking a foothold in the digital realm.

The company has been exerting huge efforts to cut burning of the associate gas, lowering the proportion from 17 percent to 0.5 percent.

On October 25, 2016, the KOC inaugurated the Sedra project for solar energy at Umm Qadir field with a project to put out 10 megawatts of electricity.

In 2017, it concluded the 3-D seismological survey in Kuwait Bay and nearby areas. In 2018, it exported the first shipment of light crude. In 2019, it signed an accord with Halliburton for marine drilling and exploration. In five years, the Al-Nokhatha field was discovered. It was estimated to contain 2.1 billion barrels of light oil and 5.1 trillion cubic feet of gas.

In 2020, the company launched a project to produce heavy crude oil in the South Retqa field north of Kuwait. Despite challenges caused by the pandemic, it exported the first shipment of this crude.

In 2022, the KOC celebrated the hiking of the production of the north region to 600,000 barrels per day and launched a plan to lift it further to 800,000 bpd by 2026.

Currently, it is working on the execution of the 2040 strategy, aimed at boosting efficiency and productivity, in addition to the 2050 energy transformation strategy, designed to attain zero carbon emission.

'We always strive to provide banking solutions'

Weyay Bank launches 'AFAQ' for instant bank transfers between GCC states at cost-efficient rates

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: In a new step to enhance its financial services and expand its regional scope, Weyay Bank announces the launch of the "AFAQ" service, which is a qualitative leap in the field of bank transfers between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

"AFAQ", by linking the payment systems of the Gulf countries, enables financial transfers in the local currencies of these countries to be made faster and at lower cost compared to the traditional methods usually used in transfers.

"AFAQ" is a regional payment system provided by the Gulf Payments Company that aims to facilitate financial transfers in the local currencies of the Gulf countries instantly and at low rates with a high level of privacy and information security.

Customers can make transfers to any of the Gulf banks that are "AFAQ" par-

ticipants effectively without having to worry about currency fluctuations or delays in transfers.

The launch of this service in the Weyay app reflects its ongoing commitment to providing innovative banking solutions that meet the needs of customers, especially in the Gulf region, and enhances its position as a pioneering digital bank in providing digital banking services that are characterized by saving time, effort, and flexibility.

Amal Al-Duwaisan, Head of Weyay Bank, mentioned, "We always strive to provide banking solutions in the field of digital innovation in line with our customers' needs, which in turn emphasizes on Weyay's position as the first digital bank in Kuwait."

She also added, "We are proud to be a participant of the "AFAQ" system, which contributes to enhancing economic cooperation and the monetary



integration strategy between the GCC countries as well as to providing an instant transfer service to our customers



Amal Al-Duwaisan

at competitive prices while ensuring the highest standards of security." "AFAQ" is set to transform how us-

ers engage with digital payments. Weyay Bank, through the new "AFAQ" service, not only does meet the evolving needs of its customers, but it also shapes the future of cross-border payments within the GCC.

All information about the digital services and features provided by Weyay Bank can be found on its website www. weyaybank.com or in the Weyay app that can be downloaded from the App Store or Google Play Store.

Weyay is the first digital bank in Kuwait, providing an innovative and convenient banking experience to its customers through an advanced digital platform. With the introduction of "AFAQ", Weyay Bank continues its commitment to providing banking solutions that keep pace with the evolution of the digital age and contributes to facilitating the lives of its customers by providing fast and efficient services.

In celebration of Khaleeji Zain kick-off, in presence of UAE Ambassador

Zain supports 'The Gulf Cup ... A Chronicle of History and Memories' book

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Zain announced its support for the book 'The Gulf Cup ... A Chronicle of History and Memories', authored by Emirati sports critic Mohammed Al-Jokar. The book chronicles the rich story of the Arabian Gulf Cup football tournament and highlights the profound and historic ties between Kuwait and the UAE. This initiative coincides with the recent kick-off of Khaleeji Zain 26.

To mark the occasion, Zain's Innovation Center (ZINC) at the company's headquarters in Shuwaikh hosted a special gathering attended by the UAE Ambassador to Kuwait, Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi, the book's author Mohammed Al-Jokar, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, and the company's team.

The book delves into the rich history of the Arabian Gulf Cup since its inception in 1970, recounting its key milestones and underscoring the deep-rooted relations among Gulf nations, particularly between Kuwait and the UAE.

It also sheds light on the Gulf leaders' commitment to supporting and developing sports. Additionally, the book offers insights into the Gulf Cup Football Federation's pivotal role in organizing the tournament and its notable achievements over the years.



Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi with Mohammed Al-Jokar, Waleed Al-Khashti, and Zain's team

ment and its notable achievements over the years.

Zain expressed its pride in the resounding success of the recent Khaleeji Zain 26 opening ceremony, held under the esteemed patronage of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The company praised

the artistic performances that celebrated the Gulf's heritage and emphasized a unified Gulf vision for a brighter future.

As the tournament's official partner, Zain highlighted the remarkable nature of the opening event, which reflected Kuwait's prestigious standing in the international sports arena. The ceremony

showcased the heritage and cultures of Gulf nations, embodying a shared sense of unity, vision, and identity. The performances vividly depicted Gulf life on land and sea, brought to life with advanced technologies, aligning with the tournament's slogan, 'The Future is Gulf.'



Al-Jokar signs copies of the book with Ambassador Al-Neyadi in attendance.

The Supreme Organizing Committee of Khaleeji Zain 26 delivered an exceptional opening ceremony that received widespread acclaim from political and sports circles alike. The event's final segment stood out, featuring a display of the flags of the eight participating nations and archi-

val footage from past Gulf Cup tournaments.

This partnership with the Gulf's premier football tournament reflects Zain's steadfast commitment to supporting major sporting events, further solidifying Kuwait's regional prominence in the sports arena.

UAB: Seven Kuwaiti banks rank top among 100 Arab banks 2023

Combined capital of the banks amounts to USD 35.6 billion

BEIRUT, Dec 23, (KUNA): A study by the Union of Arab Banks (UAB) revealed that seven Kuwaiti banks top the list of 100 Arab banks for 2023.

Secretary-General of the Union Wissam Fattouh stated in a press release, Monday, that combined capital of these banks amounted to USD 35.6 billion, while their total assets reached nearly USD 336.6 billion.

National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) ranked first locally and ninth regionally in terms of capital, followed by Kuwait Finance House (KFH) in second place locally and 10th regionally, Burgan Bank came third locally and 38th regionally.

Gulf Bank secured fourth place locally and 42nd regionally, while Commercial Bank of Kuwait ranked fifth locally and 49th regionally, the study showed. Ahli United Bank followed in sixth place locally and 51st regionally, and Kuwait International Bank came seventh locally and 61st regionally.

In terms of total assets, Kuwait Finance House led locally and ranked eighth regionally, followed by National Bank of Kuwait in second place locally and ninth regionally.



KUNA photo
Secretary-General of the Union Wissam Fattouh.

Burgan Bank ranked third locally and 41st regionally in terms of total assets, Gulf Bank came fourth locally and 42nd regionally, and Ahli United Bank followed in fifth place locally and 44th regionally.

Commercial Bank of Kuwait ranked sixth locally and 57th regionally, and Kuwait International Bank came seventh locally and 64th regionally, the study revealed. Fattouh highlighted that the total core capital of the 100 strongest Arab banks reached nearly USD 451.9 billion, with their combined assets amounting to USD 4.2 trillion.

He showed that the UAE recorded the highest number of banks in the list, with 18 entries, followed by Egypt (12 banks), Saudi Arabia (11 banks), Bahrain and Jordan (nine banks each).

Meanwhile, Qatar and Morocco (eight banks each), Kuwait and Oman (seven banks each), Tunisia (six banks), Lebanon and Algeria (two banks each), and Palestine (one bank).

He also noted that 21 Islamic banks were featured among the top 100 Arab banks in 2022, with Qatar and Saudi Arabia contributing four banks each, followed by Kuwait, UAE, and Bahrain with three banks each, Egypt with two banks, and Jordan and Oman with one bank each.

Leadership in providing high-quality service

KFH expands instant credit and prepaid card printing service to all KFH Go self-banking stations

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) offers instant credit and prepaid card printing service through KFH Go self-banking stations located in different branches across Kuwait. This service enables customers to print their cards 24/7 in a fast and secure manner.

KFH customers can print all types of banking cards directly through its devices, showcasing KFH's technological strength and commitment to enhancing customer experience with advanced solutions.

KFH services are now more accessible to all customers. Following the successful launch of this service at our Khiran Mall and Airport branches, KFH has expanded this service to all KFH Go self-banking stations throughout Kuwait.

Furthermore, printing and activating the card entails two simple options. The first one is by sending a QR code through KFH online application. A second option is to enter your civil ID into the device, follow the necessary steps, and receive an OTP via SMS with the highest security standards.

This service is part of KFH's pioneering banking services offered through ATMs to credit and prepaid cardholders. The aim is to provide them with the best banking experience through its digital channels, including the KFH Online app, KFH Go smart branches, or ATMs.

Additionally, KFH is the first bank in Kuwait to introduce instant banking card issuance using a Hybrid Solution powered by NCR, allowing customers to print their own banking cards within 3 minutes, 24/7 through several options, either via self-service using the civil ID or by using their smart phones and the QR code.

For the second time at the local banking level, KFH maintains its leadership by introducing instant credit and prepaid card issuance through its ATMs without prior request. This service is now accessible at all branches and selected shopping malls, solidifying KFH's position as the leader with the



Card printing service

largest network of available devices in Kuwait.

It is worth noting that KFH provides a comprehensive package of digital banking services that confirms its leadership in the banking industry, e.g., a secured account opening service for non-KFH customers machines and printing cheque books through XTM devices, the first of its kind in Kuwait. In response to the development of smart devices, KFH offers its service through smart watches enabling customers to complete their transactions through ATMs.

KFH offers a range of online banking services including personal financial requests, instant payments through WAMD, local and international money transfers, investment deposits, gold account opening and trading, chequebook requests, cheque deposits, financing transactions and installment tracking, investment plan viewing, as well as balance and deposit inquiries.

The new service exemplifies KFH's commitment to harnessing the latest fintech innovations to provide exceptional banking experiences that meet the highest customer quality standards.

Warning in line with its support for the Diraya awareness campaign

KIB warns against risks of sharing personal information on social media applications

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) has renewed its efforts to warn customers about the risks of sharing personal information via social media and other digital platforms, underscoring the importance of exercising extreme caution upon receiving requests for revealing confidential information. This comes as part of the Bank's ongoing efforts to protect its customers' data and ensure the safety of their personal and financial information. The awareness efforts are also an extension of KIB's support of the banking awareness campaign "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya), launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) in cooperation with domestic banks.

On this note, Mohammed Al-Sarraf, Assistant Manager – Anti-Fraud Unit at KIB, said: "Electronic fraud is a growing threat to our customers, especially methods that rely on social engineering, whereby fraudsters deceive individuals into sharing personal and sensitive information such as passwords and verification codes. By complying with these requests, customers expose their bank accounts to



Mohammed Al-Sarraf, Assistant Manager – Anti-Fraud Unit at KIB

the risk of theft and misuse for illegal purposes."

He added that the success of social engineering fraud relies on exploiting individuals' excessive trust or sense of urgency. Following this approach, fraudsters claim to represent trusted entities, such as banks or government institutions, with the aim of convincing individuals to provide their per-



Diraya logo

sonal and banking information. These fraudulent methods may take many forms, including fake phone calls or suspicious emails, asking individuals to disclose sensitive data, under the pretext of updating accounts or verifying transactions.

To protect their bank accounts, Al-Sarraf urged customers to take all necessary precautions, such as refraining from following links shared by suspicious sources and declining any requests for data that they receive on direct messaging (DM) applications or SMS. He also recommended that customers regularly review their ac-

count details and transaction histories, allowing them to detect any suspicious activity and report it immediately, noting that the Bank's customer service is available around the clock to address any suspected cases of fraud, confirming its commitment to the highest security standards for customers data protection.

Al-Sarraf also pointed out the importance of following digital security guidelines, such as using reliable and updated security applications for smartphones, relying only on the KIB's official channels to inquire about information or banking services, in addition to activating the notification service to stay immediately informed about any activity on their accounts.

It serves to note that KIB is committed to raising awareness about the risks of digital fraud as part of its ongoing support for the financial literacy campaign, Diraya. The Bank's ongoing awareness efforts aim to inform customers about the safest banking practices and the best precautionary measures to safeguard their data, urging them to immediately contact the support team in case of any security-related concerns.

CBK: US dollar stabilizes at KD 0.307, euro at KD 0.321

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (KUNA): The exchange rate of US dollar stabilized on Monday against the Kuwaiti dinar trading at KD 0.307 as did the euro settling at KD 0.321 compared to yesterday's rates, said the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK).

The CBK, in its daily bulletin, said

the sterling pound stabilized at KD 0.387, the Swiss Franc at 0.344, while the Japanese Yen remained firm trading at KD 0.002

The declared exchange rates by the CBK reflect average currency prices for the day and do not mirror actual transactions.

Empowering the community through environmentally conscious practices

stc collaborates with MEW to promote awareness on water and energy consumption

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its collaboration with the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy (MEW), which consists of launching an awareness-based social media posts highlighting the importance of conserving water and electricity. The initiative comes as part of stc's ongoing commitment to sustainability and its role in supporting national initiatives that create a positive lasting impact on the community.

The social media awareness posts aim to educate the public through informative posts published on social media platforms highlighting efficient practices for reducing energy consumption. The collaboration will focus on

the importance of resource conservation by limiting energy usage and water consumption to promote efficiency, emphasizing the shared responsibility within the community to achieve long-term sustainability. Having organized a number of awareness and sustainability campaigns, stc aims to drive engagement and spread a wide impact through this collaboration alongside MEW.

Commenting on the collaboration, Danah AlJasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "As a pioneer and leader in digital communications, we believe that it is our duty to support national initiatives and spread key messages, through our digital channels, that aim to promote and instill a sustainable mindset that will serve the generations to come. Conserving electricity and water require collective efforts, and through this campaign, we

aim to raise awareness and encourage individuals and organizations to adopt efficient resource management practices. Our collaboration strongly aligns with the key objectives defined under our 2024 Sustainability Program."

AlJasem added, "At stc, our sustainability and comprehensive corporate social responsibility frameworks are at the core of our corporate strategy, with a strong emphasis on impacting the communities we serve in a positive and effective way. Having said that, we are dedicated to implementing sustainable programs & initiatives that can impact both internally within the organization and externally while creating long-term value for society. Our collaborations with entities within the public and private sectors aim to further broaden our reach and contribute to driving positive change for the

community as a whole."

Ahmed Al Jafra, Director of the Public Relations and Citizen Service Department at MEW, said, "Conserving electricity and water extends beyond being an economic necessity, but a national duty that contributes to protecting our natural resources and the environment for future generations. We are witnessing today unnecessary consumption rates of such resources that are impacting the community, and we believe that raising awareness on such issues is essential and critical. Our collaboration with stc aims to provide citizens and residents with tips on how to reduce consumption, while sharing valuable information related to effective sustainable practices. Through cooperation and commitment, we can implement these practices and secure the needs of tomorrow."



Ahmed Al Jafra and Ms. Elaf Al-Arifi with Ahmed Al-Nuwaibit and Ms. Maryam Al-Kandari during the announcement of the cooperation.

Ascent of Chinese automakers shakes global market

What Nissan and Honda merger means for automakers, industry

BANGKOK, Dec 23, (AP): Japanese automakers Honda and Nissan will attempt to merge and create the world's third-largest automaker by sales as the industry undergoes dramatic changes in its transition away from fossil fuels.

The two companies said they had signed a memorandum of understanding on Monday and that smaller Nissan alliance member Mitsubishi Motors also had agreed to join the talks on integrating their businesses. Honda will initially lead the new management, retaining the principles and brands of each company.

Following is a quick look at what a combined Honda and Nissan would mean for the companies, and for the auto industry.

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 com-



Nissan Chief Executive Makoto Uchida, left, Honda Chief Executive Toshihiro Mibe, center, and Takao Kato, CEO of Mitsubishi Motors, right, attend a joint news conference in Tokyo, Japan, Monday, Dec. 23, 2024. (AP)

pete 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.

Nissan also has years of experience

building batteries and electric vehicles, and gas-electric hybrid powertrains that could help Honda in developing its own EVs and next generation of hybrids, he said.

"Nissan does have some product segments where Honda doesn't currently play," that a merger or partnership could help, said Sam Abuelsamid, a Detroit-area automotive industry analyst.

While Nissan's electric Leaf and Ariya haven't sold well in the U.S.,

they're solid vehicles, Fiorani said. "They haven't been resting on their laurels, and they have been developing this technology," he said. "They have new products coming that could provide a good platform for Honda for its next generation."

Nissan said last month that it was slashing 9,000 jobs, or about 6% of its global work force, and reducing global production capacity by 20% after reporting a quarterly loss of 9.3 billion yen (\$61 million).

Earlier this month it reshuffled its management and its chief executive, Makoto Uchida, took a 50% pay cut to take responsibility for the financial woes, saying Nissan needed to become more efficient and respond better to market tastes, rising costs and other global changes.

Fitch Ratings recently downgraded Nissan's credit outlook to "negative," citing worsening profitability, partly due to price cuts in the North American market. But it noted that it has a

strong financial structure and solid cash reserves that amounted to 1.44 trillion yen (\$9.4 billion).

Nissan's share price has fallen to the point where it is considered something of a bargain. A report in the Japanese financial magazine Diamond said talks with Honda gained urgency after the Taiwan maker of iPhones Hon Hai Precision Industry Co., better known as Foxconn, began exploring a possible acquisition of Nissan as part of its push into the EV sector.

The company has struggled for years following a scandal that began with the arrest of its former chairman Carlos Ghosn in late 2018 on charges of fraud and misuse of company assets, allegations that he denies. He eventually was released on bail and fled to Lebanon.

Honda reported its profits slipped nearly 20% in the first half of the April-March fiscal year from a year earlier, as sales suffered in China.

Toyota made 11.5 million vehicles in 2023, while Honda rolled out 4 million and Nissan produced 3.4 million. Mitsubishi Motors made just over 1 million. Even after a merger Toyota would remain the leading Japanese automaker.

All the global automakers are facing potential shocks if President-elect Donald Trump follows through on threats to raise or impose tariffs on imports of foreign products, even from allies like Japan and neighboring countries like Canada and Mexico. Nissan is among the major car companies that have adjusted their supply chains to include vehicles assembled in Mexico.

Meanwhile, analysts say there is an "affordability shift" taking place across the industry, led by people who feel they cannot afford to pay nearly \$50,000 for a new vehicle. In America, a vital market for companies like Nissan, Honda and Toyota, that's forcing automakers to consider lower pricing, which will eat further into industry profits.



Former Sen. Kelly Loeffler speaks before Republican vice presidential nominee Sen. JD Vance, at a campaign event on Nov. 4, 2024, in Atlanta. (AP)

Inflation a wild card

2025 brings big shifts for small businesses

WASHINGTON, Dec 23, (AP): For small businesses, the biggest change in the new year will be the arrival of a presumably more business-friendly administration in Washington. But there are other shifts owners should keep on their radar.

Among them: changes to state-level overtime and minimum wage rules, the delayed federal FinCEN registration, taxes on payments from third-party providers like Venmo and PayPal, and anything that might affect inflation, including tariffs.

The Small Business Administration is also ushering in a new leader, Trump loyalist Kelly Loeffler, assuming she's confirmed by the Senate.

"I think there a general sense that there is going to be obviously a pro-business administration on the regulatory side," said Karen Kerrigan, President and CEO of the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council, an advocacy group. "But there could be some nuances specifically on, say, workplace or labor rules. But that's still to be determined."

Here's what small business owners should keep in mind in 2025.

Inflation remains a wild card for 2025. Inflation has retreated from its peak of 7.2% in June 2022, according to the Fed's preferred gauge, standing at 2.3% in October. Moves by the Federal Reserve and the incoming Trump administration are likely to swing inflation one way or another.

On Wednesday, the Federal Reserve raised its projection for the inflation rate for 2025 to 2.5% from a prior estimate of 2.1% issued in September. The Fed

also forecast just two rate cuts for the year, down from four. Sticky inflation and high rates could mean higher costs for both consumers and businesses.

Meanwhile, Trump has proposed a range of tax cuts - on Social Security benefits, tipped income and overtime income - as well as a scaling-back of regulations. Collectively, these moves could stimulate growth. At the same time, Trump has threatened to impose a variety of tariffs on imports and to seek mass deportations of migrants, which could accelerate inflation.

Either way, inflation is certain to remain top of mind for small business owners.

"What we've seen for the past two-and-a-half years is that inflation is the top concern for small business," said Tom Sullivan, vice president of small business policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "When you're thinking about 2025, there is a significant question on whether or not the incoming president's policies are going to bring inflation down."

Established in 1953, the SBA has been through many different administrations. The agency offers resources to small businesses and helps administer small business and disaster recovery loans. It played a crucial role during the pandemic, helping distribute small business aid.

Trump said he would nominate Kelly Loeffler, a former U.S. Senator from Georgia, as the head of the SBA, pending confirmation. She replaces Isabella Casillas Guzman, who has served as the administrator since 2021.

British economy flatlines in Q3 in another blow to gov't

'No growth against previous estimate of 0.1%'

LONDON, Dec 23, (AP): The British economy flatlined in the third quarter of the year, according to downwardly revised official figures Monday, in another blow to the new Labour government that has made growth its number one mission.

In its latest revision of the July to September period, the Office for National Statistics said the British economy showed no growth against the previous estimate of 0.1%.

The agency partly blamed the reduction on fresh survey data showing weaker trading across bars and restaurants.

The reduction has prompted critics to say that Labour talked down the economy on taking power on July 5 for the first time in 14 years when it described its economic inheritance from the previous Conservative administration as being the worst in generations.

Turbocharge

Treasury chief Rachel Reeves promised to turbocharge economic growth after Labour won the July election but has now seen the economy stall over the three months to September, while official figures earlier this month also pointed towards a 0.1% decline in October.

"The challenge we face to fix our economy and properly fund our public finances after 15 years of neglect is huge," she said.

In her first budget in late October, Reeves raised taxes on businesses to help shore up public finances and ailing services. Many economists say the budget has further damaged the British economy as many businesses are responding to the tax rise by either raising prices or reducing employees or wages.

Mel Stride, the economy spokesman for the Conservatives, said "warning lights are flashing" on the economy.

"Having inherited the fastest-growing economy in the G-7, growth has tanked on Labour's watch," Stride said.

Inflation in the U.K. has risen to its highest level since March, driven by an increase in fuel prices last month, of-



Christmas shoppers out wearing seasonal hats in central London, Friday, Dec. 13, 2024. Britain's economy unexpectedly shrank by 0.1 percent in October. The Office for National Statistics stated in figures released Friday. (AP)

ficial figures showed last week.

The Office for National Statistics said consumer price inflation rose by 2.6% in the year to November, up from 2.3% the previous month. The increase, which took inflation further away from the Bank of England's target of 2%, was in line with market expectations.

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.

As inflation rates have fallen from multidecade highs, the central banks have started cutting interest rates, though few, if any, economists think that rates will fall back to the super-low levels that persisted in the years

after the global financial crisis of 2008-2009.

Recent developments have scaled back expectations of rapid cuts from the Bank of England. Rising wages and stubbornly high inflation in the services sector, the biggest single part of the U.K. economy, have prompted economists to scale back expectations of rapid rate cuts next year.

James Smith, research director at the Resolution Foundation economics think tank, said that the "latest data shows the challenge Britain faces in squeezing inflation out of the economy."

Critics have argued that the new Labour government's first budget in October will lead to higher inflation. The extra public spending announced in the budget will be largely funded through increased business taxes and borrowing. Economists think that the splurge, coupled with the prospect of business-cushioning the tax hikes by raising

prices, could push inflation higher than it otherwise would have been.

The U.K.'s central bank has kept interest rates on hold as inflation moves further above its target rate, even though the British economy is flatlining 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.

That's a disappointment for many struggling sectors in the U.K. economy that would be helped by cheaper credit in an environment of paltry growth. The British economy has now contracted for two months in a row.

US futures and oil prices advance

Asian shares mostly higher after Wall Street rally caps dismal week

BANGKOK, Dec 23, (AP): Shares mostly gained in Asia on Monday after U.S. stocks capped a mostly dismal week with a broad rally that still left the benchmark S&P 500 down 2% for the week.

U.S. futures and oil prices advanced. One shadow over markets was cleared when U.S. lawmakers passed a budget deal in the early hours of Saturday, narrowly averting a pre-Christmas government shutdown.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index jumped 1.3% to 39,201.48, while the dollar was trading at 156.65 Japanese yen, up from 156.48 yen.

Honda Motor Co. and Nissan Motor Corp. were expected to hold a news conference later Monday as reports speculated on a possible merger between Japan's second and third-largest automakers. Honda's shares, which fell after news of the talks on a deal surfaced last week, were up 2.3%. Nissan's, which had soared, rose 0.5%.

Elsewhere in Asia, Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 0.7% to 19,857.37, while the Shanghai Composite index slipped 0.1% to 3,363.01.

Australia's S&P/ASX 500 jumped 1.7% to 8,201.60.

South Korea's Kospi added 1.5% to 2,441.82 and Taiwan's Taiex jumped 2.6%, with TSMC, the world's biggest computer chip maker, gaining 4.4%. Hon Hai Precision Industry, which reportedly has been maneuvering to buy a big stake in Nissan, jumped 3.8%.

In Bangkok, the SET advanced 0.4%.

On Friday, the S&P 500 rallied 1.1%, closing at 5,930.85. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 1.2% to 42,840.26 and the Nasdaq composite gained 1% to 19,572.60.

Roughly nine of every 10 stocks in the S&P 500 rose. Superstar stock Nvidia and other Big Tech companies led the market, which got a lift after a report said a

measure of inflation the Federal Reserve likes to use was slightly lower last month than economists expected. It's an encouraging signal following recent reports suggesting inflation may be tough to get all the way down to the Fed's 2% goal from its peak above 9%.

The threat of higher inflation was one of the reasons Fed Chair Jerome Powell gave last week when the central bank hinted it may deliver fewer cuts to interest rates next year than it earlier expected.

That warning sent a shock through the stock market, which had run to 57 all-time highs this year amid the widespread assumption the Fed would deliver a string of cuts to rates into 2025. Now traders are largely betting on one, two or perhaps even zero next year, according to data from CME Group.

Critics had been warning stock prices were vulnerable to drops after running so high and that the market likely

needed everything to go correctly to justify its stellar gains for the year. Besides the diminished hopes for several rate cuts next year, Wall Street got another reminder late Thursday that everything may not go as expected.

The U.S. stock market has lost a chunk of its gain since Trump's win on Election Day, which raised hopes for faster economic growth and more lax regulations that would boost corporate profits. Worries have risen that Trump's preference for tariffs and other policies could lead to higher inflation, a bigger U.S. government debt and difficulties for global trade.

In other dealings early Monday, U.S. benchmark crude oil picked up 37 cents to \$69.83 per barrel.

Brent crude, the international standard, was up 34 cents at \$73.28.

The euro rose to \$1.0442 from \$1.0433.

New faces, old fears and big expectations

'Squid Game' returns to win again

LOS ANGELES, Dec 23, (AP): Stepping onto the set of "Squid Game" season two, Lee Jong-jae felt like he had never left.

"Including promotion, I'd been living with Gi-hun for about two years," said Lee in a recent interview. "I really felt like I was him," he said in a recent interview.

"Squid Game" follows an underground competition in Korea that recruits people in debt to participate in childlike games for money. Once the games begin, the contestants realize there are deadly consequences.

The show was a global hit when it was released in 2021, becoming Netflix's most-watched series. It also won numerous accolades including Prime-time Emmy Awards for acting for Lee Jung-jae and directing for Hwang Dong-hyuk. Lee's career catapulted, taking him to the Cannes Film Festival and giving him his first English-language role in the "Star Wars" series "The Acolyte" for Disney+.

Lee says when Netflix ordered a second season of "Squid Game," he questioned the timeline because it took Hwang years to work on the first one. "I wondered, 'How many years will it take him to write season two,'" said Lee. Hwang, in turn, surprised everyone - including himself - by taking just six months to write season two and a third and final season. "I'm not sure

I'll ever be able to write something that fast again," he said.

Creating new characters and their individual stories came easily. The biggest, challenge, Hwang said, was deciding what should happen with Gi-hun. Lee says when he read the scripts he thought Hwang "really is a genius."

It's rare for even successful TV shows in Korea to have more than one season so it was a big swing, even for the new cast.

Appeal

"There's a Korean phrase, 'there's not a sequel that does better than its prequel,' said actor Yang Dong-geong, whose character debuts in season two. "I've been careful because we aren't really sure what the reaction will be." The outlook is positive. Season two has already been nominated in the best drama series category at the upcoming Golden Globe Awards.

The opportunity to work on a project with worldwide appeal is a dream come true for a performer. Lee Byung-hun, who reprises his villain role from season one, has appeared in big budget English-language films like "G.I. Joe: The Rise of the Cobra" with Channing Tatum and Dennis Quaid and "Red 2" with Bruce Willis. It's "Squid Game" that he credits for taking his career to another level.

"I've been an actor for over three decades and... maybe most people outside of Korea have never seen anything that I've been in. If anyone through 'Squid Game' wishes to see more of me or becomes more curious about my previous works, as an actor, nothing would be more rewarding or bring me greater joy."

The audition process moved slowly. Jo Yu-ri recalls waiting two months between the first and second-round. When she finally got the part Jo says, "I actually remember crying." The actors were asked to not speak publicly about their casting to wait for Netflix to make an announcement. "There were a couple of close friends that popped champagne for me when they found out," said Yang.

Netflix's "Squid Game" universe is also growing. A second season of a reality competition show based on the series has been ordered and an English version is in development. Season three of the original has also completed filming and is in post-production.

Season two is not without controversy. The new episodes feature a transgender character played by Park Sung-hoon. Hwang says he understands why hiring a trans actor would have been ideal, but that the casting is a reflection of how the LGBTQ community and gender identity is viewed in Korea.



Lee Byung-hun, (from left), Yang Dong-geun, Hwang Dong-hyuk, Jo Yu-ri, Im Si-wan, Kang Ae-sim, Lee Seo-hwan and Lee Jung-jae pose for a portrait to promote the second season of 'Squid Game' on Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024, in Los Angeles. (AP)

K-pop star

Rosé's solo album 'Rosie' is heartfelt

LOS ANGELES, Dec 23, (AP): Rosé, the nightingale of the massively popular Korean girl group Blackpink, has flown the nest and launched her first solo album "Rosie." She's the first of the awesome foursome to release a full-length solo record, and in English at that. Members Jisoo and Jennie have previously released singles, and Lisa is gearing up for her own studio album in 2025.

Across "Rosie," titled after Rosé's nickname to communicate a kind of personal intimacy, the singer goes to great lengths to detach herself sonically from her band. Unlike Blackpink's high energy electro-pop output, Rosé's solo material is that of a coffee-house dweller with a sideline in romantic drama. But don't expect finger-plucked acoustic guitar balladry exclusively - "Rosie" is reserved in some moments, full of life in others.

Collaboration

The album starts off chipper, with the soaring piano ballad "Number One Girl," the cool synth-pop track "Two Years," the dynamic, catchy Bruno Mars collaboration "Apt.," and the contemporary, Taylor Swift-indebted pop of "Toxic Till the End." But it invariably slows down, preferring fairly stripped back production throughout. She's got the voice and she's flaunting it; it's her prerogative to showcase her range at the expense of a more energetic beat.

Across 12-tracks, the album studies heartache over lost loves ("It's been two years and you're still not gone/It doesn't make sense that I can't move on," she sings on "Two Years"), missed chances ("Are we lovers or friends/Cause it's as good as it gets" in "Call it the End") and ambivalence over situationships that probably should've been nipped in the bud but staggered along, strung by the power of lust and not much else. (That one is everywhere - particularly in the dubious boyfriends of "Toxic Till the End" and "Gameboy.") Who can't relate?

The album is an emotional rollercoaster easy to empathize with, stuffed with songs that articulate the trials and tribulations of early adult years - the search for connection and getting dragged into romances that lead nowhere. But throughout, fans of both Blackpink and Rosé might miss the spirited songs of her group. After all - your 20s are for partying, too - not just heartbreak.



Rosé speaks during a discussion on mental health at the Apple campus in Cupertino, Calif. on Nov 17, 2023. (AP)

Film



This image released by Paramount Pictures and Sega of America shows the character Sonic, voiced by Ben Schwartz, in a scene from 'Sonic the Hedgehog 3.' (AP)

Family films play major role

'Sonic 3' bests 'Mufasa' at the box office

NEW YORK, Dec 23, (AP): In the holiday season battle of big-budget family movies, Paramount Pictures' "Sonic the Hedgehog 3" sped past the Walt Disney Co.'s "Mufasa: The Lion King" to take the top spot at the box office ahead of the lucrative Christmas corridor in theaters.

"Sonic the Hedgehog 3" debuted with \$62 million in ticket sales over the weekend, according to studio estimates. With strong reviews (86% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes) and a high score from audiences (an "A" on CinemaScore), "Sonic 3" is well positioned to be the top choice in cinemas during the busiest moviegoing period of the year.

It was telling of some wider trends that "Sonic 3" - made for \$122 million - bested one of Disney's top properties. Videogame adaptations, once among the most derided movie genres, have emerged as one of the most dependable box office forces in recent years. The two previous "Sonic" movies together grossed more \$700 million worldwide and the third installment appears likely to do better than both of them. A fourth "Sonic" movie is already in development.

"Mufasa," however, was humbled in its opening weekend, with its \$35 million in domestic ticket sales coming in notably shy of expectations. The photorealistic "Lion King" prequel even opened wider than "Sonic 3," launching on 4,100 theaters and gobbling up most IMAX screens, compared with 3,761 locations for "Sonic 3."

Though "Mufasa's" reviews were poor (56% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes), audiences gave it an "A-" CinemaScore.

"Sonic 3" nearly doubled the haul for "Mufasa," which cost more than \$200 million to make. Disney could look to \$87.2 million in international sales to help make up the difference. The third "Sonic" will rollout in most overseas markets in the coming weeks.

In director Jeff Fowler's "Sonic 3," Ben Schwartz returns as the voice of the hedgehog, alongside Tails the Fox (Colleen O'Shaughnessey), Knuckles the Echidna (Idris Elba) and Jim Carrey in scene-stealing dual roles

as Dr. Robotnik and his grandfather.

"Moonlight" filmmaker Barry Jenkins directs "Mufasa's" voice cast, including Aaron Pierre, Kelvin Harrison Jr., Donald Glover, Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, Mads Mikkelsen and Blue Ivy Carter. It follows Jon Favreau's 2019 photorealistic "The Lion King" remake, which made \$1.66 billion globally despite mixed reviews. "Mufasa" didn't come close to that film's huge \$191 million opening weekend.

"We felt strongly that the marketplace could support both movies and we're certainly holding our side of the bargain," said Chris Aronson, distribution chief for Paramount.

No major franchise movie is coming this Christmas. The most anticipated Dec. 25 release might be "A Complete Unknown," with Timothee Chalamet as Bob Dylan. That means "Sonic 3" could be looking at several weeks in a row at No. 1.

Adaptation

"The family audience was 59% on 'Sonic 2.' This time it's 46%. That 13% drop reflects the time of year we're dealing with," said Aronson. "I think once the marketplace really cooks, 'Sonic' is going to be the dominant force."

Many of Disney's live-action adaptations - including "Aladdin," "Beauty and the Beast" and "Jungle Book" - have been big hits. Others, such as "Dumbo," "Mulan" and "The Little Mermaid," have been less well received. More are on the way, including a new "Snow White" in March, "Lilo & Stitch" in May, and plans for "Moana" and "Tangled" to get the same live-action treatment.

Despite "Mufasa's" muted opening, Disney is still celebrating its strongest annual performance in years. The studio has accounted for more than \$5 billion in ticket sales worldwide, including the year's top two hits: "Inside Out 2" and "Deadpool and Wolverine." The animated "Moana 2" could give Disney the top three movies of the year. In four weeks of release, it has collected

\$790.2 million globally, including \$13.1 million in US and Canadian theaters over this weekend.

Though Christmas often sees some of the biggest releases of the year, movies released around Thanksgiving really drove the box office this season. That includes "Moana 2" and Universal Pictures' "Wicked," which managed third place in its fifth weekend.

"Wicked," the hit musical adaption starring Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande, added \$13.5 million in North American theaters to push its domestic total to \$383.9 million.

Those films, among others, have led a Hollywood rebound in 2024. After a significant deficit earlier in the year, overall sales are drawing close to those of 2023. According to Comscore, the gap has narrowed to 4.4% behind last year's results. While that's still significantly less than pre-pandemic years, it's enough to flip the script on what once looked like a rough year for the movies.

Family films like "Inside Out 2," "Moana 2" and "Sonic 3" have played a major role. Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore, noted animated movies have accounted for 26.5% of this year's box office.

"The box office year was saved by the family audience being drawn to the multiplex," said Dergarabedian.

"Homestead," the latest release from Christian-themed Angel Studios, the distributor of "Sound of Freedom," opened with \$6.1 million. It follows a group of Doomsday preppers who take shelter in a self-sufficient compound after a nuclear attack in California.

Brady Corbet's "The Brutalist," one of the year's top Oscar contenders, launched on four screens in New York and Los Angeles. Its \$66,698 per-screen average was one of the highest of 2024. The post-World War II epic runs three-and-a-half hours, posing obvious theatrical challenges. A24 is trying to turn the film starring Adrien Brody and Guy Pearce into an arthouse event. It was nominated for seven Golden Globes.

Variety

NEW YORK: 'Tis the season to unpack Spotify Wrapped. And it should come as no surprise that for a second year in a row, Taylor Swift has been named its most-played artist.

The streaming giant unveiled its annual overview of individual listening trends as well as trends from around the world recently. Users can now access their top artists, songs, genres, albums and podcasts, as well as uncover which artists had the biggest year on the platform.

Swift was 2024's most-streamed artist globally, ranking in more than 26.6 billion streams. She's followed by The Weeknd, Bad Bunny, Drake and Billie Eilish, in that order.



Swift

In the US, the list looks similar: It's Swift in the top spot, followed by Drake, Zach Bryan, Morgan Wallen and Kanye West.

Last year, Swift dethroned Puerto Rican reggaeton star Bad Bunny for the top spot, globally. He held the coveted title for three years in a row beginning in 2020.

Swift also earned the title of most-streamed album in 2024, with "The Tortured Poets Department." She's followed by Eilish's "Hit Me Hard and Soft," Sabrina Carpenter's "Short n' Sweet," Karol G's "Mañana Será Bonito" and Ariana Grande's "eternal sunshine."

All of those titles are new to 2024 with the exception of Karol G's album, which released early last year.

In the U.S., there are only slight differences: Swift's album still leads, followed by Wallen's "One Thing At A Time" - released last year. Then it's Carpenter, Noah Kahan's "Stick Season," and Chappell Roan's "The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess," also released in 2023.

Carpenter leads the most-streamed songs both in the U.S. and globally this year, with her summertime smash "Espresso." It earned over 1.6 billion streams.

Globally, she's followed by Benson Boone's "Beautiful Things," Eilish's "Birds of a Feather," FloyMenor and Cris MJ's "Gata Only" and Teddy Swims' "Lose Control."

And in the U.S., she's trailed by Kendrick Lamar's "Not Like Us," Shaboozey's "A Bar Song (Tipsy)," Post Malone and Morgan Wallen's "I Had Some Help" and Tommy Richman's "Million Dollar Baby." (AP)

NEW YORK: There's a Christmas Day basketball game at Walt Disney World, featuring Mickey, Minnie, Goofy and Wemby.

An animated game, anyway. The real game takes place at Madison Square Garden, where Victor Wembanyama and the San Antonio Spurs face the New York Knicks in a game televised on ABC and ESPN and streamed on Disney+ and ESPN+. The special all-cast, the first animated presentation of an NBA game, will be shown on ESPN2 and also stream on Disney+ and ESPN+.

Madison Square Garden is a staple of the NBA's Christmas schedule. Now it merges with a bigger home of the holidays, because the "Dunk the Halls" game will be staged at Disney, on a court set up right smack in the middle of where countless families have posed for vacation photos.

Why that location? Because it was Mickey Mouse's Christmas wish.

"Basketball courts often have the ability to make a normal environment look special, but in Disney it can only turn out incredible," Wembanyama said in an ESPN video promoting his Christmas debut.

The story - this is Disney, after all - begins with Mickey penning a letter to Santa Claus, asking if he and his pals can host a basketball game. They'll not only get to watch one with NBA players, but some of them will even get to play. Goofy and Donald Duck will sub in for a couple Knicks players, while Mickey and Minnie Mouse will come on to play for the Spurs. (AP)



People enjoy themselves in celebration of the upcoming Christmas in Beirut, Lebanon, on Dec. 21, 2024. (Xinhua)



Christmas decorations are seen on a street in downtown Beirut, Lebanon, on Dec. 18, 2024. (Xinhua)



A Christmas tree is seen in downtown Beirut, Lebanon, on Dec. 18, 2024. (Xinhua)

'Christmas In Action' brings holiday joy to Beirut

Lebanon's annual Christmas fair revives festive spirit after war

BEIRUT, Dec 23, (Xinhua): Elsa Meguerditchian was busy showcasing her bracelets to shoppers during a Christmas fair at the Forum De Beyrouth exhibition hall in Lebanon's capital Beirut.

"I did not expect such great demand for my products at this year's fair, especially after a long and bloody war," Elsa told Xinhua, attributing the revival of Christmas vibes to citizens' eagerness for a respite from long-suffering during the year.

Elsa registered to participate in the fair when the war was still ongoing between Israeli forces and Hezbollah, believing it would end and that people would get to celebrate Christmas this year.

She saw herself proven right soon as a ceasefire agreement took effect on Nov. 27, ending nearly 14 months of fighting between the two sides.

Every day, thousands of people flock to the Christmas fair to shop for festive decorations, food, and other Christmas items. At the fair, or the 12th session of the annual "Christmas In Action," bands are staging live performances for visitors, and children are seen running around and playing in the hall.

Joelle Feghali, the fair's organizer, told Xinhua that she changed her plan and moved the fair to Beirut upon learning of the ceasefire. She was then surprised at how many calls she had received for reserving booths.

"I think many people have been confined to their houses for almost a year as the war escalated, only spending on necessities, thus they want to go out, buy gifts, and celebrate Christmas," Joelle said.

Rabih Nasrallah, owner of a dessert shop, told Xinhua that small and medium businesses like his are keen to participate in such events to promote and sell their products after the war.

Annie Melkonian, another participant in the fair, conveyed to Xinhua her happiness in participating in the event which offers visitors great vibes.

"I only had a few days to prepare for this event, but it is

going well, and people have a good appetite for what we showcase at this fair," she said.

Ahlam Nehme, owner of a homemade food shop, believed such markets are essential to activating different sectors and revitalizing the country's economy after a long period of stagnation.

This year's "Christmas In Action" event runs from Dec. 13 to Dec. 23. The fair is the largest and most creative Christmas market in Lebanon, where visitors can taste delicacies, enjoy live musical performances, participate in arts activities, and fully immerse themselves in an enchanting atmosphere of Christmas joy.

Holiday



The Rockefeller Center Christmas tree after being lit during the 92nd annual Rockefeller Center Christmas tree lighting ceremony, Wednesday, Dec. 4, 2024, in New York. (AP)

The iconic and unconventional sides of Christmas in New York

The challenge of photographing Christmastime in New York is that there is so much of it.

The big tree in Rockefeller Center. Ice skating in Central Park. The Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall. All those lavish, holiday-themed department store window displays.

This is the iconic New York tourists come to see. Visitors know it well from movies and television.

But millions of New Yorkers experience these

remarkable sights in a different way. For them, this is home. Those department stores might be where they shop for presents. That famous rink might be where they take their kid to skate after school.

Over several weeks, Associated Press photographer Julia Nihonson found ways to document both the familiar and unfamiliar sides of the holiday season in the city.

She found storybook images, like neighborhood

carolers and an urban garden ablaze with light, while also capturing the city's weirder side, including a holiday-themed burlesque show, a guy who roams the city impersonating a Christmas tree and an invasion of hard-drinking Santas.

And she photographed some of the ways a New York Christmas is different, like carrying a tree home under your arm after work because you don't own a car. (AP)

Cheer and charity

Vibrant 'holiday lights' lift spirits everywhere

CONCORD, N.H., Dec 23, (AP): Tiny tots with their eyes all aglow might be enough to brighten some homes this holiday season. But others are adorned with thousands of blinking lights synched to blasting music, drawing crowds and bolstering both holiday and community spirit.

In a cul-de-sac in Mesa, Arizona, 14 homeowners have been going all-out on holiday lights for the last 30 years in a tradition that hasn't been diminished by real estate turnover.

Those buying homes in the neighborhood often find the attics full of décor left behind as a gift from the previous owners, and despite cultural and religious differences, residents come together to create a festival of lights, Stephanie Castillo Price said.

"Everybody has been able to take their interpretation of the holidays and put it into a full circle," she said. "There's not somebody that's going to walk down the street and not feel included."

In Santa Clarita, California, residents of Wakefield Court decided to coordinate their holiday light displays as a way to bring some joy to their community after an earthquake. Now in its 30th year, the Wakefield Winter Wonderland includes inflatable figures and wooden cutouts of a variety of characters, from Mickey Mouse to Homer Simpson.

Neighborhood

Bryan Cobb admits he initially was against buying a home in the neighborhood when he and his wife first viewed it.

"She started crying and said, 'But this is the Christmas street! I want to live there!'" he said. "She got her way. We live here, we love it. All the neighbors bond together."

In Edmond, Oklahoma, those looking to the western sky will easily spot the Miranda family's elaborate holiday light display featuring images and music from the movie "Wicked." Spotlights reminiscent of movie studio lights shoot up from the roof, while a singing witch's face takes shape across a towering tree.

"It just seemed like the perfect fit with a light show because you can really do the drama with the lights," said Elisabeth Miranda, who handles the programming while her husband, Mark, tackles installation. "It takes a very long time to set up. Every single bulb has a spot, a place, a number, so that when we program it, it does exactly what it needs to do at the right time."

The family started putting up holiday lights in 2015 and saw a surge in traffic after being featured on ABC's "The Great Christmas Light Fight." While most neighbors have been supportive, a few complaints prompted the couple to take a few years off before returning with a better plan to limit viewing hours and control traffic.

Donations

This year, they are collecting donations for the Oklahoma Fraternal Order of Police.

"They give so much back to our community, so that's our little way of saying thank you to them for everything they do for us," Miranda said.

Charity also is a component in Las Vegas, where Laura Walters and Lenny Standish are closing in on a four-year goal of collecting 10,000 pairs of socks and underwear for organizations that help homeless people.

Their display started during the COVID-19 pandemic with a single Christmas tree for community members to add ornaments. This year, they have three snow machines in addition to the lights and music.

"People are looking for joy," Walters said. "Our world is a tough place. So to be able to just come and feel just an incredible amount of love and happiness - it's peaceful. We've never had one problem here at all. Everyone's been highly respectful of our home and full of gratitude."

Richard Taylor of Kennesaw, Georgia, estimates that more than 40,000 people visit his display of 1.2 million lights each year.

"We bring joy to a lot of people," he said. "They walk around and they forget all their problems, and they just enjoy themselves."

Music

The songwriter behind pop's biggest anthems

Allen crafts music that sticks in your head

NEW YORK, Dec 23, (AP): Amy Allen might not yet be a household name, but her work lives in your brain rent-free. And it's grabbed the attention of the Grammys.

The 32-year-old songwriter has composed enduring hits with Halsey ("Without Me"), Selena Gomez ("Back to You") and Tate McRae ("Greedy"). Her contributions to Harry Styles' "Harry's House" earned her a Grammy for album of the year in 2023. Other credits include songs from Olivia Rodrigo, Charli XCX, Rosé, René Rapp, Shawn Mendes, Leon Bridges and Justin Timberlake.

2024, however, was the year Allen's work became inescapable - thanks in large part to her collaboration with another rising star. Allen co-wrote all 12 tracks of Sabrina Carpenter's bubbly "Short n' Sweet," including "Espresso," an instant song of the summer that propelled Carpenter to a new stratosphere of stardom, and "Please Please Please," the follow-up single that proved that her winking, quotable pop had staying power. (Everyone's favorite lyric? "Heartbreak is one thing, my ego's another / I beg you, don't embarrass me," followed by a rhyming profanity rapped with a smirk.)

This fall, Allen's work sent her to No. 1 on Billboard's Hot 100 Songwriters chart for seven weeks - an impressive feat, considering her competition includes artists like Carpenter herself and Kendrick Lamar.

"Once the songs are out of my hands, I just try to let them go to the

world," Allen told The Associated Press. It helps that the world has, in turn, embraced them.

When nominations for the 67th Grammy Awards were announced, Allen was in the midst of a writing session in London. The news came in a text from her manager: She was nominated four times, including her second nomination in the songwriter of the year, non-classical, category that has only existed for three years. If she wins, she will become the first woman to take home that trophy. "Short n' Sweet" is up for album of the year and "Please Please Please" for song of the year.

Her fourth nod is in the song written for visual media category, for "Better Place," a collaboration with NSYNC for "Trolls: Band Together."

Talent

"People really gravitate toward her energy, as well as obviously her talent. That just goes without saying," said Julian Bunetta, another hit songwriter, artist and collaborator on "Short n' Sweet," of Allen.

"She just always brings a happy, optimistic attitude, that like, 'anything is possible today,'" added Julian Bunetta, who also co-wrote and produced songs on Carpenter's album. "The ease of that makes conversation come natural, which makes people open up and share details about their life."

Allen's path to professional songwriting wasn't necessarily linear. Growing up in Maine, she joined a bluegrass band, a rock band and played mu-

sic at Irish pubs throughout her teens. It wasn't until her early 20s, when she transferred to Berklee College of Music after two years in nursing school at Boston College, that she realized being both a songwriter for others and a performing artist was a career option.

"I had to really dig to realize, like, Carole King writes for other people, but she's also an artist. And then it was later on, way later on, when I came across writers like Julia that were doing it professionally," Allen said. "I knew that it was like in my blood since I was really little, that it made me feel more connected to myself and the world around me in so many ways, more than anything else I ever experienced."



Amy Allen poses for a portrait in Los Angeles on Dec. 6, 2024. (AP)

"Espresso" came together in a Paris studio. Allen, Bunetta, Carpenter and their co-writer Steph Jones "were kids having fun and laughing and playing," Bunetta said, explaining that joyful energy produced the track's cheery sound and nonsensical zingers ("that's that me espresso").

Allen believes "Short n' Sweet" found success through its quirky, playful pop - because listeners want unpredictability, narrative songs with personality and perspective.

"The general public is so much smarter than a lot of songwriters and a lot of people in the entertainment industry, give them credit for," Allen said. "The artists that are winning are the ones that are willing to put everything out there, to say something so direct and so honest to them and so authentic that it's almost impossible for the public to turn away."

In October, she was out of the studio and on the road, opening for collaborator Jack Antonoff's band Bleachers on a slate of dates across Europe, Los Angeles and New York. She performed songs from "Amy Allen," her self-titled debut album released in September - a collection of acoustic guitar melodies and percussion-led singer-songwriter pop.

Touring those songs came with a realization. "I love writing for other artists and with other artists, and I will do that for a very long time," Allen said. "But it's also so important for me to go back to how I fell in love with music, which was writing songs on my bed, writing little poems in my bedroom."



Local residents drive through the Wakefield Winter Wonderland neighborhood decorated with Christmas lights in Santa Clarita, Calif. on Dec. 17, 2024. (AP)



Resident Bryan Cobb puts the finishing touches on the lights on his house for the Wakefield Winter Wonderland lighted street in Santa Clarita, Calif. on Dec. 17, 2024. (AP)



Photos from the event.



Kuwait adopts Biolog-ID for advanced blood product tracking

ATC drives Kuwait's digital healthcare revolution with Biolog-ID

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Advanced Technology Company (ATC), the leading distributor of comprehensive health and environmental care solutions across the public and private sectors, has announced its partnership with Biolog-ID, the digital healthcare solution for the management, traceability and safety of sensitive health products, to implement the tracking of blood products across all blood centers and blood banks in Kuwait.

In presence of the Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi, Dr. Reem Al Radwan, Director of the Blood Transfusion Services Department at the Ministry of Health, with numerous officials and representatives from the medical field, the Biolog-ID solution was officially launched across all blood centers in Kuwait. This milestone positions Kuwait at the forefront of the healthcare digital transformation sector in the Gulf and the Middle

East, becoming the first country to adopt this advanced RFID solution enabling the power of real time data.

Biolog-ID's Transfusion Solutions improve the traceability, safety and availability of blood products, providing real time dynamic information enabled by its RFID proprietary technology.

From the moment a blood sample is collected from a donor, a e-Label is affixed to the bag, capturing accurate information including blood type, quantity, date of collection, and expiration date. It enables digital identification of blood bags without paper or manual work, thus providing easy surveillance and secured transfer of the blood bags from any of the Kuwait Central Blood Bank (KCBB) facilities or Sheikhia Salwa Sabah Al-Ahmad Stem Cell Centre to those hospitals which need the same. "We are delighted to announce that KCBB is the first

Blood Center in the Gulf region to adopt such a digital solution for blood component traceability. This innovative technology ensures complete visibility of critical blood components—Red Blood Cells, Platelets, and Plasma—through every stage of their journey, from collection and transportation to processing and inventory management across multiple locations in Kuwait. The implementation of this cutting-edge system aligns seamlessly with the Ministry of Health's vision to modernize healthcare infrastructure" stated Dr. Reem Al Radwan, Director of the Blood Transfusion Services Department at the Ministry of Health.

From his side, Ghassan Mamlouk, CEO at ATC said: "ATC is proud to bring Biolog-ID's cutting-edge digital solutions to Kuwait's healthcare sector. This implementation underlines our commitment to providing solutions

that enhance patient safety and healthcare efficiency. With its adoption, Kuwait is positioning itself as a regional leader in deploying a technology to revolutionize healthcare services".

Philippe Jacquet, Executive Director of Sales EMEA/LATAM at Biolog-ID, added: "Our collaboration with ATC and the Ministry of Health demonstrates the transformative power of Real-time Tracking Solutions in healthcare. By guaranteeing the safety and traceability of blood products, this solution empowers healthcare providers to deliver more precise and reliable services, ultimately improving patient outcomes". The collaboration between ATC and Biolog-ID is one of the major steps ahead in advancing Kuwait's healthcare sector. It also highlights the company's commitment to delivering latest technological solutions that support this goal.

New detector hunts ghostly neutrinos

NASA's Parker solar probe aims to fly closer to sun like never before

NEW YORK, Dec 23, (AP) — A NASA spacecraft aims to fly closer to the sun than any object sent before. The Parker Solar Probe was launched in 2018 to get a close-up look at the sun. Since then, it has flown straight through the sun's corona: the outer atmosphere visible during a total solar eclipse.

The next milestone: closest approach to the sun. Plans call for Parker on Tuesday to hurtle through the sizzling solar atmosphere and pass within a record-breaking 3.8 million miles (6 million kilometers) of the sun's surface.

At that moment, if the sun and Earth were at opposite ends of a football field, Parker "would be on the 4-yard line," said NASA's Joe Westlake.

Mission managers won't know how Parker fared until days after the flyby since the spacecraft will be out of communication range.

Parker planned to get more than seven times closer to the sun than previous spacecraft, hitting 430,000 mph (690,000 kph) at closest approach. It's the fastest spacecraft ever built and is outfitted with a heat shield that can withstand scorching temperatures up to 2,500 degrees Fahrenheit (1,371 degrees Celsius).

It'll continue circling the sun at this distance until at least September. Scientists hope to better understand why the corona is hundreds of times hotter than the sun's surface and what drives the solar wind, the supersonic stream of charged particles constantly blasting away from the sun.

The sun's warming rays make life possible on Earth. But severe solar storms can temporarily scramble radio communications and disrupt power.

The sun is currently at the maximum



This image made available by NASA shows an artist's rendering of the Parker Solar Probe approaching the Sun. It's designed to take solar punishment like never before, thanks to its revolutionary heat shield that's capable of withstanding 2,500 degrees Fahrenheit (1,370 degrees Celsius). (AP)

phase of its 11-year cycle, triggering colorful auroras in unexpected places.

"It both is our closest, friendliest neighbor," Westlake said, "but also at times is a little angry."

Neutrinos: Underneath a granite hill in southern China, a massive detector is nearly complete that will sniff out the mysterious ghost particles lurking around us.

The Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory will soon begin the difficult task of spotting neutrinos: tiny cosmic particles with a mind-bogglingly small mass. The detector is one of three being built across the globe to study these elusive ghost particles in the finest detail yet. The other two, based in the United States and Japan,

are still under construction.

Spying neutrinos is no small feat in the quest to understand how the universe came to be. The Chinese effort, set to go online next year, will push the technology to new limits, said Andre de Gouvea, a theoretical physicist at Northwestern University who is not involved with the project.

"If they can pull that off," he said, "it would be amazing."

Neutrinos date back to the Big Bang, and trillions zoom through our bodies every second. They spew from stars like the sun and stream out when atomic bits collide in a particle accelerator. Scientists have known about the existence of neutrinos for almost a century, but they're still in the early stages of figuring out what the particles really are.

Revolutionizing cardiac drug development

Curi Bio unlocks advanced cardiac insights with Novoheart integration

SEATTLE/BOSTON, Dec 23, (AP) — Curi Bio, the industry leader in delivering human functional data to the drug discovery community, and Novoheart, maker of the industry's most sophisticated and comprehensive human cardiac tissue engineering platforms, have announced the integration of Novoheart's MyHeart human ventricular cardiac organoid chamber (hvCoC) platform, also known as the "Human Heart-in-a-Jar," into Curi Bio's proprietary cloud-based Pulse analysis platform. Through this collaboration and joint commercialization, this advancement enables users of Novoheart's advanced hvCoC to analyze their data directly into Curi Bio's Pulse analytics platform, providing biopharmaceutical researchers with deeper, actionable insights into cardiac drug development and disease modeling.

Novoheart's MyHeart hvCoC is the only commercially available technology to date that enables the clinically

informative assessment of human cardiac pump performance, which is not possible with other human engineered heart tissues on the market. Combined with complementary custom-designed hardware and software, the best-in-class "human heart-in-a-jar" allows drug screening and disease modeling with unprecedented biofidelity. With this advanced model, drug discoverers can provide insight into how new drugs affect cardiac pressure, stroke area, stroke work, and ejection fraction.

Curi Bio's cloud-enabled Pulse platform combines state-of-the-art machine learning, high-throughput data processing, and intuitive visualization tools to streamline the functional analyses of complex biological datasets from human-relevant 3D and 2D models with a few simple mouse clicks. Curi Bio's flagship Mantarray™ and Nautilai™ platforms currently utilize Pulse to provide scientists a seamless end-to-end workflow culminating in

human relevant data. The integration of these industry-leading technologies expands the predictive power of Novoheart's hvCoC platform using turnkey software analytics. Cardiac scientists can now accelerate preclinical validation and reduce development costs with functional measurements of contractility.

"We are excited to collaborate with Curi Bio in integrating hvCoC data into Pulse," said Dr. Kevin Costa, Co-founder and Chief Scientific Officer at Novoheart. "Our hvCoC-backed by years of development—represents the most complex in vitro model of human heart function available on the market. With this integration, we can offer our customers Curi Bio's user friendly and powerful analytics pipeline. With these tools working together, researchers have the ability to rapidly extract deep analytics from their data, enhancing their ability to develop safer and more effective cardiac therapies."

Experts create dual drug delivery for cancer

Innovative tech targets tumor with 2 drugs

ROME, Dec 23, (Xinhua) — Researchers from Italy, Portugal, and the Netherlands have developed an innovative technology to enable co-delivery of two different drugs to the tumor site, researchers said in a statement on Sunday.

Cancer treatments often involve combining drugs to enhance therapeutic efficacy.

However, differences in drug properties such as degradation rates, circulation times, and tumor penetration can prevent them from reaching the tumor together, limiting their combined efficacy.

To maximize efficacy and minimize toxicity, the researchers developed a new platform that delivers two drugs simultaneously and selectively to the

tumor site without harming healthy organs.

The method, described in the journal Science Advances, uses polymeric nanoparticles to deliver drug pairs for treating specific cancers, including skin and breast cancer.

These biodegradable nanoparticles can encapsulate two drugs to enhance their activity.

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SPORTS

Bochum defeats relegation rival Heidenheim 2-0

Dortmund holds on with 10 men for 1st away win in Bundesliga

BERLIN, Dec 23, (AP) Borussia Dortmund held on after Pascal Groß sending off to beat Wolfsburg 3-1 for its first Bundesliga away win of the season.

Donyell Malen got the visitors off the mark with a volley to a corner in the 25th, three minutes before Julian Brandt played in Maximilian Beier to score Dortmund's second goal. Beier, who scored with the outside of his boot in off the left post, celebrated with a throwing-dart gesture.

Beier returned the favor for Brandt to score Dortmund's third two minutes after that.

Despite the commanding lead, the visitors were second-best for long periods thereafter as Wolfsburg improved dramatically.

Coach Ralph Hasenhüttl made two changes at the break, including sending on Lukas Nmecha to face his brother Felix Nmecha, who was playing for Dortmund.

Denis Vavro pulled one back in the 58th, four minutes before Groß was sent off for a foul on Lukas Nmecha when the Wolfsburg forward was through on goal.

The home team pushed hard but Dortmund managed to hold on to ease the pressure on coach Nuri Sahin.

"A 3-0 lead should mean you can get through the game with confidence," said Brandt, who complained about his

team's drop in performance. "We're to blame for that. It's not good, we need to play more confidently, we need to grow up."

Dortmund climbed to sixth ahead of the league's winter break, but it's not where the club aspires to be after a shaky start to the league.

"We'll try a reset and to play better in the new year," Beier said. "It can't be our goal to be sixth."

Bottom club Bochum defeated relegation rival Heidenheim 2-0 for its first win of the season.

"When we play like we did today it means there are lots of possibilities for the next 19 games," said Bochum coach Dieter Hecking. "From that point of view I'm also glad we won because I couldn't have handled many more games without a win."

It was the visitors' seventh straight Bundesliga defeat, the culmination of a busy schedule after clinching European qualification from its league debut last season and the off-season loss of star players like Jan-Niklas Beste, Tim Kleindienst and Eren Dinkci.

"We're at the end of another 'English week' (with mid-week games) again," Heidenheim coach Frank Schmidt said. "Everyone did their best, but we have to be honest - it wasn't enough."



Dortmund's Emre Can, left, and Wolfsburg's Yannick Gerhardt fight for the ball during the Bundesliga soccer match between VfL Wolfsburg and Borussia Dortmund, in Wolfsburg, Germany. (AP)

Langer makes winning putt in playoff over Woods at PNC

Tiger's son makes the ace

ORLANDO, Fla., Dec 23, (AP) Tiger Woods never had so much fun losing in a playoff. For the 67-year-old Bernhard Langer, it never gets old winning the PNC Championship with his son.

They all delivered a riveting show Sunday, from 15-year-old Charlie Woods making his first hole-in-one to Langer hitting the shot that ultimately mattered, an 18-foot eagle putt on the first playoff hole for his record sixth title in the tournament where everyone leaves happy.

"That was the thrill of a lifetime to be able to have that moment with Charlie, make his first hole-in-one, (daughter) Sam on the bag, just our family and friends. That's what this event is about. It's about bonding and family," Woods said.

"I know we didn't win, but it was the fact that we competed," he said. "No one really made a mistake out there. We had to earn it, and that's what you want to have. Hats off to Langers. They played amazing."

Langer and 24-year-old son Jason won for the second straight year, and Langer became the only player to win the PNC Championship back-to-back with two sons as partners. He won twice (2005 and 2006) with Stefan, who caddied Sunday for his little brother.

What made this one special was the opponent.

Woods, playing for the first time since a sixth surgery on his lower back in September, was moving well and delivering key shots in a duel at such a high level that both teams made only four pars and shot 15-under 57 in the scramble format.

Woods hit driver off the deck on the par-5 14th. Langer followed by hitting driver out of a bunker on that hole and nearly finding the green, landing in a greenside bunker.

"One of the best shots I've ever seen," Woods said of Langer, who turned pro three years before Woods was born.

Jason Langer, who played college golf at Penn, is an investment banker in New York who doesn't play all that much. But he handled the stage-playing with Tiger Woods isn't easy



Bernhard Langer, right, and his son Jason Langer hold the championship belts after winning the PNC Championship golf tournament in Orlando, Fla. (AP)

for seasoned pros - like he had been there before.

"I'm just so proud of him," Langer said. "First time playing with Tiger in the spotlight. It's not easy. A lot of people are moving. They are really not always interested in what we do. But very proud of him the way he handled himself. He hit a couple of fantastic iron shots into 18 to give us the opportunity to make birdie and then eagle."

The two-time Masters champion was equally impressed with Woods and son for embracing the spirit of this tournament amid competition so tight that neither team led by more than one shot the entire round. They broke the tournament scoring record at 28-under 116.

Woods broke into a big smile when Langer made the winner. The real thrill was watching Charlie hit 7-iron from 175 yards on the par-3 fourth that covered the flag, took a few bounces and rolled in.

Woods hugged his son as hard as he did when winning the Masters in 2019, giving him a playful shove and then reminding the high school sophomore that he had to buy a round of

drinks for everyone.

"I'm broke," Charlie replied. Even in defeat, Charlie said the hole-in-one, the great closing round, the playoff, everything, was the most fun he's had on the golf course.

"It's not even close," he said. In the playoff, Langer had the advantage on the par 5 because of his age. Anyone over 65 played the third set of tees, which were 82 yards ahead of where Woods had to play and 52 yards ahead of where the two sons were hitting.

Charlie just reached the front of the green with his second shot. His 25-foot eagle putt hit the edge of the hole but had too much pace. Woods missed low. Jason Langer hit his approach to 18 feet, narrowly missed the putt and left it to his ageless father to make the winner.

For Woods, it was his first time in a playoff since Zach Johnson beat him at Sherwood in the 2013 World Challenge. On a chilly afternoon, every seat was filled in the grandstand behind the 18th green, with fans in jackets packed down the side of the fairway. It was entertaining, along with a rare chance to see Woods on

the golf course.

It capped another amazing year for Langer, a two-time Masters champion. He tore his Achilles tendon playing pickleball at the start of the year, recovered in four months and extended his streak on the 50-and-older PGA Tour Champions by winning for the 18th consecutive season.

And now he has six titles in the PNC Championship - four with Jason, two with Stefan.

No one else was closer than five shots. Paddy Harrington and son Paddy were among those who tied for third, and they had a moment of their own when Paddy made a hole-in-one on the par-3 eighth hole.

"I was too excited. You couldn't have talked to me," Harrington said of watching his son make an ace. "I was gone. This is a great event, and all of it is great. And we try and play well, but that was sheer joy."

The tournament is for winners of a major on any tour or The Players Championship and a family member. The purse is barely over \$1 million. Team Langer won \$200,000, the amount of the new Ryder Cup stipend for Americans.

Navas bids farewell

Mbappé scores again after hitting 'rock bottom' with Real

MADRID, Dec 23, (AP) Kylian Mbappé added to his scoring streak with a superb strike in Real Madrid's 4-2 win over Sevilla in the Spanish league to finish the year on a positive note after hitting what he called "rock bottom" in early December.

Mbappé sent a right-footed shot into the upper corner 10 minutes into the match for his fourth goal in as many games with Madrid in all competitions. It was Mbappé's sixth goal in his last eight matches with Madrid.

He struggled early on with his new club, and Mbappé said his lowest point came when he missed a penalty kick in the team's 2-1 league loss at Athletic Bilbao on Dec. 4.

"I know I have a lot more to give," Mbappé said Sunday. "The last few games I've played better, I took a lot of positives from the Bilbao game, when I hit rock bottom."

The France star said that made him realize "I have to give my all for this jersey and

play with personality."

Mbappé said he feels his period of adjustment with the club is finally over.

"I think we now know each other better," he said. "I've joined the team and

that changed a lot of things. The settling-in period is over, as the coach says. I feel very comfortable in the team and I play better with the others on the field. The team is playing much better."

Federico Valverde, Rodrygo and Brahim Díaz also scored in the comfortable home victory that allowed Madrid to finish the year one point behind Spanish league leader Atletico Madrid.

Atletico next to shock Barcelona 2-1 Saturday with a stoppage-time goal by Alexander Sorloth. Third-place Barcelona is two points behind Madrid, having played an extra game.

Valverde scored in the 20th and Rodrygo in the 34th before Sevilla got on the board with Isaac Romero in the 35th. Díaz extended Madrid's lead in the 53rd and Dodi Lukebakio got the visitors' other goal in the 85th at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

"It was a well-played game, with many scoring situations, a good end to the year," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "That was what we wanted, to be near the top and get some good rest for 2025."

Madrid next faces Valencia on Jan. 3 in a match postponed because of the deadly floods that hit Valencia in October.

Sevilla, sitting in 14th place, had won two of its last two games in all competi-



Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappé runs to the ball during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Real Madrid and Sevilla at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

'Devastating news'

US Open doubles champion Purcell suspended for anti-doping breach

MELBOURNE, Australia, Dec 23, (AP) Two-time Grand Slam winning doubles player Max Purcell has entered a voluntary provisional suspension under tennis' anti-doping rules.

The International Tennis Integrity Agency announced the sanction in a statement on Monday after the 26-year-old Australian admitted to violating Article 2.2 of the Tennis Anti-Doping Program "relating to the use of a Prohibited Method."

Purcell posted a statement on Instagram saying he had "unknowingly received an IV infusion of vitamins above the allowable limit of 100 ml."

Purcell said he had told the medical clinic that the infusion needed to be below 100 ml because he was a professional athlete, but that the medical records he received back showed that the IV had been above that level.

"This news was devastating to me because I pride myself on being an athlete who always makes sure that everything is WADA safe," Purcell wrote. "I volunteered this information to the ITIA and have been as transparent as possible in trying to put this whole situation behind me."

The ITIA said the suspension came into effect on 12 Dec., and time served under provisional suspension will be credited against any future sanction. The length of time of the voluntary suspension was not specified by the ITIA.

"During the provisional suspen-

sion, Purcell is prohibited from playing in, coaching at, or attending any tennis event authorized or sanctioned by the members of the ITIA (ATP, ITF, WTA, Tennis Australia, Fédération Française de Tennis, Wimbledon and USTA) or any national association," the ITIA statement read.

Purcell, with compatriot Jordan Thompson, won the U.S. Open in September and won Wimbledon with another Australian, Matthew Ebden, in 2022. He is currently ranked No. 12 in doubles.

He also finished as a runner-up in the Australian Open doubles final twice, in 2020 and 2022.

Purcell, ranked No. 105 in singles, was not listed on the Australian Open entry lists released earlier this month and did not receive a wildcard or feature on the qualifying entries.

The ITIA did not say whether Purcell's absence from the draw of the tournament starting Jan. 12 was due to the sanction.

The latest doping violation in tennis comes just weeks after five-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek accepted a one-month suspension after testing positive for the banned substance trimetazidine.

Top-ranked men's player Jan-nik Sinner, winner of two Grand Slams this year, was exonerated by the ITIA after twice testing positive for a trace amount of an anabolic steroid in March with the World Anti-Doping Agency appealing the ruling.



In this file photo, Max Purcell returns a shot to Tommy Paul, of the United States, during a second round match of the U.S. Open tennis championships in New York. (AP)

Best of the Rest

Fonseca wins title in Jeddah: Brazil's Joao Fonseca claimed the Next Gen ATP Finals title in Jeddah on Sunday.

Fonseca, 18, delivered a perfect week to lift the trophy at the season-ending event for the best players aged 20 and under. He rallied past American Learner Tien 2-4, 4-3 (8), 4-0, 4-2 in the championship match at King Abdullah Sports City, becoming the second-youngest winner in the event's history.

Undefeated across five matches this week, Fonseca earned a tournament-record prize of 526,480 U.S. dollars.

"I was not playing my best at the beginning, I was too nervous. But after the second set, I think the third set was another Joao. I was much more aggressive going for the shots and he got a little bit tighter. In the fourth set I just did my best and got the win," said Fonseca. (Xinhua)

Vasco shows interest in Luiz: Former Brazil international defender David Luiz could join Vasco da Gama after his release from Rio de Janeiro rival Flamengo, according to media reports in the South American country.

Vasco is seeking to bolster its defense in the off-season and Luiz is at the top of the club's wishlist under new manager Fabio Carille, Globoes-

porte reported.

It added that the 37-year-old had also received offers from other clubs in Brazil and abroad.

Luiz made 132 appearances for Flamengo across all competitions after joining the club from Arsenal in September 2021.

The former Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain center-back endured a frustrating 2024 season as injuries and inconsistent form kept him to 23 league appearances out of a possible 38. (Xinhua)

Adryelson returns to Lyon: Brazilian Defender Adryelson has returned to Lyon after completing a four-month loan at Botafogo, the Brazilian Serie A club said on Sunday.

Adryelson rejoined Botafogo in September, eight months after leaving the Rio de Janeiro club to sign for Lyon. Both Lyon and Botafogo are owned by American businessman John Textor.

In his latest spell with Botafogo, Adryelson made 11 appearances and helped the club win the Copa Libertadores in addition to the Brazilian Serie A title.

"You came back to Botafogo as a man on a mission and you etched your name into our history. We are immensely proud of you," Botafogo said in a social media post.

Adryelson made just four first-team appearances in eight months for Lyon before his return to Botafogo. (Xinhua)

ABK offers free Arabian Gulf Cup transportation for Elite Plus customers

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is excited to announce a special initiative for its Elite customers holding Elite Plus credit card. In a collaboration with Q'go Concierge, ABK is offering a complimentary delivery service to facilitate attendance at the Arabian Gulf Cup football tournament matches hosted in Kuwait until 3 January 2025.

This service enhances the array of exclusive offerings for ABK's Elite customers. In addition, the partnership provides a comprehensive suite of convenience services, designed to save time and effort. This includes travel and hotel reservations, airport transfers, driving license renewals, vehicle inspections, and registrations, among others.

The Elite customer segment holds significant importance for ABK, as reflected in the ongoing exclusive offers and rewards provided in collaboration with partners across various sectors.

Commenting on this initiative, Johair Marafi, Gen-

Johair Marafi

■ We aim to provide peace of mind and direct access to the excitement of the tournament.

eral Manager of Retail Banking at ABK, said, "The new offer and free delivery service to the Arabian Gulf Cup venues underscores our commitment to ensuring the utmost comfort for our distinguished customers. We aim to provide them with peace of mind and direct access to the excitement of the tournament, especially given the anticipated high turnout."

Marafi concluded with an invitation to follow the Bank's social media accounts to remain up to date with the latest marketing initiatives and to benefit from the current promotional campaigns and offers throughout the year.



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



ABK-Khaleeji 26 special initiative for its Elite customers.

Pakistan completes 3-0 sweep of ODI series against S.Africa



Pakistan's players pose with the trophy following the third International cricket match between South Africa and Pakistan, at the Wanderers stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa. (AP)

Opener Ayub hits 101 runs in 94 balls

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 23, (AP): Pakistan completed a 3-0 sweep of its ODI series against South Africa, winning the third match by 36 runs under the DLS method.

Opener Saim Ayub hit 101 runs in 94 balls as Pakistan scored 308-9 at the Wanderers in a game reduced to 47 overs by rain. South Africa was all out for 271 in 42 overs in pursuit of a winning target of 308.

Pakistan batted first after losing the toss and was 1-1 when it lost Abdullah Shafique in the first over. The innings took off with Ayub involved in two key stands - 114 runs for the second wicket with Babar Azam (52 in 71), and 93 runs for the third with captain Mohammad Rizwan (53 in 52).

The 22-year-old Ayub, who scored 109 in the first ODI, was caught behind

against debutant Corbin Bosch. Ayub hit two sixes and 13 fours. Middle-order batter Salman Agha padded the total with a 33-ball 48.

South Africa pacer Kagiso Rabada took 3-56.

In reply, Heinrich Klaasen top scored for the hosts with 81 runs in 43 balls, and Bosch finished 40 not out. Pakistan spinner Sufiyan Muqem took 4-52 in eight overs.

Pakistan had already secured the one-day international series, winning the opener by three wickets and the second ODI by 81 runs.

South Africa won the three-match Twenty20 series 2-0. The teams will play two tests, starting Thursday at Centurion.

Pakistan's fifth successive bilateral ODI series win puts it in good stead for the Champions Trophy it will host in February.

Juventus ends a run of four straight draws in the league

Atalanta returns to top of Serie A

ROME, Dec 23, (AP): Charles De Ketelaere scored late and Atalanta returned to the top of Serie A with a 3-2 win over Empoli in the club's record-extending 11th consecutive league victory.

De Ketelaere scored two goals and African player of the year Ademola Lookman grabbed the other as Atalanta restored its two-point advantage over Napoli, which had put the home team under pressure with a 2-1 win over Genoa the day before.

Empoli forward Lorenzo Colombo stunned the hosts with the opener in the 13th minute after a quick throw in caught the Atalanta defense off guard.

Atalanta suffered another blow minutes later when Mateo Retegui had to go off with what looked like a left thigh injury. Nicolo Zaniolo went on for the Italy forward and was booked almost straight away.

Gian Piero Gasperini's side showed no alarm, however, and De Ketelaere equalized with a diving header inside the left post in the 34th. Lookman then scored his ninth league goal of the season just before the interval after Zaniolo laid off a cross from De Ketelaere.

Sebastiano Esposito pulled one back with a penalty awarded after a VAR check for an innocuous-looking challenge, but De Ketelaere

sent the home fans wild in the 86th minute when he fired inside the right post from the edge of the penalty box despite facing three defenders.

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

Juventus ended a run of four straight draws in the league with a hard-fought 2-1 win at relegation-threatened Monza.

Nicolás González scored what proved to be the winner from close range in the 39th minute after Samuele Birindelli had canceled out Weston McKennie's opener for the visi-

tors.

While Juve remains the only unbeaten team in the league, another draw would have lost it further ground on the leading teams. Juventus has drawn 10 of its 17 games so far and remains nine points off the pace.

Monza dropped to the bottom after its 10th game in a row without a win.

Also Sunday, Venezia defeated Cagliari 2-1 thanks to Marin Sverko's persistence. The Croatian defender kept going despite the attention of a handful of Cagliari defenders to score what proved to be the winner. It lifted Venezia off the bottom, three points above Monza.



Atalanta's Charles De Ketelaere, right, fights for the ball with Empoli's Giuseppe Pezzella during the Serie A soccer match between Atalanta and Empoli at Gewiss Stadium in Bergamo, Italy. (AP)



Juventus' Nico Gonzalez celebrates after scoring during the Serie A soccer match between Ac Monza and Juventus at U-Power Stadium in Monza, Italy. (AP)

Pacers dominate Kings

Brooks scores 27 points as Rockets beat Raptors

TORONTO, Dec 23, (AP): Dillon Brooks scored 27 points, Jalen Green had 22 and the Houston Rockets won in Toronto for the first time in more than five years by beating the struggling Raptors 114-110 on Sunday night.

Alperen Sengun had 17 points and 10 rebounds for the Rockets, who hadn't won in Toronto since Dec. 5, 2019. Current Rockets guard Fred VanVleet scored 20 points for the reigning NBA-champion Raptors in that game.

Ja'Kobe Walter fouled out with a career-high 27 points and Chris Boucher and Ochai Agbaji each added 15 as Toronto's losing streak reached seven. The Raptors have lost six straight at home.

Pacers 122, Kings 95

In Sacramento, Pascal Siakam had 19 points and 10 rebounds, and Indiana dominated the second half to rout Sacramento.

Siakam scored 13 points after halftime, when the Pacers outscored the Kings 70-43 after the game was tied at 52 at the break. The Pacers shot 58% for the game and made 17 3-pointers in their season-high fourth straight victory.

Myles Turner added 15 points and Ben Sheppard had 14 off the bench. Tyrese Haliburton, who started his career in Sacramento, had 14 points. Seven Pacers finished in double figures.

The Pacers took an 87-78 lead into the fourth quarter, and then started the period on a 17-5 run to take a 21-point advantage.

De'Aaron Fox had 23 points in the Kings' fourth straight loss. Domantas Sabonis had 17 points and 21 rebounds for his eighth straight double-double.

Nuggets 132, Pelicans 129, OT

In New Orleans, Nikola Jokic overcame a slow scoring start for his ninth triple-double of the season, finishing with 27 points, 13



Indiana Pacers forward Obi Toppin (1) draws a foul on Sacramento Kings guard De'Aaron Fox during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Sacramento, Calif. (AP)

rebounds and 10 assists in Denver' overtime victory over New Orleans.

Jokic turned it on after failing to score in the first 21 minutes. Jamal Murray added 27 points, scoring Denver's final five in overtime, and Russell Westbrook had 21.

The Pelicans led 107-98 with 7:50 left in regulation, but Jokic scored seven points in a 15-2 Denver run over a 3:41 span to give the Nuggets a 113-109 lead.

CJ McCollum put New Orleans up 119-117 with a 3-pointer with 52 seconds remaining, and Murray tied it with 8.8 seconds left. McCollum shot an airball on a 3-pointer at the buzzer.

Jokic scored the first six points of overtime and assisted on an Aaron Gordon layup to put Denver up 129-125.

Jordan Hawkins led New Orleans with 25 points. McCollum had 24.

Haugan wins Alta Badia slalom ahead of Meillard and McGrath

LA VILLA, Italy, Dec 23, (AP): Norwegian skier Timon Haugan added to his first-run advantage to win a World Cup slalom by a large margin in Alta Badia on Monday.

Haugan finished 1.13 seconds ahead of Loic Meillard of Switzerland and 1.26 ahead of Norwegian teammate Atle Lie McGrath.

It was Haugan's second World Cup victory after taking the slalom at finals last season in Saalbach, Austria, the site of this season's world championships in February.

Haugan led McGrath by 0.31 after the first leg then charged the entire way down his second run. He made a mistake and was pushed wide midway down and also made a slight bobble on the bottom of the Gran Risa course. But he recovered both times and celebrated by skiing in a circle in the finish area.

"I tried to keep it simple, keep it clean and really attack," McGrath said. "That was the main goal today, just focus on the skiing and not think about the result."

Haugan was coming off a fifth-place finish in Sunday's giant slalom on the Gran Risa course, which was his best result this season - until Monday.

"It's always nice to ski the GS the day before and get a feeling for the snow," Haugan said. "It's good for the nerves, too, to get a good result yesterday and then I can just relax and focus on the skiing."

Meillard was only eighth in the morning but surged up the leader board for his third podium in four slaloms this season.

McGrath, who was second after the first run, recorded his third consecutive slalom podium after placing third in Gurgl, Austria, and second in Val d'Isere, France.

Norway had a 1-2 in Val d'Isere



Norway's Timon Haugan celebrates on the podium after winning an alpine ski, men's World Cup slalom, in Alta Badia, Italy. (AP)

eight days ago with Henrik Kristoffersen finishing ahead of McGrath.

Kristoffersen finished fourth this time, 1.31 behind, but held on to his lead in the slalom standings. Olympic champion Clement Noel stood third after the first run but struggled toward the end of his second run and placed sixth.

Noel won the opening two slaloms of the season but then missed the Val d'Isere race after injuring his ankle in a giant slalom.

The course in the Italian Dolomites was dark in sections, icy and bumpy.

Lucas Pinheiro Braathen, the Norwegian-born standout now representing Brazil, finished 12th, putting down the fastest second run to move up from 24th after the first leg.

The men's circuit resumes with downhill and super-G races in Bormio on Saturday and Sunday, respectively.



Iraq and Yemen players in an aerial battle during the Khaleeji Zain 26 match in Kuwait.

Sports

Bahrain outlasts Saudi Arabia in Group B thriller

Media operations get thumbs up

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23, (Agencies): Bahrain secured a hard-fought 3-2 victory over Saudi Arabia at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium in the Khaleeji Zain 26 opening matches in Group B.

Bahrain took an early lead and dominated with multiple scoring opportunities, despite a late surge by Saudi Arabia.

With this win, Bahrain tops Group B on goal difference, edging out Iraq, who earlier defeated Yemen 1-0.

Sheikh Mubarak Fahad Jaber Al-Ahmad, Director General of the Joint Program Production Institution of the Gulf Cooperation Council, visited the main media center for the "Gulf 26" Championship at the Crowne Plaza Hotel to assess the progress of the media operations supporting the event. The center hosts a large number of media professionals representing international newspapers and news agencies.

Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah expressed his satisfaction with the successful opening of the championship and the comprehensive media arrangements in place. He also took the opportunity to speak with local, Arab, and international media representatives, all of whom expressed complete satisfaction with the support provided by the State of Kuwait.

In his concluding remarks, Sheikh Mubarak thanked and appreciated all those involved in ensuring the success of the event, highlighting its significant role in enhancing the sports system of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, strengthening the Gulf identity, and reinforcing the deep fraternal ties between the member states.

Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth



Sheikh Mubarak Fahad Jaber Al-Ahmad visits media center.



Saudi goalkeeper Nawaf Al-Aqidi delivered a spectacular save to deny a powerful Bahraini shot.

KUNA photos

Affairs, Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi, welcomed GCC Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi on Sunday, marking the occasion of the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup, "Khaleeji Zain."

Minister Al-Mutairi expressed pride in Kuwait's hosting of this prestigious sporting event, highlighting it as a source of great honor for the nation's leadership and people. He extended gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his patronage of the tournament, according to a joint statement given to Kuwait TV and

Kuwait News Agency (KUNA).

The minister emphasized the significant role of the GCC General Secretariat, under Al-Budaiwi's leadership, in fostering joint Gulf cooperation across various sectors, including initiatives aimed at empowering Gulf youth through diverse activities.

For his part, Al-Budaiwi commended Kuwait's exceptional organization of the tournament, praising the impressive opening ceremony, which symbolized a unified Gulf vision and aspirations for a prosperous future.

Blues aiming to make fans proud

Kuwait ready for high-stakes clash against UAE

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Kuwait is set to face the UAE in a crucial match tonight at 8:30 pm at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium in the second round of Group A competitions in the "Khaleeji Zain 26".

Both teams are seeking their first win, with Kuwait tying 1-1 in its opening match against Oman, while the UAE also drew 1-1 with Qatar.

Argentine coach Juan Antonio Pizzi is determined to secure his first victory with Kuwait since taking charge in July. Pizzi's tenure so far includes six matches in the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup (four draws and two losses), as well as friendly matches last month against Yemen (1-1 draw) and Lebanon (0-1 and 1-2 losses). His latest match, the Gulf Cup opener against Oman, ended in a 1-1 stalemate.

Pizzi has emphasized the need for his players to maintain focus and avoid the mistakes seen in the Oman game. He aims to improve midfield organization, diversify attacking strategies, and strengthen play through the center rather than relying solely on flanks and crosses.

The Blues will be without defender Hassan Hamdan, who sustained a severe ankle sprain against Oman. Medical assessments revealed ligament tears and



Players hold final training session.

joint bleeding, sidelining him for 2-3 weeks. Midfielder Reda Hani's availability remains uncertain after suffering a shoulder dislocation in the same match.

Fahad Al Hajri is expected to replace Hamdan in the starting lineup, with Sami Al Sanea on the right. Other key players likely to feature include Ahmed Al Dhafiri, Sultan Al Enezi, Eid Al Rashidi, Yousef Nasser, Khaled Ibrahim, Mashari Ghannam, Mohammed Daham, and Yousef Majed.

The UAE, also seeking its first win, aims to build on their strong second-half performance against Qatar, where it dominated play but was unable to convert chances into a decisive goal. Both teams are keen to secure vital points and improve their standings in Group A.

Kuwait's coach, Juan Pizzi, emphasized that the match against the UAE is important, but not decisive for qualification to the semi-finals, with the final outcome resting on the third round. Speaking at a press conference at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Pizzi said: "Every match is a new chance to secure the best possible result, and we always aim for victory. I have complete confidence in the players to give their best and secure the three points, bringing us closer to qualifying for the next stage."

Pizzi also expressed optimism about Kuwait's chances against the UAE, stating, "Our primary goal is to win. Each match has its tactical approach, and we rely on the tremendous support from our fans, which was invaluable in our opening match."

Kuwait national team player Moaz Al-Aseema shared his thoughts, acknowledging the high expectations placed on the team in every Gulf tournament. "Kuwaiti football has a rich and honorable history, with past stars winning the title ten times," Al-Aseema noted. "Although Kuwaiti football is not at its best right now, this is part of the sport. Every team goes through ups and downs, but as current players, we must work hard and aim for the best. We will do everything we can to meet the expectations of our loyal fans, especially in this challenging match against the UAE." UAE coach Paulo Bento emphasized that he does not focus on predictions favoring his team for the "Khaleeji Zain 26" title. Speaking at a press conference at the tournament's main media center at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, he said, "I can't control expectations, which is common in all tournaments. My primary mission is to concentrate on my team, enhance their technical and physical readiness, and prepare them mentally in the best way possible before each match."

Bento acknowledged that the upcoming match against the host Kuwait team will be challenging, but he remains determined to lead his team to victory in their second match of the tournament. He added that the tight schedule, with matches every three days, puts significant pressure on the players. "This is something I cannot change, and while it's abnormal, the short recovery time isn't ideal for the players," he explained. "There's limited time to correct mistakes or address any issues that arise in each match. At this stage, the key is to focus on enhancing the players' mental readiness and approach each match individually."

Bento also noted that the Gulf Championships attract considerable attention and media coverage, saying, "Everyone is eager to perform at their best, and for me personally, the championship is a significant challenge. I hope to achieve the best possible result with the team."

Garcia ready for tough challenge

Oman's Jaber confident ahead of key Qatar clash

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 23: Oman coach Rashid Jaber emphasized the importance of the upcoming match against Qatar, following a draw in the first round. Speaking at a press conference yesterday, Jaber stated that this match is crucial for gaining points, and that focus, mental presence, and capitalizing on opportunities will be key to success.

Jaber explained that taking advantage of opportunities requires quick decision-making, which is tied to both the player's intelligence and skill. He added that all teams, including Oman, are facing challenges in the offensive aspect of their game.

Jaber also mentioned that efforts are underway to prepare Salah Al-Yahyaie for the Qatar match, with his health being a top priority. While Al-Yahyaie's participation in the tournament is confirmed, his involvement in the match against Qatar is still uncertain. Additionally, the team will continue to miss the services of Mohsen Al-Ghassani.

He noted that while the outcome of the Qatar match will not determine the team's qualification for the semi-finals, he believes Oman has the ability to defeat Qatar, as the Gulf Cup is distinct from continental tournaments. Jaber expressed confidence in the Omani team's potential to progress far in the "Khaleeji Zain 26".

Jaber concluded by stating that the chances of winning the Gulf title are nearly equal for all teams, but success will depend on various factors such as player performance, seizing opportunities, preparation, game analysis, and fan support.

Qatar coach, Luis Garcia, emphasized that a draw with the UAE is a common occurrence in football. Speaking at a press conference, he acknowledged the team's limited preparation time but assured that it is ready for its upcoming match against Oman. He mentioned that the training program prior to the game focused solely on recovery.

Regarding the inclusion of new



Top and above: Rashid Jaber and Luis Garcia address the media.



Top and above: Rashid Jaber and Luis Garcia address the media.

players in the team, Garcia said, "It's important to bring fresh talent into the squad, and we have a number of young players. We aim to develop them, as they represent the future of the Qatari national team." He highlighted that each match presents unique challenges, and while the opening round against the UAE was difficult, the team is focused on achieving their goals.

On the upcoming clash with Oman, Garcia described it as a tough match. "The Omani team is strong, with counterattacks being one of their key strengths. Football, like life, has its ups and downs," he said. Garcia emphasized his desire for the team to perform at its best, recalling its victorious run in the Asian Cup. He concluded, "To compete effectively, we must adapt to the opponent's style. Just like we played the UAE match in an open manner, we aim to approach the Omani match with the same mentality and secure a victory."



Left-right: Juan Pizzi and Paulo Bento speak to reporters on the eve of the match between Kuwait and UAE.

