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**soccer**  
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## CABINET PUSHES FOR RAPID PROGRESS ON INFRASTRUCTURE, TECH PROJECTS

# Kuwait sets 15% tax on multinational firms

Law aims to prevent revenue drain, block tax evasion

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA):** The Kuwaiti Cabinet endorsed a draft resolution on issuing a law imposing a 15 percent tax on multinational entities, which have business in more than one country or a state.

This move was taken during its weekly meeting held at Bayan Palace under chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The law, which is in line with global taxes' standards, aims to curb tax evasion and prevent sending tax revenues to other countries.

It will come into effect as of January 1, 2025, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Shereeda

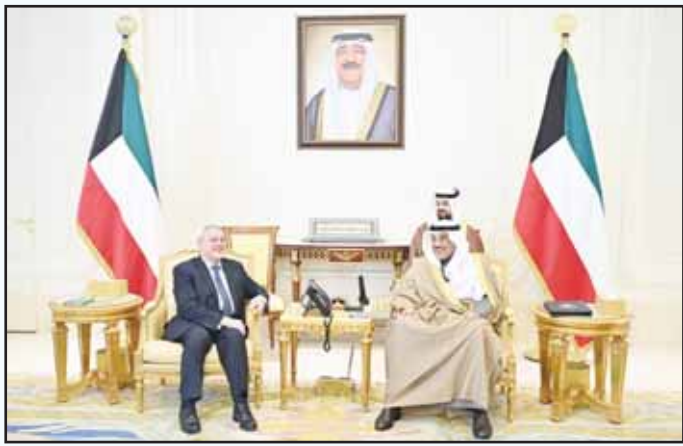
Al-Mousherji said in a statement after the meeting.

The Cabinet then extolled the excellent organization of the opening of the Arabian football cup, Khaleej Zain 26, launched on Saturday at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, under the auspices of, and in the presence of, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and in the attendance of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

The Cabinet expressed great gratitude and thanks to all teams tasked with organizing the tournament currently hosted by Kuwait from December 21 until January 3 for their efforts and action that resulted in the success of the opening ceremony.

The opening ceremony was in good shape that lives up to Kuwait's position at sports arenas, Al-Mousherji added.

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Crown Prince Diwan photo

HH the Crown Prince receives visiting Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Bilateral Relations and Personal Envoy of Iraqi Prime Minister.

## Crown Prince hosts personal envoy of Iraq Prime Minister

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA):** His Highness the Crown Prince Shekh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received Wednesday at Bayan Palace visiting Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Bilateral Relations and Personal Envoy of Iraqi Prime Minister, Ambassador Mohammad Hussain Bahr Aloolom and his accompanying delegation.

The Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs at His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan Mazen Al-Issa, Assistant Foreign Minister for Consular Affairs and Acting Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Aziz Al-Daihani, Ambassador Salem Al-Zamman, and Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab World Affairs Ambassador Ahmad Al-Bakr attended the meeting.

## Kuwait, China discuss key development initiatives

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA):** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received the Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Zhang Jianwei at Bayan Palace on Wednesday.

The meeting discussed the latest developments in implementing development projects outlined in memorandums of understanding between Kuwait and China, particularly cooperation in the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project, power systems, renewable energy, and low-carbon green waste recycling systems.

Bilateral cooperation also includes housing, environmental infrastructure for wastewater treatment plants and free trade and economic zones.

The meeting was attended by head of His Highness the Prime Minister's Office Abdulaziz Al-Dakheel, Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy Dr. Mahmood Bushehri, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdulatif Al-Mishari, Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Noura Al-Fassam, and Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Sameeh Hayat.



PM Diwan photo

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Zhang Jianwei at Bayan Palace.

Blue passports, rights preserved for women with revoked citizenship

## Kuwait to lift bank blocks on Article 8 women by Dec 29

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA):** First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah announced Wednesday that block on bank accounts of females whose citizenship have been rescinded as per Article 8 of the citizenship law will be lifted by December 29.

Security investigation into such cases remains underway, affirmed Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, also Defense Minister and Chief of the Supreme Committee to Investigate Kuwaiti Citizenship, adding that block will be reinstated on those proven to have committed violations.

This was communicated at a meeting held by Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef with editors-in-chief of daily newspapers, Kuwait News Agency's Director General, in addition to public benefit societies. A number of concerned ministers were also present alongside members of the Supreme Committee.

The meeting was held to clarify details on the new citizenship law, as well as discuss dual citizenship issues and people who acquired it by illegal means like forgery and false statements, as well as those who acquired citizenship as per Article 8 concerning wives of Kuwaiti citizens. The stripping of citizenship comes in line with stipulations of the citizenship law.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef reassured those whose citizenship revoked according to Article 8, that they will continue to have the rights they previously had, will be granted blue-colored passports and blue-colored civil IDs, equivalent to that of a Kuwaiti, and will



KUNA photo

First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah during his meeting with editors-in-chief of daily newspapers, the Director General of KUNA and heads of public benefit societies.

be dealt with as if she was a Kuwaiti citizen. This meeting, he indicated, is to examine one of the most pressing political and social topics affecting the country, a topic that have

amassed many queries.

Revoking the citizenship, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef commented, came to rectify false situations, saying that while it is a hard decision with ramifications, it is a necessity for the benefit of the state and the rule of law.

The State is well aware of consequences, he asserted, and is committed to addressing issues and ensuring justice.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef told the editors-in-chief that he was tasked by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with fulfilling this duty, saying that these directives came to put forth suitable solutions for those who lost their citizenship in order to preserve the Kuwaiti family; the building block of society. "This is a national priority."

He reaffirmed that any wife or mother of a Kuwaiti citizen, who continues to reside in the country, will be cared for by the State, and will be provided with a dignified life that preserves her rights.

A committee examining grievances of those with rescinded citizenship will be formed, and a direct line will be designated to answer any query.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef presented several cases of people who received the citizenship supposedly for their services to the country, but were found undeserving.

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## Kuwait Airways disputes inaccurate safety claims

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** Kuwait Airways has addressed rumors circulating on social media regarding the tires of one of its new fleet aircraft, categorically denying the accuracy of the report, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The airline clarified that all its aircraft are acquired following rigorous safety and compliance protocols mandated by the Kuwaiti Civil Aviation Authority and the European Air Transport Association (EASA).

Kuwait Airways emphasized that no aircraft is permitted to operate unless it meets all safety requirements. Upon receipt, every aircraft undergoes thorough technical inspections to ensure it complies with safety regulations and operational needs.

This includes verifying the availability of spare parts and tires, which are sourced from specialized, reputable companies.

The airline urged the public and media to refrain from sharing unverified information and to rely solely on official company statements for accurate updates.

Kuwait Airways also stated that it reserves the right to take legal action against any party disseminating false information that could harm the reputation of Kuwait's national carrier.

## Kuwait relief flight brings vital supplies to Lebanon

**BEIRUT, Dec 25, (KUNA):** Kuwait's ninth relief aid plane arrived in Lebanon on Wednesday with 40 tons of humanitarian aid involving foodstuff, as part of Kuwaiti efforts aiming at alleviating suffering of Lebanese people caused by continuous Israeli occupation aggressions.

Representative of Kuwait's Embassy in Beirut, First Secretary Abdullah Al-Dyein expressed to KUNA his appreciation to all entities that facilitated the arrival of aid in Lebanese people, saying that this is an implementation of the leadership's directives.

As for Representative of Lebanese Higher Relief Commission Ahmad Ibrahim, he reiterated his thanks for Kuwaiti leadership and people for their continuous support and rapid response.

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KUNA photo

Staff of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Lebanon and representatives of the Higher Relief Committee warmly welcome the arrival of humanitarian aid on a Kuwaiti Air Force plane.

### News watch

**JERUSALEM:** Israel and Hamas accused each other of complicating ceasefire efforts on Wednesday, as the two sides inch closer to a deal that could wind down the 14-month war in Gaza.

The two sides appear closer than they have been in months to reaching an agreement that would bring home dozens of hostages being held in Gaza. However, talks have come close before, only to collapse. (AP)

**ISTANBUL:** Turkish authorities detained 10 people in connection with the munitions factory explosion in Balikesir province, northwestern Türkiye, Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc announced on Wednesday.

Speaking to reporters in Balikesir, Tunc said preliminary findings showed they were "found to be responsible or negligent." (Xinhua)

**NAHARIYA, Israel:** A missile launched from Yemen triggered air raid sirens across central Israel early Wednesday, sending millions of residents looking for cover for the second night in a row.

The military said the missile was intercepted before crossing into Israeli territory, but police reported shrapnel from the interception fell in several towns. There were no reports of injuries. (AP)

## KOC achieves historic milestone, produces 90,000 bpd of heavy oil

By Najeh Bilal  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) has announced that its heavy oil production has reached 90,000 barrels per day, which is a new major achievement for the North and West Kuwait Directorate.

Deputy CEO of North and West Kuwait Issa Al-Maraghi said this level of production is unprecedented in the company's history.

He described it as a remarkable accomplishment, especially considering the huge challenges faced in developing and operating difficult heavy oil fields, as well as the shortage of steam injection resources, drilling rigs, and maintenance.

Al-Maraghi affirmed that efforts will continue to further enhance heavy oil production, revealing that the company anticipates reaching a production level of 100,000 barrels per day by the second quarter of 2025.

He credited the hard work of the responsible teams and groups at KOC for accelerating the completion of major projects in the Ratqa field in northern Kuwait.

Furthermore, Al-Maraghi highlighted that the company's recent organizational transformation has provided its departments with greater flexibility, enabling them to adapt, excel, and achieve these results in record time.

He praised the joint cooperation between KOC and Shell International on the heavy oil project, highlighting their advanced technical services

agreement through which best practices were adopted and innovative initiatives were implemented. Al-Maraghi revealed that these initiatives included the development of an automated tool to optimize steam utilization, ensuring its efficient allocation, the use of quadruple reverse osmosis water, conducting comprehensive evaluations of design performance, improving extraction efficiency, enhancing an integrated energy balance model, and continuously monitoring and improving well performance.

He expressed the pride of the company's senior management in every factor that contributed to this achievement, especially as it coincides with KOC's 90th anniversary, making this milestone a double accomplishment for the company.

In a related development, oil sources explained that KOC will continue its efforts to reach approximately 120,000 barrels per day of heavy oil production in the next two years. The company's management and employees are committed to increasing heavy oil production in line with the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC)'s strategy, which aims to achieve no less than 430,000 barrels per day of heavy oil by 2040.

However, increasing heavy oil production presents some challenges, especially since drilling and developing heavy oil fields is a complex process. These efforts are driven by continuous teamwork and the acquisition of the latest high-tech tools that greatly support KOC's operations.

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**8** NBK signs exclusive partnership with Aishaya Group



**9** KFH's unrivaled achievements in 2024 recognized with 47 prestigious awards



**15** ALSAYER & Toyota launch GR Yaris Cup season 2



## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 05:15 Asr ..... 14:38  
 Sunrise .. 06:40 Maghrib .. 16:56  
 Zohr ..... 11:48 Isha ..... 18:18

# Local

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Mild with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speed of 08-32 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

**By Night:** Cold and clouds will increase gradually with light to

## Weather

moderate southeasterly wind to variable wind, with speed of 10-35 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain later on.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	21	10
Kuwait Airport	22	08

Abdaly	21	08
Bubyan	21	09
Jahra	21	09
Failaka Island	21	11
Salmiyah	20	14
Ahmadi	23	08
Jal Aliyah	20	08
Nuwaisib	22	10



One of the entities participating in the marathon includes champion athletes, an administrative and technical staff.



Participants in the marathon for physically challenged people were honored by the organizers. KUNA photos

## PADA, PAAET organize second marathon for people with disabilities

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): The second marathon for people with disabilities was held on Wednesday, in collaboration with the Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA) and Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), aiming to promote a healthier lifestyle and develop athletic skills.

The marathon aims to enhance the athletic abilities and social integration of individuals with disabilities, which helps them overcome isolation and improve their communication with others, with 215 from 14 organizations and schools participating.

This sport event provides an inclusive atmosphere, involving participants

with Down syndrome, autism of varying degrees, intellectual disabilities, learning difficulties, and others.

The event witnessed the presence of several parents and specialists in the field of disability, aiming to foster a spirit of competition and encouragement, which positively affected attendees.

## 'Kuwait guarantees help for elderly, ill, disabled citizens'

Aid for needy in Arab, Muslim world continues: Al-Huwaila

MANAMA, Dec 25, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila, affirmed Wednesday that the State of Kuwait continues its humanitarian efforts to support the needy in Arab and Islamic countries.

Speaking during the 44th session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs held in the Kingdom of Bahrain, Al-Huwaila stressed Kuwait's firm rejection of the crimes committed by the Israeli occupation in Palestine and Lebanon, adding that Kuwait continues to provide humanitarian aid to both countries.

She noted that Kuwait has contributed to the capital of the Al-Aqsa and Jerusalem Fund and expanded ongoing aid bridges to charitable organizations operating in these countries.

Al-Huwaila highlighted Kuwait's commitment, represented by the Ministry of Social Affairs, to following up on the implementation of decisions issued by the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, particularly in relation to the social dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 discussed during the 44th session.

On addressing multidimensional poverty in Kuwait, Al-Huwaila stated that Article (11) of the Kuwaiti Constitution guarantees "assistance to citizens in cases of old age, illness, or incapacity." She pointed out that the ministry has introduced several related laws, notably Public Assistance Law No. 12 of 2011, which serves a large segment of beneficiaries, including the elderly, widows, unmarried women, prisoners' families, non-Kuwaiti spouses, individuals with chronic diseases, and those facing financial hardship.

She revealed that in 2023, more than 49,915



KUNA photo  
 Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila

families and 56,834 individuals in Kuwait benefited from social assistance programs.

Regarding persons with disabilities, Al-Huwaila emphasized Kuwait's dedication to providing comprehensive and distinguished services that safeguard their rights and support their full integration into society. She noted that Kuwait was among the first nations to enact legislation promoting the welfare and rights of this group, including Law No. 49 of 1996 on the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities and Law No. 8 of 2010 concerning Persons with Disabilities.

Kuwait also implements the "Kuwait Vision 2035 for Persons with Disabilities" project in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), aimed at achieving social security and community integration within a supportive family environment, she added.

Al-Huwaila outlined several initiatives aimed at raising community awareness, such

as the Prevention Project and the Early Disability Detection Program, along with the Community Integration Project, in cooperation with the Public Authority for Youth and Sports. She also mentioned the adoption and implementation of the Kuwaiti Accessibility Code across state institutions.

The minister pointed to various financial and compensatory benefits for persons with disabilities, including allowances for drivers or caregivers, increased social benefits, reduced working hours, and housing, educational, and rehabilitative support.

She highlighted ongoing efforts to provide employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through coordination with the Civil Service Commission and the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program, in accordance with relevant laws.

Regarding programs for children and the elderly, Al-Huwaila said that Kuwait has launched numerous initiatives, including the 'Shababna Amaluna' (Our Youth, Our Hope) program for rehabilitating juvenile delinquents, and the 'Lammatah Al-Ahel' (Family Gathering) program for the elderly. The country has also introduced mobile services for the elderly, electronic care services, priority cards, and designated parking spaces in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior.

Al-Huwaila reiterated Kuwait's dedication to protecting families, women, and children through comprehensive legislation such as Law No. 16 of 2020 on Protection from Domestic Violence and Law No. 21 of 2015 on Children's Rights. She commended the Supreme Council for Family Affairs as a pioneering model in addressing family issues and empowering women and children to face challenges.

She concluded by emphasizing the council's role in strengthening cooperation with governmental and civil society organizations to foster a secure and stable society.



KUNA photo  
 Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army, Major General Pilot Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, during his reception of the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Human Rights Affairs, Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher Ibrahim Duajj Al-Sabah.

## Role of women in military discussed

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Army's Deputy Chief of Staff, Air Marshal Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, met at his office with Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Human Rights, Ambassador Sheikhha Jawaher Ibrahim Duajj Al-Sabah.

Issues of common concern, particularly regarding the active role of women in the

Ministry of Defense; both in military and civilian sectors, were discussed.

The Kuwaiti Army General Staff, in a press release on Wednesday, said that both sides discussed ways to enhance the role of women by creating a supportive and motivational environment that provides access to job opportunities, which in part, strengthens capabilities of the armed forces.



Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah receives designer of Kuwait International Airport roundabout Kleebed Badah Al-Mutairi.

## Farwaniya governor receives airport roundabout designer

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received in his office at the governorate the owner of Al-Rabee Al-Daem Company and the designer of the Kuwait International Airport roundabout Kleebed Badah Al-Mutairi.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the governor, during the meeting, commended Al-Mutairi for his outstanding efforts in designing the roundabout, which not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the area surrounding the airport but also reflects Kuwait's civilized character.

Sheikh Athbi affirmed the importance of further developing the infrastructure and

urban facades in Farwaniya in line with Kuwait's development vision.

Later in the morning, the governor also received the President of the Women's Institute for Development and Peace, Kawthar Al-Jouan, at his office.

They discussed important developmental issues, including upcoming conferences, forums, and national celebrations. They also highlighted the significance of boosting collaboration between the governorate and the institute to achieve shared objectives.

Sheikh Athbi expressed his appreciation for these productive meetings, and praised the efforts exerted by all parties in the service of Kuwait's development and prosperity.

## Court Cases

### Two lawyers imprisoned in libel lawsuit

## Duo jailed 10 years in high-profile 'drugs' case

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Criminal Court, presided over by Counselor Dr. Khaled Al-Omara, sentenced a detective and a Bedoun to 10 years in prison in the high-profile case involving kidnappers and the masterminds behind the malicious drug trafficking charges fabricated against Dr. Imad Youssef.

The court acquitted a sergeant, a dentist and a secretary.

Attorney Enaam Haidar, lawyer for one of the defendants, successfully argued for the acquittal of her client. She contended that there was no evidence of kidnapping or any criminal intent against her client. She also pointed out that there was no proof of the crime of forging official documents.

The Public Prosecution charged the defendants with kidnapping Youssef on July 24, 2024. They allegedly deceived him by stopping and searching him, having previously fabricated evidence to falsely accuse him of drug possession.

Haidar pointed out that the victim was arrested and detained under unlawful circumstances, violating the established legal procedures outlined in Public Prosecution document number one, clause one and number four, clause two. The defendants unlawfully detained Youssef at the Drug Control General Department.



Enaam Haidar

Two of the defendants were present at the scene, supporting the perpetrators. Two other defendants, serving as public employees in the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Rescue Department at the Ministry of Interior, were accused of forging an official document -- the report on the referral of Youssef issued on July 24, 2024.

**Two lawyers jailed:** The Court of Appeal has sentenced two lawyers to one-year imprisonment for spreading rumors on social media about Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan. This ruling follows a previous three-year prison sentence handed down by the Criminal Court.

The Public Prosecution had investigated the defendants for publishing false posts on social media that were deemed defamatory toward the Minister of Public Works.

The Ministry of Interior had arrested the lawyers in a State Security case, accusing them of spreading false news about Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan on the social media platform "X".

The defendants denied the charges after being referred to the Public Prosecution.

**Muwaizri ruling Jan 8:** The Criminal Court has scheduled a session on January 8, 2025 to deliver a verdict in the case involving former MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri who was accused of spreading false news.

One week ago, the court granted Al-Muwaizri bail worth KD 1,000, and in the last session, it decided to reopen the case.

## Patience, trust vital when putting the house in order

"THE issue of revoking the citizenship of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis has sparked varied reactions, ranging from full acceptance and moderate approval to outright rejection and opposition," columnist and former Deputy Director-General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) **Iqbal Al-Ahmad** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"This debate has become a prominent topic in diwanias, gatherings and in both public and private conversations, often making headlines.

"When a Kuwaiti woman chooses to marry a non-Kuwaiti, she does so believing it will bring her happiness. This decision is personal and deeply considered, often made despite potential opposition or reservations from her family. "Her choice reflects her right to pursue a fulfilling life with her chosen partner and no one has the authority to interfere in this matter. She is entitled to her conviction and happiness, regardless of her husband's nationality.

"Similarly, a non-Kuwaiti woman who marries a Kuwaiti man retains her original nationality, often holding it with pride.

"Whether she is Arab, foreign, or Asian, her identity remains integral to her sense of self. If her Kuwaiti citizenship were to be revoked, it would not necessarily fracture her family life, as long as she and her children retain their rights within Kuwait.

"A homeland is invaluable -- it serves as the ultimate refuge for any individual, regardless of where they reside on this vast planet. Nationality is not a label to be discarded... it is a source of pride.

"If someone were to ask about a Kuwaiti man's non-Kuwaiti wife, the response would often include her original nationality alongside her acquired Kuwaiti citizenship -- be it Jordanian, Palestinian, Lebanese, Egyptian, Filipino, Sri Lankan, Moroccan, British, or American.

"It is vital to uphold the principles of rights and responsibilities that ensure dignity for everyone living on this land, whether Kuwaiti or non-Kuwaiti.

"Mistakes and transgressions can be addressed constructively without compromising the integrity of the Kuwaiti identity or allowing opportunities for forgery or deceit.

"Kuwait's policies and constitution aim to uphold justice and preserve societal cohesion. While some measures -- such as revoking citizenship in specific cases -- may feel challenging or even painful, they are often necessary for the greater good.

"Much like a neglected room in a house, which must be emptied, cleaned and organized to restore order, Kuwait must sort through its challenges to move forward. Valuable elements will be retained and repaired, while those deemed unsuitable will be left behind.

"Patience and trust are crucial during this reform process. Kuwait needs its people to support necessary changes, even when they are tough. This requires thoughtful examination of past mistakes and current circumstances to ensure the country advances responsibly and effectively.

"Let every official take the steps needed to implement reforms, even if firmness is required. Kuwait has endured years of disarray, threatening its foundations and unity. Now is the time for decisive action to rebuild and protect its future.

"It is not only permissible but a responsibility to address any overlooked loopholes or unconsidered aspects when tackling long-standing issues that have plagued the country.

"This includes matters like the withdrawal of forged citizenship and subsequent related cases. It is essential to examine the repercussions from perspectives beyond legal frameworks -- considering angles that may have been overlooked in the urgency to achieve and implement solutions.

"I am confident that our senior officials would not shy away from reassessing specific matters if evidence suggests they warrant a careful review. Reevaluating these aspects is not a sign of weakness but a testament to a commitment to fairness, thoroughness and progress."

### Also:

"Congratulations and blessings continue to pour in for His Highness Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait -- may God protect and preserve him -- on the first anniversary of his leadership," columnist **Dr. Nada Suleiman Al-Mutawa** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"Kuwait, known for its exceptional achievements on the international, regional and local stages, shines brightly once more.

"This brilliance was particularly evident during the opening of the Arabian Gulf Cup Football Championship at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

"The grand celebration, marked by its artistic and historical significance, showcased the dedication of the Supreme Organizing Committee and other specialized sports organizations. This sporting milestone has drawn praise for its impeccable organization and the renowned hospitality extended by Kuwait.

"The championship serves as the crowning achievement of a year filled with initiatives under the banner of change and reform. Reflecting on the milestones of this new era, we see a

leadership rooted in love for the nation and a steadfast commitment to its constitution.

"The journey of this era began at Abdullah Al-Salem Dome, where a new approach was unveiled -- prioritizing the national interest and fostering a spirit of unity and giving.

"His Highness also brought environmental issues to the forefront by actively participating in the Green Middle East Initiative in Riyadh. This engagement underscores his commitment to environmental protection, sustainability and the development of green initiatives.

"On the domestic front, administrative reforms have taken center stage across executive institutions, focusing on nurturing human capital and enhancing competitive capabilities. This emphasis on the human element has paved the way for scientific innovation and the strengthening of Kuwait's national identity.

"In foreign policy, this year has witnessed significant progress through institutional activities aimed at fostering bilateral relations. These efforts include the activation of joint committees featuring promising young diplomats, reflecting a forward-thinking and inclusive approach to international relations.

"Amid these advancements, Kuwait's warmth and generosity remain unwavering. Despite the troubling rise in online racism and hate, the genuine hospitality of the Kuwaiti people has shone brightly.

"From stadiums to markets and tourist sites, the warm reception extended to visitors participating in the Arabian Gulf Cup Championship has left an indelible mark.

"To further honor achievements in sports, I propose the establishment of a dedicated platform for gold medalists in all disciplines -- a 'golden platform' or exclusive cabin to recognize their excellence and provide a distinguished vantage point during matches.

"As we celebrate this year of leadership under His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, we express our sincere congratulations and hopes for continued equity, prosperity and progress. The developmental spirit ignited by his vision inspires us all to work harder and embrace creativity for a brighter future."

"The capital of Kuwait is truly the 'Bride of the Gulf' these days, as it shines in its full splendor with Gulf citizens who have gathered on its soil. This is not only for the return of the Gulf Cup, which has regained its former glory, but also for the opportunity to visit Kuwait and experience its welcoming culture," columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"The Kuwaiti people are known for their hospitality. They greet everyone with warmth and generosity. We ask Almighty God to protect our beloved Kuwait from all harm, to shield it from the evil of those who wish it ill, and to safeguard our dear Amir and Crown Prince from all dangers. May God continue to bless this great nation, which is currently adorned in its finest attire, with joy and happiness spreading throughout the country.

"A one-hour visit to Mubarakiya and its surroundings, such as Safat Square, in this pleasant and cool weather, will leave you with an impression that dazzles, delights, and fills your heart with happiness and peace.

"For the first time, I am witnessing Souk Mubarakiya in such a stunning and vibrant atmosphere, with its lights, beauty, and bustling crowds. It is not only Kuwaitis who fill the streets, but people from all over the Gulf who are all welcomed warmly, and are embodying the true spirit of the Khaleeji Cup 26 tournament.

"The visitors stand out with their lively arts and spontaneous songs, which they did not limit to the stadiums but brought with them to their gatherings in Souk Mubarakiya. This added even more joy and happiness as the market visitors gathered around them, cheering them on and joining in their chants, which were met with enthusiasm by all.

"The competition is not only in football but also in popular songs. What truly deserves praise is the strength of the security measures in place. The organized and thoughtful deployment of security forces managed to balance tight monitoring and control as well as ensured shoppers and visitors were not disturbed, and without imposing restrictions on freedoms. Despite the large crowds, music, and group dances, the atmosphere remained peaceful, with no security disturbances. This achievement is a testament to the men of the Ministry of Interior and their dedicated leadership especially the Minister of Interior!

"Finally, I invite every citizen, both men and women, to stop 'sulking' and head to Mubarakiya and its surroundings during these festive days. Come out and join in the celebrations of Kuwait, and experience the Capital in a new light, unlike anything you have seen before. Even the ceilings of Souk Mubarakiya are adorned with lights, adding an extra touch of joy and beauty to the area.

"Rejoice in your country, for it is at its most beautiful form."

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



Iqbal Al-Ahmad



Talal Saeed



Undersecretary of the National Guard Lieutenant General Eng. Hashem Al-Rifai meets UAE's Military Attaché to Kuwait, Colonel Mohammad Al-Muhairi.

## Kuwait, UAE keen to boost military ties

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25. (KUNA): Undersecretary of Kuwait National Guard Lieutenant General Eng. Hashem Al-Rifai discussed on Wednesday with UAE's Military Attaché to Kuwait, Colonel Mohammad Al-Muhairi, issues of common interest and ways to enhance military cooperation.

In a press statement, the National Guard said that Al-Rifai received Al-Muhairi on Wednesday at the National Guard HQ, in the presence of the Assistant for Operations and Training at the National Guard Major General Dr. Faleh Shuja'a, and Commander of Protection and Reinforcement Major General Hamad Ahmad.

# Bedoun arrested for committing robberies at dawn wearing mask

Several bottles of local liquor found on Surra peddler

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Criminal Security Sector's Hawally Investigation Department apprehended the masked thief who was responsible for a series of robberies. The accused, a 1993-born illegal resident in the country identified as "A. J. Y.", was arrested after committing 13 thefts of breaking and entering, with his latest crime occurring last Thursday, reports Al-Anba daily.**

The thief's criminal activities primarily involved robbing shops at dawn. He was known to use an American-made silver vehicle to target businesses, including a sweets shop and a restaurant, as reported earlier.

According to security sources, several reports were received that an unidentified individual would check whether shops and restaurants were empty before breaking locks to steal. In response to the increasing number of such cases, a special search and investigation team was formed by the Hawally detectives.

Through coordinated efforts and the use of surveillance cameras around the crime scenes, investigators tracked the suspect's movements. It was discovered that the thief consistently wore a mask to conceal his identity and used a particular tool for breaking locks. The team also learned that the perpetrator had committed multiple robberies on the same day, with his most recent crime taking place on Thursday in Hawally, where he targeted a store, resulting in charges of "theft by breaking and entering" and "theft by unusual means".

Investigations eventually led to the identification of the accused, an illegal resident (bedoun) in the country. Following this breakthrough, a warrant was issued for his arrest, along with a search for the vehicle he had been using. He was subsequently brought to the Hawally Investigations Office, where he was confronted with evidence of his crimes. The accused confessed to all the thefts and

further admitted to committing similar offenses using the same method in different parts of the country, specifically, Hawally, Capital, and Jahra governorates.

**Expatriate liquor peddler held:** The implementation of the Public Security Sector's security plan and the rapid deployment of police patrols led to the arrest of an expatriate who was promoting local liquor in Surra, and the seizure of several bottles of locally manufactured liquor, reports Al-Anba daily quoting informed sources.

They explained that a security patrol in Surra spotted a suspicious vehicle, and signaled to the driver to stop. However, the driver, after stopping the car, attempted to flee on foot but was quickly apprehended. The driver, an expatriate, was found with a bag containing bottles of suspected local liquor in the back seat. A subsequent search of the vehicle revealed several bottles of local alcohol. Both the driver and the liquor bottles were referred to the relevant authorities.

**Drug-runners gang nabbed:** Support patrols from the Jahra Security Directorate conducted a security campaign in several residential areas recently, which resulted in the arrest of 15 wanted individuals and five drug users in possession of narcotics and drug paraphernalia, reports Al-Anba daily.

The campaign, led by Jahra Security Director General Brigadier Ziad Al-Khatib, was held at checkpoints set up at the entrances to the Al-Naeem, Saad Al-Abdullah, Taima, and Al-Nasem areas.

During the campaign, 15 individuals of various nationalities wanted in connection with different cases were apprehended along with five drug users in possession of narcotics, who were referred to the Drugs Control General Department for necessary legal action.

According to security sources, such campaigns will continue in all governorates to apprehend wanted individuals and violators, curb the spread of crime, and address negative phenomena.



Fire destroys a room in the house.

## One hurt as fire erupts in Kaifan locality house

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: An individual sustained burns and injuries in a fire that broke out in a house in Kaifan.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), when the KFF Control Room received information about the house on fire, firefighters from Al-Shaheed and Shuwaikh Industrial fire stations rushed to the location and extinguished the fire within a short time. The injured victim was referred to the nearest hospital for treatment.

Investigations are ongoing to determine the cause of the fire.

**Top ex-officer insulted:** A top ex-officer from the Ministry of Defense accused a woman of insulting, and threatening him in public in Faiha, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to the case details, the brigadier general had asked the woman to move her car after she stopped in front of a school gate, which caused obstruction for the vehicles. However, the woman allegedly insulted him in response, and said, "What is wrong with you? Go away!".

He lodged a complaint against her at Shamiya Police Station, and provided details such as the type and plate number of her vehicle.

## Coal fumes kill woman

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: A female Kuwaiti citizen died of asphyxiation caused by a coal stove inside a warehouse in the Kabd area in what is seen as a tragic incident. Her husband also suffered from suffocation and was rushed to the hospital, reports Al-Rai daily.

According to a security source, the couple had rented a stable in the area. After sunset, the stable owner attempted to contact the husband but received no response.

Following this, the owner instructed the guard to check on the couple who upon entering the stable, found the couple sprawled on the floor, apparently due to suffocation from the coal stove. When the stable owner was informed of the situation, he immediately called for an ambulance.

Upon arrival, medical personnel confirmed that the wife had passed away but the husband was alive. He was taken to the hospital for treatment.

The authorities have registered a case of death due to suffocation, and an investigator has ordered the body to be referred to Forensics.



KFF boat extinguishes the fire on the yacht.

## Driver escapes fiery death

## Yacht bursts out in fire opposite Kuwait Towers

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Firefighting and marine rescue teams from the Salmiya and Shuwaikh centers contained a yacht fire in the sea near the Kuwait Towers Tuesday afternoon, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The teams carried out the operation efficiently, ensuring the fire was controlled without any injuries.

The cause of the mishap is not known.

**Miraculous escape:** A vehicle caught fire on the Fahaheel Expressway near the Al-Shaab area Tuesday morning. Fortunately, the driver escaped unharmed, managing to exit the vehicle before the fire consumed the car, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The exact cause of the fire remains unknown and is currently under investigation by the relevant authorities.

Thanks to the driver's quick reaction, a potential tragedy was averted. This incident serves as a reminder of the importance of remaining vigilant while on the road and ensuring vehicles are well-maintained to minimize risks.



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# Jaber Hospital achieves milestone

Dedicated team performs 149 kidney transplants in 2024



Medical staff in the organ transplant department at Jaber Hospital.



The solidarity of medical teams has gained medical achievements.

By Marwa Al-Bahwari  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** The Kidney Transplant Program at Jaber Hospital achieved a remarkable milestone in 2024 by successfully performing 149 kidney transplants -- an increase of nine operations over the previous year.

Head of the Organ Transplant Department at the hospital Dr. Saja Sorour expressed immense pride in this important achievement, underscoring the hospital's dedication to delivering exceptional healthcare services. She attributed the success to the collaborative efforts of the medical teams and supporting departments at the hospital. She pointed out that this record number is the result of continuous teamwork and reaffirmed the hospital's commitment to increase the number of transplants for kidney failure patients in the coming year.

She also confirmed the improvement of kidney transplant services in Kuwait, expressing her gratitude to the Ministry of Health, particularly Minister Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi and Undersecretary Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi, for their invaluable support, and acknowledged the vital role played by the medical teams and national initiatives.

On the other hand, organ transplant consultant at the hospital Dr. Colin Foreman said the opening of the Organ Transplant Department in March 2024 is considered a transformative moment for the hospital's transplant program. He added the integration of diverse medical specializations at the hospital has greatly enhanced the program's efficiency, enabling the medical team to perform more complex transplants, especially for patients with severe medical conditions or obesity.

Foreman asserted this development has contributed to a significant expansion of the program, with the number of transplant surgeries nearly doubling; indicating this is a clear reflection of the hospital's progress and improved capabilities.

It is worth mentioning that the ministry opened the Organ Transplant Department at Jaber Hospital in March 2024 alongside the National Kidney Transplant Program, which facilitates the exchange of kidneys between families.



Governor of the Capital, Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali with the Acting Director General of Kuwait Municipality, Engineer Manal Al-Asfour.

## Collaboration for better services

### Capital Governor tackles development plans with KM acting Director General

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** The Governor of the Capital, Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali, held a meeting with the Acting Director General of Kuwait Municipality, Engineer Manal Al-Asfour, at the General Diwan of the Governorate, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The meeting focused on reviewing various initiatives aimed at the development and improvement of the capital and its affiliated areas. Governor Sheikh Abdullah emphasized the importance of strengthening collaboration between executive and municipal authorities to achieve shared objectives and address citizens' aspira-

tions.

The Governor underscored the need to prioritize development and service projects that enhance the quality of services provided to residents. He called for ensuring the availability of essential resources to effectively implement development plans.

This engagement reflects a continued commitment to fostering partnerships and advancing infrastructure and services in Kuwait's capital, aligning with broader goals of improving urban living standards and meeting public expectations.

'Political consultations successful'

### Vietnam and Kuwait make significant steps to strengthen bilateral relations

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** The Vietnamese Ambassador to Kuwait, Nguyen Duc Thang, has characterized the fourth political consultations between the Kuwaiti and Vietnamese foreign ministries, held in Hanoi on December 13, as 'very successful,' emphasizing substantial follow-up measures from both sides.

The meeting, chaired by Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs, Ambassador Samih Hayat, focused on strengthening the long-standing relationship through concrete actions.

Thang noted the emphasis on enhancing political trust, fostering high-level exchanges, promoting trade and investment and encouraging people-to-people exchanges, particularly among the youth.

He also highlighted the importance of mutual support in international forums and organizations, noting the shared goals of consolidating political trust and making significant strides in bilateral relations.

The discussions encompassed attracting investments, especially from the Kuwait Investment Authority, to Vietnam and improving the efficiency of the Nghi Son Refinery, which plays a crucial role in the social and economic development of both nations.

The talks also extended to areas like food



H.E. Nguyen Duc Thang – Vietnamese Ambassador to Kuwait

security, tourism, employment and aviation, with both sides agreeing to accelerate negotiations and finalize agreements to enhance the legal framework for cooperation.

Ambassador Thang underscored Vietnam's role in Kuwait's food security, noting the country's strength in exporting agricultural and aquatic products and its focus on sustainable growth. He highlighted Vietnam's readiness to enter the global halal market and expressed potential areas for collaboration, particularly in the food sector.

### Jahra Bridge closure announced for maintenance work

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25:** The Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport (PART), in collaboration with the General Traffic Department, has announced the temporary closure of the main Jahra Bridge, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This closure, set to begin Wednesday morning and last for two weeks, will affect traffic coming from Kuwait City towards Jahra and from the Jamal Abdul Nasser Bridge heading towards Jahra.

During this period, essential maintenance work will be carried out, including the replacement of expansion joints on the bridge.

The authorities are advising motorists to plan their journeys accordingly and consider alternative routes to avoid congestion during the closure. Signage and

traffic diversions will be in place to guide commuters and ensure safety.

The replacement of expansion joints is a critical measure to ensure the long-term safety and structural integrity of the bridge. Such periodic maintenance activities are part of the broader infrastructure improvement plans led by PART.

Commuters are encouraged to stay updated on further announcements regarding the maintenance work and reopening schedules.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry denied the news circulating about the necessity of renewing the ration card to avoid its suspension, stressing the importance of verifying accuracy and relying on official sources to avoid rumors.



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## Other Voices

### Back to the tragedy and violations

By Ahmed alsarraf

A few days ago, I published an article titled 'University and Applied Sciences Professors and the Judiciary.' After its release, I realized that I had forgotten to revise the article, as I had removed the sections discussing the university and judiciary.

Later, it also became clear that the article had struck a sensitive chord with some readers. Upon further reflection, it's evident that the problems plaguing the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) extend far beyond issues of poor management, instability and the institution's unwieldy size, which hinders efficient administration.

Questions surrounding the authenticity of many faculty and administrative members' academic credentials compound these challenges.

However, the underlying issues appear to be far more profound. A former Minister of Education and Higher Education once described PAAET as a 'dumping ground' for students and teachers who could not secure better opportunities elsewhere due to their qualifications.

Many of its students also found themselves with no alternative options after failing to meet the requirements of other institutions.

The authority's history has been marked by administrative violations since its inception. Its leadership, wielding broad authority, has disproportionately affected the careers of serious academics, who, though few in number, struggle under these conditions.

Moreover, the criteria for student enrollment have been lax, allowing graduates of the two-year 'Applied' institutes to qualify for four-year

study scholarships.

Among the more peculiar violations is the establishment of impractical departments such as the makeup department, which operated for years despite minimal citizen enrollment.

These programs primarily catered to residents before eventually being shut down, alongside other departments like cooking and home economics.

There have also been allegations of professors exploiting the system by claiming additional courses and teaching commitments during the summer for extra compensation, despite not fulfilling these duties.

This lack of accountability is prevalent across the institution, with neither faculty members nor the administration being held responsible for such misconduct.

As a result, there is a growing call for a comprehensive review of the hiring process -- both administrative and academic -- and an investigation into the validity of faculty qualifications, including university and doctoral degrees.

Additionally, scholarship programs, which have been marred by violations over the years, require immediate scrutiny. The same applies to research, studies, theses and publications attributed to the institution, many of which lack credibility.

Accountability and effective oversight have been nearly absent, with parties often shielding one another due to tribal, racial, or sectarian loyalties.

Given the gravity of these accusations, His Excellency the Minister of Higher Education must urgently investigate these claims.

The harm caused by PAAET has far exceeded its societal and moral benefits. Considering the hundreds of millions of dinars allocated to it without tangible returns, this institution demands an overhaul to restore its integrity and purpose.

□ □ □

e-mail: a.alsarraf@alqabas.com.kw

## State property reclaimed

# Jahra Corniche revitalization begins

By Inaas Awadh  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: After the Municipal Council accepted the objections raised by the State Minister of Municipality Abdul Latif Al-Mishari regarding the Jahra Corniche project during its session on Dec 9, and his approval to remove the 116 chalets obstructing the project site, the office of the State Minister of Municipality began coordinating with the relevant authorities to prepare the site.

According to informed sources, Al-Mishari asked the Ministry of Finance to sign the removal decision for the chalets, which are considered state properties. Some chalet owners have already started evacuating their properties.

The legal procedures for removing the chalets will begin with the Ministry of Finance, in its capacity as the concerned authority, signing the removal decision. This will be followed by an official notification to the chalet owners, who will be given a time period to vacate and hand over the chalets to the state. A date for the full removal of the chalets will be set after they are all vacated.

The evacuation and removal of the chalets will

proceed within the specified grace period without exception.

The sources anticipated that the appeal submitted by some chalet owners to the Prime Minister requesting an extension of their contracts and a delay in evacuation would be rejected.

They said the Ministry of Finance, being the contracting party responsible for managing state-owned properties, has the right to reclaim occupied plots, especially when they are tied to the execution of vital development projects approved by the country's senior leadership, such as the Jahra Corniche project.

The sources affirmed that the project aims to revitalize the coastal strip, covering an area of 5.6 square kilometers. The investor selected as the real estate developer for the project will be granted a period of seven years for design and implementation, followed by 35 years for operation, management, and maintenance. They highlighted that the timetable set by the municipality for selecting the real estate developer, in accordance with applicable regulations and systems, requires the completion of the executive regulations for the project by the first half of 2025 at the latest.

## Continued from Page 1

### KOC achieves

Moreover, increasing heavy oil production has several key benefits, including generating substantial financial returns through export operations, as well as supplying local refineries to be converted into petroleum derivatives.

Within this framework, KOC is also working to increase production for all types of oil and enhance its strategy for boosting gas production. At the same time, the company adopts a rationalization approach and remains focused on advancing exploration operations.

KOC is also firmly committed to reducing emissions in its operations, and working towards achieving carbon neutrality for the State of Kuwait by 2050. The company utilizes advanced technologies in drilling, exploration, and extraction to minimize environmental impact, including techniques to reduce carbon emissions through storage operations.

### Kuwait relief

This aid is part of Kuwait's initiative entitled: "Kuwait Is by Your Side", mainly aiming at alleviating the humanitarian anguish of the Lebanese people amid the tough circumstances they are undergoing, the Kuwaiti charity's Board Chairman Mohammad Al-Shaya told KUNA earlier before departing for Lebanon.

The fresh humanitarian aid plane was sent to Lebanon in collaboration with the ministries of social affairs, foreign affairs and defense, he said.

Kuwait's relief and humanitarian package comes under the direction of the country's political leadership, he pointed out.

Kuwait on Tuesday dispatched its eighth relief aid plane to Lebanon, carrying onboard 30 tons of humanitarian aid involving foodstuff, medicine and blankets.

### Kuwait to

Revoking citizenship of females who acquired it according to Article 8 only began after examining all cons and violations, he remarked, adding that they cooperated with a number of constitutional experts to examine lawfulness, and all unanimously agreed that no citizenship is to be handed without an Amiri Decree.

Some of those acquired the citizenship after a "marriage of convenience" followed by a divorce while others violated the allotted time frame within which a citizenship can be given, he revealed.

The First Deputy Premier replied to a question on possibility of submitting grievances, confirming that the designated committee will examine all complaints, and expressed hope that lawyers would refrain from exploiting the matter.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef asserted that the decision of returning the citizenship is in the hands of the State's Amir alone.

Many cases who got citizenship unlawfully "escaped" from Kuwait, while others subjected to DNA tests showed that they possess multiple identities, he noted.

He hoped that reviewing Article 8 would culminate by the end of next January, while review of counterfeiters and those with dual identities remains on weekly basis.

People who acquired citizenship by false means or have dual citizenship but not submitted complaints as they are aware of their situation, he remarked, revealing that some fled within 48 hours of installing reporting hotlines.

He noted that issuance of passports granted in line with Article 17 of passports law have stopped; exempting treatment or study, "after which some 230 persons showed their real identity documents."

On his part, Deputy Premier and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Shereedah Al-Mousherji said the

mission of the Supreme Committee of Kuwaiti Citizenship Investigation is to look into lawfulness of means of acquisition.

Withdrawal of citizenship granted according to Article 8 is done over batches due to the large sum of cases, he clarified.

As for Minister of Information, Minister of Culture and State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi, he said they are working on developing the state's legal infrastructure to accommodate arising demands.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya affirmed that this is a matter of great concern, noting that they are awaiting grievance submissions as a first step prior to contacting countries of people's previous citizenship.

On property of those with revoked citizenship, Industry and Commerce Minister Khalifah Al-Ajeel affirmed that property and real-estate will remain as is, as owners will also retain ability to take action.

Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Nader Al-Jalal said in this regard that all female scholarship recipients with Article 8 citizenship are to continue their studies and receive all benefits. The number of students whose mothers' citizenship have been rescinded is 79 in both Kuwait University and on scholarships in private universities, he indicated, adding that they are to continue their studies.

Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait affirmed the government's intent on seeing this mission to completion.

He took note of recent cabinet approval of draft bill granting cabinet the authority to deal with those with revoked citizenship, with exemptions, as if Kuwaiti citizens.

Those denied of these privileges are people who acquired the citizenship through unlawful means, those who voluntarily waived their Kuwaiti nationalities, or persons who committed crimes against the State, he explained.

The State will instead be demanding the return of any expenses paid on the behalf of those who received the citizenship illegally.

The Justice Minister revealed that the public prosecution, since the beginning of the year, were investigating 12 forgery cases with a cost of KD 2.5 million on the State.

### Kuwait sets

The Cabinet commended the role by Minister of Information and Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs and head of the supreme organizing committee Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi, and all members and heads of sub-committees, as well as Chairman of Kuwait Football Association Sheikh Ahmad Yusuf Saud Al-Sabah, along members, Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Sports Bashar Abdullah, all officials, public and private sectors, volunteers and civil society organizations.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Sabah told the ministers about the outcomes of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his delegation's official visit to Kuwait on Saturday and Sunday.

They were told about the gist of Modi's meetings with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Prime Minister also referred to his official talks with his Indian peer that focused on means of boosting bilateral historic relations for wider horizons in all fields to serve the two peoples' interest.

His Highness the Prime Minister pointed to a defense memorandum of understanding signed between the Kuwait and Indian governments, in addition to a sports executive program for 2025-2028 and other deals on enhancing cooperation between the two sides.

His Highness the Prime Minister also told the ministers that Kuwait

and India agreed, during a joint statement, on upgrading their ties to the strategic partnership based on deep-seated and cordial relations.

Furthermore, First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah detailed the ministers about the results of his official visit to Saudi Arabia on Sunday and Monday, and official talks with Saudi Interior Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Naif bin Abdulaziz.

He said they discussed some security topics of mutual concern, and reviewed security ties between the two countries, and means of boosting them.

He further stated that they focused on a mechanism of coordinating joint efforts to face international and regional challenges in a manner that achieves security and stability in the two states.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef affirmed the deep-seated relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and keenness of their leaders and governments on bolstering security integration and continuing joint coordination in all issues of mutual interest, Al-Mousherji noted. The First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah briefed the cabinet on the results of his official visit to Iraq's Basra Governorate last Wednesday.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef inaugurated the Surgical Hospital in Basra, which was granted by Kuwaiti government, stressing that the opening of the hospital reflects the depth of fraternal ties between the two countries and embodies the State of Kuwait's firm belief in the importance of cooperation and joint work with the Republic of Iraq.

In light of the Council of Ministers' interest in implementing infrastructure projects for housing cities, reducing the waiting period and accelerating the distribution of housing units to those entitled to housing care, the Cabinet decided to assign the Ministry of Public Works, in coordination with the Public Institution for Housing Care, and the entities it deems appropriate, to quickly conclude contracts to implement permanent sewage treatment plant projects for cities, areas and residential suburbs that are currently being built or planned, in a manner that ensures the delivery of these projects on time.

On another front, the ministers reviewed the visual presentation submitted by Minister of State for Communications Affairs Omar Saud Al-Omar regarding the executive position of the framework agreement between the State of Kuwait and Google Cloud Company, and listened in this regard to an explanation provided by the Chairman of the Supervisory Committee for the Implementation of the Agreement, Sheikh Abdullah Sabah Al-Sabah, and a member of the committee, Mohammad Al-Rashed, about the projects that have been started in this regard, in addition to some of the challenges facing the implementation of the agreement.

The Council of Ministers decided to assign ministers and government agencies to cooperate with the Supervisory Committee to implement the agreement and overcome all obstacles facing it, provided that the committee provides the Cabinet with a report every three months that includes the latest developments regarding the implementation of the agreement.

Meanwhile, the ministers reviewed a number of topics on the agenda and decided to approve them, and decided to refer a number of them to the relevant ministerial committees for further scrutiny.

The Cabinet approved the minutes of the Supreme Committee for the Investigation of Kuwaiti Nationality, which includes cases of loss and withdrawal of Kuwaiti nationality from some persons who obtained it through fraud and forgery, in accordance with the provisions of Decree Law No. (15) of 1959 regarding Kuwaiti nationality and its amendments.

# Catholic Church in Kuwait unites faiths for Christmas

Diversity and peace celebrated

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: In an atmosphere of love and peace, the Catholic Church – Holy Family Co-Cathedral in Kuwait celebrated Christmas, bringing together a large number of believers from various sects, cultures, and nationalities. The occasion highlighted the beauty of diversity that distinguishes the church, and its role in promoting unity, especially in Kuwait, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The special Mass was led by Father Suleiman Haifawi, priest of the Latin parish, in collaboration with Father Antonios Habib.

Prior to the celebration, Father Haifawi welcomed attendees, including official and diplomatic figures, as well as believers, particularly the Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub.

Ambassador Tahboub expressed his gratitude to Father Haifawi for inviting him to deliver a speech on this holy occasion.

He said, "I am honored tonight to stand before you as an ambassador for the State of Palestine, the Holy Land, the land of messages, the birthplace of the prophets, the birthplace of Christ (PBUH), the birthplace of the Christian religion, and the Resurrection of Jesus (PBUH)."

"Palestine is the beginning and the end, the land of peace, love, and brotherhood, Palestine of Islamic-Christian coexistence that has endured for more than 1,500 years, Palestine of societal diversity, and a model for the entire world."

"I stand before you today with a heavy heart, as sadness and pain prevail over us all. We close another year marked by the scourge of war in the stricken Gaza Strip and throughout the occupied State of Palestine and the Holy Land."

"I come to you today bearing two messages. The first is from the Christian and Muslim children of Gaza, who have long been accustomed to celebrating Christmas together, and lighting the Christmas tree in this blessed month. Today, they want to tell you that, for



Photo by Rezk Taufiq

Catholic faithful attend the evening Mass celebrating Christmas with joy and devotion at the Holy Family Co-Cathedral in Kuwait City on Dec 24, 2024.

the second consecutive year, they miss the lighting of the Christmas tree, the gifts of Santa Claus, and the tradition of going with their parents to church. There is no longer a tree, no Santa Claus, no gifts, no churches, and no childhood.

"The second message is what I bring to you from the birthplace of Christ and the cradle of Christianity, the city of Bethlehem, and from the Church of the Nativity and the Grotto of the Nativity. This church, the oldest in the world, still has its doors open to worshippers. However, for the second year in a row, the city of Bethlehem is devoid of any festive celebrations for the occasion that hundreds of millions around the world celebrate, while Bethlehem is shrouded in sadness and tears."

"However, hope is still strong, and love remains great. This was the theme of a message sent by the people of Bethlehem and its institutions, from our Christian brothers, to His Holiness Pope Francis. The message included a cave of the baby Jesus wrapped in the Palestinian keffiyeh, made from Palestinian olive wood and Palestinian mother-of-pearl as a gesture of appreciation, love, and reverence for His Holiness and his steadfast positions toward Palestine and its people. The gift was displayed in the Paul VI Hall to remind

the world that Jesus Christ (PBUH) is the messenger of peace, love, and tolerance, and that Palestine is the Holy Land, the land of coexistence and diversity."

During the Mass, the attendees sang Christmas carols that brought joy and hope to the hearts of the faithful, and emphasized the noble values of Christmas, which call for love and tolerance.

They highlighted that the occasion reflects the true spirit of Christmas, which is unity, tolerance, and love.

The celebrants expressed their gratitude to Kuwait for providing an atmosphere of religious freedom and peaceful coexistence, which highlights the country's role as a beacon of diversity.

They raised prayers for Christmas and the New Year, asking Almighty Lord to protect and bless the State of Kuwait, so it may always remain an oasis of security and peace under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled.

The Catholic Church also announced the opening of its diwaniya to receive well-wishers on the occasion of Christmas and the New Year today, Thursday, December 26, from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm and welcomed everyone to join in the celebration.



Farwaniya Governorate photo

Governors pose for a group photo during the coordination meeting at Farwaniya Governorate.

### Unified efforts for a stronger Kuwait

## Governors meet to align development plans

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: In continuation of the coordination meetings among the governors, the Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah hosted a meeting at his office in Farwaniya Governorate with the Hawally Governor Ali Salem Al-Asfar, the Capital Governor Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governor Sheikh Sabah Bader Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the Jahra Governor Hamad Jassim Al-Habshi, the Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Hamoud Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and the Director General of the Gen-

eral Administration of Administrative Affairs Sheikh Nasser Mohammed Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the meeting involved discussions on developments and ways to strengthen joint cooperation between the governorates. Main issues of mutual interest were discussed, with a focus on enhancing development, security, and stability in various areas.

The governors affirmed the importance of the ongoing coordination to unify their efforts and work as one

team to fulfill the vision of the wise leadership and meet citizens' aspirations. They also highlighted the need to improve cooperation mechanisms between the governorates to provide better services, upgrade public facilities, and develop infrastructure.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Sheikh Athbi expressed his appreciation for the spirit of cooperation and understanding that prevailed, emphasizing that such coordination meetings boost integration and have a positive impact on the development of work in all governorates.

## ABK announces Mohammad Taqi Ali Hussain Khajah as Alfouz weekly draw winner

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is excited to announce Mohammad Taqi Ali Hussain Khajah as the winner of the Alfouz KD 10,000 weekly draw on Monday, 23 December 2024. The draw took place in the presence of a Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative, ensuring transparency.

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

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

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

ABK encourages everyone to open an Alfouz draw account or increase their balance to participate in the upcoming draw, which is scheduled to take place on Monday, 30 December 2024.

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



ABK Al Fouz winner

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

## INTERNATIONAL

## Call for compassion and unity

## King Charles III praises health workers in Christmas speech

LONDON, Dec 25, (AP): King Charles III is expected to use his annual Christmas message to highlight health workers, at the end of a year in which both he and the Princess of Wales were diagnosed with cancer.

His King's Speech, which will be broadcast in the afternoon on Christmas Day, was recorded at Fitzrovia Chapel in London, which was part of the now-demolished Middlesex Hospital where his first wife, Diana, opened London's first dedicated ward for those with AIDS. The building is richly decorated in a Gothic Revival style featuring more than 500 stars in a gold leaf ceiling.

The broadcast is watched by millions of people in the United Kingdom and across the Commonwealth.

In keeping with the King's desire to go into the community, he tasked the team organizing the broadcast with finding a site away from the royal estate. It's a rare occasion when the monarch's Christmas message is not recorded from one of the royal residences, notably Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle. The last time his late mother, Queen Elizabeth II, recorded her message outside the royal estate was in 2006.

The criteria were clear: the building had to have health connections, a strong community presence and a

place of solace and reflection for those with faith or none.

This is the king's third Christmas speech since he ascended the throne after the queen died in September 2022. It is the first since he was diagnosed with an undisclosed form of cancer in February.

His treatment forced him to step away from public appearances for two months. The 76-year-old monarch has slowly returned to public life in recent months and was in good spirits on a tour of Australia with his wife, Queen Camilla, in October.

It's been a difficult year for the royal family. A few weeks after Charles began treatment, the Princess of Wales announced her own cancer diagnosis, which sidelined her for much of the year as she underwent chemotherapy.

In a voiceover for the broadcast of her annual Christmas carol service at Westminster Abbey, which was recorded this month but broadcast on Tuesday evening, Kate reflected on the love and support that she has received.

"The Christmas story encourages us to consider the experiences and feelings of others," she said. "It also reflects our own vulnerabilities and reminds us of the importance of giving and receiving empathy, as well as just how much we need each other in spite of our differences."



Pope Francis presides over the Christmas Eve Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, Tuesday, Dec. 24, 2024, after opening the basilica's holy door marking the start of the Catholic Jubilee year 2025. (AP)

## Vatican rises to challenge

## Pope Francis kicks off 2025 Jubilee calls for hope and global solidarity

VATICAN CITY, Dec 25, (AP): Pope Francis kicked off the 2025 Holy Year on Tuesday, inaugurating a celebration of the Catholic Church that is expected to draw some 32 million pilgrims to Rome in a test of the pope's stamina and the ability of the Eternal City to welcome them.

From his wheelchair, Francis knocked a few times and the great Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica swung open. He was wheeled across the threshold as bells tolled across Rome and the choir inside the basilica began Christmas Eve Mass.

In his homily, Francis said the Holy Year is an opportunity to relieve the debt of poor countries and commit to protecting the planet. The aim of the Jubilee, he said, is "to bring hope to the interminable, dreary days of prisoners, to the cold and dismal lodgings of the poor and to all those places desecrated by war and violence."

The ceremony inaugurated the once-every-25-year tradition of a Jubilee, in which the Catholic faithful make pilgrimages to Rome.

Francis has dedicated the 2025 Jubilee to the theme of hope, and he will underscore that message when he opens a Holy Door on Thursday at Rome's Rebibbia prison in a bid

to give inmates hope for a better future. Francis has long incorporated prison ministry into his priestly vocation, and has made several visits to Rebibbia and other prisons during his travels.

Security around the Vatican was at its highest levels following the Christmas market attack last week in Germany, the interior ministry said.

Italian authorities were using extra police patrols and camera surveillance around Rome, while pilgrims faced metal detectors and other security checks to access St. Peter's Square via a reinforced police barricade passage.

Francis, who turned 88 last week, went into the Christmas week and Jubilee launch with a cold that forced him to deliver his weekly Sunday blessing from indoors. But he appeared in fine form Tuesday night. His health and stamina, already compromised because of his tendency to get bronchitis, are a concern given the rigorous calendar of events during the Holy Year.

One of the highlights will be the canonization of the teenage internet whiz Carlo Acutis, considered the first millennial and digital-era saint, during the Jubilee dedicated to adolescents in April.

## Spain's monarch stresses solidarity

## King Felipe VI pays tribute to Valencia flash floods victims

MADRID, Dec 25, (AP): Spanish King Felipe VI used his traditional Christmas Eve speech to remember the victims of the catastrophic Valencia flash floods, and urged the country to remain calm while addressing hot-button issues such as immigration and housing affordability.

In a pre-recorded speech that usually reviews the year's most relevant issues, Felipe said Spain "must never forget the pain and sadness" the floods caused.

The Oct. 29 floods killed more than 225 people in eastern Spain, damaging countless homes and leaving graveyards of cars piled on top of each other. In some towns, the heavy downpours that caused the floods dropped as much as a year's worth of rain in just eight hours.

In early November, as Spaniards' shock at the wreckage turned into frustration, a political blame game began, directed especially at regional authorities who failed to send timely emergency alerts to cell phones on the day of the floods.

The frustration of residents in hard-hit Paiporta near Valencia was on display when people tossed mud and shouted insults at the king and government officials in early November when they made their first visit to the town.

"We have seen - and understood - the frustration, the pain, the impatience, the demands for greater and more effective coordination," Felipe said about how the disaster was managed.

He also addressed the country's housing crunch and high rents, which have become a leading concern in the southern European country that is the eurozone's fourth-largest economy. Fast-rising rents are especially acute in cities like Barcelona and Madrid, where incomes have failed to keep up, especially for younger people in a country with chronically high unemployment.

Felipe urged that "all the actors involved reflect" and "listen to each other" so that they facilitate bringing access to housing under "affordable conditions."

Spain's immigration debate should keep in mind the country's European partners and immigrants' countries of origin, Felipe said, warning that "the way in which we are able to address immigration ... will say a lot in the future about our principles and the quality of our democracy."

Felipe said Spain needed to remain calm in the public sphere, even in the face of a "sometimes thunderous" contest in its politics.



King of Spain, Felipe VI speaks during the ceremony for the awarding of the Honoris Causa Doctorate in Social Sciences and Statistics to His Majesty King Felipe VI of Spain, at the San Carlo theater in Naples, Italy, Thursday, Dec. 12, 2024. (AP)

## Cargo ship sinks in Mediterranean

## Russia targets Ukrainian energy infrastructure on Christmas Day

KYIV, Ukraine, Dec 25, (AP): Russia launched a massive missile and drone barrage targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure on Wednesday, striking a thermal power plant and prompting Ukrainians to take shelter in metro stations on Christmas morning.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said over 70 missiles, including ballistic missiles, and over 100 attack drones were used to strike Ukraine's power sources, in a statement on X. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said one Russian missile passed Moldovan and Romanian airspace.

"Putin deliberately chose Christmas for an attack. What could be more inhumane?" Zelenskyy said. "They continue to fight for a blackout in Ukraine."

He said Ukraine has managed to shoot down at least 50 missiles and a significant number of drones.

Ukrainian energy minister, Herman Halushchenko, said Russia again "massively attacks energy infrastructure," in a Facebook statement. Ukraine's Air Force alerted multiple missiles fired at Kharkiv, Dnipro, and Poltava regions east of the country.

"The (electricity) distribution system operator takes the necessary mea-

asures to limit consumption to minimize negative consequences for the power system," he said. "As soon as the security situation allows, energy workers will establish the damage caused."

Ukraine's biggest private energy company, DTEK, said Russia struck one of their thermal power plants Wednesday morning, making it the 13th attack on Ukraine's power grid this year.

"Denying light and warmth to millions of peace-loving people as they celebrate Christmas is a depraved and evil act that must be answered," Maxim Timchenko, CEO of DTEK wrote on his X account.

Ukrainian state energy operator, Ukrenergo, applied preemptive power outages across the country, due to a "massive missile attack," leading to electricity going out in several districts of the capital, Kyiv.

At least seven strikes targeted Kharkiv sparking fires across the city, regional head Oleh Syniehubov wrote on Telegram. At least three people were injured, local authorities said.

Meanwhile, a Russian cargo ship sank in the Mediterranean Sea between Spain and Algeria, leaving two crew members missing, Spain's maritime rescue agency and the Russian Foreign Ministry said Tuesday.

Fourteen of the Ursa Major's crew were rescued uninjured from a lifeboat and transferred to Spain, the agency said. The Russian ministry said the ship started sinking following an explosion in the engine room.



Zelenskyy

## Victim families express outrage

## Trump promises to pursue executions after Biden commutes most on federal death row

FORT LAUDERDALE, Florida, Dec 25, (AP): President-elect Donald Trump promised on Tuesday to "vigorously pursue" capital punishment after President Joe Biden commuted the sentences of most people on federal death row partly to stop Trump from pushing forward their executions.

Trump criticized Biden's decision on Monday to change the sentences of 37 of the 40 condemned people to life in prison without parole, arguing that it was senseless and insulted the families of their victims. Biden said converting their punishments to life imprisonment was consistent with the moratorium imposed on federal executions in cases other than terrorism and hate-motivated mass murder.

"Joe Biden just commuted the Death Sentence on 37 of the worst killers in our Country," he wrote on his social media site. "When you hear the acts of each, you won't believe that he did this. Makes no sense. Relatives and friends are further devastated. They can't believe this is happening!"

Presidents historically have no involvement in dictating or recommending the punishments that federal prosecutors seek for defendants in criminal cases, though Trump has long sought more direct control over the Justice Department's operations. The president-elect wrote that he would direct the department to pursue the death penalty "as soon as I am inaugurated," but was



President-elect Donald Trump speaks at AmericaFest, on Dec. 22, 2024, in Phoenix. (AP)

vague on what specific actions he may take and said they would be in cases of "violent rapists, murderers, and monsters."

He highlighted the cases of two men who were on federal death row for slaying a woman and a girl, had admitted to killing more and had their sentences commuted by Biden.

On the campaign trail, Trump often called for expanding the federal death penalty - including for those who kill police officers, those convicted of drug

and human trafficking, and migrants who kill U.S. citizens.

"Trump has been fairly consistent in wanting to sort of say that he thinks the death penalty is an important tool and he wants to use it," said Douglas Berman, an expert on sentencing at Ohio State University's law school. "But whether practically any of that can happen, either under existing law or other laws, is a heavy lift."

Berman said Trump's statement at this point seems to be just a response to

Biden's commutation.

"I'm inclined to think it's still in sort of more the rhetoric phase. Just, 'don't worry. The new sheriff is coming. I like the death penalty,'" he said.

Most Americans have historically supported the death penalty for people convicted of murder, according to decades of annual polling by Gallup, but support has declined over the past few decades. About half of Americans were in favor in an October poll, while roughly 7 in 10 Americans backed capital punishment for murderers in 2007.

Before Biden's commutation, there were 40 federal death row inmates compared with more than 2,000 who have been sentenced to death by states.

"The reality is all of these crimes are typically handled by the states," Berman said.

A question is whether the Trump administration would try to take over some state murder cases, such as those related to drug trafficking or smuggling. He could also attempt to take cases from states that have abolished the death penalty.

Berman said Trump's statement, along with some recent actions by states, may present an effort to get the Supreme Court to reconsider a precedent that considers the death penalty disproportionate punishment for rape.

"That would literally take decades to unfold. It's not something that is going to happen overnight," Berman said.

## America

**Clinton discharged:** Former President Bill Clinton was discharged from a Washington hospital on Tuesday and will be home for Christmas after he was admitted the day before with a fever.

Clinton is being treated for the flu, Angel Urena, Clinton's deputy chief of staff, said in a statement about his release.

"He and his family are deeply grateful for the exceptional care provided by the team at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital and are touched by the kind messages and well wishes he received," Urena said. (AP)

**FBI offers reward:** The FBI is offering a \$10,000 reward for help finding a man suspected of fatally shooting a 7-year-old boy on a tribal reservation in Colorado earlier this month.

The agency announced the reward Monday for information leading to the arrest and conviction of Jeremiah Hight, 23, in the Dec. 11 shooting at a home in Towaoc on the Ute Mountain Ute Reservation.

The FBI investigates serious crimes on the reservation in the Four Corners region, where New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Colorado meet. It said an arrest warrant was issued for Hight, a member of the Ute Mountain Ute tribe, on Thursday after he was charged with murder, assault with a dan-



Former President Bill Clinton speaks during the Democratic National Convention, on Aug. 21, 2024, in Chicago. (AP)

gerous weapon and discharging a firearm during a crime of violence. (AP)

**Crime boss dead:** A Hawaii crime boss who died in federal detention this month was killed by an opioid overdose, Honolulu's medical examiner said Tuesday.

Michael Miske, 50, died of "toxicity of fentanyl and para-fluorofentanyl," the medical examiner's office said in a statement. The death appears to have been accidental but the case is still under investigation, it added, and an autopsy report will likely take at least another 30 days. (AP)

## Europe

**Lithuanian, Dutch PMs meet:** Lithuanian Prime Minister Gintautas Paluckas and his Dutch counterpart Dick Schoof discussed bilateral ties and security cooperation during talks in Vilnius on Tuesday.

Paluckas highlighted the Netherlands as a key economic partner, pointing to opportunities for further cooperation in high-value sectors. He also praised the Netherlands' role in regional security.

The two leaders also visited troops at a military base, where a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) multinational battle group is under Dutch command. (Xinhua)

**Balkans hit by storm:** Tens of thousands of homes in Bosnia were without electricity on Tuesday after heavy snow and winds that also brought traffic chaos in neighboring Croatia and Serbia.

In Slovenia, the search for an injured Hungarian hiker missing in the Alps north of the capital, Ljubljana, since Sunday was suspended because of strong winds. Rescuers on Monday reached his female companion and transferred her to safety.

Throughout the Balkans authorities issued travel warnings as snow drifts closed some major routes. Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia banned the movement of heavy vehicles and imposed limited traffic levels on affected roads.

A mountain rescue team used skis early Tuesday to reach a man who was stuck in his car while heading to a hospital for dialysis in central Croatia.

"We brought him there in time," rescuer Dario Cindric said. Parts of Bosnia faced a total halt of railway traffic. And Bosnia's state power company described the situation as "extremely hard" in some areas of the country. Heavy, moist snow brought down distribution lines which were hard to access, it said in a statement.

Northwestern and western Bosnia were hit hardest by the storm. Residents in some areas were left without drinking water, while schools were shut for a second day.

Regional N1 television reported dozens of vehicles were stuck in the snow for 10 hours in western Bosnia overnight before they could continue. (AP)



In this photo taken from a video released by the administration of Mangystau region, the wreckage of Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 lies on the ground near the airport of Aktau, Kazakhstan, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2024. (AP)

## Over 30 feared dead in Azerbaijani airliner crash

An Azerbaijani airliner has crashed in the Kazakhstani city of Aktau with Kazakhstan's Emergency Ministry now saying that at least 28 people survived the crash, which could mean that over 30 people are likely dead. 4 bodies have been recovered.

The ministry confirmed in a Telegram statement Wednesday that 67 people, including five crew, were on board the plane. It added that 28 of them survived the crash and have been hospitalized. Russian news agency Interfax cited the ministry as saying that there may be more

survivors.

The Embraer 190 aircraft made an emergency landing 3 km from the city, Azerbaijan Airlines said earlier.

Kazakhstan's Emergency Ministry initially said 25 people survived the crash, later revising that number to 27 and then to 28 as the search and rescue operation continued at the site of the crash, bringing the supposed death toll down.

The plane was originally scheduled to travel from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus. (AP)

Students primed for action when disaster alarm rings

## After 20 years, post-tsunami generation stays vigilant for future disasters

LHOKNGA, Indonesia, Dec 25, (AP): Qurrata Ayuni, a 28-year-old survivor of the earthquake and tsunami that devastated her hometown two decades ago, has transformed her resilience into purpose. Defying Aceh's male-dominated coffee culture, she runs a café that serves as a welcoming space for everyone, especially women, by employing and empowering them in the region worst hit by the tragedy.

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. Some 160,000 of those were in Aceh, at the northwestern tip of Indonesia.

Ayuni survived the tsunami by chance, staying at her aunt's house in Banda Aceh instead of her family home in Lampuuk, Aceh Besar district. However, the disaster shattered her childhood, claiming the lives of her parents and younger sister, who was only 6 when their home was hit by the giant waves.

Infrastructure in Aceh has been rebuilt and is now stronger than before the tsunami. Early warning systems have been set up in areas closer to shores, to warn residents of a potential tsunami.



Young girls enjoy the view at Lampuuk beach, one of the areas hardest hit by Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, on the outskirts of Banda Aceh, Indonesia, Friday, Dec. 13, 2024. (AP)

About 14 kilometers (9 miles) from Ayuni's coffee shop, in a public high school in Lhoknga, students regularly

take part in disaster simulations, especially when there is a warning of an earthquake, and get ready to evacuate

ahead of a possible tsunami.

They hide under the table and chant dhikr (the Islamic prayer) "la ilaha il-

lallah," which means "there's no God but Allah," while waiting for the next direction to move from their classroom to the designated assembly point which is on the field at the front of the school.

The school has a devastating history. Situated about one kilometer (half a mile) from the shore, it was totally destroyed and flattened to the ground like other buildings. This school was one of over 1,400 that were wrecked by the tsunami, according to a report by the Disaster Mitigation Research Center at Syiah Kuala University in Aceh, published in 2019.

Some of the teachers are survivors of that disaster. They were only teenagers when they saw the giant waves, some as high as coconut trees.

They are the only ones left at the school who experienced the disaster, as all the students now were born after 2004. They have only heard the story about the quake followed by three giant waves and the impact from their parents.

"We also want to educate them about the history of the tsunami. We don't want them to remain ignorant about that history, that there was a tragedy that may be dark for some people," said Eka Sari Dewi, the school principal.

"However, today as the younger generation, they must know what they

should do after the tsunami."

That is why Dewi has followed the government policy of educating her students about tsunamis, teaching them to remain alert and be ready to evacuate to safer places when required. After about a year of disaster simulations at school on the 26th of every month, students have become very alert and are ready to act when the disaster alarm rings.

"This simulation is very useful because if a disaster happens, we will know how to do self-rescue. Then we also won't be confused like people in the past," Rihadatul Aisy, one of the students, said.

Fazli, the head of Preparedness in Aceh Disaster Management Agency, who like many Indonesians uses a single name, said that the simulation aims to build school community capacity, raise awareness and prepare students for earthquakes by equipping them with vital earthquake and tsunami information and ensuring readiness anytime, anywhere.

"The biggest hope is that there will be minimal casualties when the (next) disaster occurs," Fazli said.

Survivors who faced disasters at a very young age like Ayuni cannot directly digest what they faced in the past. However, there is hope that younger generations can be better prepared to face such challenges in the future.

### Christmas



Christians attend the Christmas Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral Church, in Lahore, Pakistan, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2024. (AP)



A girl with face paint looks at herself in a mirror during a Christmas event organized by the Excluded Workers Movement for those in need, outside Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Dec. 24, 2024. (AP)



Indian devotees light candles during Christmas at St. Mary's Garrison Church, in Jammu, India, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2024. (AP)

### Africa

**Mozambique violence claims 21:** Violence that engulfed Mozambique after the country's highest court confirmed ruling Frelimo party presidential candidate Daniel Chapo as the winner of disputed Oct. 9 elections killed at least 21 people, including two police officers, authorities said Tuesday.

Mozambique Interior Minister Pascoal Ronda told a news conference in Maputo late Tuesday that a wave of violence and looting was sparked by the court's announcement a day earlier. He said it was led by mostly youthful supporters of losing candidate Venancio Mondlane, who received 24% of the vote, second to Chapo, who got 65%.

"From the preliminary survey, in the last 24 hours, 236 acts of violence were recorded throughout the national territory that resulted in 21 deaths, of which two members of the Police of the Republic of Mozambique also died," Ronda said. He said 13 civilians and 12 police were injured. (AP)

**Passengers unhurt in Zambia collision:** Passengers aboard a train escaped uninjured after the vehicle crashed with a truck in Choma district in southern Zambia Tuesday.

The accident occurred in the early hours of Tuesday at a level crossing involving a northbound train and a truck and trailer loaded with floor tiles en route to South Africa.

According to Sombe Longwani-Ngo'nga, public relations manager of Zambia Railways Limited, preliminary investigations have revealed that the truck driver failed to stop at the level crossing, leading to the collision with the passenger train.

"The truck capsized and a locomotive and genset coach derailed. The incident did not result in any injuries or fatalities, but caused damage to the truck, locomotive and genset coach," the manager said in a statement. "The failure by the truck driver to observe the traffic rules is unfortunate as it posed a huge risk to the many lives that were on the passenger train." (Xinhua)

**Ethiopia, Djibouti eye joint task force:** The security institutions of Ethiopia and Djibouti have agreed to establish a joint task force to combat anti-peace forces operating along their common border area.

Ethiopia's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) and the Security Documentation Service of the Republic of Djibouti signed an agreement to establish the joint task force in charge of exterminating anti-peace forces operating along their common border area, according to a press statement released by the NISS on Monday.

The agreement came after NISS Director General Redwan Hussien held a discussion with the visiting delegation from Djibouti's Security Documentation Service, led by Director Hassen Seid, on a wide range of security matters of common concern. (Xinhua)

**'Sudan's war worsens famine crisis':** Famine is spreading in Sudan due to a war between the military and a notorious paramilitary group that has devastated the country and created the world's largest displacement crisis, a global hunger monitoring group said Tuesday.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC, said it detected famine in five areas, including in Sudan's largest displacement camp, Zamzam, in North Darfur province, where famine was found for the first time in August.

The report said the war has triggered unprecedented mass displacement and a collapsing economy. It said hostilities can result in farmers abandoning their crops, looting and stock destruction. (AP)



Sudanese Khadiga Omer Adam sits by her sick child in an MSF-run clinic in the Aboutengue displacement site near Acre, Chad, Friday, Oct. 4, 2024. (AP)

### Japanese premier says stronger alliance with US key to regional stability

## Japan FM pursues fresh start in China relations

BEIJING, Dec 25, (AP): Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya met with top Chinese leaders Wednesday during his visit to Beijing, the first since the heads of the two countries met at a summit in Peru last month, in an effort to make positive inroads in the bilateral relationship.

The two neighbors have had a tense relationship in recent years. At the top of Iwaya's agenda is China's ban on Japanese seafood in response to the release of treated radioactive wastewater into the sea from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, as well as China's increasingly assertive military activity in the East and South China Seas.

Iwaya met with China's premier, Li Qiang Wednesday as well as Wang Yi, his Chinese counterpart.

"Currently the China-Japan relations are at a critical period of improvement and development," said Li, in his remarks. "China is willing to work together with Japan to move towards the important direction proposed by the leaders of the two countries."

"I want to build a relationship where the people of both countries feel that Japan-China relations have developed and progressed in a positive direction," said Iwaya, ahead of his meeting with Wang.

His trip comes just before U.S. President-elect Donald Trump is to take office in January.

Tokyo considers the Japan-U.S. alliance the lynchpin of its diplomatic and security policies, a tone emphasized in the past four years under U.S. President Joe Biden's direction, but it's unclear how Trump will impact the alliance.

Japan has revamped its approach to defense in response to Chinese actions in recent years, boosting military spending and shifting away from a principle of self-defense. Earlier this year, Japan protested when a Chinese military plane flew into Japan's airspace, while in the summer, a Chinese survey ship sailed into Japanese territorial waters.

While how U.S.-China relations come out under the Trump administration is unclear, Japan is seeking stability in its relationship with its neighbor and hopes to develop ties in areas of mutual interest, including the economy and the elderly care industry.

Iwaya told reporters before his departure Tuesday that he will also hold bilateral high-level people and cultural exchange talks, joined by the education ministers from the two sides.



Japan's Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya, left, and Chinese Premier Li Qiang, right, shake hands at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2024. (AP)

"The relationship with China, our neighboring country, is one of Japan's most important," Iwaya told reporters Tuesday. Though there are many issues and concerns, Japan and China share a variety of possibilities, he said. "The two countries share important responsibilities for the peace and prosperity of the region and the international society."

Iwaya, a security expert, is also expected to reiterate his concern about Japanese nationals detained in alleged spying allegations.

Japan maintains that the water discharged from the Fukushima plant is treated and diluted to levels much safer than international standards and adequately monitored, but China calls the water contaminated.

Japan and China agreed in September to work toward easing the seafood ban by allowing China in multinational sampling missions

under the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Chinese experts joined an IAEA monitoring mission to Fukushima in October, when China took water samples from the sea just off the coast of the Fukushima plant, as well as the water discharge system on the plant, for analysis.

However, no breakthrough is expected during Iwaya's visit.

#### Also:

**TOKYO:** Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said on Tuesday strengthening his country's alliance with the United States is key to regional security and expressed his desire to meet with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump.

This comes amid worries about China's increasingly assertive military activity, including violation of Japanese airspace and territorial waters and joint military drills with

Russia around Japan, and North Korea's repeated test-firings of ballistic missiles as part of its nuclear and missile development programs.

Ishiba leads a minority government following a significant election loss in October due to voter anger over his party's financial scandals.

"I hope to hold talks with President-elect Trump as early as possible so that we can elevate the Japan-U.S. alliance to even higher levels," Ishiba told a news conference Tuesday marking the end of this year's parliamentary session.

"In order to further elevate the Japan-U.S. alliance ... it is important to share a common view about the situation in Northeast Asia," Ishiba said.

Ishiba earlier had sought to have a meeting with Trump soon after his victory in the U.S. presidential race in November. However, the prime minister said he was told that meetings with world leaders before Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration were restricted under U.S. law.

Still, when Trump met last week with Akie Abe, the widow of late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for a dinner, he conveyed a willingness to meet the Japanese leader around mid-January, Ishiba said. Abe had close ties with the president-elect.

No specific details have been set, but officials are working on it as Trump hopes to find "an appropriate timing," according to Ishiba.

At home, the prime minister faces tough negotiations with the opposition - a major change for his Liberal Democratic Party's ruling coalition that has long forced through its favored legislation by taking advantage of its dominance in parliament, a practice set by Abe and which critics labeled autocratic.

Ishiba on Tuesday said he did his utmost to listen to opposition voices and form a broad consensus as possible on political reform legislation and supplementary budget plan.

Ishiba also promised to accelerate discussion on the possibility of allowing married couples an option to keep both of their surnames by changing the current law requiring one surname per household.

The rule has forced the majority of women to adopt their husbands' surnames, triggering criticism in Japan and abroad for being gender-biased.

Most opposition lawmakers and even a powerful business organization now support the surname policy change, which has been blocked for decades by LDP conservatives.

Market Movements 25-12-2024

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts		
UASE	- DFMGI	+0.07	5,083.68	SAUDI	- TASI	-0.29	11,913.95
EGYPT	- EGX	+0.11	30,005.00				
JAPAN	- NIKKEI	+0.24	39,130.43				

# Business

Transforming banking experiences locally and globally

## NBK signs exclusive partnership with Alshaya Group

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is dedicated to offering exceptional benefits and exclusive offers to meet the diverse needs of its customers. By aligning its services with their expectations of various lifestyles, NBK continues to add value to their exceptional banking experience.

Reaffirming its commitment to innovation and exceptional customer service, NBK announced signing an exclusive partnership agreement with Alshaya Group, one of the leading international retail franchise operators. This collaboration marks the beginning of a pioneering service set to be introduced in Kuwait at the start of 2025, aimed at enhancing NBK's customers' banking experience with innovative offerings.

The bank emphasized that this partnership is set to offer exceptional benefits to its customers both in Kuwait and internationally, strengthening NBK's leadership in the banking sector. Through this collaboration, NBK continues to innovate, offering exclusive and distinctive advantages that set it apart in delivering top-tier services to its clientele.

The signing ceremony of the agreement was attended by Mr. Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group CEO of NBK, and Mr. Mohammed Alshaya, Executive Chairman of Alshaya Group, at Burj Alshaya, while it was signed by Mr. Mohammed Al-Othman, Chief Executive Officer of Consumer & Digital Banking Group at NBK, and Mr. John Hadden, CEO of Alshaya Group.

Commenting on the event, Mr. Mohammed Al-Othman said, "This exclusive partnership agreement with Alshaya Group aligns with our ongoing efforts to strengthen our relationships with prominent companies across diverse sectors. It enables us to offer exclusive advantages and exceptional benefits that enhance the banking experience for



Isam Al-Sager and Mohammed Alshaya surrounded by the leaders of the bank and Al-Shaya Group.



Left-Right: Isam Al-Sager and Mohammed Alshaya witness the signing of the partnership agreement between the National Bank of Kuwait and Al-Shaya Group by Mohammed Al-Othman and John Hadden.

our customers." "Service excellence and a commitment to delivering an exceptional customer experience are embedded in NBK's culture. Through strategic partnerships, NBK seeks

to provide its customers with benefits that not only meet their needs, but also exceed their expectations. Drawing on decades of experience, NBK is adept at understanding customer preferences and evaluating

their objectives to offer tailored products and services that suit a variety of lifestyles," he added.

Meanwhile, Mr. John Hadden, CEO at Alshaya Group said, "We are proud of this exclusive agree-

ment with NBK for our customers in Kuwait, bringing together a leading financial and banking institution of NBK's stature with Alshaya Group."

"We are confident that this agree-

**Al-Othman:**

The newly signed agreement builds on the longstanding and historic partnership between NBK and Alshaya Group. NBK continues to capitalize on its strong relationships with leading companies across diverse sectors to deliver exclusive rewards to its customers

**Hadden:**

Alshaya Group to bring exclusive products and offers to its customers in Kuwait through the partnership with NBK.

This agreement highlights our strong belief that the partnership will fulfill the aspirations of both parties, delivering exceptional benefits and experiences to their customers.

ment will offer a fantastic range of services to Alshaya and NBK customers with superior benefits and exclusive offers that enhance their overall experience with our brands," he added.

NBK consistently strives to provide value-added offers and exclusive benefits to its customer base, strengthening its leadership position in the banking sector locally and regionally. Meanwhile, Alshaya Group operates a wide range of brands across the Middle East, North Africa, Türkiye and Europe, bringing the world's best-known brands to its customers with thousands of stores, restaurants, coffee shops, and leisure destinations and over 125 e-commerce and digital sites for its brands.

## Weyay Bank announces its partnership with Alshaya Group to enhance customers' digital experience and maximize their benefits with every spend

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Weyay Bank, Kuwait's first digital bank, has officially entered a strategic partnership with Alshaya Group, one of the leading international retail franchise operators, offering an unparalleled choice of well-known brands to customers. This partnership marks a significant milestone in both entities' efforts in the financial and retail landscapes in Kuwait and beyond.

This collaboration aims to drive innovation, expand access to financial products, and deliver exceptional value for customers.

**Key highlights of the partnership:**

■ Digital banking with retail integration: the partnership will focus on creating a seamless customer experience by combining Weyay Bank's cutting-edge digital banking capabilities and Alshaya Group's expansive retail portfolio to create an enhanced customer experience that integrates digital banking services with retail offerings.

■ New digital payment solutions: a key component of the partnership is the development of advanced payment solutions, which will enable customers



Isam Al-Sager and Mohammed Alshaya during the signing of the partnership agreement with Weyay Bank.

to easily make transactions in-store and online.

■ Financial inclusion initiatives: both entities share a commitment to enhancing financial inclusion, with joint initiatives aimed at empowering customers, especially the youth, with digital tools for better money management, savings, and personalized financial products.

Amal Al-Duwaisan, Head of Weyay

Bank, said, "This partnership with Alshaya Group represents a new chapter in our journey to transform Kuwait's banking ecosystem. Together, we are creating a seamless fusion of retail and digital banking, bringing more convenience and value to customers. We are excited to work alongside Alshaya Group to deliver innovative solutions that will reshape the way people shop

and bank inside and outside Kuwait." Francois Orhan, Vice President of Loyalty, Payments and Data at Alshaya Group, also commented, "Our partnership with Weyay Bank marks a major step forward in the retail and banking industries. By combining our extensive retail network with Weyay's digital banking expertise, we can provide our customers with a unified, rewarding experience that meets their evolving needs. We look forward to working together to bring exciting new services to the market."

Weyay Bank is Kuwait's first digital bank, dedicated to providing innovative banking solutions designed for the digital age. Through its user-friendly app interface, Weyay offers a wide range of financial services and features, with an emphasis on simplicity, speed, and security.

Alshaya Group operates a wide range of brands across the Middle East, North Africa, Türkiye and Europe, bringing the world's best-known brands to its customers with thousands of stores, restaurants, coffee shops, and leisure destinations and over 125 e-commerce and digital sites for its brands.

## Agility secures \$1.4 bln credit facility

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Agility Public Warehousing Company has announced that an indirect subsidiary has signed a credit facility agreement with several regional banks, totaling approximately \$1.4 billion (around 430 million Kuwaiti dinars), reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to a statement released by the Kuwait Stock Exchange, the facility comprises 1 billion euros and \$370 million, with repayment due in 3 to 5 years from the signing date.

The facilities will be utilized to sup-

port the company's operations and future growth initiatives, as well as to settle certain obligations, including inter-company balances within the group.

Agility clarified that the value of these facilities will be reflected in the company's financial data depending on how the funds are used.

For the first nine months of this year, Agility reported a profit of 34.79 million dinars, reflecting a 39.5 percent decline compared to 57.53 million dinars during the same period last year.

## Boursa Kuwait closes higher, led by premier market gains

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25, (Agencies): Boursa Kuwait ended Wednesday's trading session on a positive note, with the general index rising 16.28 points or 0.22 percent to close at 7,345.66 points. Trading activity was robust, with 260.8 million shares changing hands through 14,550 transactions, valued at KWD 45.6 million (approximately USD 139 million).

Market performance by segment: The premier market index was the top performer, gaining 21.66 points or 0.28 percent to reach 7,865.98 points. This segment saw 75.3 million shares traded through 4,405 transactions, worth KWD 22.7 million (USD 69.2 million).

The Main 50 index also rose, adding 18.83 points or 0.29 percent to close at 6,609.43 points. Trading in this segment involved 112.6 million shares through 6,030 transactions, valued at KWD 14.8 million (about USD 44.4 million).

The main market index, however, experienced a slight decline, dropping 1.03 points or 0.02 percent to 6,720.85 points. This segment traded 185.5 million shares through 10,145 transactions, worth KWD 22.8 million (USD 69.5 million).

The mixed performance across market segments suggests varying investor sentiment, with the premier and Main 50 indices driving the overall positive close for Boursa Kuwait on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Boursa Kuwait indices saw a positive performance during today's trading session, with varying increases across the market.

The General Market Index rose by 0.54 percent, gaining 39.13 points to close at 7329.38 points, with a liquidity of 53.5 million dinars. A total of 255.1

million shares were traded across 14,428 transactions.

The Premier Market Index increased by 0.25 percent, or 19.95 points, closing at 7844.32 points, while the Main Market Index surged by 1.80 percent, gaining 118.63 points to close at 6721.88 points.

The session saw substantial liquidity, with trading focused on stocks such as Arzan, which reached 270 fils. Leading stocks like Kuwait Finance House (KFH) saw a rise of three fils, Agility jumped by 10 fils and Gulf stocks rose by two fils, all reflecting positive market activity.

Mabane stock gained 10 fils, while Boubyan Bank's shares increased by two fils. Other notable gains were seen in National and Arab Holding, which increased by one fils each and Industries which gained two fils.

The session also saw significant gains in stocks like Madar, which saw an increase of 9.6 percent and closed at 125 dinars and Inovest, which returned to a rise of 7.8 percent. KMEFIC, after a sharp loss the previous day, recovered with a 7.5 percent increase.

However, shares like Arzan, Kuwait Real Estate and Projects saw declines, with Business City stocks losing 6.5 percent.

Despite slightly lower liquidity compared to previous sessions, the market ended positively with liquidity exceeding 50 million dinars, signaling a strong session.

Moreover, regional stock exchanges in the Gulf, including those in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, mirrored Kuwait's positive performance, while other indices saw declines. Oil prices also exceeded \$73 per barrel during the session.

# Kuwait's trade sector financing sees decline in November 2024

Local banks' total assets rose by 4.84% annually

**By Mahmoud Shendi**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: In November 2024, financing provided by local banks to Kuwait's trade sector (for both residents and non-residents) decreased by 70 million dinars, or 16.8 percent, to reach 346.2 million dinars, compared to 416.2 million dinars in October.**

However, on an annual basis, the financing saw an increase of 1.7 percent, rising by 61 million dinars from 285.2 million dinars in November 2023. The total financing for the sector for the first 11 months of 2024 amounted to approximately 3 billion dinars.

The Central Bank of Kuwait's monthly statistics showed that the accumulated balance of trade financing from local banks decreased by 0.5 percent, or 42 million dinars, to reach 3.775 billion

dinars in November, compared to 3.797 billion dinars in October.

Nonetheless, there was a 5 percent annual increase in trade financing, up 180 million dinars from 3.595 billion dinars in November 2023.

In 2023, the new (consolidated) financing provided to the trade sector grew by 33.5 percent, or 766 million dinars, from 2.282 billion dinars in 2022 to 3.048 billion dinars.

Regarding Kuwaiti import financing, local banks provided 6.62 billion dinars in the first 10 months of 2024. In Octo-

ber, import financing decreased by 9.2 percent to 779.4 million dinars, down 79.4 million dinars from the previous month. However, it increased by 11.7 percent compared to October 2023, when it stood at 697.5 million dinars.

In terms of foreign currency financing, financing in US dollars accounted for the largest share, representing 80.4 percent of the total, at 5.32 billion dinars, while financing in other currencies made up 8.63 percent, with 571.6 million dinars, followed by financing in euros at 5.6 percent, or 371.3 million dinars.

## LuLu Hypermarket achieves PCI DSS certification, setting new standards for data security

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: LuLu Hypermarket, a prominent leader in the regional retail industry, has earned international acclaim for its exceptional data security measures across its global network of outlets.

Crossbow Labs, a leading cybersecurity compliance and certification authority, awarded LuLu Hypermarket the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS v4.0.1) Certification of Compliance. The certification was presented during a

ceremony held at LuLu Hypermarket's regional office in Kuwait in December.

Top management representatives from both LuLu Hypermarket and Crossbow Labs attended the ceremony. LuLu Hypermarket officials expressed their delight in receiving the latest PCI DSS v4.0.1 certification. They highlighted it as a testament to their stringent security measures to safeguard customers' payment transactions and personal data across all

Kuwait outlets.

Administered by the PCI Security Standards Council (PCI SSC), an independent body formed by major payment brands such as American Express, Mastercard, Visa, Discover, and JCB, PCI DSS establishes global benchmarks for securely handling credit card information. The certification sets a framework for preventing, detecting, and responding to security incidents, ensuring a safe business environment for retailers and consum-

ers.

Given LuLu Hypermarket's expansive operations and the increasing challenges posed by evolving cybersecurity threats, implementing a secure data protection system aligned with international standards, has been paramount. The PCI DSS certification validates these efforts and reinforces the hypermarket's resilience against potential data breaches, safeguarding its financial stability and reputation.



LuLu Hypermarket presented with PCI DSS certification.



# KFH's unrivaled achievements in 2024 recognized with 47 prestigious awards



Most notable awards



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah honoring Chairman of the Board of Directors of KFH Hamad Al-Marzouq in the presence of Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Award Sheikhha Aida Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah.

## Affirming leadership and operational efficiency

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) concluded 2024 with 43 distinguished awards and 4 prestigious Group-wide rankings from various global and regional entities, solidifying its leadership position and successful journey in the Islamic banking sector.

The awards recognize KFH's excellence in developing services and products that meet customers' aspirations and enhance their banking experience. The awards also highlight KFH's strong operational performance, sustainable growth, diverse strategic advantages, technological innovation, digital transformation, sustainability leadership, comprehensive corporate banking services, and social responsibility initiatives. In addition, they resemble its great success in implementing nationalization, localization and training programs at the level of the private sector in Kuwait.

The awards recognize KFH's excellence in developing services and products that meet customers' aspirations and enhance their banking experience. The awards also highlight KFH's strong operational performance, sustainable growth, diverse strategic advantages, technological innovation, digital transformation, sustainability leadership, comprehensive corporate banking services, and social responsibility initiatives. In addition, they resemble its great success in implementing nationalization, localization and training programs at the level of the private sector in Kuwait.

Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at KFH, Abdulwahab Iesa Al Rushood said that the Bank's recent awards solidify its position as a leading global financial institution. Al Rushood pointed out that these awards and recognitions would not have been possible without the bank shareholders and customers trust in addition to the outstanding efforts and talents of employees by providing the best levels of service to customers according to the highest quality standards.

He revealed that the success of the digital transformation strategy – which KFH was one of the first Banks to adopt – was reflected in the series of innovative services, products and solutions that the Bank has been unique in launching in recent years, indicating that this pioneering step made KFH attract new segments of customers and enabled it to meet their changing requirements and achieve their satisfaction, and enhance its leading position in the market.

### World's Best Islamic Financial Institution

Al Rushood added: "KFH won World's Best Islamic Financial Institution Award in 2024 by Global Finance magazine. This prestigious recognition underscores KFH's sustained growth in regional and international operations, market leadership in Islamic finance, and a strong financial foundation and operational performance."

In its 17th annual awards for 2024, held during a special ceremony on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Group (WBG) meetings in Washington, D.C., USA, Global Finance magazine honored KFH Group with four additional awards. KFH Group was recognized as the 'Best Islamic Corporate Bank - Global,' 'Best Islamic Project Finance Provider - Global,' and KFH-Turkey was named 'Best Islamic Financial Institution in Turkey.' Additionally,



Nahal Al-Muslim receiving award.

AUB, a subsidiary of KFH Group, was awarded 'Bahrain's Best Bank.'

### "Best SME Bank" Award

During 2024, KFH was awarded "Best SME Bank in Kuwait" by Global Finance Magazine. The award recognizes KFH's leadership in Islamic finance, its excellence in digital banking solutions such as online banking, mobile banking, and digital payments, and its significant market share. KFH holds the first place in financing small and medium enterprises.

Additionally, KFH was also recognized as Kuwait's Best Bank for Sustainable Finance by Global Finance magazine. KFH Capital, the investment arm of KFH Group, was also awarded the Best Investment Bank in Kuwait.

### Best Bank for ESG in Kuwait

KFH was recognized for its leading position in the Islamic banking sector by winning five prestigious awards at the ceremony of Euromoney's Middle East Awards for Excellence 2024, held in Dubai. The awards are Kuwait's Best Bank, Kuwait's Best Bank for ESG, Kuwait's Best Digital Bank – tam digital bank, and Kuwait's Best Islamic Bank. In addition, KFH Capital, the investment arm of KFH Group, won the Islamic Finance Deal of the Year Award for its role in the Republic of Turkey's USD 2.5 billion Sukuk.

KFH Capital, the investment arm of KFH Group, has been awarded "Best for Fixed Income in Kuwait" in the 2024 Euromoney Securities Houses Awards. This recognition underscores the company's achievements and contributions, as well as the quality of the Sukuk deals it has arranged. These include Sukuk issuances for the Republic of Turkey, Dubai Islamic Bank, and Saudi Public Investment Fund, as well as local Sukuk issuances for Kuwait Finance House, Equate Petrochemical Company, and Warba Bank. KFH Capital has excelled in delivering a diverse portfolio of uniquely structured investment products. These innovative offerings consistently generate strong returns, making the company



Luciano DiPietro, Mishaal Al-Shaya, Yousef Al-Ruwaih, Tariq Al-Ajeel and Khaled Al-Shami with the Baytak Group prizes.



Abdulwahab AlRushood

a preferred investment choice for both corporate and individual investors.

### Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Informatics Award

Adding to its record of triumphs, KFH received the 23rd edition of His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Award for 2023 for the category of excellence in digital transformation in technical financial solutions. The award ceremony was held at Bayan Palace under the patronage and presence of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

### Corporate Social Responsibility Award

KFH was recognized with prestigious awards at the 16th Annual EMEA Finance Middle East Banking Awards. KFH secured the following accolades: Best Islamic Bank - Middle East, Best Bank – Kuwait, Best Islamic Bank – Kuwait, Best Product Launch (Zaheb)- Middle East and Corporate Social Responsibility – Middle East Award. Additionally, KFH won "Best Islamic Finance House" and "Best Financial Institution Sukuk" awards at the 16th Annual EMEA Finance Middle East, Africa and Europe Banking Awards. The "Best Financial Institution Sukuk" award celebrates KFH's

successful US\$1 billion, 5-year Tier 1 Sukuk issuance under its US\$4 billion Sukuk Program.

### Human Resources

KFH reaped 13 global awards in the Human Resources field for the year 2024 from the renowned Brandon Hall Group, a company specialized in the evaluation and performance assessment of Banks, companies, and institutions around the world. This achievement highlights KFH Group's success in securing the highest number of awards at both the local and regional levels this year.

The collection of awards earned by KFH Group includes seven awards specifically awarded to KFH Kuwait, which are: Best Leadership Development Program (Gold) for the Leadership Excellence Program, Best Social Impact (Gold), Best Certification Program (Silver), Best New Hire Onboarding Program (Silver), Best Unique or Innovative Learning and Development Program (Bronze) for Forssah Program, Best Approach to HCM Innovation (Bronze), and Best HR Data Analytics (Bronze).

The awards also include six recognitions secured by KFH –Turkey, which are: Best Benefits, Wellness and Well-being Program (Gold), Best Selecting and Onboarding Interns (Gold), Best Talent Acquisition Process (Gold), Best Corporate

Through Processing Excellence Award (STP) by Citibank Group for 2023. KFH was recognized as the best financial institution in the Middle East in the areas for remittances, e-payment services and financial transactions, achieving a perfect score of 100% according to Citibank criteria for this honor.

### Best Bank in Kuwait for Retail Banking

KFH was named the Best Retail Bank in Kuwait by The Asian Banker's Middle East & Africa Awards program for 2024.

### Bank of the Year from The Banker

KFH was named Bank of the Year 2024 - Kuwait by The Banker, a leading financial publication owned by the Financial Times Group. KFH's second consecutive win of this prestigious award underscores its excellence and leadership in the Kuwaiti banking sector.

### Forbes Magazine Rating

Additionally, KFH achieved a remarkable feat, ranking as the leading Kuwaiti company and tenth in the Middle East in terms of market value and profitability on the Forbes 2024 Top 100 Listed Companies list. This recognition highlights KFH's pioneering role, financial strength, market value, and respected brand. It further strengthens their ambition of becoming a top 100 global bank.

### First in Growth and Return on Risk

KFH Group was ranked first in the Kuwaiti banking sector in terms of growth and return on risk for this year's Top 100 Arab Banks Rankings from The Banker, reinforcing its journey of outstanding achievements and global recognition.

### ESG Rating

KFH was awarded an "A" rating by MSCI for its exemplary performance in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices. This prestigious rating underscores KFH's commitment to sustainable finance and its leadership in integrating ESG principles into its operations and strategic initiatives.

In addition, KFH was included in the FTSE4Good Index Series. Created by the global index and data provider FTSE Russell, the FTSE4Good Index Series is designed to measure the performance of companies demonstrating strong Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices. Al Rushood stressed that the awards are not just an appreciation, but rather a motivation to achieve more successes and accomplishments in the future. They are also evidence of KFH's ability to provide innovative products and services to meet customer's needs, advance the banking industry and strengthen the Kuwaiti economy.

Culture Transformation (Gold), Best Corporate Learning University (Gold) for Kuveyt Turk Academy (KFH-Turkey) and Best Use of Blended Learning (Gold) for Kuveyt Turk Academy (KFH-Turkey).

### Awards from the Islamic Finance Group

KFH Group triumphed at the 2023 Islamic Finance News Awards, receiving three prestigious recognitions from IFN magazine. KFH Group was named Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait for 2023, and its subsidiary, KFH-Turkey, secured the Best Islamic Bank in Turkey award for 2023. Additionally, KFH Capital, KFH's investment arm, clinched the Hybrid Deal of the Year 2023 award for its role in Energy Development of Oman's US\$1 billion hybrid Ijarah-Tawarruq Sukuk.

### Manpower nationalization

KFH received an honor from the Council of Ministers of Labor and Social Affairs in GCC States for its distinction and excellence in the execution of the Manpower Nationalization and qualification programs at the private sector level in Kuwait. The recognition was in a special ceremony held in Doha under the patronage of the Ministers of Labor and Social Affairs in GCC.

### tam Digital Bank

tam Digital Bank, Kuwait's first Sharia-compliant digital Bank, won the "Best Technology Use in a Program" award for 2024 at a ceremony organized by Incentive Awards. The London-based event brought together Banks and companies from around the world.

tam Digital Bank won the "Best Technology Use in a Program" award for its innovative rewards program. The award was based on a rigorous evaluation of the program, which was deemed the best, unique and youth-centric rewards platform. Key criteria included user engagement, both in earning and redeeming points, the number of app members, the number of visits, and user ratings on the Apple Store.

### Excellence in e-payment

KFH was awarded the Straight



Ziad Al-Omar receiving an honor.



Yousef Al-Ruwaih receiving the Baytak Award.



Group photo, from left: Al-Kharji, Al-Rashood, Al-Shamlan and Awyan, with a representative from Global Finance in the middle.

## AI-Terkait reflects on the positive economic transformation in 2024

# UIC releases the 20th issue of The Investor magazine for December 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Union of Investment Companies (UIC) has announced the release of the 20th issue of its quarterly magazine, The Investor, for December 2024. This special edition focuses on Kuwait's real estate market, highlighting its promising outlook amidst a cautiously optimistic global economic environment in 2024. Following the disruptions of 2023, the global economy has seen notable stability, driven by declining inflation and easing monetary policies, while Kuwait's economy has demonstrated resilience and achieved significant growth, particularly in the real estate sector.

In his editorial, UIC Chairman Abdullah H. Al-Terkait, reflects on the positive economic transformation in 2024, which has uplifted investor

sentiment. He notes that Kuwait's real estate market is witnessing an early recovery, fueled by government reforms and major housing projects spearheaded by the Public Authority for Housing Welfare. The issue also explores the role of technology and sustainability in reshaping the sector, emphasizing the rapid adoption of advanced technologies and global environmental standards, which bolster Kuwait's appeal as a promising investment destination.

The magazine features in-depth articles and analyses, including a comprehensive overview of Kuwait's real estate market, key ongoing and upcoming projects, and success stories of leading developers. A key highlight is the global economic trends report, "2024: A Year of Calm After



The Investor Issue 20 cover

### AI-Terkait:

- The real estate market in Kuwait is experiencing a recovery supported by government reforms.

the Storm", which examines how global economic factors have fostered favorable conditions for real estate recovery.

The issue also includes an exclusive interview with Mohamed Abdullah Al-Saad, CEO of Amar Finance and Leasing. Al-Saad shares his insights on the transformative phase of Kuwait's real estate market, underpinned by government-led initiatives and developmental

projects. He discusses Amar's pivotal role in providing innovative financing and leasing solutions that align with market demands, emphasizing sustainability and flexibility. Al-Saad underscores the significance of integrating advanced technologies to enhance operational efficiency and improve client experiences. Closing the interview, he stresses the importance of public-private partnerships to drive sustainable growth in the real estate sector and expresses his optimism about the market's future prospects amidst ongoing reforms and expanding investment opportunities.

Additionally, the issue features an exclusive conversation with Moath Al-Ateeqi, Vice President of Real Estate Investment for the MENA region, who delves into the challenges and oppor-

tunities in the market. He highlights structural reforms that have redefined the real estate environment in Kuwait and underscores the vital role of innovation and sustainability in accelerating progress.

Since its inception in 2017, The Investor has played a vital role in raising investment awareness within Kuwait's business community. In 2024 alone, the magazine published five issues covering critical topics such as artificial intelligence and crypto-assets. With this latest release, The Investor aims to strengthen its position as a leading platform offering insightful analysis and a forward-looking perspective on Kuwait's economy, particularly the dynamic and evolving real estate sector.

### Nikkei 225 index edged 0.1% lower

## Asian shares mostly lower, with most world markets closed for Christmas

BANGKOK, Dec 25, (AP): Shares slipped in Tokyo and Shanghai on Wednesday, two of only a handful of world markets open on Christmas day.

Oil prices rose. Japan's Nikkei 225 index edged 0.1% lower to 38,997.02, while the Shanghai Composite index lost 0.2% to 3,387.41.

Thursday will bring a weekly update on U.S. unemployment benefits.

Also early Wednesday, U.S. benchmark crude oil was up 93 cents at \$70.17 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, picked up 6 cents to \$73.23 per barrel.

The dollar rose to 157.37 Japanese yen from 157.11 yen. The euro rose to \$1.0431 from \$1.0397.

On Tuesday, stocks closed higher on Wall Street in a shortened holiday session. Gains in Big Tech stocks helped the S&P 500 to a 1.1% gain, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.9%. The Nasdaq composite climbed 1.3%.

Advancers outnumbered decliners by more than 3-to-1 on the New York Stock Exchange.

Broadcom rose 3.2%, Apple gained 1.1% and Amazon closed 1.8% higher. Super Micro Computer climbed 6%.

Tesla jumped 7.4% for the biggest gains among S&P 500 stocks.

American Airlines shook off an early loss and ended with a 0.6% gain after the airline briefly ground-

ed flights nationwide due to a technical issue.

Elsewhere in the market, U.S. Steel rose 1.9% a day after an influential government panel failed to reach consensus on the possible national security risks of the nearly \$15 billion proposed sale to Nippon Steel of Japan.

NeueHealth surged 74.9% after the health care company agreed to be taken private in a deal valued at roughly \$1.3 billion.

Tuesday's U.S. market "Santa rally" comes as the stock market enters what's historically been a very cheerful season. The last five trading days of each year, plus the first two in the new year, have brought an average gain of 1.3% since 1950.

So far this month, the U.S. stock market has lost some of its gains since President-elect Donald 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.

Even so, the U.S. market remains on pace to deliver strong returns for 2024. The benchmark S&P 500 is up 26.6% so far this year and remains within roughly 1% of the all-time high it set earlier this month - its latest of 57 record highs this year.

# Chinese firms speed up innovation drive to buck economic headwinds

CiDi's success is not an isolated case in China

BEIJING, Dec. 25 (Xinhua): A smart coal mining project in northwest China set a global record for autonomous driving this year, with the world's largest mixed fleet of 56 driverless and over 800 manned trucks operating safely since June.

These driverless trucks at the Heishan mine, 70 km south of Urumqi in Xinjiang Autonomous Region, can easily match the skill of experienced human drivers and are even capable of identifying obstacles as small as 10 cm from up to 40 meters away.

The technology behind these cutting-edge vehicles is provided by CiDi Inc., a unicorn company specializing in commercial vehicle autonomous driving. Founded in 2017, it has applied for over 530 technical patents and participated in the formulation of over 50 industry standards.

"Innovation is deeply embedded in our entrepreneurial philosophy," said Ma Wei, CiDi's co-founder, noting that the company's commitment to technological advancement is fundamental to its growth.

More than 75 percent of the company's 500-strong staff are engaged in research and development (R&D), and its R&D investment accounts for over 40 percent of the operating costs.

With a threefold revenue increase in the first half of this year, CiDi has arguably crossed the "valley of death" in the highly competitive and challenging field of autonomous driving, emerging as one of the industry's top players.

CiDi's success is not an isolated case in China. Amid a challenging economic environment this year, many private companies have intensified their focus on innovation, overcoming headwinds to strengthen their core competitiveness and secure new growth opportunities.

Chinese companies are currently facing challenges both at home and abroad. The sluggish global economy, coupled with rising trade protectionism, has dampened prospects in international markets while domestically, insufficient demand and the ongoing economic shift toward new growth drivers have also caused challenges.

Liu Yuanchun, president of the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, believes that the challenges posed by economic cycles and structural adjustments can also present growth opportunities and generate potential energy to drive economic development.



An intelligent connected vehicle tester works before a test at an enclosed test field in Tianjin, north China, June 14, 2024. (Xinhua)

Industry analysis shows that although the steel industry faces short-term pressure, there is strong demand for high-value-added steel products, particularly in sectors like electric vehicles. Similarly, while the notebook computer market is nearing saturation, sales of specialized products like gaming laptops and ultra-thin models are picking up pace. Despite the drag of insufficient domestic demand, some industries, such as travel and entertainment e-commerce, still saw notable growth.

To capture the new growth points and opportunities, it is necessary to engage in innovation, meet the ever-changing market demands, and explore broader development space, according to experts.

Li-Gong Industrial Co., an intelligent manufacturing solution provider, achieved rapid development this year as it precisely identified emerging opportunities in a niche market.

Li Weichong, president of Li-Gong, saw a rapid increase in demand for small-batch, personalized intelligent equipment, as economic pressures have driven small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to accelerate their intelligent transformation in a bid to

stay competitive.

In response, Li and his team acted swiftly. "We visit the factory of each customer to assess their digital transformation needs, designing robotic systems and customized software packages tailored to their specific requirements," Li said, noting that Li-Gong's digital transformation projects in 2024 have doubled compared with last year.

For Cangzhou Four Stars Glass Co., which is striving to secure a strong position in the fiercely competitive market, its significant investment in assembly line upgrades finally paid off this year.

The company invested nearly 300 million yuan (about 41.74 million U.S. dollars) in the past two and a half years to upgrade its factory for digitalized production.

The investment brought financial pressure, but the transformation is aimed at long-term development, said Wang Huanyi, chairman of the glass producer, noting that the company reduced overall costs by 5 percent and saw a 20 percent increase in orders this year, a remarkable achievement amid intense market competition.

Despite ongoing economic hard-

ships, the rise of more innovation-driven enterprises is injecting new vitality into the market and creating new momentum for the Chinese economy.

In the first three quarters of this year, 6.19 million new private enterprises were registered nationwide, with 40 percent of them engaged in new technologies, industries and business models. During the same period, the R&D investment of Chinese listed companies reached 1.1 trillion yuan, and in particular the R&D intensity of companies on the STAR market, China's Nasdaq-style sci-tech innovation board, stood at 9.94 percent.

Chinese authorities have ramped up efforts to support businesses this year, particularly private enterprises, through a series of policies aimed at easing their financial burdens, fostering innovation and creating a more favorable business environment.

Among the most notable measures, the People's Bank of China implemented a re-lending program to promote technological innovation and industrial upgrading. By the end of October, outstanding loans to technology-focused SMEs had reached 3.17 trillion yuan, marking a 21 percent increase from the previous year.

### Winter weather threatens more potential problems

# Heavy travel day starts in US with brief grounding of all American Airlines flights

WASHINGTON, Dec 25, (AP): American Airlines briefly grounded flights nationwide Tuesday because of a technical problem just as the Christmas travel season kicked into overdrive and winter weather threatened more potential problems for those planning to fly or drive.

Government regulators cleared American flights to get airborne about an hour after the Federal Aviation Administration ordered a national ground stop for the airline. The order, which prevented planes from taking off, was issued at the airline's request after it experienced trouble with its flight operating system, or FOS. The airline blamed technology from one of its vendors.

As a result, flights were delayed across American's major hubs, with only 36% of the airline's 3,901 domestic and international flights leaving on time, according to Cirium, an aviation analytics company. Fifty-one flights were canceled.

Dennis Tajer, a spokesperson for the Allied Pilots Association, a union representing American Airlines pilots, said the airline told pilots at 7 a.m. Eastern that there was an outage affecting the FOS system. It handles different types of airline operations, including dispatch, flight planning, passenger boarding, as well as an airplane's weight and



Travellers queue up at the American Airlines self-check-in kiosks in Denver International Airport Tuesday, Dec. 24, 2024, in Denver. (AP)

balance data, he said.

Some components of FOS have gone down in the past, but a system-wide outage is rare, Tajer said.

Hours after the ground stop was lifted, Tajer said the union had not heard about any "chaos out there beyond just the normal heavy travel day." He said officials were watching for any cascading effects, such as staffing problems.

On social media, however, customers expressed frustration with delays that caused them or their family mem-

bers to miss connecting flights. One person asked if American planned to hold flights for passengers to make connections, while others complained about the lack of assistance they said they received from the airline or gate agents.

Bobby Tighe, a real estate agent from Florida, said he will miss a family Christmas Eve party in New York because his American flight was repeatedly delayed. The delays made him miss a connecting flight, leaving

him the choice of going to his destination - Westchester, New York - on Christmas Day or taking another flight to Newark, New Jersey, that was scheduled to land Tuesday evening. He chose the latter.

"I'm just going to take an Uber or Lyft to the airport I was originally supposed to go to, pick up my rental car and kind of restart everything tomorrow," Tighe said. He said his girlfriend was "going through the same exact situation" on her way from Dallas to New York.

Cirium noted that the vast majority of flights were departing within two hours of their scheduled departure time. A similar percentage - 39% - were arriving at their destinations as scheduled.

Dallas-Fort Worth, New York's Kennedy Airport and Charlotte, North Carolina, saw the greatest number of delays, Cirium said. Washington, Chicago and Miami experienced considerably fewer delays.

Meanwhile, the flight-tracking site FlightAware reported that 4,058 flights entering or leaving the U.S., or serving domestic destinations, were delayed, with 76 flights canceled. The site did not post any American Airlines flights on Tuesday morning, but it showed in the afternoon that 961 American flights were delayed.



People walk in front of Tokyo Stock Exchange building Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2024, in Tokyo. (AP)

## Small businesses are feeling optimistic about the economy after US election

WASHINGTON, Dec 25, (AP): A recent survey shows small business owners are feeling more optimistic about the economy following the election.

The National Federation of Independent Businesses' Small Business Optimism Index rose by eight points in November to 101.7, its highest reading since June 2021.

The Uncertainty Index declined 12 points in November to 98, following October's pre-election record high of 110.

NFIB Chief Economist Bill Dunkelberg said small business owners became more certain about future business conditions following the presidential election, breaking a nearly three-year streak of record high uncertainty.

"Owners are particularly hopeful for tax and regulation policies that favor strong economic

growth as well as relief from inflationary pressures," he said in a statement. "In addition, small business owners are eager to expand their operations."

The net percent of owners expecting the economy to improve rose 41 points from October to a net 36%, the highest since June 2020.

Some owners are also hoping 2025 will be a good time to grow. The percent of small business owners believing it is a good time to expand their business rose eight points to a 14%. This is also the highest reading since June 2021.

While inflation has eased, it remains a top concern for owners. Twenty percent of owners reported that inflation was their single most important problem in operating their business (higher input and labor costs). It surpassed labor quality as the top issue by one point.



Jenna Brashear shops at Julep Home & Gift while taking advantage of Shop Small Saturday in Wesleyan Park Plaza, on Nov. 30, 2024, in Owensboro, Ky. (AP)

## Obituary



Jane Fonda, (left), and Richard Perry pose for a photo at the Los Angeles Center's 46th Anniversary Gala Vanguard Awards at the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza in Los Angeles, Nov. 7, 2015. (AP)

### Man behind iconic hits

## Richard Perry, music hitmaker, dies at 82

LOS ANGELES, Dec 25. (AP) — Richard Perry, a hitmaking record producer with a flair for both standards and contemporary sounds whose many successes included Carly Simon's "You're So Vain," Rod Stewart's "The Great American Songbook" series and a Ringo Starr album featuring all four Beatles, died Tuesday. He was 82.

Perry, a recipient of a Grammys Trustee Award in 2015, died at a Los Angeles hospital after suffering cardiac arrest, friend Daphna Kastner said.

"He maximized his time here," said Kastner, who called him a "father friend" and said he was godfather to her son. "He was generous, fun, sweet and made the world a better place. The world is a little less sweeter without him here. But it's a little bit sweeter in heaven."

Perry was a onetime drummer, oboist and doo-wop singer who proved at home with a wide variety of musical styles, the rare producer to have No. 1 hits on the pop, R&B, dance and country charts. He was on hand for Harry Nilsson's "Without You" and The Pointer Sisters' "I'm So Excited," Tiny Tim's novelty smash "Tiptoe Through the Tulips" and the Willie Nelson-Julio Iglesias lounge standard "To All the Girls I've Loved Before." Perry was widely known as a "musician's producer," treating artists like peers rather than vehicles for his own tastes. Singers turned to him whether trying to update their sound (Barbra Streisand), set back the clock (Stewart), revive their career (Fats Domino) or fulfill early promise (Leo Sayer).

"Richard had a knack for matching the right song to the right artist," Streisand wrote in her 2023 memoir, "My Name is Barbra."

Perry's life was a story, in part, of famous friends and the right places. He was backstage for 1950s performances by Little Richard and Chuck Berry, sat in the third row at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival during Otis Redding's memorable set and attended a recording session for the Rolling Stones' classic "Let It Bleed" album. A given week might find him dining one night with Paul and Linda McCartney, and Mick and Bianca Jagger the next. He dated Elizabeth Taylor and Jane Fonda among others and was briefly married to the actor Rebecca Broussard.

### Remember

In Stewart's autobiography, "Rod," he would remember Perry's home in West Hollywood as "the scene of much late-night skulduggery through the 1970s and beyond, and a place you knew you could always fall into at the end of an evening for a full-blown knees-up with drink and music and dancing."

In the '70s, Perry helped facilitate a near-Beatles reunion.

He had produced a track on Starr's first solo album, "Sentimental Journey," and grown closer to him through Nilsson and other mutual friends. "Ringo," released in 1973, would prove the drummer was a commercial force in his own right - with some well-placed names stopping by. The album, featuring contributions from Nilsson, Billy Preston, Steve Cropper, Martha Reeves and all five members of The Band, reached No. 2 on Billboard and sold more than 1 million copies. Hit singles included the chart toppers "Photograph," co-written by Starr and George Harrison, and a remake of the 1950s favorite "You're Sixteen."

But for Perry and others, the most memorable track was a non-hit, custom made. John Lennon's "I'm the Greatest" was a mock-anthem for the self-effacing drummer that brought three Beatles into the studio just three years after the band's breakup. Starr was on drums and sang lead. Lennon was on keyboards and backing vocals and longtime Beatles friend Klaus Voormann played bass. They were still working on the song when Harrison's assistant phoned, asking if the guitarist could join them. Harrison arrived soon after.

"As I looked around the room, I realized that I was at the very epicenter of the spiritual and musical quest I had dreamed of for so many years," Perry wrote in his 2021 memoir, "Cloud Nine." "By the end of each session, a small group of friends had gathered, standing silently along the back wall, just thrilled to be there."

McCartney was not in town for "I'm the Greatest," but he did help write and arrange the ballad "Six O'Clock," featuring the ex-Beatle and Linda McCartney on backing vocals.

Perry had helped make pop history the year before as producer of "You're So Vain," which he would call the nearest he came to a perfect record. Simon's scathing ballad about an unnamed lover, with Voormann's bass runs kicking off the song and Jagger joining on the chorus, hit No. 1 in 1972 and began a long-term debate over Simon's intended target. Perry's answer would echo Simon's own belated response.

"I'll take this opportunity to give my insider's scoop," he wrote in his memoir. "The person that the song is based on is really a composite of several men that Carly dated in the '60s and early '70s, but primarily, it's about my good friend, Warren Beatty."

### Private

Perry's post-1970s work included such hit singles as The Pointer Sisters' "Neutron Dance" and DeBarge's "Rhythm of the Night," along with albums by Simon, Ray Charles and Art Garfunkel. He had his greatest success with Stewart's million-selling "The Great American Songbook" albums, a project made possible by the rock star's writer's block and troubled private life. In the early 2000s, Stewart's marriage to Rachel Hunter had ended and Perry was among those consoling him. With Stewart struggling to come up with original songs, he and Perry agreed that an album of standards might work, including "The Very Thought of You," "Angel Eyes" and "Where or When."

"We were at a back table in our favorite restaurant as we exchanged ideas and wrote them down on a napkin," Perry wrote in his memoir. Stewart softly sang the options. "As I sat there and listened to him sing, it was clear that we both sensed we were on to something," Perry added.

Perry was a New York City native born into a musical family; his parents, Mark and Sylvia Perry, co-founded Peripole Music, a pioneering manufacturer of instruments for young people. With his family's help and encouragement, he learned to play drums and oboe and helped form a doo-wop group, the Escorts, that released a handful of singles. A music and theater major at the University of Michigan, he initially dreamed of acting on Broadway. Instead, he made the "life-changing" decision in the mid-1960s to form a production company with a recent acquaintance, Gary Katz, who would go on to work with Steely Dan among others.

By the end of the decade, Perry was an industry star, working on Captain Beefheart's acclaimed cult album, "Safe As Milk" and the debut recording of Tiny Tim and Ella Fitzgerald's "Ella," featuring the jazz great's interpretations of songs by the Beatles, Smokey Robinson and Randy Newman. In the early 1970s, he would oversee Streisand's million-selling "Stoney End" album, on which the singer turned from the show tunes that made her famous and covered a range of pop and rock music, from the title track, a Laura Nyro composition, to Gordon Lightfoot's "If You Could Read My Mind."

"I liked Richard from the moment we met. He was tall and lanky, with a mop of dark, curly hair and a big smile, which his big heart," Streisand wrote in her memoir. "At our first meeting, he arrived laden with songs, and we listened to them together. Whatever hesitation I may have felt about our collaboration soon vanished and I thought, 'This could be fun, and musically liberating.'"

## French and Chinese artists blend cultures

### Chinese theater brings new depth to French classics

AVIGNON, France, Dec. 25. (Xinhua) — In a quiet French village theater, the soft glow of stage lights fell on a scene that feels both familiar and entirely new. Victor Hugo's Notre-Dame de Paris unfolds, not through actors in grand costumes, but through the delicate artistry of Chinese glove puppets.

For Christian Luciani, an 83-year-old French theater veteran, the experience was nothing short of revelatory.

"Bringing French texts to life through Chinese opera is a remarkable achievement," Luciani said after attending a performance by a traditional Chinese theater troupe. "It transcends the boundaries of theater. I believe it helped the French rediscover their own culture."

The event, The Chinese Tour in the Most Beautiful Villages of France, ran from Dec. 17 to 21, bringing centuries-old Chinese theatrical traditions to the heart of southern France. Villages known for their deep artistic roots—Pernes-les-Fontaines, Lourmarin, Gordes, and Avignon—played host to the troupe, whose performances blended ancient Chinese storytelling with iconic French literature.

A glove puppet adaptation of Notre-Dame de Paris and an interpretation of Moliere's The Miser in Gaojia opera, a traditional Chinese Fujian local opera, capti-

vated audiences with their originality.

"Glove puppet theater is purely Chinese, yet it conveys the text's essence so vividly," Luciani said. "The actors express enough through their craft alone to tell the entire story. They've embraced a culture that isn't their own and elevated it with their unique perspective."

Luciani is no stranger to the stage. His journey into theater began in childhood, performing at his boarding school. By 24, he was directing the Youth and Cultural Center in Arles, and over the decades, he has played kings, judges, and popes across Europe and North Africa.

### Performances

But even with such an extensive career, Luciani finds Chinese theater offers something European performances often lack.

"In Europe, most performances are similar—we're too focused on the text," he explained. "We're not open enough to physical expression in its many forms—circus, song, movement. Chinese theater blends all of these effortlessly, offering a richness we seldom achieve."

The tour, co-organized by the China Opera Research Society, Fujian Art Vocational College, and

France's Most Beautiful Villages association, aimed to break those boundaries.

"It's a significant achievement to bring these performances to villages," Luciani noted. "When we limit ourselves to major theaters, culture becomes niche. But this brings it directly to the heart of French life."

Luciani's appreciation for Chinese theater stretches back decades. In 1993, during the famed Avignon Festival, he watched an elderly Chinese actor perform.

"I was captivated by a technique that transcended the text through physical expression. It made me realize we need to go beyond our own boundaries and embrace a more open approach to theater," he recalled.

That spark has remained with him ever since.

Now, Luciani hopes to deepen his understanding of Chinese theater. "I'd love to learn more and explore how we, as French artists, could adapt and interpret their texts," he said. His own troupe, The Company of Cormoran, continues to experiment with theatrical styles, blending tradition with new forms of artistic expression.

For Luciani, cultural exchange between France and China enriches the theatrical traditions of both nations, fostering innovation in performance and stagecraft.

"Culture must be alive," he said. "Without communication, it becomes isolated and loses its meaning."

## Music

### 'A gentle soul with magnificent voice'

## Soprano Angel Blue brings 'Aida' to Met

NEW YORK, Dec 25. (AP) — If she has the voice of an angel, and the face of an angel, she must be an Angel.

Angel Blue, that is.

The American soprano, one of the most admired singers of her generation, is headlining the Metropolitan Opera's first new production of Verdi's "Aida" in 36 years. Blue, now 40, debuted at the Met in 2017 as Mimi in Puccini's "La Boheme" and has become a fixture at the house, starring in two opening nights and this fall portraying the lead character in Osvaldo Golijov's "Ainadamar."

But "Aida" is something else. The title role of the enslaved Ethiopian princess torn between love for an Egyptian warrior and loyalty to her country represents the pinnacle of Verdi's mature vocal style. It demands power, flexibility and the ability to spin out long phrases, while conveying the dramatic intensity of the character's emotional turmoil.

It also comes weighted with history, especially for a Black soprano at the Met, where Leontyne Price embodied the role from her first performance in 1961 until her retirement in 1985.

"I don't think I'm the next Leontyne Price, but I've definitely looked at her my whole life as an example of someone to model myself after," Blue said in an interview after a day of rehearsal.

"Sometimes in opera there's an intimidation factor because of those who come before us," she added. "But when it's somebody who I look up to, I feel like, OK it's my turn. Thank you so much, it's because of you I'm here."

### Production

Blue's turn comes on New Year's Eve, when Michael Mayer's production opens before a sold-out house with a cast that includes tenor Piotr Beczala as her lover, Radames, mezzo Judit Kutasi as her rival, Amneris, and baritone Quinn Kelsey as her father, Amonasro. Met music director Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts. The Jan. 25 matinee will be broadcast live in HD to movie theaters worldwide.

Blue was less than a year old when Price made her Met farewell, so she never got to hear her live in opera. But her father, a classically trained gospel singer and pastor, loved her recordings and - according to family lore - pronounced shortly after Blue was born that she would be "the next Leontyne Price."

"My beautiful dad, he was just enamored of her," Blue said. "It was like a thought that came into his heart when I took my first breath."

Growing up as one of five children in Southern California, Blue sang in church, studied voice and piano in high school, then entered several beauty pageants and used her prize money to help pay for her musical studies. She had been bitten by the opera bug at age 4 when her father took her to see a concert performance of Puccini's "Turandot" while the family was visiting relatives in Cleveland.

Though she had sung "Aida" once in concert in Detroit, her only previous staged performances came last year at London's Royal Opera House. The critics were impressed, though some felt she was still mastering the role.

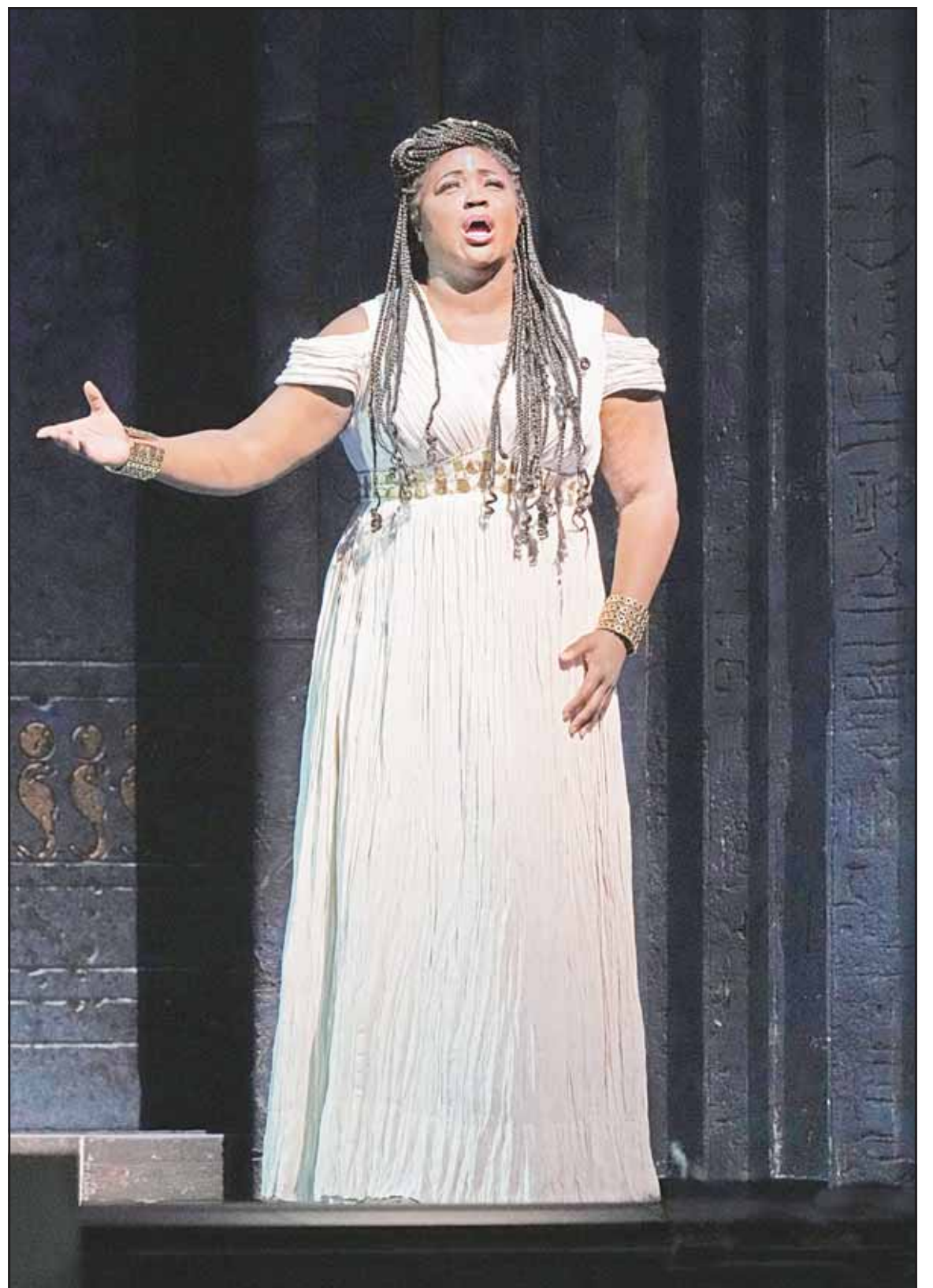
"Sometimes Blue's tone frays under pressure," wrote Neil Fisher in The Times. But he added that she is "a heartfelt, affecting Aida ... riding high in ensembles. This gutsy Aida will grow in authority."

## Variety

**SANTA FE, N.M.:** The conclusion of a criminal case against Alec Baldwin in the fatal shooting of a cinematographer clears the way for a related civil lawsuit by relatives of the deceased woman and efforts to depose the actor under oath, attorneys for plaintiffs in the civil suit said Tuesday.

At a news conference in Los Angeles, victims' rights attorney Gloria Allred said that the parents and younger sister of deceased cinematographer Halyna Hutchins were disappointed that prosecutors won't appeal the dismissal of an involuntary manslaughter charge against Baldwin. The criminal charge against Baldwin was dismissed halfway through trial in July on allegations that police and prosecutors withheld evidence from the defense.

Hutchins died shortly after being wounded during a



Soprano Angel Blue performs in a rehearsal for a new production of Verdi's 'Aida,' opening at the Metropolitan Opera on New Year's Eve. (AP)

rehearsal in the movie "Rust" in October 2021 at a film-set ranch on the outskirts of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Baldwin, the lead actor and coproducer, was pointing a pistol at Hutchins when it discharged, killing Hutchins and wounding director Joel Souza.

Baldwin has said he pulled back the hammer - but not the trigger - and the revolver fired.

Allred said Hutchins' relatives are determined to pursue damages and compensation from Baldwin and "Rust" producers in New Mexico civil court, and want Baldwin to answer questions under oath in the

proceedings. Hutchins' widower and son previously reached a separate legal settlement. (AP)



Baldwin

hearsals he was struck by how naturally Blue was able to capture the character's inner conflicts as she is torn between love for her Egyptian captor and duty to her homeland and her father.

"What's remarkable about working with Angel is that she is utterly sympathetic," Mayer said. "She does the thing that great actors do: She has the thought, and we see it. She's not doing any histrionic indicating of feelings, she's trusting that Verdi knew what he was doing in terms of how the music is telling its own story."

"She's a gentle soul, but then she opens up and you hear this magnificent

voice," Mayer said.

Opening night of the Met production will be a poignant occasion for Blue because New Year's Eve marks the 18th anniversary of her father's death. Her mother and brother will be in the audience cheering her on, and the rest of her family will come to a later performance. She's determined not to disappoint them.

"I feel like a boxer at the side of the ring, and I have these gloves on that say 'AIDA,'" Blue said. "People are giving me water, patting me down and saying, 'Angel, you've got this. You can do it!'"

**NEW YORK:** Netflix will have one of its biggest days Wednesday since the site launched in 1998 when it airs two NFL games for the first time.

"NFL Christmas Gameday on Netflix" begins with a two-hour pregame show at 11 a.m., before Pittsburgh hosts Kansas City. Baltimore faces Houston in the second game.

The streaming giant agreed to a three-year contract in May to carry Christmas Day games.

Netflix's 282.3 million subscribers in over 190 countries will be able to stream the games, marking the first time one outlet has distributed an NFL game globally. Netflix will have the games available in five languages - English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and German.

The games will also air on CBS affiliates in Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and Houston. NFL policy dictates that games on cable or being exclusively streamed must also be on an over-the-air station in the competing teams' markets. It will also be available on mobile devices in the U.S. for those who have NFL+. (AP)



A person looks at a peacock display at Kris Kringl on Saturday, Nov. 30, 2024, in Leavenworth, Wash. (AP)



A child walks past a trash can along Front Street on Wednesday, Nov. 27, 2024, in Leavenworth, Wash. (AP)



Nutcrackers are displayed outside the Leavenworth Nutcracker Museum on Wednesday, Nov. 27, 2024, in Leavenworth, Wash. (AP)

## From ghost town to Christmas wonderland

# How one village became Christmas capital of US state

LEAVENWORTH, Wash., Dec 25, (AP): The scent of bratwurst and pretzels filled the air as horses clotted down the main street, hauling a carriage full of tourists. Nestled in her mother's arms, a baby reached out to touch a shop window display, peering toward the sequin-covered reindeer behind it, as colorful ornaments twirled nearby.

Welcome to Leavenworth, Washington, the Christmas capital of the Pacific Northwest.

Decades ago, Leavenworth was a near ghost town on the eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains, one of the region's poorest communities. The mines and the sawmill had closed, and even the railroad left. In the 1960s, desperate business owners made a serious gamble. Without any state or federal help, they began taking out loans

and remodeling the downtown in the style of a Bavarian village.

More than half a century later, the result brings tourists from near and far all year long - hikers and skiers, river rafters and fly-fishers, shoppers and day-trippers from Seattle, some 3 million visitors in all last year, according to Matt Cade, president of the Greater Leavenworth Museum. The crush has prompted concerns about the cost of living, and recent efforts, including some state funding for affordable apartments, have focused on ensuring that tourism industry workers can live in town.

But the town peaks in popularity during the holidays.

In December, it takes on the ruddy, warm glow of a German Christmas market, with the magic of choirs, carolers, food vendors and a gingerbread house contest.

The longstanding practice of switching on the Christmas lights downtown on Saturday and Sunday evenings began to draw such large crowds that organizers eventually decided to just leave them on from Thanksgiving through February.

"Every time I go there, I just feel joy and excitement," said Alison Epsom, of Sultan, who visited with her husband, Brian Jolly, and their 8-month-old daughter, Acaia.

The couple met nearly two decades ago, when they were performing at an international dance festival. For one of their first dates, Jolly invited Epsom, a native of England, to visit Leavenworth.

"I knew I had one opportunity that she was going to be here and I wanted her to fall in love with me," he recalled.

As they drove through the mountain pass on their way, she told him to pull over. She jumped outside without a coat and made a little snowman.

"I had never seen that much snow," Epsom said. "So that was absolutely magical to me."

They have made it an annual tradition to return to Leavenworth, and every year they pick out a new ornament for their tree at the Kris Kringl shop downtown. The town is a core part of the couple's love story. Jolly even proposed to her on a horse-drawn sleigh.

This year, it was their daughter's turn to pick out the new ornament - her parents decided they'd buy the first one she touched. She grabbed at a white owl, which now hangs from the family's Christmas tree, near the red- and gold-glittered star that Epsom picked out on their first visit.

## Music

### Grammy nod

## Miko 'leads' the Latin trap wave

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP): Who are the top reggaeton musicians in the world? Or throughout history? Does Bad Bunny come to mind? Daddy Yankee? What about Wisin & Yandel, Rauw Alejandro, Farruko and J Balvin?

For years, it seems, urbano music has been defined solely by its male superstars. But that's not the case, and certainly not in recent history.

Karol G's "Mañana Será Bonito" is undeniable — Spotify's fourth most-streamed album, globally, in 2024 even though it was released in 2023 — and a crop of newer talent from Puerto Rico, like Villano Antillano, RaiNao and Añasco's Young Miko, demonstrate that the tide is changing — and music once associated with a certain kind of machismo is getting a makeover.

Since releasing her 2022 EP "Trap Kitty," leading to her debut full-length "Att," Young Miko has stood out. Not only for her herbgadocious Latin trap flows that aim to empower community — though that is certainly a factor — but also for her super viral hits, like "RiRi" and "offline," featuring Feid.

### Awards

Last month, "Att" earned Young Miko her first-ever Grammy nomination in the best música urbana album category, traditionally a boys' club. She's the only woman nominated in the category. The Grammy Awards will be held Feb. 2, 2025.

So, how did she react to the Grammy news?

"It was definitely unexpected. It's definitely always been a dream," she recently told The Associated Press at Variety Music Hitmakers Brunch, adding that it is not only her dream, but the dream of her entire team. "So, the moment we got that news, it was such an exciting moment. We were all together and we just want to be able to enjoy it. And we're just happy to even be considered. So yeah, it's amazing."

Earlier this year, Karol G became the first woman to win a Grammy for best música urbana album.

"As a woman, I have to say, like in my experience, it was tough... to be a girl in this industry, in the music that I do, urban music," Karol G told AP backstage at the 2024 Grammys in February after she took home the trophy. "I know I represent a lot of girls, not just in music, a lot of women in the world that are fighting to represent themselves."

Young Miko says the industry is changing, "definitely," she says.

"I think everything happens for a reason and evolution is a part of absolutely everything, so I'll just leave that there."



Puerto Rican singer Young Miko performs during the Coca-Cola Flow Fest in Mexico City on Nov 25, 2023. (AP)

## Theater



This photo provided by O+M/DKC in December 2024 shows John Mulaney performing in 'All In: Comedy About Love' in New York. (AP)

## Play features wild, whimsical tales from Simon Rich

# Mulaney back on Broadway in 'All In'

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP): John Mulaney's second trip to Broadway took little convincing. He didn't even need to look at the script before signing on.

"I was like, 'OK, well, send it to me. I'll read it.' And they sent it to me. I didn't read it. I just agreed immediately," the actor-comedian says.

What Mulaney signed up for was "All In: Comedy About Love," a stage adaptation of his friend Simon Rich's short stories that's charming Broadway audiences this winter with a starry cast.

Joining Mulaney - who made his Broadway debut in 2016 with "Oh, Hello" - is Renée Elise Goldsberry, Richard Kind and Fred Armisen. They'll eventually be replaced by Lin-Manuel Miranda, Jimmy Fallon, Aidy Bryant, Nick Kroll, Tim Meadows, Chloe Fineman, Andrew Rannells, David Cross, Annaleigh Ashford and Hank Azaria.

"All In" opens with the surreal story of a guy who walks into a bar that has a 12-inch piano player and then goes on to feature personal ads from dogs - "Full disclosure: I'm neutered but no complaints yet," reads one - a love triangle involving The Elephant Man, an aging talent agent confronting Death and a history report from the 2070s.

"These are such meticulously, beautifully written pieces," says Mulaney, who befriended Rich when both worked at "Saturday Night Live." "Because they so naturally lend themselves to performing, it's very fun to take it off the page."

Director Alex Timbers first approached Rich,

the son of noted critic Frank Rich, with the idea of transferring some of his short stories to the stage.

"Our first reading was 4 1/2 hours long so it took some process of elimination, but we eventually found a batch of stories that we felt were not just thematically linked, but would lend themselves to powerful performances by talented actors," says Rich.

Once they found the right stories, attention went to presenting them: How many actors should there be? How much of a production should the 90-minute play be? Should there be costumes and sets?

### Versatility

They landed on minimalism and four actors, which offered both a chance to showcase each's versatility and make the play more intimate. The show is enlivened by original illustrations from New Yorker cartoonist Emily Flake and the band The Bengons playing love songs from The Magnetic Fields' catalog.

"What was going to serve the material best was the purest communication of it to the audience," says Mulaney. "I'm sorry to use a drug thing, but mainlining the material versus taking it in a dissolvable."

Two of the stories - a pair of passive-aggressive pirates who abandon their rough ways to raise a young stowaway and a noir detective tale told by babies - features children and child-rearing, something both Rich and Mulaney can now relate to.

"It all is greatly enhanced by my own life,"

says Mulaney, the "touring, stand-up comedian, 'Saturday Night Live'-writing, complete night owl, Dracula-like creature who now has two kids and lives in the California suburbs."

The original four cast members will give way to four more but Rich and Mulaney think the structure is sound and can take changes. It helps that each performer sits in chairs for the entire show and has a script in their lap should they need it.

"So many people can find a way into these stories that I am sure anyone coming in to do any of these pieces will be able to bring themselves to it and rise to the occasion of how good the writing is," says Mulaney.

The replacements won't slip into the exact performer's spot just vacated - Rich says they'll scramble the parts up. "It's exciting for me to imagine how not just new individual performances will change things, but new pairings as well," he says. "So many of the stories live in the scene work between two cast members and that's another thrilling thing for me to imagine is those shifting dynamics."

The audience at the Hudson Theatre during one recent performance was notably younger than for most Broadway shows and Mulaney and Rich hope they can do some theatrical recruitment with "All In."

"I think we are finding that there are some first-time theatergoers or new theater goers that are coming and we're thrilled by that," says Rich. "We hope that comedy fans will enjoy this experience and that it'll help convert them into theater fans and maybe they'll see this show and want to check out more."

## Variety

LOS ANGELES: Christopher Nolan is following his Oscar-winning "Oppenheimer" with a true epic: Homer's "The Odyssey." It will open in theaters on July 17, 2026, Universal Pictures said Monday.

Details remain scarce, but the studio teased that it will be a "mythic action epic shot across the world using brand new IMAX technology." It will also be the first time that an adaptation of Homer's saga will play on IMAX film screens.

Nolan has been an IMAX enthusiast for years, going back to "The Dark Knight,"

and has made his last three films exclusively using large format film and the highest resolution film cameras. For "Oppenheimer," the first black-and-white IMAX film stock was developed. Nolan hasn't said specifically what the new technology for "The Odyssey" will be, but earlier this month he told The Associated Press that they're in an intensive testing phase with IMAX to prepare for the new production.

"They have an incredible engineering staff, really brilliant minds doing extraordinary work," Nolan said. "It's wonderful to see innovation in the celluloid film arena still happening and happening at the highest level possible."

"The Odyssey" will be Nolan's second collaboration with Universal Pictures following "Oppenheimer," which earned nearly \$1 billion at the box office and won the filmmaker his first Oscars, including for best director and best picture. (AP)



Nolan

TOKYO: Survivors of the US atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki said receiving a Nobel Peace Prize has given them a fresh incentive to campaign for nuclear disarmament ahead of the 80th anniversary of the 1945 attacks.

"I felt like I needed to work even harder on what I had done so far," said Terumi Tanaka, who survived the atomic attack on Nagasaki on Aug. 9, 1945.

Tanaka, 92, was speaking at a press conference in Tokyo on Tuesday after returning from Oslo where he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize award on behalf of Nihon Hidankyo, the Japanese atomic bomb survivors' organization.

Next year marks "a significant milestone of 80 years" since the end of World War II, Tanaka, who is co-chair of Nihon Hidankyo, said.

"I believe it is important to focus on the next 10 years and strengthen the movement moving forward," he added. "I would like to lead a big movement of testimonials."

Tanaka, a retired materials engineering professor, said he wants Japan to take the leadership in nuclear disarmament.

"What else is there for Japan, the only country to have suffered atomic attacks, to do other than leading the nuclear disarmament?"

That's what Tanaka said he will ask Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who supports nuclear deterrence, when they are expected to meet in January. Japan, protected under the U.S. nuclear umbrella, has refused to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons despite repeated requests by survivors. (AP)

BEIJING: China's National Press and Publication Administration has approved the import of 13 new online games this week, bringing the total number of imported titles in 2024 to 110.

This marks the second consecutive year of growth, following 98 approvals in 2023 and 44 in 2022.

Among the latest entries are major titles, including "Monster Hunter Outlanders" from the globally acclaimed Monster Hunter franchise. (Xinhua)

## Action urged against e-smoking misconceptions among youth

## E-cigarettes make quitting smoking more difficult

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Dr. Khaled Al-Saleh, Chairman of the Kuwait Society for Combating Smoking and Cancer, emphasized the growing challenge posed by electronic smoking (e-cigarettes) compared to traditional smoking cessation efforts, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to Dr. Al-Saleh, patients at the society's smoking cessation clinic, particularly regular cigarette smokers, are increasingly motivated to quit due to widespread awareness of the health risks associated with smoking.

However, he noted a significantly lower percentage of electronic smoking users seeking help to quit.

This year, the clinic recorded 121 patients of all ages, with 12 percent being women. Tailored treatments and advisory sessions were provided, resulting in a 6 percent success rate among patients who quit smoking, with ongoing follow-ups to ensure sustained success.

Dr. Al-Saleh highlighted the alarming spread of e-cigarette use globally, especially among youth aged 13-15, with the World Health Organization estimating that up to 37 million children in this age group use tobacco products.

He pointed out that e-cigarette users are less likely to seek cessation support due to widespread misconceptions fueled by media

portrayals of e-cigarettes as a healthier alternative.

The association warned against the belief that e-cigarettes are a safe alternative, citing research published on PUBMED that links e-cigarette use to an increase in sudden deaths. While the exact cause remains uncertain, the findings underscore the serious risks associated with electronic smoking.

Dr. Al-Saleh urged greater public awareness and regulatory oversight to address the rising trend of e-smoking, particularly among young people and emphasized the need to dispel misconceptions about its safety.



Dr. Khaled Al-Saleh



This photo taken on Dec. 2, 2023 shows herbal tea drinks at a tea shop in Kunming, capital of southwest China's Yunnan Province. (Xinhua)

## Natural remedies

## Herbal medicinal teas make tea time healthier than ever

KUNMING, Dec 25, (Xinhua): A number of Chinese hospitals have found their edge in the country's growing health drinks market by prescribing herbal formulas that target minor symptoms, from calming nerves and aiding sleep to promoting healthy hair.

Struggling with insomnia, Guo Xiaofan, 26, who is a resident of Kunming, capital of southwest China's Yunnan Province, recently turned to an online consultation platform of a traditional Chinese medicine hospital, where she was prescribed herbal tea.

Guo consumed the herbal tea by brewing the dried herbs at home and found it to be a great alternative to her habit of drinking milk tea. "The first sip tasted a bit strange, but as I continued drinking, it actually tasted quite good," she said.

This herbal tea is based on a well-known Chinese medicine formula designed to treat symptoms of insomnia and neurasthenia. The tea includes ingredients such as sautéed jujube kernel, dried lily, poria, and albizia bark.

The Yunnan Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital has recently launched five herbal medicine formulas for oral consumption. On the first day of the market release, 10,000 doses were sold.

## Consumption

Wan Xixi, deputy director of the hospital's medical administration department, said that these formulas are crafted based on prescriptions from renowned traditional Chinese medicine practitioners.

Each dose of herbs is individually packaged and can be brewed or boiled for easy consumption at home. "These bags of dried herbs are not available for purchase on the market. To obtain them, individuals must consult a doctor for a prescription, as they are tailored to specific syndrome differentiation," Wan explained.

In recent years, an increasing number of health-conscious young people have developed a strong interest in such medicinal herbal tea drinks.

According to a consumer behavior survey on the Chinese herbal tea drink

industry conducted by data analysis provider iiMedia Research earlier this year, more consumers are paying attention to and trying herbal drinks, with purchase intentions steadily rising.

In addition to their health benefits, prescription herbs for drinking are generally more affordable than tea beverages, which further contributes to the growing market share of herbal drinks.

## Insurance

A white-collar worker surnamed Huang from Hangzhou, capital of east China's Zhejiang Province, recently purchased several types of herbal remedies for drinking through the online platform of Zhejiang Provincial People's Hospital.

"I bought five doses of each type. With medical insurance coverage, the total bill came to less than 100 yuan (about 13.9 U.S. dollars), which I think is very reasonable. After drinking, I felt the effects were quite good," he said.

Many Chinese hospitals, especially traditional Chinese medicine hospitals, have become keen on promoting their special herbal tea formulas, some of which change seasonally. For example, in summer, they focus on formulas of smoked plum tea for relieving summer heat, and in winter, herbal tea formulas for clearing throat get more popular.

In addition to hospitals, many pharmacies, including the time-honored traditional Chinese medicine brand Beijing Tong Ren Tang, have seen a boost in herbal tea sales.

The pharmacies clearly remind buyers that, while some herbs are available in drink form and others, like Chinese yam and coix seed, which can be consumed as food, these herbal formulas are still considered medicine. Therefore, they should be taken under proper medical supervision.

According to the data from iiMedia Research, the Chinese herbal drinks market reached a size of 41.16 billion yuan in 2023 and is expected to surpass 100 billion yuan in 2028.

## Ecosystems and human health at risk

## Laundry top source of microplastic pollution, here is how to reduce it

By Judith Weis

Rutgers University - Newark

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



Microplastics are turning up everywhere, from remote mountain tops to deep ocean trenches. They also are in many animals, including humans.

The most common microplastics in the environment are microfibrils - plastic fragments shaped like tiny threads or filaments. Microfibrils come from many sources, including cigarette butts, fishing nets and ropes, but the biggest source is synthetic fabrics, which constantly shed them.

Textiles shed microfibrils while they are manufactured, worn and disposed of, but especially when they are washed. A single wash load can release several million microfibrils. Many factors affect how many fibers are released, including fabric type, mechanical action, detergents, temperature and the duration of the wash cycle.

My research focuses on coastal ecology and water pollution, including work in New York and New Jersey marshes and estuaries that are heavily affected by human activities. Here are some things to know about reducing microplastic pollution from your washing machine.

Once garments release microfibrils in washing machines, the fibers enter the wastewater stream, which generally goes to a wastewater treatment plant. Advanced treatment plants can remove up to 99% of microfibrils from water. But since a single laundry load can produce millions of fibers, treated water discharged from the plant still contains a huge number of them.

Microfibrils that are removed during treatment end up in sewage sludge - a

mix of solid materials that is processed to remove pathogens. In many cases, treated sewage sludge is applied to soil as a fertilizer. This allows microfibrils to enter air and soil, and to be transferred to soil organisms and up the terrestrial food web or taken up by crops.

Microplastics that wash into rivers, lakes and bays can have many harmful effects. They may be consumed by fish and other aquatic animals, affecting their biochemistry, physiology, reproduction, development or behavior. These microplastics contain chemical additives, including substances like phthalates and bisphenol A that can leach out and may have health effects in humans and animals, including effects on the endocrine system.

## Chemicals

Textile microfibrils also contain additional chemicals that have been shown to be toxic, such as fabric dyes, anti-wrinkle agents and flame retardants. In addition, contaminants that are present in the water, such as metals and pesticides, can stick to microplastic particles, turning them into a veritable cocktail of contaminants that may be transferred to animals that eat them.

Not all fabrics shed microfibrils at the same rate. A loosely woven fabric that feels fluffy or fuzzy, such as fleece, sheds more than a tightly woven one. While garments made of natural fibers, such as cotton and wool, would appear to be a solution, unfortunately they also shed microfibrils that can pick up pollutants in the environment.

Some textile scientists and manufacturers are developing fabrics that shed less than existing ones, thanks to features such as longer fibers and coatings to reduce shedding. Meanwhile, here are some ways to reduce microfibril shedding from your laundry:

■ Do laundry less often. Washing full loads instead of partial loads reduces

release of microfibrils because garments are exposed to less friction during the wash cycle.

■ Use cold water, which releases fewer microfibrils than hot water.

■ Use less detergent, which increases microfibril release.

■ Use a front-loading washing machine, whose tumbling action produces less microfibril release.

■ Dry laundry on a clothesline. Running clothes in dryers releases additional microfibrils into the air from the dryer vent.

Several types of products collect microfibrils in the washer before they are released with wastewater. Some are laundry bags made of woven monofilament, a single-polyamide filament that does not disintegrate into fibers. Laundry is washed while enclosed in the bag, which traps microfibrils that the garments release. A study of one such product, Guppyfriend, found that it collected about one-third of released microfibrils.

Another device, the Cora Ball, is a plastic ball with spines topped with soft plastic discs that capture microfibrils. It reduces microfibrils by about 25% to 30%, but may not be suitable for loose knits because it can snag on threads and damage clothing.

Several brands of external filters are available that can be retrofitted onto existing washing machines. External filters can remove up to 90% of microfibrils from rinse water. Their average cost is about US\$150. Owners need to clean the filters periodically and dispose of the collected microfibrils with other solid waste, not down the drain, which would put them back into the wastewater stream.

In a 2021 study, researchers installed washing machine filters in 97 homes in a town in Ontario, Canada, which represented about 10% of the households in the community. (AP)

## Malaria cases

## Yemen struggles with cholera crisis

ADEN, Yemen, Dec. 25, (Xinhua): The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that Yemen bears the highest burden of cholera globally.

In a statement, the WHO reported that as of Dec. 1, Yemen had recorded 249,900 suspected cholera cases and 861 associated deaths in 2024 alone, representing 35 percent of the global cholera burden and 18 percent of reported global fatalities from the disease.

The latest figures reveal a significant year-on-year surge, with the number of cases and deaths reported in November 2024 increasing by 37 percent and 27 percent, respectively, compared to the same period in 2023, the WHO said.

"The outbreak of waterborne diseases like cholera and acute watery diarrhea imposes an additional burden on an already stressed health system facing multiple disease outbreaks," WHO representative and head of mission in Yemen, Arturo Pesigan, was quoted as saying.

Pesigan emphasized that the lack of safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation, and poor access to timely medical treatment are exacerbating the crisis.

Persistent cholera transmission has plagued Yemen for years, with the country experiencing the largest recorded cholera outbreak in recent history from 2017 to 2020, according to the WHO.



**Meningococcal disease:** Mongolia's National Center for Communicable Diseases (NCCD) confirmed on Wednesday an outbreak of meningococcal disease, a potentially life-threatening infection.

Meningococcal infections have been reported among young children in the country recently, the NCCD said, urging parents and guardians to take precautions to protect their children from the disease.

Meningococcal disease is caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis* and can lead to severe infections in the brain's protective linings, the blood, or both. If untreated, the infection can have a high mortality rate, but it is vaccine-preventable.



**Malaria:** Ethiopia has reported 8.4 million malaria cases since the beginning of this year, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

"Malaria continues to pose a public health risk in Ethiopia, (reaching) an epidemic proportion with an average of more than 300,000 malaria cases reported weekly across the country," the WHO said in an Ethiopia Health Cluster Bulletin report released late Monday.

It said since the beginning of 2024, more than 8.4 million malaria cases have been reported across the country, making it the highest-ever number of cases reported within a year.

## Symbol of power

## Biden declares bald eagle US national bird

WASHINGTON, Dec 25, (AP): The bald eagle, a symbol of the power and strength of the United States for more than 240 years, earned an overdue honor on Tuesday: It officially became the country's national bird.

President Joe Biden signed into law legislation sent to him by Congress that amends the United States Code to correct what had long gone unnoticed and designate the bald eagle - familiar to many because of its white head, yellow beak and brown body - as the national bird.

The bald eagle has appeared on the Great Seal of the United States, which



Uncle Sam, a 25-year-old bald eagle, sits on his perch in front of a US flag. (AP)

is used in official documents, since 1782, when the design was finalized.

The seal is made up of the eagle, an olive branch, arrows, a flag-like shield, the motto "E Pluribus Unum" and a constellation of stars.

Congress that same year designated the bald eagle as the national emblem, and its image appears in a host of places, ranging from documents and the presidential flag to military insignia and US currency, according to USA.gov.

But it had never been officially designated to be what many had just assumed it was - the national bird.

The bald eagle is indigenous to North America.

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## Proteas need to win one of its remaining two test matches

# South Africa aims to seal place in WTC final in test series against Pakistan

CENTURION, South Africa, Dec 25, (AP) — South Africa will be eyeing a place in the World Test Championship final with an all-seam attack against Pakistan in the first test, starting Thursday.

The Proteas need to win one of its remaining two test matches in this WTC cycle to guarantee a place at the Lord's final next year and captain Temba Bavuma believes expectations have risen in his team to do well in the two-test series.

"There'll be pressure that comes with that," Bavuma said. "But to be honest with you, we're coming into the series to win the series 2-0. We understand that for us to do that, there's certain things that we need to do as a team: keep things simple, keep doing the small things right, and allow the results to take care of itself."

South Africa has included four fast bowlers in the lineup with Corbin Bosch, who consistently bowls above 140 kph, set to play his first test at his hometown.

Seasoned fast bowlers Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen will team up with Dane Paterson and Bosch to challenge Pakistan's batters on an expected pacey Centurion pitch where fast bowlers have a clear advantage over the last six years, picking up 227 wickets with spinners dismissing only 16 batters.

Heading into the tests, South Africa's top-order batters did struggle against Pakistan in a rare 3-0 ODI whitewash with Tony de Zorzi, Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs all failing to read the offspin bowling of Salman Ali Agha in the opening game of the series.

"Whether it's easy, whether it's hard, we've got to find a way to do it," Bavuma said. "Whatever, I don't know, trauma that was there ... guys will have to deal with it."

Pakistan has long been struggling in test matches in South

Africa, losing 12 and winning just two of the 15 test matches since it first toured the country in 1995. Pakistan's below-par show in South Africa includes its lowest test score of 49 at the Wanderers in 2013.

Pakistan is lying at No. 7 in the WTC points table and Aaqib Javed is its fourth head coach in this WTC cycle with Mickey Arthur and Mohammad Hafeez quitting after one series. Jason Gillespie resigned just two weeks before Thursday's test.

Gillespie, who was hired by the Pakistan Cricket Board in April, had a horror start to his two-year contract when Bangladesh swept Pakistan in Pakistan 2-0 in the test series before England won the first test at Multan.

Gillespie was removed from the selection panel and Javed masterminded Pakistan's back-to-back wins against England on two engineered spinning pitches where Noman Ali and Sajid Khan bagged 39 wickets.

But Pakistan has brought in only Noman Ali for the two-test series in South Africa and is still contemplating whether to follow South Africa and go with an all-out pace attack.

Shaheen Shah Afridi, who played in the preceding white-ball series in South Africa, has been surprisingly left out for the test matches.

Naseem Shah and Babar Azam return to the test fold after missing the last two home tests against England while selectors have recalled seamer Mohammad Abbas after three years with the left-arm seam option of Mir Hamza in the squad.

Abbas took 90 wickets in 25 test matches from 2017 to 21 before he ran out of selectors' favor despite his consistent performances for Hampshire in England and in domestic first-class cricket.



Pakistan's Saim Ayub plays a high ball during the third International cricket match between South Africa and Pakistan, at the Wanderers stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa. (AP)

# Sharma urges Indian bowlers to back Bumrah ahead of test

Australia gets a boost: Head fit for Boxing Day showdown

MELBOURNE, Australia, Dec 25, (AP) — India captain Rohit Sharma wants his team's other bowlers to "step up" and help pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah, who has been the standout star of the series with Australia.

Ahead of the start of Thursday's Melbourne Cricket Ground test and with the five-match series level at 1-1 after the rainy draw at Brisbane, Bumrah has taken 21 wickets at an average of 10.90, while the rest of the Indian bowlers have only five more wickets among them at a higher rate - 26 wickets at 36.81.

"Bumrah is certainly making the most of it. (Mohammed) Siraj and the other guys who are bowling around him obviously know they need to step up to get the job done as well," said Sharma.

"They're trying really hard. They've been a little unlucky as well, a lot of plays and misses, certain opportunities have gone down as well - those things can happen."

Rohit said he was "fine" after taking a knock to his knee while batting in the MCG nets on Sunday, but refused to guarantee he would remain at the No. 6 spot from where he has failed to pass 10 in this series.

He also suggested Boxing Day's hot weather forecast for Melbourne - up to 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) could encourage India to pick two spinners, despite veteran Ravichandran Ashwin retiring and flying back to Chennai after the Gabba test in Brisbane.

Sharma praised Bumrah's work ethic.



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

"The impact that he's had on the series so far is massive," Sharma said. "I hope he continues to do that because these (next) two games are very important for us. How he operates is very plain and simple. He has so much belief in his own skill set that there's not much discussion we need to have with him - it makes it easy for me."

Ravindra Jadeja has failed to take a wicket in 23 overs. Ashwin's retirement means Washington Sundar shapes as the other spin option, and Tanush Kotian has been added to their touring party as a backup spinning allrounder.

In the Australian camp, run-maker Travis Head has been passed fit to play and will be joined by MCG hero



India's Jasprit Bumrah celebrates the wicket of Australia's Marnus Labuschagne during play on day five of the third cricket test between India and Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane, Australia. (AP)

Scott Boland, who took six wickets for seven runs on his test debut at the MCG in the 2021-22 Ashes series.

Captain Pat Cummins confirmed Wednesday that his team would make two changes for the fourth test, with 19-year-old Sam Konstas to debut - replacing Nathan McSweeney - and Boland coming in for the injured Josh Hazlewood.

The 30-year-old Head has been strong, hitting centuries in Adelaide and Brisbane. Head has made 409 runs at an average of 81.80 across the first three tests, dominating India even as the rest of Australia's batters have faced significant issues against Bumrah. The fifth and final test is scheduled to start on Jan. 3 at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

## 'Khaleeji Zain 26' success is a result of dedicated leadership

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Faisal Maqsid, Chairman of the Kuwait School Sports Federation and Higher Education, emphasized Kuwait's outstanding success in organizing the "Khaleeji Zain 26". During his visit to the media center, he expressed his pride, stating, "What we have witnessed on the ground is truly heartwarming. We are proud to have experts responsible for managing this sports media affair."

Maqsid highlighted the significance of the tournament, both for Kuwait and the broader Gulf and Arab regions, attributing its success to the guidance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, the wise government, and the dedicated follow-up of Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and Chairman of the Supreme Organizing Committee, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi. He pointed out that these efforts have turned vision into reality, evident in the exceptional organization, the presence of skilled media professionals, and the smooth broadcast of the tournament's events, which bring together Gulf nations on the land of friendship and peace.



Faisal Maqsid

Maqsid further remarked, "We in Kuwait look forward to more successes and accomplishments. The tournament was a success even before its start, thanks to excellent organization, a warm reception, and the provision of all necessary requirements for the participating delegations, media professionals, and journalists. Their efforts have been key in broadcasting this important Gulf sporting event across various media platforms, with updates available in Kuwaiti, Gulf, and Arab newspapers and channels."

## Oscar returns to Sao Paulo

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 25, (Xinhua) — Sao Paulo has completed the signing of former Chelsea midfielder Oscar on a free transfer, the Brazilian Serie A club said on Tuesday.

The 33-year-old agreed to a three-year contract with the club that launched his career after parting ways with Chinese Super League (CSL) club Shanghai Port earlier this month.

"I'm happy to be back in Brazil and to be able to play for Sao Paulo, which is the club where I started, where I got my foundation and where I came to prominence," Oscar told Sao Paulo's official website.

"I am happy about coming back, as is my family. I'm grateful for the affection I have received on social media in the last few days and I will do my best to achieve great things together." Oscar, who completed a medical on Monday, is expected to join his new teammates on a pre-season training camp in the United States in the second week of January 2025.

Sao Paulo president Julio Casares said Oscar had been a long-time target of the club.

"Oscar is a player who needs no introduction," Casares said. "He has

a technical quality that is hard to find on the market. I personally committed myself to this negotiation, as I had been talking to him about this possibility for over six months." Earlier, Oscar took to social media to express gratitude for his time in China.

"Thank you for these eight unforgettable years. Thank you for everything," he said.

Oscar made 248 appearances across all competitions for Shanghai Port following his 2017 arrival from Chelsea. He scored 77 goals and provided 141 assists during his time in China, helping Shanghai Port to three CSL titles.

He enjoyed one of his best seasons in 2024 with 14 goals and 24 assists in the top flight as Shanghai Port secured the title by finishing one point ahead of second-placed Shanghai Shenhua.

Oscar began his professional career at Sao Paulo in 2008 and moved to Internacional in 2010 before his high-profile transfer to Chelsea two years later. He has been capped 48 times for Brazil and was a member of Luiz Felipe Scolari's side that won the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup on home soil.

## Demand for Khaleeji Zain 26 tickets sky high after Kuwait win



Large crowd came out for tickets.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The demand for tickets to watch Khaleeji Zain 26 matches has gone through the roof following Kuwait's dramatic 2-1 win over UAE on Tuesday night.

The official Hayakom app, through which tickets can be bought, has been swamped with fans looking to secure tickets for the next encounter

against Qatar on Friday, and crowds have been queuing at the box offices in Avenues (pictured) and 360 Malls. Fans are also snapping up tickets for the semi-finals and final, with all matches enjoying increased demand from both Kuwaitis and fans from other Gulf countries.

Nearly 49,000 fans packed into the Jaber Al-Ah-

mad International Stadium to watch Moath Alenzi score a late winner to put Kuwait equal top of Group A on four points with Oman, who also won 2-1 over Qatar on the same night.

It sets up an intriguing final round of Group A matches with Kuwait only needing a draw against Qatar to secure a place in the semi-finals.

## Best of the Rest

**Fernandez rejoins Cerro Porteno:** Paraguay international goalkeeper Gatito Fernandez has returned to Cerro Porteno on a free transfer, the Asuncion-based club said on Tuesday.

The 36-year-old, who began his professional career at Cerro Porteno in 2007, agreed to a one-year deal after parting ways with Brazil's Botafogo earlier this month.

"Welcome home, Gatito," the Paraguayan top-flight side said in a brief statement on social media.

Fernandez made 218 appearances for Botafogo following his 2017 move from its Brazilian Serie A rival Figueirense.

He has been capped 24 times for Paraguay's national team and was an overage player for his country at this year's Olympic Games in Paris. (Xinhua)

**Rafinha returns to Coritiba:** Former Brazil international defender Rafinha has agreed to rejoin his original club Coritiba on a free transfer, the Brazilian Serie B outfit said on Tuesday.

The 39-year-old signed a one-year contract with the club that launched his professional career after parting ways with Sao Paulo earlier this month.

"I'm here to let you know that I could never fail to fulfill the promise I made when I left almost 20 years ago," Rafinha said in a video published on social media.

"I departed as a kid and today I'm back to help Coritiba return to where it belongs." Rafinha left Coritiba in 2005 to join Germany's Schalke and the right-back has since had spells at Genoa, Bayern Munich and Flamengo, among other clubs. He has been capped four times for Brazil's national team. (Xinhua)

Bigger, bolder, and more thrilling than ever before

# ALSAYER & Toyota launch GR Yaris Cup season 2



KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Building on the momentum of last year's unforgettable racing after an incredibly successful inaugural season, Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons Est Co. has announced the launch of Gazoo Racing (GR) Yaris Cup season 2 supported by Toyota Motor Corporation in association with Kuwait Motor Town and Suffix Sports.

The opening ceremony was attended by Faisal Bader Al Sayer Chairman, Martin Aherne Senior Business Director Toyota Group Sales, Bader Faisal Al Sayer Senior Manager Toyota Marketing, Theo Kruger General Manager of Toyota retail sales, Hamad Al Fouzan Deputy General Manager product planning and

sales administration, Group Business Heads and Senior Managers, representatives from the sponsoring brands in the presence of members of the press and media.

According to Martin Aherne: "When we launched the first season of the championship, our aim was to contribute to the development of motorsport in the region, so I am delighted to see the great participation this year from racers and sponsors, and great preparations from the organizers."

"This mega event has the advantage of being organized by one manufacturer and distributor, Toyota and AL-Sayer. I would like to note that this championship has been officially accredited by the Federation Internationale de automobile

(FIA), which is responsible for motor championships and races around the world."

Bader Faisal Al Sayer said: "We are here today to conduct the draw to select the contestants and nominate them for the list of sponsors. We are sure that this year's championship will be more successful and advanced with 12 race cars. The second season of this tournament will take place from December 2024 to April 2025."

Embarking on a historic journey for the development of motorsport in the State of Kuwait and encourage young and affluent drivers to come forward and participate in unique events, ALSAYER had successfully concluded the first season in March

2024. For season 2 the bar is raised with even more intense competition, enhanced features, and an expanded lineup of talented drivers.

This year, the event features a larger group of distinguished sponsors who share our vision and passion for achieving success in addition to a wider range of talented drivers who will play a crucial role. The sponsors and drivers are not just part of the event; they are key partners in the suc-

cess of Season 2.

The inaugural race of the GR was held on 13th December 2024 at Kuwait Motor Town, visitors were treated to a memorable experience and thrilling atmosphere at the venue. The remaining four rounds are scheduled as below:

- Round 2 – 8th to 11th of January 2025
- Round 3 – 14th and 15th of February 2025
- Round 4 – 14th and 15th of March 2025

■ Round 5 – 11th and 12th of April 2025

The Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) certified one-make race event initiated by an automotive distributor in the region will feature 19 racing drivers backed by a strong track record of achievements in the field of motorsports.

Each car features adjustable race shocks, race exhaust, race brake pads with braided lines, and 18-inch alloy wheels, fitted with Yokohama A050 tires. Inside is equipped with race logger to log the car's performance data so drivers can identify areas of improvement. The driver's safety environment is all race car, with a Recaro pole position car race seat, six-point safety harness,

Race fire suppression system and race steering wheel all fitted inside an FIA six-point roll cage. Control parts ensure the championship remains competitive and fair. Only officially built GR Yaris cars are eligible for the championship.

GR Yaris is true sports car developed by experts at the Toyota Gazoo Racing World Rally Team and the 12 units which are part of the GR Yaris Cup Season 2 are being race prepared under FIA regulations, in-house with skill and precision by service technicians at Al Sayer Ahmadi Performance. Carefully selected race specific components are added to the impressive standard specification to create a car at home circuit in the cutthroat environment of a one-make competition.

GR YARIS SPECIFICATIONS		
Engine	Engine	In-Line 3-Cylinder Intercooler
	Type	G16E-GTS (10.5:1 compression ratio) Turbo boost is set between 1.4 and 1.81 bar
	Displacement	1,618cc
	Maximum Output (KW/PS)	220 (272)
	Maximum Torque (KW/PS)	370(37.7) / 3,000-4,600
Transmission	Transmission	6-Speed manual transmission (MT)
	Drive system	Four-Wheel drive



Top and above photos from the launch of ALSAYER & Toyota GR Yaris Cup season 2



(Left to Right): ALSAYER & Toyota GR Yaris Cup season 2 cars.



Players celebrate after their vital win over UAE in Khaleeji Zain 26 in Kuwait.

# Sports

## Resilient Kuwait boosts qualification chances



KFA Chairman Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef celebrates Kuwait winning goal.



A Kuwait player dribbles past an opponent during Kuwait and UAE match.

### Blues celebrate victory over UAE; Group A battle heats up

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: In a dramatic night of Khaleeji Zain 26 action, Kuwait came from a goal down to beat 10-man UAE, 2-1, and Oman stunned Qatar to place Group A on a knife-edge going into Friday's third and final group games.**

At the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, UAE silenced the 48,621 crowd after just five minutes when the lively Caio Canedo headed home from point-blank range following great work from Harib Abdalla.

But Kuwait had their fans back on their feet in the 16th minute when Mohamed Daham took advantage of sloppy defending to burst through and finish in style to level the scores.

And in a dramatic finish to the game, UAE had Kouame Autonne dismissed for his second yellow card in the 85th minute and, just two minutes later, another defensive lapse was pounced on by substitute Moath Alenezi to slide into the empty net and send the crowd into raptures.

In the opening match of the night, Oman came from a goal down to stun 2022 World Cup hosts, Qatar, 2-1 at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium.

Qatar flew out of the blocks to take the lead after just two minutes through striker Almoez Ali's 60th goal for his country. But Oman struck back in the 20th minute when Issam Al-Sabhi converted from the penalty spot to make it all square at the break.

Then Al-Sabhi struck again to put the 2023 finalists in front seven minutes into the second half when he ghosted into the back post unmarked to fire home a low

cross.

Qatar pushed hard for an equalizer but Oman's disciplined defence held firm for a memorable victory to go top of Group A, ahead of the third and final Group A games on Friday night.

Kuwait its hard-fought victory over the UAE by expressing gratitude to its dedicated fans.

Player Sultan Al-Anzi acknowledged the difficulty of the match, noting the strength of its opponent. "The match was challenging, especially since the UAE team includes many distinguished players. We secured the win through great focus and a strong mental approach," he said.

Despite the triumph, Al-Anzi emphasized the importance of maintaining focus. "We will not over-celebrate this win. A crucial match against Qatar is ahead, and we need to direct all our attention there. As a team, we are taking the tournament step by step, hoping to go far," he added.

Defender Khaled Mohammed Ibrahim attributed the victory to relentless effort and high spirits that endured until the final whistle. "We overcame a strong, favored UAE team filled with professionals thanks to our determination and continuous giving," he said.

Ibrahim expressed gratitude to Kuwaiti fans, describing their support as pivotal. "Khaleeji Zain 26 holds immense significance for us, given Kuwait's proud history in the Gulf Championship. Now, we've turned the page on this win and are fully focused on Qatar, the most critical match so far," he remarked. Ibrahim assured fans that the team will fight hard, adding, "Victory is the best response to skeptics, showcasing the Kuwaiti player's fighting spirit and determination."

Eid Al-Rashidi highlighted the importance of the victory and credited the team's

discipline and focus. "The win was a result of exploiting the UAE's mistakes and our consistent efforts," he said, adding that the team has yet to secure a semi-final spot.

"Our ambition extends beyond a single victory. Facing Qatar requires maximum focus, and we are determined to bring joy to our fans by aiming for the championship title," Al-Rashidi stated.

For Moaz Al-Aseima, Gulf Zain 26 marks an unforgettable milestone as his first Gulf Cup appearance. "Scoring the winning goal against the UAE is indescribable. I had full confidence in my teammates, and they delivered," he shared.

Al-Aseima stressed the importance of focusing on the Qatar match and expressed hope for continued fan support. He also extended heartfelt gratitude to his parents, calling them the cornerstone of his success.

Fawaz Ayed credited the team's determination and the fans' unwavering support for the victory. "We approached the match with a clear resolve to win and please our fans, which have been incredible since day one of the tournament," he said.

Looking ahead, Ayed emphasized the necessity of maintaining focus against Qatar. "The team hasn't qualified yet, so we must approach this match with the same determination. Step by step, we aim to build on our performance," he added.

Midfielder Ahmed Al-Dhafiri expressed gratitude to the team's technical and administrative staff for their support. Reflecting on the tournament's start, he said, "We weren't successful against Oman, but we managed to dedicate this victory over the UAE to our loyal fans."

As the players shift their attention to the decisive match against Qatar, their collective determination and the fans' encouragement remain central to their aspirations for the tournament.

### Bashar praises Kuwait fighting spirit

## Players awarded \$4,000 each after defeating UAE

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Sports bring joy, and football delivers it in the most captivating way. The sports community was filled with immense joy after Kuwait 2-1 win over the UAE in the second round of Group One in the "Khaleeji Zain 26". This win pushed its points tally to 4, placing it at the top of the standings. The Omani team followed closely in second place, after defeating Qatar 2-1 in the same group.

The excitement wasn't just because the team defeated one of the tournament's top contenders in the preliminary round, nor was it solely because it secured its first win after 10 international matches. The true source of joy lay in the remarkable spirit demonstrated by the players, reaffirming their commitment to their loyal fans with the promise that "a team with history will undoubtedly return."

To celebrate the victory over the UAE, the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Football Association awarded each player \$4,000. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef, Chairman of the Board, personally presented the players with \$1,000 each, and the Kuwait Shopping Festival "Ya Hala" contributed a reward of 500



Bashar Abdullah – Director General of the Public Authority for Sports

dinars to each player as well.

Bashar Abdullah, Director General of the Public Authority for Sports, congratulated the Kuwaiti team on its important victory over the UAE. He praised the players' fighting spirit and their ability to secure their first win in the tournament. He said, "This victory against the strong Emirati team should

serve as a turning point for the team, marking the start of its return to its rightful place among the Gulf nations."

Bashar expressed admiration for the performance, particularly its resilience in overcoming a one-goal deficit to win 2-1, which significantly enhanced its chances of progressing to the next

round. He hopes for further success in the upcoming match against Qatar on Friday, which could take it to the semi-finals. He added that Kuwait's team, with its wealth of experience in Gulf Cup participation, has previously clinched the title even when not favored, proving that there are no fixed formulas for determining the champion.

Bashar also emphasized the role of the Gulf Cup in fostering stronger relationships between officials, players, and fans from all nations. Reflecting on his own participation in five Gulf Cup tournaments, he noted the lasting friendships formed throughout the years. "The positive impact of the Gulf Cup goes beyond just advancing Gulf football; it strengthens the sense of family and unity among the peoples of the region," he concluded.

He acknowledged the difficulty of predicting the champion in this edition of the tournament, despite the insights gained from watching the 2026 World Cup qualifiers. "The Gulf Cup champion is born during the tournament," Bashar said, "and I sincerely hope that this title will belong to the Blues."

### Head of the Omani delegation lauds Kuwait's organization of Gulf Zain 26



The Vice President of the Oman Football Association, Mohsen Al-Masroori.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: The Vice President of the Oman Football Association, Mohsen Al-Masroori, predicted that the third round of the "Khaleeji Zain 26" would bring even more excitement, following a notable improvement in performance during the second round. This round saw Oman defeat Qatar 2-1 and Kuwait triumph over the UAE with the same score.

Al-Masroori explained, "Teams typically begin the tournament cautiously, as they don't want to lose in the opening match. However, as the tournament progresses, the level of play improves." He highlighted that the third and final round of the first group would be crucial, as all four teams still have a chance to qualify, leaving no room for error.

He further added that while Kuwait and Oman currently have the advantage with four points, nothing has been decided yet, as the final round remains critical. "Each match has its own circumstances, and small details can affect the outcome," Al-Masroori noted.

Looking ahead, Al-Masroori ex-

pressed hope that "Khaleeji Zain 26" would mark the beginning of a positive shift for Omani football, which has faced a "period of decline" over the past year. He also apologized to fans and media who "expect to see their national team perform at its best."

Al-Masroori reaffirmed that Oman remains a strong contender for the title, citing its runner-up finish in the last edition and consistent semi-final appearances since the introduction of the two-group system.

The head of the Omani delegation also praised the tournament's organization, the opening ceremony, and the overall atmosphere, stating, "Kuwait has always set the standard for excellence and success in every event." He concluded by acknowledging the warm, brotherly environment and the kindness of the Kuwaiti people, saying, "The hospitality and goodwill we experience reflect the true nature of the Kuwaiti people." "The hospitality and goodwill we experience reflect the true nature of the Kuwaiti people."

### Players urged to keep their celebrations in check

## Pizzi thrilled to bring joy to the Kuwaiti people

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 25: Kuwait's head coach, Juan Antonio Pizzi, expressed his delight after his team's victory over the Emirates, commending the players' efforts in a post-match press conference.

"I am very proud of the fighting spirit, balanced performance, and exceptional effort displayed by the players throughout the match," said the Argentine coach.

Pizzi highlighted the promising talent within the Kuwaiti squad, emphasizing the importance of nurturing and supporting young players to secure the future of Kuwaiti football. "We have young players with remarkable skills who represent the future of Kuwaiti football. It is our responsibility to preserve, support, and guide them to achieve their full potential," he added.

Expressing gratitude to fans, Pizzi said he was thrilled to bring joy to the Kuwaiti people after defeating a strong opponent like the Emirates. "I thank the fans for their incredible support. We will now shift our focus to preparing for the critical match against Qatar to continue our journey in the tournament and qualify for the semi-finals."

Pizzi assured fans of his ongoing commitment to hard work and continuous improvement, pledging to deliver the best results for Kuwait.

Saud Al-Mujammed, the manager of Kuwait's national team, praised the players for their determination and resilience during the match.

"The players showed an unwavering fighting spirit from the first whistle to the final minute.



Pizzi rejoicing at the victory during the press conference.

Their determination shone brightest when they came back from a goal down against a formidable opponent with a roster full of professional players, while our heroes are primarily local talents," Al-Mujammed noted.

He acknowledged the challenges inherent in football, stressing that victory demands self-confidence, determination, and belief in achieving goals—all of which the Kuwaiti team demonstrated. Al-Mujammed extended gratitude to the loyal fans for their unwavering support, whether in the stands or from afar.

Looking ahead, Al-Mujammed urged players to keep their celebrations in check and remain focused on the upcoming clash against Qatar, the reigning Asian Cup champions. "Everyone still has a chance to qualify for the semi-finals, and the match against Qatar will be tough," he said.

Concluding his remarks, Al-Mujammed emphasized that the real triumph was the joy shared by Kuwaiti fans, stating, "The joy of our audience is the greatest victory, and we will continue working with the same determination to achieve our goals."