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## Crown Prince meets with foreign ministers of GCC nations



HH the Crown Prince receives GCC foreign ministers.

Crown Prince Diwan photo

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received on Thursday at Bayan Palace Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal Bin Farhan Al-Saud, Bahraini Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Abdullah Al-Zayani, Omani Minister of Foreign Affairs Bader Al-Busaidi, Minister of State at UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Khalifa Al-Marar and Qatar's Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr. Mohammad Al-Khulaifi.

The meeting was held on the occasion of the Ministerial Council of the Arabian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) held in Kuwait.

Director of the Crown Prince Office Jamal Al-Theyab, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs at His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan Mazen Al-Issa, Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocol Affairs Minister Plenipotentiary Abdulmohsen Al-Zaid attended the meeting.

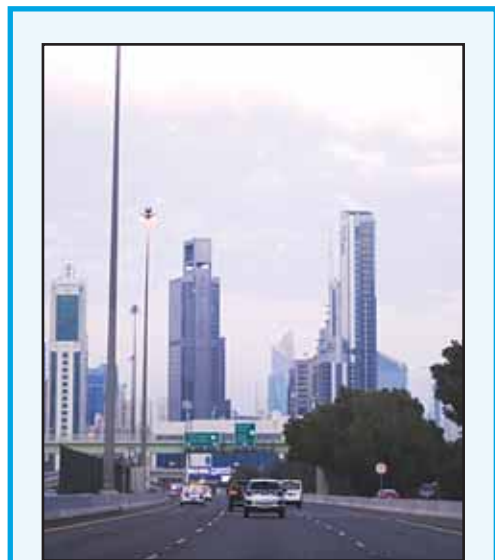


Photo by Rezk Tawfiq

Cars gracefully weave through the streets en route to Kuwait City, as the pleasant Thursday weather sets the perfect backdrop for commuters embarking on their daily journeys.

### Kuwait prepares for rainy weekend twist

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): The Kuwait Meteorological Department has forecasted that the weather in the country over the weekend will be moderate to warm during the day and cold at night. There is a chance of scattered rain, which may be thundery at times, starting Friday evening and continuing at intervals until Saturday morning.

Dharar Al-Ali, the Director of the Meteorological Department, informed KUNA that Kuwait is currently experiencing an extension of a low-pressure system accompanied by a moderate air mass. This will bring variable winds of light speed, gradually shifting to light to moderate southeasterly winds, which may occasionally become active.

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# Kuwait affirms GCC unified stance on Syria sovereignty

GCC reasserts support for Lebanon

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): President of the current session of the GCC Ministerial Council and Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya affirmed the Gulf countries unified stance on Syria's independence and sovereignty, refusing any form of foreign interference.

In his speech at the council's 46th extraordinary meeting on the situation in Lebanon and Syria in Kuwait on Thursday, Al-Yahya called on all factions to resume the political process to achieve peace and stability for the Syrian people.

He affirmed the GCC's full support for the UNSC Resolution number 2254 and the efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen. He also underlined the need to protect refugees and displaced Syrians and allow their safe return to their homes.

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GCC Foreign Ministers and Secretary-General gather for a group photo during the 46th extraordinary meeting held in Kuwait on Thursday, focusing on the critical situation in Lebanon and Syria.

Photo by Mohammad Morsi

3,701 individuals stripped of Kuwaiti citizenship

## Wives with revoked citizenship to retain jobs and salaries, says CSC

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): Kuwaiti citizens' wives whose citizenship has been scrapped pursuant to Article Eight of the Citizenship Law are to keep getting their full monthly salary, Civil Service Commission (CSC) said Thursday.

All state bodies have been instructed to continue paying salaries to those wives whose citizenship has been revoked in line with the Citizenship Law, CSC Chairman Dr. Essam Al-Rubaiyan told KUNA.

Female employees would also retain their public jobs as per renewable annual contracts as of the day their citizenship is revoked, he reassured.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Committee of Kuwaiti Citizenship on Thursday announced stripping 3,701 people of the Kuwaiti citizenship and that the decision in this regard would be referred to the Cabinet.

The Ministry of Interior said in a statement that the decision was made during the committee's meeting on Thursday, chaired by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

The Kuwaiti citizenship was revoked for the individuals according to articles 10 and 11 of the Kuwaiti citizenship law number 15/1959, said the ministry statement, adding that five of the individuals had dual citizenship.

The statement said that 94 individuals, who had acquired the citizenship for being relatives to the ones who had gotten it irregularly through fraud and allegations, would be also stripped of the nationality.

It added that the citizenship granted to 3,599 people from 54 countries has been revoked, along with a single person in the 1959 (year) category.

Embassy opens condolence book

## Amir condolences Azerbaijan crash victims

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Thursday sent a cable to President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, extending sincere and heartfelt condolences over the victims of the Azerbaijan Airlines' plane crash in western Kazakhstan, which claimed multiple casualties.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah the Almighty to forgive

the victims and get them into Paradise, while wishing a swift recovery of the injured.

Similarly, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on Thursday sent a cable to President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, offering heartfelt condolences and sincere sympathy over the victims of the Azerbaijan Airlines' plane crash in western Kazakhstan, which left a number of people dead or injured.

Continued on Page 5



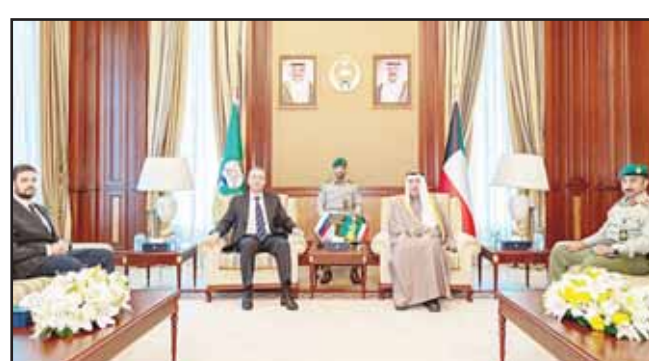
8 KFH concludes its participation in Baytak exhibition



9 NBK strengthens commitment to advancing Kuwaiti society



10 Zain's vibrant fan zones bring even more excitement to the Khaleeji Zain 26 experience



## KNG chief praises Kuwait-Russia ties

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): Chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Thursday praised the distinguished relations between Kuwait and Russia.

In a press statement by the KNG, Sheikh Mubarak received the Russian Ambassador to Kuwait, Vladimir Geltov, in his office at National Guard headquarters Thursday.

KUNA photo  
Chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Mubarak Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives the Russian Ambassador to Kuwait.

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Photo by Samer Shiqer

British Ambassador to Kuwait, Belinda Lewis, extends her condolences to Azerbaijani Ambassador Emil Karimov during the opening of a condolence book at the Azerbaijani Embassy, honoring the victims of the recent Azerbaijan Airlines plane crash.

## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 05:15 Asr ..... 14:38  
 Sunrise .. 06:40 Maghrib .. 16:57  
 Zohr ..... 11:48 Isha ..... 18:19

# Local

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Mild to warm and partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind to southerly wind, with speed of 15-50 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain and a chance for rising dust over open areas.

## Weather

**By Night:** Rather cold to cold and cloudy to partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southeasterly wind, with speed of 15-45 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thunderly at times.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	22	12

Kuwait Airport	22	07
Abdaly	23	07
Bubyan	23	08
Jahra	23	10
Faiiaka Island	23	11
Salmiyah	21	15
Ahmadi	20	10
Jal Aliyah	22	09
Nuwaisib	21	10



KUNA photo  
 Director General of the General Administration of the Coast Guard, Brigadier General Sheikh Mubarak Ali Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, after a visit to the Sabah Al-Ahmad Naval Base.

## Empowering women at military level our goal: Sheikh Mubarak

### 'Women play key role in protecting Kuwait waters'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): Kuwait's General Department of Coast Guard is keen on boosting the role of women in the protection of territorial waters, Department chief said Thursday, considering them "important and active element" of the department.

Kuwaiti women were supervising important projects at the Department, Rear Admiral Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al-Sabah said, citing Engineer Farah Ibrahim who was in charge of the new Radar System which saw installation of 12 towers equipped with radars, cameras, communication and navigation devices.

Sheikh Mubarak, in an interview with KUNA, said the project would be completed in 16 months and aimed at protecting Kuwait's territorial waters from smuggling and infiltrations. He made the remarks during a meeting with KUNA Director General Dr. Fatma Al-Salem at Sabah Al-Ahmad Naval Base to get acquainted with operations of the Department. He added that 40 percent of the team manag-

ing the new radar system made up of women, reaffirming the department's keenness to empower women at the military and civilian levels.

Sheikh Mubarak said the Department was about to execute a KD 45 million project, noting that the department sent 11 boats to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for revamping and replacement of their engines and equipment. As part of the protection of territorial waters, he added, the department would introduce Unmanned Surface Vehicles, also known as boat drones, by next month of Ramadhan.

The boat drones, he explained, would be equipped with cameras broadcasting live and surveillance devices.

Sheikh Mubarak said the department was exerting every possible effort to confront infiltrators and drug smugglers. He added coast guards were redeployed to deal decisively with anyone attempting to undermine security of the State of Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Mubarak said the department's future plan was based on four pillars with the objective of enhancing the moral and patriotism, developing training mechanisms, using state-of-the-art technology and artificial intelligence, and upgrading armament and communication devices, as well as putting emphasis on training on dealing with all circumstances and addressing challenges.

He said the department would start issuing electronic licenses for boats as of the first of January 2025. However, those who wanted paper licenses would have to pay for them, he added.

Asked about penalties against boat owners who did not install the Automated Identification System (AIS), Sheikh Mubarak said the grace period for the AIS installation would expire end of this year, after that no boat would be allowed to sail without AIS on board.

The aim of the AIS installation, he said, was to protect people and their boats.

# CAPT mandates 'biometrics' attendance for new projects

Implementation starts Dec 25

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: Based on a letter sent by the Government Performance Follow-up Agency (GPFA) on October 23, 2024, the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) has issued a circular to all ministries, authorities, and government public institutions which stressed the need for all entities subject to the provisions of the public tenders law No. 49/2016, its amendments and the executive regulations issued by decree No. 30/2017 to comply with instructions related to future construction projects. This is aimed to ensure the successful implementation of

these projects and establish provisions for their monitoring.

The circular mandates that government agencies include a clause in tender documents, practices, and direct contracts for future construction projects, and use most advanced fingerprint systems to track the attendance and departure of workers employed by the companies executing these projects. These systems must be tailored to the size of the project and the number of workers involved.

Furthermore, the circular obligates public authorities to follow up the implementation of fingerprint systems by contracting companies due to their contractual and administrative responsibilities. This step is aimed at ensuring effective project execution and stringent oversight.

The circular also specifies that the implementation of these requirements should be-

gin on December 25, 2025.

Meanwhile, in response to the Municipal Council's questions regarding the delay in addressing the proposal submitted by member Alia Al-Farsi concerning the formation of a joint committee to oversee the implementation of requirements for people with disabilities and the Kuwait Code for Accessibility in building designs, Kuwait Municipality explained that it had already reached out to the Ministry of Social Affairs to establish a joint committee to coordinate and monitor the affairs of people with disabilities.

It further clarified that three individuals had been nominated to participate in the committee - the Building Permits Supervisor at Farwaniya Municipality Abdullah Al-Otaibi, the Head of the Special Character Section at the Engineering Systems Department Barak Al-Mudajj, and an architect from the Capital Municipality Hamoud Al-Essa.

## Amir receives congratulations from Bahrain, UAE and Jordan

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Thursday a cable of congratulations from Bahrain's King Hamad bin Essa Al-Khalifah on his first anniversary since assuming office.

King Hamad wished His Highness the Amir good health and wellbeing and the State of Kuwait further progress and prosperity under his wise leadership. His Highness the Amir sent a response cable to the Bahraini King thanking him for his kind and sincere sentiments, wishing him good health and the people of Bahrain further growth and development.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Thursday a cable of congratulations from the UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum on his first anniversary since assuming office.

His Highness the Amir sent a response cable to Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, thanking him for his kind sentiments, wishing him good health and the UAE further progress and prosperity under leadership of President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Thursday a cable of congratulations from Vice President of the United Arab Emirates, deputy prime minister and minister of presidential court, Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, on his first anniversary since assuming office.

His Highness the Amir sent a response cable to the Vice President thanking him for his kind sentiments, wishing him good health and the UAE further progress and prosperity under leadership of President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Me-

shal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Thursday a cable of congratulations from the UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan on the first anniversary of taking the helm of power.

The UAE President wished His Highness the Amir good health and the State of Kuwait further progress and prosperity under his sagacious leadership.

His Highness the Amir sent a response cable to the UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, thanking him for his kind sentiments, wishing him good health and the UAE further progress and prosperity under his leadership.

### Morocco

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable of congratulations from the Moroccan King Mohammed VI on the first anniversary of taking the helm of power.

The Moroccan Monarch wished His Highness the Amir good health and the State of Kuwait further progress and prosperity under his sagacious leadership.

His Highness the Amir sent a response cable to the King, thanking him for his kind sentiments, wishing him good health and Morocco further progress and prosperity under his leadership.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has also received a cable of congratulations from Jordanian King Abdullah II on the anniversary of ascending to power, wishing His Highness the Amir good health and the State of Kuwait further progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Amir reciprocated with a cable expressing deep gratitude for the true felicitations and sentiments, expressing identical wishes for the monarch and the people of the kingdom of Jordan.



Some of the volunteers

KUNA photos

## Volunteers in 'Khaleeji Zain 26' highlight Kuwait unity

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): Kuwait's youth and volunteers, providing aid in different sectors for organizers of the Arabian Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 26), held in Kuwait, are presenting a bright picture of the unity of Kuwaitis.

Prior to the tournament's kickoff on December 21, the Public Authority for Sport started receiving volunteers to help organize the event, currently totalling about 4,400 males and females who work together to present the event in the brightest of pictures, that reflects Kuwait's efforts to create a successful Gulf football competition.



Al-Adwani

The Kuwaiti youth started with organizing car movement in the stadiums' parking, audience entry to the event's opening ceremony and matches, as well as delivering snacks and drinks to the audience during the matches.

In this context, head of Khaleeji Zain 26 volunteers committee Abdullah Al-Adwani said in a press statement on Thursday that the committee aims to provide the audience with a spectacular experience during the tournament.

The volunteering youth had gone under field training on how to deal with large numbers of audience in the stadiums prior to the event, under the supervision of international companies, he added.

On his part, the organizer of voluntary work at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium Omar Al-Mutairi told KUNA on Thursday that the volunteers are facilitating the entry to and exit from the

stadiums.

He pointed out that the team did not face any trouble so far during the process, adding that the audience were highly cooperative during the event. Meanwhile, a guide at the gates area Ghanim Al-Enezi said that the volunteers are present at every gate and level of the stadium, making audience movement easy.

Moreover, Civil Defense volunteer Sameera Al-Shimmari said that hers and her colleagues role is to deal with any emergency evacuation situation. The authority received voluntary requests application through the government application "Sahel", as the volunteers were accepted after going through interviews. These youth play a big role in creating a successful sports event and ensure a beautiful and safe experience for Kuwait's guests, and citizens and residents alike.

## No financial support if safety standards not met, says PADA

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (Agencies): The Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA) -- persons suffering from disabilities has mandated all educational and rehabilitation institutions catering to students with special needs to renew their approvals from the Kuwait Municipality and Kuwait Fire Force.

The institutions are required to submit photocopies of these approvals to ensure adherence to security and safety protocols, safeguarding the lives of students.

According to reliable sources, the Authority has issued a 30-day ultimatum for 91 institutions -- including Arab and foreign schools, nurseries, rehabilitation centers and evening programs -- to provide updated

licenses and approvals.

Non-compliance will result in the suspension of financial support. Expired licenses will no longer be accepted, underscoring the Authority's commitment to safety regulations.

The educational institutions under the Authority's purview comprise 17 Arab schools, 21 foreign schools, 31 nurseries, 11 rehabilitation centers, 2 evening programs and 9 non-supervised schools enrolling students with disabilities.

Collectively, these institutions serve approximately 13,250 students, with the education sector's budget for the 2024/2025 fiscal year reaching 45 million Kuwaiti dinars.

## Buy Gulf Cup 26 tickets from official channels

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: The Director of the Security Media Department at the Ministry of Interior, Colonel Othman Al-Ghareeb, has warned citizens and residents against purchasing tickets for matches at Jaber International Stadium and Khaled Al-Mubarak Stadium during the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup from suspicious and unapproved websites, reports Al-Anba daily.

He advised the public to only purchase tickets through the official Gulf Cup 26 website or through authorized points of sales announced via official government communication channels and the organizing committee.

Additionally, a security source confirmed that the Operations Sector, led by Major-General Yusuf Al-Khuda, especially the General Directorate of Rescue Police under the supervision of Brigadier General Fares Al-Qahtani, played a key role in organizing all the matches, particularly those involving the national team.

This was achieved through careful planning of traffic flow around Jaber Stadium to facilitate the smooth entry and exit of fans.



Al-Seyassah photo  
 Kuwait's Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Dr. Mohammad Al-Wasmi receives the invitation letter from the Bahraini Ambassador to Kuwait Salah Al-Maliki.

### Al-Wasmi, Al-Ma'atouq meet Al-Maliki

## Bahrain envoy invites Kuwait to attend Islamic Dialogue confab

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: Dr. Mohammad Al-Wasmi, Kuwait's Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, received the Bahraini Ambassador to Kuwait, Salah Al-Maliki, who delivered an official invitation from King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The invitation is for the upcoming Islamic Dialogue Conference titled "One Nation, Shared Destiny," set to take place on February 19-20, 2025, in Bahrain.

During their meeting, Dr. Al-Wasmi and Ambassador Al-Maliki discussed strengthening bilateral relations and sharing expertise to benefit both nations.

In other news, Dr. Abdullah Al-Ma'atouq, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO), also received Ambassador Al-Maliki, who extended the same invitation to the Islamic Dialogue Conference.

Dr. Al-Ma'atouq commended the strong ties between Kuwait and Bahrain and their collaborative efforts across various sectors. He highlighted the significance of the conference as a platform to foster Islamic unity and

promote values of brotherhood and solidarity.

Ambassador Al-Maliki expressed gratitude for IICO's impactful contributions to humanitarian and development initiatives regionally and globally.

He emphasized the importance of the Islamic Dialogue Conference in addressing shared challenges and reinforcing cooperation among Islamic nations.

The Islamic Dialogue Conference, organized by Bahrain's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, comes at a critical time when Islamic countries are seeking greater collaboration and integration.

The conference aims to enhance solidarity among Islamic nations and communities; advocate for human values such as tolerance, cooperation and understanding and provide a platform for scholars, thought leaders and policymakers to exchange ideas on pressing issues.

The event is expected to draw prominent figures, including scholars, decision-makers and thought leaders, ensuring a robust dialogue on ways to promote unity and shared prosperity within the Islamic world.



## AI and the ethical conundrum

"RECENT studies have highlighted the growing global interest in the ethical dimensions of artificial intelligence (AI), emphasizing the increasing attention from international organizations in developing regulatory and advisory frameworks," columnist Dr. Dhari Adel Al-Huwail wrote for Al-Qabas daily.

"Notably, one study found that over 80 percent of US citizens are concerned about AI ethics and its significance. As digital advancements accelerate and AI technologies integrate into various fields, there is an urgent need for ethical guidelines that ensure these innovations enhance human well-being rather than threaten it."



Dr. Al-Huwail

"Prominent AI technologies such as virtual assistant applications like 'Alexa' and 'Siri,' alongside advanced tools like drones, have become integral to modern life."

"However, their irresponsible use poses significant ethical and social challenges, including decision-making biases, privacy violations and disruptions to labor markets."

"In this context, the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) in Kuwait has taken a commendable step by publishing the first version of the Artificial Intelligence Ethics Guide."

"This guide outlines key principles to ensure the responsible use of AI technologies, focusing on critical areas such as:

-- Transparency and Accountability: Smart system designs must allow decisions to be understandable and interpretable by humans, ensuring clear mechanisms for review to prevent violations."

-- Fairness and Impartiality: AI applications must be free from discrimination and bias, with institutions responsible for examining and refining the data used in system training to maintain these standards."

-- Privacy Protection: Smart systems should respect individuals' rights to control their personal information, requiring stringent compliance from developers and users alike."

"The guide represents a vital step towards fostering an innovation-friendly environment for AI development at the local level while promoting responsible use."

"However, voluntary guidelines alone may not be sufficient. There is a pressing need for legislation to regulate AI in ways that protect society from potential risks without stifling creativity and innovation."

"Over-regulation could inadvertently hinder the adaptive and inventive use of AI technologies."

"Effective AI regulation must strike a delicate balance between safeguarding fundamental rights, such as security and privacy and creating an environment conducive to innovation."

"Transparency and accountability should serve as foundational principles, accompanied by room for experimentation and advancement. Such an approach ensures that legislation remains adaptive to evolving technologies while upholding ethical standards."

"The successful implementation of ethical AI principles demands broad collaboration across the public sector, private enterprises and academia."

"Encouraging scientific research to develop solutions that address both technical and ethical challenges is crucial to achieving a safe and responsible digital future."

"As AI becomes an increasingly powerful force in shaping our world, its use must align with fundamental human values."

"The CITRA guidelines mark an important beginning, but translating these principles into actionable policies and practices requires collective responsibility."

"By fostering a flexible, ethical framework for AI, we can pave the way for a digital future that prioritizes human well-being while embracing the transformative potential of innovation."

### Also:

"Once liberated from the constraints of the National Assembly, many believed Kuwait stood on the brink of a new era -- a chance to shed the restrictions imposed by its more regressive factions and to embark on a journey of progress and renaissance," columnist Abdul Latif Al-Duaij wrote for Al-Jarida daily.

"It was hoped that the government, unshackled from the Assembly's influence, would steer the nation back to the enlightened, open and modern Kuwait of the past."

"But as time passed, the truth became harder to ignore. The problem, it seemed, wasn't solely the Assembly's influence, as many had believed."

"The real issue lay within the government itself. The same primitive mentality that critics thought was confined to the Assembly's backward members now revealed itself in the government's decisions, dragging the country further into stagnation."

"One glaring example of this was the recent amendments to the Nationality Law. Instead of moving toward equality and unity, these changes en-

trenched unconstitutional discrimination between citizens."

"Worse, they represented a retreat into restrictive policies, surrendering to the demands of religious movements whose proposals seemed to pull Kuwait backward rather than propel it forward."

"The latest amendment to Article 13 was particularly concerning. It decreed that citizenship could be revoked from anyone convicted of insulting 'the Divine being, the Prophets, or the princely being."

"While most agreed on the importance of protecting the dignity of the princely figure, the inclusion of 'the Divine being' and 'Prophets' raised questions. Wasn't this too broad, too open to interpretation?"

"For many, the Divine is sacred, deeply respected by most Kuwaitis. But why include the Prophets, particularly those from ancient religious traditions, many of whom are revered by communities outside Kuwait?"

"The law now extended its protection to figures such as Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Jesus -- Prophets from the children of Israel. In a tongue-in-cheek reflection, some even joked that this amendment could, theoretically, shield someone like Benjamin Netanyahu, a descendant of Isaac."

"This raised a deeper question: Why jeopardize a Kuwaiti citizen's nationality to protect historical figures, many of whom have no direct connection to the present-day realities of Kuwait?"

"The situation felt eerily reminiscent of a time long past. Decades after freeing itself from British guardianship, Kuwait still seemed trapped -- this time under the influence of religious and ideological conservatism."

"Since the dissolution of the 1976 parliament, the country had not truly shaken off the dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood and similar movements."

"How long", critics wondered, 'will this government remain a prisoner of outdated ideologies? How long will it surrender to the weight of ideas rooted in events from 1,400 years ago?"

"As the voices of concern grew louder, the question became not just about the amendments themselves, but about the larger direction Kuwait was taking. Would the nation find its way back to progress, or would it remain anchored to a past that no longer served its people?"

"Social media is undeniably a double-edged sword, serving as both a blessing and a curse. Its primary goal is to foster social connections and support societal and cultural cohesion," columnist, Kuwaiti writer Dr. Abdullah Mohammed Al-Tarjji wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"However, when misused, it can transform into a destructive tool. Social media, like any other instrument, can build or destroy society based on how it is wielded."

"On the positive side, social media strengthens relationships, promotes dialogue and facilitates the exchange of ideas. On the negative side, it can become a platform for personal vendettas, spreading discord, and pursuing political agendas, turning it into a minefield that requires careful navigation."

"From my personal experience in parliamentary work, I have witnessed the worst misuse of social media when it is weaponized in political disputes. Rather than being a space for idea exchange and community communication, it has often been transformed into a battleground for rumors, character defamation, and opponent destruction."

"This shift has diverted social media from its original purpose, making it a tool of chaos that blurs the lines between truth and lies."

"The distinction between using social media to express opinions and employing it to suppress or attack dissenting voices is critical. When these platforms are used to exclude others or undermine their thoughts and beliefs, they shift from being a blessing to a curse."

"The effectiveness of social media in achieving its intended goals is intrinsically linked to the nature of the society that uses it. Social media reflects a society's culture, education, and political values."

"Civilized societies foster constructive communication, good education ensures responsible usage, and fair politics amplifies its positive impact. Conversely, weaknesses in these areas inevitably lead to misuse."

"What we post on social media reaches beyond our immediate community, shaping perceptions both locally and globally."

"It is essential to ensure that these platforms reflect our values and traditions positively, serving as tools for cohesion and progress rather than division and discord."

"Let us commit to using social media responsibly, turning it into a blessing that builds and strengthens, rather than a curse that destroys. May Allah grant us success in this endeavor."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes



Air Marshal Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives UAE Ambassador to the country Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi.



Air Marshal Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives the Charge d'Affaires of the Serbian Embassy in Kuwait, Filip Katic.

## Deputy Chief-of-Staff receives UAE, Serbian envoys

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Army's Deputy Chief of Staff, Air Marshal Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, received at his office, separately, UAE Ambassador to the country Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi,

and the Charge d'Affaires of the Serbian Embassy in Kuwait, Filip Katic.

The General Staff Public Relations, in a press release on Wednesday, said topics of mutual interest, especially military-related, were discussed during the meetings.

the Serbian Embassy in Kuwait, Filip Katic.

## Two Iranians, Bedoun get death ruling for smuggling 160kg drugs

### Kuwaiti woman gets 15 years in drug trafficking

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: The Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Abdullah Al-Asimi, sentenced two Iranians and a Bedoun resident to death for the trafficking of 160 kilograms of hashish.

During a previous open session, the defendants confessed to bringing the drugs by sea from Abadan, Iran, aboard a cruiser that they had rented from local fishermen in Abadan.

The defendants attempted to dispose of the drugs, but were apprehended by drug enforcement officers before they could carry out their plan.

**Woman gets 15 years jail:** The Court of Appeal has sentenced a Kuwaiti woman, convicted of drug trafficking including hashish and psychotropic substances, to 15 years in prison and a fine of KD 10,000. The court also sentenced one of her clients to two-year imprisonment for drug use. The third defendant was acquitted.

According to the case file, officers from the Drug Control General Department had apprehended

the accused in a sting operation.

The first defendant admitted to obtaining the drugs from the second defendant, revealing to detectives that the woman was his supplier. He indicated that she occasionally allowed him to use the drugs at her apartment.

**Housing allowance won:** In a final ruling, the Court of Cassation, presided over by Judge Najib Majed Al-Majed, yesterday ordered the Fatwa and Legislation Department of the Council of Ministers to pay a housing allowance of KD 300 per month to a female lawyer in the department, retroactively from 2018, under the "Married" category.

Lawyer Fawzia Al-Sabah explained that her client, who works as a lawyer in the Fatwa and Legislation Department, had requested for the housing allowance in accordance with Cabinet's resolution No. 142/1992. However, the department initially rejected her request, arguing that she was not entitled to the allowance. This led her client to take legal action, which resulted in the court ruling in her favor.

Lawyer Fawzia Al-Sabah called the ruling "a victory for justice and the law", adding that it sets a precedent that may allow other members of the Fatwa and Legislation Department to claim their right to housing allowances.

### Expat swindles Kuwaiti citizen

## Minister issues fines in Shuwaikh inspection visit

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs, Abdullatif Al-Mishari, conducted an inspection tour of the Shuwaikh Industrial Area, accompanied by senior officials from the Kuwait Municipality in the Capital Governorate, reports Al-Jarida daily.

During the tour, a number of violations were observed, leading to fines being issued.

This visit is part of Al-Mishari's ongoing field tours to monitor the work of the Kuwait Municipality, focusing on the enforcement of building and shop regulations.

The tours also aim to ensure adherence to municipal laws and systems, particularly following the recent implementation of a geographical distribution of inspectors.

The Minister emphasized the importance of strict law enforcement, reiterating that violations must be dealt with firmly and without leniency.

**Expat swindles Kuwaiti:** Police are looking for an unidentified expatriate born in 1973 for 'robbing' a 34-year-old Kuwaiti, reports Al-Anba daily. According to a complaint filed by the victim as the Abdullah Al-Salem Police Station the suspect promised to sell and install a tracking device in his vehicle for a certain fee and after an agreement between both men the victim paid 390 dinars advance.

The complainant said the suspect works for

an unidentified company and he met the suspect on the company premises.

However, when the suspect failed to deliver the goods at a promised time, he tried to contact the man but was told by the company that the suspect had not reported to work for quite some time.

The company also revealed that the payment was made under the suspect's personal name and the money was not transferred to the company.

**Wild bull flees slaughter:** The Ministry of Interior's operations center received a report of the escape of a wild bull from the slaughterhouse in the Abdullah Mubarak area. Rescue patrols were dispatched to control the animal and return it to its owner, reports Al-Anba daily.

**Customs officers honored:** Director General of the General Administration of Customs Mutlaq Turki Al-Enezi honored several customs officers from various customs departments and ports in recognition of their outstanding efforts and exceptional performance, reports Al-Anba daily.

He encouraged them to continue to raise the level of their work performance, stressing that customs officers are the first line of defense in protecting the country's borders.

It is worth highlighting that this recognition is part of the administration's ongoing efforts to motivate customs personnel to enhance their performance and follow the example set by their distinguished colleagues.

According to a customs source, the honorees played a vital role in thwarting smuggling attempts involving narcotics and other prohibited substances through their vigilance, dedication, and commitment to their duties.

**Man escapes death:** Divine providence and the driver's quick thinking spared him from death when a fire engulfed his car while he was driving on the Fahaheel Expressway near Shaab, as he was able to stop and safely exit the car on time before it was engulfed in flames, reports Al-Anba daily.

When the Operations Room of the Ministry of Interior recently received information about the car on fire on the Fahaheel Expressway near Shaab, firefighters and policemen immediately rushed to the scene. They were able to extinguish the fire, which had completely destroyed the car, and the police worked to manage traffic flow that had been disrupted.

The safety of the driver was confirmed. He explained that he was driving down the road when he noticed his car was on fire. He quickly pulled over to the side of the road and managed to exit the vehicle before it became fully engulfed in flames within minutes.



Shop reduced to ashes by the blaze.

## 3 hurt as firemen tackle blaze in Jleeb workshop

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: Today morning, firefighting teams from the Al-Sumoud and Al-Ardhiya centers controlled a fire that broke out in a workshop for repairing power generators in the Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh area, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The daily said, as the firemen continued battling the flames, the emergency medical services personnel were busy giving first aid to three men who were injured when they tried in vain to control the fire before the arrival of firemen.

The injured were subsequently taken to a nearby hospital. Their injuries are believed to be not life threatening.

**Capital area discussed:** The Capital Governor Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali received the acting Director General of Kuwait Municipality Eng. Manal Al-Asfour at his office in the general diwan of the governorate headquarters, reports Al-Anba daily.

During the meeting, several topics related to the development of the Capital area and the improvement of its affiliated areas were discussed.

The governor affirmed the importance of strengthening cooperation and coordination between the executive and municipal bodies to achieve common goals and fulfill the aspirations of citizens.



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Project moving forward as planned

## Al-Mishari inspects Al-Mubarakiya renovation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: Today, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdul Latif Al-Mishari, along with Sheikha Amthal Al-Ahmad, Head of the Volunteer Work Center, conducted a field visit to inspect the Mubarakiya Market reconstruction project, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The visit aimed to ensure that the work is progressing according to the established timetable.

In a press statement following the tour, Minister Al-Mishari confirmed that the project is moving forward as planned.

He emphasized that the tour is part of his ongoing efforts to monitor all fieldwork closely.

He also noted that the visit to Mubarakiya Market is part of a series of inspections related to the reconstruction project and the preparation of exhibitions and facilities for the market's reopening.



KUNA photo  
Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdul Latif Al-Mishari during an inspection tour of the Shuwaikh Industrial Area.

## Minister Al-Tabtabaei tackles Kuwait's educational reform with OECD expert

Strategic action plan for updating curriculum proposed

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: Minister of Education Jalal Al-Tabtabaei held an "important" video conference meeting with Dr. Andreas Schleicher, Director of the Education and Skills Department at the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the official in charge of the international PISA tests program, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The Ministry of Education said taking part in the meeting also was a group of experts in education. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment that measures

15-year-old students' reading, mathematics and science literacy.



Al-Tabtabaei

This meeting is part of the Minister's comprehensive vision aimed at enhancing Kuwait's educational system.

The goal is to reflect the nation's future aspirations and achieve a qualitative shift in educational outcomes.

The strategy focuses on creating a sustainable and inclusive education system that prepares future generations to be creative and innovative across various fields.

The discussion centered on several critical topics, primarily the development of a strategic plan

to improve government education curricula.

The aim is to elevate standards of learning to align with international benchmarks, improve student engagement, and introduce diverse educational pathways.

The meeting also emphasized the importance of reviewing current curricula in mathematics, science, and English to provide targeted recommendations, as well as advice on a teacher licensing test that the Ministry is planning to implement.

Furthermore, the meeting focused on developing a curriculum that is in line with global trends, integrates Kuwaiti culture and environment, and prepares students for future challenges.

The outcome of the meeting included the proposal of a comprehensive action plan to update curricula across all educational levels, ensuring that students are equipped with the knowledge required to meet the demands of the 21st century.

## Kuwait, Lebanon & Syria FMs discuss bilateral ties, regional developments

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, discussed in a phone call Wednesday, with Lebanese counterpart Dr. Abdullah BouHabib the close bilateral relations and means for strengthening them in various fields.

They also reviewed the latest regional and international developments of common concern.

Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received a phone call on Wednesday from the newly-appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Syrian interim government Asaad Al-Shibani.

During the phone conversation, the ministers discussed developments in Syria and ways to enhance the strong fraternal relations between the two countries and their peoples.

### Other Voices

#### Manipulation of employment documents

By Ahmed alsarraf

At the Humanitarian Friendship Association, we have, like many others, extended substantial financial aid to numerous residents in need, particularly those who are destitute or earn low incomes.

However, we were shocked to encounter cases such as that of a driver earning a reported salary of just 75 Kuwaiti dinars, as documented in official government records.

This amount is supposed to cover not only his family's basic needs -- such as food, clothing, housing and medical care -- but also transportation, school fees and other living expenses. Clearly, this is an impossible expectation.

When asked how they manage to survive on such a meager income, recipients often respond with statements like, "God is generous and there are many kind people."

However, further investigation revealed that many of these individuals are evasive about their actual earnings. This lack of transparency stems from the fear that revealing their true income would disqualify them from receiving aid from charitable organizations like ours.

We also discovered that a significant number of these low-salaried individuals do not work for the entities listed on their official residency documents. Instead, they work elsewhere and pay an annual fee to the sponsoring company for maintaining their residency status.

To avoid future disputes, these companies report the minimum wage on official documents, creating a facade of compliance. This practice is widely

known and yet tolerated, with the salary of 75 dinars -- used in work contracts issued by the Public Authority for Manpower -- serving as a fictional benchmark.

While this minimum wage might apply to workers brought in under specific conditions by cleaning and contracting companies that cover their housing, food, transportation, medical care and travel expenses, it does not reflect the reality for workers supporting families independently.

This discrepancy has led us to temporarily halt financial assistance to individuals claiming low incomes. We found ourselves and others, victims of fraud perpetuated by organized groups, many of whom exploit the good intentions of charitable organizations by manipulating official documents.

We call on the Ministry of Interior and the Public Authority for Manpower to address these issues with greater rigor. Specifically, the salary declared in work permits should accurately reflect the worker's social and financial realities.

Stricter controls must be established and the minimum wage should be adjusted to reflect current economic conditions. How can a salary of 75 dinars suffice for a family head supporting a spouse and children in private schools, living in an apartment and managing transportation and communication expenses?

The manipulation of official documents to exploit these loopholes is both unethical and illegal and we urge immediate corrective measures.

We cannot accept the continued silence of regulatory bodies on this matter. A comprehensive review and revision of employment contracts are imperative to end these fraudulent practices and restore fairness and humanity to the system.

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



Ahmed alsarraf

#### Al-Faiha area kicks off first phase

### Ministry of Public Works begins road maintenance in Capital Governorate

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: The Ministry of Public Works has commenced its first road maintenance project in the Capital Governorate, starting in the Al-Faiha area, as part of new contracts for comprehensive maintenance of highways and internal roads.

In a press statement today, the



Al-Mashaan

ministry revealed that Minister Noura Al-Mashaan has issued clear instructions to the concerned work teams at the ministry and the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport to ensure that work is expedited and implemented according to the agreed upon time table.

She emphasized the importance of completing the tasks within the specified timelines and according to agreed-upon standards.

Jamal Al-Otaibi, the supervisor of the Capital Governorate project, explained that the current maintenance work includes cleaning and inspecting the rainwater and sewage networks to ensure their safety and prevent blockages.

### PAI to collect data from consulting offices for feasibility studies of industrial projects

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: In line with the launch of several industrial projects that require feasibility studies, the Public Authority for Industry (PAI) is set to gather data from specialized consulting offices at the beginning of next year, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Sources informed the daily that PAI plans to compile a list of accredited consulting offices to accelerate the completion of key industrial projects, aligning with the Authority's strategic goals.

This initiative will help assess the economic significance of projects and their contribution to enhancing the country's industrial output.

Prior to initiating this process, PAI has outlined the necessary qualifications, requirements and documentation to accredit consult-

ing offices based on specific standards for economic feasibility studies.

These standards aim to ensure high technical quality in terms of identifying technical resources, production needs, energy requirements, consumption rates, and technology.

The consulting offices are expected to meet several conditions, including analyzing the technical aspects of projects, market size and trends, targeted sectors, operational details, private sector participation, and project timelines.

They must also determine the total expected cost, propose capital distribution, assess project risks, clarify expected economic benefits, and establish the roles of investors and involved parties.

#### CAS strengthens nat'l data system

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: The Central Administration of Statistics has reaffirmed its commitment to advancing the national statistical system, ensuring the production of accurate and reliable data to support the country's planning and development processes, reports Al-Jarida daily.

This statement came from Acting Director General Wafa'a Al-Yahya on the occasion of Gulf Statistics Day, celebrated annually on December 24 by National Statistical Centers in the GCC countries. This year's theme was "The future of statistics towards sustainable Gulf development".

She acknowledged the growing challenges faced by statistical work, such as data integration across sectors and the optimal use of modern technology at the same time emphasizing the administration's dedication to overcoming these challenges through regional cooperation.

#### Al-Baghli praises resolution

### Kuwait's Architectural Heritage secured by Ministerial approval

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: Maha Al-Baghli, General Secretary and Board Member of the Kuwait Society for Architectural Heritage, expressed her satisfaction with the issuance of Ministerial Resolution No. 55 of 2024, which recognizes the society's ambitious vision of achieving "a living heritage with a future vision," reports Al-Seyassah daily.

She explained that the society aims to preserve, document and rehabilitate Kuwait's architectural heritage, while raising awareness of its significance and fostering its development.

The society also seeks to strengthen national identity by protecting historical buildings and sites, promoting creative initiatives and collaborating with local and international organizations to safeguard architectural heritage as a vital part of Kuwait's past and a foundation for a sustainable future.



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# Kuwaiti tenth aid plane arrives in Lebanon



The tenth relief plane from the Kuwaiti Air Bridge carrying 9 tons of food aid for the brothers in Lebanon. KUNA photo

BEIRUT, Dec 26, (KUNA): A plane from the Kuwaiti Air Force, carrying nine tons of aid food, arrived on Thursday at Beirut's Rafic Hariri International Airport as part of Kuwait's airlift to assist Lebanon in light of Israeli attacks.

Abdullah Khaled Al-Diyen, the First Secretary at the Kuwaiti Embassy in Lebanon, told KUNA that the relief aircraft has arrived in line with Kuwait's leading role in charity and humanitarian work, which is embodied in the establishment of the Kuwaiti airlift to support Lebanon under the "Kuwait is with You" campaign.

In turn, the representative of the Lebanese Higher Relief Committee, Brigadier General Ahmad Ibrahim, told KUNA that such relief supplies are crucial for supporting displaced families who have not been able to return to their homes due to the war, as well as for families that have returned to their towns.

Ibrahim praised the diverse aid food provided by the Kuwaiti airlift, distributed in collaboration with local municipalities.

The Kuwaiti airlift has previously delivered various supplies to Lebanon through the Kuwaiti Air Force.

## HH Amir signs 'decree' appointing new KWFIU Chairman and deputy

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Thursday signed a decree appointing Dr. Hamad Al-Mekrad as chairman of the Kuwait Financial Intelligence Unit (KWFIU) in the rank of ministry

undersecretary for a period of four years, renewable once.

The decree also includes the naming of Yusuf Al-Omar as deputy chairman of the KWFIU in the rank of assistant ministry undersecretary for a period of four years, renewable once.

## Kuwait's Amir congratulates Libya on Independence Day

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable to Dr. Mohammad Youness Al-Manfi, Head of the Libyan Presidential Council, congratulating him on the 73rd anniversary of Libya's independence. His Highness extended his best wishes for the health and

well-being of Dr. Al-Manfi and for Libya's continued progress and prosperity.

Similarly, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah conveyed his congratulations to Dr. Al-Manfi in a separate cable, expressing wishes for his good health and Libya's advancement and prosperity.

## Kuwaiti Ambassador to Turkiye presents credentials to Erdogan

ANKARA, Dec 26, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Ambassador to Turkiye, Abdulaziz Ahmad Al-Adwani, presented his credentials Thursday to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during a ceremony held at the presidential palace in the capital city, Ankara.

A statement issued by Kuwait's Embassy in Ankara, and obtained by KUNA, mentioned that Ambassador Al-Adwani discussed during the meeting mechanisms of boosting bilateral

ties across a variety of fields including, economic, health, security, educational and defense industries.

The meeting also underlined keenness of both leaderships on exchanging visits, and affirmed the strength of the deeply rooted and extended relations.

Ambassador Al-Adwani relayed greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Turkish president.

Results on MoE website, Sahel app

## Intermediate exams wrap up, 10th and 11th graders to end by Dec 30

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: Intermediate school students concluded their first semester exams on Thursday, Dec 26, while students in the tenth and eleventh grades will finish their exams on Monday, December 30, reports Al-Anba daily quoting informed sources.

They revealed that the results will be announced as soon as the correction and review process is completed, adding that the results will be available on the Ministry of Education's website and the Sahel app.



Al-Tabtabaei

The sources affirmed that the exam process went well over the past few days, with no disruptions to the exam environment.

They praised the close oversight by the Minister of Education Eng. Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei in ensuring the smooth progress of the exams.

Meanwhile, Director of Salem Al-Hussainan Intermediate School for Boys in the Capital Educational Zone Sharyan Al-Loughani affirmed that the current period is the "harvest season" for the efforts that students and teachers have invested throughout the first semester.

He wished success and prosperity to all students.

Al-Loughani highlighted the importance of creating a calm and comfortable environment for students during the exam period.

He stressed the need for proper preparation and a conducive atmosphere to help students study and focus effectively.

Al-Loughani recommended maintaining healthy eating habits at appropriate times and ensuring adequate sleep, stressing that these factors positively impact performance and achievement.

Regarding the school's preparations for the exam period, Al-Loughani explained that detailed planning was carried out by the school's organizing and exam committees for ensuring that all necessary supplies were in place to create a comfortable environment for students.

He assured that the school adhered to the standards and regulations set by the Ministry of Education.

In addition, the school conducted comprehensive review lessons for students before the exams via the "Teams" platform to help them prepare thoroughly. The school also launched the "Ask Me" program, which takes place daily before exams, for allowing students to ask questions and clarify any uncertainties, with answers being provided by specialized teachers.

# Kuwaiti citizenship 'revocations' lead to new ministry collaboration with CARSIR

MEW streamlines employee transfers, enhances data monitoring

By Mohammad Ghanem Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: According to informed sources from the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, the ministry held a meeting last week with the Central Agency for the Remedy of the Situation of Illegal Residents (CARSIR) to discuss the status of employees whose Kuwaiti citizenship had been revoked.

They explained that the meeting resulted

in several important recommendations, including the potential development of an automated interface between CARSIR and the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy. This system would enable the ministry to receive updates on individuals whose citizenship had been revoked, and ensure that their data and information are accurately monitored, with alerts issued for those who have modified their status.

Another recommendation was that the certificate of good conduct must be issued in paper format and formally approved by the Ministry of Electricity and Water. This certificate is to be granted to employees whose citizenship was revoked. The ministry emphasized that an online certificate would not be sufficient.

Meanwhile, the sources revealed that the ministry is currently reviewing 2,200 requests for employee transfers from various departments.

They explained that the concerned committee has started evaluating these requests based on applicable guidelines and standards, with the goal of ensuring that human resources are allocated in a manner that improves performance efficiency and meets the needs of the different departments.

The ministry aims to enhance productivity and create a work environment that aligns with employees' aspirations, as well as maintain fairness in dealing with these requests.

The sources affirmed that the review process is part of the ministry's plan to improve administrative performance and optimize the utilization of talent for improving the quality of services provided to citizens.

## PAHW opens tender for Q2 Youth Center in Saad Al-Abdullah

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) has launched a tender for the construction, completion, and maintenance of the Q2 Youth Center building in Saad Al-Abdullah Residential City, reports Al-Anba daily quoting informed sources.

They explained that the deadline for local companies specialized in public building projects to submit bids is January 16, 2025.

The tender includes specific conditions to ensure high-quality work. Applicants must have completed similar projects in Kuwait in the last ten years with a total project value of no less than three million dinars.

The companies applying for the tender must not have received valid penalties in previous tenders or have ongoing projects that are more than 50 percent delayed from their completion dates. Subcontracting or projects in-

volving multiple work orders will not be accepted.

This project is part of PAHW's efforts to develop youth facilities in Kuwait and enhance the infrastructure in new residential areas. The Q2 Youth Center will serve as a vital hub for youth for boosting social activities in the region.

The project aligns with the New Kuwait 2035 vision, which seeks to modernize and expand the service network in various areas of the country, as well

as empower youth to play a more active role in society.

The sources affirmed that PAHW is committed to adhering to all quality and sustainability standards in the implementation of this project.

They said inquiries regarding the tender will be accepted until December 29, 2024, adding that companies interested in participating must ensure they meet all the specified requirements and submit the necessary documentation.

## 53 violations issued in Jahra's November cleanup drive

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: The Public Relations Department of the Kuwait Municipality announced that the Department of General Hygiene and Road Occupancy at Jahra Municipality carried out an extensive campaign in November 2024 with the aim of improving cleanliness and removing obstacles from roads that mar the area's appearance through the removal of abandoned cars, boats, and scrap materials from streets and public spaces, reports Al-Anba daily.

Director of the Department of General Hygiene

and Road Occupancy at Jahra Municipality Nawaf Al-Mutairi explained that the purpose of the intensive field tours was to monitor violators and take legal action against them. The inspection team paid attention to enhancing the level of cleanliness in the areas under its jurisdiction and removing anything that detracts from the area's aesthetic appeal or blocks roadways. These efforts are part of the strategy to preserve the orderly and civilized appearance of the governorate.

In the month of November, the inspection team successfully removed 101 abandoned cars, scrap, and food trucks, issued 53 violations related to cleanliness, road occupations, and street vendors, and issued 1,886 warnings, stickers, and pledges. Also, 35 cars were released from the municipality's impoundment.

Al-Mutairi confirmed that the inspection team would continue its field tours and take all necessary legal actions against violators of the regulations related to general hygiene and road occupancy.

Continued from Page 1

## Kuwait affirms

The Middle East region is witnessing rapidly growing challenges and crises nowadays, said Al-Yahya, noting that this requires extra joint work and cooperation to achieve peace in Syria and Lebanon, which will in return positively affect the security and stability in other Arab states.

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, the GCC had continuously supported the Syrian people, hosting donors conferences to aid them, the minister said.

In this context, he noted that Kuwait had hosted three donors conferences for Syrians in 2013, 2014 and 2015, while the country also co-chaired the donors conferences in London in 2016 and Brussels in 2017.

As for the situation in Lebanon, Al-Yahya said that the GCC is closely monitoring the conditions in the country, expressing deep concern over the recent developments. He reaffirmed the Gulf's full support to Lebanon's sovereignty, calling for commitment to UN resolution number 1701. Moreover, the minister expressed optimism on the upcoming presidential elections on January 9 in Lebanon, hoping it would be an opportunity to bring back stability to the country.

Al-Yahya expressed deep concern over the continuous Israeli occupation attacks on Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, a clear violation of the international law and human rights. The minister reaffirmed the Gulf's commitment to support the Palestinian cause and the rights of Palestinians to have an independent state with Jerusalem as the capital.

He renewed the call for the international community to end the Israeli occupation attacks on Palestinians, and allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Meanwhile, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi said Thursday that the extraordinary GCC ministerial meeting held in Kuwait reflects support to the security and stability of Syria and Lebanon.

Addressing the 46th extraordinary meeting, Al-Budaiwi said the gather-

ing also aimed at coordinating Gulf stances amid the ongoing events and swift developments in Syria and Lebanon.

He added that Kuwait-hosted meeting came just a few days following the 45th GCC summit, which focused on the latest regional and international developments, mainly the Israeli occupation's war on and continued violations in the Gaza Strip in a breach of all international laws and humanitarian norms and criteria.

On Syria, he said the Gulf bloc, since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, has adopted a relentless stance and clear-cut policy regarding Syria, and has exerted efforts to support the Syrian people, citing Kuwait's hosting of several donor conferences to alleviate the humanitarian anguish of the Syrian people.

He pointed out Gulf relief and humanitarian aid worth over eight billion US dollars and hosting more than two million Syrians who enjoy full rights and benefits.

Politically, the GCC member countries have thrown much weight behind UN efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis in line with Statement of Geneva One and UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2254, which underlined immediate reforms that would fulfill the Syrian people's expectations, maintain their country's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and reject any foreign interference in Syria's internal affairs.

The GCC chief condemned the recent Israeli occupation attacks on Syria, the occupation of the border area and settlement expansions in the occupied Golan Heights as a serious violation of international laws, UNSC resolutions and the 1974 Disengagement Agreement.

In this context, he called on the international community to take on its due role and responsibilities by moving to halt such aggressions on the Syrian territory and oblige the Israeli occupation to pull out of all occupied Syrian lands.

Al-Budaiwi commended the positive steps adopted by the caretaker Syrian government for power transition and safety of Syrian civilians, along with efforts to maintain Syrian state bodies and achieve national

reconciliation as a core pillar of security and stability.

He also urged all Syrian parties and groups to prioritize their country's supreme interests and national unity, and to adopt dialogue in order to meet the Syrian people's hopes of security, stability, development and prosperity.

On Lebanon, the GCC chief quoted the final communique of the 45th GCC gathering as having restated the bloc's unwavering support for the Lebanese people and their country's security and stability, in addition to its condemnation of serious Israeli occupation atrocities.

He also underlined the significance of all-out political and economic reforms aiming at enabling Lebanon to overcome its political and economic crisis, implementation of UNSC Resolution 1701, home-return of refugees and internally displaced persons, restoration of security and stability and respect of Lebanon's territorial integrity, political independence and sovereignty.

He concluded by saying that Kuwait-hosted meeting reflects the GCC member countries' much attention to all Arab and Muslim causes, and their commitment to promoting joint cooperation and ensuring regional security and stability.

The Ministerial Council of the Arabian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Thursday urged all parties of the Syrian people to join hands and seek bonding on the national higher interests' bases and affirmed solid support for Lebanon's sovereignty.

The GCC council, in a statement marking conclusion of the 46th session, called on the Syrian people to uphold national unity, launch comprehensive national dialogue for restoring security and stability to the country.

The council, session of which was chaired by Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya, affirmed necessity of respecting sovereignty of the sisterly Arab Republic of Syria, its independence, territorial unity, rejecting meddling in its internal affairs, affirming rejection of terrorism and chaos.

The GCC ministers applauded the steps that have been taken to

protect civilians, avert blood spilling, achieve national conciliation, preserve the Syrian State assets, dissolve the militias and the armed groups and restrict weapons possession to the State "as these steps are bases for safeguarding Syria's security, stability, restoring its regional and international status."

They acclaimed a call by the UN Secretary General to form a special mission to aid the Syrians in the transitional process, with emphasis on the necessity to abide by the UN charter that calls for respecting the State sovereignty, non-interference in states' local affairs and resolving conflicts peacefully.

They condemned the recurring Israeli attacks on Syria, occupation of the buffer zone in the border region in flagrant breach of Syria's sovereignty and the disengagement accord worked out in 1974.

On Lebanon, the GCC council affirmed the council's unwavering stances in support of the country's sovereignty, security, stability, territorial unity, noting necessity to conduct full-scale structural political and economic reforms.

The council affirmed necessity to adhere to the cease-fire agreement, condemned recurring Israeli attacks that have left thousands of civilian as victims, forcing many to flee their homes, destroying infrastructural facilities, civil and health installations.

It stressed on the necessity to implement the UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and the Taif accord.

## Kuwait prepares

On Friday, the forecast indicates moderate to warm conditions with partly cloudy to cloudy skies. Winds will shift from southeasterly to southerly and may become active at speeds ranging from 15 to 50 km/h. There is also a possibility of scattered light rain and dust in exposed areas.

Maximum temperatures are expected to range between 22 and 24 degrees Celsius, with the sea remaining light to moderate and waves potentially rising between 2 and 6 feet.

On Friday night, conditions are

predicted to turn cold again, with cloudy to partly cloudy skies. Southeasterly winds will vary in speed from light to moderate, occasionally becoming active at speeds between 8 and 40 km/h. Scattered rain may occur, potentially thundery at times. The expected minimum temperatures will be between 10 and 12 degrees Celsius, while the sea will continue to be light to moderate with waves rising between 2 and 6 feet.

For Saturday, the weather is anticipated to remain moderate to warm with partly cloudy to cloudy skies. Winds are expected to shift from southeasterly to northwesterly, blowing at light to moderate speeds that could occasionally become active at speeds ranging from 12 to 45 km/h. There is a chance of scattered rain that may also be thundery at times. Maximum temperatures are forecasted to range between 22 and 24 degrees Celsius, with sea conditions remaining light to moderate and waves potentially rising between 2 and 6 feet.

Finally, Saturday night will bring colder temperatures again, with northwesterly winds blowing at speeds between 12 and 38 km/h. Minimum temperatures are expected to range from 7 to 9 degrees Celsius, while the sea will remain light to moderate with waves between 2 and 5 feet.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent a cable to President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, extending sincere and heartfelt condolences over the victims of the Azerbaijan Airlines' plane crash in western Kazakhstan.

Earlier, the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry on Thursday voiced sympathy and solidarity with the government and people of Azerbaijan over the Azerbaijan Airlines' plane crash in western Kazakhstan, which claimed multiple casualties.

In a press release, the ministry said the State of Kuwait extends sincere condolences to the government and people of Azerbaijan and the

victims' families over the tragedy, while wishing a swift recovery of the injured.

Meanwhile, the Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Kuwait Emil Karimov described the recent crash of an Azerbaijani Airlines plane as a "tragic disaster" for the Azerbaijani people, which resulted in the death of 38 passengers, while 16 others survived.

Ambassador Karimov said in a press statement during the opening of a condolence book at the Azerbaijani Embassy, following the crash of the Azerbaijan Airlines plane.

He said, "By order of the head of state, an investigation committee has been formed to determine the circumstances of the incident, and we are awaiting the official findings of this committee."

Ambassador Karimov expressed gratitude for the international responses to the tragedy, particularly by Kuwait's leadership headed by His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, and His Highness the Prime Minister of Kuwait, who sent their sympathies to the President of Azerbaijan.

He said, "We have received many cables of condolences from various countries, the United Nations, and international organizations, including the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which reflects the magnitude of this great disaster."

Ambassador Karimov also commended the statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which expressed Kuwait's sympathy and solidarity with Azerbaijan's government and people, following the plane crash in western Kazakhstan.

See Also Page 6

## KNG chief

Ambassador Geltov congratulated Sheikh Mubarak on his appointment as KNG Chief and the political leadership's trust.

In return, Sheikh Mubarak expressed his gratitude and appreciation to Ambassador Geltov for his congratulations.

38 lives lost, 29 survivors injured as speculation mounts about cause

Azerbaijan observes day of mourning for air crash victims

BAKU, Dec 26, (AP): Azerbaijan on Thursday observed a nationwide day of mourning for the victims of the air crash that killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured as speculation mounted about a possible cause of the crash that remained unknown.

Azerbaijan Airlines' Embraer 190 was en route from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus on Wednesday when it was diverted for reasons yet unclear and crashed while making an attempt to land in Aktau in Kazakhstan after flying east across the Caspian Sea.

The plane went down about 3 kilometers (around 2 miles) from Aktau. Cellphone footage circulating online appeared to show the aircraft making a steep descent before smashing into the ground in a fireball. Other footage showed part of its fuselage ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft lying upside in the grass.

On Thursday, national flags were lowered across Azerbaijan, traffic across the country stopped at noon, and signals were sounded from ships and trains as the country observed a



In this photo provided by Azerbaijan's Presidential Press Office, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, center, holds a meeting following an Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 plane crash, in Baku, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2024. (AP)



In this photo released by Kazakhstan's Emergency Ministry Press Service, rescuers work at the wreckage of Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 on the ground near the airport of Aktau, Kazakhstan, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2024. (AP)

nationwide moment of silence. Speaking at a news conference Wednesday, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said that it was too soon to speculate on the reasons behind the

crash, but said that the weather had forced the plane to change from its planned course.

"The information provided to me is that the plane changed its course be-

tween Baku and Grozny due to worsening weather conditions and headed to Aktau airport, where it crashed upon landing," he said.

Russia's civil aviation authority,

Rosaviatsia, said that preliminary information indicated that the pilots diverted to Aktau after a bird strike led to an emergency on board.

According to Kazakh officials, those

aboard the plane included 42 Azerbaijani citizens, 16 Russian nationals, six Kazakhs and three Kyrgyzstani nationals.

As the official crash investigation started, theories abounded about a possible cause, with some commentators alleging that holes seen in the plane's tail section possibly indicate that it could have come under fire from Russian air defense systems fending off a Ukrainian drone attack.

Ukrainian drones had previously attacked Grozny, the provincial capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, and other regions in the country's North Caucasus. Some Russian media claimed that another drone attack on Chechnya happened on Wednesday, although it wasn't officially confirmed.

Osprey Flight Solutions, an aviation security firm based in the United Kingdom, warned its clients that the "Azerbaijan Airlines flight was likely shot down by a Russian military air-defense system." Osprey provides analysis for carriers still flying into Russia after Western airlines halted their flights during the war.

Rocky path to confirmation as allies and critics collide

Fate of Trump's Cabinet picks still unclear as Republicans prepare to take power in Senate

WASHINGTON, Dec 26, (AP): The fate of President-elect Donald Trump's Cabinet is still unclear after Republican senators spent much of December carefully dodging questions about Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s views on vaccines, accusations of sexual misconduct against Pete Hegseth and Tulsi Gabbard's 2017 meeting with then-President Bashar Assad of Syria.

While some GOP senators have indicated they are all-in for Trump's picks, others have withheld support, for now, especially on some of his more controversial nominees. The dynamic is injecting uncertainty into the process as Republicans prepare to take the Senate majority in January with a four-seat margin and as Trump aggressively challenges them to confirm his Cabinet immediately.

It's not unusual for senators to wait until after confirmation hearings to publicly announce a decision. But Republicans are under more pressure than usual as Trump and his allies make clear that they will confront senators who don't fall in line.

"You only have control of the Senate because of Donald Trump," the president-elect's son, Donald Trump Jr., warned during a media appearance this month. "Without that, you'd be relegated to insignificance."

There has been one casualty of the process so far - former Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, who withdrew from contention as attorney general after senators relayed private concerns. But Trump has enthusiastically stood by the rest, including Kennedy for secretary of Health and Human Services, Hegseth for secretary of Defense and Gabbard for director of national intelligence.

With hearings starting by mid-January, before Trump is even inaugurated, senators will soon have to decide how closely they will scrutinize the nominees and whether they are willing to vote against any of them. Republicans will have a 53-47 majority, so Trump cannot lose more than three votes on any nomination if Democrats are united in opposition.

The outcome of the confirmation process, and the level of dissent in the Senate, will likely set the tone for Trump's presidency and his relationship with Congress, which was frequently tumultuous during his first term. He often clashed with the Senate, in particular, but has signaled he expects Republican senators to be more compliant this time around.

"It's not about putting yeses on the board, it's about keeping nos off the board," said Oklahoma Sen. Markwayne Mullin, one of Trump's top allies in the Senate, who speaks with him frequently.

While most Senate Republicans have scrambled to display as much loyalty to Trump as possible, a handful have made clear that they are willing to defend the body's "advise and consent" role. Among the senators to watch are moderate Republicans Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Susan Collins of Maine and incoming freshman Sen. John Curtis of Utah.

"Anybody who wants to give me heat for doing my job, bring it on," Curtis said Sunday on ABC's "This Week" when asked about vetting Trump's nominees. "This is my job. It's my constitutional responsibility."

Still, even moderate senators have shied away from directly criticizing Trump's picks. And not a



Pete Hegseth, President-elect Donald Trump's nominee to be Defense Secretary, gives a thumbs-up as he walks with his wife Jennifer Rauchet, left, to meet with Sen. Joni Ernst, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, at the Capitol in Washington, on Dec. 9, 2024. (AP)

single Republican has gone on the record against a nominee.

Several of Trump's picks are expected to sail to confirmation, perhaps even with some Democratic votes. Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., has indicated he will support Florida Sen. Marco Rubio for secretary of State and Rep. Elise Stefanik for United Nations ambassador, as have a few other Democrats.

For the more controversial nominees, though, party unity will be key.

One of Trump's most embattled picks is Hegseth, a Fox News host and veteran who some see as inexperienced and has publicly questioned whether women should serve in combat. He has also faced allegations of sexual assault and excessive drinking that he has denied. But it's all given some senators pause, despite Trump's enthusiastic support.

Hegseth has faced particular pressure from Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst, herself a combat veteran who has worked to address sexual assault in the military. She has met with Hegseth several times, and has not yet said she will support him. She will have a chance to question him, publicly and face-to-face, in a Senate Armed Services Committee confirmation hearing that is scheduled for Jan. 14.

Though a hearing for Gabbard has not yet been set, senators will also be able to question her publicly and in a classified setting about her trip to Syria after the U.S. had severed diplomatic relations. Gabbard has defended the trip, saying it's important to open dialogue, but critics hear echoes of Russia-fueled talking points in her commentary. Assad fled to Moscow earlier this month after opposition forces overtook Syria in a surprise attack, ending his family's five decades of rule.

While Republican senators have mostly refrained from publicly expressing concerns about Gabbard's ties abroad, nearly 100 former senior U.S. diplomats and intelligence and national security officials have urged Senate leaders to schedule closed-door hearings to allow a full review of the government's files on her.

Senators have been a bit more openly skeptical of Kennedy, who has long questioned the use of some vaccines.

After a report in the New York Times that one of his advisers filed a petition to revoke approval for the polio vaccine in 2022, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell issued a statement saying that "efforts to undermine public confidence in proven cures are not just uninformed - they're dangerous," and that "anyone seeking the Senate's consent to serve in the incoming administration would do well to steer clear of even the appearance of association with such efforts."

McConnell, who had polio as a child, is leaving leadership next year but will stay in the Senate. His votes will also be closely watched after years of tension with Trump as he assumes a new role free from the responsibilities of leadership.

Like McConnell, many senators have taken an "advice" approach, telling the nominees what they need to do to be confirmed.

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis says he's told all of the nominees he's met with so far, "go out and see what the press is saying about you, find your top 10 and disarm the conversation by having a good solution for why that isn't you."

In addition, Tillis said, "you've got to have a good showing in committee."

US pledges air defense surge

Biden slams Russia's 'outrageous' attacks on Ukraine's energy grids

WASHINGTON, Dec 26, (KUNA): US President Joe Biden has condemned Russian "outrageous" attack

of cities and energy facilities in Ukraine, calling on the international community to stand by Kyiv against the Russian aggression.

"In the early hours of Christmas, Russia launched waves of missiles and drones against Ukrainian cities and critical energy infrastructure," Biden said in a statement late Wednesday.

The purpose of this "outrageous"

attack, he said, was to cut off the Ukrainian people's access to heat and electricity during winter and to jeopardize the safety of its grid.

The international community, he added, must continue to stand with Ukraine "until it triumphs over Russia's aggression." He said the US has in recent months provided Ukraine with hundreds of air defense missiles. "More are on the way."

"I have directed the Department of Defense to continue its surge of weapons deliveries to Ukraine, and the United States will continue to work tirelessly to strengthen Ukraine's position in its defense against Russian forces," said Biden.

Ukraine said the Russian attack caused damage to energy facilities.



Biden

Undersea power cable linking Finland, Estonia hit by outage

FRANKFURT, Germany, Dec 26, (AP): A power cable linking Finland and Estonia under the Baltic Sea suffered an outage, prompting an investigation, Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo said Wednesday.

Writing on X, Orpo said that power transmission through the Estlink-2 cable stopped Wednesday and that authorities were "investigating the matter." He said the interruption would not affect electricity supplies in Finland.

Estonian network operator Elering said there was enough spare capacity to meet power needs on the Estonian side, public broadcaster ERR said on its website.

Authorities have been on edge about undersea infrastructure in the Baltic. Two data cables, one running between Finland and Germany, the other between Lithuania and Sweden, were severed in November.

Germany's defense minister said officials had to assume the incident was "sabotage," but without providing evidence or saying who might have been responsible. The remark came during a speech in which he discussed hybrid warfare threats from Russia.



Finland's Prime Minister Petteri Orpo arrives for an EU summit at the European Council building in Brussels, Thursday, Dec. 19, 2024. (AP)

The Nord Stream natural gas pipelines that once brought natural gas from Russia to Germany were damaged by underwater explosions in September 2022. Authorities have termed it sabotage and launched criminal probes.

The Estlink-2 cable was down for much of this year to repair damage from a short circuit that may have been caused by the cable's complex positioning, ERR reported.

Europe

**Dutch found guilty:** A Russian court sentenced a Dutch citizen to three years in prison Wednesday after he was found guilty of punching a police officer.

Harry Johannes van Wurden was arrested and placed under house arrest following an altercation with a police officer in central Moscow in October, Russian news agency RIA Novosti reported, citing police. It said that van Wurden punched the officer in the face following a disagreement about a knocked-down road sign.

Van Wurden was found guilty of using violence against a government official by the capital's Khamovnichesky District Court, Russia's Interfax news agency said. The charge carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

A number of foreign nationals from the U.S. and Western Europe have been jailed in high-profile cases in Russia in recent years. (AP)

**Serbian students protest:** Serbia's striking university students on Wednesday rallied outside the chief prosecutor's office to demand justice over a concrete canopy collapse that killed 15 people last month in the country's north.

More than 1,000 students symbolically left letters on the doorstep of the public prosecutor's office, telling chief prosecutor Zagorka Dolovac that "students expect you to fight for law and justice, without political abuse or corruption."

Dolovac's office later responded with a statement inviting a student delegation to a meeting.

Serbia's universities have been blocked for weeks as part of a wider movement demanding accountability over the Nov. 1 tragedy in Novi Sad when a huge concrete construction at the railway station crashed onto the people below. (AP)



Pope Francis leaves the Rebibbia Prison where he symbolically opened a Holy Door with inmates in Rome, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2024. (AP)

Pope opens Holy Year with a message of hope to inmates

ROME, Dec 26, (AP): Pope Francis inaugurated his Holy Year at Rome's main prison on Thursday, bringing a message of hope to inmates and involving them in the Catholic Church's once every quarter-century celebration that is expected to bring about 32 million pilgrims to Rome.

Francis stood up from his wheelchair, knocked on the door to the chapel at Rebibbia prison and walked across the threshold, reenacting the gesture he performed at the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica two nights earlier on Christmas Eve.

The opening of the Holy Door at the basilica officially kicked off the Jubilee year, a church tradition dating to 1300 that nowadays occurs every 25 years and involves the faithful coming to Rome on pilgrimages.

"The first Holy Door I opened at Christmas in St. Peter's. I wanted the second one to be here, in a prison," Francis told the inmates before he entered. "I wanted each of us here, inside and out, to have the possibility of throwing open the door of our hearts and understanding that hope doesn't disappoint."

America

**Trump assassination trial delayed:** A man accused of attempting to assassinate President-elect Donald Trump in South Florida won't be tried until September 2025, a federal judge ruled this week.

Ryan Routh's trial will begin Sept. 8 instead of the previously scheduled Feb. 10, 2025 start date, U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon said in an order released on Monday.

Routh, 58, a Hawaii resident, has pleaded not guilty. Routh's attorneys had asked the judge to delay the trial until no earlier than next December, saying they needed more time to review the evidence against him and decide whether to mount an insanity defense. (AP)

**Dead body found in United plane:** Maui police are investigating the discovery of a dead body in the wheel well of a United Airlines plane after it landed in Maui, the airline and police department said in statements on Wednesday.

The body was found in the wheel well of one of the main landing gears on flight 202, which arrived at Kahului Airport from Chicago on Tuesday, United said in an emailed statement. The airline said the wheel well of the Boeing 787-10 was only accessible from the outside of the aircraft, and that it was unclear how or when the person accessed it.

In an emailed statement, the Maui Police Department said it was "actively investigating" the discovery of the dead body. (AP)

**NY taxi driver hits 6 pedestrians:** A taxicab hit six pedestrians in midtown Manhattan on Wednesday, police said, with three people - including a 9-year-old boy - transported to hospitals for their injuries.

A New York Police Department spokesman said the taxi driver may have suffered a medical episode, but that the investigation had yet to confirm that.

Two people, including the 9-year-old boy, were taken to Weill Cornell Medical Center, and one person was taken to Bellevue Hospital, the spokesperson said. The other three people who were hit by the taxi refused medical attention. All were in stable condition.

The taxi cab jumped the curb near Macy's flagship store at Herald Square around 4 p.m. and hit the pedestrians on the sidewalk, police said, adding that the driver remained at the scene. (AP)



A Mega Millions logo is displayed on a vending machine at the Indiana State Fair, Aug. 3, 2023, in Indianapolis. (AP)

Mega Millions jackpot surges past \$1b after no ticket match

INDIANAPOLIS, Dec 26, (AP): Hang onto those stocking-stuffer lottery tickets.

The Mega Millions jackpot has surpassed \$1 billion after no ticket matched all six numbers drawn on Christmas Eve. That means the estimated jackpot for Friday's drawing is \$1.15 billion, potentially the fifth-largest jackpot in the game's history.

"We know that many people will likely receive tickets to Friday's drawing as holiday gifts, and what a gift that would turn out to be if you ended up with a ticket worth a \$1.15 billion jackpot," Joshua Johnston, lead director for the Mega Millions Consortium said in a Wednesday statement.

The odds of winning the Mega Millions jackpot are 1 in 302,575,350, while the odds of winning any Mega Millions prize are 1 in 24, according to lottery officials.

Tickets for the game are sold in 45 states, along with Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Mega Millions tickets are \$2 a piece. Half of the proceeds from the sale of each ticket remains in the state where the ticket was sold. Drawings are held at 11 p.m. Eastern Time on Tuesdays and Fridays.

'Charismatic ... dictator'

## Former Suriname leader, military strongman dies

PARAMARIBO, Suriname, Dec 26, (AP): Desi Bouterse, a military strongman who led a 1980 coup in the former Dutch colony of Suriname then returned to power by election three decades later despite charges of drug smuggling and murder, has died. He was 79.

Suriname's President Chan Santokhi on Wednesday reflected on Bouterse's outsized legacy in a message of condolences to his family and called on the nation to "keep calm and maintain order."

Vice President Ronnie Brunswijk wrote on Facebook that Bouterse's "life had a lasting impact on our country and his efforts will not be forgotten." The cause of death was not immediately known.

Bouterse was applauded by supporters for his charisma and populist social programs. For his opponents, he was a ruthless dictator who was convicted of drug trafficking and extrajudicial killings.

In December 2023, Bouterse was sentenced to 20 years in prison for the murders of 15 opponents of the then-military government in a December 1982, ending a historic 16-year legal process. He then vanished and never served time in jail despite the sentencing.

### History

"There is nobody who has shaped the history of Suriname since its independence like Desi Bouterse," said Dutch historian Pepijn Reeser, who wrote a biography of Bouterse in 2015.

He said that Bouterse was the first to overcome the stark social class divide that once defined Suriname.

"Before the coup, it was unthinkable somebody from the lower class could become the most powerful man of the country. But he was also the first post-colonial leader to resort to political violence, and the first to use Suriname as a transshipment point for illegal narcotics," Reeser said.

Early Wednesday, dozens of

supporters gathered outside Bouterse's home where his wife lived, tears streaming down their faces. Many were dressed in purple, the color of his political party.

Born Oct. 13, 1945, on a former sugar plantation near the capital, Paramaribo, Bouterse left for the Netherlands in 1968, as did thousands of other Surinamers in that era to seek adventure or a better life in Europe. Suriname was then still a colony, and as a Dutch citizen he was eligible for conscription, so he joined the armed forces a few months after arriving.

### Frustration

He graduated from the Royal Military School and served at several Dutch army bases in the Netherlands and Germany. Bouterse returned to Suriname two weeks before it became an independent republic on Nov. 25, 1975, and joined its newly formed military.

The initial optimism of young military men in serving their own country quickly turned into frustration over widespread favoritism and corruption in the consecutive governments of Prime Minister Henck Arron. When Arron forbade the troops from unionizing, 16 young soldiers led by Bouterse overthrew the government on Feb. 25, 1980, and made him the de facto ruler.

"We took control because we want to save this country from ruin. There needs to be a total change of mentality to transform Suriname into the paradise it used to be," Bouterse said to a journalist a few hours after the coup.

When promised democratic reforms did not materialize, opposition to Bouterse's military regime grew rapidly, culminating in the killing of 15 men on Dec. 8, 1982. The victims were journalists, lawyers, military and university teachers, and their slaying became known as the "December Murders."



Suriname's President Desi Bouterse, re-elected to a second, five-year term, attends his swearing-in ceremony in Paramaribo, Suriname, Aug. 12, 2015. (AP)



Indian artists perform during procession of Shree Panchagni Akhada towards Sangam, the confluence of rivers Ganges and Yamuna during the first 'royal entry' (Peshwai) for the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, India, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2024. (AP)

## Youth visits, sports ties in pacts

# China, Japan deepen exchanges with 10 agreements

BEIJING, Dec 26, (Xinhua): Wang Yi, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese foreign minister, and Takeshi Iwaya, Japanese minister for foreign affairs, jointly attended the second meeting of a high-level consultation mechanism on people-to-people and cultural exchanges between China and Japan, in Beijing on Wednesday.

The meeting resulted in 10 important agreements, as follows.

First, the two sides will promote youth exchange visits, and encourage and support study trips between the two countries.

Second, the two sides will deepen cooperation in the field of education, strengthen the exchange of overseas students, and support primary and secondary schools in the two countries to establish sister schools and institutions of higher education to carry out inter-school cooperation.

Third, the two sides will support tourism cooperation and introduce more facilitation measures to promote mutual visits between tourists from the two countries.

Fourth, the two sides will build more bridges for exchanges between sister cities and make good use of mechanisms and platforms such as the China-Japan Governor Forum, the China-Japan-ROK Cultural Exchange Year and the Culture Cities of East Asia to expand friendly ex-

changes at the local and non-governmental levels.

Fifth, the two sides will strengthen sports exchanges and cooperation, and support each other in hosting major sports events such as the 2025 Harbin Asian Winter Games and the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in 2026.

Sixth, the two sides will support continued cooperation in film, television, music, publishing, animation, games and other cultural and entertainment industries, exchange visits of high-level art groups, and support the

translation and publication of classic works between the two countries.

Seventh, the two sides will strengthen exchanges and cooperation between media and think tanks, play a positive role in bilateral relations, and strive to improve public opinion and the environment for public opinion. The two sides will support exchanges and cooperation in new media and encourage exchanges between positive vibes of the two countries.

Eighth, the two sides will conduct exchanges between women's groups

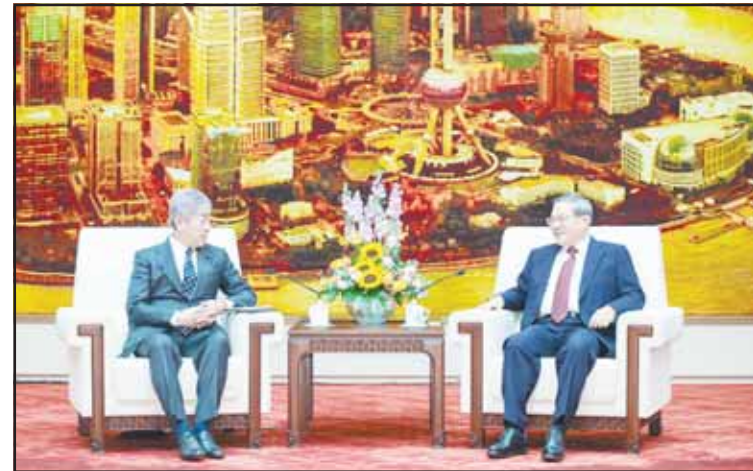
and share experience on promoting the common development of men and women. China invites Japan to attend the Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Ninth, the two sides will build the World Expo 2025 in Osaka, Kansai, into a platform for exchanges and friendship between the two peoples. China supports Japan in hosting the expo, while Japan welcomes China's participation and will provide assistance in the preparation and operation of the China Pavilion.

Tenth, the two sides will hold the third meeting of China-Japan high-level consultation mechanism on people-to-people and cultural exchanges in Japan in due course.

Noting that next year marks the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, Wang said that the purpose of remembering this history is to draw lessons from it and cherish the hard-won peace.

China hopes and believes that Japan can once again demonstrate its determination for peaceful development and work with China to promote the sound and stable development of China-Japan relations in the spirit of facing history squarely and looking to the future, said Wang.



Chinese Premier Li Qiang meets with Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Takeshi Iwaya at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, capital of China, Dec. 25, 2024. (Xinhua)

Conservatives accused of undermining court process to save Yoon's presidency

## South Korean opposition submits motion to impeach acting president as strife deepens

SEOUL, Dec 26, (AP): South Korea's main opposition party submitted a motion on Thursday to impeach the country's acting leader over his reluctance to fill three Constitutional Court vacancies ahead of the court's review of rebellion charges against impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol stemming from his short-lived martial law decree on Dec. 3.

The court appointments have stalled amid an intensifying dispute between the liberal opposition and Yoon's conservative party, and the potential impeachment of Prime Minister Han Duck-soo may deepen the political paralysis that has halted high-level diplomacy and rattled financial markets.

The opposition-controlled National Assembly also passed motions calling for the appointment of three Constitutional Court justices as the court prepares to start deliberations on whether to dismiss or reinstate Yoon. The vote came shortly after Han reiterated in a televised statement that he wouldn't appoint the justices without bipartisan consent.

National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik urged Han to swiftly appoint the justices, saying that his calls for bipartisan consent essentially amounted



South Korea's main opposition Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung, third from right, talks with his party members during the plenary session at the National Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2024. (AP)

to a refusal and "infringes on the National Assembly's right to select Constitutional Court justices."

Yoon's People Power Party, whose members mostly boycotted the National Assembly vote, argued that Han shouldn't exercise presidential author-

ity to appoint the proposed justices while Yoon has yet to be formally removed from office.

The main opposition Democratic Party has accused the conservatives of undermining the court process to save Yoon's presidency, and its motion to

impeach Han could go to a floor vote as early as Friday. The Democrats' floor leader, Park Chan-dae, said Han's comments showed "he lacks both the qualifications to serve as the acting leader and the will to uphold the Constitution."

Yoon's presidential powers were suspended after the National Assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14 over an attempted power grab that lasted only hours but has triggered weeks of political turmoil that has shaken one of Asia's most robust democracies.

To formally end Yoon's presidency, at least six justices on the nine-member Constitutional Court must vote in favor. Three seats remain vacant following retirements and a full bench could make conviction more likely.

The court, which is to hold a pretrial hearing in Yoon's case on Friday, has said it believes the acting president can exercise the right to appoint justices.

Three of the court's nine justices are directly appointed by the president. Three are nominated by the head of the Supreme Court and three by the National Assembly, and they are then formally appointed by the president in what is widely considered a procedural matter.

The three seats that are currently open are to be nominated by lawmakers. South Korea's Constitution states that the National Assembly "selects" three spots on the court rather than recommends, suggesting that the presidential appointments for these spots are a formality rather than a substantive authority, according to some legal experts.

"The consistent spirit reflected in our Constitution and laws is that an acting president should focus on maintaining stability in governance to help the country overcome crisis while refraining from exercising significant powers exclusive to the president, including appointments to constitutional institutions," Han said. "I will withhold the appointment of Constitutional Court justices until the ruling and opposition parties submit an agreed-upon proposal."

Han has also clashed with the Democrats over his vetoes of controversial agricultural bills endorsed by the opposition and refusal to approve bills calling for independent investigations of Yoon and corruption allegations involving his wife, Kim Keon Hee.

If Han is impeached, Choi Sang-mok, the country's deputy prime min-

ister and finance minister, is next in line.

The impeachment vote against Han could face legal ambiguities. Most South Korean officials can be impeached with a simple majority of the National Assembly, but impeaching presidents requires two-thirds. The rival parties differ on which standard should apply to an acting president. The Democratic Party controls 170 of the National Assembly's 300 seats, so it would need support from members of other parties including Yoon's own to get a two-thirds majority.

While focusing on defending himself in the Constitutional Court, Yoon has dodged several requests by law enforcement authorities to appear for questioning over rebellion charges and also blocked searches of his office.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which is leading a joint investigation with police and military authorities of Yoon, summoned him for questioning this Sunday after he ignored a request to appear on Christmas Day. The office plans to question Yoon on charges of abuse of authority and orchestrating a rebellion.

## Taliban say Pakistani airstrikes killed 46 in Afghanistan, mostly women and children

PESHAWAR, Pakistan, Dec 26, (AP): Pakistan's airstrikes on eastern Afghanistan killed 46 people, mostly women and children, a Taliban government official said Wednesday, raising fears of further straining relations between the two neighbors.

Hamdullah Fitrat, the deputy spokesman for the Afghan government, said those killed in the strikes that targeted four locations in Barmal, a district in the province of Paktika, were refugees, adding that six others were also wounded.

This comes a day after Pakistani security officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity in line with regulations, told The Associated Press that Tuesday's operation was to dismantle a training facility and kill insurgents in Paktika.

Earlier Wednesday, Mohammad

Khurasani, the spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban or Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, claimed in a statement that 50 people, including 27 women and children, died in the strikes.

He said they were "unarmed refugees" who fled to Afghanistan because of Pakistan's offensive in the northwest.

The TTP - a separate group but also a close ally of the Afghan Taliban - also shared photos, alleging they were of children killed during the Pakistani operation.

The strikes came hours after Mohammad Sadiq, Pakistan's special representative for Afghanistan, traveled to Kabul to discuss a range of issues.

Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry in Kabul summoned the Pakistani envoy and lodged a strong protest over the strikes by Pakistan's military.

In a statement, it said while a representative of the civilian government of Pakistan was busy in talks with the Afghan officials, the strikes were carried out by Pakistani forces to "create mistrust in the relations between the two countries."

It said Kabul "will not accept the violation of the country's territory under any circumstances, and the country is ready to defend its independence and territory" and "such irresponsible actions will definitely have consequences."

Pakistan has not commented on the latest strikes.

However, the Pakistani military said Wednesday that security forces killed 13 insurgents in an intelligence-based operation in South Waziristan, a district located along eastern Afghanistan's Paktika province.

## Africa

**Famine alarms UN chief:** UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is alarmed by the rapidly worsening food security situation in Sudan and calls for the parties to facilitate access to humanitarian assistance, his spokesman said in a statement on Tuesday.

After over 20 months of conflict, more than 24.6 million people in Sudan -- over half the population -- face high levels of acute food insecurity, the statement said, citing the latest UN-backed assessment.

In a report released on Tuesday, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the global hunger monitor, confirmed that famine is present in at least five areas of Sudan, including North Darfur's Zamzam camp and parts of the Western Nuba Mountains. The crisis is projected to expand further, with five additional areas expected to face famine between December 2024 and May 2025.

The statement said that the United Nations and its partners are scaling up the delivery of food assistance and other essential support for the most vulnerable, but ongoing fighting and restrictions on the movement of relief supplies and personnel continue to imperil aid operations. (Xinhua)

**SADC welcomes ruling:** Zimbabwean President and Southern African Development Community (SADC) Chairperson Emmerson Mnangagwa on Wednesday welcomed a court ruling that proclaimed



Guterres



Mnangagwa

Daniel Chapo the winner of the Oct. 9 general elections of Mozambique.

"The ruling by that country's top electoral court, which upheld Frelimo party's victory, completes and thus exhausts all lawful processes on determining election results, in line with that country's national laws, and in keeping with SADC's Election Guidelines and expectations," Mnangagwa said in a statement. (Xinhua)

**Libya deports migrants:** Libya deported a group of migrants to Niger by land on Wednesday, the first such deportation in years, according to the Libyan Illegal Migration Control Department.

The department said in a statement on its Facebook page that the deportation took place in the presence of Niger's charge d'affaires to Libya.

The migrants were deported across the land border with Niger "for violating applicable Libyan laws" after completing necessary procedures, the statement said. (Xinhua)

## Market Movements 26-12-2024

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts		
UAE	- DFMGI	+0.56	5,111.98	SAUDI	- TASI	-0.28	11,859.47
JAPAN	- NIKKEI	+1.12	39,568.06	PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	-1.96	110,436.02
PHILIPPINES	- PSEI	+0.06	6,539.02				

# Business

Showcasing its diverse financing solutions

## KFH concludes its participation in Baytak exhibition



Honoring of Baytak.



Arshied Al-Baddah making his presentation.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has concluded its participation as a main sponsor of the Baytak Exhibition – Building and Design from A to Z, Kuwait's largest exhibition for construction and building. Held at the Kuwait International Fair, the event featured participation from over 135

local entities and representatives of renowned global companies and brands in the industry.

During the exhibition, KFH showcased its best financing products and solutions, including exclusive facilities for construction and finishing, at a dedicated booth staffed by a specialized team. The team addressed all

inquiries from customers and visitors.

KFH showcased its prominent financing services and products offered to customers under the slogan "Your Financing Easier with KFH". These offerings provide customers with a wide range of competitive advantages, including financing up to KD 70,000 for up to 15 years, free

financial advisory, a deferred first installment for 12 months, and competitive profit margin.

At a lecture held concurrently with the exhibition titled "Your Financing Made Easier with KFH", Manager-Home/Installment Finance at KFH, Arshied Al-Baddah emphasized KFH's leading role in real estate

and consumer financing, along with its prominent financial and technical facilitation services for construction. Furthermore, attendees received a brief overview of the most salient services and products available to customers and companies.

KFH has partnered with leading local suppliers to offer special pro-

motions on construction and finishing materials, electronics, and furniture. KFH also provides investor discounts to capitalize on Kuwait's growing real estate and construction sectors. For a seamless experience, financing and transactions can be completed online through KFHOnline or kfh.com.

## Turkiye's soaring costs creating a 'lost generation' of children forced to help their families get by

Inflation stood at 47% in Nov, having peaked at 85% in late 2022

ISTANBUL, Dec 26, (AP): In a dim one-room apartment in one of Istanbul's poorest neighborhoods, 11-year-old Atakan Sahin curls up on a threadbare sofa with his siblings to watch TV while their mother stirs a pot of pasta.

The simple meal is all the family of six can look forward to most evenings. Atakan, his two younger brothers and 5-year-old sister are among the one-third of Turkish children living in poverty.

"Look at the state of my children," said Rukiye Sahin, 28. "I have four children. They don't get to eat chicken, they don't get to eat meat. I send them to school with torn shoes."

Persistently high inflation, triggered by currency depreciation and unconventional economic policies that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pursued but later abandoned, has left many families struggling to pay for food and housing. Experts say it's creating a lost generation of children who have been forced to grow up too quickly to help their families eke out an existence.

According to a 2023 joint report by UNICEF and the Turkish Statistical Institute, about 7 million of Turkey's roughly 22.2 million children live in poverty.

That deprivation is brought into stark focus in neighborhoods such as Istanbul's Tarlabasi, where the Sahin family lives just a few minutes' walk from Istiklal Avenue, a tourism hot spot bris-



Young girls sell tissues to passersby on the Karakoy sea promenade in Istanbul, Turkiye, Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024. (AP)

ting with brightly lit shops and expensive restaurants.

Meanwhile, the Sahins eat sitting on the floor of their room - the same floor Rukiye and her husband sleep on while their children occupy the room's sofas. In the chilly early December night, a stove burns scraps of wood to keep them warm. They sometimes fall

asleep to the sound of rats scuttling through the building.

Atakan spends his days helping his father scour dumpsters in search of recyclable material to earn the family a meager income.

Poor children in Istanbul also earn money for their families by selling small items such as pens, tissues or

bracelets at the bars and cafes in the city's entertainment districts, often working late into the night.

"I can't go to school because I have no money," he said. "We have nothing. Can you tell me how I can go? On sunny days, when I don't go to school, I collect plastic and other things with my father. We sell whatever we find."

The cash helps buy basic food-stuffs and pay for his siblings to attend school. On the days Atakan can attend, he is ill-equipped to succeed, lacking proper shoes, a coat and textbooks for the English class he loves.

The Sahins struggle to scrape together the money to cover the rent, utilities and other basic expenses as Turkiye's cost-of-living crisis continues to rage. Inflation stood at 47% in November, having peaked at 85% in late 2022. Prices of food and nonalcoholic drinks were 5.1% higher in November than in the previous month.

Under these circumstances, a generation of children is growing up rarely enjoying a full meal of fresh meat or vegetables.

Rukiye and her husband receive 6,000 lira (\$173) per month in government welfare to help towards school costs, but they pay the same amount in rent for their home.

"My son says, 'Mom, it's raining, my shoes are soaking wet.' But what can I do?" Rukiye said. "The state doesn't help me. I'm in this room alone with my children. Who do I have except them?"

The picture of children rummaging through garbage to help support their families is far from the image Turkiye presents to the world: that of an influential world power with a vibrant economy favorable to foreign investment.

Erdogan is proud of the social programs his party has introduced since he came to power more than 20 years ago, boasting that the "old days of prohibitions, oppression, deprivation and poverty are completely behind us."

Speaking at the G20 summit in November, Erdogan described Turkiye's social security system as "one of the

most comprehensive and inclusive" in the world. "Our goal is to ensure that not a single poor person remains. We will continue our work until we achieve this," he said.

Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek, tasked with implementing austerity and taming inflation, said the 17,000 lira (\$488) monthly minimum wage isn't low. But he has pledged to raise it as soon as possible.

Although the government allocates billions of lira to struggling households, inflation, which most people agree is far above the official figure, eats into any aid the state can give.

In districts such as Tarlabasi, rents have risen five-fold in recent years due to gentrification in central Istanbul that puts pressure on the housing market for low-income families.

Experts say welfare payments aren't enough for the millions who rely on them, forcing many parents to make impossible choices: Should they pay the rent or buy clothing for the children? Should they send them to school or keep them home to earn a few extra lira?

Volunteers are trying to ease the cycle of deprivation.

Mehmet Yeralan, a 53-year-old former restaurant owner, brings essentials to Tarlabasi's poor people that they can't afford, including coats, notebooks and the occasional bag of rice.

"Our children do not deserve this," he said, warming himself by a barrel of burning scrap wood on the street. "Families are in very difficult situations.

They cannot buy food for their children and send them to school. Children are on the streets, selling tissues to support their families. We are seeing deep poverty here."

### Beijing-Ankara cooperation under the initiative has gained traction

China's BRI offers 'win-win solutions' to nations, says Turkish expert

ANKARA, Dec 26, (Xinhua): The China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) serves as a good example of equal and mutually beneficial cooperation between nations based on "win-win solutions," a Turkish expert told Xinhua in a recent interview.

"The BRI is a very important initiative to revive the ancient Silk Road, a cross-Eurasian land-based communication and trade network," said Ali Oguz Dirioz, an associate professor of international relations at Ankara's TOBB University of Economics and Technology.

China-Turkiye cooperation under the BRI has gained traction, with Turkiye's strategic position bridging Asia and Europe, Dirioz noted.

He added that over the past decade,

the BRI has grown into an extensive cooperation network spanning three continents, offering a new model for multilateral cooperation amid growing global trade threats from conflicts and crises.

The initiative reflects the Chinese philosophy of peaceful cooperation between communities, Dirioz said.

"When Chinese President Xi Jinping said that China wants to jointly develop the BRI, this is exactly the message of the peaceful cooperative approach which is in line with the Chinese philosophy of fostering collaborative communities," he noted.

In 2013, Xi proposed jointly building a Silk Road Economic Belt and a 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, now

known as the BRI. Since then, transnational cooperation under the BRI has expanded from Eurasia to Africa, Latin America and the South Pacific.

A decade later, the BRI has evolved from a vision into reality, from a general framework into concrete projects. It has become the world's most popular international public good and the largest international cooperation platform, Dirioz said.

So far, over 150 countries and over 30 international organizations have signed cooperation documents with Beijing under the BRI, a testimony to its growing global appeal.

Data from China's Ministry of Commerce revealed that by the end of 2023, Chinese companies had established

17,000 overseas enterprises in BRI-participating countries, with direct investment stock surpassing 330 billion U.S. dollars. Meanwhile, overseas economic and trade cooperation zones built under the initiative had created 530,000 local jobs.

Dirioz called the initiative a model for promoting global growth, highlighting its transformative impact on infrastructure, trade, and technology, especially renewable energy technologies.

"China has been one of the most responsible nations in showing leadership for renewable energy and technology development, and also in regards to cooperation with its partners," Dirioz observed.

### Bursa Kuwait closes with the general index rising by 0.07%

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): Bursa Kuwait closed on Thursday with the general index rising by 5.20 points, or 0.07 percent, to reach 7,350.86 points. A total of 172.4 million shares were traded through 11,276 cash transactions, amounting to KD 37 million (approximately USD 112.8 million).

The main market index also saw an increase, climbing 9.54 points or 0.14 percent to close at 6,730.39 points. This segment recorded trading of 102.7 million shares through 6,730 transactions, valued at KD 13.6 million (USD 96.3 million).

Meanwhile, the premier market index rose by 4.31 points or 0.05 per-

cent, reaching 7,870.29 points with 69.7 million shares traded through 4,546 transactions worth KD 23.3 million (USD 71 million).

Additionally, the Main 50 index increased by 1.20 points or 0.02 percent to close at 6,610.63 points, with trading involving 55 million shares through 3,680 cash transactions valued at KD 8.8 million (approximately USD 26.8 million).

Overall, the positive performance across various market segments indicates a steady investor sentiment in Bursa Kuwait as trading activity remains robust amid ongoing economic developments in the region.

## China lends helping hand in Mideast's green transition

CAIRO, Dec. 26, (Xinhua): In the golden expanse of the Arabian desert where oil's dominance was unchallenged, a new source of power is taking shape: solar panels gleam under the relentless sun; wind turbines carve arcs against the sky; and electric cars hum along newly paved roads.

The scene is not a fantasy but a rapidly unfolding reality, driven by an alliance that is reshaping the Middle East's future -- its partnership with China.

By 2024, China and the Middle East

had forged dynamic cooperation in green energy, fitting the region's aspirations to diversify its economy with China's expertise in renewable technologies. The partnership, spanning solar power, hydrogen production, and electric vehicles, is remoulding the region's "power" dynamics.

**A solar-powered renaissance**

In the Al Dhafra desert, the world's largest single-site solar plant built by China Machinery Engineering Corporation stood as a testament to this pro-

ductive partnership, delivering a staggering 2,100 MW of power, lighting up 200,000 homes in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and cutting carbon emissions by 2.4 million tonnes annually.

The UAE is not unique in making strides in green energy across the region, where iconic projects are sprouting: the NOOR Concentrated Solar Power projects in Morocco, one of the world's largest concentrated solar farms whose second and the third phases were constructed by Chinese

companies; Ibril Solar Power project, the largest renewable energy project in Oman; and the world's largest photovoltaic-energy storage microgrid on Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast.

Adding to the momentum, Chinese giants Jinko Solar and TCL Zhonghuan announced joint ventures with Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) in July 2024. With investments worth over 3 billion U.S. dollars, these projects aim to localize solar manufacturing and help translate Saudi

Arabia into a global hub for renewable energy exports.

"These agreements will not only enhance local capabilities but also solidify Saudi Arabia's role in the global energy transition," a PIF statement said.

**Electric dreams come true**

While solar power is being wired to Mideast homes, Chinese-made electric vehicles (EVs) are whizzing on the roads. In Riyadh and Dubai, EVs are no longer novelties but harbingers of a dramatic change for green energy

vehicles. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 presents a 50 billion dollar investment in EV production, with the first Saudi-made electric vehicles coming off the production line in 2025.

In the UAE, Chinese carmaker NIO, in partnership with CYVN Holdings, launched NIO MENA in October. The joint venture will introduce NIO's vehicle models and establish a research and development center focused on AI-driven technologies, notably autonomous driving.





Efforts realized through bank's social responsibility initiatives in 2024

# NBK strengthens commitment to advancing Kuwaiti society

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: In 2024, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) reaffirmed its dedication to sustainability by actively initiating and supporting social programs spanning health, social development, environmental protection, youth advancement, education, and women's empowerment. These efforts highlighted NBK's pivotal role in championing social responsibility in Kuwait, reinforcing its position as a leader in driving sustainable development in alignment with the National Development Plan's objectives.

Over the course of the year, NBK reached notable milestones in its sustainability journey through a range of services, contributions, and initiatives. These efforts spanned key areas such as environmental stewardship, healthcare advancements, social empowerment, education, and sports development, highlighting the bank's dedication to embedding sustainability into its operations and fostering community support.

Commenting on NBK's Sustainability Report 2024, Manal Al-Mattar, Deputy General Manager and Head of the Corporate Communications Group at NBK, stated, "NBK remains committed to steadily amplifying the positive impact of our community investments by diversifying support and driving meaningful social change, all in alignment with the Group's ESG strategy, which we view as a fundamental responsibility."

## NBK Initiatives & Programs

### Bankee Program: Promoting Financial Literacy in Schools

This year saw the continued success of the Bankee program, Kuwait's first initiative of its kind, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha). The program aims to enhance financial awareness among school students by offering practical and interactive lessons on financial literacy.

"Our goal is to cultivate a financially informed community that can contribute to sustainable economic growth in Kuwait by integrating financial literacy into the curriculum and promoting public-private partnerships through the implementation of the classroom economy model in schools," Mattar stated.

Bankee is the first program of its kind, developed by NBK, to introduce financial literacy to the community, with a focus on students in schools. Its aim is to enhance financial inclusion and ensure sustainable improvement in financial literacy within the community for the future.

In its first academic year (2023-2024), the program included 30 schools, 3,400 teachers, and approximately 16,000 students. For the second year (2024-2025), the program aims to reach 60 schools, 6,000 teachers, and 30,000 students.

The program seeks to introduce students to fundamental economic concepts and practices, including earning, spending, saving, and managing financial obligations. This is achieved through a classroom system that simulates the real economic environment, using practical methods and an interactive approach.

The program has been implemented in several primary schools in Kuwait since 2022. In recognition of its innovative approach, the Bank was awarded the Bronze Award for the Bankee program at the Qorus Awards in the Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG) category, honoring organizations that integrate sustainability and ESG standards into their operations.

### Training Programs for Fresh Graduates

NBK offered internship opportunities through a training program that it sponsored, supported, or organized, including the following initiatives:

- Sponsorship of LOYAC training program "KON". Now in its seventh consecutive year, this program is organized in collaboration with Babson College for Entrepreneurship Education and aims to inspire students to lead and innovate with projects that contribute to societal progress. This year, 53 trainees participated in the program. Additionally, the Bank supported another LOYAC initiative, Kilma, designed to enhance public speaking and persuasion skills. This three-week program saw the participation of 18 young individuals aged 13 to 17.

- Sponsored the TAMAKAN Program, organized by Creative Confidence for the fifth consecutive year, offering 34 trainees specialized courses aimed at enhancing their skills and preparing them to become effective and valuable contributors to the workforce.

- Organized the Aspire Program for high school students in 2024, training 120 students aged 14 to 18 on banking skills and conducting workshops in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, Nazaha, Kuwait Dive Team, Omniya Recycling, and Creative Confidence. The program concluded with interactive field tours of some of Kuwait's most successful landmarks in business, culture, and finance, including Kuwait Airways, Jazeera Airways, Kuwait Dairy Company (KDD), Grand Hyatt Hotel, and Kuwait Times newspaper.

### Ramadan Initiatives

Al-Mattar emphasized that one of NBK's most notable annual initiatives is its program dedicated to the month of Ramadan. This year, the program involved the distribution of 5,000



meals, including Iftar meals for fasting individuals, through field tours across various areas in Kuwait throughout the holy month. NBK's meal trucks visited residential neighborhoods, popular markets, public transport hubs, and numerous key facilities to distribute Iftar meals, marking a significant milestone in the program's development. The initiative not only provided financial support but also invested in businesses and social programs, ensuring the ongoing impact of this charitable effort for families and individuals in need.

### Environmental Protection

NBK has further strengthened its commitment to community development by providing continuous support for LOYAC's impactful programs, particularly those centered around sustainability. A notable example is the Permaculture Training Program in Portugal, which underscores the strategic partnership between the Bank and LOYAC in empowering youth and enhancing their understanding of environmental sustainability. Spanning seven days, this initiative exemplifies NBK's dedication to fostering a generation of socially responsible individuals who are equipped to drive positive change in the environment.

NBK also supported the "EcoQuest" competition, which LOYAC has established as a regular initiative to promote environmental awareness and foster knowledge and culture among high school students aged 15 to 17. This competition aligns with LOYAC's strategy for green spaces and its goal of raising environmental awareness among youth, preparing an empowered generation committed to advancing sustainable agriculture and expanding green spaces in Kuwait. This year, 35 students participated in the competition.

NBK also took part in the trips organized by the LOYAC Environmental Volunteer Foundation, as well as the Green Volunteering and Green Darb programs, which support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 15, which focuses on life on land. This aligns with NBK's strategy to invest in and support society. The volunteer trips included visits to the Sulaibiya and Wafra farms, with a total of 130 volunteers participating in the environmental training programs.

As part of its sponsorship of Kuwait Dive Team's project to protect and rehabilitate the marine environment, islands, and coral reefs, NBK supported the team in an operation focused on removing harmful waste and neglected fishing nets. The KuwaitDive Team successfully removed plastic waste and abandoned fishing nets from various areas of Kuwaiti coasts, contributing to the preservation of the marine ecosystem.

NBK also supported Omniya Recycling's "Your School's Wish" project, the largest educational competition across all government educational levels, aimed at collecting plastic for recycling.

NBK also extended its support to the Blank Camp for children aged 3 to 13, aiming to foster their creativity. As part of this initiative, the children created five advertisements centered around the concept of sustainability, in collaboration with a company specializing in animation production.

### Diverse social support

Speaking about social initiatives, Al-Mattar highlighted the total social welfare efforts provided by NBK this year, led by organizations such as LOYAC, Bait Abdullah, and Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH). The Bank also supported various events, including Center 21 and the Kuwait Association for Learning Differences (KALD), along with projects in collaboration with the Red Crescent Society and the annual Ramadan "Doing Good Deeds" program. Furthermore, NBK contributed to significant cultural projects with the Jaber Cultural Center and Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah, reflecting the Bank's commitment to being a leading supporter of events that hold cultural and artistic value, fostering purposeful development and strengthening the cultural depth of society.

Furthermore, NBK organized an open day for low-income children and their families, offering them a chance to enjoy a day filled with fun and sports activities, especially for those unable to access summer programs. This initiative reflects NBK's commitment to sustainable development and aligns with the United Nations SDGs, aiming to enhance the quality of life for underprivileged children and contribute to building a more equitable society. The event, held in collaboration with the Touristic Enterprises Company, hosted 55 children aged 6 to 12 who participated in swimming, sports lessons, competitions, and other recreational activities. Each child received gifts and prizes, making the day truly special.

### NBK Run

NBK organized its annual NBK Run, reaffirming its dedication to community development through initiatives that foster social engagement. This year, the Bank partnered with EQUATE Petrochemical Company to enhance the event, including a special needs category for participants. EQUATE sponsored this category across three groups: wheelchair users, visually impaired individuals, and those with prosthetics. The 30th edition of the race attracted over 7,000 participants and a large audience, underscoring NBK's success in hosting events that consistently garner widespread participation and community trust.

### NBK Children's Hospital Activities and the "I Dream To Be" Initiative

NBK continued its weekly activities at the NBK Specialized Hospital for Hematology, Cancer, and Pediatric Stem Cell Transplantation, aiming to provide exceptional psychological care for patients and their families. Over the year, the Bank organized 16 activities, attended by approximately 300 children, creating moments of joy and support during their treatment journey.

As part of its "I Dream to Be" initiative, NBK brought joy to six children with cancer by fulfilling their dreams, highlighting the Bank's dedication to making a meaningful difference in their lives.

This year, NBK continued its support for Bayt Abdullah (BACH) and KACCH, reinforcing its commitment to health-focused initiatives aimed at supporting children with cancer.

### Prioritizing Employee Well-Being for a Healthier and More Productive Work Environment

Through its Employee Wellbeing Program, NBK provides a range of medical, health, and awareness campaigns dedicated to enhancing the well-being of its employees.

As part of its health awareness campaigns, NBK collaborates with Wara Hospital, with specialists and doctors stationed at the NBK Clinic located at the Bank's headquarters. The clinic, now managed by Wara, provides employees with consultations and conducts necessary medical tests to support their health and well-being.

As part of this year's awareness initiatives, NBK launched several awareness campaigns aligned with international and national events. The most prominent of these campaigns focused on employee health, addressing mental health, nutritional health, physical well-being, exercise, as well as chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and incurable diseases like breast cancer, among others.

NBK also organized numerous recreational activities and trips for its employees. This year, the Bank inaugurated a library corner for relaxation and leisure, while continuing to offer access to the health club at its headquarters for all employees.

### Women Empowerment

As part of its commitment to women's safety and security, NBK illuminated its headquarters in orange, marking one of Kuwait's landmarks for 16 days in support of the UN's "The World is Orange" campaign. This initiative aimed to raise awareness about the severity of gender-based violence. Notably, NBK was among the first organizations in Kuwait to sign the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPS) on the United Nations website.



Manal Al-Mattar

### Al-Mattar:

- We are making steady progress in amplifying our positive societal impact by diversifying support initiatives and aligning with the Group's ESG strategy
- The Bankee Program, designed to enhance financial literacy among students, stands as a successful model of collaboration between the public and private sectors to advance educational awareness in financial management
- Distribution of 5,000 Iftar meals to fasting individuals during field tours conducted throughout the holy month, reflecting a spirit of community solidarity
- The annual running race continues to promote health, social engagement, and sports awareness, reinforcing its enduring message of wellness
- Training approximately 200 students through tailored programs for graduates and university students, including "KON," "TAMAKAN," and "Kilma," aimed at fostering career readiness and leadership skills
- Collaborating with the Kuwait Dive Team to remove plastic waste and abandoned fishing nets from various Kuwaiti coasts, contributing to marine conservation efforts
- Supporting LOYAC's environmental programs to raise ecological awareness among youth, empower sustainable agricultural practices, and expand green spaces across Kuwait
- Continuing to implement initiatives under the Employee Wellbeing Program, in partnership with specialists and doctors from Wara Hospital, to promote health and wellness among employees



Top and above: Photos from the NBK initiatives & programs.

# What's On

## Zain's vibrant fan zones bring even more excitement to the Khaleeji Zain 26 experience



Screens for live match broadcasts and numerous entertainment activities.



Zain's fan zones welcome fans throughout the tournament.

### Live matches, prizes, activities, and more at 5 locations

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: Since the first whistle blew to mark the start of Khaleeji Zain 26, Zain, the Title Partner of the tournament, has been committed to enriching the fans' experience both inside and outside the stadium. Through dedicated fan zones spread across Kuwait, Zain celebrates this regional sporting event throughout the tournament's duration.

Zain welcomes fans daily at Murouj from 4 PM to 10 PM, in addition to the fan zone at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium and Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium before kick-off and during halftime. These include features such as the "Fan of the Match" segment, which highlights outstanding supporters, Zain's quiz competitions, and more.

The tournament, which began last week with a spectacular open-

ing ceremony, will conclude on January 3, 2025. This marks the fifth time Kuwait has hosted the



The tournament mascot, Haydo, engages with fans

ing ceremony, will conclude on January 3, 2025. This marks the fifth time Kuwait has hosted the

Gulf Cup. As Zain warmly welcomes Gulf delegations and fans to this premier regional event, the

company reaffirms that its strategic partnership with this prominent championship underscores its commitment to supporting major sports events and competitions, enhancing Kuwait's standing in the regional sports arena.

Zain's partnership with this tournament further emphasizes its ongoing support for sports at both the local and regional levels. Ahead of the competition's kick-off, Zain hosted the tournament's original trophy at its headquarters, serving as the first stop of its promotional tour in Kuwait. Zain employees and their families had the unique opportunity to capture memorable moments with the trophy before the tournament officially commenced.

The promotional tour included multiple stops, such as Kuwait Inter-

national Airport, partner and sponsor premises, and The Walk Mall. The tour also showcased the trophy and official match ball at Zain's Murouj fan zone. Zain took pride in welcoming Gulf teams and delegations to Kuwait by offering exclusive lines featuring their respective country codes and complimentary lines for guests to enhance their connectivity experience during their stay in Kuwait. These were distributed at both air and land entry points.

Additionally, Zain collaborated with Kuwait Times to release a special edition celebrating the launch of Khaleeji Zain 26. This edition features detailed information about the tournament, participating teams, match schedules, and more. It is available at Zain's fan zones throughout the event.



Photos of some of the performances by Grade 3 students

### A celebration of arts, culture, global citizenship

## FAIPS Grade-3 students dazzle at the 'Heal the World' Annual Day function

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: Morning of Thursday, Dec 19, saw the spectacular FAIPS Annual Day Function 'Heal the World' with great elation and gusto at the state of art school auditorium put up wholeheartedly by the grade 3 students.

The event commenced with the rendition of the Holy Quran followed by the lighting of the lamp. The Principal, Ravi Ayanoli welcomed the esteemed guests of the day: the Chief Guest His Excellency Olivier Gauvin, Ambassador of France to the State of Kuwait, the Guest of Honor Dr. Sameer Humad, President of IDF Kuwait. Also welcomed special guests Benoit Cathala, Director, IFK, Cultural Attaché, Embassy of France, Kuwait and Dr. Said, Assistant Director, French Institute in Kuwait. In his welcome note, the Principal, Ravi Ayanoli highlighted the crucial role that both parents and teachers play in nurturing the students.... global citizens of tomorrow.

The theme of the event 'Heal the World' was synchronously choreographed and meticulously expressed through a wide array of performances starting with heartwarming Hindi and English songs that left everyone in awe by showing that there is still hope to protect the Earth.

The inaugural dance 'Rhythm of Life' lit up the morning by beautifully conveying the message to protect the trees. The jaw dropping act of mime by 'Silent Riders' shouted out the importance of saving water. The carefully choreographed French, Arabic, Gujarati, Goan, fusion and contemporary dances left the audience cheering for more.

The culminating power packed performance of the 'Thunder Threads' featured stunning display of moves. Their infectious smiles and spirited movements brought a sense of joy, leaving everyone excited for next year's celebration.



Photos from the FAIPS Grade 2 Annual Day function.

The Chief Guest, His Excellency Olivier Gauvin commended the students for their outstanding performances. He applauded the school for excelling not only in academics but also fostering overall development of its students. He further pointed out the collaboration of FAIPS with the French Institute Kuwait to not only encourage but enhance the French language and activities related to it.

The Guest of Honor Dr. Sameer Humad, who is also the father of 2 alumni of FAIPS; in his address was full of appreciation to see the growth of the school infrastructure and facilities. He praised the school for providing successful and responsible alumni to the world.

The function ended with a vote of thanks by the Headmistress of the Primary School,



Photos from the event.

### STECI Kuwait Parish conducts its Christmas Carol Service – Sneha Piravi 2024

The Christmas Carol Service, 'Sneha Piravi 2024', of the St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India, Kuwait Parish, was held on Friday, Dec 20, at the NECK Church & Parish Hall. The Parish Vicar, Rev. Sibi P. J., presided over

the carol, and delivered the blessed Christmas message. Roy K. Yohannan (Secretary, NECK) and Saju V. Thomas (Common Council Member, NECK) gave their felicitations for the program. The parish choir, under

the leadership of choirmaster, Linu P. Manikunju, sang beautiful carols. A variety of Christmas related programs were performed by the Sunday School students too. The Parish Secretary, Reju Daniel John, welcomed

the gathering, while the Parish Treasurer, Biju Samuel, delivered the vote of thanks. The Carol Service was attended by not only members of the parish, but also by members of various other churches too.



Nikki Glaser participates in a segment after an NFL football game between the Los Angeles Chargers and the Denver Broncos, Thursday, Dec. 19, 2024, in Inglewood, Calif. (AP)

## Actor blends comedy and football

# Glaser uses NFL show to prepare for Globes

INGLEWOOD, Calif., Dec 26, (AP) — What do Tom Brady, Taylor Swift and comedy have to do with learning about football?

In the case of Nikki Glaser, it is all intertwined. Glaser has become a familiar face to football fans this season. Her breakthrough performance at the Tom Brady Roast on May 5 paved the way for five appearances on Amazon Prime Video's "Thursday Night Football" postgame show.

Before last Thursday's game between the Denver Broncos and Los Angeles Chargers, Glaser said doing her "Late Hits" segment was a no-brainer following her success at the Brady roast.

"The football audience is kind of familiar with me already. It's one that is OK with me not knowing every detail about football or expecting me to be an expert about it because I was who I was on the Brady Roast. I kind of admitted to not really following football that much," Glaser said. "And I became a fan of Tom Brady and the sport in doing it through that process. So then I was like, 'Let me just keep learning about football through joking about it.' And that was kind of my goal."

Glaser admits her knowledge of football is not

all the way there yet. Still, it is further ahead than it was a year ago when she started casually watching Chiefs games due to Swift's relationship with Kansas City tight end Travis Kelce. And mostly then, it was to see when Swift appeared on screen.

However, Glaser decided to start learning more about the game, which she compared to trying to learn a new language.

"I went my whole life putting on blinders because I was just scared to look stupid if I tried to learn. I always thought football fans would be really judgmental and cruel about my lack of knowledge. But they're not," Glaser said. "They're eager for you to understand and explain."

### Appearance

While NFL viewers are used to seeing comedians, those were mostly confined to the pregame shows and have been taped segments. Fox Sports used Frank Caliendo and Rob Riggle for years, while Caliendo has also made appearances on ESPN.

Glaser's appearances on "Thursday Night Football" took place after the games and are more like

roasts of both teams.

Instead of having at least a week to try out a joke or hone material, Glaser and her team of writers are coming up with material as the game is taking place.

Reaction (cross head)

"I give her and her team a ton of credit because what they did was they took a risk by doing live stand-up comedy on a sports show. And there's no way we could have rehearsed what our first one was going to be like. None of us knew what the reaction would be in the crowd," said Spoon Daftary, senior coordinating producer at Prime Video's pregame, halftime and postgame shows.

According to Nielsen, Prime's postgame show is averaging 2.05 million viewers, an 11% increase over last season. That is also outdrawing network late-night shows.

The other significant improvement from Glaser's first appearance, which was after the Sept. 19 game between the New England Patriots and New York Jets, to last Thursday's was that the fans who stuck around to see the postgame show in the stadium could hear her segment and react.

## Variety

**NEW YORK:** Blake Lively's claims that "It Ends With Us" director and co-star Justin Baldoni unleashed a smear campaign against her have gained support from a new lawsuit that Baldoni's former publicist filed against him.



Lively

The lawsuit was lodged Tuesday in New York state court in Manhattan by Stephanie Jones, who began representing Baldoni in 2017. It said the actor and his movie production company, Wayfarer, expanded their contract in 2020, agreeing to pay a \$25,000 monthly fee.

The lawsuit alleged that Baldoni, 40, and Wayfarer last August, when the film was released, teamed up with publicists to try to "bury" and "destroy" Lively amid fears that allegations of misogynistic and toxic on-set behavior as the romantic drama was made might harm his reputation and career.

Jones sought unspecified damages from the defendants, including Jennifer Abel, a former employee who she says carried out the campaign to damage Lively and muddy the reputation of Jones.

The lawsuit alleges that Abel was fired after Jones learned on Aug. 21 that Abel had "stolen more than 70 proprietary and sensitive business documents and additional client leads" from Jonesworks as Abel prepared to leave the firm to start her own publicity company, taking along Baldoni and Wayfarer as clients.

The lawsuit also alleges that Abel teamed up with Melissa Nathan, a crisis management expert who in the past has represented actor Johnny Depp, in a quest to influence and control media content damaging to Lively and Jones.

Numerous text messages included in the lawsuit were extracted from the company phone that Abel returned to Jonesworks when she was fired, the lawsuit said.

In response to a request for comment Wednesday, Abel sent an email that included screenshots of text messages between herself and Jones, along with a July 26 email she sent to Jones, two weeks after announcing her plans during a Zoom call to leave the company on Aug. 23.

In the email, she wrote, in part: "I know this path won't be easy, but I hope I can keep you in my life as a mentor, a friend and a close confidant because I truly view you as family and would be lost without your support. I want to assure you however I can, that unlike those who have burned you in the past, that there is not one ounce of ill will here."

She added: "I have left a company before with grace and with my relationships intact, and that's what I fully plan on, and hope for." Nathan did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Wednesday.

Last week, Lively filed a complaint with the California Civil Rights Department, a step that often precedes the filing of a lawsuit, alleging that Baldoni sought to damage her reputation after Lively, 37, and her husband Ryan Reynolds addressed "repeated sexual harassment" by Baldoni and a producer on the movie.

Bryan Freedman, an attorney representing Baldoni, Wayfarer Studios and its representatives, called the claims in Lively's filing "completely false, outrageous and intentionally salacious." (AP)

**ISTANBUL:** A new documentary offering a glimpse into everyday life in China's northwestern Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is set for an online premiere in early January, its director said on Wednesday.

The half-hour film, "Seven Days in Xinjiang," was named after Turkish filmmaker Serkan Koc's week-long stay in the region.

Koc told Xinhua that the film, through its portrayal of Chinese culture, offers a chance for Turkish and Chinese audiences to connect and better understand each other by discovering shared cultural elements.

Koc conducted spontaneous interviews, approaching people he met on the streets, buses, and metro, as well as in markets, and recording their stories.

The documentary also showcases local customs, cuisine, and traditional dances and music. (Xinhua)

## Music



Beyoncé performs during halftime of an NFL football game between the Houston Texans and the Baltimore Ravens, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2024, in Houston. (AP)

## NFL's Christmas Day games stream smoothly on Netflix

# Beyoncé's performance overpowers games

**NEW YORK,** Dec 26, (AP) — Beyoncé provided more excitement than either game during Netflix's NFL debut on Christmas Day.

Riding into her halftime appearance on a white horse, the 32-time Grammy winner rocked her hometown Houston crowd with a nearly 13-minute performance on Wednesday.

She surprised fans by bringing out Shaboozey to perform "Sweet Honey Buckiin'" and Post Malone joined her for "Levii's Jeans."

The action on the field didn't live up to expectations as the NFL showcased four of the AFC's top five teams.

Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce exposed a glitch in Pittsburgh's defense during Kansas City's 29-10 rout in the first game.

The broadcast itself went off just fine, quickly becoming the second-most popular live title on Netflix to date, according to NFL Media.

Lamar Jackson and the Ravens led C.J. Stroud and the Texans 17-2 at halftime before Beyoncé stole the show. Baltimore finished off the 31-2 victory with Jackson resting most of the fourth quarter.

Mariah Carey opened the football doubleheader with a taped performance of "All I Want for Christmas is You" and then the two-time defending Super Bowl champion Chiefs trounced the Steelers to clinch the No. 1 seed in the AFC.

There were no signs of any major streaming issues during the game after Netflix experienced minor blunders at the start of the pregame show. The broadcast opened with roughly 10 seconds of silence because it appeared studio host Kay Adams' microphone wasn't turned on.

Beyoncé's live performance at NRG Stadium was supposed to be the biggest test for the streaming giant and it seemed to go off without a hitch.

Mahomes threw for 320 yards and three touchdowns and Kelce had eight catches for 84 yards and one score as the Chiefs (15-1) earned a first-round bye and home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs. The Steelers (10-6) have lost three straight games and may have to settle for a wild-card spot.

Jackson tossed two touchdown passes and ran for a score and Derrick Henry had 147 yards rushing and one TD to help the Ravens (11-5) move into first place in the AFC

North, one game ahead of Pittsburgh.

Netflix agreed to a three-year contract in May to broadcast Christmas Day games. The NFL is expected to give the streaming service one of its biggest days since the site launched in 1998.

Netflix's 282.3 million subscribers in more than 190 countries could stream the games, marking the first time one outlet distributed an NFL game globally. Netflix had the games available in five languages - English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German.

### Viewers

Netflix had problems streaming the Mike Tyson-Jake Paul fight on Nov. 14. The bout peaked at 65 million concurrent streams, including 38 million concurrent streams in the United States. According to the website Down Detector, nearly 85,000 viewers logged problems with outages or streaming leading up to and during the fight.

There were fewer complaints on Wednesday. According to NFL Media, viewers in all 50 states tuned in within minutes of the pregame show going live and viewers from nearly 200 countries watched the first game. Before the Ravens-Texans kicked off, Netflix reported that it eclipsed its peak concurrent viewers of any Christmas in



Beyoncé, (left), performs alongside her daughter, Blue Ivy, (right), during halftime of an NFL football game between the Baltimore Ravens and Houston Texans Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2024, in Houston. (AP)

the past four years.

The NFL was playing its first games on a Wednesday since the Steelers and Ravens were forced to play on Dec. 2, 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The only other time the league played on a Wednesday since 1948 was in 2012 when the Giants and Cowboys met in the season opener.

Netflix promoted its own programming in addition to the usual slew of advertisements. The first teaser trailer for "Happy Gilmore 2" was released before kickoff. Adam Sandler is back as Happy Gilmore for the sports comedy that hits the streaming service in 2025. Travis Kelce also was featured in a trailer filled with cameos by celebrities, including Bad Bunny and Kid Cudi.

The NFL played its first games on Christmas Day in 1971 with a pair of divisional playoff games. The league avoided playing on Dec. 25 from 1972-88 and shifted its full slate of games to Saturday if Christmas fell on a Sunday. Since 1989, there have been 30 games on Christmas, never more than three on that day. But the NFL went out of its way to schedule two games on Wednesday to accommodate its \$150 million deal with Netflix.

J.J. Watt, a three-time AP Defensive Player of the Year and brother of Steelers four-time All-Pro edge rusher T.J. Watt, and former NFL wide receiver Nate Burleson shared analyst duties for the Chiefs-Steelers game, with Ian Eagle on play-by-play.

"I'm extremely proud of him and also slightly concerned he's getting close to a lot of my records," J.J. Watt said of his younger brother at the start of the broadcast.

Noah Eagle, Ian's son, was on play-by-play for the Ravens-Texans game, with former NFL tight end Greg Olsen in the analyst seat.

This wasn't the first time NFL games aired exclusively on a streaming service. The league's Thursday night games are in their third season on Amazon Prime Video, Peacock streamed the Packers-Eagles game in São Paulo, Brazil, in Week 1 and Prime Video will stream a wild-card game. Also, the "Sunday Ticket" package moved to YouTube TV last year.

The largest audience for a streamed-exclusive NFL game was 23 million on Peacock for last season's AFC wild-card game between the Miami Dolphins and the Chiefs.



GloRilla poses for a portrait on Oct 10, 2024 in Los Angeles. GloRilla has been named one of the Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2024. (AP)

## One of most promising voices of hip-hop

# GloRilla's journey from choir to chart-topping rapper

LOS ANGELES, Dec 26, (AP): GloRilla has gone from choir girl to husky-voiced rap queen, climbing the hip-hop ranks so high that she's earned a trip to the White House.

The Memphis-born performer has become one of industry's most promising voices with her genuine character, rap flow and unmistakable Southern drawl. She established herself this year as a proven hitmaker with "Wanna Be" featuring Megan Thee Stallion and the breakout hit "Yeah Glo!," which earned two nominations at the upcoming Grammys.

The rapper's mentality this year has been to "put your foot on the gas and don't let up," she told The Associated Press.

In 2024 alone, she's been a guest performer on the domestic leg of Megan's Hot Girl Summer Tour, gaining more confidence performing in sold-out arenas. She's performed at a star-studded party in front of celebrities ranging from Leonardo DiCaprio to Kim Kardashian, and met with President Joe Biden during a women's history month event.

All of this came before the October release of her critically acclaimed debut album "Glorious," whose "TGIF" had Rihanna dancing in a social media post, earning GloRilla a spot as one of the AP's Breakthrough Entertainers of 2024.

"Don't ever get too comfortable," said the rapper,

who burst onto the hip-hop scene in 2022 with "Tomorrow" and the Grammy-nominated "F.N.F. (Let's Go)." "Take advantage of everything that comes your way. If you drive and apply yourself, it's going to happen."

GloRilla's humble beginnings served as a driving force to chase bigger horizons. Born Gloria Hallelujah Woods (the stage name was a cousin's suggestion), the 25-year-old credits her mother and her church-centered upbringing for preparing her for this pivotal moment in her life.

### Personality

"My momma always told me to be humble and grateful," she said. "I come from nothing almost. My mom is very low-key. My mom taught us right, like, internally, have a great spirit. My personality and spirit come from my momma."

GloRilla is still adjusting to her rising fame while dealing with some controversies. She was left "heart-broken" after three women were killed in a deadly stampede toward the end of a 2023 concert in upstate New York in which investigators found no criminal wrongdoing. She faced backlash for using a disability-related slur in her lyrics and was charged with drunken driving in Georgia this year.

Despite that, her profile has grown in recent months to become one of rap's biggest names - thanks to something rapper Yo Gotti spotted when he signed her to his

Collective Music Group label in 2022.

"It's the authenticity," said Yo Gotti, a fellow Memphis native. "Even when she talks about the struggles throughout this journey, it's refreshing. I don't think many artists do that. Everybody wants to play perfect. I think that's why so many people gravitate to her. She relates to real people." While she enjoys snapping photos with fans, she opts for incognito mode on her more casual days: "I don't like to tell people 'No.' I don't want to be mean to my fans. That's probably the worst part. I hate taking pictures when I'm not prepared."

Seeking a career role model, GloRilla often examines the work ethic of Beyoncé, who called the rapper one of her favorite young artists.

"She's a businesswoman. She multitasks a lot," she said. "That's something I have to get better at. She's a super hard worker. Her work ethic is crazy."

GloRilla could follow Beyoncé's footsteps as an actor. Since childhood, she's dreamed of starring in a film or TV show - though she's bracing herself for the marathon days on set that come with it.

"Think I'm still going to do it," she said. "But I'm not going to lie. When I'm on those music video sets, I be like 'I don't know if I can do acting.' I can only imagine how many times I got to say the script and memorize it in my head. I don't know. ... But I'm going to still try it."

## Culture



The Museum of the History of Science and Technology in Islam is one of the most unique museums in the world.



Islamic discoveries and inventions that made a groundbreaking impact in the fields of science and knowledge.

## Istanbul Islamic Science Museum revives golden era of innovation

Istanbul Museum of the History of Science and Technology in Islam is a one-of-a-kind global institution, featuring recreated replicas of inventions from the Islamic Golden Age.

The museum showcases 507 reconstructed artifacts and tools that reflect the scientific

contributions of the Islamic world between the 9th and 16th centuries, covering astronomy, geography, maritime sciences, engineering, optics, chemistry, metallurgy, physics, mechanics, warfare technology, and timekeeping.

Officials stress that the museum's primary purpose is to correct widespread misconceptions about the scientific achievements of Arabs and Muslims, positioning the museum as a hub for objective scientific research, publication, and translation. (KUNA)



Reviving Islamic discoveries through models that represent the development of Islamic culture.



The museum will be a center for objective scientific research and a platform for publishing and translation. (KUNA photos)

## Film

### 'Hard Truths' dark drama

# Jean-Baptiste 'tests' our empathy limits as Pansy

NEW YORK, Dec 26, (AP): Of all the movie protagonists you might have seen this year, none is quite like Marianne Jean-Baptiste's Pansy in Mike Leigh's "Hard Truths."

Pansy, a middle-aged woman in contemporary London, is foul-tempered from beginning to end. She spends her days in evident pain that she unleashes upon all those around her, including her husband Curtley (David Webber), her 20-something son Moses (Tuwaine Barrett) and most anyone else she encounters. Her venom might fall on a supermarket cashier or a furniture-shopping couple who dare to put their feet up on an ottoman. Heaven help the man who wants her parking spot.

For everyone, Pansy is a test. She tests the patience and empathy of her family, just as she does the viewer. She's not an antihero, she's anti-everything.

"The world is full of Pansys. People live with other people's conditions," Jean-Baptiste says. "Often I've met people who have just been enraged, because you didn't see them in the car park pulling into the space. You go: It can't just be about me. How did you get that angry about something so stupid? You don't know what they're going through or how they got there."

"Hard Truths," which will open nationwide in theaters Jan. 10, never supplies any answers. Instead, it unfolds as a cantankerous character study, led by Jean-Baptiste's compellingly prickly Pansy.

The performance has earned Jean-Baptiste her best reviews since her last film with Leigh: "Secrets & Lies," nearly 30 years ago. For that film, Jean-Baptiste became the first Black British actress nominated for an Academy Award. Her performance in "Hard Truths" has been just as celebrated, earning best actress from both the New York Film Critics Circle and the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. Three decades later, Jean-Baptiste could be heading back to the Oscars.

### Intelligent

"You sit down with Marianne a hundred years later from 'Secrets and Lies,' in which she played a very intelligent young woman, and Marianne has now moved on in life," Leigh says. "We love each other because she's very, very funny. So sitting down with her ability to be real and profound but also grotesque, that, alone, points me in the direction of possibility."

Making a film with Leigh, the 81-year-old humanist master of "Naked," "Vera Drake" and "Mr. Turner," isn't a typical process. There's no script to begin with, just an invitation.

"It was the usual: Let's do a film," says Jean-Baptiste. "Don't know anything, but let's do it."

Leigh pulls his characters and storyline out of months of rehearsal. In the case of "Hard Truths," they rehearsed for three months - somewhat short for Leigh (it was

six months for "Secrets & Lies"), but extremely lengthy for today's movie industry.

"Normally you get on set it's like, 'Uh, this is Ralph. He'll be playing your husband. You'll stand over there,'" says Jean-Baptiste.

In Leigh's manner of rehearsal, they begin with a character's first memory, and then flesh out their life all the way up until the time period of the film. But there are parallel histories for other characters that require constantly going back through and recontextualizing. Meanwhile, costume designers and production designers await clarity on what kind of clothes and homes they should craft.

"All the decisions about the character that you can make, the actor makes them," says Jean-Baptiste. "Any of the decisions that God makes for somebody's life, he makes them. So it's like: She wants this job, so she applies. A letter arrives in the mail: Unfortunately you did not get it."

### Performance

Jean-Baptiste was a recent drama school graduate, classically trained and oriented toward theater, when she co-starred in 1996's "Secrets & Lies." It was her breakthrough. A few years after that film, she moved to Los Angeles, where she's been since, acting in a wide variety of projects including the TV series "Without a Trace," "Blindspot" and "Homecoming." Asked if her collaboration with Leigh had changed from "Secrets & Lies," Jean-Baptiste said much was the same.

"Obviously we're a lot older," she says, smiling. "I think we just slipped right back into it. He was gentler."

Part of what makes Jean-Baptiste's performance as Pansy so uncanny is how unlike Pansy she is. Jean-Baptiste is charismatic, laughs frequently and enjoys throwing herself into uncertain circumstances (like "Hard Truths"). Asked if she has anything in common with Pansy, she replies, with a laugh, "I hope not."

"I have a sense of humor she doesn't, although she's really funny," Jean-Baptiste says. "I think I recognize that part of myself to the extent that I'm like: That's not how I want to live. That's not how I want to be."

But in Pansy, Jean-Baptiste recognized people she knows, and the kind of character that seldom makes it onto movie screens. "A difficult Black woman, you don't see that," she says. "I don't think I ever have."

In "Hard Truths," the root of Pansy's depression is uncertain, but a sense of festering wounds from the past is palpable. When she speaks to a doctor, she sums it up: "The heart of the matter is me head." Later, when asked why she can't enjoy life, she replies, "I don't know." Jean-Baptiste, in mapping out Pansy's history, has some theories about what's made her this way.



Marianne Jean-Baptiste, a cast member in the film 'Hard Truths,' poses for a portrait during the Toronto International Film Festival, Saturday, Sept. 7, 2024, in Toronto. (AP)

## Philadelphia Orchestra celebrates cultural exchange

# Violinist strikes a chord for China-US bond

BEIJING, Dec 26, (Xinhua): For Davyd Booth, 74, a veteran violinist with the world-renowned Philadelphia Orchestra, each concert tour to China is more than just a musical journey -- it's a celebration of cultural connection and shared joy.

From Oct. 31 to Nov. 10, Booth returned to China for the orchestra's 14th tour since 1973, which took the orchestra to Beijing, Tianjin, Chengdu and Haikou. Their performances were met with enthusiastic applause, reinforcing the power of music to bridge nations and hearts.

The Philadelphia Orchestra has a large fanbase in China and holds a prominent place in cultural exchanges between China and the United States.

In 1973, the orchestra became the first American ensemble to perform in China after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, marking a significant thaw in cultural relations between the two nations. This historic visit was also Booth's first trip to China, and the beginning of his strong connection with the country.

Reflecting on his experiences, Booth said that the strong bond the orchestra has developed with China is what keeps him coming back to the country.

"Some of the Chinese orchestras have come to Philadelphia. They have played there, and also we have played with them," he told Xinhua. "It is a very, very closely bonded friendship."

Last year, the orchestra performed alongside the China National Symphony Orchestra and the Asian Performing Arts Council (APAC). Booth fondly recalled being gifted a box of tea by one of the Chinese musicians who shared the stage with him.

For more than five decades, Booth has made many Chinese friends. These connections extend beyond just music enthusiasts to include those who collaborated with the orchestra, assisted the ensemble during its travels, and reached out through social media.

He spoke highly of Chinese audiences, describing them as big music lovers and incredibly wonderful. "We feel the energy and the appreciation of the love from them just as much as we do, giving it out there into the auditorium." "Although we play all over the world, there's no other country that we become so close with and develop such a close and enduring relationship with," he said.

### Concert

During the concert tours, Booth visited nearly all the major attractions in China, including the iconic Great Wall, the Palace Museum, and the Summer Palace. Commenting on the booming trend of "China Travel," he said the country's stunning landscapes and rich history, which spans thousands of years, are significant attractions for visitors from the United States.

Chinese and American leaders laud the Philadelphia Orchestra as an active cultural envoy, instrumental in strengthening China-U.S. ties. For Booth, such a role can never be underplayed.

Music, often regarded as a universal language, is one of the best ways to foster friendships and bridge cultures, he said.

"We have to see our similarities, not our differences, and especially when we play music, it's like the difference is sort of melted away. That's one of the great things about music," Booth said.

Sharing similar sentiments as Booth, Wang Zhenyao, a Beijing resident, enjoyed the orchestra's premier concert of its 2024 China tour in the 2,000-seat capacity concert hall at China's National Center for the Performing Arts on Oct. 31.

Exchanges in culture and arts are conducive to enhancing mutual understanding among people of the two countries, said Wang, who attended the concert with his wife and child.

"Both China and the United States are great nations. We should respect each other and understand each other," he added. During the concert tour in 1973, among the famous pieces of music from the two countries, the orchestra played Beethoven's Symphony No.5, and the Moon Reflected on the Erquan Spring. It was Booth's first-ever exposure to traditional Chinese music and instruments.

At the third Beijing concert of the recent China tour, the orchestra, together with the APAC, premiered "A Night of Flowers and Moonlight by the Spring River," based on the Tang Dynasty (618-907) masterpiece by poet Zhang Ruoxu. The symphonic edition was produced by composer Mason Bates, who is reputed for integrating electronic sounds and technology into classical music.

"This piece is a special gift to the Chinese audience," Matias Tarnopolsky, president and CEO of the Philadelphia Orchestra, said. Booth joined the ensemble while this piece was performed under the baton of conductor Marin Alsop. The violinist expressed the hope that the beauty of the music the ensemble brings to China will help inspire stronger China-US relationships.

Schools are still learning to harness technology

AI is a game changer for students with disabilities

NEW YORK, Dec 26, (AP): For Makenzie Gilkison, spelling is such a struggle that a word like rhinoceros might come out as "rineaanswsaurs" or sarcastic as "srkastik."

The 14-year-old from suburban Indianapolis can sound out words, but her dyslexia makes the process so draining that she often struggles with comprehension. "I just assumed I was stupid," she recalled of her early grade school years.

But assistive technology powered by artificial intelligence has helped her keep up with classmates. Last year, Makenzie was named to the National Junior Honor Society. She credits a customized AI-powered chatbot, a word prediction program and other tools that can read for her.



Makenzie Gilkison stands in the main lobby at Greenfield Central High School, Tuesday, Dec. 17, in Greenfield, Ind. (AP)

"I would have just probably given up if I didn't have them," she said.

Artificial intelligence holds the promise of helping countless other students with a range of visual, speech, language and hearing impairments to execute tasks that come easily to others. Schools everywhere have been wrestling with how and where to incorporate AI, but many are fast-tracking applications for students with disabilities.

Getting the latest technology into the hands of students with disabilities is a priority for the U.S. Education Department, which has told schools they must consider whether students need tools like text-to-speech and alternative communication devices. New rules from the

Department of Justice also will require schools and other government entities to make apps and online content accessible to those with disabilities.

There is concern about how to ensure students using it - including those with disabilities - are still learning.

Students can use artificial intelligence to summarize jumbled thoughts into an outline, summarize complicated passages, or even translate Shakespeare into common English. And computer-generated voices that can read passages for visually impaired and dyslexic students are becoming

less robotic and more natural.

"I'm seeing that a lot of students are kind of exploring on their own, almost feeling like they've found a cheat code in a video game," said Alexis Reid, an educational therapist in the Boston area who works with students with learning disabilities. But in her view, it is far from cheating: "We're meeting students where they are."

Ben Snyder, a 14-year-old freshman from Larchmont, New York, who was recently diagnosed with a learning disability, has been increasingly using AI to help with homework.

"Sometimes in math, my teachers

will explain a problem to me, but it just makes absolutely no sense," he said. "So if I plug that problem into AI, it'll give me multiple different ways of explaining how to do that."

He likes a program called Question AI. Earlier in the day, he asked the program to help him write an outline for a book report - a task he completed in 15 minutes that otherwise would have taken him an hour and a half because of his struggles with writing and organization. But he does think using AI to write the whole report crosses a line.

"That's just cheating," Ben said.

Benefits

Schools have been trying to balance the technology's benefits against the risk that it will do too much. If a special education plan sets reading growth as a goal, the student needs to improve that skill. AI can't do it for them, said Mary Lawson, general counsel at the Council of the Great City Schools.

But the technology can help level the playing field for students with disabilities, said Paul Sanft, director of a Minnesota-based center where families can try out different assistive technology tools and borrow devices.

"There are definitely going to be people who use some of these tools in nefarious ways. That's always going to happen," Sanft said. "But I don't think that's the biggest concern with people with disabilities, who are just trying to do something that they couldn't do before."

Another risk is that AI will track students into less rigorous courses of study. And, because it is so good at identifying patterns, AI might be able to figure out a student has a disability. Having that disclosed by AI and not the student or their family could create ethical dilemmas, said Luis Pérez, the disability and digital inclusion lead at the Center for Accessible Technology.

Schools are using the technology to help students who struggle academically, even if they do not qualify for special education services. In Iowa, a new law requires students deemed not proficient - about a quarter of them - to get an individualized reading plan. As part of that effort, the state's education department spent \$3 million on an AI-driven personalized tutoring program. When students struggle, a digital avatar intervenes.

More AI tools are coming soon. The U.S. National Science Foundation is funding AI research and development. One firm is developing tools to help children with speech and language difficulties. Called the National AI Institute for Exceptional Education, it is headquartered at the University of Buffalo, which did pioneering work on handwriting recognition that helped the U.S. Postal Service save hundreds of millions of dollars by automating processing.

"We are able to solve the postal application with very high accuracy. When it comes to children's handwriting, we fail very badly," said Venu Govindaraju, the director of the institute.

He sees it as an area that needs more work, along with speech-to-text technology, which isn't as good at understanding children's voices, particularly if there is a speech impediment.

Sorting through the sheer number of programs developed by education technology companies can be a time-consuming challenge for schools. Richard Culatta, CEO of the International Society for Technology in Education, said the nonprofit launched an effort this fall to make it easier for districts to vet what they are buying and ensure it is accessible.

Makenzie wishes some of the tools were easier to use. Sometimes a feature will inexplicably be turned off, and she will be without it for a week while the tech team investigates. The challenges can be so cumbersome that some students resist the technology entirely.

But Makenzie's mother, Nadine Gilkison, who works as a technology integration supervisor at Franklin Township Community School Corporation in Indiana, said she sees more promise than downside.

In September, her district rolled out chatbots to help special education students in high school. She said teachers, who sometimes struggled to provide students the help they needed, became emotional when they heard about the program. Until now, students were reliant on someone to help them, unable to move ahead on their own. "Now we don't need to wait anymore," she said.

AI-assisted healthcare

Harmful microbes live in microwave ovens: study

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26: A team of scientists from the University of Valencia and the University of Darwin Bioprospecting Excellence in Spain has uncovered harmful types of microbes residing in microwave ovens, which could cause various diseases, according to Science Alert.

The research by the scientists mapped the ecosystems within microwaves, revealing unusual microbes thriving in these commonly used appliances.

The scientists noted that infrequent cleaning of microwaves creates a favorable environment for these microbes to proliferate. Surprisingly, many of these microorganisms are not affected by intense electromagnetic radiation.

The research team swabbed the interiors of 30 microwaves, including 10 from home kitchens, 10 from shared kitchens (such as in company or university cafeterias), and 10 from molecular biology and microbiology laboratories. The results revealed the presence of bacteria such as Brachybacterium, Micrococcus, Paracoccus, and Priestia in microwaves across all locations. These bacteria are linked to respiratory diseases.

While these microbes can pose health risks, the study found that their presence in home microwaves was not more concerning than their presence on other common kitchen surfaces.

Home microwaves showed fewer types of microbes and contaminants compared to shared microwaves. The researchers suggested that the harsh conditions in laboratory microwaves, where longer exposure times are used for heating processes, likely contribute to the types of microbes found there.

The study highlighted that these bacteria are resistant to radiation, heat shock and dehydration. While the microbes found in home microwaves were not particularly dangerous, the study indicates that bacteria with the genetic ability to resist these extreme

conditions can live in domestic environments.

**AI in healthcare:** Over the past year, millions of people have started being treated by US health providers using artificial intelligence (AI) for repetitive clinical work. The hope is that it will make doctors less stressed out, speed up treatment and possibly spot mistakes, reported The Washington Post on Wednesday.

"Medicine, traditionally a conservative, evidence-based profession, is adopting AI at the hyper speed of Silicon Valley," noted the report. "These AI tools are being widely adopted in clinics even as doctors are still testing when they're a good idea, a waste of time or even dangerous."

The harm of generative AI, notorious for "hallucinations," producing bad information is often difficult to see, but in medicine the danger is stark. One study found that out of 382 test medical questions, ChatGPT gave an "inappropriate" answer on 20 percent. A doctor using the AI to draft communications could inadvertently pass along bad advice, according to the report.

**PFAS:** Potentially harmful PFAS chemicals have been detected at excessive levels in tap water from 44 private suppliers across Japan, including some that supply the Japanese Self-Defense Forces facilities, local media reported Tuesday.

A government survey from fiscal 2020 looked into some 2,000 private suppliers of drinking water nationwide dedicated to supplying hospitals, schools and other facilities, amid growing concerns over the health impact of the widely used and long-lasting substances already detected in water filtration plants and rivers across the country, Kyodo News reported.



In this photo provided by the National Park Service, people watch as an eruption takes place on the summit of the Kilauea volcano in Hawaii, Monday, Dec. 23. (AP)

Stunning lava eruption at Kilauea

One of the world's most active volcanoes spewed lava into the air for a second straight day on Tuesday.

The eruption of Kilauea volcano on Hawaii's Big Island has stayed within the mountain's summit caldera inside Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. No homes were threatened.

Molten rock began shooting from the volcano before dawn on Monday when fissures opened in the caldera floor and propelled lava 295 feet (90 meters) into the air. The red liquid formed tall fountains and then spread across 650 acres

(263 hectares). The Hawaiian Volcano Observatory estimated the lava was about 1 yard (1 meter) thick.

Scientists expect activity to fluctuate in the coming days. The lava paused Monday afternoon but fountains reemerged Tuesday morning.

The eruption occurred in an area that's been closed to the public since 2007 due to hazards including crater wall instability and rock-falls. Visitors to the park were able to watch the foundations at a distance from an overlook spot. (AP)

Pet food recalled

House cat dies from bird flu

PORTLAND, Ore., Dec 26, (AP): An Oregon house cat died after eating pet food that tested positive for bird flu, Oregon authorities said, prompting a recall of raw frozen pet food that was sold nationwide.

Northwest Naturals, a pet food company based in Portland, Oregon, said Tuesday it had voluntarily recalled one batch of its two-pound Feline Turkey Recipe raw frozen pet food after it tested positive for the virus. The

product was sold through distributors in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Wisconsin, as well as Canada's British Columbia.

"We are confident that this cat contracted H5N1 by eating the Northwest Naturals raw and frozen pet food," Oregon Department of Agriculture State Veterinarian Dr. Ryan Scholz said in a Tuesday news release.

Thousands need surgeries

Lebanon facing 'staggering' unmet health needs: WHO

BEIRUT, Dec. 26, (Xinhua): Lebanon is facing "staggering unmet health needs" as thousands of civilians cry out for reconstructive surgeries and physical rehabilitation after the Hezbollah-Israel ceasefire, the World Health Organization Lebanon Office said recently.

Over 4,000 people have been killed and 17,000 others injured in Lebanon since last October, and the death toll has been climbing continuously "as more bodies are found in the 16,000 buildings that have been partially or completely destroyed, leaving an estimated 8 million tonnes of debris," the office said in a news release.

"One in four people with life-changing injuries will need long-term rehabilitation," it noted.

Most hospitals in Lebanon are running below capacity due to financial restraints and shortages of health workers, long-standing challenges in Lebanon, it said.

The need for health workers is also dire in the country, as more than 530 health workers and patients have been killed or wounded in attacks on health care, and thousands of health workers have been displaced, it said.

"Water and sanitation systems have been severely disrupted, compounding the risk of disease outbreaks," it added.

The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah went into effect on Nov. 27, putting an end to the confrontations that erupted on Oct. 8, 2023.

Despite the agreement, the Israeli army continues to carry out strikes in Lebanon, which, according to reports from official Lebanese media, ranged between machine gun fire, artillery shelling, bulldozing homes, and air-strikes, some of which resulted in deaths and injuries in southern and eastern Lebanon. Meanwhile, Hezbollah has violated the truce once after it said it was in response to the repeated Israeli attacks.

**Cholera:** More than 2 million doses of oral cholera vaccines have been administered in Myanmar since September this year, an official from the Ministry of Health said on Tuesday.

Following a diarrhea outbreak in Yangon region in July this year, the country's Ministry of Health reported the situation to the World Health Organization (WHO) and intensified efforts to combat the disease, the ministry said.

The administration of the vaccines began in September. Currently, the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with local and related organizations, is monitoring the outbreak of diarrhea in regions and states across the country, it said.

**Traditional remedy:** A traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) international diagnosis and treatment center was inaugurated in Kathmandu on Monday, becoming the second of its kind in Nepal.

The center at the Civil Service Hospital is operated by TCM doctors from a Chinese medical team and Nepali doctors, where healing techniques including acupuncture, massage, gua sha and cupping are applied, providing new treatment options for Nepalese suffering from hemiplegia, facial paralysis and neck, shoulder, waist and leg pains in particular.

The center will also help Nepal to cultivate medical talent with TCM diagnosis and treatment skills through physician training and medical equipment assistance.

The fact that the Chinese medical team has settled in the Civil Service Hospital built with Chinese aid and the new center has been established successfully reflects the pragmatic results achieved by Nepali Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's visit to China earlier this month and has further deepened bilateral cooperation in the field of medical and health care, said Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Chen Song.

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Phoenix Suns forward Kevin Durant (35) drives on Denver Nuggets forward Peyton Watson (8) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Phoenix. (AP)



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (30) dribbles against Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (23) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in San Francisco. (AP)

## James scores 31 in record 19th Xmas Day game as Lakers hold off Curry, Warriors

Suns beat Nuggets to close out Christmas slate

**SAN FRANCISCO, Dec 26, (AP):** Austin Reaves scored the winning layup with one second left after Stephen Curry tied it on a 31-foot 3-pointer with seven seconds remaining, LeBron James had 31 points and 10 assists playing in his NBA-record 19th Christmas Day game, and the Los Angeles Lakers held off the Golden State Warriors 115-113.

Curry scored 38 with eight 3s, hitting one under pressure from the baseline with 12 seconds left and another with 2:49 remaining only for James to answer from long range on the other end.

Reaves recorded a triple-double with 26 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for the Lakers, who lost big man Anthony Davis to a sprained left ankle late in the first quarter.

### Suns 110, Nuggets 100

In Phoenix, Kevin Durant and Bradley Beal each scored 27 points and the Phoenix Suns beat the Denver Nuggets in the nightcap to the NBA's Christmas slate of games.

Phoenix led by seven after three quarters and stretched it to 99-81 by the midpoint of the fourth quarter. The Suns pushed the lead to 15



San Antonio Spurs' Victor Wembanyama (1), top right, commits goaltending on a shot put up by New York Knicks' Josh Hart (3), top left, during the first half of an NBA basketball game in New York. (AP)

and held off the Nuggets down the stretch to end a three-game losing streak.

Nikola Jokic had 25 points and 15 rebounds to lead the Nuggets. Michael Porter Jr. added 22 and Russell Westbrook had 17.

### Knicks 117, Spurs 114

In New York, Mikal Bridges scored a season-high 41 points, and the New York Knicks overcame 42 from Victor Wembanyama in a monster Christmas debut to edge the San Antonio Spurs.

Wembanyama set a Spurs' record for points on the holiday and added 18 rebounds, four assists and four blocked shots. The reigning Western Conference player of the week made six 3-pointers. But Bridges shot 17 for 25 from the field, 6 for 9 behind the arc, to make sure the Knicks had just enough offense to win their fifth in a row and improve to 20-10.

Karl-Anthony Towns added 21 points and nine rebounds, and Jalen Brunson scored 20 points.

Josh Hart finished with 12 points, 12 boards and six assists.

Jeremy Sochan had 21 points and nine rebounds for the Spurs.

### Timberwolves 105, Mavericks 99

In Dallas, Anthony Edwards scored 26 points, and Minnesota held on for a Christmas Day victory over Dallas after superstar Luka Doncic left the game with a strained left calf.

A rematch of last season's Western Conference finals won by Dallas fell flat when Doncic pulled up lame while running a play late in the second quarter Wednesday. Then it got wild when the Mavs erased almost all of a 28-point deficit in the second half.

### 76ers 118, Celtics 114

In Boston, Joel Embiid popped up from a pregame fall and scored 27 points with nine rebounds, making 4 of 5 from 3-point range and sinking a pair of free throws with 3 seconds left to turn back Boston's final rally and lead the Philadelphia to a victory.

Tyrese Maxey had 33 points and 12 assists. He scored 13 in the fourth quarter, including a quick-trigger layup to open a seven-point lead with about a minute left after the Sixers inbounded the ball with 1.1 seconds on the shot clock.

### Hawaii finishes third

## Nebraska tops Oregon St for Diamond Head Classic title

**HONOLULU, Dec 26, (AP):** Brice Williams scored 11 of his 25 points in the final six minutes and Nebraska closed on a 6-0 run to beat Oregon State 78-66 in the championship game of the Diamond Head Classic.

Nebraska (10-2) claimed its first tournament title since the San Juan Shootout in 2000 when the Cornhuskers won three games by a total of four points. Fred Hoiberg also became the first coach to win multiple Diamond Head Classic titles, including his Iowa State squad in 2013.

After Oregon State (10-3) tied it at 51 with 10:20 to go, Nebraska used a 10-2 run to take control as the Beavers went five-plus minutes without a field goal. The Cornhuskers' lead didn't drop below four points the rest of the way.

Berke Buyuktuncel banked in a 3-pointer with 1:51 left to extend Nebraska's lead to 72-63. Buyuktuncel finished with 16 points and three 3-pointers, and Juvon Gary added 14 for Nebraska. Nate Kingz scored 19 points and Damarco Minor added 16 for Oregon State.

Williams scored 10 points in the first half to help Nebraska take a 34-33 lead at the break. The Cornhuskers shot 50% from the field, including 6 of 11 from 3-point range in the first half.

It was the second straight year Nebraska and Oregon State met at a neutral site, with last year's game being played in South Dakota.

Gytis Nemeiksa scored 25 points and he blocked a 3-point shot on the last possession of overtime to help Hawaii defeat Oakland 73-70 on Wednesday in the third-place game of the Diamond Head Classic.

Nemeiksa also had 11 rebounds for the Rainbow Warriors (8-4). Harry Rouhliedeff scored 15 points while going 5 of 9 and 5 of 5 from the free-throw line. Ryan Rapp went 5 of 10 from the field (2 for 5 from 3-point range) to finish with 12 points.

The Golden Grizzlies (4-9) were led by Malcolm Christie, who posted 27 points. Tuburu Niavalurua added 13 points and eight rebounds.

Naivalurua made a reverse layup with 27 seconds left in regulation to give Oakland a 64-62 lead. Aaron Hunkin-Clayton had a bank shot roll off the rim, but Tanner Christensen grabbed the offensive rebound and was fouled. He made both free throws with 4.8 seconds left to tie it. Then both teams turned it over to force overtime.



Williams

### The first all-Filipino crew of 15 sailors in 13th place

## Comanche, defending champion LawConnect lead early

**SYDNEY, Dec 26, (AP):** Comanche took an eight nautical-mile lead over defending line honors champion and fellow 100-foot super maxi LawConnect early in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race on Thursday.

LawConnect, which led the 104-yacht fleet out of Sydney harbor, gave up the lead when a furling line malfunctioned, but managed to recover, having suffered a similar problem early in last year's race.

Reigning overall handicap winner Alive became the first yacht to retire from the 628-nautical mile (722 miles, 1,160 kilometers) race. The 66-footer quit off Wollongong in New South Wales state with engine and electrical issues.

The fleet was expected to make a fast start down the New South Wales state coast in a northeasterly breeze before a wind change hits Bass Strait overnight, bringing strong winds and possible showers.

The race takes the yachts across Bass Strait and to the island state of Tasmania, ending in the state capital Hobart after sailing the last portion of the race on the Derwent River.



Master Lock Comanche, left, and LawConnect sail out of the heads following the start of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race in Sydney. (AP)

The first all-Filipino crew of 15 sailors is entered in the race. With veteran sailor Ernesto Echazu at the helm, Centennial 7 is one of six

international entrants and includes sailors from the Philippines' national team and the Philippines navy.

The Filipino entry was in 13th place about four hours into the race, trailing Comanche by about 30 nautical miles.

Last year, LawConnect won line honors after holding off defending champion Comanche by less than a minute in an exciting finish between the super maxis. LawConnect, which was runner-up in the last three editions of the race, finished in 1 day, 19 hours, 3 minutes, 58 seconds. Comanche's time was 1 day, 19 hours, 4 minutes, 49 seconds - a margin of just 51 seconds.

It was the second-closest finish in Sydney to Hobart history after Condor of Bermuda beat Apollo by seven seconds in 1982.

Comanche holds the race record of 1 day, 9 hours, 15 minutes, 24 seconds, set when it won in 2017.

## China faces tough task at United Cup without star Zheng

**SYDNEY, Dec 26, (Xinhua):** Gao Xinyu will face the formidable challenge of replacing women's world No. 5 Zheng Qinwen when she partners with Zhang Zhizhen, China's highest-ranked men's player, at the season-opening United Cup starting on Dec. 27.

Fifth-seeded China opens its tournament against Brazil on Friday at the 15,000-seat RAC Arena in Perth. Defending champion Germany, led by men's world No. 2 Alexander Zverev, is also in Group E.

Organized by the ATP and WTA, the third edition of the mixed team event in Sydney and Perth effectively launches the 2025 international tennis season ahead of the Australian Open, which is annually the first Grand Slam on the calendar.

Seven of the world's top 10 women's players and six of the highest 12 ranked men will feature at the United Cup, culminating with the final on Jan. 5, 2025, in Sydney.

China's hopes of improving on its quarterfinal result in the previous edition took a major hit after Zheng withdrew to focus on rest before next month's Australian Open.

Zheng is coming off a breakout season, highlighted by winning the women's Olympic gold medal. She was runner-up to current world No. 1

Aryna Sabalenka at Melbourne Park after playing in the United Cup in Perth last season.

She was set to again represent China before pulling out.

"After the long season that 2024 was for me, I need a few extra weeks of rest, recovery, and good training to get ready for the new season," Zheng wrote on social media. "I had such a fantastic time at the United Cup in January of this year, and therefore will miss the event greatly." Zheng's withdrawal gives an opportunity to world No. 175 Gao. The 27-year-old most recently reached the round of 32 at the Hong Kong Open. She will be the underdog against 17th-ranked Beatriz Haddad Maia of Brazil before concluding the group stage against Germany's Laura Siegemund.

China's hopes for a deep run in the tournament will likely rest with men's 45th-ranked Zhang, who reached the third round of this year's French Open. The 28-year-old won a silver medal at the Paris Olympics in mixed doubles alongside Wang Xinyu.

He also enjoyed a barnstorming semifinal run at this year's Australian Open doubles with Czech Tomas Machac.

Zhang will face 109th ranked Thiago Monteiro in the United Cup, before taking on Zverev

on Dec. 30. Zverev will be seeking to sharpen his Australian Open preparations as he aims to end his Grand Slam title drought.

Eighteen teams are drawn into six groups in a round-robin format, with the group winners and two best-performing runners-up advancing to the quarterfinals.

Top-seeded United States is headlined by women's world No. 3 Coco Gauff, who did not win a Grand Slam this year after claiming the 2023 U.S. Open. She partners with men's No. 4 Taylor Fritz, who reached his first major final at the U.S. Open before losing to world No. 1 Jannik Sinner in straight sets.

The United States is in Group A alongside Canada and Croatia.

Women's world No. 2 Iga Swiatek will draw particular attention as she returns following a one-month suspension for testing positive for the banned substance trimetazidine.

The five-time Grand Slam champion will spearhead second-seeded Poland with Hubert Hurkacz, currently No. 16 in the men's rankings. They guided Poland to a runner-up finish in the last United Cup. This time, Poland has been drawn with the Czech Republic and Norway in Group B.

### Best of the Rest

**Quinteros leaves Velez:** Manager Gustavo Quinteros parted ways with Velez Sarsfield on Wednesday, less than two weeks after guiding the club to Argentina's Primera Division title.

Velez said the 59-year-old former Bolivia international defender turned down an offer of a new contract amid speculation linking him with Brazil's Gremio.

"Goodbye Gustavo! The coach of the Argentine champion has decided not to renew his contract. We wish him all the best," the Buenos Aires club said in a social media post.

Quinteros oversaw 28 wins, 14 draws and nine losses after taking charge of the club in January.

This month, Velez clinched his first top-flight title in 12 years by beating Huracan 2-0 in the last round of the season. (Xinhua)

**Oscar aiming high:** Former Chelsea midfielder Oscar promised "maximum commitment" on Wednesday after securing a return to his original club Sao Paulo.

The 33-year-old agreed to a three-year deal with the Tricolor Paulista after parting ways with Chinese Super League (CSL) club Shanghai Port earlier this month.

"I want to start the year well to lay the foundation for a successful season," Oscar said. "We have high hopes and I can promise that from me there will be maximum commitment."

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.

On a personal level, Oscar is in peak form, having led Shanghai Port to this year's CSL title with 14 goals and 24 assists.

"I've just had one of my best years in Shanghai, more than 30 assists, 16 goals," Oscar said. "I'm in a good phase, both technically and physically. So, I hope to come here to Sao Paulo and help as much as I can to win big titles and be at the top of my game."

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.

The playmaker said he is looking forward to reuniting with former Brazil national team colleagues Lucas Moura and Luiz Gustavo when Sao Paulo's squad begins pre-season training in January 2025.

"Lucas sent a message wanting to know if I would be coming," Oscar said. "And then there's Luiz Gustavo, who I played with on the national team. It feels good to be back among so many familiar faces." (Xinhua)

**Halep withdraws from qualifying:** Two-time Grand Slam champion Simona Halep pulled out of Australian Open qualifying and a tuneup tournament in Auckland, New Zealand, on Thursday because of pain in her knee and shoulder, the latest interruption of her comeback from a drug suspension.

Halep posted on social media that she was feeling poorly after participating in an exhibition event in Abu Dhabi.

"After discussing with my team at length, we agreed it is sensible to delay the start of my season," Halep wrote. "It's not what I wanted."

The 33-year-old Romanian said she is planning to next enter the Transylvania Open in her home country, where play begins Feb. 3.

Last week, Halep was granted a wild-card entry for qualifying in the Australian Open. She was the runner-up at Melbourne Park in 2018 and won major titles at the French Open later that year and at Wimbledon in 2019. She has been ranked as high as No. 1 but is currently 877th and hasn't played at any Grand Slam tournament since 2022 after missing all tournaments for 1 1/2 years because of a doping case.

Australian Open qualifying starts on Jan. 6, and the main draw begins on Jan. 12. (AP)

# Saudi Arabia to host Khaleeji 27 tournament in 2026

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26, (KUNA): The General Assembly of the Gulf Football Federation approved on Thursday, Saudi Arabia's hosting of (Khaleeji 27), scheduled in October 2026.

The Federation's Secretary-General Jassem Al-Rumaihi announced in a press conference following the meeting that they adopted the financial and administrative reports, in addition to approving the adoption of the federation's new name as "the Arab Gulf Cup Federation" instead of its current name.

He added that the Federation is prepared to consider an alternative host if Saudi Arabia cannot hold the tournament, inviting nominations from other Gulf countries.

Saudi Arabia previously hosted the Arab Gulf Cup tournaments in 1972, 1988, 2002, and 2014, and the upcoming "Khaleeji 27" tournament will mark the fifth time the Kingdom has hosted.



The General Assembly of the Gulf Football Federation approved on Thursday, Saudi Arabia's hosting of Khaleeji 27, scheduled in October 2026.

## India fights back with late wickets as Australia ends Day 1 at 311-6



Australia's Marnus Labuschagne plays a sweep shot during play on the first day of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

### Kohli and Konstas provide a fiery start to the 4th test

**MELBOURNE, Australia, Dec 26, (AP): Former India captain Virat Kohli is facing a possible fine after bumping shoulders with Australia's Sam Konstas in a fiery opening Thursday to the fourth test of the five-match series.**

After choosing to bat at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Australia reached 311-6 at stumps Thursday.

Teenager Konstas (60), Usman Khawaja (57), Marnus Labuschagne (72), and Steve Smith (68 not out) all made half-centuries in front of a crowd of 87,242.

Jasprit Bumrah claimed 3-75, continuing his dominance of Australia's batters in this series.

The on-field action heated up at the end of the 10th over. Kohli collided shoulder to shoulder as he walked past 19-year-old Konstas, whose risky stroke play was causing enormous frustration for the fielding side.

Debutant Konstas and 36-year-old Kohli exchanged words after the collision. A visibly angry Kohli started walking back towards Konstas before umpire Michael Gough and Khawaja hurried over to settle things between the pair.

India assistant coach Abishek Nayar said he could not confirm a

media report that Kohli had accepted a fine of 20% of his match fee. Nayar said he did not see the incident as he was "having a conversation outside."

"When you play a game like that, there's always going to be emotions, but I'm pretty sure that it's not as big as it seems," he said.

Konstas said Kohli had run into him "accidentally."

"I was just doing my gloves and I think he accidentally bumped me. But I think that's just cricket, just the tension," Konstas said.

Konstas said his aggressive batting was part of a new era in test cricket.

"Yeah definitely. I reckon 20 or 30 years ago people would be saying 'defend a lot, just bat all day,'" Konstas said. "But I think there's a new generation, new shots. It's exciting for me. I like doing that, putting pressure back on the bowlers."

Konstas admitted it "probably would look silly" if he was dismissed from playing such outlandish shots.

"That's the beauty about being young and maybe a bit naive," he said.

Asked about his verbal battles with India's bowlers, Konstas said: "It got heated at times which was good for me. I feel like that brings the best out of me."

Nayar said India's bowlers showed a lot of character to bounce back after Konstas led Australia's scoring in the opening session.



India's Jasprit Bumrah bowls a delivery during play on the first day of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

"Overall, we were happy with where we ended," he said.

Earlier, Konstas looked nervous as he played and missed four times in the opening over of the match, bowled by Bumrah. The youngster fought back by playing three audacious reverse scoops over slips in Bumrah's fourth over, hitting two fours and a six.

Konstas dominated an opening

stand of 89 before being lbw to spinner Ravindra Jadeja, ending a pulsating 65-ball debut. Australia reached 112-1 at lunch.

Khawaja scored his first half-century of the series before Bumrah struck at 154-2 when the left-hander chipped a catch to mid-wicket.

Australia was in control at 237-2 but lost momentum when Labuschagne miscued a lofted drive and was caught at mid-off off the bowling of spinner Washington Sundar. Labuschagne had added 83 for the third wicket with Steve Smith.

Travis Head, the leading run-scorer in the series, was bowled for a duck by Bumrah after offering no shot in a crucial breakthrough for India three runs later.

Mitchell Marsh was caught behind for four in Bumrah's next over as Australia suffered a middle-order collapse, losing three wickets for nine runs.

Akash Deep broke a partnership 53 between Smith and Alex Carey (31) in the second over with the second new ball when Carey was caught behind. At stumps, Pat Cummins was providing good support for Smith, reaching eight not out.

The five-match series is level at 1-1 after a rainy draw at Brisbane. The fifth and final test is scheduled to start on Jan. 3 at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

### Haaland misses penalty

## Man City drops more points after 1-1 draw with Everton

MANCHESTER, England, Dec 26, (AP): Erling Haaland missed a penalty as Manchester City was held 1-1 by Everton in the Premier League on Thursday.

Haaland had the chance to set the four-time defending champion on course for only its second win in 13 games when stepping up for a 53rd minute spot kick at the Etihad Stadium. But he was denied by Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford as City's woeful recent run was extended.

Pep Guardiola's team has lost nine of its last 13 games in all competitions. The draw means City picked up only its fifth point in the league since the end of October.

Bernardo Silva's deflected shot gave City the lead in the 14th, but Iliman Ndiaye leveled the score in the 36th. The result leaves City sixth in the standings and 11 points behind leader Liverpool, having played two games more.

Haaland missed penalty means the Norway international has only scored one in his last seven games. He headed in from the rebound, but the goal was ruled out for offside.



Manchester City's Erling Haaland fails to score a penalty during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester City and Everton at the Etihad stadium in Manchester. (AP)

### Glover narrowly gets in

## Masters gets 9 more players from top 50 in world ranking

WASHINGTON, Dec 26, (AP): Lucas Glover held down the 50th spot in the final world ranking of the year, making him one of nine players who will be added to the invitation list to play in the Masters.

The field has eight more players than it did at this time a year ago. The Masters takes the top 50 in the Official World Golf Ranking at the end of the calendar year, and it will take the top 50 not already invited from the world ranking published a week before the tournament is held April 10-13.

The addition of the nine players brings the field to 85 players who are eligible and expected to play. There were 77 players who were eligible at this time a year ago, a difference that would point to weaker fields in the PGA Tour's FedEx Cup Fall.

The Masters has the smallest field of the four majors, and Augusta National prefers that it stays below 100 to give players an experience unlike any other. It last topped 100 players in 1966, when there were 103 players in the field.

Glover had dipped outside the top 50 in the last few weeks, but the ranking is based on a formula that measures a two-year period with points gradually losing value.

Tom Kim at No. 21 was the highest-ranked player who had not already qualified. The others to get in through the world ranking are Nick Dunlap, Max Greyserman, Rasmus Hojgaard, Jason Day, Corey Connors, Denny McCarthy and Min Woo Lee.

It was the second straight year McCarthy and Lee earned spots in the Masters through the year-end world ranking. Neither has won on the PGA Tour.

A year ago, four players from the 77 who had qualified by the end of the year earned invitations by winning PGA Tour events in the fall. This year, all eight fall winners were not eligible when they won tournaments.

Five of those fall winners - McCarthy, Yu, Echavarria, Campos and McNealy - will be playing the Masters for the first time.

The PGA Tour went back to a calendar schedule for 2024, with several big events (including the Olympics) packed into the schedule. Most of the top players did not enter a PGA Tour event over the last three months of the year.

The Masters will add to the field with the Latin America Amateur Championship winner, any winner of a PGA Tour event that offers full FedEx Cup points, and the top 50 from the world ranking published on March 31. Fourteen tournaments will provide a Masters invitation.

Augusta National also could choose to use a special invitation. It offered three last year, including one to Joaquin Niemann of LIV Golf, noting his victory in the Australian Open and another top finish in Australia in his effort to play worldwide.

Thorbjorn Olesen of Denmark also received a special invitation because he played primarily on the European tour. The club historically is not that favorable to PGA Tour members because they have more avenues to get in.

Among those who missed out on the top 50 was Nicolai Hojgaard, who shot 76 on the final day at Augusta this year and tied for 16th. Hojgaard, who played in the Ryder Cup in 2023, missed by one shot qualifying for the Masters in the category that takes the top 12 finishers.

His twin brother, Rasmus Hojgaard, will make his debut in April.

## South Africa reaches 82-3 after Pakistan folds for 211 against pacers

CENTURION, South Africa, Dec 26, (AP): Dane Paterson bagged his second successive five-wicket haul and Corbin Bosch made a dream test debut with a wicket off his first ball as 13 batters fell to pace bowlers on an eventful start to the Boxing Day test match between South Africa and Pakistan on Thursday.

Paterson followed a 5-71 against Sri Lanka earlier this month with 5-61 and 30-year-old Bosch went on to claim 4-63 in his first test match as Pakistan was bowled out for 211.

Kamran Ghulam's counterattacking 54 off 71 balls and a stubborn 22-run last wicket partnership between Khurram Shahzad and Mohammad Abbas allowed the tourists to cross the 200-run mark on a seamer-friendly SuperSport Park pitch where batters had been struggling for the last six years.

South Africa, which needs to win one of the two

test matches against Pakistan to seal a place in next June's World Test Championship final at Lord's, reached 82-3 at stumps.

Aiden Markram made an attractive unbeaten 47 off 67 balls and captain Temba Bavuma was not out on 4 as fit-again Shahzad claimed two wickets and Abbas, playing his first test after more than three years, removed Tristan Stubbs for 9.

Shahzad hit the top of Tony de Zorzi's (2) middle stump with a delivery that jugged back into the left-hander and wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan took a splendid low catch to dismiss Ryan Rickelton (8) with fast bowlers making full use of conducive conditions throughout the day.

Abbas then baffled Stubbs with a nippy delivery and had him trapped leg before wicket before South Africa ended the day without further damage.

Paterson filled the void perfectly after several

South African fast bowlers were sidelined for the two-match series due to injuries, dismissing five of the top seven Pakistan batters.

Paterson's 5-fer came after Bosch had lured Pakistan captain Shan Masood (17) to play a loose drive and had him caught in the slips an hour after captain Temba Bavuma had won the toss and elected to field.

Bosch joined four other countrymen -- Bert Vogler, Dane Piedt, Hardu Viljoen and Tshepo Moreki -- to achieve the unique feat of getting a wicket with their first ball in test cricket.

Bosch's breakthrough saw Pakistan's top-order crumble against the pace with Paterson finding edges of Ayub and Babar Azam (4).

Babar, who was dropped for the last two test matches at home against England, has long been struggling in red-ball cricket.



Pakistan's Saud Shakeel plays a shot during Day One of the Test cricket match between South Africa and Pakistan, at the Centurion Park in Centurion, South Africa, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2024. (AP)



Players challenge for the ball during Bahrain-Iraq game in Kuwait.

# Sports

## Saudi Arabia to host Khaleeji 27 tournament in 2026

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### Bahrain qualifies for semis, Saudis bounce back



Photo by Rezk Tawfik

Saudi Arabia and Yemen players battle for the ball during Khaleeji Zain 26 match.

#### Yemen denied historic victory

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26:** The Khaleeji Zain 26 in Kuwait is turning into one for the ages after another round of thrilling Group B matches on the fourth day of action on Wednesday.

Bahrain booked its place in the semi-finals with a 2-0 win over Iraq, and Saudi Arabia came from 2-0 down to beat Yemen 3-2 in a game that was an absolute Christmas cracker.

At the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, Bahrain opened the scoring through Ali Madan after the Iraqi defence was sliced open down the left, allowing the wide man to connect with a cross unmarked and finish from close range.

The same player made it 2-0 a minute into the second half when the defence was caught napping, allowing him to score at the second attempt.

The win moves it to six points from two games, guaranteeing passage through to the last four with one more group match to play against Yemen on Saturday.

In the evening's opening match at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium, Yemen stunned Saudi Arabia by taking the lead in the eighth

minute when a short corner resulted in some fine work from captain Abdulwasea Al Matari whose pin-point cross was met by the head of Harwan Al Zubaidi.

That lead was doubled in the 27th minute when a short back pass was intercepted by Abdulmajeed Sabarah to poke past the advancing keeper and send the Yemen fans wild.

But the two-goal lead was short-lived as Saudi Arabia hit back just two minutes later. A well-worked free kick found Mohammed Kanno unmarked to head home and reduce the arrears to 2-1 at the break.

The game then turned on a controversial penalty awarded to Saudi Arabia early in the second half for handball following a lengthy VAR check. Musab Al-Juwayr kept his calm from the spot to bring the scores level.

Despite Saudi pressure, the game appeared to be heading to a draw, but in the fourth added minute, Abdullah Alhamdhan broke Yemeni hearts with a vital winner, setting Group B up for a frantic finale on Saturday night when the winner of Saudi Arabia and Iraq will advance to the semi-finals with Bahrain.

#### UAE confident ahead of must-win Oman clash

### Kuwait feeling soccer feel-good factor as Group A reaches finale



The management of the Kuwait Shopping Festival 'Ya Hala' honored the Kuwaiti national football team at Regency Hotel.

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 26:** Kuwait soccer fans are on cloud nine this week and the head coach said they intend to keep the feel-good factor going when they take on Asian champions Qatar at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium on Friday night.

The Khaleeji Gulf 26 hosts are top of Group A with Oman on four points following Tuesday night's dramatic 2-1 win over the much-fancied UAE.

The result has seen tickets for the final group match snapped up in record time with a capacity crowd expected to watch The Blues take on a Qatar side that lost to Oman on the same night.

"It was a very difficult match on Tuesday and, of course, the players are tired, but they are optimistic for the match with Qatar," said Kuwait head coach, Juan Pizzi, at the eve-of-match press conference held at the Crowne Plaza.

"The fans are understandably happy because we beat a very strong UAE national team. The players returned to training yesterday and showed me their mental readiness. They are focussed on Qatar and we will play tomorrow's match to qualify (to the semi-finals).

"Very little between all eight teams is playing here in this tournament, as the match between Yemen and Saudi Arabia showed last night (2-3). We have full respect for all teams here, including Qatar, who is a very good side. I feel whoever has the best physical fitness will win tomorrow's match."

Kuwait midfielder Mushari Ghannam said his teammates are feeding off the support of the spectators, but pointed out that they are not getting carried away.

"We are preparing ourselves properly for the match against Qatar," he said. "It is the champion of Asia, a very strong side. But this is the Gulf Cup and it will be different. We will build on the positives from the UAE game, and take care of the negatives to continue to make our Kuwait supporters happy." A draw will be enough for Kuwait to finish in the top two and qualify for the semi-finals, with Qatar having to win.

Qatar intends to spoil Kuwait's Khaleeji Zain party by reaching the semi-finals at the host nation's expense.

Qatar has just a point from two Group A matches so far, with Kuwait sitting atop with Oman on four points meaning that Qatar must win by two goals to guarantee a passage to the last four.

And at the eve-of-match press conference at the Crowne Plaza, head coach Luis Garcia said it is time for his new-look squad to step up and be counted.

"It will be a very tough game," he admitted. "Kuwait is doing really well in front of its fans, but we are confident to do a good match and get this victory to go through to the semi-final.

"We are pleased with the recovery from Tuesday's match despite the short time. So, I am happy with the fitness and with the mindset of the players which is very important." Garcia's squad rotation has come in for criticism from some quarters back home, with young players given their chance, and he will be missing several senior players through injury and suspension against Kuwait at what is expected to be a sold-out Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

"We have three players injured and suspended which will affect our team



Juan Pizzi with Mushari Ghannam at the press conference.

because it is a short tournament and not too much time to recover," said Garcia. "But we have a squad of 26 players and everybody is ready to help the team push to win the match against Kuwait.

"This is a very important tournament for Qatar and our young players because we can check how they perform in a big competition, so they need to show what they can do. They are doing really well and we are proud of them.

"Football never stops. If we don't try with the young players now then the future will be a problem. We need to play them. Maybe it is their time?" Asian footballer of the year Akram Afif is expected to lead the team again and Garcia described him as "a teammate everyone would love to have".

In Group A's other match being held at the same time, Oman will take on UAE, who are also on one point and, like Qatar, it has to win.

UAE coach Paulo Bento believes his team can finally live up to its Khaleeji Zain 26 favourite tag by beating neighbour Oman tomorrow night and qualifying for the semi-finals at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium.

The UAE went into the tournament in Kuwait as many people's favourite for the title, but Tuesday's defensive lapses saw it lose 2-1 to the hosts and leave it with just a point from two games, meaning Friday night presents a must-win situation.

Speaking at the eve-of-match press conference at the Crowne Plaza, Bento said: "Mistakes are a part of the game. We made them in all the previous games and we will make mistakes in the next games. We should rise above it and avoid them as much as we can. We fell once, we should get up twice. Normally the people, the press, like to choose the guilty. This is not our job.

"My job is to try to make the team play well. Be better than the opponent. Win three points each game. Until now we have not reached the three points. But in my opinion, the performances were not bad. I think we were better than our opponents. In the second game, we were not effective in the offensive way because we created a lot of chances to score. We cannot control the expectations of other people. It is not important if people consider us favorites, because I don't know which reason they have to consider our team favorite. It's just talk. Let's focus on the next game and get three points against a team in a better position than us." Oman has been the surprise of the tournament so far, showing solid organisation to sit atop Group A with Kuwait on four points. And Bento was full of praise for his opponents.

"Oman is a team that is well organised," said Bento. "It is working with a coach since October who knew a lot of his players already because he has worked with them before. It's a team that shows good organisation in both phases of the game. He has clear ideas about what they need to do offensively

and defensively. They are in a good position. We will find the best solutions. We are optimistic to make a good performance and of course, try to win this game and go to the semi-final." UAE's match with Oman will be held at the same time as Group B's other match between Kuwait and Qatar, with the top two advancing.

Oman coach Rasheed Jaber has warned that all four teams in Group A can still qualify for the Khaleeji Zain 26 semi-finals as he prepares to take on neighbours UAE in Friday's dramatic final round of matches.

A draw and a victory place Oman at equal top of the group with host, Kuwait, and tomorrow's opponent, UAE, will need to win to qualify, but Jaber believes his side is improving with every day it is together and can book a last-four spot.

"The chance is equal for all four teams to qualify to the next round so tomorrow it is as if we are starting from zero points," said Jaber.

"We want to go on and continue in this Gulf Cup, but we need effort and desire which is very important for 90 minutes. I believe the team will qualify and make the best performance yet for the match against UAE who are a very good team with ambition to also win the match.

"But we all have the desire to qualify. We have our players in very good mental shape and we are all concentrating on tomorrow's match." Oman has caught the eye with two solid defensive performances and looks dangerous on the transition, and the manager believes the best is yet to come.

"Ultimately the result is the most important. I can see our performances are improving day after day, and we will be defined by the result of the match. I am so confident in my players." The match against the UAE kicks off at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium at the same time as the other Group A match between Kuwait and Qatar, with the top two advancing to the semi-finals.



Rasheed Jaber



Paulo Bento



Luis Garcia