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**basketball**  
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## Opinion

# Tehran turned Arab capitals into human mincers for its purposes and wars

**Ahmed Al-Jarallah**  
Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

SINCE 1917, immediately after the implementation of the Sykes-Picot agreement, Arabs have been struggling to apply their own decisions. The words in the Holy Quran, Surah Al-Hashr, verse 14 that: "Their violence among themselves is severe. You think they are united, but their hearts are diverse," seem to aptly describe their situation. That is why they did not have a unified stance on the Palestinian issue during the establishment of

the State of Israel. Historically, Arab nations have been repeatedly undermined and manipulated. They allowed external powers and countries to dictate their decisions. A prime example is in 1979 when the Shah of Iran was overthrown. The Arabs lacked the strength to resist the Persian plan, presented as "export of revolution", and thus allowed Lebanon to become a bridgehead for Iran's interests, which furthered its influence in the region. Lebanon, a small country, could have freed itself from the malignant Iranian influence if there had been a cohesive and strategic Arab approach. However, Tehran

capitalized on divisions within Lebanon, and enhanced the power of the minority Shiite factions by supporting groups like Hezbollah and Amal Movement. Meanwhile, Syria played a role in furthering this divisive strategy and contributing to the fragmentation of other sects. Since 1982, Lebanon has been fragmented into sects, tribes, and parties, each undermining the power of the state. Hezbollah has played a major role in dragging the country into destructive internal conflicts, and further weakening the institutions that survived the civil war. Also, Hezbollah has repeatedly provoked Israeli aggression in southern Lebanon

and failed to achieve victory in those conflicts. Syria, too, has been a key player in Iran's regional plans. Since the so-called "Iranian Revolution," Syria has been mired in miscalculations. It transformed from being the beating heart of the Arab world into a mere pawn in the regional power game, following Iran's lead. Rather than fulfilling its traditional Arab role, Syria became a country where its citizens are led to slaughter like sheep in prisons, and imprisoned for refusing to abandon their nation's unity and their loyalty to their homeland. Over the past few decades, Iran has employed the old rule of "divide and conquer."

It embedded its militias in most of the Arab world, and used Islamic slogans to legitimize its actions. Iran exploited the power vacuum created by the United States in Iraq to dominate Baghdad, which became the third Arab capital under its influence.

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## Kuwait Airways to open Beirut route by December end

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Kuwait Airways has announced the resumption of its flights to and from Beirut, starting at the end of this month, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

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## NewsWatch

**KUWAIT CITY:** The Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs has strongly denounced the storming of the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque by an extremist minister of Israeli occupation government.

In a press release, the ministry echoed Kuwait's condemnation of such frequent practices that provoke the sentiments of Muslims around the world, break international legitimacy resolutions, and reflect continued Israeli occupation bids to alter the existing historic and legal status of Jerusalem and its holy sites. (KUNA)

**BEIRUT:** The wife and daughter of one of deposed Syrian president Bashar Assad's cousins were arrested Friday at the Beirut airport, where they attempted to fly out with allegedly forged passports, Lebanese judicial and security officials said. Rasha Khazem, the wife of Duraid Assad - the son of former Syrian Vice President Rifaat Assad, the uncle of Bashar Assad - and their daughter, Shams, were smuggled illegally into Lebanon and were trying to fly to Egypt when they were arrested, according to five Lebanese officials familiar with the case. (AP)

**8** KFH honors winners of 'Mishkat Al-Nubuwwa' Hadith Memorization Competition



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**15** Sheikh Khaled Al-Badr commends the organization of Khaleeji Zain 26

# Philippines saddened by Kuwaiti child's death, vows cooperation

'Incident doesn't reflect Filipino values'



Boats are safely moored as Kuwait enjoys warm and partly cloudy weather on Saturday, creating a serene scene for those out on the water amidst the pleasant conditions. Photo by Mohammad Morsi

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** The Philippine Embassy in Kuwait and the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) have expressed profound sorrow and deep concern over the tragic death of a young Kuwaiti child allegedly caused by a Filipino domestic worker.

In a statement shared with Arab Times on Friday, the Philippine Embassy extended heartfelt condolences and prayers to the bereaved family, affirming its solidarity during this difficult time. "The Embassy is cooperating fully with Kuwaiti authorities investigating the incident," the statement read, adding that assistance is being provided to the detained domestic worker in accordance with Kuwaiti law and its diplomatic mandate.

The DMW echoed these sentiments in a separate statement on Saturday, conveying its condolences to the child's family and the Kuwaiti government.

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Suspect detained as investigators seek crime motive

## Murder of well-known Kuwaiti sends shock waves to Jabriya residents

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** A tragic incident occurred in Jabriya recently when a famous Kuwaiti traveler in his forties was shot and killed by a citizen at his home, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to security sources, when the Operations Room of the Ministry of Interior received a report of a shooting and murder at a residence in Jabriya, police officers rushed to the location and

discovered that a Kuwaiti citizen was shot by another. The victim died before reaching the hospital, and his body was referred to the Forensic Medicine Department.

Detectives have apprehended the suspect, who is currently being questioned to determine the circumstances and motives behind the crime.

The suspect is expected to be referred to the Public Prosecution on charges of intentional murder.

Reports circulating on social media also mentioned that the victim's mother witnessed the incident and was later taken to the hospital after being deeply affected by the traumatic scene of seeing her son covered in blood.

## Kuwait takes action on financial integrity with key appointments

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** Kuwait has made significant strides in enhancing its efforts to combat money laundering and terrorist financing, as evidenced by the issuance of Amiri Decree No. 216 of 2024, which appointed Dr. Hamad Al-Mekrad as the head of the Kuwaiti Financial Intelligence Unit and Yousef Al-Omar as his deputy.

These appointments are seen as key steps in addressing the concerns raised by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) regarding Kuwait's anti-money laundering framework.

Kuwaiti officials and experts consider these moves crucial in closing the gaps that have previously threatened Kuwait's economic and financial reputation.

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## Embassy of India in Kuwait mourns passing of former PM Singh, opens condolence book

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** The Embassy of India in Kuwait has expressed its deep sorrow over the passing of Dr. Manmohan Singh, former Prime Minister of India, who died on Thursday, December 26, 2024, in New Delhi. Dr. Singh, who served as India's Prime Minister from 2004 to 2014, was a widely respected statesman and economist.

The Government of India has declared a seven-day period of national mourning from December 26, 2024, to January 1, 2025, to honor his legacy.

In tribute to the late leader, the Indian Embassy will open a condolence book at its premises in the Diplomatic Enclave, Daeya Area, Block 5, Aden Street, on Monday, December 30, and Tuesday, December 31, 2024. The book will be available for signing from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM on both days.

— See Also Page 7

Kamal Adwan Hospital director detained, says Gaza Health Ministry

## Kuwait condemns Israel for burning Gaza hospital

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (Agencies):** Kuwait condemned the heinous crime the Israeli occupation forces committed by burning down Kamal Adwan Hospital in north Gaza, which resulted in the evacuation of patients and medical staff, in a grave breach of international humanitarian law and all international conventions and norms.

In a statement on Saturday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs renewed Kuwait's call on the international community to end such violations immediately, bring perpetrators to accountability, and protect civilian properties and medical and humanitarian aid staff.

Meanwhile, Israel's army detained the director of one of northern Gaza's last functioning hospitals as overnight strikes in the territory killed nine people, including children, Palestinian medical officials said Saturday.

Gaza's Health Ministry said Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, was arrested by Israeli forces

Friday along with dozens of other staff and taken to an interrogation center. The ministry said Israeli troops stormed the hospital and forced many staff and patients outside and told them to strip in winter weather, according to the ministry.

Israel's army didn't respond to questions about the director. On Friday, it denied it had entered or set fire to the hospital complex but acknowledged it had ordered people outside, and said it was conducting operations against Hamas infrastructure and militants in the area.

The military repeated claims that Hamas militants operate inside Kamal Adwan but provided no evidence. Hospital officials have denied that. The hospital has been hit multiple times over the past three months by Israeli troops waging an offensive in largely isolated northern Gaza against Hamas fighters it says have regrouped.

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A Palestinian man sits mourning relatives killed in overnight Israeli airstrikes on the Maghazi refugee camp, at Al-Aqsa Hospital, in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, Saturday, Dec. 28, 2024. (AP)

## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 05:16 Asr ..... 14:39  
 Sunrise .. 06:41 Maghrib .. 16:58  
 Zohr ..... 11:49 Isha ..... 18:20

# Local

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Mild and partly cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 12-32 km/h.

**By Night:** Rather cold to cold and partly cloudy to cloudy with

## Weather

light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 08-30 km/h.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	22	18
Kuwait Airport	24	18
Abdaly	24	17

Bubyan	20	17
Jahra	24	18
Failaka Island	23	19
Salmiyah	24	17
Ahmadi	17	14
Jal Aliyah	24	17
Nuwaisib	25	18

## PAM sets new guidelines to get engineering visas

Time delay for jobs if docs unapproved

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has issued new guidelines requiring the equivalency of engineering qualifications to obtain or renew a work permit in engineering professions.**

PAM Director Marzouq Al-Otaibi, detailed the mechanisms for recognizing engineering qualifications and registering professions through a circular. The outlined procedures include submitting an initial recognition request for engineering qualifications via PAM's electronic portals, which is mandatory before applying for a work permit.

Key points in the circular include the follow-

ing:

Eligibility for Work Permits -- graduates from accredited colleges of Kuwaiti government or private universities specializing in engineering, engineering sciences, or architecture.

Individuals who have received equivalency and accreditation for their qualifications from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Higher Education.

Renewals and transfers -- Engineers registered in PAM's systems as of September 8, 2024, can renew or transfer their work permits, with their profession registered temporarily until qualifications are equated.

Engineers entering Kuwait on work permits must secure initial recognition from the relevant committee, allowing temporary registration for two years to finalize qualification equivalency.

Alternative options -- Workers whose qualifications are not initially recognized may transfer to other professions and later apply for engineering permits upon qualification approval.

The government sector employees transferring to the private sector must provide an original certificate from the Civil Service Bureau confirming prior registration in an engineering profession.

Special cases -- Family members, business partners, or individuals on business visits transferring to the private sector as engineers require committee approval for temporary registration until qualification equivalency is achieved.

Consequences of non-compliance -- Workers failing to complete the equivalency process within the allowed time frame may be required to register in non-engineering professions.

The circular emphasizes that employers and engineer workers share responsibility for ensuring the equivalency and accreditation of engineering qualifications.

The measures aim to standardize the recognition of engineering professionals in Kuwait's private sector, enhancing compliance and professional integrity.



KUNA photo

One of the earlier trophies made in Italy from pure gold.

### Changing faces of Gulf Cup

## Gulf soccer Cup helps solidify ties between people: minister

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (KUNA):** Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi stated that the Arabian Gulf Football Cup helps strengthen fraternal bonds between the Gulf peoples.

In statements to reporters on the sidelines of an open day for the participating delegation in Al-Mutlaa Views Resort, Minister Al-Mutairi said the Arabian Gulf championship, which is currently hosted by Kuwait, reaffirms the depth of relations between Gulf youth.

He lauded His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sponsorship of the tournament and the support of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He added the directives of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah had a great impact on the success of organizing this distinguished edition.

He welcomed to the participating del-

egations and their fans in Kuwait.

The event was also attended by President of the Gulf Football Federation Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, a number of heads and members of the participating delegations, and a number of media professionals participating in covering the tournament competitions.

Meanwhile, since its inception in Bahrain in 1970, the Arabian Gulf Cup has undergone a long journey that tells a great sports story about common Gulf history and identity. The Gulf sports championship has taken different shapes of trophies during the period from 1970 to 2004. The first white gold-designed trophy was made in Bahrain and was in the form of two olive branches and a hexagonal figure symbolizing peace, up to the current sixth pure gold-designed version shaped as an incense burner adorned with pearls and embraced by the Gulf shemagh (headdress), reflecting Gulf people-to-people cohesion.

### Other Voices

## 'Humor is a cognitive skill'

By Ahmad alsarraf

I have hundreds of funny anecdotes and jokes in my memory, political, social and others, in addition to the funny events and situations I personally experienced, some of which I published in several articles.

The Western society is characterized by the phenomenon of the Standing Comedian, where a talented person stands on stage, tells jokes to the audience and often interacts with them and together they create a wonderful feeling of happiness and familiarity.

Some of these comedians make huge fortunes, with the richest earning around \$70 million a year, doing dozens of shows a year. The most famous of these comedians, including the late George Carlin and Richard Boyer and those who retired after making hundreds of millions of dollars, include John Leno, Jerry Seinfeld, Eddie Murphy and many others.

Saudi thinker Ibrahim Al-Bulaihi says that the sense of humor is of great importance and it was not surprising that three of the most famous minds in America participated in studying the subject of 'humor'.

The famous philosopher Daniel Dennett and his colleagues Matthew Hurley and Reynald Adams, published a book entitled 'Inside the Joke', with a subtitle that says 'Humor Reflects the Engineering of the Mind'.

The book was published by the most famous scientific institution in America and the book was translated into Arabic with an extensive introduction by the translator Qais Qasim Al-Ajrash and was published by Dar Sutour.

Its authors say in their introduction: Humor constitutes a vital aspect and a rich source that enhances our idea of the scene of mechanisms, or soft mechanisms operating inside our brains.

He adds: As time passes, we will discover that humor has revealed its permanence and that it can take new paths and updated concepts to have an effect and influence!

A sense of humor is a noble human value, it is a sign of intelligence and it is also comforting and cheerful, so Char-

lie Chaplin believes that the worst day is the day that passes without laughter.

The cheerful thing is that anyone who follows social media will notice that the sense of humor is clearly high among Saudis and this has a cheerful connotation, as laughter is a human trait and some even believe that laughter is one of the most prominent characteristics of a human being, which is why it was said: a human being is a laughing being.

The ability to make others laugh and the ability to respond automatically to a joke are also signs of intelligence, as a sense of humor is one of the most wonderful manifestations of human interaction and we notice that a dull-witted person may hear a joke and not grasp the meaning, while smart people grasp the meaning before the speaker finishes and they drown in laughter, which is as much a sign of intelligence as it is one of the joys of life.

People are thirsty for what is funny, entertaining and comforting, so people are keen to attend comedy theater and a person known for his sense of humor is loved and those who know him are keen to accompany him.

Because of the importance of laughter in human life, philosophy, literature and science have paid attention to it. Laughter has become so important that it has become the subject of a science in its own right, 'the science of laughter.' The famous French philosopher Henri Bergson also wrote a book about 'laughter.'

Psychology has been interested in laughter as a treatment for human misery. As Dr. Daniel Siegel says: The world is full of psychological pain, so the famous psychiatrist Patch Adams was interested in employing a sense of humor and laughter in order to make people happy or at least reduce misery in their lives.

The book 'The Science of Laughter,' written by Stephanie Davis, comes within this trend and she confirms that 'humor is a cognitive skill,' which grows according to the openness of the environment, the diversity of knowledge and the flexibility of dealing.

The sense of humor includes many concepts, such as laughter, sarcasm, irony, smiling, joy and other spontaneous emotions. Today, satirical literature has become one of the most prominent forms of literature, so we find detailed studies on funny writers who are famous for their sense of humor.

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### Oil stays dominant

## Kuwait GDP fell 9.6 pc in '23, says CBS report

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** Figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics revealed that Kuwait's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current prices decreased by 9.6 percent in 2023 compared to 2022, reaching 50.8 billion dinars, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This decline highlights the continued dominance of the oil sector, which remains the cornerstone of Kuwait's economy.

The oil sector accounted for 47.1 percent of GDP, with its added value declining by 19.9 percent year-on-year. This drop is attributed to a decline in global oil prices from \$100.9 per barrel in 2022 to \$82.5 in 2023. The sector's added value amounted to 23.9 billion dinars in 2023.

Despite the downturn in the oil sector, the non-oil sector demonstrated resilience, growing by 2.1 percent at current prices, totaling 26.8 billion dinars. Notable contributors to this growth include:

Public administration and defense, which grew by 5.4 percent and contributed 11.5 percent of GDP.

Financial activities, which grew by 1 percent, contributed 8.6 percent of GDP.

For the third quarter of 2024, GDP at current prices fell by 7.5 percent compared to Q3 2023, recording 11.9 billion dinars.

This decline was driven by a 15.6 percent decrease in the added value of the oil sector, reflecting the impact of lower global oil prices (\$86.7 per barrel in Q3 2023 to \$79.8 per barrel in Q3 2024) and reduced production quantities.

However, the non-oil sector showed a slight 0.1 percent growth, contributing 55.6 percent of GDP in Q3 2024.

At constant prices, GDP declined by 3.9 percent in Q3 2024 compared to Q3 2023, amounting to 9.7 billion dinars.

The oil sector's added value at constant prices dropped by 5.3 percent, while the non-oil sector saw a 2.5 percent decline.

Key contributions to Kuwait's economic performance in Q3 2024 include:

■ Manufacturing (refining activities): 8.1 percent at current prices, 7.7 percent at constant prices.

■ Public administration, defense and social security: 12.6 percent of GDP, contributing 1.5 billion dinars.

■ Financial brokerage activities: 9.5 percent at current prices, 9 percent at constant prices.

■ Services sector (education, health, restaurants, real estate): 21.7 percent of GDP in Q3.

The figures underscore Kuwait's continued dependence on the oil sector, though the non-oil economy continues to show growth in key areas.

## 76 persons arrested in drugs, liquor offenses in December

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** In the first three weeks of the month of December, emergency patrols arrested 76 individuals for possessing narcotics, drugs, and alcohol, as well as for being in an abnormal condition. These individuals were referred to the Drug Control General Department (DCGD) for further action.

According to security sources, rescue patrols were deployed in all governorates based on instructions from the Assistant Undersecretary for Traffic Affairs and Operations. As a result, 76 people were apprehended for drug and alcohol-related offenses. All suspects were referred to DCGD for appropriate legal action.

Security campaigns carried out

by the rescue patrols led to the arrest of approximately 400 wanted individuals and violators of residency laws. These individuals were also detained and referred to the relevant authorities.

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**Housemaid found dead:** An expatriate woman was found dead in her sponsor's house in Firdous in an apparent suicide. The body has been transferred to Forensic Medicine for examination, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to a security source, when the Operations Room of the Ministry of Interior received a report from a citizen, who said his 40-year-old maid had died, security forces and paramedics rushed to the location, and confirmed her death. A case has been registered for further investigation.

### Decline in citizens' spending on foreign travel

## Kuwait positive moves lead to increase in tourism

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** Tourism in Kuwait is thriving, with official data from the Central Bank of Kuwait revealing that visitors spent approximately KD 505.7 million in the first nine months of 2024 (from January to September). This marks an annual increase of 28.2 percent, amounting to an additional KD 111.3 million compared to the KD 394.4 million spent during the same period in 2023, reports Al-Anba daily.

The data also highlighted the spending trends throughout the year. Foreign tourists (non-resident visitors) spent about KD 170.1 million in the first quarter, KD 172 million in the second quarter, and approximately KD 163.6 million in the third quarter.

The figures reveal a significant increase in tourist spending in Ku-

wait, driven by several key factors. These include government efforts to facilitate the entry of visitors and the development of the country's tourism infrastructure. Kuwait has made substantial investments in improving and expanding its tourism facilities, such as hotels, restaurants, and shopping malls. The organization of events and festivals has also played a crucial role in attracting more visitors and boosting their spending.

Also, the expansion of shopping and entertainment centers, with the opening of new malls and recreational facilities, has drawn more tourists and further increased their spending. The improvement of tourism services, with a focus on quality and customer satisfaction, has contributed to this growth, leading to higher satisfaction

levels among visitors. In addition, the promotion of Kuwait as a touristic destination has boosted the number of visitors and their spending.

The data also highlighted a decline in Kuwaiti citizens' spending on tourism and travel during the first nine months of 2024, totaling KD 2.97 billion, compared to KD 3.53 billion during the same period in 2023, which reflects a decrease of approximately 15.8 percent.

In detail, spending on tourism and travel outside the country amounted to about KD 1.16 billion in the first quarter of 2024, KD 841.8 million in the second quarter, and KD 974.6 million in the third quarter.

The decline in Kuwaiti spending on travel during 2024 can be attributed to several factors. One major

factor is the change in seasonal travel patterns, as improved weather and cooler temperatures in Kuwait during the winter months have led many citizens to prefer staying in the country rather than traveling abroad. This trend has reduced the demand for international travel, with local entertainment becoming more attractive.

Also, the high costs of foreign travel, including airline tickets and accommodation, have limited citizens' demand for international tourism. As a result, many have reduced the number of trips they take or sought closer and less expensive destinations.

However, there was a noticeable shift in spending during the third quarter of 2024, with a marked increase in travel expenditures, reflecting a 15.7 percent quarterly growth.

## Info begins walk-in interviews for top posts from January 5

By Mohammad Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** The Ministry of Information announced that the committee responsible for filling supervisory positions will begin conducting personal interviews with applicants for vacant supervisory positions starting January 5.

According to informed sources, interviews for 23 positions, including department directors and supervisors in various sectors, will be held during the first phase.

The qualified candidates will be selected to lead main departments,

including the Department of Council Affairs within the minister's sector, the Security and Safety Department, the Technical Office, the Undersecretary's Office, and the Financial Affairs Department.

Special interviews will be held for candidates applying for "Supervisor" positions. These include 18 vacant roles in various sectors, such as the Undersecretary's sector, Administrative and Financial Affairs, the Radio Sector, the News and Political Programs sector, the External Media sector, and the Press, Publishing, and Publications sector.

Among the most prominent po-

sitions available are roles related to the inspection of artistic works, advertising and publicity, electronic support, and overseeing publishing and distribution houses, libraries, printing presses, and parcels. Additional positions include monitoring external stations, radio studios, and the editing of news and political radio programs.

Through this process, the ministry aims to select highly qualified individuals who can strengthen its media and administrative functions.

The selection process will be conducted in accordance with relevant ministerial decisions to ensure trans-

parency and fairness. This initiative is part of the ministry's commitment to supporting qualified national talent and providing opportunities for them to contribute to the development of the media.

The sources affirmed that the opening of nominations for vacant supervisory positions is in line with the ministry's goal to establish equal opportunities for all applicants, in compliance with Civil Service Council's resolution No. 25/2006 and its amendments regarding the conditions for filling supervisory positions, as well as other relevant ministerial decisions.



KUNA photo

Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi during the discussions.

### Minister reviews preparations

Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi discussed with members of the Supreme Committee for Kuwait 'Capital of Arab Culture and Media 2025' the latest preparations for the launch of this important cultural and media event. The Minister and the committee members also reviewed the list of the planned programs and scheduled activities for this important

occasion.

Following the meeting, Minister Al-Mutairi expressed his sincere thanks and gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his high patronage of the opening of this event. He stressed that this generous patronage reflects the political leadership's interest in enhancing Kuwait's role as a cultural and media beacon in the Arab world. (KUNA)

## 'Don't misplace blame, work to build better Kuwait future'

"I RESPECTFULLY disagree with what my dear friend Sami Al-Nisf wrote in his article 'Waiting for a New Constitution!' published in the esteemed daily An-Nahar," columnist **Youssef Abdul Karim Al-Zankawi** wrote for Al-Jaridah daily.

"While he describes the Constitution of the State of Kuwait as flawed -- attributing its shortcomings to the political culture and legacies that, according to him, "contributed to the spread of financial and administrative corruption and the illicit enrichment of MPs" -- I believe the Constitution itself is not to blame.

"Where I align with Sami, however, is in his suggestion to establish two councils: an elected National Assembly and an appointed Shura Council or Senate, composed of notables.

"I also agree with removing the National Assembly's involvement in matters concerning the ruling family and allowing the Amir full discretion in exercising his powers, such as appointing the Crown Prince without requiring the Assembly's approval.

"Furthermore, I support the idea of creating evaluation committees to hold representatives of both councils accountable for any deviations from their duties.

"The failure to implement such proposals, which would undoubtedly serve the nation's interest, lies not in the Constitution but in the lack of seriousness and dedication to executing its provisions.

"The Kuwaiti Constitution, as laid out in Chapter Five under general and temporary provisions, is inherently flexible, allowing for amendments to align with evolving political, economic and social circumstances.

"Articles 174, 175 and 176 of the Constitution explicitly provide mechanisms for amendments while safeguarding fundamental principles such as the Amiri system and the freedoms and equality guaranteed to all citizens.

"Thus, the fault does not lie with the Constitution, which has remained adaptable and robust for over six decades, but with those who have neglected their duty to amend it in a way that serves the public interest.

"The Constitution is a tool, much like a car or social media: its misuse reflects the failings of its users, not the object itself.

"We remain hopeful that in this era of decisive leadership, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may God protect him, will address these critical issues.

"Amending the Constitution to enhance freedom and equality, preserving the Kuwaiti identity and resolving longstanding national challenges are priorities that demand immediate attention.

"Let us not lay blame where it does not belong. Instead, we must hold accountable those who have failed to uphold their responsibilities and work together to build a better future for Kuwait."

### Also:

"The advocates of chaos and destruction argue that the homeland exists only for the wealthy, the influential and those who thrive on nepotism, leaving no place for the poor, low-income earners, or those striving for a decent life," columnist **Dr Abdulrahman Al-Jeeran** wrote for Al-Rai daily.

"They claim that the law's prestige and the state's strength merely serve to protect a system dominated by the rich and powerful.

"However, what we categorically deny -- and what the enemies of nationalism and order do not -- is the distortion of patriotism when reduced to a transactional relationship, where one's connection to their homeland is based solely on wealth, privileges, or the distribution of benefits like citizenship to favored individuals.

"Yes, patriotism based on materialism is fraught with flaws, but it is absurd to suggest that these flaws justify abolishing patriotism altogether. Can we truly believe that any system replacing nationalism would be flawless and immune to defects?"

"History has shown that genuine patriotism transcends material interests. It is rooted in values of sacrifice, chivalry and unwavering loyalty to the homeland. Consider Kuwait's past struggles -- the battles of Jahra and the sacrifices during the brutal Iraqi invasion -- when patriotism was not measured by salaries or wealth but by courage, unity and resilience.

"The history of a homeland is not the history of financial institutions, industrial holdings, or corporate shares. It is a testament to the strength, sacrifices and virtues of its people in the face of challenges and hardships.

"The homelands thrive not through material abundance but through the dedication of their citizens to knowledge, perseverance and moral values.

"Conversely, when societies succumb to materialism, intellectual complacency and divisive debates on social media, the very fabric of patriotism weakens, giving way to vice and disintegration.

"These are the tactics of those who aim to sow chaos and destroy the es-

sence of nationalism by distorting it or labeling it as racism.

"Finally, let us remember: just as malnutrition does not invalidate the importance of food, the flaws in human behavior do not undermine the value of patriotism.

"The issue is not the principle of patriotism but how it is practiced and nurtured. A nation cannot thrive on material sustenance alone; it requires moral and spiritual nourishment as well.

"Patriotism is not the enemy -- it is the bond that unites us, inspires us to rise above the challenges and ensures the preservation of our identity and values for future generations. Let us not allow duplicity and false narratives to erode this bond."

"This is the reality that we must fully grasp."

"King Faisal I of Iraq in 1921 was one of the most exemplary Arab politicians, as he set a remarkable standard for national unity. His leadership was characterized by inclusivity, with his entourage representing Arabs and Kurds, Muslims and Christians, Sunnis and Shiites, as well as both tribal and urban communities," columnist **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for Al-Seyassah daily.

"Despite being a Sunni himself, King Faisal frequently visited Shiite shrines, and won the admiration of Iraq's minority groups, including Christians and Jews. He ensured that these diverse communities had access to government positions in a fair and equitable manner.

"King Faisal also demonstrated a profound respect for the rule of law, and the decisions of the courts and judges. On several occasions, both he and his officials lost cases in court, yet he accepted the judiciary's decisions with grace and openness. He did not seek personal wealth at the expense of the people. The king's finances were subject to parliamentary scrutiny from time to time, and his modesty was evident in his practice of traveling around Iraq to engage with ordinary citizens, and rarely staying in his palace.

"King Faisal was also dedicated to the country's educational and economic development. Under his reign, Iraq saw the emergence of a distinguished generation of teachers, doctors, engineers, architects, and administrators.

"Furthermore, he cultivated strong diplomatic relationships with neighboring countries and the major global powers of his time.

"King Faisal's legacy offers valuable lessons in leadership, unity, and governance that can serve as an example for the people of Syria today.

"He believed that an alliance with Britain was necessary for Iraq's security and development, and he worked diligently to build a strong and efficient army.

"During his reign, Iraq became unified, with all its classes and religious groups standing together. This unity contributed to prosperity and progress in all sectors, and love and harmony prevailed among the Iraqi people.

"This serves as an important lesson for our Syrian brothers and for the Arab world.

"Recently, during celebrations in Syria, a Christmas tree was erected, but some individuals, driven by anger, set it on fire. This act is a reminder of how sectarian tensions can emerge at any moment, and threaten national security.

"Brothers, we must practice tolerance, live harmoniously in one country and unite in all religious sects. Let nothing divide you. After 54 years of suffering under tyrannical rule, during which fear and division plagued your lives, it is time to heal and unite.

"The Kurds occupy a third of Syria's land in the northeast, and granting them self-rule could set a dangerous precedent. If this happens, other groups such as the Alawites and Druze may also demand autonomy, which will lead to further fragmentation of Syria. This is a real threat, according to military analyses.

"The caretaker government led by Ahmad al-Sharaa in Damascus is managing the situation well. If other military factions lay down their weapons, a national government is formed to revive the country, and stability returns to Syria, it could become one of the best Arab countries.

"With a relatively small population and a vast area, Syria benefits from being a prime location by the sea, its proximity to Europe, fertile land, a capable workforce, and hospitable people. It has the potential to attract European tourists. Hotels and resorts could operate with payments in euros or dollars, and Arab countries will not leave Syria behind, and will offer loans and assistance in rebuilding.

"Syrians must unite. Enough time has passed, i.e., 54 years of oppressive rule that restricted freedom, monitored citizens through state intelligence, and led to a harsh life and deteriorating internal conditions.

"King Faisal's Iraq provides a valuable lesson for Syrians and all Arabs."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes/  
Mahmoud Attiyeh



The designated parking areas in Souk Mubarakiya.

Al-Seyassah photo

## 'Park at designated places only in Souk Mubarakiya'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: The Traffic and Operations Affairs Sector at the Ministry of Interior has urged market-goers to adhere to parking guidelines and use designated parking spaces when visiting the Mubarakiya Market, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The ministry emphasized the importance of avoiding incorrect parking to prevent legal repercussions.

The following parking areas are available for use by those visiting the market -- Blocks, Grand Mosque, Gold Market, Wholesale

Market, Municipal Park, Fahad Al-Salem Street Building, Ali Al-Salem Street and Old Central Bank parking lots.

Visitors are encouraged to park in these designated areas to ensure smooth traffic flow and avoid potential fines.

# 7 yrs jail, KD 18 mln fine for Transport Ministry employee

Defendant accused of embezzling KD 6 million

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: The Court of Appeal, led by Counselor Nasr Al-Haid and supported by Counselors Saud Al-Sanea and Tariq Metwally, has upheld a previous ruling by the Criminal Court sentencing a Ministry of Transport employee to seven years in prison. The court also ordered the defendant to pay a fine of 18 million dinars and dismissed him from his position, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The Public Prosecution charged the individual, an administrative coordinator in the Services Accounts Department, with embezzling 6 million dinars from the Ministry of Transport. Tasked

with collecting financial dues from subscribers, the accused misappropriated funds entrusted to him and failed to transfer them to the ministry, instead using them for personal gain.

The court determined that the accused was guilty of embezzlement of public funds, forgery, and money laundering. Evidence presented during the trial revealed that the individual deceived subscribers into believing their debts had to be paid either in cash or through deposits into his personal bank accounts. The accused also manipulated records by using his user credentials to issue fraudulent receipts and enter incorrect data regarding debt payments via the "K-Net" system.

Notably, the accused had fled Kuwait but later surrendered himself after being convicted in absentia. Both the Criminal Court and the Court of Appeal upheld the in-absentia ruling following his surrender.



Mol photo  
Captagon pills seized from sofa sets.

## Customs seizes 1.8m drug pills packed with sofa sets

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Kuwaiti customs officers made a significant drug seizure at Shuwaikh Port of approximately 1.8 million Captagon pills believed to be highly addictive, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During a routine inspection of containers, the officers became suspicious of a shipment containing sofa sets and coffee table sets.

Upon thorough examination, they discovered the hidden yellow pills inside the goods.

The contraband was seized and referred to the appropriate authorities for further investigation.

This operation marks another successful blow against drug trafficking and contraband smuggling operations in the region.

The daily did not give more details of the contraband of if any arrests have been made.

## KFF inspects safety measures

## Mol reviews security situation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Major General Ali Al-Adwani, inspected the security preparations at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, accompanied by senior ministry officials, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Major General Al-Adwani emphasized the importance of coordination among various security agencies and the need for thorough readiness of plans to address any emergencies.

He reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to creating a safe and secure environment for the public, ensuring that events proceed smoothly and without incident.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Fire Force Chief Major General Talal Al-Roumi, conducted an inspection of the force's preparations at the stadium.

During the visit, Al-Roumi praised the efforts of the firefighters and emphasized maintaining the highest levels of vigilance, readiness and optimal preparation.

He highlighted the force's commitment to ensuring a safe and secure atmosphere for spectators and the smooth progression of matches. The operation involves 67 specialized fire engines, 7 main security points and a deployment of 250 firefighters across all facilities and gates at both Jaber Stadium and Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium.



KFF photo  
Kuwait Fire Force chief Major General Talal Al-Roumi giving instructions to his team at the stadium.



KFF photo  
Car repair shop reduced to ashes.

## Fire wrecks car garage

Fire brigades from Shuwaikh Industrial and Al-Shaheed Centers controlled a fire that broke out at a car repair shop (garage) inside the Shuwaikh Industrial Area Friday afternoon, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The fire also affected destroyed several vehicles. Fortunately, no injuries were reported and the fire was extinguished after intense efforts.



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# Khalid Al-Essa Award recognizes charitable excellence across GCC

Top regional initiatives honored

By Mohammed Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** The Union of Charitable Societies and Foundations held the fifth session of the Khalid Al-Essa Award for Excellence in Charitable Work under the patronage of the Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah.

The ceremony, held at the Al-Babtain Central Library for Arabic Poetry, honored outstanding contributions to charitable and humanitarian work.

The event was attended by prominent personalities including the Director of the Charitable Societies and Endowments Department, Abdulaziz Al-Ajmi, the Chairman of the Union of Charitable Societies and Foundations, Saad Al-Otaibi and Khalid Al-Essa Al-Saleh, Secretary-General of the award.

Al-Ajmi, representing Dr. Al-Huwailah, highlighted that the Khalid Al-Essa Award has become a key recognition for charitable and humanitarian initiatives across Kuwait, the GCC countries and the Arab world.

This year's fifth edition honored distinguished projects that contributed to sustainable development and community welfare.

Al-Ajmi emphasized that the award is a vital platform for promoting high standards in charitable work, fostering innovation and motivating individuals and institutions to enhance their efforts.

Saad Al-Otaibi noted the significant role of the award in institutionalizing charitable work in Kuwait. He emphasized that the inclusion of new standards for innovation and



Attendance from entities and institutions working in the charitable sector from inside and outside the country.



Khalid Al-Essa Al-Saleh speaking at the ceremony.

technology in charitable initiatives has further enhanced the award's impact. Looking ahead to 2025,

He expressed hopes for deeper integration between charitable work and cultural enrichment, especially

with Kuwait being designated as the capital of Arab culture.

The ceremony also featured the honoring of winners from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman, reflecting strong cooperation between the Gulf nations in supporting humanitarian work.

The Al-Awazem Charitable Foundation won the Excellence Award in Media, recognizing its innovative use of media to spread charitable awareness and promote volunteerism.

Hamad Al-Bassis, Chairman of Al-Awazem Charitable Foundation, expressed pride in the achievement, acknowledging the team's efforts and the importance of media in building a cohesive society through charitable values.

The Khalid Al-Essa Award continues to stand as a beacon for excellence in humanitarian work, encouraging continuous development and a spirit of giving across the region.

## MEW signs contracts worth 238 mln dinars for power and water stations

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Mahmoud Bushehri signed two maintenance and modernization contracts for power and water distillation stations — valued at about KD 238 million — after obtaining approval from the concerned regulatory authorities.

According to the Ministry of Electricity, the first contract includes the provision of high-precision and efficient engineering services for gas and

steam turbine units used in electricity generation, as well as regular and major maintenance works to ensure their safe and reliable operation, particularly in the next summer season.

The second contract is for the development and modernization of steam boilers used in power production and water distillation at the West Doha Station. The goal is to extend the lifespan of the boilers for 20 years, while enhancing their efficiency. These improvements are expected to contribute to the reduction of operating costs and carbon emissions to protect the environment.

## KUNA al-sagheer engages kids

### Kuwait Health Ministry puts all resources at Khaleeji's disposal

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (KUNA):** The Ministry of Health has secured medical teams with full equipment at the stadiums during the Gulf Cup tournament (Khaleeji Zain 26).

The ministry has provided 50 ambulance vehicles, 400 paramedics, available at the stadiums of the games and the training sessions, in addition to some ex-

ternal spots such as Al-Morooj complex.

The magazine "KUNA al-sagheer" has taken part in children's celebrations of the Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 26).

Children from other states are also present at the stadiums sharing the local peers, entertaining the magazine latest edition, the 20th, and watching the games.



KUNA little magazine shares children's joy in the 26th Gulf Cup with distinctive cultural content.

### Step forward for government readiness

## 89 Kuwaitis successfully registered for employment in Civil Service initiative

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** Head of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) Dr. Essam Al-Rubaian says the registration process for 89 citizens seeking employment has been completed.

In a press statement issued at the conclusion of the third edition of the "Future of Work in Government Program for the GCC States", he explained that prior to this initiative, every Kuwaiti man and woman was nominated for jobs.

This achievement is attributed to the plan developed by the Civil Service Council in line with the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad.

This effort is aimed to ensure equal opportunities and justice without any favoritism, wasta, or individual nominations, and address the previous recruitment challenges.

Dr. Al-Rubaian affirmed that the "Future of Work in Government Program for the GCC States" is a pioneering initiative aimed at preparing future leaders and enhancing government readiness to adapt to the rapid global developments.

In the speech he delivered during the closing ceremony of the program on behalf of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sherida Al-Muosherji, Dr. Al-Rubaian affirmed that the program aims to build a generation capable of leading the future with awareness, wisdom, and efficiency.

He indicated that the closing ceremony marks the graduation of an exceptional batch from this ambitious program.

Dr. Al-Rubaian further explained that the program has achieved several important outcomes, notably the preparation of innovative leadership cadres ready to tackle future challenges. It has also enhanced the development of proactive solutions, promoted strategic thinking, and contributed to institutional growth by aligning with the best global practices in government work.

A regional network of competencies and expertise from various GCC countries has been established to boost cooperation and integration between governments. This network also aims to launch innovative initiatives and

projects that align with the aspirations of societies and elevate the quality of government services.

He expressed his gratitude to the President of the Royal Academy of Administration in the Sultanate of Oman Dr. Ali Al-Lawati for leading the initiative with a keen vision and dedication to develop government leaders in accordance with the needs of societies and the challenges of the modern era.

Dr. Al-Rubaian also extended his thanks to the trainers, experts, organizers, and participants for their efforts in executing this program and achieving its goals.

Meanwhile, Dr. Ali Al-Lawati explained that the program is the first of its kind that targets second-tier leaders in the government sector from Oman and other GCC countries.

The program was implemented through the Royal Academy of Administration in collaboration with the Institute of Public Administration in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Civil Service Commission in Kuwait, and in partnership with the Said Business School at Oxford University.

It is a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing Gulf cooperation in developing government work and aligning with national visions. It also seeks to prepare the GCC countries for the future and promote sustainable development.

The program's journey included several stages and main themes, including ten remote units presented in Arabic. The executive learning units focused on strategic and leadership topics such as public administration, project management, business analysis, and digital transformation.

It addressed critical issues such as change management, improving efficiency in leading teams, and enabling institutions to adapt and thrive in the digital economy. It also covered leadership strategies and preparing for future challenges.

In addition, Director of the Organization Department and the Human Resources Development Center at the Civil Service Commission (CSC) Muhammad Al-Ahmad affirmed that CSC, collaboration with the Royal Academy, successfully completed a program in the State of Kuwait, with the participation of a group of trainees from various entities in the GCC countries.

He highlighted that the program included a discussion session focused on the future vision of GCC, adding that the event was aimed at empowering the targeted middle management group of 65 trainees to achieve their goals.

## MoE launches 'Consult' platform

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28:** The Ministry of Education has announced the launch of the "Consult" platform on its website and mobile application, offering psychological, social, educational and family consultations for students and

parents, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The platform will be overseen and monitored by specialists from the Department of Social and Psychological Services to provide professional support and guidance.



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## LOCAL



Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi attending the open day activities at 'Al-Mutlala Views.' He confirmed that the 'Khaleeji Zain 26' tournament came to reaffirm the depth of the relations that bring together Gulf youth.



Ministry of Information photos

### Al-Mutairi highlights Gulf Cup's role in strengthening Gulf ties at Al-Mutlala Views event

In an event attended by Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, the Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Al-Mutlala Views hosted an open day for media professionals covering the Arabian Gulf Cup Foot-

ball Championship (Gulf Zain 26) Thursday evening, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Al-Mutairi emphasized the Gulf Cup's role as a long-standing platform for

strengthening fraternal ties between Gulf nations, spanning over fifty years. He highlighted that the 'Gulf Zain 26' Championship serves to further cement the deep relations between the youth of the Gulf.

### Maintenance set for 17 areas from Dec 28 to Jan 4

## MEW announces power outages

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: The Ministry of Electricity and Water has announced that periodic maintenance work for some power transformers, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

A press release issued by the ministry said 17 areas across the six governorates will be affected starting Dec 28, 2024 and continue until Jan 4, 2025.

The press statement added, power will be cut off in these areas from 8:00 am for a duration of four hours.

However, there will be no power outages or maintenance work happening on Jan 1 and 2.

Below is the schedule of affected

areas:

Saturday, Dec 28, 2024 -- Rumaithiya Block 6, Al-Sara'a Block 2, Sabah Al-Nasser Block 1 and Ishbiliya Block 2

Sunday, Dec 29, 2024 -- Jabriya Block 3B and 8, Fahaaheel Block 9, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Block 8, Sabah Al-Salem Block 9, Jaber Al-Ahmad Block 4, Sabah Al-Nasser Block 2, Ishbiliya Block 1 and Granada Block 1

Monday, Dec 30, 2024 -- Jabriya Block 5, Fahaaheel Block 9, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Block 8, Al-Qosour, Block 4, Jaber Al-Ahmad Block 4, Al-Ouyoun Block 1, Sabah Al-Nasser Block 2,

Ishbiliya Block 1 and Granada Block 1

Tuesday, Dec 31, 2024 -- Jabriya Block 5 and 8, Fahaaheel Block 10, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Block 8, Al-Qosour, Block 4, Sabah Al-Nasser Block 2 and Ishbiliya Block 1

Friday, Jan 3, 2025 -- Sulaibikhat Block 2,

Saturday, Jan 4, 2025 -- Sulaibikhat Block 3, Jaber Al-Ahmad Block 6, Al-Naem Block 2, Al-Rabieh Block 4, Al-Ardiya Residential Block 9 and Al-Rabieh Block 4

The Ministry advises residents in the affected areas to take necessary precautions during the scheduled outages.

Continued from Page 1

### Tehran turned

Iran also worked to plant its influence in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, where it strengthened the Houthi rebels since 2011 and turned the area into a stronghold of extremism and ignorance.

Today, many countries in the Arab world are grappling with a range of serious issues. Lebanon has become a failed state, and Syria has suffered a lot both under the Ba'ath Party's rule since 1970 with Hafez al-Assad, and more recently. The country has turned into a human mincer, as it witnessed a civil war that lasted 13 years and resulted in the displacement of nearly 12 million citizens and the death of over 500,000 of them. Syria has also been ravaged by poverty and starvation.

Iraq has not fared better as well. The rule of a minority elite and the rise of sectarian militias have dominated the country, as Tehran worked to deepen divisions between the Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds. Iran has largely succeeded in this strategy, leaving Iraq fragile and teetering on the brink of another potential civil war under the weight of a complex and ongoing crisis.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of Iran's regional strategy is its use of the Houthi militia to target the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah.

According to Iran's ideology, controlling these sacred sites would grant them power over the entire Islamic world.

It may be useful to look back at history, not to reopen old wounds, but to highlight how wise and powerful the Arabs were in the past.

During the dispute between Ali bin Abi Talib and Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan (may Allah be pleased with them), the Roman Caesar sought to exploit the conflict.

He hence sent a letter to Muawiyah, saying: "We know what has happened between you and Ali bin Abi Talib, and we believe you are more deserving of the caliphate than he. If you order me, I will send an army to bring you Ali's head."

Muawiyah's response was wise and resolute: "Two brothers have quarreled, so why should you intervene? If you do not stop, I will send you an army, the first of which will reach you and the last of which will reach me. This army will bring me your head and I will hand it over to Ali."

In contrast, the leaders of the four countries - Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen - lacked this wisdom. Rather than resisting the Persian extremist agenda, they became deeply entangled in it, which weakened their nations and their people.

Today, with the new leadership in Syria whose vision for the country's future is beginning to take shape, it is important to recognize that Syria's geographical location and its diverse population are invaluable assets to the Arab world. If Arab and Islamic countries do not act quickly to support Syria, they will be digging their own graves.

When Syria is stable, Arab soft power can help unite the people of Iraq, sever the last Persian influence in Yemen, and bring stability to Lebanon. This will empower the Arab world, from east to west, to rise up with

strength and cohesion.

As a result, the Arab decision will no longer be in the hands of any minority that seeks foreign support over the interests of their own people and country.

### Kuwait condemns

The health ministry said a strike on the hospital earlier this week killed five medical personnel.

MedGlobal, the humanitarian organization for which Abu Safiya worked, said Friday it was gravely concerned about him. It said the incident follows the October detention of five other staff, calling it an "alarming and egregious pattern of targeting medical personnel and spaces."

Israel's nearly 15-month-old campaign of bombardment and ground offensives has devastated Gaza's health sector.

The World Health Organization has said the raid on Kamal Adwan has put northern Gaza's last major health facility "out of service" after growing restrictions on access, adding that "this horror must end and health care must be protected."

The Health Ministry said conditions for Kamal Adwan patients who were relocated to the damaged Indonesian Hospital nearby - also raided in the past - were "extremely difficult."

The war has killed more than 45,400 Palestinians, over half of them women and children, and wounded more than 108,000 others, according to the Health Ministry. Its count does not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Since October, Israel's offensive has virtually sealed off the northern Gaza areas of Jabaliya, Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya and leveled large parts of them. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were forced out but thousands are believed to remain in the area where Kamal Adwan and two other hospitals are located.

Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas after the militants' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel in which they killed around 1,200 people and abducted some 250 others. Some 100 Israelis remain captive in Gaza, around a third believed to be dead.

Israel continued attacks across Gaza on Saturday. An overnight strike killed at least nine people in Maghazi, including women and children, according to staff at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital where they were taken and an Associated Press reporter who saw the bodies.

Men cried as the bodies, wrapped in bloodied white plastic, lay on the floor of the morgue.

The Health Ministry said Saturday that 48 people had been killed in the past 24 hours by Israeli fire.

Meanwhile, Israel said its troops had begun operating in the northern city of Beit Hanoun, citing intelligence that fighters and Hamas infrastructure were in the area.

Strikes also continued in Israel. Air raid sirens sounded early Saturday and the military said it inter-

cepted a missile fired by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

Israeli warplanes bombed key infrastructure in Yemen again on Thursday. The Houthis also have been attacking shipping in the Red Sea and say they won't stop until Israel agrees to a ceasefire in Gaza.

### Philippines saddened

The department assured the public that it is closely monitoring the situation in coordination with the Philippine Embassy and the Migrant Workers Office in Kuwait.

"The DMW is providing the necessary assistance to the domestic worker while respecting Kuwaiti laws and our mandate," the statement said. Both the Embassy and the DMW emphasized that this isolated incident does not reflect the values of Filipinos or Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), who are widely regarded for their dedication, reliability, and positive contributions to society.

The tragic event occurred on Thursday when the Filipino domestic worker allegedly placed the young child inside a washing machine at her employer's residence, leading to his death. Initial reports suggest the parents rushed to the child's aid after hearing his cries but were unable to save him. He was transported to Jaber Hospital, where medical staff confirmed he had succumbed to his injuries.

### Kuwait Airways

The airline encouraged customers to make reservations or inquiries through its customer service channels.

This move marks a renewed connection between Kuwait and Lebanon, offering travelers enhanced travel options.

### Kuwait takes

The growing fears of Kuwait being placed on the FATF grey list have been alleviated by the government's clear efforts to tighten regulations and address legislative shortcomings.

These include measures such as the Ministry of Commerce's initiatives to combat commercial cover-ups and the Central Bank's requirement for exchange companies to undergo regular audits.

According to Dr. Mohammad Buzobar, former Minister of Justice and current Minister of State for Integrity Enhancement Affairs, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) serves as the first line of defense in protecting Kuwait's economy.

It plays a vital role in preserving Kuwait's financial reputation and preventing crimes related to money laundering and terrorist financing.

The success of the unit largely depends on the competency and experience of its leadership, which is strengthened by the appointment of Al-Mekrad and Al-Omar.

## Catholic Church opens annual Diwaniya to greet well-wishers

Celebration of unity and cultural diversity

By Najeh Bilal  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: The Catholic Church in the State of Kuwait has opened its Diwaniya to welcome well-wishers in celebration of Christmas and the New Year.**

This initiative serves as a special occasion that underscores the spirit of love and brotherhood, bringing together various segments of society.

Among the distinguished guests were ambassadors, diplomats, church leaders and priests from different local church-

es across the country. During the gathering, warm wishes were exchanged; reflecting the deep and lasting relationship between churches and various institutions.

This annual event highlights the Catholic Church's role as a bridge of communication between diverse communities, promoting the values of national unity and peaceful coexistence through participation in festive occasions.

The tradition of opening the Diwaniya each year demonstrates the Church's commitment to strengthen bonds of love and mutual respect among people in the country, while showcasing the nation's embrace of religious and cultural diversity.

On this joyful occasion, the Catholic Church extended its heartfelt greetings to the leadership and people of Kuwait, wishing them peace and prosperity in the coming year.

### 24,000-26,000 job grades allocated

## New budget set to fill key gov't roles

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: According to informed sources, the job grades allocated in the 2025/2026 budget will be between 24,000 and 26,000 grades, reports Al-Anba daily.

They explained that the allocation of these grades aims to balance the available financial resources in order to provide new job opportunities for individuals seeking government employment, and also meet the needs of government agencies. At the same time, the budget is designed to ensure the continuity of the state's financial sustainability and safeguard the well-being of future generations.

These job grades will be used to hire job seekers, including recent graduates and individuals with different educational qualifications who have successfully completed relevant training programs.

The budget for job grades was meticulously prepared and reviewed based on the needs of each agency for vacant positions. Coordination took place between the Ministry of Finance and government agencies to prioritize appointments, focusing on sectors with the greatest demand, such as the Min-

istry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Electricity and Water, and the Ministry of Interior.

The sources commended the effective collaboration between the Ministry of Finance and the Civil Service Commission to address the staffing needs of government agencies.

They affirmed the importance of adhering to applicable regulations and systems, ensuring that the budget allocated for appointments is not exceeded, and that job grades are adhered to efficiently to avoid unnecessary job inflation.



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The bid proposal shall be delivered by hand-delivery or thru courier service to the Contracts Department in Al-Khafji Joint Operations, Al-Khafji, Saudi Arabia on or before the closing date **14:00 Hours, Monday, March 3, 2025** of the time stipulated in the tender document.

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## National election set for Feb 23

## Germany's president dissolves parliament

FRANKFURT, Germany, Dec 28, (AP): German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier ordered parliament dissolved and set new elections for Feb. 23 in the wake of the collapse of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition, saying it was the only way to give the country a stable government capable of tackling its problems.

Scholz lost a confidence vote on Dec. 16 and leads a minority government after his unpopular and notoriously rancorous three-party coalition collapsed on Nov. 6 when he fired his finance minister in a dispute over how to revitalize Germany's stagnant economy.

Steinmeier said he made the decision because it was clear after consultation with party leaders that there was no agreement among Germany's political parties on a majority for a new government in the current parliament.

"It is precisely in difficult times like these that stability requires a government capable of taking action and a reliable majority in parliament," he said as he made the announcement in Berlin.

"Therefore I am convinced that for the good of our country new elections are the right way."

Since the post-World War II constitution doesn't allow the Bundestag to dissolve itself, it was up to Steinmeier to decide whether to dissolve parliament and call an election. He had 21 days to make that decision. Once parliament is dissolved, the election must be held within 60 days. Leaders of several major parties agreed earlier on the election date of Feb. 23, seven months earlier than originally planned.

Steinmeier warned about outside interference in the poll, saying it is "a danger to democracy, whether it is covert, as was evidently the case recently in the Romanian elections, or open and blatant, as is currently being practiced particularly intensively on platform X."

A top Romanian court annulled the first round of the country's presidential election, days after allegations emerged that Russia ran a coordinated online campaign to promote the far-right outsider who won the first round.

The campaign is already well underway. Polls show Scholz's party trailing the conservative opposition Union bloc led by Friedrich Merz. Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck of the environmentalist Greens, the remaining partner in



German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier announces the decision to dissolve the German Bundestag and schedule a new election for February 23 next year, in Berlin, on Dec. 27, 2024. (AP)

Scholz's government, is also bidding for the top job - though his party is further back. If recent polls hold up, the likely next government would be led by Merz as chancellor in coalition with at least one other party. Key issues include immigration, how to get the sluggish economy going, and how best to aid Ukraine in its struggle against Russia.

The populist, anti-immigration Alternative for Germany, or AfD, which is polling strongly, has nominated Alice Weidel as its candidate for chancellor but has no chance of taking the job because other parties refuse to work with it.

Germany's electoral system traditionally produces coalitions, and polls show no party anywhere near an absolute majority on its own. The election is expected to be followed by weeks of negotiations to form a new government.

It's only the fourth time that the Bundestag has been dissolved ahead of schedule under Germany's post-World War II constitution. It happened under Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1972, Helmut Kohl in 1982 and Gerhard Schroeder in 2005. Schroeder used the confidence vote to engineer an early election narrowly won by center-right challenger Angela Merkel.

## Finland probes possible sabotage of undersea cables

## NATO will step up Baltic Sea patrols

BRUSSELS, Dec 28, (AP): NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said that the military alliance will step up patrols in the Baltic Sea region as Finnish investigators work to establish whether a ship linked to Russia sabotaged undersea cables there this week.

Finnish authorities seized control of the ship, the Eagle S, on Thursday as they tried to establish whether it had damaged a power cable linking Finland and Estonia and several data cables. It was the latest in a string of incidents involving the disruption of key infrastructure in the region.

In a post on X, Rutte said that he had spoken to Finland's President Alexander Stubb "about the ongoing Finnish-led investigation into possible sabotage of undersea cables." Rutte said that "NATO will enhance its military presence in the Baltic Sea."

Asked for details about what might be done and when, NATO headquarters would say only that the 32-country alliance "remains vigilant and is working to provide further support, including by enhancing our military presence" in the region.

Finland, which shares a 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) border with Russia, joined NATO in 2023, abandoning a decades-old policy of neutrality.

In October 2023, in response to similar incidents, NATO and its allies deployed more maritime patrol aircraft, long-distance radar planes and drones on surveillance and reconnaissance flights, while a fleet of minehunters was also dispatched to the region.

The Eagle S is flagged in the Cook Islands but has been described by Finnish customs officials and European Union officials as being part of Russia's shadow fleet of tankers shipping oil and gas in defiance of international sanctions imposed over its war on Ukraine.

The aging vessels, often with obscure ownership, routinely operate without Western-regulated insurance. Russia's use of the vessels has raised environmental concerns about accidents given their age and uncertain insurance coverage.

The Eagle S's anchor is suspected of causing damage to the cable, Finland's Yle state broadcaster has reported, rely-



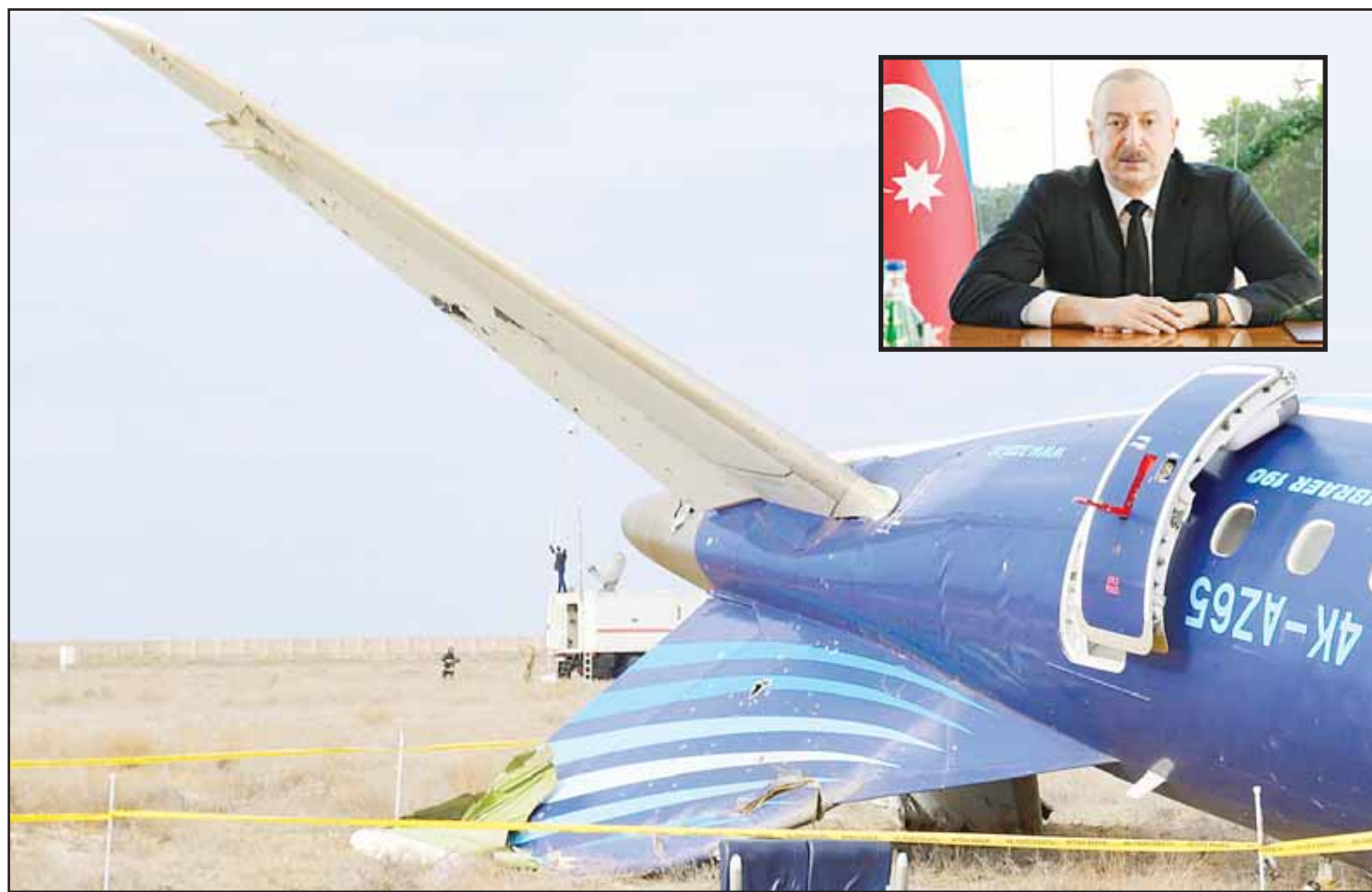
Finnish President Alexander Stubb meets with media to make comments on the Finland-Estonia electrical link Estlink cable disruption, at the Presidential Palace in Helsinki, Finland, on Dec. 27, 2024. (AP)

ing on police statements. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was asked about the seizure on Friday but declined to comment.

After a high-level meeting about the incident, Stubb posted on X that "the situation is under control. We have no reason to be worried," while adding that the investigation continues. He said that Finland and Estonia had requested extra NATO help.

He said new measures could include "inspections of the insurance certificates of vessels" in the region. Stubb added that "we are also looking at ways, based on international maritime law, to respond more effectively to similar incidents in the future."

The Estlink-2 power cable, which takes electricity from Finland to Estonia across the Baltic Sea, went down on Wednesday but had little impact on services. The incident follows damage to two data cables and the Nord Stream gas pipelines, both of which have been termed sabotage.



This image from video released by the administration of the Mangystau region of Kazakhstan, shows the wreckage of Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 on the ground near the airport of Aktau, Kazakhstan, on Dec. 25, 2024. Inset: In this photo provided by Azerbaijan's Presidential Press Office, Azerbaijanian President Ilham Aliyev holds a meeting in Baku, on Dec. 25, 2024 following an Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 plane crash. (AP)

## US and Azerbaijan blamed external weapon for crash

## Putin apologizes to Azerbaijani leader for 'tragic incident' involving crashed plane

BAKU, Dec 28, (AP): Russian air defense systems may have brought down an Azerbaijanian airliner this week, a U.S. official said Friday after an Azerbaijani minister also suggested the plane was hit by a weapon, citing expert analysis and survivor accounts.

Friday's assessments by Rasha Nabiyev and White House national security spokesman John Kirby echoed those made by outside aviation experts who blamed the crash on Russian air defense systems responding to a Ukrainian attack. These statements raised pressure on Russia, where officials said a drone attack was underway in the region where the Azerbaijan Airlines flight was heading for a landing. They did not address statements blaming air defenses.

Kirby told reporters on Friday that the U.S. "have seen some early indications that would certainly point to the possibility that this jet was brought down by Russian air defense systems,"



Russian President Vladimir Putin chairs a Security Council meeting via video-conference at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, Saturday, Dec. 28, 2024. (AP)

but refused to elaborate, citing an ongoing investigation.

Pressed on whether the U.S. has

intelligence that helped lead to that conclusion, or was simply relying on informed speculation from experts

based on visual assessments of the crash, Kirby characterized the short answer as "yes" but said he'd "leave it at that," without providing further details.

The plane was flying from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, on Wednesday when it turned toward Kazakhstan and crashed while making an attempt to land. The crash killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured.

Nabiyev, Azerbaijan's minister of digital development and transportation, told Azerbaijani media that "preliminary conclusions by experts point at external impact," as does witness testimony.

"The type of weapon used in the impact will be determined during the probe," Nabiyev said.

Passengers and crew who survived the crash told Azerbaijani media that they heard loud noises on the aircraft as it was circling over Grozny.

## 'Salt Typhoon' breach widens

## 9th telecoms firm hit by a massive Chinese espionage campaign: WH

WASHINGTON, Dec 28, (AP): A ninth U.S. telecoms firm has been confirmed to have been hacked as part of a sprawling Chinese espionage campaign that gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations of an unknown number of Americans, a top White House official said.

Biden administration officials said this month that at least eight telecommunications companies, as well as dozens of nations, had been affected by the Chinese hacking blitz known as Salt Typhoon.

But deputy national security adviser Anne Neuberger told reporters Friday that a ninth victim had been identified after the administration released guidance to companies about how to hunt for Chinese culprits in their networks.

The update from Neuberger is the latest development in a massive hacking operation that has alarmed national security officials, exposed cybersecurity vulnerabilities in the private sector and laid bare China's hacking sophistication.

The hackers compromised the networks of telecommunications companies to obtain customer call records and gain access to the private communications of what officials have said is a limited number of individuals. Though the FBI has not publicly identified any of the victims, officials believe senior U.S. government officials and prominent political figures are among those whose communications were accessed.

Neuberger said Friday that officials did not yet have a precise sense how many Americans overall were affected by Salt Typhoon, in part because the Chinese were careful about



Anne Neuberger, Deputy National Security Advisor for Cyber and Emerging Technology, speaks during a press briefing at the White House, March 21, 2022, in Washington. (AP)

their techniques, but that a "large number" were in the Washington-Virginia area.

Officials believe the goal of the hackers was to identify who owned the phones and, if they were "government targets of interest," spy on their texts and phone calls, she said.

The FBI said most of the people targeted by the hackers are "primarily involved in government or political activity."

Neuberger said the episode highlighted the need for required cybersecurity practices in the telecommunications industry, something the Federal Communications Commission is to take up at a meeting next month. In addition, she said, the government was planning additional actions in coming weeks in response to the hacking campaign, though she did not say what they were.

"We know that voluntary cyber security practices are inadequate to protect against China, Russia and Iran hacking of our critical infrastructure," she said.

The Chinese government has denied responsibility for the hacking.

## Greece, Cyprus and Armenia sign military cooperation pacts for 2025

ATHENS, Dec 28, (Xinhua): Greece, Cyprus and Armenia signed new military cooperation agreements for 2025 in Athens on Friday, the Greek national news agency AMNA reported.

The "Greece-Cyprus-Armenia Joint Action Plan" and the "Greece-Armenia Military Cooperation Programme" build on similar agreements signed for 2024, the Hellenic National Defence

General Staff (GEETHA) said.

The new plans include operational training activities, joint special forces exercises, exchanges of experience and lessons learned, and director-level staff meetings.

These initiatives reinforce strong military ties between the three countries and aim to enhance the operational capabilities and interoperability of their armed forces, GEETHA added.

## Europe

**Belarus convicts well-known activist:** A court in Belarus convicted a well-known opposition activist and sentenced him to six years in prison, the country's oldest and most prominent human rights group, Viasna, reported Friday. The move is the latest in the unabating crackdown against dissent that the country's authorities have unleashed in recent years.

**Dzmitry Kuchuk,** whose Green Party was shut down last year, was convicted of gross violations of public order and calling for actions aimed at undermining national security. He was sentenced to six years in prison and fined about \$6,000, Viasna reported. The verdict in Kuchuk's trial, which took place behind closed doors in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, was announced on Tuesday, but rights advocates only found out days later. (AP)



Kuchuk

**Russia's railway transport disrupted:** Falling debris from a Ukrainian drone has disrupted railway transport in the Voronezh region, Governor Alexander Gusev said Saturday on his Telegram channel.

He said that Russia's air defense and electronic warfare systems neutralized over 10 Ukrainian drones in the suburbs of Voronezh and nearby districts. According to preliminary information, there were no casualties. (Xinhua)

**Kuril Islands hit by 6.3 earthquake:** A 6.3-magnitude earthquake struck off the southern Kuril Islands in the early hours of Saturday, Russia's RIA Novosti reported.

"The earthquake occurred ... with its epicenter located in the Sea of Okhotsk, 28 kilometers west of Simushir Island. The seismic focus was at a depth of 160 kilometers," Elena Semenova, head of the Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk seismic station, was quoted by RIA Novosti as saying. She added that no tsunami warning has been issued. (Xinhua)

**Serbian student protests persist:** Serbian university students left piles of old school books outside the education ministry building on Friday as part of almost daily street protests demanding accountability over the collapse nearly two months ago of a concrete canopy that killed 15 people in the country's north.

Scattered traffic blockades were also held on various locations throughout Serbia at 11:52 a.m. - the exact time that the concrete construction on the front of the railway station building in Novi Sad crashed onto the people below. The traffic blockades have been held every Friday since the Nov. 1 crash, lasting 15 minutes for the 15 victims. (AP)

## America

**Judge signals blow to Giuliani:** A federal judge is signaling that Rudy's contempt hearing next Friday might not end so well for the former New York City mayor and onetime personal lawyer for President-elect Donald Trump as two Georgia election poll workers try to collect a \$148 million defamation award they won against him.

Judge Lewis J. Liman in Manhattan issued an order Friday in which he was dismissive of what he described as attempts by Giuliani and his lawyer to dodge providing information to the election workers' lawyers. (AP)

**Lottery jackpot winning ticket sold:** At least one Mega Millions player has plenty of dough to ring in the New Year after drawing the winning number. After three months without anyone winning the top prize in the lottery, a ticket worth an estimated \$1.22 billion was sold in California for the drawing Friday night, according to the Mega Millions website.

The winning ticket matched the white balls 3, 7, 37, 49, 55 and the gold Mega Ball 6. The identity of the winner or winners was not immediately known. (AP)

**Oldest Pearl Harbor survivor dies:** Warren Upton, the oldest living survivor of the 1941 Japanese attack on



Rudy Giuliani speaks to reporters as he leaves the federal courthouse in New York, Nov. 26, 2024. (AP)

Pearl Harbor and the last remaining survivor of the USS Utah, has died. He was 105.

Upton died Wednesday at a hospital in Los Gatos, California, after suffering a bout of pneumonia, said Kathleen Farley, the California state chair of the Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors.

The Utah, a battleship, was moored at Pearl Harbor when Japanese planes began bombing the Hawaii naval base in the early hours of Dec. 7, 1941, in an attack that propelled the U.S. into World War II. (AP)

Politicians, public mourn veteran leader's death

## State funeral begins for former Indian PM Singh



Gursharan Kaur, right, wife of former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, sits with others next to the casket of her late husband at Congress party headquarters in New Delhi, India, Saturday, Dec. 28, 2024. (AP)



Security officials and others walk with the hearse carrying the body of former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh towards the cremation site in New Delhi, India, Saturday, Dec. 28, 2024. (AP)

NEW DELHI, Dec 28, (AP): Manmohan Singh, the former Indian prime minister widely regarded as the architect of the country's economic reform program, was cremated after a state funeral on Saturday as politicians and the public mourned his death.

The veteran leader, who was also credited for a landmark nuclear deal with the United States, died late Thursday at age 92.

Singh's body was taken Saturday morning to the headquarters of his Congress party in New Delhi, where party leaders and activists paid tributes to him and chanted "Manmohan Singh lives forever."

Abhishek Bishnoi, a party leader, said Singh's death was big loss for the country. "He used to speak little, but his talent and his actions spoke louder than his words," he said.

Later, Singh's body was transported to a crematorium ground for his last rites as soldiers beat drums.

Government officials, politicians and family members paid their last respects to Singh, whose casket was adorned with flowers and wrapped in the Indian flag. Security personnel honored him with a ceremonial gun salute.

Indian President Draupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who called Singh one of the country's "most distinguished leaders," and several Cabinet ministers participated in the funeral ceremony.

Singh's body was then transferred to a pyre as religious hymns played and cremated.

Authorities declared a seven-day mourning period and canceled all cultural and entertainment events during that time. Government



Congress party President Mallikarjun Kharge touches the casket of former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to pay his tributes at the party headquarters in New Delhi, India, Saturday, Dec. 28, 2024. (AP)

buildings across India are flying the national flag at half-staff.

A mild-mannered technocrat, Singh was prime minister for 10 years and leader of the Congress party in Parliament's upper house, earning a reputation as a man of great personal integrity. He was chosen to be prime minister in 2004 by Sonia Gandhi, the widow of assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Singh was reelected in 2009, but his second term was clouded by financial scandals and corruption charges over the organization of the 2010 Commonwealth Games. This led to the Congress party's

crushing defeat in 2014 national elections by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party under the leadership of Narendra Modi.

Singh adopted a low profile after relinquishing the post of prime minister.

As finance minister, Singh in 1991 instituted reforms that moved India away from a socialist-patterned economy and toward a capitalist model in the face of a huge balance of payments deficit, skirting a potential economic crisis.

Singh was the first Sikh to hold the country's top post and made a public apology in Parliament for

the 1984 Sikh Massacre in which some 3,000 Sikhs were killed after then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards.

In a move hailed as one of his biggest achievements apart from economic reforms, Singh ended India's nuclear isolation by signing a deal with the U.S. that gave India access to American nuclear technology.

But the deal hurt his coalition government, with Communist allies withdrawing their support and criticism of the agreement growing within India in 2008 when it was finalized.

Tokyo and Washington create 1st guidelines for extended deterrence

## Japan Cabinet okays record defense budget as it pushes strike-back capability

TOKYO, Dec 28, (Agencies): The Japanese Cabinet approved a record 8.7 trillion yen (\$55 billion) defense budget for 2025 as Japan accelerates building up its strike-back capability with long-range cruise missiles and starts deploying Tomahawks to fortify itself against growing threats from China, North Korea and Russia.

The Cabinet-endorsed draft defense budget marks the third year of Japan's ongoing five-year military buildup under the national security strategy adopted in 2022. The defense spending is part of the more than 115 trillion yen (\$730 billion) national budget bill - also a record - that requires parliamentary approval by March to be enacted.

Japan is preparing to deploy U.S.-made Tomahawks late in the fiscal year 2025 as part of its ongoing effort to acquire strike-back capability with long-range missiles that can hit distant targets. The budget allocates 940 billion yen (\$6 billion) for the so-called "standoff" defense system that also includes long-range missiles, satellite constellation and other arsenals.

The cost includes 1.8 billion yen (\$11.4 million) for the purchase and addition of equipment to launch Tomahawks from an Aegis-class destroyers.

In order to reinforce its missile defense system, Japan plans to spend another 533 billion yen (\$3.37 billion) that includes purchases of interceptors and a mobile reconnaissance radar to be placed on Okinawa, where more than half of about 50,000 American troops are based.

Under the defense strategy, Japan



This photo shows an exterior view of the Defense Ministry of Japan with its sign at the main entrance in Tokyo on Sept. 17, 2021. (AP)

aims to eventually double its annual military spending to around 10 trillion yen (\$63 billion), making it the world's No. 3 military spender after the United States and China.

As part of the military buildup, Japan is pushing to strengthen its largely domestic defense industry by participating in joint development and promoting foreign sales.

For 2025, Japan plans to spend

314.8 billion yen (\$2 billion) to build three 4,800-ton new multi-purpose compact destroyers, or FFM, that require 90 crew members, less than half the crew size currently needed as a result of automation and labor-saving design - the platform Japan wants

Australia to choose for their future frigates. They are upgraded Mogami-class destroyers equipped with long-range missiles, reinforced anti-

submarine warfare functions and high stealth performance, officials say.

The destroyers built by the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries is one of two candidates shortlisted by Australia for its Sea 3000 frigate project and is competing against Germany's MEKO A-200 offered by Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems. Japan would jointly develop and produce frigates for the Australian Navy.

The project not only serves to further deepen cooperation between Japan and Australia but contributes to enhancing Japan's warship capabilities, Defense Minister Gen Nakatani said last month.

Japan, whose only treaty ally is the United States, has developed close ties with Australia and considers it a semi-ally as they face China's growing threat in the region.

Japan is desperate to win the deal after it lost to France in the 2016 submarine deal with Australia. Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's Cabinet has already approved foreign sales of Mogami-class FFM to Australia in hopes it is selected, and set up a joint panel of government and industrial officials to step up its campaign drive to Canberra.

Japan is also jointly developing a next-generation fighter jet with Britain and Italy for deployment in 2035 and allocated 108.7 billion yen (\$690 million) in the budget for the project.

As the country's population continues to shrink, Japan focuses on unmanned weapons and artificial intelligence to make up for the declining number of service-members and allocated 111 billion yen (\$703 million). Separately, the budget also government this week also adopted a plan to reinforce the "human base" by significantly improving salary, working conditions and support for career paths for the Self Defense Force to attract more applicants.

### Also:

**TOKYO:** Tokyo and Washington have formulated their first guidelines

for extended deterrence to protect Japan with US nuclear forces, as the two nations aim to promote regional stability and deter the outbreak of conflict, the Japanese Foreign Ministry announced.

The guidelines were created based on the contents of past discussions between Japan and the US regarding extended deterrence, the ministry said in press release.

However, the specific details have not been disclosed.

The document reinforces the Japan-US alliance's existing consultation and communication procedures related to extended deterrence amid increasing severe strategic and nuclear threat environment, the ministry said.

In addition, the guidelines also "address strategic messaging to maximize deterrence and enhance measures for US extended deterrence, bolstered by Japan's defense capabilities."

"This is significant as it is based on Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's instructions to further strengthen the credibility of the US extended deterrence," Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya explained at a press conference.

"We would like to advance efforts to strengthen the deterrence and response capabilities of the alliance, including extended deterrence," said Iwaya.

Since 2010, the two governments have held regular talks on extended deterrence, discussing the regional security environment, including North Korea's nuclear and missile development and China's increasingly active military activities.

### Africa

**Senegal closes foreign military bases:** Senegal has announced the closure of all foreign military bases, without setting a timeline for the exit of foreign troops.

Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko made the announcement Friday during a general policy statement to the National Assembly. "The President of the Republic has decided to close all foreign military bases in the very near future," Sonko said.

France's military and Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to the announcement.

President Bassirou Diomaye Faye last month expressed his desire to close the French bases in Senegal.

"Senegal is an independent country, it is a sovereign country, and sovereignty does not accommodate the presence of foreign military bases," the head of state said in a rare media interview. (AP)

**Nigeria airstrike kills 10 civilians:** An airstrike targeting an armed group in northwestern Nigeria mistakenly killed at least 10 civilians, the West African nation's military said Friday.

The villagers were killed on Christmas Day when the air force targeted a logistics base of the Lakurawa insurgent group in the Silame area of Sokoto state, Edward Buba, Nigerian defense spokesperson, told journalists at a press conference.

On Thursday, the Sokoto state government said the air force mistakenly shelled the villagers in the early hours of Wednesday in an attempt to dislodge the insurgents from the area.

However, on Friday, Buba said only that the Lakurawa insurgents were directly hit by munitions and that the civilians died from "secondary explosions." (AP)

**6,000 escape from Mozambique prison:** At least 6,000 inmates escaped from a high-security prison in Mozambique's capital on Christmas Day after a rebellion, the country's police chief said, as widespread post-election riots and violence continue to engulf the country.

Thirty-three prisoners died and 15 others were injured during a confrontation with the security forces, the police chief Bernardino Rafael added.

The prisoners fled during violent protests, that have seen police cars, stations and general public infrastructure destroyed after the country's Constitutional Council confirmed the ruling Frelimo party as the winner of the Oct.9 elections. (AP)

## South Korea Assembly votes to impeach acting president

SEOUL, Dec 28, (AP): South Korea's opposition-controlled National Assembly voted to impeach acting President Han Duck-soo despite vehement protests by governing party lawmakers, further deepening the country's political crisis set off by President Yoon Suk Yeol's stunning imposition of martial law and ensuing impeachment.

Han's impeachment means he will be stripped of the powers and duties of the president until the Constitutional Court decides whether to dismiss or reinstate him. The court is already reviewing whether to uphold Yoon's

earlier impeachment.

The impeachments of the country's top two officials has worsened its political turmoil, deepened economic uncertainties and hurting its international image.

The single-chamber National Assembly passed Han's impeachment motion with a 192-0 vote. Lawmakers with the governing People Power Party boycotted the vote and surrounded the podium where assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik was seated, shouting that the vote was invalid and demanding Woo's resignation. No violence or injuries were reported.



South Korea's main opposition Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung holds a sign during a rally demanding South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol to resign, in downtown Seoul, South Korea, Saturday, Dec. 28, 2024. (AP)

### Lat/Am

**8 killed in Mexico bus accident:** At least eight people were killed and 27 others injured after a passenger bus collided with a semi-trailer truck early Friday in eastern Mexico, local authorities said.

The collision occurred on the Perote-Xalapa highway near Los Molinos in the eastern state of Veracruz, killing three men, four women and one minor, the Veracruz State Attorney General's Office said.

It added that the Xalapa regional prosecutor's office has opened an investigation to determine the cause of the accident.

According to local media, the ADO bus was traveling the Mexico City-Xalapa route, and it appeared that the bus driver failed to notice the presence of the semi-trailer, leading to the collision. (Xinhua)

**Probe into missing children 'stalled':** A probe into the military's role in the disappearance of four children in Ecuador this month was delayed for almost two weeks, even though police had access to surveillance videos showing soldiers taking two of the children, The Associated Press has learned.

The case of the children, aged 11 to 15, who went missing on Dec. 8 in the coastal city of Guayaquil after playing soccer, has struck a nerve in Ecuador, with rights groups and the public demanding information about their whereabouts and asking that the case be investigated as a forced disappearance.

The surveillance video was handed in to authorities a day after the children went missing, two persons familiar with the investigation told the AP. But an investigation of the military's role in the disappearance was not announced until 15 days later.

The two spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the case. The probe only started after the children's families went on local news channels and social media to demand more action from authorities. (AP)

**Brazil bridge collapse toll hits 9:** A woman's body has been found after a bridge linking two northern states in Brazil collapsed, bringing the death toll so far to nine.

Brazil's navy said on Friday that the body was found 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) from the Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira Bridge. Another eight people remain unaccounted for.

Several cars and trucks plunged into the Tocantins River after a section of the bridge crumbled on Sunday.

Police operating on the border of the northern states of Maranhao and Tocantins said four trucks, two cars and two motorcycles entered the river. (AP)

		Change	Closing pts			Change	Closing pts
DUBAI	- DFMGI	+17.66	5,129.64	PHILIPPINES	- PSEI	-10.23	6,528.79
JAPAN	- Nikkei 225	+713.10	40,281.16				
PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	+1,013.46	111,449.50				
BRITAIN	- FTSE 100	+12.79	8,149.78				
EUROPE	- EURO STOXX 50	+41.02	4,898.88				

# Business



Left & right: Al Rushood, Al-Tabtaba'e and a number of officials with the honorees.

The largest of its kind in Kuwait

## KFH honors winners of 'Mishkat Al-Nubuwwa' Hadith Memorization Competition

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) successfully concluded its inaugural Hadith Memorization Competition, the largest of its kind in Kuwait, with significant participation and prizes totaling up to KD 10,000.

In a closing ceremony, held in Arraya Hall, KFH Acting Group Chief Executive Officer, Abdulwahab Iesa Al Rushood and KFH Chairman of Fatwa and Shari'a Supervisory Board, Professor Dr. Sayyid Mohammed Al-Tabtaba'e attended the event along with other KFH officials.

During the ceremony, 30 winners from three age groups were honored. The first group is for ages 6 to 11 (30 hadith), the second group is for ages 12 to 17 (60 hadith), and the third group is for ages 18 and above (90 hadith). 10 winners were selected from each group.

KFH Acting Group Chief Executive Officer, Abdulwahab Iesa Al Rushood, expressed pride in the significant participation in the competition. He commended the competitive spirit among the participants and congratulated all

winners across all participating age groups.

Al Rushood pointed out that this initiative is part of KFH's commitment to social responsibility and its eagerness to launch impactful initiatives that serve the broader community and demonstrate the Bank's CSR leadership.

He added that KFH has consistently been a pioneer in such social initiatives that positively impact society. "Aligned with the principles of social responsibility, these contributions support education, healthcare, and sports. They empower innovators, entrepreneurs, individuals with special needs, and young people. KFH's initiatives include awareness and education programs, further enhancing the bank's reputation for quality achievements and social contributions," remarked Al Rushood.

He further explained that the Mishkat Al-Nubuwwa competition is one of several competitions designed by KFH, such as the annual Holy Quran recitation competition for the public and employees (now in its 10th edition).

Chairman of Fatwa and Shari'a Supervisory Board - Professor Dr. Sayyid Mohammad Al-Tabtaba'e

Meanwhile, KFH Chairman of Fatwa and Shari'a Supervisory Board, Professor Dr. Sayyid Mohammed Al-Tabtaba'e, commended the significant participation of all age groups in these impactful initiatives that contribute to the promotion of Islamic and ethical values.

He congratulated all the winners on their excellence and dedication in memorizing the Sunnah of the Prophet (the Hadith). He also commended the blessed efforts behind organizing such events that encourage the community to follow the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Al-Tabtaba'e emphasized the profound impact these efforts have in cultivating generations committed to carrying the message of Islam and its noble values. He further affirmed KFH's commitment to organizing purposeful community contributions that reinforce noble principles.

### Other Voices

#### Production to exceed 100K bpd

## KOC discovers heavy oil in 'Al-Ratqa' field

By Kamel Al-Harami  
Independent Oil Analyst

Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) has announced the addition of 90,000 barrels of heavy crude to its production, with more to come.

Last week, the company revealed the discovery of heavy oil in the northern part of Kuwait, specifically in the Al-Ratqa field. It anticipates that production will exceed 100,000 barrels per day in the second half of next year.

It is the heavy type of crude, with an API gravity of 17 but Kuwait has the necessary infrastructure to handle and process this type of oil. The Al-Zour Refinery is equipped to break down heavy oil into lighter products, and the Shuaiba Refinery, built in 1967, was the first of its kind among OPEC countries to convert heavy oil into lighter products. This adds value and profit over crude oil.

Kuwait has traditionally produced a single type of crude, which is called Kuwait Export Crude (KEC). Our six refineries are specifically designed to process KEC, but they are also capable of handling other types of crude without any limitations. With this new discovery, Kuwait's production is expected to reach three million barrels per day in the second half of next year.

It is necessary that we notify OPEC about this new production

level so that it can be officially recorded and registered. Following this, Kuwait will seek an increase in its production quota, similar to the recent adjustments made by other OPEC members such as Iraq and Abu Dhabi, with the goal of obtaining organizational consensus.

Kuwait's oil strategy is unique, as it started with a 40 percent ownership stake based on a belief in the value-added benefits. By investing in refining and benefiting from the various products it generates, Kuwait has created the financial advantages needed for its oil industry. With top-notch management focused on maximizing every cent from refinery operations, the Shuaiba Refinery was established as a testament to this vision.

There is no doubt that Kuwait has a deep commitment to the refining industry, consistently seeking investments both locally and internationally. It has the bread and butter of Kuwait's oil sector, and this strategy is now well understood.

The recent discovery of heavy oil is an addition to the reserves already found on our island, which contribute more crude to our oil reserves. Fortunately, our refineries are well-equipped to handle this new resource.

Kuwait's vision for refining is not new. It dates back to our great-grandfathers, who invested their own private funds into these ventures, at a time when international oil majors doubted Kuwait's ability to succeed in refining due to its lack of experience. Today, Kuwait operates six refineries globally, which is a remarkable achievement.

Well done, Kuwait, on your new heavy oil discovery!

Email: [nafitkuwait@yahoo.com](mailto:nafitkuwait@yahoo.com)



Kamel Al-Harami

## Bursa sees mixed performance

Al-Shall index rises 1%

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: A special economic report has highlighted a mixed performance for the Bursa Kuwait in the past week, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Despite a decline in the value and quantity of traded shares, as well as the number of deals concluded, the Al-Shall Index (value index) saw an increase.

According to the Al-Shall Consulting report, the Al-Shall Index closed at 631.5 points at the end of trading last Thursday, marking an increase of 6.1 points (1 percent) from the previous week's closing. This represents a 5 percent increase compared to the end of 2023.

The report also noted that 17 companies saw an increase in their prices

during the past week, compared to 10 companies the week before.

Meanwhile, 10 companies experienced a decrease in their prices, down from 14 in the prior week. The prices of two companies remained unchanged, a decrease from five companies in the previous week.

In terms of overall performance, the Bursa Kuwait concluded last week's trading with a modest rise of 5.20 points (0.07 percent), reaching 7,350.86 points. This was achieved through the trading of 172.4 million shares, executed in 11,276 transactions, totaling 37 million Kuwaiti dinars (approximately \$112.8 million).

The report provides a snapshot of a volatile market where specific indices, such as the Al-Shall Index, continue to show upward momentum, despite fluctuations in the broader market metrics.

### Bids open for KASCO tender, deadline Jan 14

## KASCO appoints Saad Rashid Al-Hajri as CEO

By Najeh Bilal  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: According to reliable sources, Saad Rashid Al-Hajri has recently been appointed as the CEO of Kuwait Aviation Services Company (KASCO).

They explained that the new board of directors, formed in October, has developed a strategy in collaboration with the parent company, Kuwait Airways Corporation, which aims to improve KASCO's performance in the coming year for

maximizing profits and enhancing financial efficiency, which is one of the main priorities of the company.

It is also committed to maintaining its international reputation in providing services to airlines and the local market.

KASCO recently floated a public tender among specialized companies and institutions to select a global consultant for the design and interior furnishing work of its building at Kuwait International Airport Terminal 2. The deadline for submitting bids is set for Tuesday, January 14, 2025.

According to the tender conditions, applicants must be local or international companies, institutions, or firms with at least 20 years of experience in the relevant field. The capital of the bidding company or institution must not be less than \$10 million or its equivalent in other currencies.

KASCO is aiming to establish itself as a leader in the field of supplying meals for passengers of Kuwait Airways and other airlines, in addition to providing various services to both official and private sector companies.

Tourism sector poised for strong 2024 and 2025 growth

## Türkiye's central bank lowers key interest rate to 47.5%

ANKARA, Dec 28, (Agencies): Türkiye's central bank lowered its key interest rate by 2.5 percentage points to 47.5% on Thursday, carrying out its first rate cut in nearly two years as it tries to control soaring inflation.

Citing slowing inflation, the bank's Monetary Policy Committee said it was reducing its one-week repo rate to 47.5% from the current 50%.

The committee said in a statement that the overall inflation trend was "flat" in November and that indicators suggest it is likely to decline in December. Demand within the country was slowing, helping to reduce inflation, it said.

Inflation in Türkiye surged in recent years due to declining foreign reserves and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's unconventional economic policy of lowering rates as a way to tame inflation - which he later abandoned.

Inflation stood at 47% in November, after having peaked at 85% in late 2022, although independent economists say the real rate is much higher than the official figures.

Most economists argue that higher interest rates help control inflation, but the Turkish leader had fired central bank governors for failing to fall in line with his previous rate-cutting policies.

Following a return to more conventional policies under a new economic team, the central bank raised interest rates from 8.5% to 50% between May 2023 and March 2024. The bank had kept rates steady at 50% until Thursday's rate cut.

The high inflation has left many households struggling to afford ba-



People buy food outside the Egyptian market at Eminonu commercial area, in Istanbul, Turkey, Thursday, Dec. 26, 2024, as Turkey's central bank lowered its key interest rate by 2.5 percentage points to 47.5% carrying out its first rate cut in nearly two years as it tries to control soaring inflation. (AP)

sic goods, such as food and housing.

Türkiye is planning to build three nuclear power plants by 2035, Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Alparslan Bayraktar confirmed in an interview with Hurriyet Daily News on Friday.

"We absolutely need two more large conventional nuclear power plants, one in Sinop and another in the Thrace region," Bayraktar stated. "2025 will be a pivotal year for us as we decide on the technology and model for these plants."

The Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, Türkiye's first, is scheduled to begin electricity generation in 2025. The plant's initial reactor, with a capacity of 1,200 megawatts, is expected to meet 2.5 percent of the country's electricity demand. Once fully operational, with a total

capacity of 4,800 megawatts, Akkuyu will supply 10 percent of Türkiye's electricity needs.

Bayraktar also emphasized the economic benefits, noting that Akkuyu will reduce the import of 7 to 7.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas, saving Türkiye approximately 3 billion U.S. dollars annually.

To reach its 2035 energy target, Türkiye plans to develop two additional nuclear plants -- one in Sinop, on the Black Sea coast, and the other in Thrace. Together, these projects will increase Türkiye's nuclear energy capacity to 7,200 megawatts.

#### Also:

ANKARA: Türkiye's tourism sector is poised to close 2024 on a high note, with industry insiders expressing optimism for a strong 2025.

Early bookings indicate a continued upward trajectory, signaling sustained growth for the country's vital tourism industry.

Despite regional challenges, including the ongoing Gaza crisis, demand for Türkiye remains robust, particularly from European markets. Experts are confident that the momentum seen in 2024 will carry into the coming year, potentially driving even stronger results.

Recep Yavuz, a tourism representative from Antalya, Türkiye's leading tourism hub, noted that early deals for 2025 have already garnered significant interest, especially from European countries. "The strong demand we're seeing suggests that 2025 will be another strong year for Turkish tourism," he told Xinhua.

Yavuz also emphasized that Antalya is on track to set a new record for foreign holidaymakers, with an estimated 16 million visitors expected in 2024.

Esra Demir, a travel associate with Sun Tours in Ankara, observed that early reservations for culinary-focused trips are on the rise. "Interest in gastronomic tours is growing, as travelers increasingly seek to explore regional specialties and the cultural significance of food," Demir said. "We expect even more travelers to join these tours in 2025, especially with continued promotional campaigns."

Türkiye welcomed over 50 million foreign tourists between January and November, marking a 7.1 percent increase compared to the same period in 2023, according to data from the Culture and Tourism Ministry on Dec. 20.

## Kuwait's oil exports to Japan dip 26% in Nov

TOKYO, Dec 28, (KUNA): Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in November declined 26.0 percent from a year earlier to 5.18 million barrels, or 173,000 barrels per day (bpd), down for the 14th consecutive month, government data showed Friday.

As Japan's third-biggest oil provider, Kuwait supplied 7.3 percent of its total crude imports, compared with 9.0 percent in the same month of last year, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report.

Japan's overall imports of crude oil in November fell 8.6 percent year-on-year to 2.37 million bpd,

down for the 12th month in a row. Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 95.1 percent of the total, up 0.5 percentage points from the year before.

By country, Saudi Arabia returned to the top spot, although imports from the kingdom shrank 5.3 percent from the year before to 1.05 million bpd, followed by the United Arab Emirates with 904,000 bpd, down 7.2 percent. Qatar ranked fourth with 114,000 bpd and Ecuador fifth with 43,000 bpd, respectively.

Japan is the world's-third biggest oil consumer after China and the US.



Fostering a workplace that inspires creativity and innovation throughout 2024

# NBK's Human Resources Group: Empowering employees through innovative programs and comprehensive wellbeing initiatives

The Human Resources Group at National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) remains integral to the bank's continued success, focusing on the development of human capital and the nurturing of professional talent. By fostering a work environment that inspires creativity and innovation, the department plays a critical role in advancing the bank's strategic goals. Additionally, it is committed to attracting and providing job opportunities for young Kuwaiti talent, ensuring a strong workforce that supports the Group's ongoing growth and aspirations.

Throughout the year, the Human Resources Group has tirelessly worked to foster creativity, innovation, and continuous development. Their unwavering support has been instrumental in helping employees build promising, sustainable careers, reinforcing the bank's commitment to talent development and long-term success.

The year 2024 marked a defining moment for the Human Resources Department at NBK, underscoring its central role within the Group. Through its relentless commitment to innovation, creativity, and development, the department achieved significant milestones. These accomplishments were celebrated with multiple prestigious awards, further solidifying NBK's leadership both regionally and globally.

Mr. Emad Al-Ablani, General Manager-Head of Human Resources Group at NBK, remarked, "Throughout 2024, we successfully achieved all of our interim objectives, which focused on enhancing the capabilities of our workforce across all levels. These initiatives promoted diversity and inclusion in the workplace, attracted and nurtured young national talent, and emphasized a healthy work-life balance by offering flexible working hours. Ultimately, our goal was to create a more prosperous and supportive work environment for all our employees."

"The HR team played a crucial role in the bank's successes this year, executing numerous initiatives with excellence that directly contributed to the achievement of our strategic goals and plans set at the outset of the year," Al Ablani added.

Al-Ablani highlighted that the HR team spearheaded numerous initiatives throughout 2024, aimed at developing innovative strategies to attract national talent, creating an ideal work environment that fosters creativity and innovation. Furthermore, the team focused on enhancing educational infrastructure and expanding career development programs in collaboration with prestigious universities and global experts.

## More Than Just A Workplace

Al-Ablani emphasized that NBK is committed to cultivating a distinctive work environment, centered around the motto "More than just a workplace." This approach not only enhances the overall well-being of employees but also prioritizes their mental and physical health, empowering them to perform at their best. Al-Ablani further highlighted that the bank's human resources strategy is built on four key pillars: ensuring the right competencies are placed in the right roles at the right time; preparing future leaders by fostering a culture of inspiration and empowerment; attracting top talent through effective recruitment, retention, and development practices; and creating a sustainable performance culture that supports diversity, inclusion, clear results management, and employee protection.

"NBK stands out as one of the few institutions in Kuwait that provides a unique and ideal work environment on par with global institutions. This is due to the exceptional professional development opportunities it offers, as well as its commitment to employee welfare. Notable initiatives include the adoption of flexible working hours and the introduction of paternity leave, allowing fathers to stay home and bond with their newborns," Al-Ablani added.

He emphasized that education and training initiatives form a core element of NBK's strategic plans. The bank has developed a robust framework prioritizing career development, mentorship, and a variety of professional growth opportunities. This comprehensive approach is designed to help employees shape their career trajectories and cultivate an environment where they can succeed and drive innovation.

## Investing in Human Capital

Believing strongly in the value of investing in human capital, NBK continued to support its young workforce in 2024 by offering top-tier training and development programs aligned with international standards. The goal was to cultivate a generation of highly skilled bankers across all fields, with a particular emphasis on digital disciplines. These fields have become increasingly essential as banking transactions evolve, driven by cutting-edge technologies and artificial intelligence.

In 2024, the Learning and Development Department intensified its focus on specialized training to refine employee skills. Through a combination of initiatives, workshops, and educational programs, the department aligned its efforts with the dynamic changes in the banking sector. NBK provided a total of 101,463 training hours across the Group, with 86,374 hours dedicated to employees in NBK-Kuwait and 15,089 hours allocated to employees in international locations. This effort engaged 3,476 employees, including 2,913 at NBK-Kuwait and 563 at international locations. Notably, the employee satisfaction rate for all training courses and development programs reached an impressive 90%.

The first cohort of the NBK Tech Academy, the first initiative of its kind in Kuwait, successfully graduated 10 promising young Kuwaiti talents. Over a rigorous 7-month training period, these participants honed their skills in vital areas such as digital technology, data systems, cybersecurity, digital payments, and artificial intelligence. In addition to gaining technical expertise, the program also emphasized the development of personal skills, all aimed at equipping the graduates for impactful careers in the banking sector.

The bank has also launched two distinguished sales team programs, the "NBK Pioneers Program" and the "Prime Program," engaging 79 employees. Specifically tailored for sales channel employees and leaders, these initiatives target a select group of talented NBK staff with a proven track record of exceptional performance and leadership potential. The core focus of the programs lies in management and leadership specializations. The "Pioneers Program" is designed to equip participants with the knowledge, skills, and behavioral traits essential for realizing their full potential as the next generation of NBK leaders. Spanning six months, the program engages 16 trainees and offers intensive training across various bank departments and divisions, providing participants with a comprehensive understanding of the banking sector. The program emphasizes key areas such as influence skills, digital transformation, technical expertise, personal communication, leadership, and innovation. Meanwhile, the "Prime Program" has seen the participation of 63 employees in the distinguished leaders program, which encompasses all local branch managers affiliated with NBK. This program is dedicated to cultivating leadership, communication, guidance, and strategic thinking skills among branch managers.

In 2024, NBK Group achieved a remarkable improvement in engagement, with the overall response rate rising to 86%, and sustainable engagement reaching 84%. These figures exceed the global average for the financial services sector by 7%.

## Women's Empowerment

In 2024, NBK launched the second edition of the NBK RISE program, aimed at empowering and supporting



Emad Al-Ablani, General Manager – Head of Human Resources Group

### Emad Al-Ablani:

- Employee support and engagement initiatives were successfully strengthened, alongside the fostering of a culture of diversity and inclusion across the Group
- Interim objectives aligned with the Group's strategic direction were achieved, ensuring continued progress towards overarching goals
- A continuous learning culture was instilled among employees, reinforcing the foundation of a digital training environment
- Human resources management played a crucial role in enhancing the Group's overall performance throughout the year
- Key initiatives were implemented, aimed at improving the work environment, advancing training programs, and refining talent acquisition strategies
- Over 100,000 training hours were provided, benefiting 3,476 employees across various departments within the Group
- The empowerment of women and promotion of female leaders within the organization continued to be a primary focus

throughout the year

- We recruited 373 new employees in 2024, with women representing 36.4% of the new hires
- Kuwaitization rate increased to 77.1%, supporting Kuwait's national vision and contributing to the country's economic development
- The Group successfully participated in seven career fairs, showcasing our commitment to attracting local talent and promoting job opportunities
- NBK retained its position as one of the most attractive employers in the private sector, particularly for Kuwaiti nationals.
- Digital platforms were effectively utilized in the recruitment process, promoting sustainability and reducing the Group's carbon footprint
- The establishment of the Digital Banking Group marked a significant milestone, driving innovation in digital products, applications, and systems
- Human resources management's efforts were recognized, culminating in the receipt of six prestigious awards in 2024



Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal accompanied by Al-Ablani and Gadeer Al Kooheji with the NBK team during the Career Fair.



National Bank of Kuwait wins the Gold Award for Excellence in Employee Health and Well-being.



NBK's Tech Academy



NBK RISE continues its successful journey towards promoting and supporting female leaders.

women. The program saw the participation of 25 trainees from various professional backgrounds, including those from NBK-Kuwait, international branches, NBK Wealth, and several renowned regional companies. These included Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, Ooredoo, Kuwait Banking Association, Abyat, Gulf Bank, Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz), J's Bakery, and Intervest Capital Partners New York. This initiative further underscores NBK's commitment to fostering gender equality and empowering women in the workplace.

NBK RISE stands as a pioneering initiative, being the first program of its kind designed specifically to support women leaders. Its core objective is to enhance the leadership roles of women, equipping them with the skills and qualifications needed for top executive positions. This program is fully aligned with the bank's broader strategy to elevate women's leadership both within the organization and beyond—extending its impact to the country, region, and globally.

## Strategic Partnerships with International Universities

As part of its commitment to advancing the capabilities of its workforce and fostering development based on the highest standards of excellence, the Bank has entered into an exclusive partnership with the renowned IE University, Spain. This collaboration focuses on several key areas, including talent development, driving institutional innovation, creating and implementing integrated solutions, and leveraging the university's expertise in both applied and academic research.

## Talent Acquisition

The Talent Acquisition Department continued its efforts to build a dynamic workforce to support the bank's growth trajectory, successfully recruiting 373 new employees in 2024. This marked a notable increase in the bank's local hiring efforts, with new female employees accounting for 36.4% of the total workforce. Additionally, the department managed 98 internal recruitment announcements across various bank departments.

NBK is widely recognized as one of the most attractive employers, offering equal opportunities and a strong focus on diversity in the workplace. The bank prioritizes employee training and development, equipping staff with the best programs to enhance their skills and build successful careers. This commitment to nurturing talent positions NBK as the employer of choice for fresh Kuwaiti graduates, providing a pathway for future leadership roles within the organization.

The bank remained dedicated to maintaining a strong Kuwaitization strategy throughout 2024, actively participating in seven career fairs where recruiting national talent was prioritized. Additionally, the bank took steps to exclusively recruit Kuwaiti nationals for certain specialized roles.

The Kuwaitization rate rose to 77.1% in alignment with the Central Bank of Kuwait's (CBK) requirements, reflecting the bank's strategic focus on attracting and nurturing local talent. This approach ensures the sustainability of the workforce and supports the bank's commitment to expanding the scope of national talent recruitment.

NBK also adopts a distinctive approach to ensuring equal opportunities, guaranteeing fairness for all its employees without exception. This commitment is reflected in the fact that women represent 44.6% of the total workforce, a remarkable achievement within both the banking sector and the regional labor market.

## Sustainable practices

The Talent Acquisition Department has successfully integrated sustainable practices into its recruitment processes by leveraging digital platforms for virtual interviews, simplifying the recruitment journey while minimizing its environmental impact. Additionally, the use of Augmented Reality (AR) and 3D glasses offers candidates an immersive, fully simulated experience at NBK's headquarters, ensuring an innovative and eco-conscious approach to talent acquisition.

As part of its ongoing efforts to integrate sustainability practices across all its operations, NBK Group's HR department has introduced NBK HR Pedia, a digital assistant designed to provide employees with 24/7 access to HR support and information. This tool offers instant answers to HR-related inquiries, streamlining communication and enhancing efficiency. In addition, the bank has implemented an integrated archiving program that digitizes and secures employee documents in a sophisticated electronic system. This initiative not only ensures efficient information management and easy access when needed, but also plays a crucial role in reducing paper waste, aligning with the bank's broader environmental sustainability goals and efforts to lower its carbon footprint.

Furthermore, in 2024, the Bank placed a strong emphasis on fostering a culture of continuous learning, leveraging automation and digital platforms to enhance performance quality. The Learning and Development team successfully rolled out the Prime Leadership Program, which focused on cultivating essential leadership competencies for branch and area managers. A total of 62 managers participated in this initiative, which covered key areas such as strategic thinking, market trend forecasting, informed decision-making for long-term growth, and developing high-performing teams. Additionally, the Professional Leader Program saw the participation of 106 leaders from various Bank divisions.

## Prestigious Awards

Throughout 2024, the Human Resources Department's continuous efforts were rewarded with six prestigious awards, further strengthening NBK's global reputation for excellence. Notably, the bank received the Gold Award for "Excellence in Health and Wellbeing" from the prestigious US-based Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). This recognition highlights NBK's exceptional initiatives in promoting employee health, demonstrating a clear understanding of the link between well-being and productivity. The bank's commitment to this cause is reflected in its innovative health and wellness programs, which foster an environment that not only prioritizes employee well-being but also contributes to enhanced organizational performance.

The Bank was also honored with the title of Best Bank for Diversity and Inclusion in Kuwait by the renowned

global financial publication, Euromoney. This prestigious award highlighted the effectiveness of the NBK RISE program, reflecting the bank's unwavering commitment to empowering women and promoting their advancement into leadership roles within the organization.

NBK also received the Excellence in Sustainable Investment in MENA award at the MEED Banking Excellence Awards 2024 for the third consecutive year. This recognition celebrated the NBK Academy program, a legacy of success spanning over 16 years. The program is designed to enable new university graduates from Kuwaiti youth to enter the banking sector. It achieves this through world-class training programs developed in collaboration with leading global institutions and universities, ensuring participants are equipped to meet the demands of the evolving labor market.

Furthermore, the Bank received two esteemed accolades from the Brandon Hall Group of Excellence: recognition in the "Best Advance in Compliance Training" category for the NBK Highfliers program and as the Best Bank for Diversity and Inclusion in Kuwait. Additionally, the NBK RISE program was honored with MERIT's Special Recognition for Developing Women Leaders, underscoring the Bank's unwavering commitment to cultivating leadership and championing inclusivity across all facets of its operations.

## Added Value for Employees

To enhance employee satisfaction and provide additional value, the HR Department has introduced new financial benefits tailored specifically to employees. These include exclusive fixed deposit interest rates and an extended interest-free loan program, enabling employees to apply for a second loan upon full repayment of the first. Additionally, working hours on Thursdays have been reduced by one hour, and employees are granted three days of welfare leave, reinforcing the Bank's commitment to promoting work-life balance and employee well-being.

The Strategic Business Support Partners Department has been instrumental in establishing the Digital Banking Group, a key driver of NBK's digital transformation journey. This group is dedicated to developing innovative digital products, applications, and systems while attracting top-tier digital talent to the bank. By enhancing the expertise of these professionals and enabling them to adapt to the rapidly evolving digital landscape, the department ensures alignment with NBK's strategic vision for digital innovation and transformation.

Moreover, the Human Resources Department has embraced Robotic Process Automation (RPA) technology to automate a variety of routine processes and procedures. By leveraging RPA as a digital workforce, the department has significantly enhanced operational efficiency, minimized human errors, and freed up employees to focus on complex, value-added tasks.

The Human Resources Department introduced a bi-annual performance self-review process to enhance alignment and mutual recognition of performance between managers and employees. This initiative fosters a culture of transparency within the bank, encouraging open communication and collaboration while ensuring performance expectations are clearly understood and consistently evaluated.

## 2024 has been a wonderful year for investors

## How the stock market defied expectations again this year, by the numbers

NEW YORK, Dec 28, (AP): What a wonderful year 2024 has been for investors.

U.S. stocks ripped higher and carried the S&P 500 to records as the economy kept growing and the Federal Reserve began cutting interest rates.

The year featured many familiar winners, such as Big Tech, which got even bigger as their stock prices kept growing. But it wasn't just Apple, Nvidia and the like. Bitcoin, gold and other investments also drove higher.

Here's a look at some of the numbers that defined the year. All are as of Dec. 20.

Remember when President Bill Clinton got impeached or when baseball's Mark McGwire hit his 70th home run against the Montreal Expos? That was the last time the U.S. stock market closed out a second straight year with a leap of at least 20%, something the S&P 500 is on track to do again this year. The index has climbed 24.3% so far this year, not including dividends, following last year's spurt of 24.2%.

The number of all-time highs the S&P 500 has set so far this year. The first came early, on Jan. 19, when the index capped a two-year comeback from the swoon caused by high infla-

tion and worries that high interest rates instituted by the Federal Reserve to combat it would create a recession. But the index was methodical through the rest of the year, setting a record in every month outside of April and August, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices. The latest came on Dec. 6.

The number of times the Federal Reserve has cut its main interest rate this year from a two-decade high, offering some relief to the economy. Expectations for those cuts, along with hopes for more in 2025, were a big reason the U.S. stock market has been so successful this year. The 1 percentage point of cuts, though, is still short of the 1.5 percentage points that many traders were forecasting for 2024 at the start of the year. The Fed disappointed investors in December when it said it may cut rates just two more times in 2025, fewer than it had earlier expected.

That's how many points the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose by the day after Election Day, as investors made bets on what Donald Trump's return to the White House will mean for the economy and the world. The more widely followed S&P 500 soared 2.5% for its best day in nearly two years. Aside from bitcoin, stocks of



A specialist studies monitors on the New York Stock Exchange trading floor in New York on November 21, 2024. (AP)

banks and smaller winners were also perceived to be big winners. The bump has since diminished amid worries that Trump's policies could also send inflation higher.

The level that bitcoin topped to set a record above \$108,000 this past month. It's been climbing as interest rates come down, and it got a partic-

ularly big boost following Trump's election. He's turned around and become a fan of crypto, and he's named a former regulator who's seen as friendly to digital currencies as the next chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission, replacing someone who critics said was overly aggressive in his oversight. Bitcoin

was below \$17,000 just two years ago following the collapse of crypto exchange FTX.

Gold's rise for the year, as it also hit records and had as strong a run as U.S. stocks. Wars around the world have helped drive demand for investments seen as safe, such as gold. It's also benefited from the Fed's cut to interest rates. When bonds are paying less in interest, they pull away fewer potential buyers from gold, which pays investors nothing.

It's a favorite number of Elon Musk, and it's also a threshold that Tesla's stock price passed in December as it set a record. The number has a long history among marijuana devotees, and Musk famously said in 2018 that he had secured funding to take Tesla private at \$420 per share. Tesla soared this year, up from less than \$250 at the start, in part because of expectations that Musk's close relationship with Trump could benefit the company.

That's how much revenue Nvidia made in the nine months through Oct. 27, showing how the artificial-intelligence frenzy is creating mountains of cash. Nvidia's chips are driving much of the move into AI, and its revenue through the last nine months cata-

pulted from less than \$39 billion the year before. Such growth has boosted Nvidia's worth to more than \$3 trillion in total.

GameStop's gain on May 13 after Keith Gill, better known as "Roaring Kitty," appeared online for the first time in three years to support the video game retailer's stock, which helped rocket to unimaginable heights during the "meme stock craze" in 2021. Several other meme stocks also jumped following his post in May on the social platform X, including AMC Entertainment. Gill later disclosed a sizeable stake in the online pet products retailer Chewy, but he sold all of his holdings by late October.

That's how much the U.S. economy grew, at annualized seasonally adjusted rates, in each of the three first quarters of this year. Such growth blew past what many pessimists were expecting when inflation was topping 9% in the summer of 2022. The fear was that the medicine prescribed by the Fed to beat high inflation - high interest rates - would create a recession. Households at the lower end of the income spectrum in particular are feeling pain now, as they contend with still-high prices. But the overall economy has remained remarkably resilient.

# Yellen tells Congress US could hit debt limit in mid-January

Need to start taking 'extraordinary measures'

WASHINGTON, Dec 28, (AP): US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said her agency will need to start taking "extraordinary measures," or special accounting maneuvers intended to prevent the nation from hitting the debt ceiling, as early as January 14, in a letter Friday to congressional leaders Friday afternoon.

"Treasury expects to hit the statutory debt ceiling between January 14 and January 23," Yellen wrote in a letter addressed to House and Senate leadership, at which point extraordinary measures would be used to prevent the government from breaching the nation's debt ceiling - which has been suspended until Jan. 1, 2025.

The department has in the past deployed what are known as "extraordinary measures" or accounting maneuvers to keep the government operating. But once those measures run out the government risks defaulting on its debt unless lawmakers and the president agree to lift the limit on the U.S. government's ability to borrow.

"I respectfully urge Congress to act to protect the full faith and credit of the United States," she said.

The news comes after President Joe Biden signed a bill into law last week that averted a government shutdown but did not include President-elect Donald Trump's core debt demand to raise or suspend the nation's debt limit. The bill was approved by Congress only after fierce internal debate among Republicans over how to han-



U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen speaks during a visit to the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (Fin-CEN) in Vienna, Va., on Jan. 8, 2024. (AP)

dle Trump's demand. "Anything else is a betrayal of our country," Trump said in a statement.

After a protracted debate in the summer of 2023 over how to fund the government, policymakers crafted the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which included suspending the nation's \$31.4 trillion borrowing authority until Jan. 1, 2025.

Notably however, Yellen said, on Jan. 2 the debt is projected to tempo-

rarily decrease due to a scheduled redemption of nonmarketable securities held by a federal trust fund associated with Medicare payments. As a result, "Treasury does not expect that it will be necessary to start taking extraordinary measures on January 2 to prevent the United States from defaulting on its obligations," she said.

The federal debt currently stands at roughly \$36 trillion - which ballooned across both Republican and

Democratic administrations. And the spike in inflation after the coronavirus pandemic pushed up government borrowing costs such that debt service next year will exceed spending on national security.

Republicans, who will have full control of the White House, House and Senate in the new year, have big plans to extend Trump's 2017 tax cuts and other priorities but debate over how to pay for them.

## Canadian Cabinet ministers meet Trump's nominee for commerce secretary in bid to avoid tariffs

TORONTO, Dec 28, (AP): Two Canadian Cabinet ministers left a meeting at Mar-a-Lago without assurances President-elect Donald Trump will back away from threatened tariffs on all products from the major American trading partner.

The Canadians called the talks "productive" and said there would be further discussions but one official said the Americans remain fixated on the U.S. trade deficit with Canada.

Finance Minister Dominic LeBlanc and Foreign Minister Melanie Joly met with Howard Lutnick, Trump's nominee for commerce secretary, as well as North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, Trump's pick to lead the Interior Department.

Trump has threatened to impose 25% tariffs on all Canadian products if Canada does not stem what he calls a flow of migrants and fentanyl into the United States - even though far fewer of each cross into the U.S. from Canada than from Mexico, which Trump has also threatened.

"Minister LeBlanc and Minister Joly had a positive, productive meeting at Mar-a-Lago with Howard Lutnick and Doug Burgum, as a follow-up to the dinner between the Prime Minister and President Trump last month," said Jean-Sébastien Comeau, a spokesman for LeBlanc.

Comeau said both ministers outlined the measures in Canada's billion-dollar plan to increase security at the border and reiterated "the shared commitment to strengthen border security as well as combat the harm caused by fentanyl to save Canadian and American lives."

Comeau said Lutnick and Burgum agreed to relay the information to Trump.

A senior Canadian official, however, said the Americans remain preoccupied on the U.S. trade deficit with Canada and want it to shrink. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

Trump has made an issue of the U.S. trade deficit, erroneously calling it a subsidy.

Canada's ambassador to Washington, Kirsten Hillman, has said the U.S. had a \$75 billion trade deficit with Canada last year. But she noted a third of what Canada sells into the U.S. are energy exports and said there is a deficit when oil prices are high.

About 60% of U.S. crude oil imports and 85% of U.S. electricity imports are from Canada. Alberta alone sends 4.3 million barrels of oil per day to the U.S. which tends to consume about 20 million barrels a day.

The Trump transition team did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

Further discussions are expected in the coming weeks. Joly will also have dinner with U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham on Friday.

Trump has been trolling Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on social media in recent weeks by calling him the Governor of the 51st state.

Trudeau has not directly responded, but did post a link Thursday to a six-minute video on YouTube from 2010 in which American NBC journalist Tom Brokaw "explains Canada to Americans."



Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly responds to a question during a news conference in Ottawa, Nov. 1, 2024. (AP)

## More than 770,000 people counted as homeless

# US homelessness up 18 percent as affordable housing remains out of reach for many people

WASHINGTON, Dec 28, (AP): The United States saw an 18.1% increase in homelessness this year, a dramatic rise driven mostly by a lack of affordable housing as well as devastating natural disasters and a surge of migrants in several parts of the country, federal officials said Friday.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development said federally required tallies taken across the country in January found that more than 770,000 people were counted as homeless - a number that misses some people and does not include those staying with friends or family because they do not have a place of their own.

That increase comes on top of a 12% increase in 2023, which HUD blamed on soaring rents and the end of pandemic assistance. The 2023 increase also was driven by people experiencing homelessness for the first time. The numbers overall represent 23 of every 10,000 people in the U.S., with Black people being overrepresented among the homeless population.

"No American should face homelessness, and the Biden-Harris Administration is committed to ensur-



A man walks past a homeless encampment in downtown Los Angeles, Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2023. (AP)

ing every family has access to the affordable, safe, and quality housing they deserve," HUD Agency Head Adrienne Todman said in a statement, adding that the focus should remain on "evidence-based efforts to prevent and

end homelessness."

Among the most concerning trends was a nearly 40% rise in family homelessness - one of the areas that was most affected by the arrival of migrants in big cities. Family homeless-

ness more than doubled in 13 communities impacted by migrants including Denver, Chicago and New York City, according to HUD, while it rose less than 8% in the remaining 373 communities. Nearly 150,000 children experienced homelessness on a single night in 2024, reflecting a 33% jump from last year.

Disasters also played a part in the rise in the count, especially last year's catastrophic Maui wildfire, the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century. More than 5,200 people were staying in emergency shelters in Hawaii on the night of the count.

"Increased homelessness is the tragic, yet predictable, consequence of underinvesting in the resources and protections that help people find and maintain safe, affordable housing," Renee Willis, incoming interim CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, in a statement. "As advocates, researchers, and people with lived experience have warned, the number of people experiencing homelessness continues to increase as more people struggle to afford sky-high housing costs."

# Concerns mount over new energy crisis in EU

VALLETTA, Dec 28, (Xinhua): "If Russian natural gas stops transiting from Ukraine to the EU, European countries including Croatia will feel the impact and maybe a new energy supply crisis could occur in Europe," Frano Kalac, a Zagreb citizen, voiced his concerns about further increases in gas prices.

Ukraine announced recently that it would no lon-

ger allow Russia to transport natural gas via its pipeline network to European countries after the five-year transit agreement with Russian energy giant Gazprom expires at the end of the year. The concerns are shared not only by European citizens but also by industries, which have struggled with high energy costs and declining competitiveness since the EU

sought to reduce its reliance on Russian energy following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Despite the efforts, the EU's dependence on Russian natural gas will likely persist in the foreseeable future amid challenges such as high energy costs, a sluggish economic recovery, and divisions among member states.

## A boost, not a shock

# China partnering with developing countries for economic takeoff

BEIJING, Dec 28, (Xinhua): Some Western politicians have been quite active in their attempts to discredit China, concocting tales and spreading disinformation ranging from "China threat" to "China collapse" and "Peak China." Their latest allegation is that China is exporting its "overcapacity" and jeopardizing the manufacturing industries of developing countries, causing what they call "China shock 2.0."

This accusation is a stark departure from reality.

China, having experienced rapid growth in recent decades, has become the world's second-largest economy, and it stays a committed member of the Global South. Facing similar challenges in pursuit of development, China and other developing countries are natural partners who focus on boosting growth and enhancing livelihoods.

In contrast to the assertions of some Western politicians, China's development is not a threat to other countries. Instead, it is the wellspring of opportunities for the world. More importantly, China's journey of pursuing development has provided empirical insights and confidence for other developing nations to blaze their own paths of development.

Statistics reveal the significant role of China's investments in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) partner countries. By the end of 2023, the stock of China's direct investment in these countries exceeded 300 billion U.S. dollars, with Chinese companies contracted for projects worth more than 1.4 trillion dollars. By the end of June, China has built more than 100 overseas economic and trade cooperation zones across 46 countries, contributing more than 13.3 billion dollars in taxes and fees to the host countries.

The capital, technology and cost-effective equipment from China have played a vital role in facilitating the industrial transformation and economic growth in these partner countries.

Meanwhile, China actively embraces quality products from the developing world, sharing the opportunities of China's vast domestic market.

China is the largest export market for 44 countries and regions, and ranks among the top five export markets for 104 countries and regions. In 2023 alone, China imported 2.56-trillion-dollar worth of goods, securing its position as the world's second-largest importer of goods for the 15th consecutive year.

Seasonal suspense series of 2025

## Netflix's 'Missing You' arrives for New Year binge

LONDON, Dec 28, (AP) — It's Netflix's resolution every new year to give viewers a head-scratcher in January.

Since 2020, the streamer has released a UK miniseries based on thriller book by Harlan Coben over the holidays. It seems to have paid off: "Fool Me Once," starring Michelle Keegan, Adeel Akhtar and Joanna Lumley, launched this past January and became what Netflix says was one of their most watched shows of the year, amassing 108 million views.

2025's seasonal suspense series is "Missing You," based on Coben's 2014 New York Times bestseller. It stars Rosalind Eleazar ("Slow Horses") as Detective Inspector Kat Donovan, a police officer who specializes in finding missing people — apart from the fiancé that vanished 11 years earlier.

"They know Jan. 1 is the sweet spot for them," says actor Richard Armitage, who has appeared in each winter Coben adaptation, which relocates the stories from the books' America to the north of England. "People have ownership over the show now, so like, 'I want my Harlan Coben show on New Year's

Day. Give me my Harlan Coben fix.'"

"It's perfect timing for the release, to be honest," says co-star Ashley Walters. "Most people are going to be hung over or, you know, just not have anything to do with the day."

The show opens with the shock of Donovan's ex-fiance (Walters) popping up on a dating app, over a decade after she came home one day to find him gone.

"I've ghosted people before," laughs Armitage. "Just people you don't want to talk to anymore. Not digitally though."

Another star, Jessica Plummer, isn't a fan of those who disappear without saying goodbye, though.

"I'd just feel too guilty," she admits, calling it "cowardly and lazy — sorry Richard!"

Eleazar promises twists and turns along the way, adding that the actors weren't initially given the final two scripts and had to turn to the book to find out what happens.

Coben "really is a genius at taking you up the wrong track," says Eleazar. "You're so sure that this time you've got it right and it's this person or this thing, but you are inevitably

always wrong."

"I would love to know, actually, how he starts a book, you know? Does it start with an idea or does he think of the most inconceivable idea and go, 'That's how it's going to end?'" she asks.

Armitage agrees that "Missing You" does justice to the "hair-raising" shock ending of the book: "It's like the rug is pulled away at the last minute."

And while audiences at home can binge-watch the whole five-part series as 2025 is still finding its feet, the cast will be busy with a variety of pastimes.

Lenny Henry, who portrays Kat's father, jokes that he usually wakes up to a new year surrounded by roast potatoes, while wearing pajamas.

Armitage likes to be outside and start fresh by skiing down a mountain, while Eleazar has plans to celebrate in style: She and a group of friends have a tradition where they rent a castle and dress up in themed costumes.

Past New Year's Eve parties have included donning 18th century garb in France and last year's Versace-themed fete.



Ashley Walters, (left), and Rosalind Eleazar pose for photographers at a photo call for the television series 'Missing You', Nov. 6, 2024, in London. (AP)

### Obituary

#### CBS legend

## Sportscaster Gumbel dies

NEW YORK, Dec 28, (AP) — Greg Gumbel, a longtime CBS sportscaster who broke barriers during his career calling some of the biggest sporting events, has died from cancer, according to a statement from family released by the network on Friday. He was 78.

"He leaves behind a legacy of love, inspiration and dedication to over 50 extraordinary years in the sports broadcast industry; and his iconic voice will never be forgotten," his wife Marcy Gumbel and daughter Michelle Gumbel said in a statement.

In March, Gumbel missed his first NCAA Tournament since 1997 due to what he said at the time were family health issues.

Gumbel was the studio host for CBS since returning to the network from NBC in 1998. Gumbel signed an extension with CBS last year that allowed him to continue hosting college basketball while stepping back from NFL announcing duties.

In 2001, he announced Super Bowl 35 for CBS, becoming the first Black announcer in the U.S. to call play-by-play of a major sports championship.

David Berson, president and CEO of CBS Sports, described Gumbel as someone who broke barriers and set standards for others during his years as a voice for fans in sports, including in the NFL and March Madness.

"A tremendous broadcaster and gifted storyteller, Greg led one of the most remarkable and groundbreaking sports broadcasting careers of all time," said Berson.

Gumbel had two stints at CBS, leaving the network for NBC when it lost football in 1994 and returning when it regained the contract in 1998.

#### Coverage

He hosted CBS' coverage of the 1992 and 1994 Winter Olympics and called Major League Baseball games during its four-year run broadcasting the national pastime. In 1995, he hosted the World Figure Skating Championships and the following year hosted NBC's daytime coverage of the Olympic Summer Games in Atlanta.

But it was football and basketball where he was best known and made his biggest impact. Gumbel hosted CBS' NFL studio show, "The NFL Today" from 1990 to 1993 and again in 2004-05.

Earlier this year, Gumbel recalled replacing Brent Musburger as host of "The NFL Today" in 1990, describing it as intimidating and daunting.

"The fact that I got to sit in the same chair and do the same thing or try to do the same thing that he did was an incredible honor," he said.

Gumbel also called NFL games as the network's lead play-by-play announcer from 1998 to 2003, including Super Bowl 35 and 38. He returned to the NFL booth in 2005, leaving that role after the 2022 season.

"Like all who knew and loved him, I too am saddened by his death, yet also so very grateful to have known him in my life," Clark Kellogg, a CBS Sports college basketball game and studio analyst, said in a statement. "What a gift to be touched by such a good man and partner."

### Music



This image released by Netflix shows a scene from 'Avicii - I'm Tim,' the story of Tim Bergling. (AP)

Docu director on focusing on DJ's legacy, not tragedy

## New Avicii films celebrate his life, music

NEW YORK, Dec 28, (AP) — Avicii, the groundbreaking Swedish DJ-producer, died six years ago at 28. Two new movies hitting Netflix next week aim to celebrate his life.

His death was a tragedy that reverberated around the world — much like his music, which brought unexpected genres and collaborators into his melodic EDM through forward-thinking, chart-topping hits like "Wake Me Up!" and "Hey Brother."

A short concert film captured at what became his final performance, "Avicii - My Last Show," and a full-length documentary, "Avicii - I'm Tim," will premiere Tuesday on Netflix. They work to celebrate the artist born Tim Bergling, capturing his early life, the songs that made him an idiosyncratic talent, his insatiable curiosity and hunger for reinvention, and the people he left behind.

Miraculously, Avicii himself narrates a lot of the film — pulled from archival interviews and some never before published.

Capturing Avicii's life and career was no easy feat, director Henrik Burman told The Associated Press. The project took half a decade, beginning before the pandemic and not long after the DJ's death. Burman's interviews were long and many. "To know people around Tim," he says, was the only way "to know Tim."

Burman discussed Avicii's life, career and legacy with the AP. This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

**AP:** How did you approach this project?  
**Burman:** I would say from the beginning, the first thing I knew I wanted to do was find my story ... the story that I wanted to tell about Tim. But the most important (aspect) was time. I wanted this to be a project with no time limits ... I wanted it to be a slow process. And I wanted to have a lot of time

for research. And the people close to Tim, I didn't want to force them into anything. I didn't want to push it. I wanted them to see and learn what I wanted to tell, you know, my story and my vision.

**AP:** The structure is compelling; it really focuses on Avicii's life and his biggest songs that shifted genre — you avoid casting his career as "it was the 2010s and EDM was massive." There's a lot of research.

**Burman:** I had access to a lot of material ... I was looking for clues all the time ... I've watched so, so many hours of, you know, in-



Avicii poses for a portrait in New York, Monday, Jan. 23, 2012. (AP)

terviews with Tim just to see, "OK, he says this again. And it was like the eighth time that year. OK. That should be important." ... It was kind of a puzzle and yeah, it was huge research work.

Sometimes, in the material that I had ... he was like, "If there's a documentary, ever, about me, this should be in it." ... There's a story in the film, in the beginning, from where he is a kid. He tells a story to the interviewer. And he says, "When I was a kid, I wasn't like a really nice person. For a few years, I was kind of bullying people. And I was around 6 or 7. And after a while I realized that people didn't like me, so after a summer, I was thinking about this, and I decided, 'I need to change ... and see what happens.' And then people liked me again." And when he told that story, he was like, "That's a really important story. That's a story that needs to be in a documentary, if it's ever a documentary about me, because that says so much about me as a person."

I was trying to find clues and stories and listen and ... early on, I was quite sure that I wanted to tell the story from Miami Ultra (Music Festival) and what happened there. That was kind of a key moment for me, and that was a huge key moment for Tim. But when I realized that this ... needs to be the center of my story, at the midpoint for my story, I realized that I had something to hold on to.

**AP:** The childhood story reflects his interest in creative transformation, too. How do you aim to capture his spirit and not center his death?

**Burman:** That is hard. I have from the beginning ... tried to explain my vision for this film ... But I reached out to a lot of friends, and of course his family, and I got their

blessing.

When I got this kind of group of people that said yes to being in the film that I could start to ask more questions and have deeper conversations. But again, we needed time ... I wanted to work gently, that was very important.

**AP:** And you have footage of Tim in the womb! It is very different than what could've very easily been an exploitative version of the film.

**Burman:** I wanted to make an intimate and personal story and not speculate ... to find the right tone, you need time. And since we started work ... one, one-and-a-half years after Tim passed, I just knew that we needed time. And, of course, people around Tim needed a lot of time.

**AP:** What is Avicii's legacy?  
**Burman:** You can answer that question in so many ways. But if you're talking about the music, and the music that he produced and wrote, he was so much ahead of his time, I would say. And you can hear the legacy of Avicii in the music today. You can hear it in the production in new music and hits from today. If you listen to the music — go back and listen to the music now that he released like 10 years ago, it sounds so fresh, modern, and I would say timeless.

**AP:** What do you hope viewers take away from this film?

**Burman:** Someone said to me that the film is so much about Tim, but at the same time, it's so kind of universal. And I thought that was beautiful because life is not simple. There are no easy answers. And everything is complex and multilayered. So, that's what I aim to contribute to Tim's story. And I also really hope that even the most hardcore fans get a new, fresh perspective of Tim as a person and Avicii as an artist.

## Iconic hotel featured in band's 1970 album

## The Doors' 'Morrison Hotel' goes up in flames in LA

LOS ANGELES, Dec 28, (AP) — The former Morrison Hotel, made famous by The Doors and their 1970 album of the same name, was significantly damaged by a fire that erupted in downtown Los Angeles on Thursday.

The four-story building, which has been vacant more than a decade, burned for nearly two hours before more than 100 firefighters brought the flames under control, according to the Los Angeles Fire Department.

The Morrison Hotel was featured on the cover of The Doors' fifth album. Celebrated music photogra-

pher Henry Diltz made the image in 1969 and said years later that it took a little trickery to pull it off.

A hotel clerk told the band they weren't allowed to take photos inside, but when the clerk stepped away, the group ran into the lobby and Diltz quickly got the photo looking through the window, with legendary frontman Jim Morrison in the middle.

"It was a great old wooden building with many small rooms upstairs where transients and drinkers could sleep it off on a cot for \$2.50

a night!" Diltz told The Associated Press on Friday. "I think the beautiful front window with 'Morrison Hotel' in red letters was the best part of it! So did The Doors!"

The album was viewed as a come-back to their roots for The Doors, coming on the heels of Morrison's on-stage arrest at a Miami concert that saw him convicted of indecent exposure and profanity.

Morrison and The Doors would release one final album, "L.A. Woman," before he was found dead in a Paris bathtub on July 3, 1971.

Los Angeles firefighters who first arrived at the blaze on Thursday found heavy flames on the building's top floor.

Several people who were in the building escaped without injuries, including three people rescued by firefighters from the third floor, according to the department. The building's roof collapsed, leaving its structural integrity in doubt, the department said.

The building in recent years had been used as a training site for firefighters.



Fire crews battle a building fire on the 1200 block of South Hope Street Thursday, Dec. 26, in Los Angeles. (AP)

## New Year



Times Square New Year's Eve Ball is displayed at One Times Square, Friday, Dec. 27, 2024, in New York. (AP)

## Final crystal triangles installed on Times Square ball ahead of New Year's Eve

The last of the crystal triangles that make up this year's Times Square New Year's Eve ball were installed on Friday morning, marking the first time in 10 years that all 2,688 were replaced at once.

Rapper Pitbull and inventor Joy Mangano were among those on hand to help the organizers of the celebration put the final pieces in place atop One Times Square, the skyscraper

from which the 11,875-pound (5,386-kilogram) geodesic sphere drops to mark the new year.

A New Year's Eve ball was first dropped in Times Square in 1907. Built by a young immigrant metalworker named Jacob Starr, the 700-pound (318-kilogram), 5-foot (1.52-meter) diameter ball was made of iron and wood and featured 100 25-watt light bulbs. Six newer versions of the ball have

been featured in the century-plus since that first celebration.

The only years no ball drop occurred were 1942 and 1943, when the city instituted a nightly "dimout" during World War II to protect itself from attacks. Crowds instead celebrated the new year with a moment of silence followed by chimes rung from the base of One Times Square. (AP)

## Television

## Hwang wishes to work with Jake Gyllenhaal

## 'Squid Game' creator enjoys killing characters

NEW YORK, Dec 28, (AP) — Viewers may gasp, cringe or cry out watching characters die on Netflix's "Squid Game," but those simulated deaths have a different effect on its creator, writer and director. Instead, Hwang Dong-hyuk feels happiness seeing them go.

The show has a huge cast and Hwang says it was "really difficult" to manage everyone on set.

As characters would die, Hwang recalls saying to the actors on their last day, "Oh no! How sad! I won't see you tomorrow," but I was always smiling inside."

"Squid Game" season two premieres Thursday. It once again stars Lee Jung-jae and centers around a secret competition in South Korea that targets people in debt and the winner gets a big cash prize. What they don't know is that losing the game is deadly.

Hwang originally conceived of the show 15 years ago as a two-hour film but it failed to gain traction with financiers or even interested actors. He put it aside and worked on other films in-



Hwang Dong-hyuk poses for a portrait to promote the second season of 'Squid Game' on Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024, in Los Angeles. (AP)

stead. He then had the idea to make it a TV series instead and took the project to Netflix. There, it could reach a wide

audience.

"I never in my wildest dream thought it was going to be this huge," said Hwang, who spoke with the AP about the show and what comes next. Answers have been edited for clarity and length.

**AP:** What have you learned from "Squid Game"?

**Hwang:** I learned that I shouldn't give up. If you love something and if you want to create something, it might not work now, but the time might come later. Or that idea could be the source of inspiration for something else.

**AP:** You've already finished filming season three of "Squid Game." Have you thought about what your next project will be?

**Hwang:** I'm afraid to talk about it but it's a feature film taking place 10-20 years in the future. It's darker than "Squid Game." It's going to be quite cruel, quite sad, but at the same time quite quirky and humorous.

**AP:** What films and TV shows do you enjoy?

**Hwang:** I used to think you had to have a specific taste to be cool, but I

actually think I'm very omnivorous. I like to watch anything. When I'm on the couch watching TV, sometimes I watch CNN or Fox News. And then National Geographic and nature documentaries, I also watch some very soapy Korean shows or reality TV as well. I hop around and watch everything that's kind of happening in the world. With a series, I often don't stick with it the whole way through. There's only about like five shows that I watched until the very end, like "Breaking Bad" and "Why Women Kill."

**AP:** Would you ever want to direct a US production or Hollywood actors?

**Hwang:** Of course. I studied film school at the University of Southern California and there are so many people I'd love to work with. I have had those offers since "Squid Game," but because I'm a writer-director I think I'm best when I'm working with Korean actors, giving direction in Korean with my Korean script. But, if I come across an amazing script, why not? I'd love to work with Jake Gyllenhaal.

**AP:** There are more characters in

season two of "Squid Game." Why is that?

**Hwang:** With seasons two and three, I had more screen time for more characters. This time around we have a lot of younger characters. When I was creating season one, I thought it was very hard for you to be up to your neck in debt when you're only in your 20s or 30s. I thought you had to be at least middle-aged to need money and want to join the Squid Game. But the world has changed. Now I feel like there are less decent jobs for young people and they feel like working hard doesn't even get them to middle class. They want to hit the jackpot, so that's why they invest in cryptocurrency. In Korea, there are a lot of young people in their early 20s or 30s turning to online gambling. I wanted to show what society really is like today.

**AP:** Season two of "Squid Game" has already been nominated for a Golden Globe which is a good sign. Can you say anything about season three of "Squid Game"?

**Hwang:** It's better than season two.

## Variety

**NEW YORK:** An Alabama woman who says she was raped by Jay-Z and Sean "Diddy" Combs when she was 13 can proceed anonymously, for now, in her lawsuit against the rap moguls, a judge ruled Thursday.

In her written order, Judge Analisa Torres also chastised the lawyer representing Jay-Z for what she described as his combative motions and "inflammatory language" against the plaintiff's lawyer, calling them inappropriate.

The Manhattan jurist said the woman can proceed anonymously at this early stage of the litigation, but she may be required to reveal her identity at a later date, if the case proceeds. That would allow defense lawyers to collect facts necessary to prepare for trial. Torres also cited "substantial interest" from the public.

Combs remains jailed in New York awaiting a criminal trial on federal sex trafficking charges.

He also faces a wave of sexual assault lawsuits, many of which were filed by the plaintiff's lawyer, Tony Buzbee, a Texas attorney who says his firm represents over 150 people, both men and women, who allege sexual abuse and exploitation by Combs.

The lawsuits allege many individuals were abused at parties in New York, California and Florida after receiving drug-laced drinks.

Combs' lawyers have dismissed Buzbee's lawsuits as "shameless publicity stunts, designed to extract payments from celebrities who fear having lies spread about them, just as lies have been spread about Mr. Combs." Jay-Z has said in a statement that Buzbee is trying to blackmail him to settle the Alabama woman's allegations.

Buzbee said in an email that his firm does not comment on court rulings.

In her lawsuit, the woman who says she was raped at 13 identifies herself as "Jane Doe." She said she was living in Rochester in 2000 when she made her way to New York City and be-

friend a limousine driver who drove her to an after-party for the MTV Music Awards, where she says she was eventually attacked by Jay-Z and Combs.

Alex Spiro, a lawyer for Jay-Z, asked the judge to dismiss the entertainer from the woman's lawsuit and he requested a hearing on the case for the day after he made his requests in writing on Dec. 18.

Citing an interview the plaintiff did on NBC-TV, Spiro wrote that the broadcast revealed "glaring inconsistencies and outright impossibilities" in the plaintiff's story. For one thing, the woman said she traveled for five hours

from Rochester to watch the music awards show on a jumbotron outside the VMA even though permits and pictures show there was no jumbotron at

the event.

Spiro also noted that the woman's father has said he does not recall driving from Rochester to pick his daughter up in New York City, as she says he did.

The woman has admitted inconsistencies in her story.

Torres wrote in her order Thursday that Spiro, who has been on the case less than three weeks, has submitted a "litany of letters and motions attempting to impugn the character of Plaintiff's lawyer, many of them expounding on the purported 'urgency' of this case."

Referring to Jay-Z by his legal last name, the judge added: "Carter's lawyer's relentless filing of combative motions containing inflammatory language and ad hominem attacks is inappropriate, a waste of judicial resources, and a tactic unlikely to benefit his client. The Court will not fast-track the judicial process merely because counsel demands it."

A message seeking comment from Spiro was left for him on Thursday. (AP)

## Obituaries

## Iconic role

## 'Romeo &amp; Juliet' star Hussey dies

LONDON, Dec 28, (AP) — Olivia Hussey, the actor who starred as a teenage Juliet in the 1968 film "Romeo and Juliet," has died, her family said on social media Saturday. She was 73.

Hussey died on Friday, "peacefully at home surrounded by her loved ones," a statement posted to her Instagram account said.

Hussey was 15 when director Franco Zeffirelli cast her in his adaptation of the William Shakespeare tragedy after spotting her onstage in the play "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie," which also starred Vanessa Redgrave.

"Romeo and Juliet" won two Oscars and Hussey won a Golden Globe for best new actress for her part as Juliet, opposite British actor Leonard Whiting, who was 16 at the time.

Decades later Hussey and Whiting brought a lawsuit against Paramount Pictures alleging sexual abuse, sexual harassment and fraud over nude scenes in the film.

They alleged that they were initially told they would wear flesh-colored undergarments in a bedroom scene, but on the day of the shoot Zeffirelli told the pair they would wear only body makeup and that the camera would be positioned in a way that would not show nudity. They alleged they were filmed in the nude without their knowledge.

The case was dismissed by a Los Angeles County judge in 2023, who found their depiction could not be considered child pornography and the pair filed their claim too late.



Actress Olivia Hussey smiles as she appears at the Japan premiere of her latest film 'Mother Teresa of Calcutta' in Tokyo, June 15, 2005. (AP)

## Actor Meek dies in accident at 16

VESTAVIA HILLS, Ala., Dec 28, (AP) — Teenage actor Hudson Meek has died after he fell out of a moving vehicle in Alabama, authorities said.

Meek, 16, was hurt on Dec. 19 while on a street in Vestavia Hills, a suburb of Birmingham. He died two days later, according to the Jefferson County Coroner's Office.

The Vestavia Hills Police Department, which is investigating Meek's death, has not issued any public statements.

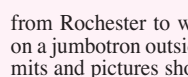
Meek made his on-screen debut in 2014's "The Santa Con," and had roles in various TV series, including "MacGyver." He was perhaps best known for his role in the 2017 film "Baby Driver," in which he played a younger version of Ansel Elgort's titular character.

"His 16 years on this earth were far too short, but he accomplished so much and significantly impacted everyone he met," a post on Meek's Instagram page read.

Meek played football at Vestavia Hills High School, enjoyed Bible study with his teammates and had traveled to all 50 states. He loved snow skiing, making music playlists for his friends and singing in the school choir, according to his obituary.



Meek



Gyllenhaal



A US Food and Drug Administration building is seen behind FDA logos at a bus stop on the agency's campus in Silver Spring, Md., on Aug. 2, 2018. (AP)

## Talc-related cancer lawsuits prompt new FDA rules

# FDA plans stricter asbestos testing for cosmetics

WASHINGTON, Dec 28, (AP): Cosmetic companies would have to take extra steps to ensure that any products containing talc are free of asbestos under a federal rule proposed Thursday.

The proposal from the Food and Drug Administration and mandated by Congress is intended to reassure consumers about the safety of makeup, baby powder and other personal care products.

It follows years of lawsuits against Johnson & Johnson and other companies alleging links between talc-based baby powder and cancer. Despite the lawsuits, research has found mixed evidence of a potential link between cancer and talc, although the possibility has been recognized for decades because of how it is mined.

Talc is a mineral used to absorb moisture or improve the texture, feel and color of cosmetics. It is

mined from underground deposits that are sometimes located near the toxic mineral asbestos. The risk of cross contamination has long been recognized by cosmetic companies.

But recent FDA-sponsored testing hasn't uncovered any safety issues. Since 2021, laboratory analysis of more than 150 cosmetic samples has come back negative for asbestos, according to the FDA.

Still, concerns about the risk prompted Congress to pass a 2023 law requiring the FDA to release new industry standards for asbestos testing.

Dr. Linda Katz, the director of the FDA's Office of Cosmetics and Colors, said in a statement that the agency has "carefully considered the scientific evidence and complex policy issues related to detecting and identifying asbestos in talc and talc-containing

cosmetic products." "We believe that the proposed testing techniques are appropriate methods to detect asbestos to help ensure the safety of talc-containing cosmetic products," Katz said.

The long-running litigation against J&J alleges that the company's talc baby powder caused women to develop ovarian cancer, when used for feminine hygiene. A J&J subsidiary has proposed paying roughly \$8 billion to settle tens of thousands of lawsuits. As part of the deal, the subsidiary would declare bankruptcy, although that proposal has been challenged in court by the Justice Department.

J&J removed talc from its baby powder in the US market in 2020 and then internationally in 2023. The company says it continues to stand by the safety of its products.

## NY to charge fossil fuel firms

# Climate change added 41 days of dangerous heat worldwide in 2024

NEW YORK, Dec 28, (AP): People around the world suffered an average of 41 extra days of dangerous heat this year because of human-caused climate change, according to a group of scientists who also said that climate change worsened much of the world's damaging weather throughout 2024.

The analysis from World Weather Attribution and Climate Central researchers comes at the end of a year that shattered climate record after climate record as heat across the globe made 2024 likely to be its hottest ever measured and a slew of other fatal weather events spared few.

"The finding is devastating but utterly unsurprising: Climate change did play a role, and often a major role in most of the events we studied, making heat, droughts, tropical cyclones and heavy rainfall more likely and more intense across the world, destroying lives and livelihoods of millions and often uncounted numbers of people," Friederike Otto, the lead of World Weather Attribution and an Imperial College climate scientist, said during a media briefing on the scientists' findings. "As long as the world keeps burning fossil fuels, this will only get worse."

Millions of people endured stifling heat this year. Northern California and Death Valley baked. Sizzling daytime temperatures scorched Mexico and Central America. Heat endangered already vulnerable children in West Africa. Skyrocketing southern European temperatures forced Greece to close the Acropolis. In South and Southeast Asian countries, heat forced school closures. Earth experienced some of the hottest days ever measured and its hottest-yet summer, with a 13-month heat streak that just barely broke.

### Temperatures

To do its heat analysis, the team of volunteer international scientists compared daily temperatures around the globe in 2024 to the temperatures that would have been expected in a world without climate change. The results are not yet peer-reviewed, but researchers use peer-reviewed methods.

Some areas saw 150 days or more of extreme heat due to climate change.

"The poorest, least developed countries on the planet are the places that are experiencing even higher numbers," said Kristina Dahl, vice president of climate science at Climate Central.

What's worse, heat-related deaths are often underreported.

"People don't have to die in heat waves. But if we can't communicate convincingly, 'but actually a lot of people are dying,' it's much harder to raise this awareness," Otto said. "Heat waves are by far the deadliest extreme event, and they are the extreme events



Tourists with an umbrella walk in front of the Parthenon at the ancient Acropolis in central Athens, June 12, 2024. (AP)

where climate change is a real game changer."

This year was a warning that the planet is getting dangerously close to the Paris Agreement's 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) warming limit compared to the pre-industrial average, according to the scientists. Earth is expected to soon edge past that threshold, although it's not considered to have been breached until that warming is sustained over decades.

The researchers closely examined 29 extreme weather events this year that killed at least 3,700 people and displaced millions, and found that 26 of them had clear links to climate change.

The El Niño weather pattern, which naturally warms the Pacific Ocean and changes weather around the world, made some of this weather more likely earlier in the year. But the researchers said most of their studies found that climate change played a bigger role than that phenomenon in fueling 2024's events. Warm ocean waters and warmer air fueled more destructive storms, according to the researchers, while temperatures led to many record-breaking downpours.

Jennifer Francis, a climate scientist at the Woodwell Climate Research Center in Cape Cod who wasn't involved in the research, said the science and findings were sound.

"Extreme weather will continue to become more frequent, intense, destructive, costly, and deadly, until we can lower the concentration of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere," she said.

Significantly more climate extremes could be expected without action, the United Nations Environment Programme said in the fall, as more planet-warming carbon dioxide has been sent into the air this year by burning fossil fuels than last year.

But the deaths and damages from extreme weather events aren't inevitable, said Julie Arrighi, director of programmes at the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre and part of the research.

"Countries can reduce those impacts by preparing for climate change, and while the challenges faced by individual countries or systems or places vary around the world, we do see that every country has a role to play," she said.

### Companies

In a related development, large fossil fuel companies would have to pay fees to help New York fight the effects of climate change under a bill signed Thursday by Gov. Kathy Hochul.

The new law requires companies responsible for substantial greenhouse gas emissions to pay into a state fund for infrastructure projects meant to repair or avoid future damage from climate change.

Lawmakers approved the bill earlier this year to force big oil and gas companies to contribute to the cost of repairs after extreme weather events and resiliency projects such as coastal wetland restoration and upgrades to roads, bridges and water drainage systems.

"The Climate Change Superfund Act is now law, and New York has fired a shot that will be heard round the world: the companies most responsible for the climate crisis will be held accountable," said state Sen. Liz Krueger, a Democrat who sponsored the bill.

"The planet's largest climate polluters bear a unique responsibility for creating the climate crisis, and they must pay their fair share to help regular New Yorkers deal with the consequences," Krueger said.

The biggest emitters of greenhouse gases between 2000 and 2018 would be subjected to the fines.

## Space mystery

### Probe survives fiery sun flyby

NEW YORK, Dec 28, (Agencies): NASA's Parker Solar Probe has successfully made the closest approach to the sun, the space agency confirmed Friday.

Earlier this week, the spacecraft passed within a record-breaking 3.8 million miles (6 million kilometers) of the scorching star. NASA received an all-clear message from Parker on Thursday night confirming it survived the journey.

Launched in 2018 to get a close-up look at the sun, Parker has since flown straight through its crownlike outer atmosphere, or corona. With its close brush complete, the craft is expected to circle the sun at this distance through at least September.

It's the fastest spacecraft built by humans, and hit 430,000 mph (690,000 kph) at closest approach. It is outfitted with a heat shield that can withstand scorching temperatures up to 2,500 degrees Fahrenheit (1,370 degrees Celsius).

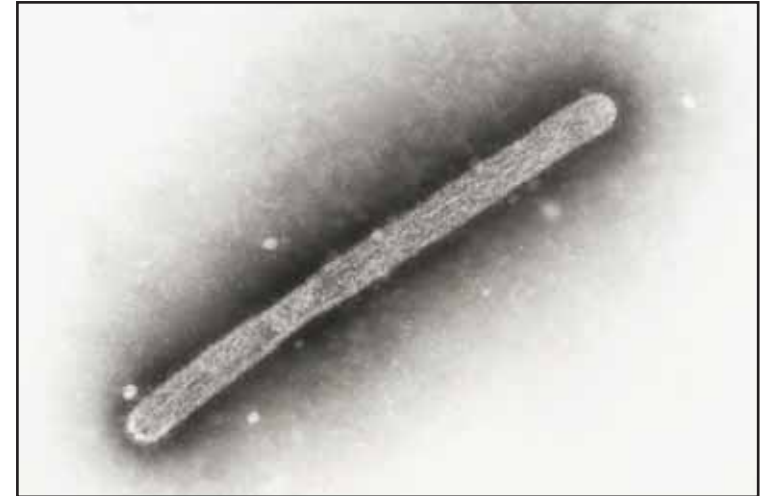
Scientists hope the data from Parker will help them better understand why the sun's outer atmosphere is hundreds of times hotter than its surface and what drives the solar wind, the super-sonic stream of charged particles constantly blasting away from the sun.

**Radio telescopes:** Two radio telescopes with 40-meter-diameter antennas, one located in northeast and the other in southwest China, were put into use on Friday. These telescopes will aid in exploring deep space and unravelling cosmic mysteries.

The two telescopes were built by the Shanghai Astronomical Observatory (SHAO) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) in Changbai Mountain area in northeast China's Jilin Province and in Shigatse in southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region respectively.

Following the deployment of the two new telescopes, the Very-Long-Baseline Interferometry (VLBI) network in China now includes one control center in Shanghai and six stations in Shanghai, Urumqi, Kunming, Changbai Mountain and Shigatse, according to SHAO.

VLBI is a radio interferometry technology that can be used to obtain fine radio images and precise positions of cosmic objects.



This 2005 electron microscope image shows an avian influenza A H5N1 virion. (AP)

## 'Protect pets from bird flu'

# Bird flu likely mutated within the patient: CDC

NEW YORK, Dec 28, (Agencies): A genetic analysis suggests the bird flu virus mutated inside a Louisiana patient who contracted the nation's first severe case of the illness, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said this week.

Scientists believe the mutations may allow the virus to better bind to receptors in the upper airways of humans - something they say is concerning but not a cause for alarm.

Michael Osterholm, a University of Minnesota infectious disease researcher, likened this binding interaction to a lock and key.

To enter a cell, the virus needs to have a key that turns the lock, and this finding means the virus may be changing to have a key that might work. "Is this an indication that we may be closer to seeing a readily transmitted virus between people? No," Osterholm said. "Right now, this is a key that sits in the lock, but it doesn't open the door."

The virus has been causing sporadic, mostly mild illnesses in people in the US, and nearly all of those infected worked on dairy or poultry farms.

The Louisiana patient was hospitalized in critical condition with severe respiratory symptoms from bird flu after coming in contact with sick and dead birds in a backyard flock.

The person, who has not been identified, is older than 65 and has underlying medical problems, officials said earlier this month.

The CDC stressed there has been no known transmission of the virus from the Louisiana patient to anyone else. The agency said its findings about the mutations were "concerning" but the risk to the general public from the outbreak "has not changed and remains low."

Still, Osterholm said, scientists should continue to follow what's happening with mutations carefully.

"There will be additional influenza pandemics and they could be much worse than we saw with COVID," he said. "We know that the pandemic clock is ticking. We just don't know what time it is."

**Cat bird flu:** The death of an Oregon house cat and a pet food recall are raising questions about the ongoing outbreak of bird flu and how people can protect their pets.

Oregon health officials traced the cat's illness to frozen cat food that contained raw turkey. Virus recovered from the recalled pet food and the infected cat matched.

Some pet owners feed their animals raw meat, but that can be dangerous, even fatal for the animals, said Dr. Michael Q. Bailey, president-elect of the American Veterinary Medical Association. Cooking meat or pasteurizing raw milk destroys the bird flu virus and other disease-causing germs.

"Raw milk, raw meat products can be and are a vector for carrying this virus," he said.

Though cases of infection are rare, cats seem especially susceptible to the bird flu virus, or Type A H5N1. Even before the cattle outbreak, there were feline cases linked to wild birds or poultry. Since March, dozens of cats have caught the virus. These include barn and feral cats, indoor cats, and big cats in zoos and in the wild.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health is investigating the deaths of four house cats that drank recalled raw milk.

Dogs seem to be less vulnerable than cats, but they should eat only thoroughly cooked foods, Bailey said. Cats should not drink unpasteurized dairy products or eat raw meat. Pet owners should keep cats away from wild birds, livestock and poultry.

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Hosts lead by 116 runs

## Reddy the hero for India with maiden century against Australia

MELBOURNE, Australia, Dec 28, (AP): India has a new batting hero after 21-year-old Nitish Kumar Reddy showed the poise of a veteran to score his maiden century, leading his team's comeback against Australia on day three of the fourth test.

At stumps on Saturday at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, India (358-9) still trailed Australia (474) by 116 runs on the first innings, but it could have been much worse.

Reddy, playing in just his fourth test and batting at No. 8, rescued India from a shaky 221-7, sharing a 127-run partnership with Washington Sundar (50).

The pair fell two runs shy of equaling the record for an eighth-wicket partnership for India versus Australia of 129 which was set by Harbhajan Singh and Sachin Tendulkar at the Sydney Cricket Ground in January 2008.

Spin-bowling allrounder Sundar offered a difficult chance off the back of his bat to second slip on 18, which was dropped by a diving Steve Smith as Mitchell Starc bowled the first over with the second new ball.

But chances were few for Australia's bowlers. Reddy was unbeaten on 85 at tea, with the score on 326-7.

With Reddy on 97, Sundar's 162-ball innings finally ended when he was caught at slip off the bowling of spinner Nathan Lyon (2-88) at 348-8. The patient Sundar struck just one boundary.

Reddy played a lofted drive to cover to move to 99 but lost tailender Jasprit Bumrah for a duck, caught at first slip off the bowling of captain Pat Cummins (3-86), in the following over at 350-9.

The tension was building as Mohammed Siraj survived three deliveries from Cummins, allowing Reddy to seize the moment and make the century in the following over with an on-drive to the boundary, leading to deafening roars from the thousands of India fans in the stands, including his father.

Reddy's father Mutyala nervously watched from the stands as his son edged through the nervous 90s, before wiping away tears of joy as he was mobbed by well-wishers in the MCG crowd.

"For our family, it's a special day and we cannot forget this day in our life... he has been performing well since the age group of 14-15, and

now in international cricket, it's a very special feeling," Mutyala told hindustantimes.com.

"I was very tense. Only the last wicket was remaining. Thankfully Siraj managed to survive."

Reddy's hundred came off 171 deliveries and included 10 fours and one six. Only nine more deliveries were bowled before play was delayed and then called off due to bad light and rain, with Reddy unbeaten on 105.

Sundar said he felt India was in a good position, despite still trailing by 116 runs but enjoying playing in front of a roaring crowd of over 83,000 on Saturday.

"We will just fight, no matter what," Sundar said. "Playing against Australia in a big series, you are always going to be up against a challenge."

"I'm very, very happy for Nitish. He got an unbelievable hundred and I'm sure this will be remembered forever. The way he went about his business today was amazing. This hundred will be talked about for a very long time."

Australia fast bowler Scott Boland said after play ended that his fellow pace bowler Starc, who took 0-86 off 25 overs, was carrying an injury.



India's Nitish Kumar Reddy raises his bat as he celebrates after scoring his century during play on the third day of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

## Cavs sink Nuggets for 6th straight win

Brown scores season-high 44 points, Celtics cruise past Pacers



Houston Rockets guard Aaron Holiday, left, and Minnesota Timberwolves guard Mike Conley, right, battle for a loose ball during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Houston. (AP)

DENVER, Dec 28, (AP): Donovan Mitchell scored 33 points, Evan Mobley had 26 points and the streaking Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Denver Nuggets 149-135 on Friday night for their sixth straight win.

Cleveland set a season high in points and improved to 10-1 since dropping two in a row to Atlanta last month.

Nikola Jokic had 27 points, 14 rebounds and 13 assists for his league-leading 12th triple-double of the season, and Jamal Murray also had 27 with 10 assists for Denver, which has dropped two in a row.

Michael Porter Jr. scored 13 of the Nuggets' first 25 points to help keep pace with the Cavaliers but only scored five the rest of the way.

Cleveland led by as many as 19 to improve its NBA-best record to 27-4.

### Celtics 142, Pacers 105

In Boston, Jaylen Brown scored a season-high 44 points, including six 3-pointers, and the Boston Celtics snapped a two-game skid with a rout over the Indiana Pacers.

Jayson Tatum added 22 points and 13 rebounds for Boston, which connected on 23 3s and never trailed. Brown also had four steals to join Larry Bird (five times) and Antoine Walker as the only Celtics with at least 44 points and four steals in a game.

Payton Pritchard finished with 18 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds.

The Pacers have lost two straight since posting a season-best five-game win streak.

Tyrese Haliburton had 19 points and nine assists, Benedict Ma-



San Francisco Spurs' Harrison Barnes, right, dribbles the ball against Brooklyn Nets Jalen Wilson, left, during the first half of an NBA basketball game in New York. (AP)

thurin finished with 18 points and Pascal Siakam added 14 points and nine rebounds.

### Mavericks 98, Suns 89

In Phoenix, Kyrie Irving scored 20 points, Daniel Gafford added 16 and the Dallas Mavericks won their first game since star Luka Doncic was injured, beating the Phoenix Suns.

Kevin Durant scored 35 points for the Suns, who have lost four of their past five games.

Doncic is expected to miss about a month with a calf injury suffered in the team's Christmas Day loss to Minnesota. The Mavs were left further short-handed on Friday in the third quarter after forwards Naji Marshall and P.J. Washington - along with Phoenix's Jusuf Nurkic - were ejected after a brief fight.

The Mavs persevered anyway thanks to a balanced effort on both ends of the floor. Dallas never trailed and led by as many as 18.

Spencer Dinwiddie and Maxi Kleber each scored 15 points and Klay Thompson added 11.

Dallas took a 55-39 lead by halftime, led by Irving's 15 points. The Suns shot just 33.3% over the first two quarters.

### Spurs 96, Nets 87

In New York, Victor Wembanyama had 19 points, seven rebounds and six blocks, Jeremy Sochan had 12 points and 14 rebounds and the San Antonio Spurs beat the Brooklyn Nets.

Julian Champagnie scored 18 points, and Keldon Johnson had 15 points and six rebounds to help the Spurs end a two-game skid.

Keon Johnson scored a game-high 25 points and Shake Milton chipped in with 16 points and 12 assists for Brooklyn, which fell for the ninth time in its past 12 games.

### Timberwolves 113, Rockets 112

In Houston, Anthony Edwards

made a step-back 3-pointer with 23 seconds left to cap a furious rally and lift the Minnesota Timberwolves to a win over the Houston Rockets.

The Rockets were up by 12 with about three minutes left before a 10-0 run by the Timberwolves, highlighted by a 3-point play by Edwards, cut the lead to 110-108 with 90 seconds to go.

Alperen Sengun made 1 of 2 free throws after that, but Julius Randle's dunk on the other end got Minnesota within 1. Sengun fouled a second time and again made just 1 of 2 free throws to leave Houston up 112-110.

Edwards then sunk the 3-pointer to give Minnesota its first lead since midway through the third quarter.

The Rockets had a chance for the win, but Fred VanVleet's 3-point attempt was off.

Randle had 27 points and Edwards added 24 as the Timberwolves won their second straight after losing three in a row.

### Knicks 108, Magic 85

In Orlando, Jalen Brunson had 26 points and nine assists, Josh Hart added 23 points and 13 rebounds and the New York Knicks extended their winning streak to six games with a win over the Orlando Magic.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 16 points and eight rebounds for the Knicks, who pulled away in the second half. Mikal Bridges, coming off a season-best 41-point game in a win over San Antonio on Christmas Day, added 17 points.

Jalen Suggs, limited to 26 minutes due to foul trouble, scored 27 points. Goga Bitadze had 14 points and 10 rebounds for Orlando, which dropped its second straight and lost for the fifth time in seven games.

## New Zealand fight back to beat Sri Lanka by 8 runs in first T20

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, New Zealand, Dec 28, (AP): Daryl Mitchell and Michael Bracewell made half centuries in a 105-run sixth wicket partnership to help lead New Zealand to an eight-run win over Sri Lanka on Saturday in the first of three T20 internationals.

Outstanding bowling at the death also turned the match in New Zealand's favor as Sri Lanka slumped from 121-0 to 164-8 in reply to New Zealand's 172-8.

Mitchell made 62 and Bracewell 59 in a partnership lasting only 60 balls, after coming together with New Zealand in trouble at 65-5 when Wanindu Hasaranga dismissed Glenn Phillips and Mitchell Hay with consecutive deliveries in the 10th over.

New Zealand's total looked inadequate as Pathum Nissanka made 90 in 60 balls and shared a 121-run opening stand with Kusal Mendis which seemed to have set up Sri Lanka for a comfortable win.

Mendis contributed 46 to Sri Lanka's first century opening partnership in T20s in 122 innings over eight years.

He was out in the 14th over, an over where Jacob Duffy took three wickets for one run, marking the point at which Sri Lanka's run chase began to unravel. Kamindu Mendis and Kusal Perera were also out in the same over.

"They're class batters, particularly those two at the top," Duffy said. "We know these conditions well with a bit of bounce and swing up top."

Nissanka was dismissed with the total 153-5 in the 19th over and only 20 runs needed for victory.

But Sri Lanka went into the match with a long tail and it wasn't able to finish what Nissanka and Kusal Mendis had started.

"We're really disappointed about the result and we really should have done better," Sri Lanka captain Char-



New Zealand's Tim Robinson bats during the first Twenty20 international cricket match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka at Mt Maunganui, New Zealand. (AP)

ith Asalanka said. "I think Pathum Nissanka and Kusal Mendis batted really well and the rest of us, myself included, should take responsibility for this loss."

New Zealand was under pressure for most of the match, stumbling to 32-2 at the end of the power play as Binura Fernando bowled superbly at the top of the innings, finishing with 2-22.

Hasaranga then stepped up and took his two important middle-order wickets as New Zealand reached 65-5 by the midpoint of its innings.

Mitchell and Bracewell lifted New Zealand to a solid total which was still made to look reachable under the early onslaught from Nissanka and Mendis.

But after Duffy's three-wicket burst, Sri Lanka lost its way and the next best score after the opening pair was 8. Matt Henry and Zak Foulkes bowled superbly at the death.

### 'Shocking decision'

## NBA coaches react with dismay over firing of 2-time coach of year Brown

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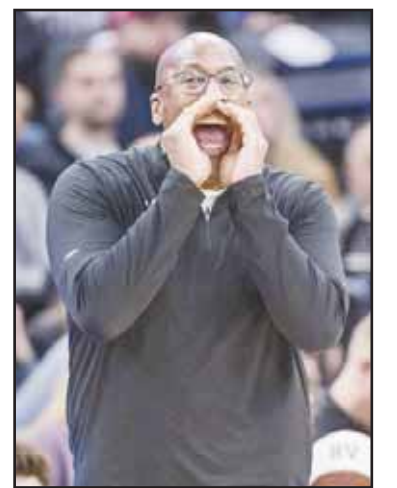
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In this file photo, Sacramento Kings head coach Mike Brown shouts instructions from the bench during the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Denver Nuggets in Sacramento, Calif. (AP)

done better," Sri Lanka captain Charith Asalanka said. "I think Pathum Nissanka and Kusal Mendis batted really well and the rest of us, myself included, should take responsibility for this loss."

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## Union fires coach Bo Svensson after 9 games without a win

BERLIN, Dec 28, (AP): Union Berlin has fired coach Bo Svensson and his assistants after nine games without a win in all competitions.

The Bundesliga club said it will decide on a new coach to take charge of the team from Jan. 2 in the "next days."

Union was knocked out of the German Cup and hasn't won a game since beating promoted Holstein Kiel in October. It hasn't won any of its last eight Bundesliga games under Svensson, who took over in the summer,

and the team showed little sign of development during his stay despite an encouraging start.

"We're convinced that a significant change is necessary to reverse the trend," Union sporting director Horst Heldt said. "We have therefore decided not to continue our collaboration with Bo Svensson, Babak Keyhanfar, Kristoffer Wichmann and Tijan Njie."

Svensson's last game in charge was a chastening 4-1 loss at Werder Bremen on Dec. 21.

Union has had little luck with coaching appointments since firing club favorite Urs Fischer last season. Fischer had led the club to Bundesliga promotion for the first time in 2019, followed by ever-improving finishes in the Bundesliga until it qualified for the Champions League in 2023.

That success arguably upset the balance in the team as it prompted Heldt to bring in experienced big names like Leonardo Bonucci and Robin Gosens to prepare it for the additional demands

of competing in European soccer's top club competition. Both have since left Union.

Fischer was fired after a 14-game run without a win. Marco Grote took over on an interim basis, then Croatian coach Nenad Bjelica was appointed for what proved to be an unhappy spell. Bjelica was fired after a loss to relegation rival Bochum left the club a point above the drop zone. Grote returned and ultimately steered the club to safety on the final day.

Kuwait's qualification for semifinals celebrated

## Sheikh Khaled Al-Badr commends the organization of Khaleeji Zain 26

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Sheikh Khaled Al-Badr Al-Sabah, President of the Kuwaiti and Asian Aquatics Federations, expressed his immense happiness at the qualification of the Kuwaiti national team to the semi-finals of the Khaleeji Zain 26 tournament.

In a press release, Sheikh Khaled praised the competitive and enthusiastic atmosphere of the tournament.

He highlighted the brotherly spirit shared among the participating teams, as well as the remarkable public presence, which strengthens the bonds of unity and solidarity between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

Sheikh Khaled congratulated the players, the technical and administrative staff, and the members of the Board of Directors of

the Kuwait Football Association for the outstanding performance displayed by the Kuwaiti national team during the preliminary rounds.

He extended his gratitude to all those involved in organizing the event, which succeeded in showcasing the civilized and honorable face of Kuwait. From the opening ceremony to the smooth organization and the facilities provided for the fans, everything was executed with great skill.

Sheikh Khaled expressed his hope that the tournament's bright image would be crowned with the Kuwaiti national team emerging as a deserving champion.

He congratulated the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on being selected as the hosts of the Gulf 27 Cup tournament, unanimously

by the members of the General Assembly of the Arabian Gulf Cup Federation. This reflects Saudi Arabia's prominent position and the successes it achieved in recent years by hosting several important sporting events and activities. It also highlights Saudi Arabia's ability to deliver a distinctive version of the tournament, thanks to the continuous development of its sports system, which has become an exemplary model for others to follow.

Sheikh also congratulated the Chair and members of the Board of Directors of the Saudi Water Sports Federation on assuming their new roles, and wished them success in advancing water sports in Saudi Arabia.

He expressed his anticipation for further cooperation in this regard to achieve the shared goals.



Sheikh Khaled Al-Badr



Tomooh Sports Club at Jaber Al-Ahmad Stadium.

### Tomooh Sports Club's support energizes the national team

The players of Tomooh Sports Club for the Intellectually Disabled showed their unwavering support for Kuwait during its Khaleeji Zain 26 crucial match against Qatar at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, which ended 1-1 draw to secure the Blues spot in the tournament's semi-

finals. Demonstrating their enthusiasm and dedication, the club ensured its players participated in cheering for the national team. From the stands, the stars of Tomooh Sports Club encouraged the players tirelessly until the final whistle.

Ahead of the Championship, Tomooh Sports Club had announced its commitment to supporting the national team, facilitating its members' attendance at matches, and fostering an atmosphere of encouragement and pride for the "Blue" at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.



Leicester's Jordan Ayew, left, and Liverpool's Alexis Mac Allister battle for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match at the Anfield stadium in Liverpool. (AP)

### Fulham flying high

Liverpool and Man City back in action in hectic Xmas program

LONDON, Dec 28, (Xinhua): The frantic Premier League holiday program of matches continues on Sunday with six games, which see Liverpool look to extend its lead, while Manchester City continues the search for an elusive win.

Liverpool travels to play a West Ham side that is slowly looking more cohesive as a team to lift the pressure on coach Julen Lopetegui.

Dominik Szoboszlai is suspended for Liverpool, while West Ham has Lucas Paqueta, Guido Rodriguez and Tomas Soucek all sitting the game out for disciplinary reasons.

Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola will be hoping that Leicester City's fragile defense will offer striker Erling Haaland the chance to recover his form in front of goal and offer his team a route back to winning ways.

Haaland missed a penalty that would have seen City win on Boxing Day, and his miss means the team's painful run has extended to just one win in 13 matches.

Leicester has slipped into the bottom three after a run that has seen the team concede 10 goals in three games and score just one, with the scorer of that goal, Jordan Ayew, suspended on Sunday, while veteran forward Jamie Vardy is an injury doubt.

Everton has one win and three draws from the last four matches and Sean Dyche's team is now at home to Nottingham Forest, with this season's surprise package sitting fourth in the table.

Neither team will take risks, with Everton's main threat from set pieces, while Forest is comfortable without the ball and will look for the pace of Anthony Elanga and Morgan Gibbs-White on the break.

Two wins from two under new coach Vitor Pereira have lifted Wolverhampton Wanderers out of the bottom three, with the team facing a Tottenham side on the verge of crisis.

Four defeats in five league games have increased the pressure on Spurs coach Ange Postecoglou, and another home loss could force the club into drastic action, especially if the fans voice their anger at the Australian.

Crystal Palace is dragging itself away from the danger zone one point at a time, but the Eagles will be without suspended England defender Marc Guehi when they entertain bottom side Southampton.

Although the Saints look doomed to relegation, the defense has tightened up since the arrival of Ivan Juric as head coach, and may fancy taking a result with some solid rearguard action.

Sunday's final game sees Fulham, fresh from a shock win at Chelsea, at home to sixth-placed Bournemouth, flying high after four wins and two draws from the last six matches.

The round of matches ends on Monday with Chelsea away to struggling Ipswich, while Aston Villa will be without the suspended Jhon Duran and Matty Cash to receive Brighton. Elsewhere, new Manchester United coach Ruben Amorim faces another stiff test when his struggling team entertains an in-form Newcastle, with the Magpies travelling to Old Trafford on the back of three consecutive wins.

## 2 sailor deaths result in muted celebrations on winning yacht in Sydney to Hobart race

All-Filipino crew was among the retirements because of weather

**SYDNEY, Dec 28, (AP):** Champagne corks often pop and loud, boisterous cheers are usually heard around Constitution Dock when the Sydney to Hobart line honors winner finishes in the Tasmanian state capital.

There were no such celebrations this year when defending champion LawConnect won the race in the early hours of Saturday morning, and with good reason: It came about 24 hours after two sailors died on separate boats in sail boom accidents two hours apart on a storm-ravaged first night of the race.

LawConnect, a 100-foot super maxi skippered by Australian tech millionaire Christian Beck, sailed up the River Derwent just after 2:30 a.m. Saturday. It had an elapsed time of 1 day, 13 hours, 35 minutes and 13 seconds, for the 628-nautical mile (722 miles, 1,160 kilometers) race that began Thursday in Sydney harbor.

Celestial V70 finished second, about 2 1/2 hours behind LawConnect, and Wild Thing 100 was third, about 25 minutes behind Celestial. Of the 104 starters, 29 had retired at sea or in port.

LawConnect crew member Tony Mutter said celebrations would be held privately out of respect of the two sailors who died. He said crew members were informed of the deaths on the morning of day two after a busy night battling the same stormy seas that caused the fatal accidents.

"I didn't actually hear it on the first night. I heard it in the early hours of the next morning," Mutter told Australian Broadcasting Corp. radio. "We were pretty busy. We were 100% focused on the race. Our navigator knew, and he had to just pick the right moment to let us



Crew of LawConnect pose for a photo after winning the line honors in the Sydney to Hobart race. (AP)

know."

Mutter said the crew became "more somber" after being told about the deaths - "we were absolutely surprised and just felt for the other competitors."

On Friday, the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia in Sydney, which administers the yacht race, said that one sailor each on entrants Flying Fish Arctos and Bowline were killed after being struck by the boom, a large horizontal pole at the bottom of the sail.

Later the dead sailors were identified as Roy Quaden 55, from Western Australia state, a crew member on Flying Fish Arctos, and 65-year-old Nick Smith of South Australia, who was on Bowline.

New South Wales police said both yachts had been seized for evidence for a likely coroner's inquest. The Cruising Yacht Club said it would hold its own investigation.

Officials also said a sailor was

washed overboard on another boat, but was rescued. That crew member was from Hobart yacht Porco Rosso, and he drifted a kilometer from the yacht before being rescued.

The incident triggered the crew member's emergency position-indicating radio beacon, a safety device that must be worn by all sailors in the race.

"That is one of the most terrifying experiences that you can have," said David Jacobs, vice-commodore of the CYCA. "(And) it was at night, which makes it tenfold more scary."

The deaths came 26 years after six sailors were killed in storms during the 1998 race, which initiated a state coronial inquest and mass reforms to the safety protocols - including the radio beacon on all sailors - that govern the race. There have been 13 fatalities in the 79-year history of the race, with four of those deaths resulting from sailor heart attacks.

The first all-Filipino crew of 15

sailors was entered in this year's race, but was among the retirements because of the weather. With veteran sailor Ernesto Echazau at the helm, Centennial 7 was one of six international entrants and includes sailors from the Philippines' national team and the country's navy.

Grant Wharrington, the Australian skipper of third-place Wild Thing 100 and a veteran around-the-world sailor, described the Hobart race as "testing and boat breaking."

"There's some tragic things that have happened in the race this year," he said. "It makes you second-guess whether you should be doing it for yourself, for your own health, for your well-being, and for your family."

"At the end of the day, we challenge our own personalities and our bodies. We go and do these crazy things in life, and this is one of them, and we love it. I've done it 31 times. It holds great memories for me."

## Judge orders the release of Argentine women's players after racist incident

SAO PAULO, Dec 28, (AP): A Brazilian judge ordered late on Friday the release from prison of four players from River Plate's women's soccer team who had been arrested for an alleged racial slur during a match.

Judge Fernando Oliveira Camargo decided to free Argentine footballers Candela Diaz, Camila Duarte, Juana Cango and Milagros Diaz on condition they show up in court in Sao Paulo every month until the case is finished.

Sao Paulo state authorities have yet to say when the footballers will be released from the Carandiru penitentiary where they spent Christmas.

On Dec. 21, a Brazil Ladies Cup semifinal between River and Brazil's Grêmio was stopped in the first half after Diaz made apparent monkey gestures to a ball boy, as shown in broad-

cast footage. A brawl started and Grêmio players walked off in protest.

The referee showed red cards to six River players and ended the match because there was no longer the minimum number of players required to continue.

The score was 1-1 but the referee awarded the match to Grêmio, which won the final of the tournament on penalties against compatriots Bahia two days later.

The Brazil Ladies Cup also banned River from the tournament for two years.

Organizers said future editions will immediately ban any participating team whose athletes or staff "engage in racist gestures on the playing field."

Grêmio coach Thaisan Passos said her team told her River players had previously called them "monkeys."



Kuwait head coach Juan Pizzi speaks to reporters after Kuwait-Qatar game.

# Sports

Pizzi vows to deliver victory for Kuwait fans

## Blues earn \$150,000 bonus after reaching Khaleeji Zain 26 semis

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28: Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah, President of the Kuwait Football Association, has announced a financial bonus of \$150,000 for the national team's players following their qualification for the semi-finals of "Khaleeji Zain 26."

In a statement shared on the association's official account on the social networking platform "X," Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef praised the players for their "outstanding performance" against the Qatari team in the final Group A match of the tournament.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef also extended his gratitude to businessmen, private companies, and all supporters who contributed to the team's success in reaching the semi-finals.

Kuwait coach Juan Pizzi expressed pride in his team's performance following its impressive display against Qatar, a match that secured Kuwait's spot in the semi-finals of "Khaleeji Zain 26."

Speaking at a press conference after the game, Pizzi vowed to give his all to bring joy to Kuwaiti fans for the remainder of the tournament. "We feel

the fans' support and will harness all the team's capabilities and skills to achieve victory," he stated.

Pizzi revealed that the team's optimism and step-by-step preparation were key to advancing through the group stage. However, he acknowledged the challenges ahead, noting that the semi-finals will bring greater psychological pressure on the players. He emphasized that the technical staff is working diligently to ensure the team is fully prepared, even for the possibility of extra time.

Qatar coach Luis Garcia, speaking at the same conference, expressed disappointment with the outcome, despite his team's efforts to secure a win and qualify. "We did everything to achieve victory, but luck was not on our side," he said. Garcia highlighted the numerous opportunities his team had during the match but admitted they fell short of converting them into goals. He also noted that the final minutes of the game were marked by intense competition and enthusiasm, though the players' efforts did not yield the desired result.



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah – President of the Kuwait Football Association

## Al-Mutairi congratulates Kuwait on advancing to Khaleeji Zain 26 semis

Oman through as UAE and Qatar eliminated



Kuwait goalkeeper lies on the ground as players fight for the ball.

Photos by Mohammed Morsi

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 28, (Agencies): Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi extended his congratulations to the Kuwait national football team, the technical and administrative staff, the Kuwait Football Association, and the devoted fans on the team's well-earned qualification for the semi-finals of the Arabian Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 26).**

In a statement to KUNA, Al-Mutairi, who also serves as the Minister of Information and Culture and Chairman of the Khaleeji Zain Supreme Organizing Committee, expressed full confidence in the team, stating, "We are confident in our heroes and sure that they will give their best in the upcoming matches."

Al-Mutairi also congratulated the Omani national team for its qualification and wished the UAE and Qatar teams the best of luck in future tournaments. He praised the unwavering support of Kuwaiti fans, emphasizing their crucial role in the team's success.

The Minister also acknowledged the dedicated efforts of all state agencies in ensuring the successful organization of the tournament.

Kuwait and last year's finalist Oman are through to the semi-finals of the Khaleeji Zain 26 (Gulf Cup) following a dramatic night of action that saw Qatar and

much-fancied UAE eliminated.

With both matches kicking off at the same time and all four teams still in with a chance to qualify, it was nail-biting stuff for the 57,742 fans packed into the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

But they were celebrating following a 1-1 draw with Qatar that saw Kuwait top the group with five points alongside Oman who will join it in the last four after a 1-1 draw with its neighbour, UAE, on the other side of the city.

It was Qatar who thought it had opened the scoring in the 38th minute when Yusuf Abdurisag headed in from a corner, but the referee blew for a foul on the goalkeeper.

Kuwait's first opportunity to

take the lead came on 62 minutes when Mohammad Daham burst through the Qatari defense but saw his low shot come back off the post. And then just a minute later, the same player saw another effort hit the same spot on the upright.

At the other end, substitute Mohammed Muntari thought he had finally broken the deadlock for Qatar but his effort was ruled out by a late flag for offside.

But it was Daham that finally got his deserved goal to send the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium into raptures. A free-kick was awarded on the edge of the box for handball and the striker bent it past the wall into the far corner.

There was more drama in the

77th minute when the referee was sent to the television to check a VAR call on a penalty for Qatar, but after a long deliberation he turned it down.

Kuwait faced a nervous final couple of minutes when Muntari headed home for Qatar to make it 1-1, but The Blues held on for a memorable, and deserved, point to go through.

Meanwhile, at the Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium, the UAE took the lead in the 20th minute through Musen Al-Ghasani. But Oman pulled level 11 minutes from time through winger Abdulrahman Al-Mushaifri for the all-important point to advance.



Kuwaiti fans patiently wait for proceedings to start.

Brighton draws 0-0 with Brentford

Arsenal moves up to second

LONDON, Dec 28, (AP): Arsenal moved up to second place in the Premier League with a 1-0 home win against Ipswich.

Mikel Arteta's side is six points behind leader Liverpool, which has a game in hand.

Second-bottom Ipswich had won two of its last three away games but was up against it from the start at the Emirates.

The visitors did not have one touch in the Gunners' box during the first 45 minutes and, although Ipswich showed signs of life after the break, it was Arsenal which continued to dominate the game, marshaled by Declan Rice in midfield.

Kai Havertz got the only goal midway through the first half when he knocked in a cross from Leandro Trossard.

Havertz, Rice, Mikel Merino, Martin Odegaard and Gabriel Jesus all had chances but none of them could add to Arsenal's tally.

"It's so tough, every team is tough to break down," Havertz said. "They fight for each other and at the end we're very proud for the win."

Arsenal is a point above third-place Chelsea and two points clear of season surprise team Nottingham Forest in fourth.

Brighton had most of the chances but could not find the net in a 0-0 draw with Brentford that extended the south coast club's winless run to six league games.

It was a frustrating night for the home side and especially Julio Enciso. The Paraguay striker had a host of opportunities to score but couldn't make them count.

Along with Southampton, Brent-



Ipswich Town's Omari Hutchinson, left, challenges Arsenal's Leandro Trossard during the English Premier League soccer match between Arsenal and Ipswich at the Emirates Stadium in London. (AP)

ford has the worst away record in the league with seven losses and two draws and it was easy to see why in this toothless performance.

Brentford had an early goal from Yoane Wissa ruled out for offside and, although it came a bit more into the game in the second half, it failed to pressure Icelandic goalkeeper Hakon Valdimarsson, who made his Premier League debut eight minutes before halftime when Mark Flekken went off with a high injury.

One bright spot for the home side was the return of winger Solly March. He came on as a late substitute to make his first appearance for Brighton since injuring a knee against Manchester City 14 months ago.

The result leaves Brighton in 10th place with 26 points, one spot and two points ahead of the Bees.

CR7 named best player in Middle East

## Ronaldo backs coach Amorim, picks Vinicius over Rodri at soccer awards

DUBAI, Dec 28, (AP): Cristiano Ronaldo backed Manchester United coach Ruben Amorim on Friday, saying "the storm will finish" after his Portuguese countryman's difficult start to life in the Premier League.

The former Manchester United star, and five-time Ballon d'Or winner, currently plays for Saudi Arabia's Al-Nassr. Ronaldo spoke after being named the best player in the Middle East at the Globe Soccer Awards in Dubai.

Amorim - who was hired after Erik ten Hag was fired - has lost five of his first 10 games at United in all competitions. Approaching the Premier League's halfway point, the team is 14th and eight points above the relegation zone.

"(Amorim) did a fantastic job in Portugal with my (club) Sporting," the 39-year-old Ronaldo said. "But the Premier League is a different beast, the most competitive league in the world."

"I knew that it would be tough and they will continue the storm. But the storm will finish and the sun will rise," he added.

Ronaldo's second spell at United ended in November 2022, with disagreements between him and Ten Hag.

"I say this one year and half ago and I will continue to say, the problem is not the coaches," Ronaldo added. "It's like the



Al Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo poses with an award, during the Globe Soccer Awards 2025, in Dubai, UAE. (AP)

aquarium and you have the fish inside and it's sick, and you take him out and fix the problem. If you put it back in the aquarium it will be sick again."

Real Madrid's all-time top scorer Ronaldo also said Vinicius Júnior had deserved to win the prestigious Ballon d'Or award rather than Spain midfielder Rodri. The Brazilian won the best player in the world award on Friday in Dubai. Earlier this month, Vinicius was also named men's player of the year at FIFA's "The Best" awards.

"Vinicius deserved the Ballon d'Or," Ronaldo said. "It was unfair (to lose it). I say it in front of everyone."