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VISIT VISA OVERSTAYS TO COST 10 DINARS PER DAY Kuwait hikes residency violation fines

Tougher rules for expats effective January 5

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Ministry of Interior in Kuwait is set to enforce new fines for residency law violations beginning January 5, reports Al-Anba daily quoting a security source.

The revised penalties aim to ensure better compliance with residency regulations and address various categories of violations.

Key points of the new fine structure: 1. Failure to register newborns: ■ 2 dinars for the first month (after a 4-month grace period); ■ 4 dinars for subsequent months; ■ Maximum fine: 2,000 dinars. 2. Work visa violations: ■ Same fines as above; ■ Maximum fine: 1,200 dinars. 3. Visit visa overstays: ■ 10 dinars per day; ■ Maximum fine: 2,000 dinars. 4. Domestic worker violations: ■ 2 dinars per day for temporary residency or departure notice violations; ■ Maximum fine: 600 dinars. 5. Residency cancellations (Articles 17, 18, 20): ■ 2 dinars per day for the first month; ■ 4 dinars per day thereafter; ■ Maximum fine: 1,200 dinars.

The new system also applies to expatriates who have overstayed their temporary residency or those whose residency has expired and have refused to renew or leave the country.

These changes represent a significant increase from the previous maximum fine of 600 dinars. The Ministry of Interior has updated its computer system to incorporate these new violations effective January 5.

The revised structure sets a maximum fine of 1,200 dinars for residency holders and 2,000 dinars for visitors, reflecting Kuwait's efforts to tighten residency law enforcement and encourage timely compliance among expatriates.



Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Kuwait: A blessed nation for 400 years

SINCE the year 1613, Kuwait has been a blessed land, as its people and rulers have long proclaimed. For centuries, it has been a sanctuary for those seeking peace and tranquility, which is why it attracted people from all over the world.

Throughout those centuries, Kuwait faced crises, challenges, and epidemics, yet it has always triumphed, thanks to the unity and solidarity of its people. Even during times of poverty when the country relied on the sea and its resources, the people never questioned the origins of others. They believed in the importance of living in a tolerant society. Security and stability were their top priorities.

Therefore, all those who came to this blessed land found tolerant rulers who did no wrong. It is this spirit of justice and fairness that enabled the people to overcome all challenges, along with the unity enhanced by the wisdom of their leaders and the harmony shared by all families in the country.

As a result, the invasions, challenges, and attempts to erase Kuwait's identity throughout its history have never weakened its people. Even during the Iraqi invasion, Kuwaitis resisted with simple tools initially, and displayed remarkable heroism in the face of adversity.

No citizen was ever questioned about their origin, class, sect, family, or nationality. For this reason, the people of Kuwait were able to overcome all difficulties.

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Kuwait condoles South Korea over fatal plane crash



Firefighters and rescue team members work near the wreckage of a passenger plane at Muan International Airport in Muan, South Korea, Sunday, Dec. 29, 2024. (AP)

179 dead, 2 miraculously survive fiery wreckage

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (Agencies): The State of Kuwait extended sympathy and solidarity with the friendly Republic of Korea following the tragic plane crash at Muan International Airport, which led to a number of deaths and injuries.

This came in a statement by Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressing its sincere condolences to South Korea over the victims of such sad accident, and wished

the injured a speedy recovery.

A passenger plane skidded off a runway at a South Korean airport Sunday, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into flames after its front landing gear apparently failed to deploy. All but two of the 181 people on board died in one of the country's worst aviation disasters.

The Jeju Air plane crashed while landing in the town of Muan, about 290 kilometers (180 miles) south of Seoul.

The Transport Ministry said the plane was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9:03 a.m.

A total of 179 people - 85 women, 84 men and 10 others whose genders weren't immediately identifiable - died in the fire, the South Korean fire agency said. Emergency

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2 Bahrain envoy hails organizers of Khaleeji Zain 26 Championship



9 stc creates lasting contributions in the community by leading the way in sustainable corporate social responsibility



10 Burgan Bank reinforces its social responsibility leadership with extensive support for Kuwaiti society

NewsWatch

KUWAIT CITY: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences on Sunday to President of India Droupadi Murmu over the passing of India's former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir expressed sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah Almighty to grant his family and relatives patience.

Similarly, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences on Sunday to President of India Droupadi Murmu over the passing of India's former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.

In the cable, His Highness the Crown Prince expressed sincere condolences and sympathy to his family and relatives.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent a cable of condolences on Sunday to President of India Droupadi Murmu over the passing of India's former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. (KUNA)

Citizenship of 2,087 women cancelled by Kuwait decree

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The official gazette, "Kuwait Alyawn," has published a decree to revoke Kuwaiti citizenship from 2,087 women, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The decision also includes the withdrawal of citizenship from those who obtained it on the strength of dependent

status.

This action follows the decisions of the Kuwaiti Nationality Investigation Committee, chaired by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

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Rumors of biometric fine for domestic workers debunked

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Ministry of Interior in Kuwait has refuted the rumors circulating about a 500 Kuwaiti dinar fine for not completing the biometric fingerprint registration for domestic workers, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The Ministry clarified that these claims are inaccurate. However, it urged the public to ensure that

biometric fingerprint data for domestic workers is collected before the December 31, 2024 deadline to avoid disruptions in official transactions.

The Ministry emphasized the importance of obtaining information from official sources and cautioned against the spread of misleading rumors.

Kuwait validates digital driving permits for residents nationwide

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: A new ministerial resolution, No. 2815 of 2024, regarding the validity of vehicle driving permits for residents issued electronically, was published today in the Official Gazette, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to the first article of the resolution, "the vehicle driving permit for residents issued through

the My Identity and Sahel applications, as well as the Ministry of Interior application, shall be valid with all entities across the country.

It must be accepted for all governmental and non-governmental transactions to prove its existence and validity.

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Kuwait customs thwart drug smuggling, illegal entry plot

By Munif Naif
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Ministry of Interior announced Sunday that the Northern Ports Customs Administration at Shuwaik Port thwarted an attempt to smuggle around 1.8 million Captagon pills, ingeniously concealed inside furniture.

In a separate incident, Kuwait General Administration of Customs (KGAC) officers assigned at Nuwaiseeb Port foiled an infiltration attempt, resulting in the arrest of a person who tried to sneak into the country by hiding in a car trunk.

In a press statement, the ministry affirmed the significant role of KGAC officers in preventing narcotics smuggling and illegal entry.

Customs officials at the air cargo and search and investigation departments at the Express Mail facility also seized four parcels originating from several countries; as they were found to be containing a total of 550 grams of marijuana, 37,000 Lyrica capsules, 780 narcotic capsules and 7.5 kilograms of hashish.

Moreover, KGAC officers at Kuwait International Airport (T1) intercepted

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Customs officers display a significant seizure of 1,200 Tramadol pills and 210 grams of marijuana, intercepted during an attempt to smuggle drugs into Kuwait.

Other Voices

'Forgive us our trespasses, grant us your peace'

(Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the LVIII World Day of Peace Jan 1, 2025)

At the dawn of this New Year given to us by our heavenly Father, a year of Jubilee in the spirit of hope, I offer heartfelt good wishes of peace to every man and woman. I think especially of those who feel downtrodden, burdened by their past mistakes, oppressed by the judgment of others and incapable of perceiving even a glimmer of hope for their own lives. Upon everyone I invoke hope and peace, for this is a Year of Grace born of the Heart of the Redeemer!

"Throughout this year, the Catholic Church celebrates the Jubilee, an event that fills hearts with hope. The "jubilee" recalls an ancient Jewish practice, when, every forty-ninth year, the sound of a ram's horn (in Hebrew, jobel) would proclaim a year of forgiveness and freedom for the entire people (cf. Lev 25:10).

"This solemn proclamation was meant to echo throughout the land (cf. Lev 25:9) and to restore God's justice in every

aspect of life: in the use of the land, in the possession of goods and in relationships with others, above all the poor and the dispossessed.

"The blowing of the horn reminded the entire people, rich and poor alike, that no one comes into this world doomed to oppression: all of us are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same Father, born to live in freedom, in accordance with the Lord's will (cf. Lev 25:17, 25, 43, 46, 55).

"In our day too, the Jubilee is an event that inspires us to seek to establish the liberating justice of God in our world. In place of the ram's horn, at the start of this Year of Grace we wish to hear the "desperate plea for help" that, like the cry of the blood of Abel (cf. Gen 4:10), rises up from so many parts of our world - a plea that God never fails to hear. We for our part feel bound to cry out and denounce the many situations in which the earth is exploited and our neighbors oppressed.

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Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:17 Asr 14:40
 Sunrise .. 06:41 Maghrib .. 16:58
 Zohr 11:50 Isha 18:21

Local

Expected weather for the next 24 hours:

By Day: Mild, and partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind to variable wind, with speed of 08-30 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain.

Weather

By Night: Rather cold to cold and partly cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind to variable wind, with speed of 08-28 km/h.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	22	12

Kuwait Airport	21	12
Abdaly	21	05
Bubyan	21	10
Jahra	22	11
Failaka Island	21	13
Salmiyah	20	13
Ahmadi	20	10
Jal Aliyah	21	08



Editor-in-Chief of Al-Seyassah and Arab Times Ahmed Al-Jarallah receives the Bahraini Ambassador to Kuwait Salah Ali Al-Maliki. Deputy Editor-in-Chief Suleiman Al-Jarallah (right) was also present at the meeting.



Editor-in-Chief of Al-Seyassah and Arab Times Ahmed Al-Jarallah receives the Bahraini Ambassador to Kuwait Salah Ali Al-Maliki.

Media plays key role in reinforcing Gulf unity: Al-Jarallah

Bahrain envoy hails Khaleeji Zain 26 Cup organizers

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah received the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the State of Kuwait Salah Al-Maliki in his office at Dar Al-Seyassah headquarters, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During the friendly meeting, which was held in the presence of the Deputy Editor-in-Chief Suleiman Al-Jarallah, they highlighted the deep, fraternal relations between Kuwait and Bahrain.

Ambassador Al-Maliki presented the embassy's sash and shield to Ahmed Al-Jarallah as a token of appreciation for the role played by Kuwaiti media in strengthening the strong ties between the two peoples. This gesture reflected the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect that unites the Kingdom of Bahrain and the State of Kuwait. Ambassador Al-Maliki commended the tremendous efforts exerted by those responsible for organizing the Khaleeji Zain 26 Cup championship, affirming that this sporting event represents a Gulf gathering that strengthens the spirit of brotherhood on the land of love and peace.

He also praised Kuwait's leadership in hosting the tournament, and showcasing outstanding organiza-



Photos by Rizk Tawfik
 Editor-in-Chief of Al-Seyassah and Arab Times Ahmed Al-Jarallah and the Bahraini Ambassador to Kuwait Salah Ali Al-Maliki pose for a picture in the office.

tional skills and generosity, which reflect the country's commitment to enhancing Gulf unity. Meanwhile, Ahmed Al-Jarallah highlighted the vital role of the media in covering the tournament's events.

He explained that the media is a key partner in the success of such major sporting events. Media coverage goes beyond just broadcasting matches, as it also plays a vital role in highlighting the organizational efforts and emphasizing the cultural and humanitarian messages of the tournament, which reinforce the values of unity and cohesion among the people of the Gulf. The media plays an important role in presenting an honorable image of the tournament both locally and internationally.

Al-Jarallah praised the high level of professionalism demonstrated by the Kuwaiti and Gulf media in documenting this exceptional sporting event, which embodies the spirit of brotherhood and cooperation between the Gulf countries.

At the end of the meeting, Al-Jarallah expressed his gratitude and appreciation for Ambassador Al-Maliki's generous gesture.

He wished the Kingdom of Bahrain and its people continued progress and prosperity, and reiterated the importance of maintaining strong cooperation between the two sides to further strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and mutual collaboration in various fields.



Bahrain Ambassador to Kuwait Salah Al-Maliki presents the embassy's sash and shield to Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah.

'Sustainable energy projects vital to meet power demand'

Rising summer temp, AC use cause of surge

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Informed sources have revealed a 4.5 percent annual increase in Kuwait's maximum electricity load, translating to an additional 700 megawatts within a year.

The peak load for 2023 reached 16,940 megawatts on August 2, while this year's peak hit 17,640 megawatts on August 27.

Experts have urged the swift implementation of both traditional and renewable energy production projects to meet the growing demand.

The Ministry of Electricity and Water currently has seven major projects in its pipeline, projected to add 13,700 megawatts by 2030.

The surge in electricity demand, driven by rising temperatures and air conditioning needs -- which account for 70 percent of total electricity consumption -- highlights the importance of intensifying energy-saving campaigns.

Collaboration with governmental and private sectors is essential to enforce rationalization measures effectively.

The increased electricity demand reflects the effects of population growth and state housing project expansions.

To cope with the summer load, the ministry relied on energy purchases from the Gulf Interconnection Network for four months, incurring millions of dinars in expenses.

Additionally, programmed power cuts were implemented in some areas as a crisis management measure.

As demand for electricity continues to rise, the urgency for sustainable energy solutions and effective consumption management becomes increasingly critical for Kuwait's energy sector.

GCC Achievements in 2024

Group status climbs globally

GCC pushes 2-state solution, seeks quick end to Gaza war

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) made large strides locally, regionally and globally in 2024, boosting development, its international status and expanding its strategic partnerships with international blocs.

Engagement of the GCC countries has been tense, hosting a series of international conferences and exchanging visits regarding a host of matters related to regional and global affairs, foremost the Palestinian cause amidst the Israeli occupation's systematic aggression on Gaza Strip and Lebanon.

The six-state GCC intensified endeavors towards the two-state solution and ending the war on Gaza Strip. Saudi Arabia launched an international coalition in September for the two-state solution, in addition to mediations to end the war on Gaza coupled with humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people.

In their 45th summit in Kuwait, the GCC leaders opened the door for a new phase of common action with a comprehensive vision, which include expanding strategic partnerships, boosting the bloc as an international hub for businesses and economy, as well as diversifying sustainable economy and maintaining balance in energy markets.

Foreign Ministers, in a meeting early March, agreed to form a coordination committee for the sovereign wealth funds.

The GCC-European Union summit in Brussels in October was a chance to embark on new chapter of relations and partnership, as well as setting the stage for expanding political, economic and security cooperation.

The Arab Gulf countries reiterated their support to a peaceful end of the Yemeni conflict in line with the GCC initiative and its implementation mechanism, UN Security Council resolution 2216 and outcome of na-

tional dialogue, in a manner that preserves Yemen's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

The GCC made mediation efforts that contributed to swap of prisoners. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) brokered prisoners of war exchange between Russia and Ukraine, while Oman secured an agreement between Iran and Sweden to swap prisoners. Qatar and France co-brokered an agreement between the Israeli occupation and Hamas to allow medicine and relief supplies into Gaza.

Meanwhile, the GCC countries witnessed political events. Qatar amended the constitution to allow the Amir appoint all members of the Shura Council. In the old version, people will elect 30 members and the Amir appoints 15 others.

Kuwait Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah dissolved the parliament in May and suspended some articles of the constitution for not more than four years, during which the democratic process will be reviewed.

The UAE witnessed appointment of Dubai Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammad Al-Maktoum as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense.

The GCC and Turkiye launched expanded negotiations aimed at establishing one of the world's largest free trade zones. The GCC signed agreements with many countries to encourage direct investment, electricity linkage, food security, transport, logistical services, roads and tourism.

The GCC realized achievements related to credit ratings and competition.

Kuwait witnessed the first surgery using robots to remove a prostate. Saudi Arabia witnessed the first heart transplant of a 16-year-old using robot, and Qatar invented a treatment protocol for a Kuwaiti infant suffering from excessive production of insulin.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, on the other hand, inaugurated the Arabian football Gulf Cup (Khaleeji 26) on December 21.



Sheikh Hamdan

Road repairs continue at full throttle in all Kuwait

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan has affirmed the continuation of extensive maintenance work on roads in the six governorates, as part of new contracts for overhauling highways and internal roads.

These contracts, which cover 18 major road development projects, will address the urgent need for road repairs throughout the country.

Al-Mashaan stressed the importance of completing the maintenance works quickly, while ensuring that all tasks meet the required quality and efficiency standards. "These works will be carried out according to approved technical specifications and within the schedule, under the supervision of teams from the ministry," she added.

Meanwhile, ministerial sources indicated that the 18 radical maintenance contracts for internal and express roads are expected to be completed by the end of 2027. The initial phases of these projects will be delivered during this period, adhering to updated standards and requirements set by the ministry to guarantee quality and meet the expectations as per the contracts, they explained.

Sources said the ministry and the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) are committed to ensuring the timely and high-quality execution of these contracts to address the severe deterioration of road conditions, which became evident after the heavy rains in November 2018. Many roads have shown signs of damage and wear over the past five years, making these repairs a critical priority. To guarantee that the maintenance works meet speed and quality requirements; the ministry and regulatory authorities set standards developed by specialists from scientific, executive and regulatory bodies, sources asserted.

Sources disclosed that the ministry took several measures to make sure the maintenance works proceed as planned. Sources stated these measures include coordination with the General Traffic Department (GTD) to minimize traffic disruptions during the repair works and close supervision by national staff with expertise in road construction.

Sources went on to say that the ministry set conditions to maintain the quality of work throughout the project implementation period; such as periodic monitoring by its testing center and independent laboratories to check the asphalt in factories before it is used on the roads.

Sources added the contractors will be responsible for the quality of the foundation and surface layers of the roads, with a five-year warranty for the surface layer and a 10-year warranty for the foundation. If any defects are found, the contractor will be obliged to repair them at their own expense within the specified period, sources revealed.



Dr. Al-Mashaan

Other Voices

Do we wait for Ho Chi Minh, Mandela, Gandhi to emerge?

By Ahmad alsarraf

The longing to belong to a free and independent homeland arises from deep psychological, social and cultural roots, offering a sense of identity, security and belonging.

This intrinsic drive explains why people throughout history have fought for independence. Examples include the struggles of the Kurds, Basques, Catalans, Scots and Irish, all aiming for self-determination.

Similarly, Theodor Herzl's efforts at the First Zionist Congress in 1897 underscored the necessity of establishing a national home for the Jewish people and the Palestinians today strive for the same goal.

Thus, while one might denounce or be shocked by the events of October 7, 2023 -- when an armed group attacked Israeli forces, resulting in the deaths of over 1,200 Israelis, the capture of around 250 and subsequent devastating repercussions in Gaza -- these events stem from historical patterns seen in liberation movements.

Gaza suffered immense losses: over 40,000 Palestinians killed, many more injured and millions displaced. Yet, the motivations behind such acts trace back to the universal yearning for freedom and the rejection of external domination.

The liberation struggles have historically been driven by a desire to preserve cultural identity, language, traditions and dignity, even among prosperous groups like the Basques, Catalans, Scots and Irish.

The refusal to live under external rule

often outweighs material prosperity, as evidenced by countless independence movements worldwide.

Attention to Gaza's plight may have waned following Hamas's clear defeat in its confrontation with Israel, but this does not signify the defeat of the Palestinian cause or the loss of their rights.

Such actions should be viewed within the broader context of legitimate struggles for justice and sovereignty. This perspective does not equate to support for any ideological group but rather acknowledges the historical precedence of resistance.

Notable figures, including some from within Israel, have recognized the legitimacy of Palestinian resistance. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak remarked that, if he were Palestinian, he might have joined a resistance group.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Ami Ayalon, a former head of Israeli intelligence. Leaders like Ho Chi Minh also remind us that the pursuit of freedom often requires immense sacrifice, as seen in Vietnam's prolonged struggles against the French and American occupation.

The Palestinian movement, though plagued by internal betrayal and corruption, is not unique in these challenges. Most liberation struggles have faced similar hurdles. Victory, as history shows, is possible when determination and sacrifice persist, as demonstrated by leaders like Gandhi and Mandela.

Ultimately, the path forward for Palestinians must be determined by themselves. Their options include armed resistance, passive resistance, or accepting the status quo. Such a decision should come through a general referendum under international supervision, ensuring their voices are heard and respected.

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Pulling citizenship ... move to restore rule of law & integrity

"LAST week, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef provided an unequivocal explanation regarding the work of the Nationality Committee. His statement clarified that no nationality had been revoked under Article 8 for five months and the committee had undertaken a thorough review of past decisions," columnist **Badr Khaled Al-Bahr** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"With the assistance of constitutional experts, it was reaffirmed that 'there is no nationality without an Amiri decree.' Moreover, the committee reinstated salaries for those whose citizenships had been withdrawn under Article 8, while issuing a stern warning that any future legal violations would result in salary suspensions.

"We stand firmly in support of Sheikh Al-Yousef and the committee's mission to combat corruption and correct past errors. As we previously stated in a tweet: 'Do not stop and do not justify to anyone the reasons for fighting corruption and correcting mistakes.'

"While the committee's efforts have been largely welcomed, certain voices have sought to undermine its decisions through misinformation and baseless arguments.

"For instance, a legal scholar attempted to philosophize the issue of citizenship withdrawal, presenting superficial research that lacked credibility. The Quality Education Association, to which we belong, has openly opposed his views, recognizing the potential harm of such unfounded claims.

"Similarly, an economist -- despite being respected personally -- has gone too far in opposing the revocation of Article 8 citizenships. He relied on hypothetical numbers and unsubstantiated claims, suggesting that the decision was akin to a 'wholesale auction.' His assertion that these actions impacted 300,000 individuals, potentially a third of Kuwait's population, is not only inaccurate but has fueled harmful rumors.

"Even more alarming are his assumptions about political instability, suggesting that those affected by the revocations could become pawns in a power struggle. Such statements are not only speculative but also irresponsible, creating unnecessary fear and confusion.

"The purification of the nationality file must continue unabated and perhaps even at an accelerated pace. Establishing additional subcommittees could help address the issue more effectively, particularly given the magnitude of the problem.

"For example, comparing historical censuses of Kuwaitis -- from the 1959 issuance of the nationality law to the 1990 invasion -- reveals significant discrepancies. These disparities, compounded by revelations of over 62,000 cases of forgery identified in 2014, highlight the extent of irregularities.

"Such issues have inflated the population of Kuwaitis beyond reasonable growth rates, distorting the country's demographic and legal landscape. The committee's work is essential to restoring accuracy and integrity to these records.

"While many citizens support the committee's decision to allow those whose nationalities were revoked under Article 8 to retain access to education, healthcare and salaries, concerns remain about their ownership of companies."

"Allowing non-Kuwaitis to own shares and companies must comply with existing laws, such as Law 20/2000 and Decree Law 74/1979, which impose restrictions on foreign ownership, particularly in real estate.

"The Real Estate Registration and Documentation Department has clear guidelines prohibiting the transfer of real estate to companies unless the shareholders are entirely Kuwaiti. Those affected should be given time to regularize their status but should not be permitted to bypass these regulations.

"Transparency is essential and the number of companies and workers linked to these individuals must be disclosed to evaluate the broader social and economic impact.

"Kuwait is back to being a blank page." This profound statement, attributed last week to the First Deputy Prime Minister on behalf of His Highness the Amir, encapsulates the hope for a brighter future. As we previously wrote: "One of the best things said since the death of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem."

"Kuwait, a nation once marred by corruption, is now being reformed by those committed to justice and accountability. The Nationality Committee's efforts represent a critical step toward restoring the rule of law and ensuring that the country remains a beacon of integrity for future generations."

Also:

"Retirees are the foundation of our society, the fathers and grandfathers who spent their youth building Kuwait into the nation it is today," columnist **Yaqoub Youssef Al-Omar** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"They dedicated their lives to public service, only to now find themselves reliant on government-provided financial and healthcare support. This support is not merely a privilege but a moral obligation -- one that must continue without interruption.

"In recent years, the discontinuation of the 'Afiya' health insurance program has left retirees struggling to access basic medical care. This program was a lifeline, offering dignity and ease in

their twilight years. Its removal was not a consequence of financial hardship; Kuwait's revenues, by all accounts, remain abundant. The government's loans to other nations far exceed the modest cost of maintaining 'Afiya.'

"At the same time, large sums of money continue to be allocated to officials under the banner of 'excellent work.' While it is expected that public officials should perform their duties with distinction, this excellence should not come with additional financial rewards -- especially when those who built the nation face neglect.

"Retirees face immense hardships navigating Kuwait's healthcare system. The overcrowding of government medical centers is a significant issue, with expatriates -- who outnumber Kuwaitis -- contributing to long wait times and strained resources. While foreigners pay a nominal fee of one or two dinars for medical services, the cost of the medicines they receive often far exceeds this amount.

"For elderly citizens, who typically require frequent medical attention, the situation is dire. A staggering 90 percent of retirees require specialized hospital visits. Yet, they are often left waiting months for critical treatments.

"One retiree's story illustrates the problem. After being diagnosed with cataracts, he was shuffled through five crowded examination rooms, where the majority of patients were expatriates. Feeling like a stranger in his own country, he attempted to assert his priority as an elderly citizen -- a right acknowledged by the Ministry of Health -- but his plea was dismissed by a non-Kuwaiti employee. His surgery was scheduled five months later, a delay that could prove life-threatening for many seniors.

"Retirees are not asking for luxuries; they are asking for respect and care. The absence of 'Afiya' has made their lives harder, turning routine medical visits into ordeals. The question arises: if Kuwait's population were as vast as India or China, would retirees even survive long enough to receive care?"

"The plight of retirees serves as a sobering reminder: the day will come when today's leaders, too, will grow old and seek the same care and support. The government must recognize the sacrifices of this generation and honor their contributions by reinstating the 'Afiya' program.

"Retirees spent their youth serving Kuwait. They are one of us and we are one of them. Let us not forget that we owe them not just gratitude but tangible support."

"Restoring 'Afiya' would not only ease their burdens but also reaffirm the nation's commitment to those who dedicated their lives to its service."

"We are accustomed to seeing in Egyptian films the portrayal of an innocent person who is falsely accused and framed by a security officer. The events of the film unfold, and by the end, the innocence of the accused is revealed. However, we never imagined that we would witness such fabricated charges occurring in the State of Kuwait, specifically with the planting of hashish in an innocent person's car, followed by a search, arrest, and the fabrication of a case that leads to the accused being referred to the Drug Control General Department. Had the fabrication succeeded and not been uncovered, this innocent person would have faced many years in prison for a crime they did not commit," columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Thanks to the Almighty God, the Just One, who does not tolerate injustice, the truth was revealed. The accused was exonerated from the case, and the court sentenced the detective and his accomplice to ten years in prison. Of course, the ruling is not final, and there are still two more levels of litigation in which circumstances may change. Nevertheless, we are referring to the decision made by the esteemed Criminal Court, which was published in the newspapers and exposed the fabrication of the charges.

"This situation highlights the core issue: when a security officer abuses their position and wrongfully accuses an innocent person. Such a scenario would have been unthinkable in the past in the State of Kuwait, which is a country built on the rule of law.

"This case may be an isolated incident or an exception, but we are not accustomed to injustice, nor do we tolerate it. We hope that the severe ruling issued by the Criminal Court serves as a lesson to those who may consider such actions. The warning is serious when a person loses their fear of God, their conscience, and their humanity, and fabricates accusations against an innocent individual for a worldly goal that may never be realized.

"The entire nation of Kuwait is upset by this incident, which we hope will never be repeated. However, it is important to highlight this case to demonstrate the people's rejection of it, their resentment, and their solidarity with the oppressed against the oppressor. This will ensure that such acts do not happen again. If they do, it will represent a severe blow to our trust in one another and in our security services. Such actions tarnish the reputation of our country. May God help us."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes/
Mahmoud Attiyeh



Badr Al-Bahr



Talal Al-Saeed

Felony, financial fraud top rise in 2024 first half criminal cases

Drugs worth millions seized as major gangs dismantled

By **Jaber Al-Hamoud/Munif Naif**
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Public Prosecution has witnessed a notable increase in its caseload, receiving 20,612 cases in the first half of 2024, marking a 21.1 percent rise compared to the same period last year.

The criminal cases topped the chart, comprising 28.6 percent of the total, while drug addiction cases were the least frequent, accounting for just 2.4 percent.

The statistics, a copy of which has been received by the Al-Seyassah daily, reveal that the Prosecution dealt with 19,544 cases overall, resolving 18,833.

The felony and commercial misdemeanor cases stood out as the most prominent categories, making up 30.8 percent and 30.5 percent, respectively, of cases handled.

The banking crimes and drug-related offenses were the largest categories among newly received cases, each contributing approximately 29 percent.

Despite the general rise in cases, there were notable declines in specific categories. Drug addiction cases fell by 33.6 percent, environmental misdemeanors by 4.3 percent and juvenile offenses by 2.1 percent.

The commercial misdemeanors saw the most dramatic surge, climbing 101.7 percent. The technology-related offenses followed with a 33.1 percent increase, reflecting the growing complexity of cybercrimes. The felony cases and check misdemeanors also rose by 7.9 percent and 9.2 percent, respectively.

On the other hand, murder and assault cases

experienced a sharp drop of 51.4 percent, while property crimes decreased by 24.7 percent.

The cases involving assaults on honor and reputation fell by 15.6 percent and banking crimes decreased by 7.7 percent.

The statistics underscore both challenges and achievements for Kuwait's judicial system. The rise in drug and psychotropic substance crimes by



Al-Dawas



Qabazard

30.4 percent, along with a 3.1 percent increase in kidnapping and unlawful detention cases, highlights areas needing intensified focus.

As the Public Prosecution continues to tackle these evolving trends, the significant progress in reducing violent crimes, such as murder and assault, provides a silver lining to an otherwise busy year for law enforcement and judiciary authorities.

Drug gangs busted: In 2024, the Directorate-General of Drug Control (DGDC) in Kuwait intensified its efforts to dismantle drug trafficking networks under the directives of Sheikh Fahd Al-Youssef, First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior, and Major General Hamed Al-Dawas and Brigadier General Muhammad Qabazard.

These operations resulted in unprecedented sei-

zures of narcotics with a street value of millions of dinars, dealing successive blows to drug traffickers operating by land, sea and air.

Security sources told Al-Seyassah that the significant operations included:

■ 113 kilograms of drugs and one million narcotic pills seized from a single individual.

■ The arrest of three individuals attempting to smuggle 308 kilograms of hashish, one million Lyrica pills and 500,000 Captagon pills via sea, worth at KD 2.5 million.

■ Smuggling attempt thwarted by the Kuwait International Airport securitymen who seized one million Lyrica pills worth 2 million dinars, implicating six suspects, including two Customs employees.

■ The arrest of two persons at sea in possession of 40 kilograms of hashish and 40,000 narcotic pills.

Among the most significant incidents was the arrest of two Asians carrying 80 kilograms of shabu, with a market value exceeding KD 1 million. The Coast Guard also foiled the smuggling of 164 kilograms of narcotics, worth KD 450,000, arresting five suspects in the process.

A joint operation with the Emirati Ministry of Interior led to the seizure of 3,750,000 Lyrica pills, one million of which were intercepted at the Kuwait International Airport, while the remainder was confiscated in the UAE.

Other notable cases included the dismantling of an international drug network smuggling 60 kilograms of marijuana and hashish, valued at KD 750,000 and the seizure of 500,000 Captagon pills and 30,000 Lyrica pills in separate incidents.

These operations underscore Kuwait's relentless efforts to combat the drug trade. The coordination between national agencies and international partners highlights the country's commitment to eradicating drug trafficking and protecting its society from the devastating effects of narcotics.

Probe intensified in shock incidents

Jabriya killer, Filipina worker face premeditated kill charge

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Public Prosecution has intensified investigations into two high-profile murder cases that shocked the nation. A citizen accused of shooting a fellow Kuwaiti in Jabriya and a Filipina domestic worker alleged to have killed her sponsor's infant by placing him in a washing machine remain in custody. Both individuals are expected to face charges of premeditated murder following reenactments of the crimes, reports Al-Anba daily.

A security source revealed that the suspect in the Jabriya shooting admitted during questioning that disputes with the victim motivated the fatal act. The shooting, which occurred on Friday afternoon, involved three bullets fired from a pistol, two of which proved fatal. The perpetrator later surrendered to authorities.

Meanwhile, the Filipina domestic worker is accused of killing her sponsor's infant son, born in 2023, on Thurs-

day evening in Sabah Al-Salem. During interrogation, the accused claimed mistreatment by her employers drove her to commit the act as an act of revenge. According to initial reports, the infant was rushed to Al-Adan Hospital by his family but was pronounced dead. The child's parents alleged they heard screams from the washing machine and found the worker attempting to flee after committing the heinous crime.

The Public Prosecution is expected to press charges of premeditated murder against both suspects, pending the results of ongoing investigations and crime reenactments. Authorities are working diligently to uncover the full details surrounding both incidents, which have left the community in shock.

The tragic events underscore the need for robust measures to address disputes and improve the treatment of domestic workers to prevent such horrifying outcomes.



Mol photo
Drug pills and other items seized by the Jahra traffic patrol.

Police patrol nab suspects

3 people under probe for carrying narcotics

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Three individuals have been referred to the General Department for Drug Control by Jahra traffic patrols after being found in possession of psychotropic substances and drug-related paraphernalia, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to a security source, the arrests occurred in Jahra when a patrol noticed suspicious behavior from a vehicle occupied by three young men. Upon stopping the vehicle, the occupants appeared visibly nervous. A subsequent search revealed a quantity of narcotic Lyrica pills in their possession.

Duo held in Salmiya for drug offenses

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: A routine patrol in the Salmiya area led to the arrest of two individuals for suspected drug and alcohol-related offenses, reports Al-Anba daily.

The incident involved two men, born in 1995 and 1975, who were taken into custody by the General Department for Combating Narcotics. The arrest followed the patrol's observation of erratic driving, prompting officers to stop the vehicle.

Upon inspection, the driver and his companion appeared to be under the influence. A search of the car revealed two plastic cups containing intoxicating substances, as well as a bottle of similar substances.

The driver now faces charges for driving under the influence, while further investigations are underway to determine the extent of their involvement in narcotics-related activities.

Fans get top services

Jaber Stadium security officers win big praise

By **Munif Naif**
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Social media users widely praised the humanitarian act of a Special Forces officer who was seen carrying a fan on his back in the stands of Jaber Stadium, showcasing the true spirit of humanitarian service carried out by security personnel during the Gulf 26 matches.

In response to the viral video, the Ministry of Interior highlighted that security officers embody a noble example of humanitarian work.

They effectively combine their duties of maintaining security with offering assistance and support, all while ensuring the safety and comfort of everyone.

The ministry reiterated that this dedication reflects their commitment to upholding humanitarian values based on their loyalty to the country and the responsibilities they bear.

Before the match between Kuwait and Qatar, the presence of security personnel on the streets and roads leading to Jaber Al-Ahmad and Jaber Al-Hamad stadiums to manage traffic was evident. They were also stationed in large numbers at Souk Mubarakiya to ensure smooth traffic flow and prevent any potential issues among fans.

Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Major General Ali Al-Adwani, along with several ministry leaders, conducted an inspection of the security arrangements at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium in preparation for the match between the Kuwaiti and Qatari national teams, which took place on Friday.



Ali Al-Adwani

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Ministry of Higher Education photo
Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal with key officials during a video conference with the heads of cultural offices abroad.

Ministry to establish support offices

Minister Al-Jalal unveils plan to strengthen scholarship system

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal announced plans to establish support offices for cultural offices in the Ministry of Higher Education.

This follows a recent video conference with the heads of cultural offices abroad, attended by key officials including Acting Undersecretary Lamia Al-Mulhim and Director-General of the Public Authority for Academic Accreditation and Education Quality Assurance Dr. Jassim Al-Ali.

The meeting focused on identifying challenges and proposing solutions for issues such as the academic failure of scholarship students and the imbalance in student distribution across university specializations.

Dr. Al-Jalal emphasized that these efforts are part of a broader strategic plan aligned with Kuwait's national vision to develop its external scholarship sector.

He stressed the importance of cultural offices in supporting students

abroad and strengthening cooperation with international universities to expand scholarship opportunities.

The minister also discussed the alignment of student placement with the country's sectoral needs, particularly in medical specialties, and highlighted the need for enhancing English language proficiency to reduce academic failure rates.

Additionally, Dr. Al-Jalal called for continuous updates on accredited universities and improved partnerships with new institutions to support strategic development sectors in Kuwait.

Dr. Jassim Al-Ali reaffirmed the National Authority's commitment to monitoring educational institutions and ensuring academic standards are met, while Al-Mulhim and Ghaida Madhkur underscored the importance of strengthening support systems for scholarship students in line with Kuwait's Vision 2035.

The Ministry's concerted efforts aim to develop qualified national cadres that will contribute to the country's sustainable development and future goals.

Red Palace Village project set to restore Jahra's cultural heritage

Kuwait Municipality seeks private sector partnership

By **Mohammad Al-Muslih**
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Kuwait Municipality is taking the initial steps toward completing the Red Palace Village project in Jahra, which will be built on the site of the National Park. The project aims to revive and recreate the atmosphere of the Souk Mubarakiya experience.

According to a study prepared by Kuwait Municipality, the project is in line with the State of Kuwait's vision to preserve and promote the national heritage associated with the Red Palace in Jahra and its historical significance.

The municipality explained that the project will include a park and a heritage market in Jahra that will primarily serve the local residents, and contributed to enhancing tourism in the governorate.

The project is designed to create a historical and cultural atmosphere for boosting both tourism and the economy, and enhancing the agricultural aspects of the land.

The municipality plans to offer the project to the private sector for development.

It revealed that the building area allowed for project development is set at 15 percent of the total site area, with the commercial space limited to 12 percent of the total area.

The study indicated that the total area of the Red Palace Village project is 470,000 square meters, with a construction area of 70,500 square meters and a commercial area of 56,400 square meters. The project will also feature extensive green spaces covering 399,500 square meters.

It aims to align with the goals of the "New Kuwait 2035" vision, promote tourism, and create an attractive environment for investment.

In addition, the project seeks to support the private sector, enhance cultural development through a heritage project near the Red Palace, and provide a sustainable environmental solution.

The project will create a car-free urban space and will include commercial areas for small and medium-sized businesses. It will also generate job opportunities that will contribute both directly and indirectly to the national economy.

Located in the northern part of Jahra, the project is adjacent to the Red Palace, and divided into two sides by Marzouq Al-Mutaeb Street. The project is situated next to the Red Palace and separated by an internal street, which enhances its heritage character.

The study highlighted that the project is 34 km from Kuwait City and easily accessible via Jahra Road, which is Road No. 80.

The study stressed the need to remove part of the internal street separating the project land from the Red Palace to create a direct connection between the two areas. This would allow for easier

access, and maintain a dedicated entrance for the fire station and the passenger drop-off point. Additionally, it recommended the construction of a bridge or tunnel to link the northern and southern parts of the project for the smooth passage of visitors.

The study outlined eight key design criteria for the project:

1. The architectural style of the project market area should reflect the Kuwaiti heritage, particularly drawing inspiration from Souk Mubarakiya in Kuwait City.

2. The project should include activities and features that make it vibrant and attractive throughout the year.

3. Green spaces should be prioritized, with efforts to enhance and preserve them throughout the project site.

4. The design must align with the site's characteristics, considering factors such as afforestation, shading techniques, building orientation, material selection, and building height.

5. The project must adhere to sustainability standards and aim to secure a green building certification.

6. The project should be accessible to pedestrians, including those with special needs.

7. Appropriate solutions must be found to connect the project with the Red Palace, facilitating seamless access between the northern and southern parts for visitors.

Minister meets citizens to address their concerns

Al-Mishari gives nod to housing bylaw revision

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (Agencies): The Public Authority for Housing Welfare announced that Abdul Latif Al-Mishari, the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs, has approved the Board of Directors' decision to amend certain provisions of the housing bylaw, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This amendment is aimed at safeguarding the rights of Kuwaiti families and ensuring they receive proper housing care.

The new decision specifies that the exchange and concession process will occur only once, whether through exchange or concession, emphasizing a commitment to providing stable and appropriate housing care to those in need.

Also, Minister Al-Mishari, met with a group of citizens to listen to their concerns and comments, accompanied by the senior officials of the relevant institutions, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The Ministry reported that Al-Mishari carefully listened to the citizens' inquiries and requests and directed that they be addressed within the appropriate legal frameworks and procedures.

The Ministry also highlighted that citizens can meet with the Minister through prior appointments in coordination with the follow-up department.

This initiative aims to enhance direct communication and resolve any challenges citizens may face.



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Farwaniya Governor photo
Farwaniya Governor receives Kuwaiti citizens in his office at Farwaniya Governorate.

Farwaniya Governor hosts local citizens

Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received in his office at Farwaniya Governorate headquarters the Kuwaiti citizens Naif Muhanna Al-Adwani, Dr. Sami Al-Adwani, and Faisal Ghazi Al-Mutairi.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the discussions during the meeting were focused on regional issues. They also presented

suggestions aimed at enhancing services for citizens.

Sheikh Athbi expressed his satisfaction with the meeting and praised the vital role played by public figures in promoting social welfare, enhancing brotherhood, and strengthening national spirit.

He affirmed the importance of cooperation to serve the interests of both citizens and the nation as a whole.

Agency organizes blood donation drive at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Government Performance Follow-up Agency organized a blood donation campaign at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, reinforcing its commitment to social responsibility and supporting the health sector, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The aim of the campaign is to enhance humanitarian and health initiatives, ensuring adequate blood supply in hospitals.

The event saw active participation from the Authority's employees, who emphasized community solidarity and the promotion of blood donation. The campaign concluded with



Blood donation campaign

expressions of gratitude to all participants and the blood bank team at the Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, highlighting the importance of continuing such initiatives for sustainable health support.

Projects remain behind schedule

MoH faces new challenges as 2025 looms

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: As 2024 comes to a close and 2025 approaches, the Ministry of Health in Kuwait confronts both new ambitions and persistent challenges, reports Al-Jarida daily.

One of the primary issues is the launch and operation of the smart fingerprint system for employees, set to begin on January 5, 2025.

The ministry has been testing the system since December 4, 2024, but technical difficulties during this trial period have posed obstacles for doctors and other staff in activating the application. The Ministry is working on resolving these issues ahead of the system's official rollout.

Another challenge facing Kuwait's healthcare system is the slow progress on health projects within the national development plan.

There is an urgent need to expedite the completion of these projects, particularly the new Kuwait Cancer Control Center,

which is of great significance.

Moreover, efforts must be increased to attract skilled doctors to help transfer expertise and reduce the need for costly treatments abroad, which drains the state budget.

The MoH is also tasked with ensuring the availability of essential medications in hospitals and health centers and continuing to raise awareness about chronic non-communicable diseases, which account for about 70 percent of deaths in Kuwait.

These diseases -- heart disease, diabetes, respiratory diseases and cancer -- are linked to risk factors such as obesity, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity.

Expanding public education campaigns on these conditions is critical, as awareness of diseases like cancer can lead to a 30 percent increase in early detection and recovery rates, ultimately improving the quality of care and saving substantial public funds spent on treating chronic diseases.

LOCAL



KUNA photo
The Minister of Foreign Affairs receives a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House of Representatives of the United States of America.

Kuwaiti FM Al-Yahya holds talks with US Congressman Cory Mills

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received on Sunday visiting member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives Cory Mills.

During the meeting, long-standing, historic and friendly relations between Kuwait and the United States, as well as progress

made in various fields, were discussed.

They also conversed over the strong ties between the governments and peoples of both countries, regional and international issues, and areas of cooperation aimed at enhancing shared interests for the benefit of both nations, noted a ministry statement.

Amir receives Crown Prince, top State officials

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received, on Sunday at Seif Palace, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received His Highness the Prime

Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the head of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Court of Cassation Judge Dr. Adel Majed Boursli, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

Over 12,000 individuals already benefited from campaign

IICO raises funds to aid poor families worldwide

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): The International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) is raising donations to aid families in need in eight countries.

The charity, as part of the efforts, has set up a booth at Al-Assima Mall, located in the heart of the Kuwaiti capital, for donations to finance its campaign, "warm hearts," to provide winter clothes to the needy families in eight countries worldwide.

Ibrahim Al-Badr, the deputy director general for communications, told KUNA the charity has so far provided aid to 12,000 people at a total value of KD 92,750 (more than USD 290,000), revealing that the campaign aims at raising KD 200,000 (approx. USD 650,000) to secure clothes and basic needs for these families in winter.

Al-Badr indicated that this year's aid covers countries at wars and strife and those hosting refugees namely Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, in addition to Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan.



KUNA photo
The International Islamic Charitable Organization organizes its winter campaign 'Warm Hearts'.

Continued from Page 1

Kuwait: A blessed

They were united by their belief that no one can differentiate between its people and its rulers. In times of adversity, you always see them standing together with the firm conviction that Kuwait is their constant and eternal homeland.

In light of this history, and the financial prosperity that God has blessed it with, Kuwait, despite its relatively small geographical size, has the potential to accommodate over 15 million people. Through prudent financial and administrative management, this population could contribute to the growth of projects, industries, and food security. This population can strengthen society through its cultural diversity, as was evident before the invasion and even until a few years ago. During that time, Kuwait became a cultural hub for the Arab world, surpassing several Arab capitals.

Therefore, it would not be detrimental for the number of residents or naturalized citizens to exceed the number of Kuwaiti nationals. In fact, countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar have benefited from this dynamic, as they turned their diverse populations into valuable assets that have enriched their economies and societies.

These countries did not concern themselves with whether the number of residents or naturalized citizens exceeded the number of original citizens, as their primary focus is on maximizing their national output. This is exactly what Kuwait needs at this stage, when nations compete to build economic and cultural soft power for the benefit of their people.

Kuwait's rulers and elites have always affirmed that blessings should benefit everyone, unlike isolation and societal discord, which can weaken even the strongest of nations.

In many countries, a person's origins are not as important as their contributions to society. Once an individual obtains citizenship, they are considered a full citizen and they serve the state. Thus, there is no distinction between the nationality of one citizen and another; the only measure is adherence to the law.

We have witnessed this in Kuwait, and it is clear that such inclusivity positively impacts societal stability, the economy, and, most importantly, national loyalty, which is the foundation of strong societies and nations.

However, this does not excuse those who engage in forgery or hold dual nationalities from being held accountable, as it is a violation of the law. Anyone who fails to adhere to the law must be held responsible to prevent confusion and chaos.

The most important factor, however, is the conviction that Kuwait can overcome its economic and social challenges, and continue to thrive as a blessed and influential nation within its regional and Arab context. Achieving this requires sound and prudent economic and social management, one that recognizes what benefits its people and enhances the added value of the nation, ensuring it is not squandered.

'Forgive us

These injustices can appear at times in the form of what Saint John Paul II called "structures of sin", that arise not only from injustice on the part of some but are also consolidated and maintained by a network of complicity.

"Each of us must feel in some way responsible for the devastation to which the earth, our common home, has been subjected, beginning with those actions that, albeit only indirectly, fuel the conflicts that presently plague our human family.

"Systemic challenges, distinct yet interconnected, are thus created and together cause havoc in our world. I think, in particular, of all manner of disparities, the inhuman treatment meted out to migrants, environmental decay, the confusion willfully created by disinformation, the refus-

al to engage in any form of dialogue and the immense resources spent on the industry of war.

"All these, taken together, represent a threat to the existence of humanity as a whole. At the beginning of this year, then, we desire to heed the plea of suffering humankind in order to feel called, together and as individuals, to break the bonds of injustice and to proclaim God's justice. Sporadic acts of philanthropy are not enough. Cultural and structural changes are necessary, so that enduring change may come about.

"The celebration of the Jubilee spurs us to make a number of changes in order to confront the present state of injustice and inequality by reminding ourselves that the goods of the earth are meant not for a privileged few, but for everyone. We do well to recall the words of Saint Basil of Caesarea: "Tell me, what things belong to you? Where did you find them to make them part of your life? ...

"Did you not come forth naked from the womb of your mother? Will you not return naked to the ground? Where did your property come from? If you say that it comes to you naturally by luck, you would deny God by not recognizing the Creator and being grateful to the Giver". Without gratitude, we are unable to recognize God's gifts. Yet in his infinite mercy the Lord does not abandon sinful humanity, but instead reaffirms his gift of life by the saving forgiveness offered to all through Jesus Christ. That is why, in teaching us the "Our Father", Jesus told us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses" (Mt 6:12).

"Once we lose sight of our relationship to the Father, we begin to cherish the illusion that our relationships with others can be governed by a logic of exploitation and oppression, where might makes right. Like the elites at the time of Jesus, who profited from the suffering of the poor, so today, in our interconnected global village, the international system, unless it is inspired by a spirit of solidarity and interdependence, gives rise to injustices, aggravated by corruption, which leave the poorer countries trapped. A mentality that exploits the indebted can serve as a shorthand description of the present "debt crisis" that weighs upon a number of countries, above all in the global South.

"I have repeatedly stated that foreign debt has become a means of control whereby certain governments and private financial institutions of the richer countries unscrupulously and indiscriminately exploit the human and natural resources of poorer countries, simply to satisfy the demands of their own markets. In addition, different peoples, already burdened by international debt, find themselves also forced to bear the burden of the "ecological debt" incurred by the more developed countries.

"Foreign debt and ecological debt are two sides of the same coin, namely the mindset of exploitation that has culminated in the debt crisis. In the spirit of this Jubilee Year, I urge the international community to work towards forgiving foreign debt in recognition of the ecological debt existing between the North and the South of this world. This is an appeal for solidarity, but above all for justice.

"The cultural and structural change needed to surmount this crisis will come about when we finally recognize that we are all sons and daughters of the one Father, that we are all in his debt but also that we need one another, in a spirit of shared and diversified responsibility.

"We will be able to "rediscover once for all that we need one another" and are indebted one to another. "If we take to heart these much-needed changes, the Jubilee Year of Grace can serve to set each of us on a renewed journey of hope, born of the experience of God's unlimited mercy.

"God owes nothing to anyone, yet he constantly bestows his grace and mercy upon all. As Isaac of Ninaveh, a seventh-century Father of the

Eastern Church, put it in one of his prayers: "Your love, Lord, is greater than my trespasses.

"The waves of the sea are nothing with respect to the multitude of my sins, but placed on a scale and weighed against your love, they vanish like a speck of dust". God does not weigh up the evils we commit; rather, he is immensely "rich in mercy, for the great love with which he loved us." (Eph 2:4). Yet he also hears the plea of the poor and the cry of the earth. We would do well simply to stop for a moment, at the beginning of this year, to think of the mercy with which he constantly forgives our sins and forgives our every debt, so that our hearts may overflow with hope and peace.

"In teaching us to pray the "Our Father", Jesus begins by asking the Father to forgive our trespasses, but passes immediately to the challenging words: "as we forgive those who trespass against us" (cf. Mt 6:12). In order to forgive others their trespasses and to offer them hope, we need for our own lives to be filled with that same hope, the fruit of our experience of God's mercy. Hope overflows in generosity; it is free of calculation, makes no hidden demands, is unconcerned with gain, but aims at one thing alone: to raise up those who have fallen, to heal hearts that are broken and to set us free from every kind of bondage.

"Consequently, at the beginning of this Year of Grace, I would like to offer three proposals capable of restoring dignity to the lives of entire peoples and enabling them to set them out anew on the journey of hope. In this way, the debt crisis can be overcome and all of us can once more realize that we are debtors whose debts have been forgiven.

"First, I renew the appeal launched by Saint John Paul II on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 to consider "reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations". In recognition of their ecological debt, the more prosperous countries ought to feel called to do everything possible to forgive the debts of those countries that are in no condition to repay the amount they owe. Naturally, lest this prove merely an isolated act of charity that simply reboots the vicious cycle of financing and indebtedness, a new financial framework must be devised, leading to the creation of a global financial Charter based on solidarity and harmony between peoples.

"I also ask for a firm commitment to respect for the dignity of human life from conception to natural death, so that each person can cherish his or her own life and all may look with hope to a future of prosperity and happiness for themselves and for their children. Without hope for the future, it becomes hard for the young to look forward to bringing new lives into the world. Here I would like once more to propose a concrete gesture that can help foster the culture of life, namely the elimination of the death penalty in all nations. This penalty not only compromises the inviolability of life but eliminates every human hope of forgiveness and rehabilitation.

"In addition, following in the footsteps of Saint Paul VI and Benedict XVI, I do not hesitate to make yet another appeal, for the sake of future generations. In this time marked by wars, let us use at least a fixed percentage of the money earmarked for armaments to establish a global Fund to eradicate hunger and facilitate in the poorer countries educational activities aimed at promoting sustainable development and combating climate change.

"We need to work at eliminating every pretext that encourages young people to regard their future as hopeless or dominated by the thirst to avenge the blood of their dear ones. The future is a gift meant to enable us to go beyond past failures and to pave new paths of peace.

"Those who take up these proposals and set out on the journey of hope will surely glimpse the dawn of the

greatly desired goal of peace. The Psalmist promises us that "steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss" (Ps 85:10). When I divest myself of the weapon of credit and restore the path of hope to one of my brothers or sisters, I contribute to the restoration of God's justice on this earth and, with that person, I advance towards the goal of peace. As Saint John XXIII observed, true peace can be born only from a heart "disarmed" of anxiety and the fear of war.

"May 2025 be a year in which peace flourishes! A true and lasting peace that goes beyond quibbling over the details of agreements and human compromises.

"May we seek the true peace that is granted by God to hearts disarmed: hearts not set on calculating what is mine and what is yours; hearts that turn selfishness into readiness to reach out to others; hearts that see themselves as indebted to God and thus prepared to forgive the debts that oppress others; hearts that replace anxiety about the future with the hope that every individual can be a resource for the building of a better world.

"Disarming hearts is a job for everyone, great and small, rich and poor alike. At times, something quite simple will do, such as "a smile, a small gesture of friendship, a kind look, a ready ear, a good deed".

"With such gestures, we progress towards the goal of peace. We will arrive all the more quickly if, in the course of journeying alongside our brothers and sisters, we discover that we have changed from the time we first set out. Peace does not only come with the end of wars but with the dawn of a new world, a world in which we realize that we are different, closer and more fraternal than we ever thought possible.

"Lord, grant us your peace! This is my prayer to God as I now offer my cordial good wishes for the New Year to the Heads of State and Government, to the leaders of International Organizations, to the leaders of the various religions and to every person of good will."

Kuwait customs

the smuggling of 1,200 Tramadol pills and 210 grams of marijuana.

The ministry confirmed that all the confiscated items and the suspects were handed over to the concerned authorities. It reiterated its commitment to combat the smuggling of prohibited substances and illegal entry, stressing that KGAC is keen on maintaining national security and the well-being of the entire society.

Kuwait validates

Article Two specifies that "the Undersecretary of the Ministry shall implement this decision, which will take effect from the date of its publication."

A new ministerial resolution, No. 2815 of 2024, concerning the validity of electronically issued vehicle driving permits for residents, has been published in Kuwait's Official Gazette. The resolution aims to streamline the process of verifying driving permits across various entities in the country.

The first article of the resolution states that vehicle driving permits for residents issued through the My Identity and Sahel applications, as well as the Ministry of Interior application, will be considered valid and must be accepted for all governmental and non-governmental transactions throughout Kuwait. This move is expected to simplify administrative procedures and enhance convenience for resident drivers.

According to Article Two of the resolution, the Undersecretary of the Ministry is tasked with implementing this decision. The new regulation will come into effect immediately upon its publication in the Official Gazette.

Citizenship of

In other news, from Sunday, Dec 29, the suspension of bank accounts of individuals whose nationalities were revoked under Article 8 began, based on the announcement made by the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, reports Al-Rai daily quoting informed sources.

In response to a question regarding those who have modified their status, regained their original nationality, and obtained a passport from their country after their Kuwaiti nationality was revoked under Article 8 of the Kuwaiti Nationality Law, the sources explained that these individuals cannot retain their Kuwaiti passport. However, they will be granted a ten-year residency in the country, which will be renewable for as long as they remain alive. They will also retain full privileges, except that they cannot hold both their Kuwaiti passport and the passport of their original country at the same time.

During an open meeting last Wednesday with editors-in-chief of various newspapers and heads of non-profit associations, the First Deputy Prime Minister had declared that individuals whose citizenship was revoked under Article 8 will retain all the benefits they enjoyed while holding Kuwaiti citizenship. In addition, they will be issued a blue Kuwaiti passport without Kuwaiti citizenship and a civil ID card similar to the blue Kuwaiti card.

In a related development, the Women's Social and Cultural Society issued an apology for canceling the discussion session titled "Legal and Social Repercussions of Revoking Citizenship Under Article 8 of the Nationality Law," which had been scheduled for Sunday, Dec 29, based on instructions from the relevant authorities.

Kuwait condoles

workers pulled two people, both crew members, to safety. Health officials said they are conscious and not in life-threatening condition.

Among the 177 bodies so far found, officials have so far identified 88 of them, the fire agency said. The passengers were predominantly South Korean, as well as two Thai nationals.

Ju Woong, director of the Ewha Womans University Seoul Hospital, where one of the survivors was hospitalized, said the man was being treated in an intensive care unit for fractures to his ribs, shoulder blade and upper spine. Ju said the man, whose name wasn't released, told doctors he "woke up to find (himself) rescued."

The fire agency deployed 32 fire trucks and several helicopters to contain the blaze. About 1,570 firefighters, police officers, soldiers and other officials were also sent to the site, according to the fire agency and transport ministry.

Footage of the crash aired by South Korean television channels showed the plane skidding across the airstrip at high speed, apparently with its landing gear still closed, overrunning the runway and colliding head-on with a concrete wall on the outskirts of the facility, triggering an explosion. Other local TV stations aired footage showing thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was engulfed in flames.

Lee Jeong-hyeon, chief of the Muan fire station, told a televised briefing that the plane was completely destroyed, with only the tail assembly remaining recognizable among the wreckage. Lee said that workers were looking into various possibilities about what caused the crash, including whether the aircraft was struck by birds, Lee said.

Transport Ministry officials later said their early assessment of communication records show the airport control tower issued a bird strike warning to the plane shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different

area. The pilot sent out a distress signal shortly before the plane overshoot the end of the runway and skidded across a buffer zone before hitting the wall, the officials said.

Senior Transport Ministry official Joo Jong-wan said workers have retrieved the flight data and cockpit voice recorders of the plane's black box, which will be examined by government experts investigating the cause of the crash and fire. He said it may take months for investigators to complete their probe. The runway at the Muan airport will be closed until Jan. 1, the ministry said.

Thailand's prime minister, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, expressed deep condolences to the families of those affected by the accident in a post on social platform X. Paetongtarn said she ordered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide assistance immediately.

Kerati Kijmanawat, the director of Airports of Thailand, confirmed in a statement that Jeju Air flight 7C 2216 departed from Suvarnabhumi Airport with no reports of abnormal conditions with the aircraft or on the runway.

Jeju Air in a statement expressed its "deep apology" over the crash and said it will do its "utmost to manage the aftermath of the accident."

In a televised news conference, Kim E-bae, Jeju Air's president, bowed deeply with other senior company officials as he apologized to bereaved families and said he feels "full responsibility" for the incident. Kim said the company hadn't identified any mechanical problems with the aircraft following regular check-ups and that he would wait for the results of government investigations into the cause of the incident.

Family members wailed as officials announced the names of some victims at a lounge in the Muan airport.

Boeing said in a statement on X it was in contact with Jeju Air and is ready to support the company in dealing with the crash.

"We extend our deepest condolences to the families who lost loved ones, and our thoughts remain with the passengers and crew," Boeing said.

The incident came as South Korea is embroiled into a huge political crisis triggered by President Yoon Suk Yeol's stunning imposition of martial law and ensuing impeachment. Last Friday, South Korean lawmakers impeached acting President Han Duck-soo and suspended his duties, leading Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok to take over.

Choi, who traveled to the site in Muan, called for officials to employ all available resources to find the missing and identify the victims as soon as possible. The government declared Muan a special disaster zone to provide assistance to the families of victims and designated a weeklong national mourning period through Saturday.

Yoon's office said his chief secretary, Chung Jin-suk, presided over an emergency meeting between senior presidential staff to discuss the crash and reported the details to Choi. Yoon expressed condolences to the victims in a Facebook posting.

The Muan crash is one of the deadliest disasters in South Korea's aviation history. The last time South Korea suffered a large-scale air disaster was in 1997, when a Korean Airline plane crashed in Guam, killing 228 people on board. In 2013, an Asiana Airlines plane crash-landed in San Francisco, killing three and injuring approximately 200.

Sunday's accident was also one of the worst landing mishaps since a July 2007 crash that killed all 187 people on board and 12 others on the ground when an Airbus A320 slid off a slick airstrip in Sao Paulo and collided with a nearby building, according to data compiled by the Flight Safety Foundation, a nonprofit group aimed at improving air safety. In 2010, 158 people died when an Air India Express aircraft overshoot a runway in Mangalore, India, and plummeted into a gorge before erupting into flames, according to the safety foundation. World leaders expressed their sympathies as South Korea dealt with the tragedy.

Scarce land and rising fears push burial associations to confront wartime realities

Sweden embarks on sober search for more cemetery space in case of war

GOTHENBURG, Sweden, Dec 29, (AP): Burial associations in Sweden are looking to acquire enough land for something they hope they'll never have to do: bury thousands of people in the event of war.

The search follows recommendations from the Church of Sweden's national secretariat, which reflect crisis preparedness guidelines from the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) and the Swedish Armed Forces.

The preparedness guidelines have been put in a new light by Sweden's decision to join NATO and tensions with Russia in the Baltic Sea region.

According to the Church of Sweden provisions, supported by legal paragraphs in Sweden's Burial Act, burial associations are responsible for ensuring the availability of enough land to bury roughly 5 percent of the population within a parish, if needed.

The Goteborg Burial Association, which operates in Sweden's second-largest city, is currently trying to navigate the challenge of acquiring at least 10 acres (40,470 square meters) of land to ensure it can handle urgent casket burials for some 30,000 dead in case of war. That is in addition to another 15 acres (60,700 square meters) of land needed for building graveyards for regular use in Goteborg.

"The (recommendations) mean that we need more land for burial grounds and this is a phenomenon in the big cities, and a problem in the big cities, where land resources are scarce to begin with and not always sufficient to meet burial ground needs even in times of calm and peace," said Katarina Evenseth,



A view of graves at Östra Kyrkogården, one of the largest cemeteries in Gothenburg, on Dec. 20, 2024 in Gothenburg, Sweden. (AP)

senior advisor at the Goteborg Burial Association. Together with the local municipality, which has a

monopoly in making decisions about land usage in Goteborg, the burial association has identified a vast

area appropriate for building a large-scale cemetery for the intended purpose.

But a lengthy approval and building process means it could take approximately 10 years to complete, posing further challenges in uncertain times.

Meanwhile, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) continues to stress the importance of crisis preparedness and highlights the efforts of the Church of Sweden.

"Already back in 2015 the Government assigned various authorities to once again start engaging in civil defense planning, and many organizations have started planning, with the Church of Sweden being at the forefront of that planning," said Jan-Olof Olsson, Critical Infrastructure Protection (CIP) expert at MSB.

"Unfortunately it is the case that we are reminded to a greater degree that war could happen and that we simply need to be prepared for that," Olsson said.

Sweden pursued a policy of neutrality during World War II.

But public opinion shifted sharply in 2022 after Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, leading to Sweden and Finland applying to join the transatlantic alliance out of concern about the threat from their newly aggressive Russian neighbor across the Baltic Sea.

Sweden and Finland sent out updated civil preparedness guides in November with instructions on how to survive in war. The guides are similar to those in Denmark and Norway, though they don't mention Russia by name.

Incumbent NATO, EU critic considered favorite

Croatia holds presidential election

ZAGREB, Croatia, Dec 29, (AP): Croatia's left-leaning president, an outspoken critic of Western military support for Ukraine in its war against Russia, is running for reelection in the Adriatic Sea state, but is unlikely to get an outright majority in the first round of voting on Sunday.

President Zoran Milanović, who is often compared to Donald Trump for his combative style of communication with political opponents, faces seven other contenders, including Dragan Primorac, the candidate of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union.

The two are expected to face off in the second round on Jan. 12 if no contender gets more than 50% of the vote, according to pre-election polls.

The most popular politician in Croatia, 58-year-old Milanović had served as prime minister in the past. Populist in style, Milanović has been a fierce critic of current Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and continuous sparring between the two has lately marked Croatia's political scene.

Plenković, the prime minister, has sought to portray the vote as one about Croatia's future in the EU and NATO. He has labeled Milanović "pro-Russian" and a threat to Croatia's international standing.

"The difference between him and Milanović is quite simple: Milanović is leading us East, Primorac is leading us West," he said.

Though the presidency is largely ceremonial in Croatia, an elected



Dragan Primorac, the candidate of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) speaks to the media after casting his ballot during a presidential election at a polling station in Zagreb, Croatia, Sunday, Dec. 29, 2024. (AP)

president holds political authority and acts as the supreme commander of the military.

Milanović has criticized the NATO and European Union support for Ukraine and has often insisted that Croatia should not take sides. He has said Croatia should stay away from global disputes, thought it is a member of both NATO and the EU.

Milanović has also blocked Croatia's participation in a NATO-led training mission for Ukraine, declaring that "no Croatian soldier will take part in somebody else's war."

His main rival in the election, Primorac, has stated that "Croatia's place is in the West, not the

East." His presidency bid, however, has been marred by a high-level corruption case that landed Croatia's health minister in jail last month and which featured prominently in pre-election debates.

Trailing a distant third in the pre-election polls is Marija Selak Raspudić, a conservative independent candidate. She has focused her election campaign on the economic troubles of ordinary citizens, corruption and issues such as population decline in the country of some 3.8 million.

Sunday's presidential election is Croatia's third vote this year, following a snap parliamentary election in April and the European Parliament balloting in June.

Dispute stirring discontent among supporters

Trump seems to side with Musk, tech allies in debate over foreign workers

WEST PALM BEACH, Florida, Dec 29, (AP): President-elect Donald Trump appears to be siding with Elon Musk and his other backers in the tech industry as a dispute over immigration visas has divided his supporters.

Trump, in an interview with the New York Post on Saturday, praised the use of visas to bring skilled foreign workers to the U.S. The topic has become a flashpoint within his conservative base.

"I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favor of the visas. That's why we have them," Trump said.

In fact, Trump has in the past criticized the H-1B visas, calling them "very bad" and "unfair" for U.S. workers. During his first term as president, he unveiled a "Hire American" policy that directed changes to the program to try to ensure the visas were awarded to the highest-paid or most-skilled applicants.

Despite his criticism of them and attempts to curb their use, he has also used the visas at his businesses in the past, something he acknowledged in his interview Saturday.

"I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B. I have used it many times. It's a great program," Trump told the newspaper.



President-elect Donald Trump listens to Elon Musk as he arrives to watch SpaceX's mega rocket Starship lift off for a test flight from Starbase in Boca Chica, Texas, Nov. 19, 2024. (AP)

He did not appear to address questions about whether he would pursue any changes to the number or use of the visas once he takes office Jan. 20.

Trump's hardline immigration policies, focused mostly on immigrants who are in the country illegally, were a cornerstone of his presidential campaign and a priority issue for his supporters.

But in recent days, his coalition has split in a public debate largely taking place online about the tech industry's hiring of foreign workers. Hard-right

members of Trump's movement have accused Musk and others in Trump's new flank of tech-world supporters of pushing policies at odds with Trump's "America First" vision.

Software engineers and others in the tech industry have used H-1B visas for skilled foreign workers and say they are a critical tool for hard-to-fill positions.

But critics have said they undercut U.S. citizens who could take those jobs. Some on the right have called for the program to be eliminated.

America

Train-fire truck crash injures 15: Three firefighters and a dozen passengers were injured in Florida on Saturday when a fire truck with its lights flashing drove around rail crossing arms and into the path of a high-speed passenger train after waiting for another train to pass, according to video of the incident and a person briefed on what happened.

The crash happened at 10:45 a.m. in crowded downtown Delray Beach. In the aftermath the Brightline train was stopped on the tracks, its front destroyed, about a block away from the Delray Beach Fire Rescue truck. Its ladder was ripped off and in the grass several yards away. The Sun-Sentinel reported.

The Delray Beach Fire Rescue said in a social media post that three Delray Beach firefighters were in stable condition at a hospital. Palm Beach County Fire Rescue took 12 people from the train to the hospital with minor injuries. (AP)

2 men die from forest exposure: Two Oregon men were found dead in a Washington state forest after they failed to return from a trip to look for Sasquatch, authorities said Saturday.

The 59-year-old and 37-year-old appear to have died from exposure, the Skamania County Sheriff's Office said via Facebook. The weather and the men's lack of preparedness led the office to draw that conclusion, it said.

Sasquatch is a folkloric beast thought by some to roam the forests, particularly in the Pacific Northwest.

The two men were found in a heavily wooded area of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, which is about 150 miles (240 kilometers) northeast of Portland.

A family member reported them missing at around 1 a.m. on Christmas Day after they failed to return from a Christmas Eve outing.

Sixty volunteer search-and-rescue personnel helped in the three-day search, including canine, drone and ground teams. The Coast Guard used infrared technology to search from the air. (AP)



A damaged Brightline train is seen after it collided with a fire truck in downtown Delray Beach, Fla., on Dec. 28, 2024. (AP)



Saul Rodriguez uses a chain saw to remove debris atop a car from a woman's home after strong thunderstorms pass through the Greater Houston region, on Dec. 28, 2024, in Porter Heights. (AP)

Tornadoes in Texas and Mississippi kill 2, injure 6 as storms move east

HOUSTON, Dec 29, (AP): At least two people were killed and six more injured as several tornadoes touched down in Texas and Mississippi on Saturday, damaging homes and flipping vehicles as the storm system moved east across Alabama early Sunday.

The National Weather Service's severe storm tracker indicated the system was moving east through Alabama into Georgia shortly before 4 a.m. The agency issued severe thunder storm warnings with the possibility of tornadoes in western Georgia and the northwestern tip of Florida directly above the Gulf of Mexico.

One person died in the Liverpool area, located south of Houston, and four people suffered injuries that were not considered critical, according to Madison Polston of the Brazoria County Sheriff's Office.

There were "multiple touchdown points" in the county between Liverpool, Hillcrest Village and Alvin. Officials knew of around 10 damaged homes but were working to determine the extent of the damage, Polston said.

In Mississippi, one person died in Adams County and two people were injured in Franklin County, according to the Mississippi

Emergency Management Agency.

The National Weather Service said two tornadoes hit around Bude and the city of Brandon, ripping roofs from several buildings.

"These storms are probably going to get a lot worse this evening and overnight the further east you go," said Josh Lichter, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

It appeared at least six tornadoes touched down in the Houston area, though they may discover there were more when crews go out to survey the damage, and there was damage in the area from both tornadoes and straight-line winds, Litcher said.

North of Houston, mobile homes were damaged or destroyed in Katy and Porter Heights, where the doors of a fire station were blown in, the weather service said.

The storms also caused departure delays of over an hour Saturday afternoon at Houston's two main airports, Bush Intercontinental and Hobby, according to the website FlightAware.

About 71,000 utility customers were without power in Mississippi Saturday and the number was expected to rise, said Malary White, chief communications officer for the state's Emergency Management Agency.

Europe

Belarus pardons prisoners: Belarus' authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko pardoned 20 more people that rights activists describe as political prisoners, a statement on the president's website said Saturday.

The announcement came amid persistent oppression in the run-up to presidential elections next month that are likely to extend Lukashenko's decades-long rule.

Belarusian officials did not provide the names of those released, but the statement posted on the website of the president said that all of them had been convicted of "crimes of an extremist nature." (AP)



Lukashenko

south of Oslo. The aircraft landed safely but veered off the runway at low speed, coming to a stop on the grass beside the runway.

Norwegian police, as cited by Dutch media, confirmed that the plane carried 176 passengers and six crew members, all of whom were safely evacuated. (Xinhua)

Greece upgrades jets: Greece is modernizing its air force with upgraded Rafale jets, having received 23 of the Dassault-made 4.5-generation jets to date.

The final jet is expected to arrive at Tanagra Air Base, north of Athens, in the coming days, Greek media outlet To Vima reported on Saturday. (Xinhua)

EU calls for probe: The European Union called on Saturday for a swift and independent investigation into the crash of an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane in Kazakhstan.

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas said on social media platform X, "I call for a swift and independent international investigation," considering reports suggesting that Russian fire could have caused the crash as a "stark reminder" of the Malaysian Airlines "disaster" (MH 17), in which all passengers were killed after the plane was hit by a missile in a region controlled by pro-Russian forces in Ukraine in 2014. (KUNA)



Fog and clouds drift over the top of the Feldberg mountain near Frankfurt, Germany, Sunday, Dec. 29, 2024. (AP)

Response from international community in coming months pivotal

Prolonged conflict deepens Sudan's humanitarian crisis in 2024

KHARTOUM, Dec 29, (Xinhua): In 2024, violent conflict continued to devastate Sudan, deepening the humanitarian crisis that has afflicted millions since the brutal clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted in April 2023.

The war, which has claimed nearly 30,000 lives, has displaced more than 14 million people -- roughly one-third of Sudan's population, creating what the United Nations describes as "the world's largest displacement crisis."

Despite the staggering human toll, the conflict in Sudan has not attracted the same level of global attention as other crises, such as those in Ukraine and Gaza. This relative neglect has resulted in a lack of effective political mediation and insufficient humanitarian aid, putting the country at risk of plunging deeper into catastrophe.

The response from the international community in the coming months will be pivotal. It will determine whether millions of Sudanese civilians will continue to suffer from displacement, hunger, and violence -- or whether there is a genuine opportunity for peace and stability to take root.

In 2024, armed confrontations between the SAF and the RSF have continued to ravage Sudan, spreading from the capital, Khartoum, through the central Gezira and Sinnar states, and extending to North Darfur in the west. Since May, El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, has become a central battleground between the two forces.

For seven months, the city has been



A doctor treats a Sudanese child suffering from malnutrition at an MSF clinic in Metche Camp, Chad, near the Sudanese border, on April 6, 2024. (AP)

under siege by the RSF, enduring relentless shelling and airstrikes from both the paramilitary group and the army. These attacks have frequently targeted densely populated areas, including camps housing displaced civilians.

On Dec. 20, the Office of the UN

High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) revealed in a press release that the ongoing siege and conflict in El Fasher have killed at least 782 civilians and left more than 1,143 injured.

"The continuing siege of El Fasher and the relentless fighting are devastat-

ing lives every day on a massive scale," said OHCHR chief Volker Turk.

The UN humanitarian agency also reported last week that hostilities have spread to additional urban areas in North Darfur and South Darfur, resulting in heavy civilian casualties and

the destruction of homes, markets, and medical facilities.

The Darfur region, which comprises five states, is a key base for the RSF, with the majority of its recruits coming from the region. The militia is determined to gain full control of the region, seeking to capture El Fasher, the last SAF-controlled stronghold in the area.

"It is clear that both of the warring parties want to resolve the conflict militarily, which seems far-fetched, at least for now," Ahmed Ismail, a Sudanese military expert, told Xinhua.

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has displaced more than 14 million people, or approximately 30 percent of the population, doubling the figure from last December. This makes it the world's largest displacement crisis, according to UN data.

"The (internal) displacement number has hit 11 million. That's up 200,000 just since September," Director-General of the International Organization for Migration Amy Pope said in late October at a press briefing from Port Sudan, adding that "another 3.1 million people have traveled across borders to flee the fighting."

Of the internally displaced, Sudanese government figures show that 4 million are women and 3 million are children.

In addition to the displacement crisis, more than 24.6 million people in Sudan are now facing high levels of acute food insecurity, a UN spokesperson said on Tuesday.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a global hunger moni-

tor, confirmed in a report released Tuesday that famine is present in at least five areas of Sudan, including North Darfur's Zamzam camp and parts of the Western Nuba Mountains. The crisis is projected to expand to five additional areas before May 2025.

Abdullah Ibrahim, a food security expert in Sudan, cautioned that the true scale of the food crisis may be even worse than reported. "The full impact of the war on the food situation remains unclear, and the number of people at risk of famine is likely higher than the current estimates from the UN and the Sudanese government," he said.

The crisis has also fueled a health emergency. Epidemics, particularly cholera and dengue fever, have surged during the rainy season from June to October. Sudan's war-battered medical system has struggled to cope. The Health Ministry reported over 44,000 cholera cases and about 8,500 dengue fever infections.

The UN and other relief agencies now face significant obstacles to assisting the most vulnerable, including security risks, restrictions on aid flow and personnel movement, and a funding gap.

Humanitarian aid agencies face immense challenges in providing assistance. Security risks, restrictions on aid movement, and a significant funding shortfall have hindered efforts. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted that only 30 percent of the 1.5 billion U.S. dollars needed for Sudan's 2024 response have been secured, leaving many urgent needs unmet.

Bolivia's Morales seeks political comeback ... 'return to the past'

LAUCA Ñ, Bolivia, Dec 29, (AP): Bolivia's former leader Evo Morales has a campaign pitch for 2025 that has worked elsewhere: Other politicians of recent years have brought you nothing but misery. It's time for a return to the past.

His supporters are looking to Morales for a rescue from the five tumultuous years since his 2019 resignation. The country's first Indigenous president, Morales is credited with spreading the wealth of a commodities boom and ushering in a rare stretch of social and economic stability during his nearly 14 years in office.

His detractors say Morales - who built an economy uncomfortably dependent on natural gas reserves and sought to stay in power longer than Bolivia's constitution allows - bears responsibility for much of the turmoil that followed his tenure.

A bitter political battle is looming between Morales, 65, and his former economy minister and once-protégé, President Luis Arce, over who will lead their long-dominant leftist Movement Toward Socialism, or MAS, into the August 2025 election.

Disqualifying

Arce has unleashed allies in the judiciary against Morales, with the Constitutional Court disqualifying Morales' candidacy and ousting him from the leadership of MAS, a party he helped found in the 1990s.

Prosecutors in mid-December charged Morales with statutory rape for fathering a child with a 15-year-old girl when he was 56 and president. Morales didn't deny the relationship but accused Arce of deploying a "dirty, odious" campaign to undermine him.

Since talk of his arrest warrant surfaced in September, Morales has been holed up in Bolivia's coca-growing region of Chapare, ringed by loyal supporters.

Here, the former coca farmer and fiery union leader - long considered one of the last of the so-called "pink wave" of leftist leaders who once dominated Latin American politics - is planning his comeback.



Former President Evo Morales gives an interview in Lauca N in the Chapare region of Bolivia, Nov. 21, 2024. (AP)

Few outsiders are allowed inside his stronghold in Bolivia's steamy lowlands, but The Associated Press was invited last month for a look from behind the barricades.

"They don't want me to be the candidate because they know I'll win," Morales told the AP. "We're in a state of total siege, morally, legally and politically."

The four-hour drive to Chapare from Bolivia's third-biggest city of Cochabamba is steep and slick with mist.

A narcotics checkpoint from the U.S.-financed war on drugs that wreaked havoc across this jungle is far less intimidating than the makeshift checkpoints manned by Morales' followers.

Accomplishments

As the van rumbled on, Pedro Cepita, a guide tasked with accompanying the AP, pointed out Morales' accomplishments in the long-stigmatized Chapare - university buildings, cell towers, an airport, a 25,000-seat soccer stadium.

Morales' face adorns murals alongside cult heroes like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. "Evo 2025-2030" slogans blanket brick houses.

"We're in la Tierra de Evo," Cepita said - the Land of Evo.

At sandbagged checkpoints, Morales' supporters - some with batons on their belts - waved the van through only after recognizing Cepita.

Security forces, chased out by Morales' followers, rarely venture here. Door-knocking census workers - even emergency rescuers responding to a deadly landslide last month - said they were harassed and kicked out by Morales' coca union activists.

Earlier this month and after 40 days of negotiations, police began trickling back.

Coca farmers drying their leaves proudly recount how Morales kicked out U.S. anti-drug agents almost in the same breath as they extoll the benefits of the coca plant, cherished by Indigenous communities and maligned by the West as the raw material for cocaine.



This photo taken on Dec. 28, 2024 shows night view of a snow town scenic area in Hailin City, northeast China's Heilongjiang Province. The scenic area has seen a peak in tourism recently with the average number of daily visitors exceeding 20,000. (Xinhua)

North Korean leader Kim vows toughest anti-US policy before Trump takes office

SEOUL, Dec 29, (AP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to implement the "toughest" anti-U.S. policy, state media reported Sunday, less than a month before Donald Trump takes office as U.S. president.

Trump's return to the White House raises prospects for high-profile diplomacy with North Korea. During his first term, Trump met Kim three times for talks on the North's nuclear program. Many experts however say a quick resumption of Kim-Trump summitry is unlikely as Trump would first focus on conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. North Korea's support for Russia's war against Ukraine also poses a challenge to efforts to revive diplomacy, experts say.

During a five-day plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party that ended Friday, Kim called the U.S. "the most reactionary state that regards anti-communism as its invariable state policy." Kim said that the U.S.-South Korea-Japan security partnership is expanding into "a nuclear military bloc for aggression."

"This reality clearly shows to which direction we should advance and what we should do and how," Kim said, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

It said Kim's speech "clarified the strategy

for the toughest anti-U.S. counteraction to be launched aggressively" by North Korea for its long-term national interests and security.

KCNA didn't elaborate on the anti-U.S. strategy. But it said Kim set forth tasks to bolster military capability through defense technology advancements and stressed the need to improve the mental toughness of North Korean soldiers.

The previous meetings between Trump and Kim had not only put an end to their exchanges of fiery rhetoric and threats of destruction, but they developed personal connections. Trump once famously said he and Kim "fell in love." But their talks eventually collapsed in 2019, as they wrangled over U.S.-led sanctions on the North.

North Korea has since sharply increased the pace of its weapons testing activities to build more reliable nuclear missiles targeting the U.S. and its allies. The U.S. and South Korea have responded by expanding their military bilateral drills and also trilateral ones involving Japan, drawing strong rebukes from the North, which views such U.S.-led exercises as invasion rehearsals.

Further complicating efforts to convince North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons in

return for economic and political benefits is its deepening military cooperation with Russia.

According to U.S., Ukrainian and South Korean assessments, North Korea has sent more than 10,000 troops and conventional weapons systems to support Moscow's war against Ukraine. There are concerns that Russia could give North Korea advanced weapons technology in return, including help to build more powerful nuclear missiles.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last week that 3,000 North Korean troops have been killed and wounded in the fighting in Russia's Kursk region. It was the first significant estimate by Ukraine of North Korean casualties since the North Korean troop deployment to Russia began in October.

Russia and China, locked in separate disputes with the U.S., have repeatedly blocked U.S.-led pushes to levy more U.N. sanctions on North Korea despite its repeated missile tests in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Last month, Kim said that his past negotiations with the United States only confirmed Washington's "unchangeable" hostility toward his country and described his nuclear buildup as the only way to counter external threats.

Asia

3 held for drug trafficking in Myanmar: Two Myanmar nationals and a Malaysian national were arrested for drug trafficking in Yangon, along with a large haul of drugs and drug-making devices, the official daily The Global New Light of Myanmar reported on Sunday.

Acting on a tip-off, a joint anti-narcotic task force searched a vehicle in Botataung Township of Yangon region on Dec. 22 and confiscated 238.5 grams of "Happy Water" drug, 27 grams of ketamine, and 400 stimulant tablets along with a suspect, the report said, citing Myanmar Police Force.

Investigation revealed that another suspect was arrested in Tamwe Township of Yangon on the same day, with 129 grams of "Happy Water" drug. A search of his home in Pazundaung Township led to the seizure of 6,125 kg of "Happy Water" drug, 950 grams of ketamine, and 240 ecstasy pills. (Xinhua)

Australian PM announces disaster payments: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has announced emergency disaster payments for people affected by a major bushfire in the country's southeast.

Albanese on Sunday assessed the damage caused by the ongoing bushfire in the Grampians National Park, approximately 230 km west of Melbourne, along with the Premier of the state of Victoria, Jacinta Allan.

Albanese told reporters that federal and state government disaster recovery pay-

ments will be available from Monday for workers and sole traders directly affected by the fire, providing up to 13 weeks worth of income support.

"This has been a devastating fire event," he said. "We live in a country that's got harsh conditions, the truth is they are becoming more frequent and more intense."

The bushfire was ignited by a lightning strike on Dec. 6 and has burnt through over 70,000 hectares of farmland, national park and private property.

No injuries have been reported but at least three homes have been destroyed and a significant number of livestock lost. (Xinhua)

13 convicted Filipino surrogates repatriated: The Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said that 13 Filipino surrogates convicted by a Cambodian court on Dec. 2, 2024 for violating Cambodia's law on the Suppression of Human Trafficking, returned to the Philippines on Sunday.

"All 13 departed Phnom Penh, Cambodia and arrived safely in Manila following the grant of Royal Pardon by His Majesty Preah Bat Samdech Preah Boromeath Norodom Sihamoni on Dec. 26, 2024," the DFA said in a statement.

The royal decree pardoning all the 13 Filipinos paved the way for their release and immediate repatriation, based on the Philippine Embassy's request and the Cambodian government's endorsement. The DFA conveyed the Philippines' appreciation to Cambodia for the humanitarian treatment extended to Filipino mothers throughout the investigative and judicial processes.

"Their safe homecoming is a testament to the longstanding friendly relations between the Philippines and Cambodia and the firm commitment of both governments to

combat human trafficking and other transnational crimes," the DFA added. (Xinhua)

Indonesia detains 4 alleged terror suspects: The Indonesian police detained four suspects on Friday during an operation in West Java, as part of an investigation into alleged terrorist activities, local media reported on Saturday.

This operation, conducted by the National Police's counterterrorism unit, took place in the Majalengka region of the province. Officers reportedly seized several pieces of evidence, including documents and firecrackers.

Indonesia has experienced several terrorist attacks in the past, including the deadly Bali bombings in 2002 and the Makassar cathedral bombing in 2021. In response, the Southeast Asian nation has carried out counter-terrorism operations both domestically and internationally. (Xinhua)

Indonesia aids quake-hit Vanuatu: The Indonesian government has provided emergency assistance to quake-stricken Vanuatu to help the nation carry out emergency relief efforts following the 7.3-magnitude quake on Dec. 17 that killed a dozen people and wounded hundreds of others.

A plane carrying a medical team and 50.5 tons of logistics and food departed from Halim Perdanakusuma Air Force base in East Jakarta on Friday afternoon.

Health Minister Budi Sadikin expressed his expectation that the medical team will begin aiding the victims of the catastrophe upon their arrival in the country. According to him, the team is scheduled to conduct the humanitarian mission for 14 days. (Xinhua)

Market Movements 29-12-2024

Country	Change	Closing pts	Country	Change	Closing pts				
SAUDI	-	Tadawul	+33.28	11,892.75	EGYPT	-	EXG 30	-363.49	29,594.48



Business

Mangaf fire affected investment and warehouse sectors

Kuwaiti real estate liquidity up 13.8% in 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Kuwaiti real estate sector has experienced significant changes and milestones throughout 2024, impacting liquidity, price levels and market dynamics, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The sector's liquidity increased by 13.8 percent in the first 11 months of 2024, reaching 3.07 billion dinars, compared to 2.70 billion dinars during the same period in 2023. Expectations for the year-end liquidity increase are projected to exceed 15 percent.

Among the notable developments this year was the Mangaf fire, which affected the investment and warehouse sectors, alongside the approval of several real estate-related laws and decisions.

A survey conducted by the daily sought insights from real estate professionals regarding the market's outlook for 2025. Key factors influencing the sector's direction include interest rates, government policies and investor sentiment.

Ibrahim Al-Awadhi, head of the Real Estate Union, highlighted that residential real estate prices surged after the COVID-19 pandemic but experienced declines in certain areas in 2023.

In 2024, the sector continued to see a price drop of approximately 4 percent, with areas farther from Kuwait City witnessing the steepest declines. He expects this downward trend to persist into 2025, though at a more gradual pace, especially in areas with speculative pricing in recent years.

Al-Awadhi also predicted a stabilization in interior regions, with a potential rise in prices toward the end of the year.

He emphasized that the local market is driven by psychological factors and government trends rather than solely on concrete data.

For example, issues such as nationality withdrawal have affected market sentiment but not its actual performance. He also noted that the industrial sector, particularly in state-owned properties, faces uncertainty, which may result in declines in 2025, while the investment and commercial sectors could experience slow but steady growth due to limited supply and high prices.

Imad Haidar, head of the Real Estate Brokers Association, shared that 2024 saw a relative calm in all sectors, with price corrections in some residential areas.

He expects the decline in residential prices to continue in 2025, particularly in areas previously affected by speculation.

However, Haidar highlighted an opportunity for increased demand in the investment sector, driven by potential interest rate cuts and the migration of capital from residential to investment properties.

He also outlined several challenges for the sector in 2025, including the implementation of new laws, increased fees and regional geopolitical factors.

Real estate expert Qais Al-Ghanim noted that regional instability could encourage more local investment, pushing liquidity toward the real estate sector, especially if interest rates decrease.

He highlighted the high demand for housing, limited land availability and ongoing construction delays as factors that could stabilize residential property prices.

Al-Ghanim also predicted continued growth in the investment sector, especially if favorable government policies, such as allowing expatriates to own property, are enacted.

Silver stable at \$1,074

Gold declines to \$2,631 amid market volatility

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): Gold prices closed at USD 2,631 per ounce at the end of last week's trading, down 0.85 percent (USD 22) compared to the previous week's close.

A report by Kuwait's Dar Al-Sabaek on Sunday attributed the decline to rising US Treasury yields, subdued holiday trading, and a 0.15 percent drop in the dollar index to 108 points, causing market volatility.

The report highlighted that gold prices were influenced by economic and geopolitical factors, including US political developments, as markets monitor the anticipated return of President-elect Donald Trump to office on January 20 and the potential impact of his economic policies on markets, especially considering the Federal Reserve's expected monetary strategy for 2025.

Despite the recent price drop, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and Middle East ten-

sions have driven demand for gold as a safe haven.

The precious metal remains appealing amid inflation fears and geopolitical uncertainty, with experts predicting prices may surpass USD 3,000 per ounce if central banks continue purchasing gold at a rapid pace.

However, the strength of the US dollar, with its index above 108 points, poses a challenge by making gold more expensive for investors using other currencies.

Expectations of Federal Reserve rate cuts and declining US bond yields could enhance gold's appeal.

Locally, the report noted that 24-karat gold reached KD 26.16 per gram (about USD 80), while 22-karat gold was priced at KD 24 (USD 74) per gram, with silver stabilizing at KD 331 per kilogram (USD 1,074).

An ounce equals 28.349 grams in general measurement and 31.103 grams for precious metals.

Kuwait's markets thrive with boost in sales for New Year celebrations

Ready-made clothing sales jump 60%

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Kuwait's markets are witnessing a resurgence in buying and selling activity, especially in ready-made clothes, gold and gift stores, as well as restaurants and cafés, thanks to the festive atmosphere surrounding the New Year.

During a field tour conducted by Al-Seyassah daily merchants and store owners reported significant increases in sales during this period, which follows a period of stagnation. Local mar-

kets often rely on special occasions and holidays to make up for previous losses.

The ready-made clothing sector has seen a remarkable 60 percent increase in sales, according to Ahmed Dawood, an official at a clothing store.

He explained that clothes imported from China, Turkey and India has contributed to lower prices compared to previous years, helping the recovery of the clothing trade.

The sector, which suffered significant losses during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, is now bouncing back with strong profits.

In the restaurant sector, Haifa, a local resident, noted that the Christmas season is incomplete without daily outings, especially with Kuwait's pleasant weather at this time of year.

Adham Mahrous, a frequent diner, expressed his

satisfaction with the unique dining experience at 'Braith Salem' restaurants, which are particularly vibrant during festive occasions.

Grocery stores are also experiencing a busy period, with Mohammed Hassan, an official at a major store, confirming the surge in activity driven by the Christmas and New Year celebrations.

Meanwhile, Abu Muhand, a gold trader, mentioned that the gold market is also seeing a recovery despite recent price increases.

Sales of gold have risen by 40 percent during the festive season, with gold remaining a cherished commodity during special occasions.

Kuwait's markets are thriving with festive cheer, as various sectors benefit from the seasonal demand, signaling a successful start to the New Year.

Bank of Japan signals caution on policy shift

US sentiment drops as housing market expands

By National Bank of Kuwait
United States

US CB Consumer Confidence

The Conference Board's Consumer Confidence Index, a crucial gauge of consumer sentiment and spending in the U.S. economy, has fallen short of expectations with a reading of 104.7, well below the projected 112.9. This figure not only missed economists' forecasts but also represented a decline from the previous level of 112.8, signaling declining consumer optimism. Since consumer spending constitutes a significant portion of economic activity, this downturn could have broader implications for the economy. As a leading indicator, the Consumer Confidence Index is often used to anticipate future spending patterns, with higher readings typically reflecting optimism that fuels spending and economic growth, while lower readings suggest caution that may reduce economic activity. This unexpected decline may also be interpreted as a bearish signal for the U.S. dollar, given that stronger consumer confidence generally supports the currency by signaling robust economic prospects. In contrast, weaker readings, like the current one, are often viewed as negative for the dollar. The drop in consumer confidence is likely to draw close attention from economists and policymakers, potentially influencing decisions on fiscal and monetary policy aimed at fostering economic stability. Businesses, too, may adjust their strategies to align with shifting consumer sentiment, highlighting the far-reaching impact of this metric. While the lower-than-expected index raises concerns about future consumer spending and economic growth, it is just one of many factors shaping the broader economic landscape, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive view of the economy.

US New Home Sales

In November 2024, sales of new single-family homes in the U.S. increased by 5.9% from the previous month to an annualized rate of 664,000, exceeding market expectations of 666,000. Sales rose sharply

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.0423	1.0382	1.0445	1.0427	1.0200	1.0700	1.0470
GBP	1.2564	1.2498	1.2592	1.2579	1.2400	1.2800	1.2572
JPY	156.46	156.32	158.08	157.82	154.00	159.00	156.14
CHF	0.8917	0.8912	0.9027	0.9017	0.8800	0.9100	0.8927

in the South (13.9%) and the Midwest (17.3%) but declined in the West (-7.5%) and the Northeast (-41%). The median price of new homes was \$402,600, with an average price of \$484,800. The inventory of homes for sale stood at 481,000, representing 8.9 months of supply at the current sales pace.

Richmond Manufacturing Index

The Richmond Manufacturing Index reported an actual value of -10 in December, matching expectations and improving from the previous -14. The Richmond Business Conditions Index remained steady at 14 after a revision. However, the Philadelphia Fed Non-Manufacturing Index recorded a decline, with an actual value of -6, worse than the expected -2.4. Despite minor improvements in manufacturing, the broader U.S. manufacturing and services data remain weak, with signs of deteriorating conditions in non-manufacturing sectors.

Unemployment claims

The latest Initial Jobless Claims data revealed a modest decline in the number of people filing for unemployment benefits for the first time, coming in at 219,000. This figure was lower than both the forecasted 223,000 and the previous reading of 220,000, signaling a slight improvement in the job market. The 4,000 drop from expectations and the 1,000 decline from the prior data point suggest steady progress in employment conditions. As one of the earliest U.S. economic indicators released each week, the Initial Jobless Claims data is closely watched, with lower-than-expected numbers generally seen as a positive sign for the economy. Fewer claims indicate fewer indi-

viduals are seeking unemployment benefits, reflecting a healthier labor market. This improvement is considered bullish for the U.S. dollar, as it points to economic strength and stability. Although the decrease is small, it underscores the resilience of the job market, particularly in the face of a forecasted increase. Moving forward, this data will remain an important metric for assessing the health of the economy and its potential impact on financial markets.

The Greenback surged the week, last trading at 107.998.

Canadian GDP m/m

Canada's economy grew by 0.3% in October 2024, beating expectations of 0.2%, driven by gains in oil and gas extraction (2.4%) and manufacturing (0.3%), following an upward revision of September's growth to 0.2%. However, GDP likely contracted by 0.1% in November, with declines in mining, oil and gas, and transportation offset by growth in accommodation, food services, and real estate. The Bank of Canada recently cut its policy rate by 50 bps to 3.25% to address slower growth, with further gradual cuts expected. Markets see a 72% chance of an additional 25 bps cut in January.

The USD/CAD currency pair last seen trading at 1.4407.

Asia Pacific

Bank of Japan Monetary Policy Meeting Minutes

Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda emphasized the need for careful assessment of economic and financial risks before making any decisions on interest rate hikes, without signaling an imminent policy shift. He highlighted that any adjustments in monetary policy would depend on economic activity,

- US CB Consumer Confidence Index came in at 104.7 vs expectations of 112.9.
- US New Home Sales came in at 664K vs expectations of 666K.
- US Richmond Manufacturing Index came in inline with expectations at -10.
- US Unemployment Claims came in at 219K vs expectations of 223K.
- Canadian GDP m/m came in at 0.3% vs expectations of 0.2%.
- Bank of Japan Signals Caution on Policy Shift, Weakening Yen.

price developments, and financial conditions. Ueda's cautious tone follows a dovish message that surprised markets, weakening the yen by casting doubt on rate hikes in January. While the BOJ kept its benchmark rate at 0.25% in December, Ueda stressed the importance of monitoring data, including spring wage talks and U.S. economic trends, to guide future actions.

The USD/JPY currency pair last seen trading at 157.82.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30810.

CEO praises KNET team

KNET achieves record growth in e-payments

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Mohammed Al-Othman, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Shared Electronic Banking Services Company (KNET), revealed that the company is set to achieve record-breaking growth in the fiscal year ending October 31, 2024, across various electronic payment channels, including points of sale, online payment gateways, the 'Tasdeed' government program and ATMs, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Al-Othman reported a 17 percent increase in the total number of transactions compared to the previous year, with a 6 percent rise in the total transaction values.

Notably, KNET's point-of-sale service, which has become a cornerstone of Kuwait's payment system, recorded a 20 percent increase in transaction volumes and a 5 percent growth in the number of POS devices.

Al-Othman highlighted the company's continued efforts to maintain its leadership in the payment services sector, emphasizing the importance of adopting the latest digital technologies and enhancing infrastructure.

He noted KNET's strategic partnerships with top financial technology firms to further innovate and improve customer experiences.

The company has also witnessed a 13 percent growth in online payment gateway transactions, along with a 7 percent increase in the value of these transactions.

While ATM withdrawals decreased by 14 percent in volume, the value of these transactions fell by 15

percent, indicating a shift towards digital payments.

In discussing the government's electronic payment program, 'Tasdeed,' Al-Othman reported a 4 percent growth in completed transactions.

He also praised the Central Bank of Kuwait's support for KNET, which plays a crucial role in enhancing the payments sector and promoting financial inclusion.

Essam Al-Khashnam, CEO of KNET, emphasized the company's commitment to digital transformation and reducing cash reliance, with a key achievement being the launch of the 'Wam'd' instant payment service. This service allows for quick and secure fund transfers between personal bank accounts.

Al-Khashnam also announced that 90 percent of the old POS devices operating on outdated communication networks had been replaced with modern devices, ensuring better efficiency and security.

Looking ahead, KNET is preparing to launch new services, aiming to expand its customer and merchant base in Kuwait.

Al-Khashnam concluded by praising the company's employees for their contributions to its success and the Board of Directors for their unwavering support.

KNET, founded in 1992, is a leading Kuwaiti company in electronic payment services, linking local banking systems to provide efficient, secure and innovative payment solutions across the country, aiming to reduce reliance on cash transactions.

Insurance premiums surge

Red Sea shipping traffic decreases by 50 percent

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The year 2024 saw significant disruptions in global shipping, primarily due to the escalation of maritime warfare, especially in the Red Sea, where the Yemeni Houthi group carried out a series of attacks, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

These actions led to a sharp increase in insurance premiums and a reduction in shipping traffic through the region.

The Houthi group's hijacking of the Galaxy Leader in October 2023, which had an insurance bill of \$65 million, was a key event.

The attacks also caused a 50 percent drop in Red Sea traffic, with shipping companies opting to re-route via the Cape of Good Hope.

In response, insurance rates for vessels in the region surged, with Gallagher Insurance Services noting that average market rates had risen dramatically, from 0.02-0.03 percent pre-conflict to around 0.75 percent in February 2024.

Following further attacks, including the sinking of the cargo ship Rubymar, these rates rose even higher.

This has made it increasingly difficult to secure insurance for ships bound for the UK, US and Israel, due to the continued threat of Houthi missile attacks.

As we move into 2025, the outlook for the region remains uncertain, with expectations of continued Houthi activity and an ongoing Israeli military presence in Gaza.

Global energy consumption up 2% in 2023, with renewables and oil leading

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: According to Al-Shall's report, the 2024 issue of the World Energy Report, published by the Energy Institute (formerly British Petroleum BP), reveals a 2.0 percent increase in global energy consumption in 2023, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The key components of global energy consumption saw growth, with renewable energy up by 12.0 percent, oil by 2.6 percent, nuclear energy by 1.8 percent, coal by 1.6 percent and a slight increase of 0.03 percent in natural gas consumption. However, hydropower consumption decreased by 2.3 percent.

The Middle East accounted for 31.5 percent of global oil production in 2023, producing approximately 30.362 million barrels per day of the world's total 96.376 million barrels.

Saudi Arabia led the region with an 11.8 percent share of global production, followed by Iran (4.8 percent), Iraq (4.5 percent), the UAE (4.1 percent) and Kuwait (3.0 percent).

North America produced 28.1 percent of global oil (with the USA contributing 20.1 percent), while the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) produced 14.4 percent (Russia contributing 11.5 percent).

Other regions, such as South and Central America, Asia-Pacific, Africa and Europe, had lower production shares, with Europe contributing only 3.3 percent and Norway's share at 2.1 percent.

In terms of consumption, Asia-Pacific led the world with 38.0 percent of oil consumption, driven by China (16.5 percent), India (5.4 percent), Japan (3.4 percent) and South Korea (2.8 percent). North America consumed 23.2 percent,

with the USA responsible for 18.9 percent, while Europe and the CIS together consumed 18.5 percent, with Russia accounting for 3.6 percent.

When it comes to natural gas, North America produces 31.1 percent of global supply and consumes 27.5 percent, less than its production.

Europe and the CIS consume 26.5 percent, with Asia-Pacific consuming 23.3 percent, but only producing 17.0 percent, indicating that natural gas consumption remains concentrated in production regions, unlike oil.

Asia-Pacific dominates coal production with 79.0 percent of global output (China alone produces 51.8 percent) and it also leads in consumption with 82.7 percent, driven by China's consumption of 56.0 percent. Europe and the CIS produce 11.0 percent of global coal and North America produces 6.4 percent. Consumption in North America stands at 5.4 percent.

Driving engagement, collaborations, and building partnerships to make a long-lasting impact

stc creates lasting contributions in the community by leading the way in sustainable corporate social responsibility

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: stc has consistently demonstrated its commitment to supporting the community through its comprehensive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program, which was further strengthened this year with its Sustainability Program. As a pioneer in Kuwait's telecom and digital industries, stc has been a catalyst for positive change by implementing or participating in initiatives within the key areas of education, environmental sustainability, sports, youth empowerment, and entrepreneurship. Through these activities and initiatives, stc aimed to create lasting contributions for the community, while also aligning with the Company's strategic focus on enabling digital transformation.

Danah AlJasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "Over the years, stc broadened its CSR framework to include various sub-programs that have played a role in shaping the Company's commitment to its key pillars. Initiatives such as 'Weyak', the educational 'upgrade' initiative, and 'Because We Care' have now taken on a more prominent role under the framework, with annual recurring initiatives launched under their respective umbrellas."

In 2024, stc signed several strategic partnerships with various local institutions to create a wider and more positive impact within the community. These partnerships came in addition to the different initiatives launched by stc annually, as we all the Company's CSR agenda for the year. Under each partnership, stc contributed in different ways to the core pillars defined under its CSR framework. This enabled the Company to support the youth, as well as segments in the community in unique ways alongside trusted partners."

Aside from its partnerships and collaborations, stc launched its own unique initiatives focused on addressing and highlighting key topics that impact the community. The initiatives, in alignment with the Company's CSR pillars, aimed to either engage with the community or the Company's employees in different positive ways. One key subject that stc strongly stands by is empowering the youth and supporting the younger generation. In launching its own initiatives under this category, stc held its annual programs for students, while introducing various educational platforms. These efforts, as well as other activities implemented by stc, have significantly contributed to strengthening the social fabric and fostering unity across diverse segments of Kuwait's society.

Sustainability Program - Small Move, Big Impact
With a newfound outlook on sustainable practices, stc announced its Sustainability Program, an annual initiative that reinforces the Company's commitment to sustainability across the ESG pillars. Under this program, stc implemented a series of strategic initiatives to enhance its carbon footprint and promote eco-friendly practices through community-driven projects focused on education, youth empowerment, and entrepreneurship. Additionally, stc worked closely with government bodies and regulatory agencies to ensure compliance with the highest governance standards, further embedding transparency, accountability, and ethical business practices into its operations. Through this comprehensive approach, the Sustainability Program reflects stc's long-term vision of integrating sustainability into every aspect of its business, creating a positive and lasting impact on society and the environment.

A highlight of the 'Sustainability Program' was the launch of the first standalone Sustainability Report in line with our commitment to transparency and progress. This milestone reflects our dedication to integrating sustainable practices across all aspects of our business while creating long-term value for our stakeholders.

As part of the campaign, stc collaborated with the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy (MEW), through an awareness-based social media campaign highlighting the importance of conserving water and electricity.

Another initiative was the Partnership with Tadwire to launch E-waste recycling initiative. Supported by the Kuwait National SME Fund, Tadwire complemented stc's sustainability initiative for the year 2024, focusing on ways to reduce the waste footprint in its offices, operations, and the community.

stc partnered with SEEDs by sponsoring Bloom Market, the first market dedicated to promoting sustainable lifestyle and entertainment in Kuwait, in addition to launching the Plastic Free July initiative, which included 17 sustainable Kuwaiti projects. All vendors in the market were committed to not using plastic, and participants ranged from recycled furniture stores to eco-friendly daily consumer goods and fashion clothing.

As part of a series of initiatives, stc announced its strategic sponsorship of the sustainability forum organized by the Kuwait Transparency Society. The forum, bearing the slogan, "Governance and environmental sustainability: Effective methods and practices", was held at the National Library Theater under the patronage of H.E. Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila, Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs. Through this program, the Company aimed to raise awareness on various issues, while adopting long-term sustainable practices that leave a positive impact on the community and future generations.

stc also collaborated with the Ministry of Municipality to launch a significant cleaning campaign in the Al Mutlaa desert area. With the spirit of environmental consciousness and community service in mind, employees were invited to participate in the clean-up, where they were presented with an opportunity to actively contribute to the preservation of the environment.

Celebrating Kuwait in a national TVC
In celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation Days, stc launched its TVC concept, titled "الكويتي مازال" - which blended modernity and tradition through a focus on the importance of progression and sustainability in the community. The production featured several influential figures that have played a role in empowering the community, especially the younger generation. Following its long-standing commitment to sustainability, coupled with its extensive corporate social responsibility (CSR) program, the TVC aimed to reflect the values that stc stands by along with the importance of these activities in nurturing and empowering entrepreneurs, innovators, and the younger generation.

The concept and execution of the production was done by Together Production, with Sine Agency as the production house. The production featured the well-known singer Bader Al-Shaebi, lyricist and composer Ali Bougheith, under the direction of Shamlan Al-Nassar and the director of photography Amin Shamsuddin.

Youssef Al-Omran, also known as "Bu Jarrah", a well-known advocate for sustainability, as well as other influencers and supporters featured in the production alongside the Kuwaiti award-winning inventor Jenan Al Shehab, along with media influencers Alia Ahmad, Jenan Al Zaid and Ali Najm were featured in the TVC considering their roles as influencers who encourage the importance of knowledge, achievements, and other aspects that drive progression and innovation.

'With good, we go further'
During the Holy Month of Ramadan, stc launched its "With good, we go further" campaign, which consisted of different activities and programs designed to emphasize the importance of performing good deeds for the greater good of the community. The approach behind the "With good, we go further" campaign was to show participants and the public the trickle effect of doing good in the community, and how the impact can grow towards a positive sustainable future. stc, with the support of its various partners, launched initiatives that aimed to spread goodness in the community in ways that positively impact members of the community. These initiatives came in the form of distributing meals, supporting worshippers during Ramadan, spreading awareness on various issues, and engaging with the community.

The initiatives launched during the campaign included partnering with the Zajel Volunteer Team to organize various activities including the largest Futoor with over 3,000 meals distributed in Mubarakiya in collaboration with Kuwait Municipality, Gastronomia, and Jabez Kuwait. This came in addition to distributing Eid gifts at the Zajel Expo to families in need, stc also collaborated with Flare Fitness to host the "Your Calories = internet" event, as well as collaborating with the Aspire Kids Club to distribute iftar meals and hold



Danah AlJasem and Mohammed Alrashed in the middle of the work teams during the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding.



The company's executive management with the winners of the inspireU Kuwait program participating in the graduation ceremony.



Eng. Aldharrab with Maryam Al-Enezi, averaging the outstanding students.



A group photo of Sheikh Omar Al Damkhi with the competition participants and the stc team.



Group photo of the winners at the closing ceremony of the competition.



Participation of Danah AlJasem and officials of the Private Schools Education Department in honoring outstanding students.



Nexus



stc ambassadors and public relations team are present to participate in the event.



Group photo of all winners and organizers.



Group photo of participants in stc environmental cleaning campaign.



The largest Iftar table in Mubarakiya to serve more than 3,000 fasting people.

workshops to assist children in memorizing the Holy Quran. On the community front, stc participated in various initiatives such as the Al Qabas 2024 Padel Tournament where the Company was a sponsor for the 3rd year in a row, stc also hosted a Quran memorization contest in collaboration with the Imam of Grand Mosque Sheikh Omar Al Damkhi. During the Qiyam prayers in the last ten days of Ramadan, a special service for worshippers was organized by stc during the last 10 days of Ramadan at different mosques in Kuwait. Additionally, stc hosted several Girgean celebrations within the different events it participated in as part of its Ramadan celebrations for the youth.

These initiatives, as well as other implemented under the "With good, we go further" theme aimed to diversify stc's range of activities, programs, and sponsorships, positively aligning with the core objectives behind the Company's CSR and sustainability frameworks.

'Weyak' - Empowering Kuwaiti youth while nurturing the entrepreneurial ecosystem within the community
AlJasem added, "The 'Weyak' initiative remained to be an integral part of stc's CSR efforts in 2024, with innovative approaches to inspiring and empowering Kuwaiti youth while nurturing the entrepreneurial ecosystem within the community. Designed to support the aspirations of young innovators, startups, and SMEs, 'Weyak' provided tools and resources needed to either bring ambitious ideas to life or support existing concepts in thriving. With a special focus on blending creativity with business skills, the various programs under the initiative helped individuals achieve their set out objectives while contributing to the progression of Kuwait's economy."

With its objectives set on supporting SMEs in Kuwait, stc's 'Weyak' initiative engaged with aspiring entrepreneurs throughout various activities and programs. The Company organized several gatherings for entrepreneurs and SMEs as part

of its strategic focus on empowering the private sector to drive economic growth and societal advancement. The interactive experience enabled like minded individuals to share their experiences and unique journeys in starting their own businesses, while discussing the entrepreneurial landscape in Kuwait.

Aside from that, stc strengthened its strategic partnership with Flare Fitness by sponsoring the 'Flare Festival' for the 5th consecutive year. Flare Festival is considered one of the largest events of its kind in Kuwait and this year welcomed over 3,500 registered competitors across all tournament events, with a total of over 8,000 attendees over the course of three days.

stc also organized its first gathering for Kuwaiti female photographers coinciding with 'World Photography Day', with a workshop conducted by Kuwaiti photographer, Haya Buqam-maz. The event brought together 45 talented female photographers to discuss various styles of capturing photographs

stc organized several workshops that covered important entrepreneurial topics to support entrepreneurs and start-ups in Kuwait. Through 'weyak' program and workshops, stc seeks to support and equip motivated business leaders with the knowledge and tools they need to succeed and thrive.

The 'Weyak' initiative reflects stc's deep commitment to building a thriving economy for young entrepreneurs and innovators. The initiative is rooted in the belief that Kuwait's future prosperity depends on empowering its youth and supporting the entrepreneurial ecosystem in line with Kuwait Vision 2035. Over the years, stc made this a priority within its CSR strategy, ensuring that its initiatives resonate with this vision. In 2024, the Company continued to push boundaries by introducing innovative ideas and platforms, assisting individuals and businesses navigate and benefit from the rapidly evolving digital world.

'upgrade' - focusing on supporting educational programs and platforms that aim to spread knowledge to

members of the community

Commenting on the educational 'upgrade' initiative, Al-Jasem said, "Education remains one of the key pillars of stc's CSR framework, especially in 2024. Since the launch of its educational 'upgrade' initiative, stc focused on supporting educational programs and platforms that aim to uplift the education sector while spreading knowledge to members of the community. Several initiatives were launched throughout the year under the umbrella of the educational 'upgrade' initiative, each serving a different purpose. This focus mirrors stc's understanding of the nature of academic excellence in building a sustainable future."

Throughout the year, stc formed strategic partnerships with various institutions such as the National Union of Kuwait Students (NUKS) - Kuwait University Branch, Kuwait College for Science and Technology (KCST), Kuwait Technical College (KTECH), and the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC). The strategic partnerships focused on launching and sponsoring different programs that aimed to enhance the accessibility to educational platforms that can assist students and individuals in learning more about different subjects. Some of the programs stc participated in following the partnerships included the TechNext program launched by KTECH which was designed to channel their creativity and innovation within the field of technology. Another program was KTECH's coding competition that witnessed the participation of over 30 public high schools where students had to put their problem solving and python programming skills to use. stc also sponsored the Journey in Kuwait robotics competition under its strategic partnership with SACGC. The "Journey in Kuwait" competition focused on the exciting world of robotics, programming, and artificial intelligence (AI), and was for children between the ages of 7 and 10 years old.

Other than the programs stc participated in as part of the Memorandum of Understandings (MoU) that it formed with various institutions, the Company also participated in several honoring ceremonies for academic excellence. stc honored top performing high school students at stc's headquarters in Olympia Tower which was attended by Maryam Al-Enezi, Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Development & Activities Sector at the Ministry of Education, and stc executives including Eng. Muataz Aldharrab, CEO of stc. The Company also honored 130 exceptional students with physical disabilities for the 3rd consecutive year in the presence of Mansour Al-Dhaffri, Assistant Undersecretary for Special and Specific Education, Mahmoud Abdel-Rida, acting Director of Special Education Schools Administration and the presence of several GCC ambassadors in Kuwait. 60 Kuwait University students who displayed academic excellence in the College of Arts were also celebrated by stc during 2024.

Through a range of impactful programs and activities in 2024, the educational 'upgrade' initiative reinforced stc's dedication to cultivating a society rooted in knowledge and awareness. The activities carried out under the initiative align with the Company's broader vision of social responsibility, addressing immediate community needs while creating a positive long-term impact on the younger generation.

'Because we care' - to reinforce our commitment towards the community

As for stc's commitment to the environment and the community, AlJasem stated, "Environmental preservation, sustainable practices, and personal wellness are all key themes under stc's 'Because we care' initiative. Throughout 2024, stc launched and participated in numerous campaigns that aimed to spread awareness on various health issues and environmental causes that impact the community."

Under the 'Because we care' initiative, stc carried out its annual health initiatives related to Blood Donation, Breast Cancer and Prostate Cancer. The Company collaborated with various entities to promote and raise awareness on these health issues and the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

stc welcomed arriving Hejaj at Kuwait International Airport's Terminal 4 from Mecca for the 3rd year in a row, in collaboration with the Kuwait International Airport and the Directorate General for Civil Aviation and Incheon Korea for Airports Services- T4.

In celebration of Eid Al Adha, stc organized a visit to Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Hospital in the presence of Gergasha Characters and stc Sofara'a Team from all departments to distribute gifts and bring joy to the children who are seeking medical needs.

As part of stc's ongoing commitment to foster health and wellbeing across the community and in collaboration with the Kuwait Oncology Association and other strategic partners, the Company launched its annual breast cancer awareness campaign called, "Your Awareness protects you" in line with Breast Cancer Awareness Month to promote early detection and prevention

The activities launched under stc's 'Because we care' initiative were designed to promote community wellbeing while raising awareness about environmental, health and societal issues. To create a lasting positive impact, stc strongly believes in the power of engaging with the community by providing them with platforms to come together and do good for the community. The activities organized under the initiative also align closely with the stc's broader strategy to enhance the quality of life and lifestyle choices for its customers.

11th intake of 'inspireU' entrepreneur accelerator

In collaboration with inspireU from stc group, this year witnessed the launch of the 2nd take of the inspireU Program in Kuwait, an entrepreneurial state-of-the-art incubator and accelerator designed to support startups and SMEs in Kuwait which focused on several areas including fintech, cybersecurity, Artificial Intelligence (AI), IoT, and online gaming. The program aims to equip entrepreneurs with the tools and guidance needed to turn their ideas into successful projects, fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship to create new job opportunities and enhance sustainable growth, in line with stc's vision for enabling digital transformation.

And by the end of 2024, stc celebrated the graduates of the "inspireU" program in a graduation ceremony held by stc Group in its HQ in Riyadh that recognized 44 businesses and startups that completed the inspireU program, including 5 startups from Kuwait. This marked the successful conclusion of the program's 10th and 11th intakes, as well as the first season of the advanced inspireU program.

A lasting positive impact

As stc looks ahead, the Company remains deeply committed to creating a positive and lasting impact on the community through its comprehensive CSR and sustainability programs. These initiatives, rooted in stc's core values, aim to empower individuals, drive social and economic progress, and foster environmental stewardship. By addressing immediate community needs while laying the groundwork for long-term benefits, stc continues to build a legacy of positive change that resonates across Kuwait.

AlJasem concluded, "The progress we have made through our CSR and sustainability programs, as well as our collaborations with various institutions in Kuwait, align with our overall mission to drive positive and lasting change in the community. We are grateful for the opportunities we have had to contribute meaningfully to the lives of individuals and society as a whole. Moving forward, we aim to build on these achievements by strengthening our partnerships and exploring new ways to address the evolving needs of our community, ensuring a brighter and more sustainable future for generations to come."

Looking ahead, stc envisions deepening its role as a responsible corporate citizen by further integrating sustainability into its core business strategy and operation. Having set its long-term strategic goals, stc will continue to build strategic partnerships with local and international organizations, adding value to its programs through wider reach and exposure to remain impactful and relevant. The Company will also continue focusing on expanding its environmental initiatives, with plans to launch new projects that contribute to Kuwait's sustainability goals. By aligning its CSR and Sustainability programs with both national and global objectives, stc reaffirms its commitment to creating lasting, positive change across the community and driving sustainable development for future generations.

BUSINESS



Mrs. Kholoud AlFeeli from Burgan Bank with Mr. Ali Al Marri, Ms. Fatema Hayat and Mr. Khalil Naddoum from the Kuwait Olympic Committee



H.E. Sheikh Hamoud Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Governor of Al Ahmadi inaugurating the exhibition



Mr. Andrew Christopher Singh, Group Chief Risk Officer, and Dr. Ali Abdulhamid Al Kazimi, Chief Information Security Officer – Group Risk Management at Burgan Bank, receiving an honorary shield for their participation.



Breast Cancer awareness October 2024



A group photo of the Burgan Bank and Flare Fitness teams



H.E. Sheikh Hamoud Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Governor of Al Ahmadi and Mrs. Kholoud AlFeeli, Deputy General Manager – Corporate Communications at Burgan Bank with participants

Burgan Bank's 2024 CSR: A year of diverse and innovative programs

Burgan Bank reinforces its social responsibility leadership with extensive support for Kuwaiti society

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Burgan Bank upheld its leadership position throughout 2024 on the social responsibility front with its continued efforts to support the Kuwaiti society across various fields. In addition to its pivotal role in the banking sector, Burgan remains committed to empowering youth, supporting women, enhancing education and health sectors, advancing the sports, arts, and cultural scenes, as well as supporting community and humanitarian initiatives across Kuwait.

In adherence to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles, Burgan Bank strives to achieve sustainable development through a wide range of innovative initiatives and programs in line with its slogan "Driven By You".

"Driven By You" is not merely a slogan but a work philosophy that manifests in Burgan Bank's social responsibility achievements for 2024," said Ms. Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Senior Manager – Corporate and CSR Communications at Burgan Bank. "Throughout the year, the Bank reinforced its role as a key partner in building a better future for its community and a major contributor to the development of the cultural and institutional infrastructure, thus charting new horizons for growth and development."

Al-Najadah added: "Burgan Bank's initiatives included a wide range of diverse activities and events, covering several areas such as youth support, education, women's empowerment, contributing to the development of the sports and health sectors, in addition to supporting community and humanitarian initiatives, financial awareness, and supporting national projects."

Sponsoring sports events and supporting Kuwaiti Champions

Throughout 2024, and under the umbrella of its efforts to contribute to Kuwait's strategy for sustainable development, Burgan Bank sponsored various sporting events and activities that served to encourage a healthy lifestyle in Kuwait. In addition, the Bank signed a strategic partnership with the Kuwait Olympic Committee (KOC) to sponsor the cohort of champions who represented Kuwait at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. This agreement came as an extension of the long-standing cooperation between Burgan Bank and KOC.

Unlike traditional sponsorship of Olympians, this partnership adopted a unique vision that spanned two years of diligent preparations with Burgan Bank supporting the Kuwaiti champions in their mission to reach the Olympic Games in Paris. It was a joint journey that reflected Burgan's commitment to supporting national athletes throughout their careers.

As part of the Olympic Athletes Preparation Program, Burgan Bank has sponsored several athletes on Kuwait's Olympic Team throughout their sports careers as well as in many regional and international competitions. The Kuwaiti delegation to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games consisted of nine athletes who competed in shooting, athletics, sailing, rowing, swimming, and fencing: Amal Al Roumi, Ameena Shah, Lara Dashti, Soaad Al-Faqan, Khaled Al-Mudhaf, Mohammad Al-Daihani, Mohammad Zubaid, Yousef Al-Shamlan, and Yaqoub Al-Youha.

Other sponsorships included Salwa Al-Sabah Sport Club's women's handball and volleyball teams during the current season, as part of its ongoing efforts to support the sports sector in Kuwait and enhance national talents. In addition, Burgan Bank sponsored the Kuwait Equestrian Fed-



Ms. Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Senior Manager – Corporate and CSR Communications at Burgan Bank



Burgan employees donating blood as part of this year's campaign



Sheikha Naima Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Mrs. Kholoud Rida AlFeeli, and Ms. Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah in a group photo with the women's team at Salwa Al-Sabah Sport Club

eration (KEF) Tour for the 2023/2024 season's endurance competition. This sponsorship, considered the most prominent in the local sports arena for the third year in a row, reflects the Bank's commitment to promoting the sports culture in Kuwait as part of its comprehensive social responsibility program and its commitment to supporting the development and growth of society.

In addition, Burgan Bank extended its strategic sponsorship for the second consecutive year, to the ninth edition of Flare Festival, Kuwait's largest fitness competition. Moreover, the Bank sponsored Kuwaiti students' participation in a football match between the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England, hosted by the Bristol Rovers Football Academy at Memorial Stadium.

Burgan Bank also sponsored the unique fitness experience "The Workout" in partnership with Fohgah App and coach Salah Al-Shatti, upholding its strategic efforts to promote the culture of sports and health awareness in Kuwait.

Furthermore, the Bank sponsored the inaugural International Padel Tournament, for both men and women, held on October 6-8 October 2024 at the Ocean Padel Academy courts. The championship was organized by the Kuwait Scouts Association in cooperation with the Arab Scout Organization, with high-level participation from Gulf and Arab countries.

Financial awareness

As part of its efforts to raise public awareness of financial literacy and safe banking practices, under the umbrella of its continued support of the national banking awareness campaign, Burgan Bank concluded its sponsorship and participation in the fifth edition of the Gulf Cy-

bersecurity Challenges Conference and Exhibition.

In light of the significant increase in financial fraud and the Ministry of Interior's success in handling many fraud reports since the establishment and operation of the virtual room to combat fraud, Burgan Bank renewed its efforts to urge its customers to follow the best banking practices and the necessary measures to avoid falling victim to financial fraud.

The Bank also participated in the virtual room to combat fraud (Aman) – established by the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) under the supervision of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), with representatives from all local banks in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and the Public Prosecution – to tackle electronic financial fraud reports around the clock, seven days a week.

As part of its support for the "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya) campaign, Burgan Bank continued to raise financial literacy and banking awareness by regularly sharing practical advice and clear instructions on the safest use of banking products and services, especially during high-spending seasons, such as travel seasons and official holidays, when financial fraud escalates.

Burgan Bank also delivered numerous workshops throughout the year on banking awareness and financial literacy at different schools and universities as well as events, whereby Burgan representatives discussed the latest fraud and scamming trends.

As part of its active contribution to the campaign during the summer vacation, Burgan Bank published several awareness messages on its website and across its various social media accounts.

Among the Bank's latest contributions to Diraya was a series of

videos published by the Bank while accompanying the Kuwaiti delegation at the Paris 2024 Olympics, as well as a series of awareness messages published in conjunction with the back-to-school season and its accompanying financial requirements. With each contribution, Burgan redirects public awareness to the most prominent fraudulent operations and common electronic hacking attempts, further providing security guidelines for customers to protect their personal information, bank accounts, and valuable savings.

Community and humanitarian initiatives

In line with its dedicated social responsibility program and as part of its continuous support for its community, Burgan Bank, under the auspices and in the presence of His Excellency Sheikh Humoud Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Governor of Al Ahmadi, extended its support to the Kuwait Society for the Handicapped by donating essential equipment and supplies to the association's educational center in Al Ahmadi.

Burgan Bank also sponsored the annual "Art's Night" event organized by the American United School (AUS) in Kuwait for teachers, students, and their families, as part of its continuous efforts to support, empower, and develop Kuwaiti students. In addition, the Bank sponsored AUS's annual National and Liberation Day celebrations held on the school's premises. This day-long carnival was attended by approximately 1,500 participants, including employees, students, and their families, reflecting the essence of Kuwaiti society.

Cooperation with the Kuwait Food and Relief Bank

In cooperation with the Kuwait Food and Relief Bank and as part

vention.

Arts and cultural initiatives

As part of its ongoing efforts to advance Kuwait's arts and entertainment sector, and in line with its comprehensive social responsibility program, Burgan Bank dedicated plenty of its resources in 2024 to elevating the domestic culture scene by sponsoring various culture and live entertainment events and activities.

In celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation Day, Burgan Bank launched the new "Beladona Helwa" (Our Country is Beautiful) video clip, capturing Kuwaitis' deep-rooted love for their homeland. The Bank also announced reviving the highly celebrated classic play "Al-Sindbad Al-Bahri" in a new guise, building on the play's original glory as a Kuwaiti cultural icon whose social value and national meanings have been engraved in the hearts of generations.

The Bank also launched the Eid Al-Fitr "Wain Al Ayadi, Middo Al 'Ayadi" TVC, performed by the talented artist Bader Al-Shuaibi and a distinguished group of children to promote the culture of saving in line with the Diraya banking awareness campaign. The song was featured in the "Abracadabra 2" show, garnering wide acclaim from the audience and notable views on various social media channels.

Following the great success of its distinguished events, Burgan Bank continued its partnership with Free Jabriya Productions for the second consecutive year, sponsoring several shows, including "Graish", an immersive live performance that encapsulates the authentic Kuwaiti Ramadan experience, reenacting staple TV shows, songs, and situations that draw a timeline of the Ramadan traditions throughout the past decades.

Burgan Bank also sponsored "Macintosh" – a unique live music and performance extravaganza, which took place at the Arena Kuwait, with an audience of approximately 10,000 viewers. The show, directed by Jassim Al-Qames and Maryam Al-Khatrash, brought together a group of distinguished Kuwaiti artists, including Ayed, Bader Al-Shuaibi, Daffy, Rahaf, Hamad Al-Amari, and Khaled Al-Mulla, with the accompaniment of an orchestra of 50 talented musicians led by Kuwaiti maestro Ahmad Al-Oud.

Burgan Bank concluded its partnership with Free Jabriya by sponsoring "Feykom Tarab? Sukkar Zeyada", featuring the Kuwaiti favorite, Miami Band, which spanned five nights of memorable live entertainment and revived nostalgia. The show follows the success of the first edition "Feykom Tarab? A Night with Miami Band", bringing a bigger flare and live entertainment prowess to the stage and taking the audience on an unforgettable journey into the world of Miami Band. The concert, held at the Arena Kuwait, was attended by a multi-generational audience of more than 23,000 Miami Band fans.

As part of its unwavering commitment to its comprehensive social responsibility program and its commitment to providing the best banking experience for private banking customers, Burgan Bank sponsored the "Umm Kulthum with Marwa Nagy" concert in partnership with the National Creative Industries Group (NCIG).

In addition, Burgan Bank sponsored the FERYA culinary experience by Fohgah App, Bader Al-Shatti and Jassim Al-Jarki, which took place over two days at Assima Mall, witnessing the participation of 2,000 food enthusiasts.

ABK signs agreement with DLD as escrow account trustee

First Kuwaiti Gulf bank to offer this service to customers in the UAE



Osamah Al Hamdani and Mohammed Al-Badwawi during the signing of the agreement.



Abdulla AlSumait — Acting Group Chief Executive Officer



Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait and Dubai Land Department officials during the announcement of the agreement.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Real Estate Regulatory Agency (RERA), the regulatory arm of Dubai Land Department (DLD), has appointed Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK-UAE) as an escrow account trustee, making it the first Kuwaiti Gulf bank to offer this service to customers in the UAE.

This Real Estate Escrow Account service enables developers to collect amounts from buyers of real estate units sold off-plan or from project financiers to a designated and regulated escrow account with ABK. This mechanism safeguards the interest of all parties involved, fostering greater confidence and ensuring the underlying financial transactions are conducted securely and transparently, with the highest service standards.

This appointment underscores the confidence that the Bank has gained in the UAE through its excellent service quality, adherence to regulatory standards and continuous efforts to enhance its competitive edge and diversify its offerings to cater for all customer segments while maintaining the highest standards of quality and reliability.

The agreement was signed during an inaugural ceremony attended by key representatives, including Mohammed Al-

Badwawi, Acting CEO of the Dubai Real Estate Regulatory Agency (RERA) at Dubai Land Department; Osamah Al Hamdani, Deputy CEO and General Manager of Wholesale Banking at ABK-UAE; and other key representatives.

On this occasion, Abdulla Al-Sumait, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at ABK, stated, "This new agreement underscores our unwavering commitment to strengthening our presence in the United Arab Emirates and delivering exceptional value to our customers by adhering to the highest service standards in the banking industry."

He further emphasized that ABK is fully prepared to establish additional partnerships with key stakeholders in the UAE to capitalize on the robust growth across various sectors, particularly the real estate market, which has experienced remarkable activity in the recent years."

The new agreement reflects our ongoing commitment to enhancing our operations in the United Arab Emirates and providing added value to our customers while meeting their needs according to the highest service standards in the banking industry."

AlSumait confirmed that ABK is fully prepared to sign more agreements with the responsible entities in the United Arab Emirates to benefit from the growth being witnessed in the Emirati market across various sectors, par-

■ **Abdulla AlSumait:**
The new agreement reflects our ongoing commitment to enhancing our operations in the United Arab Emirates.

■ **Mohammed Al-Badwawi:**
We reaffirm our commitment to involving financial institutions in implementing initiatives that enhance transparency and elevate the quality of services.

■ **Osamah Al Hamdani:**
This new agreement reflects our continued commitment to the UAE.

ticularly in the real estate sector, which has seen significant activity in recent years.

Al-Badwawi said, "The Real Estate Escrow Account is one of the fundamental tools that safeguard investors' rights and bolster confidence in Dubai's real estate market. It ensures the financial transactions of off-plan projects are regulated by depositing funds collected from buyers or financiers into a dedicated bank account for each project. This guarantees that these funds are used solely for construction and development phases in accordance with approved legislation."

He added, "Dubai Land Department remains committed to strengthening its partnerships with the private sector, recognising the essential role these collaborations play in supporting the sustainability and growth of the

real estate sector. Our collaboration with ABK-UAE reflects our dedication to involving financial institutions in implementing initiatives that enhance transparency and elevate service quality. This partnership also translates our strategy to strengthen the real estate investment environment, supporting Dubai's ambitions and aligning with the vision of our wise leadership."

On his part, Al-Hamdani said, "The new agreement reflects the continued success of ABK in the UAE market, the exceptional capabilities of our team, and our dedication to introducing new products and services that meet the dynamic demands of the UAE banking industry while addressing the aspirations of both individual and corporate customers."

Al Hamdani further highlighted that ABK-UAE's appointment follows the Bank's recent initiatives to enhance service quality, including the launch of mortgage loans for individuals and corporate services desk in the UAE. These steps position ABK-UAE as one of the few Real Estate Escrow agents, reaffirming its commitment to supporting the UAE's rapidly growing real estate sector.

Al Hamdani continued that this appointment strengthens ABK-UAE's role as a reliable and forward-thinking partner in the UAE banking sector, aligning with Dubai's Vision 2030 for a transparent and investor-friendly environment.



New Year greeting

ABK announces official closure days on the occasion of New Year 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) extends its greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, as well as the government, people, and residents of Kuwait on the occasion of the New Year 2025.

ABK discloses that its branches will be closed Wednesday 1 and Thursday 2 January 2025, to resume operations on Sunday, 5 Janu-

ary 2025. During this time, ABK's branch in Al Khiran Mall will be open to serve customers from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

The Bank has also confirmed its full operational readiness to serve customers 24/7 via its various digital platforms throughout the holiday.

This includes Online Banking via eahli.com, Mobile Banking through the ABK app, as well as the Bank's call center Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899 and its ATM network.

Ankara to expand train network

Turkish leader signals more interest rate cuts in 2025

ANKARA, Dec 29, (Xinhua): Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan confirmed on Saturday that additional policy rate cuts are expected in 2025, following the central bank's recent decision to reduce its key interest rate by 250 basis points to 47.5 percent.

"We will absolutely begin lowering interest rates. The year 2025 will be a turning point for this effort," Erdogan said during a meeting with members of his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Bursa, a city in northwestern Türkiye.

Erdogan emphasized that reducing interest rates would help curb inflation, stating, "Interest rates will decrease, which in turn will reduce inflation. Taking this step is now indispensable for us."

He further outlined that the main objective of the government's economic program is to quickly address the welfare losses suffered by citizens due to exchange rate fluctuations and inflation. "The priority of the program we are implementing is to control inflation," he added.

On Thursday, Türkiye's central bank implemented its first rate cut in nearly two years, lowering its benchmark interest rate by 250 basis points to 47.5 percent. The bank cited slowing inflation as the primary rationale for the decision.

The country has faced persistently high inflation in recent years, prompting a series of aggressive rate hikes by

the central bank, which raised its policy rate by a cumulative 4,150 basis points since mid-2023.

As a result of these disinflationary measures, Türkiye has managed to reduce year-on-year inflation from over 75 percent in May to 47.09 percent in November.

Also:

ISTANBUL: Türkiye aims to increase its high-speed train (YHT) lines by 83 percent by 2027, expanding the current 2,251-kilometers to 4,122 kilometers, Turkish Transportation and Infrastructure Minister **Abdulkadir Uraloglu** announced on Sunday.

"We receive significant demand from our citizens for the YHT, which are both more affordable and comfortable compared to other modes of transportation," Uraloglu was quoted by the state-run Anadolu Agency as saying.

The minister also revealed that the Super High-Speed Train Project connecting Istanbul and Ankara, which will travel at speeds of up to 350 kilometers per hour, has officially begun. To be completed by 2034, the line is expected to reduce the journey between the two cities to 80 minutes.

Highlighting Türkiye's strategic position bridging Asia and Europe, the minister noted that the Halkali-Kapikule Railway Project, part of the YHT lines under construction, will be a crucial part of the Asia-Europe corridor.

Since first launching in 2021, it has attracted around 70,000 participants

Zain Esports racks up another year of success, growth in gamers, viewers and social media fans

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Zain Group, a leading provider of innovative technologies and digital lifestyle and ICT solutions operating in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announced the end of another successful year for Zain Esports, the e-gaming arm of the Group.

During 2024, Zain Esports undertook 50 tournaments and activations across Zain operations in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, and Iraq. Since first launching in 2021, Zain Esports has attracted around 70,000 participants and garnered over 160million social media impressions regionally.

Moreover, Zain Esports currently has 210,000 social media followers and during 2024, over 820,000 unique viewers watched Zain Esports tournaments streamed live on Twitch and YouTube.

Zain has invested heavily in network upgrades in recent years, with gaming being one of the most significant business use cases for 5G and fiber-to-the-home (FTTH). Zain was able to identify this opportunity early on, working to cultivate the e-gaming community across the Middle East in general, and within its markets of operation in particular.

This investment in network and resources has resulted in the development of a vibrant e-gaming ecosystem across regional markets, with Zain Esports leading and involved in multiple gaming activities centered around the main esports titles, namely Fortnite, Counter Strike, Call of Duty, PUBG Mobile, League of Legends, FC 24 (previously FIFA), Valorant, etc.

Regionwide: Notably during 2024, Zain Esports partnered with Riot games in more than 15 venues across eight countries to launch the League of Legend MENA servers that saw more than five-thousand gamers participate and received more than 45 million impressions.

Kuwait: Zain Esports conducted multiple offline FC (football) tournaments in Kuwait through-



Zain Esports 2024 growth

■ During 2024, 50 tournaments and activations held across Kuwait, KSA, Bahrain, Jordan, and Iraq

■ 820,000 unique viewers watched Zain Esports tournaments streamed live on Twitch and YouTube

■ Since first launching in 2021, Zain Esports has attracted 70,000 gamers and over 160million social media impressions regionally

out 2024 with hundreds of gamers competing in the 62 matches that were played.

Saudi Arabia- Zain Esports local arm PLAYHERA continued to support the Saudi gaming system

Bahrain - Zain Esports partnered with universities to launch the Zain University League within the Kingdom, seeing more than 300 up and coming gamers participate in various tournaments and workshops held in the recently established Zain Esports Lab within the Zain HQ offices.

Jordan - Zain partnered with the First Jordan Gaming and Esports Summit, as well as being the main sponsor of the Jordanian Esports Federation- collaborating in multiple tournaments across the year. Zain Esports in Jordan holds regular activations at its new state-of-the-art venue, the Dome, in partnership with gamergg, a Jordanian esports company spe-

cializing in tournament organization.

Iraq - Zain Esports participated in the Esports World Cup 2024 Tekken 8 held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Additionally, Zain Esports in Iraq was a strategic partner of the Iraq International Information & Telecommunication Technology Expo (ITEX), supporting its monthly events of esports tournaments.

Malek Hammoud, Zain Group Chief Investment and Digital Officer said, "Gamers around the world are a passionate community, and in the Middle East this is no different. Zain remains committed to supporting the growth and development of this exciting, often youth-oriented activity, and we are extremely grateful to our partners and collaborators with whom we organize events, which capture the imagination and translate into successful opportunities for Zain Esports. All

our stakeholders are impressed in how Zain Esports has evolved to become an integral part of the Zain's data services across our footprint, with its popularity and reach having a positive impact on brand recognition and customer acquisition."

Beyond the brand and financial benefits accruing from participating in online gaming for the players, Zain's activities in this area support operating companies to connect with the gaming community and provide data and similar high-value services. Spectators are also able watch the gaming and content live over Zain Esports social media channels, predominantly Twitch and YouTube, as well as over regular posts on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

With the continual investments in 5G and FTTH network upgrades across its markets, Zain Esports will be empowered to offer more appealing activities and competitions in gaming during 2025 and beyond.

Stay tuned for more and follow: <https://zainesports.com/en/>; <https://www.twitch.tv/zainesports>; <https://www.youtube.com/zainesports>; <https://www.instagram.com/Zain.esports/>; <https://www.facebook.com/EsportsZain>

Newest dining destination at Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait

A taste of Lebanon in Kuwait: Four Seasons Hotel unveils Li Beirut

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya proudly announced the opening of Li Beirut, an authentic Lebanese restaurant that brings the vibrant flavors, warm hospitality, and lively spirit of Lebanon to the heart of Kuwait.

Li Beirut offers a unique dining experience that combines exceptional cuisine with an inviting ambiance. Guests can enjoy live Oud performances by Alain, a talented musician from Lebanon, every evening starting at 7:00 PM.

Whether gathering with family or friends, Li Beirut is the perfect destination to relax, socialize, and savor the best of Lebanese culture.

The restaurant's culinary creations are led by Chef Mohammed El-Hajjar, a master of Lebanese flavors with over 20 years of experience. Born and raised



Li Beirut opens at Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait, bringing authentic Lebanese cuisine and culture to Kuwait.

in Lebanon, Chef Mohammed brings a personal touch to every

dish, blending traditional recipes with a modern twist.

Guests can indulge in flavorful offerings like crispy

boneless chicken wings with coriander labneh, baked meat rolls with mixed nuts and yogurt mint sauce, and a refreshing SajMillefeuille dessert with lemon cream, pecans, and apricots—all crafted with passion and authenticity.

"Our vision for Li Beirut was to create a space where the essence of Lebanese culture comes alive through food, music, and a welcoming atmosphere," said Martin Kipping, General Manager at Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait.

"We are thrilled to introduce this vibrant new dining experience to our guests and the local community, bringing them a little closer to Lebanon in the heart of Kuwait."

The thoughtfully designed space features both indoor and outdoor seating, offering a relaxed yet stylish atmosphere.

Guests dining indoors will enjoy panoramic views through glass walls that let in natural sunlight, while the open kitchen invites them to witness the art of Lebanese cooking firsthand.

Li Beirut promises to be more than just a restaurant—it's a celebration of Lebanese heritage and the vibrant connection between two cultures.

For more information or reservations, visit [fourseasons.com/kuwait](https://www.fourseasons.com/kuwait) or follow Li Beirut on Instagram: @libeirutkuwait.

About Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya

Located in the heart of Kuwait City, Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait offers unparalleled luxury and personalized service.

With world-class dining, state-of-the-art amenities, and an unwavering commitment to excellence, it continues to redefine hospitality in Kuwait.



The campaign visual

20 win cash prizes worth KD1,500 each

KFH announces winners of Al-Rabeh draw

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the winners of the AlRabeh draw with 20 customers winning cash prizes worth KD1,500 each for the 50th and 51st weeks of 2024.

The winners of KD 1,500 are: Hussain Al-Musallam, Amal Al-Saeed, Dalia Abdulmalek, Ibrahim Al-Ansari, Mohammad Araghi, Abdullah Al-Dakheel, Abdullah Al-Jalawi, Hasnah Al-Shammari, Sultan Al-Enezi, Naif Al-Qahtani, Reem Shabib, Shimah Al-Mutairi, Murtaza Mohammad, Abdulaziz Abdullah, Nourah Al-Dhafeeri, Ali Al-Qattan, Thiab Al-Ajmi, Fatemah Al-Khaldi, Hanan Al-Shammari, Nhayyah Al-Hashan.

The AlRabeh campaign provides prizes and draws that offer customers several chances of winning "weekly, monthly and quarterly". The campaign crowns 536 winners throughout the year.

The draw took place under the supervision of a

representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The campaign is part of KFH's ongoing efforts to offer exceptional products and services that meet customers' aspirations, enhance the Bank's leadership in the local and global markets, as well as reflect its excellence in offering innovative banking solutions as per the highest quality standards.

The Al-Rabeh account is a salary account available to customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts. Customers can open Al-Rabeh account in any of KFH branches in Kuwait, or through the Bank's online channels. The account can be opened in the Kuwaiti Dinar and is targeted for customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts. Salary transfer is a prerequisite for customers to enter the draw provided that the transfer of salary to Al-Rabeh account is con-

stant.

Regarding the terms and conditions of the prizes and draws, a customer can deposit 3 salaries during the 3 months prior to the draw, and the minimum balance of the account should not be less than KD 50 at the end of each month during the 3 months prior to the draw. Ten draws take place on a weekly basis for K.D 1,500 for 10 winners each, 1 KG of KFH gold will be drawn monthly for one winner and K.D 25,000 for one winner every quarter, reaching a total number of 536 winners during the year.

KFH is keen to further meet customers' requirements and aspirations and their increasing needs as well as offer innovative and modern services, therefore achieving customer satisfaction, which is one of the fundamentals at KFH. The Bank has achieved a qualitative shift in the level of financial services by utilizing technology.

Jan 12 is registration deadline

IMA Youth Wing launches the 'Students Mega Quiz' contest

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Indian Muslim Association Youth Wing is pleased to launch the 'Students Mega Quiz' an engaging and dynamic knowledge-based competition for students, to inspire and engage young minds under the esteemed patronage of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Kuwait.

This initiative is designed to foster intellectual growth, enhance understanding of Islamic Studies, and cultivate a spirit of healthy competition among the youth. The competition is open to Indian nationals residing in Kuwait, specifically male students aged 14 to 23 years. Students from all faiths are encouraged to participate.

Registration and Eligibility
Registration for the competition is entirely free, and the deadline to register has been extended to January 12, 2025. Detailed guidelines and instructions will be provided upon registration.

Competition Structure and Key Dates

The competition will be conducted in multiple rounds, leading up to an on-stage grand finale. The schedule is as follows:

- Round 1: January 16, 2025
- Round 2: January 17, 2025
- Round 3: January 24, 2025 (At Masjid AlKabeer)
- Grand finale: January 24, 2025 (At Masjid AlKabeer)

Exciting Prizes Await the Winners
Participants will have the opportunity to win prestigious prizes, including:

- Lenovo Idea Pad Slim3 Laptop
- Samsung Galaxy Buds 3 Pro
- Samsung Smartwatch Series 5
- Samsung Fit 3 Smart watches

These prizes aim to recognize and reward the intellectual excellence and dedication of the participants.

The grand finale will be held at the iconic Masjid AlKabeer on January 24, 2025, offering an enriching and interactive experience for participants and spectators alike.

For further details or to register, please contact 60622043 via WhatsApp.

Participants and their families can also stay updated through our social media platforms:

- Instagram: @imayouthwing
- YouTube: uthtube
- Facebook: IMA Youth Wing

About the Indian Muslim Association Youth Wing

The IMA Youth Wing is a vibrant organization committed to fostering education, leadership, and community engagement among Indian expatriate youth in Kuwait. Through initiatives such as the Students Mega Quiz, the association continues to empower young individuals with knowledge and values that promote excellence and unity.

The Indian Muslim Association Youth Wing invites all eligible students to seize this remarkable opportunity to showcase their knowledge, engage in meaningful learning, and compete for extraordinary prizes.



A photo from the event.

KDNA organizes a condolence meet for M.T. Vasudevan Nair

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The Kozhikode District NRI Association (KDNA) organized a condolence meeting for M.T. Vasudevan Nair on Friday, the 27th, at the Zam Zam Hall in Abbasiya.

The meeting began with tributes paid to the late former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. KDNA President Santosh Punathil presided over the gathering, while Vice President Aziz Thikkodi presented the condolence note.

The speakers highlighted M.T. Vasudevan Nair's invaluable contributions, particularly his role in Kozhikode being recognized as a UNESCO City of Literature. They opined that M.T.'s legacy would endure as long as the Malayalam language exists, not only for his literary works but also for his

influence across all art forms.

KDNA Advisory board members Krishnan Kadalundi, Suresh Mathur, Basheer Batha, Office Bearers Ramachandran Peringolam and Ubaid Chakkittakandi area representatives Syam Prasad, Sameer K.T and Shameer P.S along with Women's Forum Arts Secretary Chinnu Shyam, Central Executive Committee member Hameed Paleri, and Shafi A.K expressed their condolences.

KDNA General Secretary Firoz Nalakkath delivered the welcome address, and Treasurer Mansoor Alakkal offered the vote of thanks. The event was coordinated by Ilyas Thottathil, Shijith Kumar Chirakkal, Hanifa Kutichira, Santosh Naripetta, Dhaneesh, and Vinil Kumar.



Niram 2024 Children's Day painting competition winners

Prize distribution ceremony on Jan 10

Kala(Art) announces winners of 'Niram 2024'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Kala(Art) Kuwait has announced the winners of "Niram 2024" Children's Day painting competition held on Dec 6, 2024 at Indian Community School, Khaitan.

The prize distribution ceremony will take place at Indian Community School, Khaitan on Friday, Jan 10, 2025 at 2:00 PM onwards.

Kala(Art) Kuwait proudly announce that this is the 20th consecutive year of Niram has been conducted on the occasion of Children's Day, the birth day of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India.

It is worthwhile to note that students of different nationalities from all 28 Indian Schools in Kuwait with the active participation of more than 3100children in the competition.

The School Managements as well as Indian Community including business establishments as sponsors have also voluntarily extended their entire support to this wonderful event.

Winners of Painting Competition titled "NIRAM2024" have been adjudged by the well-known Artists Sasi Krishnan, Sunil Kulanada, Hari Chengannur, MukundanPzhanim and Rajive appointed by the Executive Committee of "Kala(Art) Kuwait" and accordingly the Lists of winners are being released by the organizers as follows:

Overall Championship: 1st position: Indian Community School, Khaitan, 2nd position: Indian Community School, Salmiya, 3rd position: IES-Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, Abbasiya.

C. Bhaskaran Memorial Trophy as a tribute to late C Bhaskaran, one of the founder and advisory board member of Kala (Art) Kuwait,

won by Indian Community School, Khaitan, the school from which maximum numbers of students were participated in this event.

Group-A: 1st prize: Aashka Yashpal Poojari, 1st Std, IES-Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, Abbasiya, 2nd prize: Zayd Ibrahim Shaji, UKG, Indian Community School, Amman, and Mozhisikaran Dinakaran, 1st Std, Indian Community School, Khaitan, 3rd prize: Prarthana Neeraj Pillai, 1st Std, Fahaheel Al-Watanieh Indian private School, Ahmadi and Elsa Rose Sebastian, 1st Std, United International Indian School (UIIS-New).

Group-B: 1st Prize-Anika Murathuvilakathu Ajish, 2nd Std., Indian School of Excellence, 2nd Prize-Sharvani Rohit Panchal, 3rd Std., Indian Community School, Salmiya and Ayisha Midha, 4th Std., Indian Community School, Khaitan, 3rd Prize: Advik Pradeepkumar, 4th Std., New Gulf Indian School, Mahboula and Dhyan Krishna, 3rd Std., Smart Indian School, Kuwait.

Group-C: 1st prize: Dimple Khatri, 7th Std., IES-Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, Abbasiya, 2nd prize: Kaavya Ashutosh Panchal, 6th Std., Indian School of Excellence, 3rd prize: Sachin Kolanchi, 7th Std., Indian Community School, Salmiya and Daniel Sanju Paul, 7th Std., Indian Community School, Salmiya.

Group-D: 1st prize: Gauri Krishna Ginu, 8th Std., Indian Community School, Amman, 2nd prize: Tiara D'cruz, 12th Std., Indian Community School, Khaitan and Jessica Mary Dias, 12th Std., Learners Own Academy, Abbasiya, 3rd prize: Keziah Thomas, 9th Std., Indian Community School, Khaitan.

Clay Sculpture: 1st Prize-Onega William, 12th Std., Indian Community School, Salmi-

ya, IInd Prize-Jalaluddeen Akbar, 10th Std., IES-Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, Abbasiya, IIIRD Prize-Akshay Rajesh, 10th Std., Indian Community School, Amman and Angela Anilson, 9th Std., Learners Own Academy, Abbasiya.

Open Canvas (for parents and guests): 1st Prize: Mrs. Anwesha Biswas, 2nd Prize: Mrs. Mashida Manaf, 3rd Prize: Mrs. Deepa Praveen Kumar.

The organizers announced that the entire winners list consisting 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 66 Merit Prizes as well as 254 Consolation Prizes (Total 345 Prizes) have already been forwarded to all participated Schools. The List may also be available at our website www.kalakuwait.net.

Kala(Art) Kuwait, highlights the exclusive prizes for the winners as first place with Gold Coin and gold medal, second place with silver medal and third place with bronze medal along with memento and certificate. Merit and Consolation prize winners also will have trophy an certificate.

Kala(Art) Kuwait has congratulated all the winners and also thanked all the participants andthe School Managements, Sponsors, all Indian Associations for their wholehearted support to make the event as a great success and well supported by Kuwait's English and Malayalam visual and print media and Web Portals. The organizers also convey their heartfelt thanks to the parents and art teachers, according to 'Kala(Art) Kuwait' President,Siva Kumar., General Secretary, Aneesh Varghese., Treasurer, Ajith Kumar, General Convener Ragesh P. D and Public Relation Convener, Mukesh V. P.

Virus poses greater risk to children and seniors

Norovirus returns with surge in cases in US

NEW YORK, Dec 29, (AP): Cases of a wretched stomach bug are surging in parts of the United States this winter, according to government data.

The most recent numbers from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show there were 91 outbreaks of norovirus reported during the week of Dec. 5, up from 69 outbreaks the last week of November.

Numbers from the past few years show a maximum of 65 outbreaks reported during that first week of December.

A norovirus infection is characterized by sudden vomiting and diarrhea. Outbreaks are often seen on cruise ships, in congregate living situations like nursing homes and jails, as well as schools and places where people are close together.

Here are a few things to know about the virus. Norovirus is the leading cause of foodborne illness in the United States, responsible for 58% of such infections acquired in the country each year, according to the CDC.

Norovirus infections are caused by a group of

viruses that spread easily, with as few as 10 viral particles having the ability to make someone sick, health experts say.

There are about 2,500 norovirus outbreaks reported annually in the United States. The outbreaks can occur throughout the year but are most common from November to April.

Along with vomiting and diarrhea, common symptoms include nausea, stomach pain, body ache, headache and fever.

Most norovirus outbreaks occur when people who are already infected spread the virus to others by direct means, such as through sharing food or eating utensils. Outbreaks can also be spread through food, water or contaminated surfaces.

Illness caused by norovirus typically starts suddenly, with symptoms developing 12 to 48 hours following exposure to the virus. Most people get better within one to three days and recover fully.

But with 19 to 21 million illnesses each year in the United States, norovirus nevertheless causes on average 900 deaths and 109,000 hospitalizations annually, mostly among adults aged 65 and

older. It also leads to 465,000 emergency department visits, mostly involving young children.

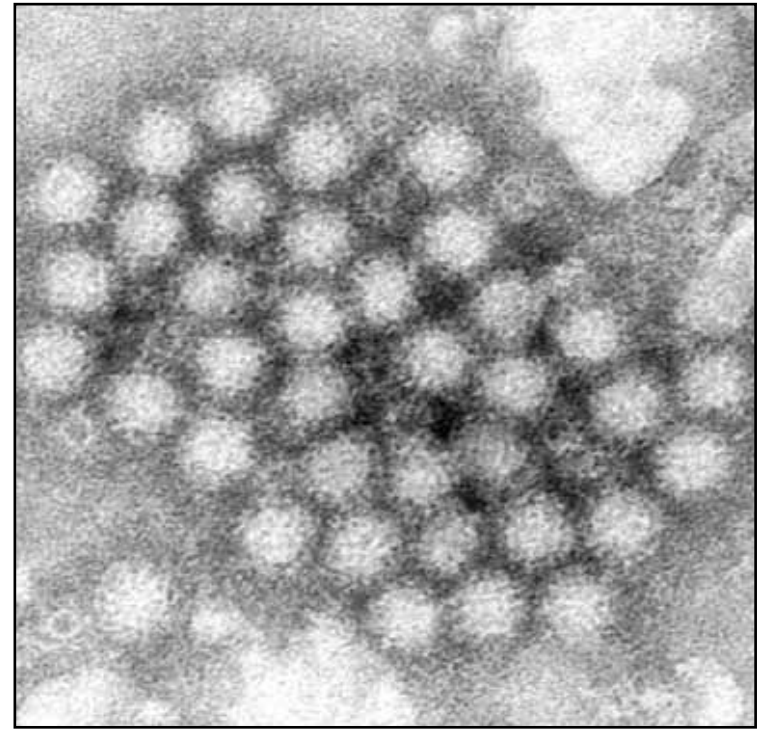
People of all ages can get infected and fall sick from norovirus. Young children, older people and those with weakened immune systems are most at risk, with dehydration from vomiting and diarrhea the top concern.

There is no medication to treat norovirus. Rehydration is recommended by drinking water and other liquids, with the exception of coffee, tea and alcohol.

Anyone suffering from dehydration should seek medical help. Symptoms of dehydration include a decrease in urination, dry mouth and throat, and feeling dizzy when standing. Dehydrated children may be unusually sleepy or fussy and cry with few or no tears.

Rigorous and frequent handwashing is the best defense against norovirus during the peak winter season, scrubbing the hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before meals.

Scrubbing surfaces with household disinfectants can also help.



This electron microscope image provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows a cluster of norovirus virions. (AP)



A man vapes on a disposable electronic cigarette in Brussels on Dec. 12, 2024, ahead of Belgium's ban on the sale of disposable vapes as of Jan. 1, 2025. (AP)

Obesity 'new epidemic'

Belgium to ban sales of disposable e-cigarettes

BRUSSELS, Dec 29, (AP): Belgium will ban the sale of disposable electronic cigarettes as of Jan. 1 on health and environmental grounds in a groundbreaking move for European Union nations.

Health minister Frank Vandenbroucke said the inexpensive e-cigarettes had turned into a health threat since they are an easy way for teenagers to be drawn into smoking and get hooked on nicotine.

"Disposable e-cigarettes is a new product simply designed to attract new consumers," he said in an interview.

"E-cigarettes often contain nicotine. Nicotine makes you addicted to nicotine. Nicotine is bad for your health. These are fact," Vandenbroucke added.

Because they are disposable, the plastic, battery and circuits are a burden on the environment. On top of that, "they create hazardous waste chemicals still present in what people throw away," Vandenbroucke said.

The health minister said he also targeted the disposable e-cigarettes because reusable ones could be a tool to help people quit smoking if they cannot find another way.

Australia outlawed the sale of "vapes" outside pharmacies earlier this year in some of the world's toughest restrictions on electronic cigarettes. Now Belgium is leading the EU drive.

"We are the first country in Europe to do so," Vandenbroucke said.

He wants tougher tobacco measures in the 27-nation bloc.

"We are really calling on the Europe-

an Commission to come forward now with new initiatives to update, to modernize, the tobacco legislation," he said.

There is understanding about Belgium's decision, even in some shops selling electronic cigarettes, and especially on the environmental issue.



Obesity: Lithuania ranks fifth in Europe for overweight individuals aged 16 and above, according to a recent Eurostat poll, prompting experts to call it a "new epidemic," local radio broadcaster LRT reported Saturday.

Only Latvia, Finland, Romania, and Malta surpass Lithuania in the report, while Italy has the lowest rate of overweight people.

Professor Rimantas Stukas of Vilnius University attributes the issue to poor diets and low physical activity. "Lithuanians favor fatty foods. They do not consume enough vegetables and products rich in dietary fibre. Low levels of physical activity also contribute to being overweight," he told LRT.

Dietitian Edvardas Grisinis highlighted cultural factors. He said Lithuanians eat a lot of semi-finished products, like frozen and canned foods, as they "are not picky about food quality." Pointing to Italy and France, he said strong culinary traditions there focus on quality contribute to lower obesity rates.

Grisinis also stressed economic factors. "Higher-quality food often costs more and not everyone can afford to eat this way. Some people don't think about quality food, but about how to eat more cheaply," he said to LRT.

Regular PT a key to long-term wellness

Physical therapy is the best-kept secret in health care: APTA chief

NEW YORK, Dec 29, (AP): If you think physical therapy is only about rehabilitation after surgery or recovering from an accident, think again. For the vast majority, seeing a physical therapist should be about prevention, routine assessment and staying well.

"We're the best-kept secret in health care," Sharon Dunn, the past president of the American Physical Therapy Association, told The Associated Press.

Roger Herr, the current president of the APTA, and Gammon Earhart, associate dean for physical therapy at the medical school at Washington University in St. Louis, echoed Dunn's prevention message in separate interviews with the AP.

"We need to change our image by getting out of our silos, out of our brick-and-mortar clinics," said Dunn, who teaches at LSU.

The image of the profession tends to be one-dimensional. You've had knee surgery, your back keeps acting up or you're injured and you've been referred by a physician to a physical therapist. You go several times, you get an evaluation and you're discharged with exercises to do and advice about how to move more efficiently.

Appointments

"That's a big chunk of what physical therapists do," Earhart said. "But I think a lot of people don't understand. They think when they have a major medical problem that a physical therapist is going to massage them until they feel better. That's not what it is."

Many in the profession favor thinking of physical therapists the way we do dentists; patients make appointments for regular exams.

"Even if you're not having any problem, you go in and have everything checked out," Earhart said. "If there's any problems that seem to be brewing, you head them off at the pass."

An exam could include health history and current health - physical activity, sleep, nutrition, etc. This would be followed by a look at how you're moving. It might include things like postural alignment and movement patterns as you walk, run, reach, sit and stand. In terms of strength and flexibility, think muscle imbalances.

Herr is a big backer of annual wellness visits. For all ages.

"Physical therapists can fit into all parts of the spectrum," Herr said. "It can be for the young, emerging athletes or high-end athletes, or someone who wants to age well and be as functional



Jacob Bullard lifts a weight as part of his physical therapy at WashU, Monday, Dec. 16, 2024, in St. Louis. (AP)

and independent as possible."

You can now visit a physical therapist in all 50 states without needing a referral from a physician or surgeon. That's the good news.

"I just don't think the public knows they can go to a physical therapist without a physician's referral," Dunn said.

The bad news for an annual exam might be the price tag. These preventative visits are not usually covered by insurance. Earhart estimated such a visit in the Midwest might cost \$150 out of pocket. But an intervention like this might save expenses - and add healthy years - in the long run.

Herr, who is based in New York, suggested a cost of \$200-\$300 in a more expensive part of the country.

Surgery

"Surgery and accidents can still happen, but generally you're on top of things with these visits," Earhart said. "I think if people understood more that the way they move might be setting them up for a problem down the line, they'd be much more inclined to see a physical therapist."

We are all built differently with variations in hip architecture and so forth. It might be useful to evaluate children early to decide what sports or activities suit them. Testing beforehand to avoid a problem later is the perfect job for a physical therapist.

"If we screened kids as they were choosing sports and said this sport is probably not the right kind of stress for the way you are put together, it could save a lot pain and problems down the

line," Earhart said. "Maybe they don't have the hips for ballet."

Distance runners should think this way. Some are built more efficiently to avoid injuries despite pouring on the miles or kilometers. Others are not, and it would be good to know in advance.

Falling - and the fear of falling - is debilitating for the aging population. Herr said physical therapists can help with relatively simple interventions.

"You want to show people they can get back up if they fall," Herr said. "And once they know they can do it, it gives them confidence and it can help reduce the fear of falling. One of the risks of falling is that people don't do anything, so you don't move and therefore you become more out of shape and not as functional."

Herr noted that "floor to stand" movements involve flexibility, strength, balance and coordination. And planning.

"It sounds simple getting up from a lying position on the floor to stand," Herr said. "But it's a great exercise for all age groups."

Earhart estimated that perhaps 50% of physical therapy patients are there because of issues related to being overweight.

"Somebody does not have to be morbidly obese for their weight to be affecting their movement," she said. "The more weight somebody is carrying the higher the loads are on their joints."

Earhart said she sees patients for "prehab" for weight-loss surgery known as bariatric surgery, also known as gastric bypass. This involves the digestive system to limit how much patients can eat, or the ability of take in calories.

'Orphan drug'

China 'develops' eye cancer drug

HANGZHOU, Dec. 29, (Xinhua): A new type of Aptamer Drug Conjugate (ApDC) developed by a group of Chinese researchers has recently been granted orphan drug designation from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), bringing new hope for patients with rare eye cancer, the Hangzhou Institute of Medicine (HIM) under the Chinese Academy of Sciences said Saturday.

The first ApDC to have FDA orphan drug designation globally, the drug was jointly developed by researchers from HIM and Wenzhou Medical University. Orphan drugs are drugs specifically used to treat rare diseases.

The drug targets tumors such as malignant uveal melanoma and liver metastatic tumors. It uses aptamers as targeting molecules to accurately bind cancer cells and release antitumor drugs. With fewer side effects and a high safety level, it reduces damage to healthy tissues and achieves more efficient and safer therapeutic effects.

Experiments

The team said that comprehensive animal experiments have shown that the ApDC drug not only efficiently inhibits the growth of ocular tumors in situ, but also significantly reduces the risk of tumor metastasis to the liver, lungs, bones and brain, demonstrating significant antitumor effects.

The team plans to carry out clinical trials and put it into application as soon as possible, bringing new hope for patients.

Uveal melanoma is a rare but deadly eye cancer. Its early symptoms are often not obvious, and many patients have already reached the advanced stage when diagnosed. It is highly prone to spreading through the bloodstream, especially to the liver. Once metastasis occurs, the average survival period for patients is less than a year.

Meanwhile, more than 200 people, including children, on Pemba Island in Tanzania's Zanzibar, received free medical services on Friday provided by three Chinese medical teams operating in the East African nation.

The joint free medical services were organized by a Chinese medical team stationed in Zanzibar, another on the Tanzanian mainland, and a schistosomiasis control team in Zanzibar.

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SPORTS

Tourists bowled out for 369 in reply to the home side's 474

Bumrah stars with four wickets but Australia's tail pushes lead past 300

MELBOURNE, Australia, Dec 29. (AP): India's superstar seamer Jasprit Bumrah was at his unplayable best at the Melbourne Cricket Ground Sunday, claiming 4-56 including his 200th wicket in a breathtaking performance in the fourth test against Australia.

Bumrah dominated Australia's middle order, removing Travis Head, Mitchell Marsh and Alex Carey cheaply before the home side's tail waggled, reaching 228-9 at stumps, with one day of play remaining. Australia leads by 333 runs.

Earlier, Australia lost four wickets for 11 runs in 22 deliveries, slumping from 80-2 to 91-6 in a dramatic middle-order collapse after lunch.

But the home side rallied thanks to a 57-run partnership between Marcus Labuschagne (70) and Pat Cummins (41).

India resumed Sunday on 358-9 and was bowled out for 369 in reply to the home side's 474.

Nitish Kumar Reddy top-scored

with 114. It was the 21-year-old's maiden century in his fourth test. Cummins (3-89), Scott Boland (3-57) and spinner Nathan Lyon (3-96) took three wickets each.

Reddy said to have family and friends including his father Mutyala watching on when he scored his maiden test century was a special moment.

"That was a special century for me and for my father," Reddy said. "When I was nothing, the first person who believed in me was my father. He believed in me and he resigned his job for me."

"He made a lot of sacrifices. I'm so grateful to have a father like him." Australia edged slowly to 53-2 off 25 overs in its second innings at lunch Sunday on a pitch that continued to offer sideways movement. Openers Sam Konstas (eight) and Usman Khawaja (21) departed before lunch.

Mohammed Siraj (3-66) triggered a collapse by removing first-innings

century-maker Steve Smith caught behind for 13 at 80-3.

In the next over, Bumrah broke through twice. The 31-year-old claimed his 200th wicket, removing Head caught at forward-square leg for one, and Marsh was caught behind four balls later for a duck.

The 44-test capped Bumrah claimed his fourth wicket of the innings when he bowled Carey (2) in his next over as Australia staggered to 91-6.

Labuschagne described the bowling of Bumrah, who has taken 29 wickets in the series at an average of 13.24, as "relentless."

"He just bowls a relentless length. He attacks the stumps. He's tough to navigate," Labuschagne said. "He was hot. He had three wickets in two overs. He's been very good this series."

Yashvi Jaiswal missed three catches in the field, including dropping Labuschagne at gully on 46, and Cummins on 21 at silly point.

Australia regained its composure, pushing its lead beyond 250, before Siraj trapped Labuschagne lbw at 148-7. Mitchell Starc (5) was run out shortly after tea at 156-8.

Cummins was caught at slip 17 runs later, but India fumbled a fourth chance when Siraj put down a caught-and-bowled chance when Lyon was on five.

Lyon (41 not out) and Boland (10 not out) added to India's frustrations with an unbeaten 55-run partnership for the final wicket. Bumrah had Lyon caught in slips on 35 in the final over of the day, but it was a no-ball.

The highest successful run-chase in a test match since 2000 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground is Australia's 231-2 in 2013/2014 against England.

Reddy said it would be important to have "one or two good partnerships" to give India a chance of victory.

"We can see later on the fourth day the pitch was doing a little bit



India's Jasprit Bumrah celebrates the wicket of Australia's Mitchell Marsh during play on day four of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

more," Reddy said. "We don't need to put more pressure (on ourselves) by saying the pitch is doing this or that."

The five-match series is level at 1-1. The fifth and final Australia-India test is scheduled to start on Jan. 3 at the Sydney Cricket Ground.



Sacramento Kings forward Trey Lyles (41) and Los Angeles Lakers forward Anthony Davis (3) grapple for a rebound during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Los Angeles. (AP)

Lakers spoil Christie's Kings debut

Trail Blazers beat short-handed Mavs

LOS ANGELES, Dec 29, (AP): Anthony Davis had 36 points, 15 rebounds and eight assists in the Los Angeles Lakers' 132-122 win over Sacramento on Saturday night in the Kings' first game under interim coach Doug Christie.

LeBron James didn't play for the Lakers because of illness, but a balanced effort helped make up for his absence, led by Austin Reaves with 26 points and a career-high 16 assists. Rui Hachimura had 21 points, Max Christie chipped in with 16 and Dalton Knecht had 18 off the bench.

Playing for the first time since Mike Brown was fired on Friday in controversial fashion, De'Aaron Fox led the Kings with 29 points and 12 assists, and DeMar DeRozan had 25 points.

Los Angeles erupted for 12 straight points to end the third and start the fourth to open up a 20-point advantage.

Sacramento got it to 123-117 with less than four minutes to go, but Reaves and Christie made sure the home team held on.

Trail Blazers 126, Mavericks 122

In Portland, Shaedon Sharpe had 23 points, Anfernee Simons scored 22 and the Portland Trail Blazers held off the Dallas Mavericks.

Deandre Ayton had 21 points, 16 rebounds and three blocks and Deni Avdija had 21 points, five rebounds and five assists. Scoot Henderson had 19 points, four rebounds, six assists and a career-high five steals off the bench.

Kyrie Irving led all scorers with 46 points and was the only consistent offensive threat for the Mavericks who were playing without Najj Marshall, PJ Washington - suspended for their involvement in an on-court fight against the Suns - Luka Doncic and Dereck Lively II.

Irving had 20 points in the fourth quarter as Dallas tried to mount a comeback that ultimately fell short.



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry, center front, shoots while defended by Phoenix Suns forward Ryan Dunn, center back, during the second half of an NBA basketball game in San Francisco. (AP)

76ers 114, Jazz 111

In Salt Lake City, Joel Embiid and Tyrese Maxey each scored 32 points to lead the Philadelphia 76ers to a victory over the Utah Jazz.

Embiid went 11 of 13 from the free-throw line to rally the 76ers from a 14-point first-half deficit for their ninth victory in 12 games. Paul George had a season-high five steals to go along with 13 points.

Utah trailed by 11 early in the second half before rallying, but the 76ers took a 110-108 lead with 1:38 left on back-to-back baskets from Maxey and Embiid. Lauri Markkanen cut the deficit to 112-111 on a 3-pointer with 4.1 seconds remaining, but Maxey sealed the win with two free throws.

Markkanen led the Jazz with 23 points. Collin Sexton and Brice Sensabaugh added 20 apiece.

Utah shot 54% from the field in the first quarter and led 42-28 early in the second following back-to-back layups from Sexton and Sensabaugh. Philadelphia erased the deficit before halftime behind a 24-5 run spanning six minutes, taking a 52-47 lead when Embiid punctuated the run with a pair of baskets.

Nuggets 134, Pistons 121

In Denver, Nikola Jokic had 37 points, Jamal Murray scored 21 of his 34 points in a decisive third period, and the Denver Nuggets survived Detroit's fourth-quarter rally to beat

the Pistons.

Michael Porter Jr. finished with 26 points for Denver, which used an 18-4 run to take the lead for good at halftime and then opened a 25-point lead heading into the fourth. Murray scored 12 points in the final 2:27 of the period to give him his first 30-point game of the season.

Cade Cunningham and Jaden Ivey scored 17 points each to lead Detroit.

With the starters on the bench in the fourth quarter, the Pistons cut a 25-point deficit to 10 and forced Denver coach Michael Malone to put his starters back in. Ronald Holland's 3-pointer made it 128-121 with 2:35 left but Jokic closed it out with six straight points.

Bulls 116, Bucks 111

In Chicago, Josh Giddey had 23 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists for his second triple-double this season to lead the Chicago Bulls to win over the Milwaukee Bucks.

Giddey, who missed the previous four games with an ankle injury, sank two free throws with 10 seconds left to make it 115-111, then pulled down a rebound to help seal it as Chicago snapped a three-game losing streak.

Nikola Vucevic had 23 points and 13 rebounds. Coby White, who scored 22, nailed a tiebreaking jumper with 32 seconds remaining.

Warriors 109, Suns 105

In San Francisco, Jonathan Kum-

inga had 34 points and made the go-ahead free throw in the Golden State Warriors' win over the Phoenix Suns.

With the Warriors down one, Kuminga was fouled after getting inside positioning on Kevin Durant on an out-of-bounds play with 29 seconds to go. Kuminga made both free throws to put Golden State ahead and tie his career high in points a day after setting it against the Clippers on Friday.

Durant, who led the Suns with 31 points, missed a shot on the other end, and Dennis Schroder made two free throws after the Suns committed a loose ball foul on the rebound.

Knicks 136, Wizards 132 OT

In Washington, Jalen Brunson scored nine of his season-high 55 points in overtime and Karl-Anthony Towns had 30 points and 14 rebounds as the New York Knicks extended their season-long winning streak to seven games in a win over the Washington Wizards.

It was the first overtime game for both teams, and New York outscored Washington 17-13 in the extra period.

Brunson, who scored 42 points after halftime, had two jump shots and hit five free throws in overtime.

Justin Champagnie scored a career-high 31 points with 10 rebounds and Malcolm Brogdon added 22 as the Wizards failed to win their second straight game after beating the Hornets 113-110 on Thursday.

Thunder 106, Hornets 94

In Charlotte, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 22 points, Jalen Williams added 20 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Charlotte Hornets for their 10th straight regular-season win.

Aaron Wiggins added 17 points and Isaiah Hartenstein had 12 points and 15 rebounds for the Thunder, who never trailed.

Miles Bridges had 19 points and 10 rebounds, while Vasa Micic added 16 points for the Hornets, who have lost 15 of their last 16 games.

Both teams were missing multiple starters with LaMelo Ball and Brandon Miller sitting out for Charlotte and Luguentz Dort and Cason Wallace out for the Thunder.

Texas A&M routs Abilene Christian

Dailey leads UCLA over Gonzaga in college hoops game at Intuit Dome

INGLEWOOD, Calif., Dec 29, (AP): Eric Dailey Jr. scored 18 points, making four 3-pointers, and No. 22 UCLA edged 14th-ranked Gonzaga 65-62 on Saturday in the first college basketball game played at Intuit Dome, the new home of the NBA's Los Angeles Clippers.

Ryan Nembhard's basket gave Gonzaga a 60-58 lead with 56 seconds left before the Bruins (11-2) scored five points in a row. Sebastian Mack converted a three-point play with 33 seconds remaining to put UCLA ahead, and Skyy Clark hit two free throws 20 seconds later.

Nembhard then drove the length of the court and scored while getting fouled. After a timeout, he missed the potential tying free throw with 8 seconds to go.

Graham Ike fouled Clark, who made both free throws for a 65-62 lead with 5 seconds left. Nembhard's 3-point heave from halfcourt missed at the buzzer.

Ike led the Bulldogs (9-4) with 24 points and eight rebounds. Nembhard had 16 points and eight assists.

Graham was 11 of 16 from the floor on a day when both teams struggled offensively in the 18,000-seat arena.

Wade Taylor IV had 15 points and a career-high 10 assists, and Zhuric Phelps had 12 points and 10 rebounds in No. 13 Texas A&M's 92-54 win over Abilene Christian.

Taylor's 15 points passed Vernon Smith, who scored 1,778 points at A&M from 1977-81, for second on Texas A&M's all-time scoring list. Taylor now has 1,779 career points and needs 212 more to pass Bernard King, who scored 1,990 points from 1999-2003, as Texas A&M's all-time scoring leader.

Taylor returned to action after he missed his first career game on Dec. 20 against Houston Christian.

The Aggies (11-2) opened the game on a 7-0 run and never looked

back. Texas A&M led 48-29 at halftime and ended the game on a 12-0 run over the final 5:24.

Quion Williams led Abilene Christian (8-6) with 14 points.

Geronimo Rubio De La Rosa scored 27 points as Columbia beat Fairfield 85-72 on Saturday night.

De La Rosa shot 8 of 15 from the field, including 5 for 11 from 3-point range, and went 6 for 6 from the line for the Lions (11-1). Avery Brown shot 5 of 8 from the field and 5 of 5 from the free-throw line to add 16 points. Kenny Noland went 5 of 12 from the field (3 for 7 from 3-point range) to finish with 15 points.

The Stags (5-8, 1-1 Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference) were led by Louis Bleechmore, who recorded 12 points. Fairfield also got 12 points and seven assists from Jamie Bergens. Deon Perry had 12 points and five assists.

Columbia's next game is Monday against Rutgers on the road, and Fairfield visits Merrimack on Friday.

Colby Rogers scored 28 points and Moussa Cisse had 13 points, 11 rebounds and three blocks as Memphis defeated No. 16 Mississippi 87-70.

PJ Haggerty finished with 17 points as Memphis (10-3) won for the third time in four games.

Sean Pedulla led Ole Miss (11-2) with 13 points and four assists. Jaylen Murray scored 12 and Malik Dia 11 as the Rebels had their five-game winning streak halted.

Memphis' defense caused early problems for the Rebels, and the Tigers extended their lead to double digits. But, Ole Miss made five straight field goals, including a string of 3-pointers, to get back into the game before halftime, trailing by just two points at the break.

The Tigers opened the second half on a 14-4 run and extended their lead to as many as 13 points near the midway point of the second half.

Carlsen quits tournament in a dispute over jeans

NEW YORK, Dec 29, (AP): Top ranked chess player Magnus Carlsen has left the World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championships after refusing to change out of the jeans he wore to the competition, the International Chess Federation said.

The federation said in a Friday statement that its regulations include a dress code that bars participants from wearing jeans at the event.

"The Chief Arbiter informed Mr. Carlsen of the breach, issued a \$200 fine, and requested that he change his attire," the federation said in the statement posted to its website. "Unfortunately, Mr. Carlsen declined, and as a result, he was not paired for round nine. This decision was made impartially and applies equally to all players."

The 34-year-old Norwegian chess grandmaster said in a video from his Take Take Take chess app that he posted on the social platform X

that he accepted a \$200 fine. But he refused to change his pants before quitting the competition in New York.

"I said, 'I'll change tomorrow if that's OK,'" Carlsen said in the video. "But they said, 'Well, you have to change now.' At that point it became a bit of a matter of principle for me."

The federation said in its statement that the dress code is "designed to ensure professionalism and fairness for all participants."

It said fellow participant Ian Nepomniachtchi was also fined earlier Friday for breaching the dress code by wearing sports shoes.

"However, Mr. Nepomniachtchi complied, changed into approved attire, and continued to play in the tournament," the statement said. "These rules have been in place for years and are well-known to all participants and are communicated to them ahead of each event."

Quinteros takes charge of Gremio

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec. 29, (Xinhua): Former Bolivia international defender Gustavo Quinteros has been appointed manager of Gremio on a one-year deal, the Porto Alegre side said.

Quinteros replaces Renato Portaluppi, who left the club after its 14th-place finish in this year's Brazilian Serie A championship.

"Gustavo will arrive in Porto Alegre in the next few days to sign a contract that runs until December 31, 2025," read a statement on Gremio's official website.

The 59-year-old's group of assistants will include Leandro Desabato, Maximiliano Quezada and Rodrigo

Quinteros, as well as fitness coach Hugo Roldan, the club said.

Quinteros parted ways with Velez Sarsfield on Wednesday, less than two weeks after guiding the club to Argentina's Primera Division title.

His coaching career has also included spells in charge of the Bolivia and Ecuador national teams.

As a player, Argentinian-born Quinteros represented Argentinos Juniors, San Lorenzo and The Strongest, among other clubs.

He was capped 26 times for Bolivia's national team and represented his adopted country at the 1994 FIFA World Cup in the United States.

Inter Milan dominates Cagliari

Atalanta win streak ends but still on top after late equalizer at Lazio

ROME, Dec 29, (AP) — Atalanta's winning streak ended at 11 matches after drawing at fourth-placed Lazio 1-1 in Serie A.

Substitute Marco Brescianini's late equalizer meant the Bergamo squad remained atop Serie A.

Four minutes after he went on, Brescianini finished off a counterattack set up by Nicolo Zaniolo and Ademola Lookman.

Fisayo Dele-Bashiru scored midway through the first half for Lazio after receiving a ball over the top and blasting past onrushing goalkeeper Marco Carnesecchi.

Atalanta was left one point ahead of defending champion Inter Milan, which won at Cagliari 3-0 earlier and also has a match in hand.

Atalanta will face Inter in its next match on Thursday, in the semifinals of the Italian Super Cup in Saudi Arabia.

Juventus plays AC Milan in the other semifinal.

Atalanta was without leading scorer Mateo Retegui, who injured his left leg against Empoli last weekend.

Thirteen goals scored. Zero conceded. Four wins in four matches across all competitions.

Ever since a 1-0 loss at Bayer Leverkusen in the Champions League this month, Inter has been perfect.

Inter's latest performance was decided with two assists from Nicolò Barella.

Alessandro Bastoni put Inter ahead with a looping header following a cross from Barella after the break.

Lautaro Martinez scored his first Serie A goal in nearly two months by volleying in another cross from Barella.

Then Hakan Calhanoglu converted a penalty.

Earlier, Patrick Vieira's Genoa won at Empoli 2-1 with goals from Milan Badelj and Caleb Ekuban; and Parma beat last-placed Monza 2-1 with a header from Lautaro Rodrigo Valenti eight minutes into stoppage time to spoil the debut of new Monza coach Salvatore Bocchetti.



Lazio's Taty Castellanos, left, duels for the ball with Atalanta's Isak Hien during a Serie A soccer match between Lazio and Atalanta, at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome, Italy. (AP)

Gulf media lauds Kuwait's stellar organization of Khaleeji Zain 26

Amal Al-Saeed makes mark in Khaleeji Zain 26 coverage

By Suzan Nasser

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staf

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Saudi media personality Amal Al-Saeed made a remarkable impact during her participation in the Khaleeji Zain 26, showcasing her passion and vast experience in sports journalism. Her insightful field coverage and in-depth analyses earned her recognition as one of the leading female figures bridging the media and sports worlds.

Al-Saeed's smooth and professional style stood out, blending dynamic field reporting with capturing the pulse of fans. Her work highlighted the growing influence and contributions of Saudi women in the sports media landscape.

Her coverage delved into match atmospheres, technical team performance analysis, and exclusive interviews with players and officials. These elements solidified her reputation for delivering comprehensive and engaging sports journalism.

Speaking to Al-Seyassah, Al-Saeed described her Gulf Cup coverage as an "exceptional experience" that underscored the rising prominence of Saudi women in the media industry. She emphasized how Saudi participation in the championship reflects the Kingdom's passion for sports and the media's role in presenting a progressive image to the world.



Saudi media personality Amal Al-Saeed

"I am not new to the media arena," Al-Saeed noted, highlighting her previous achievement of winning the Excellence Award in Sports Media. "It is an accomplishment I am very proud of." She added, "Today, I strive to enhance the presence of Saudi women in regional and international sports forums. My goal is to serve as a role model for Saudi women media professionals, showcasing how ambition and professionalism can go hand in hand in the field of media."

Through her distinguished presence and dedication, Amal Al-Saeed continues to pave the way for future generations of Saudi women in sports media.

'Success before it began'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Media professionals from across the Gulf and Arab world have commended the exceptional efforts of the main media center and the media committee for the "Khaleeji Zain 26" held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. The facilities provided to Gulf media have streamlined the work of journalists, creating an efficient and professional platform to broadcast tournament matches and events.

Emirati media professional Mohammed Al-Joker lauded the committee's dedication, describing the operation as "a beehive of activity" that simplifies journalists' tasks. He noted:

"This level of organization is rare in other tournaments. It is not surprising from Kuwait, which has excelled in organizational, administrative, and the media aspects."

Al-Joker highlighted Kuwait's comprehensive development, particularly in sports media, attributing it to the support of the country's political leadership and the Gulf Championship's organizing committee. He expressed gratitude to the media center's staff, wishing them continued success and hoping for the return of Kuwait's national team to championship glory.

Sports commentator Khalil Al-Balushi emphasized the familial spirit of Gulf championships hosted in Kuwait, particularly at "Khaleeji Zain 26". He remarked:

"This Gulf gathering fosters a sense of unity among Gulf nations, embodying the one-family spirit we aspire to."

Al-Balushi also noted that the tournament aligns with Kuwait's aspira-



Khalil Al Balushi



Mohammed Al-Joker



Ali Al Mohsen



Ahmed Saleem



Saif Al-Maliki

tions to host the Asian Cup; with its media success enhancing the credibility of Kuwait's bid for larger championships.

Iraqi media figure Saif Al-Maliki praised Kuwait's hosting of the tournament, stating that its success was evident even before it began. He attributed this to Kuwait's wise leadership and meticulous preparations by its working committees.

"Kuwait has always demonstrated lessons in solidarity and cohesion," Al-Maliki said. "This Gulf Championship is a celebration of friendship and peace, organized in a beautiful brotherly atmosphere by loyal Kuwaitis."

Ahmed Saleem, a journalist with Qatar's Al-Raya newspaper, commended the media committee's detailed coverage of the tournament. He said:

"The daily updates provided by the media committee allow Gulf media outlets to follow every organizational and team-related detail."

Saleem praised Kuwait's organizational capabilities, government support, and modernized football stadiums, all contributing to a successful tournament.

Saudi media and sports commentator Ali Al-Mohsen highlighted the unique charm of the Gulf Cham-

ampionship when hosted by Kuwait, saying:

"Kuwait is the queen of this championship, leading in titles. Hosting the tournament here feels like a grand sports wedding and carnival."

Al-Mohsen applauded the efforts of the Kuwait Football Association, led by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef, and the commitment of senior officials to make this edition a memorable and distinctive event.

Kuwait's hosting of "Khaleeji Zain 26" has been widely celebrated, showcasing its capacity to unite the Gulf in a spirit of sportsmanship and camaraderie.

Injured skier is airlifted off 2026 Olympics slope

Ljutic gives Croatian women's team 1st win since 2006

SEMMERING, Austria, Dec 29, (AP) — Zrinka Ljutic gave the Croatian women's ski team its first World Cup victory in almost 19 years by triumphing in the final race of the calendar year on Sunday.

With injured star Mikaela Shiffrin not racing, Ljutic dominated the fourth slalom of the season, posted the fastest times in both runs and won by a huge margin of 1.75 seconds over runner-up Lena Duerr of Germany.

Katharina Liensberger, the 2021 world champion from Austria, finished 1.85 behind in third.

"It feels like a dream, it was my dream since I was a little kid and to do it today is just amazing," said Ljutic, who turns 21 next month and had racked up five podium results over the last two years.

It's the first World Cup victory for a Croatian woman since four-time Olympic champion Janica Kostelic earned her 30th and last win in March 2006.

Fredrik Moeller of Norway claimed his first World Cup victory by winning a super-G that got off to an inauspicious start on Sunday as Gino Caviezel became the third skier this weekend to be airlifted off the slope set to be used for the 2026 Olympics. After Alexis Monney's debut



The winner Croatia's Zrinka Ljutic celebrates after an alpine ski, women's World Cup slalom race in Semmering, Austria. (AP)

World Cup win in the downhill the previous day, Moeller also recorded his first victory on the circuit with an early benchmark run down the fearsome Stelvio slope to finish 0.20 seconds ahead of Austrian skier Vincent Kriechmayr.

"It feels really good," Moeller said. "My skiing was obviously good. It felt like I had some mistakes, which I did, but they weren't that costly. I managed to ski well where I know I can, and not do anything stupid."

Monney, who was 27th out of the gate, threatened to knock Moeller out of the leader's chair after the Swiss skier recovered from a poor start but finished third, just four hundredths of a second behind Kriechmayr - to Moeller's obvious relief.

"It's crazy. I don't know really what to say and I don't realize what happened this weekend," Monney told The Associated Press. "The Olympics is still far away, but for sure the slope I like it a lot."

Like Monney, Moeller had never even been on the podium prior to this weekend. His previous best finish was fourth.

But the young guns clearly enjoyed the Stelvio, where the men's Alpine skiing events are set to take place in 14 months at the Milan-Cortina Olympics.

"Incredible. I'm 33 years old, and they keep pushing all the time," Kriechmayr said. "They are always on the limit. Now I think you have to be 100% from top to bottom, and if you're not searching for the limit you're not able to beat them."

"It's good to know what I have to do, but it's incredible what they are doing now."

Both Monney and Moeller are 24. "Yeah it's crazy, it's really nice that we can push a bit the older ones, get better maybe," Monney added with a laugh.

Monney's more lauded teammate Marco Odermatt leaves Bormio without a podium finish this weekend. As in the downhill, the three-time overall champion was fifth, sandwiched between two other Swiss teammates - Stefan Rogentin and Franjo von Allmen.

It was a miserable day for compatriot Caviezel, however. The 32-year-old was first out of the gates but crashed heavily early on and was taken to hospital by helicopter.

French standout Cyprien Sarrazin and Italian Pietro Zazzi were also taken off the slope by helicopter after crashing in separate incidents in downhill training on Friday.

Sarrazin underwent surgery to drain a bleed near the brain while Zazzi had an operation on his leg.

Odermatt still leads the super-G standings but has seen his advantage cut to just five points by Moeller. He leads the overall standings by 161 points.

Casas takes responsibility for Iraq Khaleeji Zain 26 elimination

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Spanish coach Jesús Casas of the Iraq team described the penalty that led to Saudi Arabia's opening goal as the pivotal moment in their 3-1 loss, which secured Saudi Arabia's spot in the semifinals of the "Khaleeji Zain 26".

Speaking at the post-match press conference, Casas highlighted that his team's performance was impacted by several key absences throughout the tournament, making the match against Saudi Arabia particularly challenging.

Despite the loss and Iraq's elimination from the Gulf Championship, Casas emphasized that this setback would not derail the team's campaign in the 2026 World Cup qualifiers, where Iraq currently holds second place in its group after six rounds.

Casas accepted shared responsibility for the defeat, stressing the importance of participating in tournaments like the Gulf Championship. He added that the competition provided a valuable opportunity to test new players, even though not all squad members were available for various reasons.



Jesús Casas

Players have 'been kept in the dark' on doping breaches, says Djokovic

BRISBANE, Australia, Dec 29, (AP) — On the eve of his return to the court, Novak Djokovic has weighed in on tennis's high-profile doping cases and criticized what he perceives as double standards in the sport.

The former world No. 1, who is chasing a record 25th Grand Slam title at next month's Australian Open, expressed his frustration Sunday at being "kept in the dark" regarding top-ranked Jannik Sinner's doping case.

Djokovic is the top seed in the Brisbane International this week, making his first appearance at the event since 2009. He will also team up with Australia's Nick Kyrgios in doubles, with the duo headlining Monday's action.

Off the court, Djokovic lent his voice Sunday to Kyrgios's strong criticisms made a day earlier, speaking out

at length about the ongoing doping case involving current world No.1 Jannik Sinner.

"I'm not questioning whether (Sinner) took the banned substance intentionally or not," Djokovic said at a press conference Sunday in Brisbane. "We've had plenty of players in the past and currently under suspension for not even testing positive to banned substances."

"Some players with lower rankings waiting for their case to be resolved for over a year. I've been really frustrated ... to see we've been kept in the dark for at least five months (on the Sinner case)." The International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) charged both Sinner and former women's world No.1 Iga Swiatek with anti-doping breaches earlier in the year.



Head coach speaks to reporters following Saudi Arabia decisive victory over Iraq.

Sports

Saudis hungry for Khaleeji Zain 26 glory

Reaching semis is not enough

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: The “Khaleeji Zain 26” has reached its thrilling final stages with the completion of the golden square lineup. Saudi Arabia secured its spot in the semi-finals with a decisive 3-1 victory over Iraq on Saturday in the third and final round of Group B. The round also saw a historic win for Yemen, who defeated Bahrain despite the latter having already qualified for the semi-finals.

The semi-finals are set for Tuesday at Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium. Saudi Arabia will face Oman at 5:30 pm, while Kuwait will take on Bahrain at 8:45pm at Jaber International Stadium.

French coach Hervé Renard expressed dissatisfaction with his team's performance despite their victory over Iraq. Speaking at the post-match press conference, Renard acknowledged the Saudi fans that showed up to support their team and admitted:

“We were not good in the first half, but our performance improved in the second, allowing us to secure the win.”

Renard emphasized that the team's ambition extends beyond the semi-finals:

“Our goal is to win the title. Reaching the semi-finals is not enough for us or the Saudi fans. We are focused on reaching the final and achieving the championship.”

Renard highlighted the challenges of maintaining mental resilience in football, noting:

“It's not easy to shift players' mindsets during tough periods. However, our team showed strength throughout the tournament.”

He revealed that his halftime talk focused on improving the team's effectiveness and winning two-way battles on the field. Renard also praised striker Abdullah Al-Hamdan, whose two goals were pivotal in securing Saudi Arabia's victory.

As the “Khaleeji Zain 26” progresses, all eyes are on the semi-finals as teams battle for a place in the coveted final match.



Saudi Arabia skipper vies for the ball with Iraqi player during the finale Group B match in Kuwait.

Photo by Mohammed Morsi

Khaleeji Zain 26 final rescheduled to Jan 4

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): The Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF) announced on Sunday that the final match of the Khaleeji Zain 26 has been rescheduled to January 4.

In a statement, AGCFF Competitions Committee Chairman Khaled Al-Muqren explained that the decision to postpone the final by one day was made for “compelling reasons.” However, the dates for the semi-finals remain unchanged.

The semi-final matches are set for Tuesday, with Oman facing Saudi Arabia at 17:30 pm., followed by Kuwait's match against Bahrain at 20:45 pm.



The Kuwait national flag is hoisted above the Jaber International Stadium.

VAR technology: A game-changing innovation in the world of soccer

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29, (KUNA): The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology has revolutionized football by resolving disputes over controversial officiating decisions, at times influencing the outcomes of key matches. Its purpose is to minimize errors and ensure greater accuracy in situations such as penalty kicks, red

cards, and offside calls, using replay and multi-angle footage.

While VAR has been praised for enhancing fairness and precision, it has also sparked debate, with some fans and players arguing that it disrupts the flow of the game. VAR made its debut in the Gulf Cup during the 24th edition, hosted by Qatar in 2019.



VAR referees follow up on the matches.

Su to retire after National Games

GUANGZHOU, Dec. 29, (Xinhua): China's star sprinter Su Bingtian said here on Sunday that he intends to retire after China's 15th National Games, which will be co-hosted by Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao in November 2025.

“I hope to contribute my strength to my hometown and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, I will try my best to bring my career to a good conclusion at the National Games,” Su said. The 34-year-old ran an Asian record of 9.83 seconds in the men's 100m semifinal and finished sixth in the final at the 2020 Tokyo

Olympics, but missed the 2024 Paris Olympics with injury.

“I had considered retiring after missing the Paris Olympics, but when I realized that the 2025 National Games would be held in my hometown, I decided to spare no effort to be back,” said Su, who was born and brought up in Guangdong Province.

The veteran sprinter revealed he was currently in good shape and had already resumed training.

“I am not able yet to manage intense training, but I can complete moderate tasks. I hope I can be back on the track as soon as possible,” he said.

Talajic reflects on Bahrain's defeat

Ould Ali celebrates Yemen's historic victory

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: Algerian coach Nouredine Ould Ali of the Yemeni national team celebrated a historic achievement, dedicating Yemen's first-ever Gulf Cup victory to the nation and its passionate fans. Speaking at the post-match press conference, Ould Ali said, “We succeeded in achieving a historic victory over Bahrain at the conclusion of the group stage, and we dedicate this win to the Yemeni people who have long waited such a moment in the Gulf championship.”

Ould Ali also extended his gratitude to the Yemeni Football Association, the loyal supporters of Yemeni football, and the players who delivered their best performance to secure the win and claim three points. “This precious victory is for everyone who believed in us,” he added.

The coach emphasized that Yemen's participation in the tournament aimed at achieving positive results, saying, “We came here to leave a mark, and we succeeded by achieving this historic first victory.”

On the other side, Croatian coach



Algerian coach Nouredine Ould Ali of the Yemeni national team.



Bahrain head coach Dragan Talajic

Dragan Talajic of the Bahraini national team acknowledged Yemen's strong performance, stating, “The Yemeni team played an excellent match and deserved to win.”

Talajic explained that Bahrain fielded a team of substitutes for the

game, commending their efforts despite the unfavorable result. “Everyone gave their best during the match, but the outcome was not what we hoped for,” he said.

Talajic expressed disappointment with the loss, especially giv-

en the massive turnout of Bahraini fans who came to support the team. “My goal was to win every match in the tournament,” he said, adding, “We now shift focus to preparing for the semi-final clash against Kuwait.”

Proteas earn a tense 2-wicket win against Pakistan

South Africa seals place in World Test Championship final

CENTURION, South Africa, Dec 29, (AP): South Africa tailenders Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen hung in against relentless fast bowler Mohammad Abbas for a tense two-wicket win in the first test on Sunday to seal the Proteas' place in next year's World Test Championship final.

Jansen (16 not out) overshadowed Abbas' brilliant figures of 6-54 with a square driven boundary against the fast bowler as South Africa reached 150-8 just after lunch on Day 4 and escaped with a close win in the opener of the two-match series.

“Quite an emotional moment for me, good advert for test cricket,” said South Africa captain Temba Bavuma, who made 40. “We haven't been ruthless but have found a way to ensure the result was on our side. Lot of joy and happiness on our side, a bit of a rollercoaster, glad that we were able to get the result.”

Abbas, making a comeback after more than three years in the test wilderness, had knocked back South Africa's tricky chase of 148 runs in a marathon 13-over spell before lunch on Day 4 as the home team limped to 99-8, losing four wickets for three runs.

However, Rabada changed gears in an unbroken 51-run stand with Jansen and made an unbeaten 31 off 26 balls with five fours to seal a memorable victory and denied Pakistan its first test win in South Africa in almost 18 years.

South Africa had started this WTC cycle with a 1-1 drawn series against India before getting swept 2-0 in New

Zealand. But since then the Proteas have beaten West Indies, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to stay on top of the table.

“It (WTC final) is a big one, not just for myself but also the team and the coach,” Bavuma said. “The way we started our campaign, against India and then New Zealand with a not-so-strong team, and the way we have gone through with our performances, not many gave us a chance.”

India, Australia and Sri Lanka are the other teams still in contention for next June's WTC final against South Africa at Lord's.

Captain Temba Bavuma (40) and

Aiden Markram (37) had thwarted Abbas for an hour after South Africa resumed at a wobbly 27-3, still needing 121 for victory.

Bavuma's controversial dismissal punctuated a South Africa collapse in the latter half of first session with Abbas grabbing three off his six balls in a sensational home team collapse. Bavuma, who made 40, surprisingly didn't request a television review when replays suggested that Abbas' ball had brushed the batter's pocket and didn't make contact with the inside edge of the bat but the South African skipper walked back to the dressing room.

Abbas bowled an unchanged mara-

thon spell of 13 overs, but had to wait as Markram and Bavuma saw off eight overs from the fast bowlers.

Resuming at 27-3, Bavuma and Markram showed plenty of patience against Abbas' probing line and length before the fast bowler finally got the breakthrough after the first drinks break.

Abbas was rewarded for his brilliant seam bowling when he beat the outside edge of Markram's bat and knocked back the off stump.

Bavuma survived a couple of close chances when he successfully overturned an on-field lbw decision against him early in the day and Naseem Shah couldn't hold onto a sharp catch at fine leg as he overstepped the boundary cushion while grabbing the ball over his head.

South Africa had controlled the game at 96-4 before Bavuma's dismissal saw Abbas finding the outside edges of David Bedingham (14) and Corbin Bosch's (0) bat off successive deliveries and in between Kyle Verreynne dragged Naseem Shah's delivery back onto his stumps.

Abbas found the outside edge of Rabada's bat in his first over after lunch that fell just short of wicket-keeper Rizwan before both tailenders took the team home.

“Extremely proud of the efforts, but going forward we need to be ruthless,” Pakistan captain Shan Masood said. “We keep making the same mistakes but we have to get over the line, seize moments.”

The second test begins at Cape Town on Friday.



South Africa's David Bedingham plays a shot during day four of the Test cricket match between South Africa and Pakistan, at the Centurion Park in Centurion, South Africa. (AP)