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## Opinion

# Iran, how are you faring in this New Year?

### Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

SINCE the revolution succeeded in altering Syria's reality and toppling its regime, it seems that the Iranian decision-maker has lost his bearings, and has started issuing random statements that re-

flect a sense of defeat. This sentiment is evident not only in the regional situation in general but also in the so-called "Axis of Resistance".

Iran's internal situation is no better. With the collapse of its currency Toman, public frustration with the regime has been rising. The country also faces major regional and global consequences.

It is important to note that everything Iran is experiencing today was a result of deliberate calculations. The country

pushed its regional proxies to carry out violent actions, once under the guise of "liberating Palestine" starting from the Gaza Strip, and at other times destabilizing Lebanese institutions by mobilizing its Lebanese arm, and even opening a front in the south to facilitate behind-the-scenes negotiations with Washington over the nuclear issue.

Iran did not miss an opportunity to challenge the countries of the region. It used the Houthi group to disrupt mari-

time traffic through Bab al-Mandab, which led to increased confrontation from the United States and Britain over this form of maritime terrorism.

Meanwhile, Iran worked on destabilizing the situation in Iraq, and attempted to involve its sectarian groups in the massacre against the Syrian people. Iran once boasted about its ability to turn the tables on everyone in the Middle East. However, with the escape of the head of the Baathist regime from Damascus, all of

Iran's calculations proved to be wrong. As a result, Iran today has become like a drowning man clutching at a straw, represented by Russian and Chinese support. However, the winds did not blow as

Continued on Page 5

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## Amir condolences US on Carter's demise



Former US President Jimmy Carter smiles as he returns to Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., to teach Sunday school, June 9, 2019. (AP)

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has sent a cable of condolences to US President Joe Biden expressing condolences on death of the former president, Jimmy Carter, invoking Almighty Allah to grace his family with patience.

Similarly, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah has sent a cable of condolences to US President

Continued on Page 5

# 76% OF KUWAIT'S RESIDENTS COMPLETE FINGERPRINTING No fines, but 224,000 expats face service cuts Wednesday

### 8 centers open to expedite registration

By Munif Naif  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Director of the General Department of Criminal Evidence, Major General Eid Al-Owihan, has announced the suspension of all government transactions for expatriates who have not completed the biometric fingerprinting within the specified deadline, which ends on Dec 31, 2024.**

However, he denied that any fines would be imposed for failing to complete the process. The suspension includes renewal of residence permits and the freezing of bank accounts.

In an interview with 'Al-Akhar' channel, Major General Al-Owihan stated that around 76

percent of expatriates living in Kuwait have completed the biometric fingerprinting process. He also mentioned that there are 8 centers open from 8 am to 8 pm to accommodate citizens and residents wishing to complete the procedure, with services continuing throughout January 2025.

He added that devices have been provided to visit the homes of individuals with special needs and bed-ridden patients. To date, about 13,241 individuals have been fingerprinted through this service.

He emphasized that the ministry has taken all necessary measures to facilitate the process for citizens.

Additionally, Al-Owihan mentioned ongoing communications between the ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs to provide a list of Kuwaitis studying abroad, patients receiving treatment, and diplomats in order to lift the 'block' on their transactions until they return to Kuwait to complete the fingerprinting process.

Continued on Page 5

## Kuwait Foreign Minister Al-Yahya arrives in Damascus



A moment captured before Kuwait's inaugural airlift flight departs, loaded with essential food supplies and tents bound for Syria.

KRCS photo

### Aid flight to Syria

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30, (Agencies): Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya arrived in the Syrian capital, Damascus, on Monday.

According to a ministry statement, Al-Yahya, accompanied by GCC Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi, are heading a high-level delegation to the recovering Arab country within the framework of GCC ministerial council recommendations of guaranteeing Syria's independence, sovereignty and unity, a message of support to the Syrian people's will. Kuwait is the current chair of the ministerial council.

This visit is seen as a practical step towards implementing agreements made during the 46th extraordinary meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Ministerial Council held in Kuwait, including continued humanitarian support for the Syrian people as outlined in the final statement.

The Gulf Ministerial Council reaffirmed its stance in the final statement, emphasizing Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Continued on Page 5



KUNA photo

A child beams with joy upon receiving winter supplies from Namaa Charity.

## Namaa Charity aids 5,000 in Yemen with winter supplies

ADEN, Dec 30, (KUNA): Namaa Charity, affiliated with the Kuwaiti Social Reform Society, distributed on Monday winter supplies to about 5,000 people in several Yemeni governorates as part of the "Kuwait Next to You" campaign, which has been ongoing for nine years.

In a statement, Namaa Charity said that it distributed winter aid that benefited 4,970 people in several Yemeni governorates for alleviating the suffering of those affected by harsh living conditions.

Continued on Page 5

## NewsWatch

### MoH assures readiness

## 47 health centers open for New Year

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Ministry of Health in Kuwait has announced that 47 primary health care centers will be operational during the New Year's holiday to ensure continuous health services for citizens and residents, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The Central Administration for Primary Health Care has confirmed the readiness of these centers across various health regions in Kuwait.

Key points of the announcement:  
1. Capital Region: Six centers will operate 24/7, including Ali Sabah Al Salem Center and Hamad Al Saqr Specialized Center.

2. Hawalli Region: Six centers in total, with three operating 24/7 (Al-Rumaihiya Specialized Center, Sabah

Al-Salem Specialized Center, and West Salmiya Center) and three open from 7 am to midnight.

3. Farwaniya Region: Nine health centers, four of which will be open 24/7, including Al Farwaniyah South Center and Al Andalus Center.

4. Ahmadi Region: Fourteen centers operational, with thirteen providing 24-hour services, including facilities in Sabah Al-Ahmad and Al-Wafra.

5. Mubarak Al-Kabeer Region: Five primary care centers, with Al-Adan Specialized Center and Al-Salam Health Center operating round-the-clock.

6. Jahra Region: Seven centers in total, five of which will be open 24/7, including Al-Jahra Health Center and Saad Al-Abdullah Center.

### Day by Day

DEAR Honorable Minister of State for Municipal Affairs, We say when a citizen requires a 'description certificate', they have to navigate through numerous hurdles, including obtaining an organizational opinion.

The process takes over a week and the certificate that is eventually issued is dated the day the request was made. What's even more frustrating is that the certificate is only valid for a month - 28 days if it's February. If we subtract the week spent waiting for its issuance, this leaves it valid for just two weeks.

So, we ask: where is the electronic government? What era are we living in?

Do you really believe that Kuwait can attain the status of international financial and economic hub?  
... Yet, tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar



**8**  
NBK Mobile App strengthened its position as Kuwait's leading digital banking platform

**8**  
KIPCO repays its seven-year KD 66.5 mln bond



**9**  
ABK concludes 2024 with numerous 'Let's Be Aware' initiatives

**12**  
Tunisia's Ennejma Ezzahra ... a unique historical site

## Jahra couple detained as murder of maid surfaces

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Prosecutors are moving to charge a couple with concealing the premeditated murder of an Asian domestic worker, as investigations continue with the main suspect. The accused, who has a history of criminal cases and was recently released from prison, is under scrutiny to determine the motive behind the crime.

During the investigation, the suspect's younger brother revealed that the domestic worker was killed following a dispute between the suspect and his wife. Security and forensic teams responded to the incident at a house in Saad Al-Abdullah, Jahra, where the body was discovered buried in the garden.

Initial forensic examinations suggest the death occurred over two months ago. Authorities have detained the suspect and continue to probe the case.

## Kuwait begins nationality review after mass citizenship revocation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Coinciding with the issuance of Decree No. 217 of 2024, which revoked Kuwaiti citizenship from 2,087 women granted citizenship under the repealed Article 8 of the Nationality Law, informed sources revealed significant updates on citizenship reviews, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to Al-Seyassah, the Supreme Committee for the Investigation of Kuwaiti Citizenship, active since its formation last May, has decided to withdraw, revoke, or annul citizenship for 18,775 individuals.

These cases include those who obtained citizenship by dependency based on various articles of the Nationality Law.

Sources confirmed the issuance of higher instructions to ensure that individuals whose citizenship was revoked under Article 8 are not deprived of privileges typically accorded to Kuwaiti women. These measures aim to remove obstacles and facilitate access to services.

Continued on Page 5

**RAMALLAH:** The Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoners' Society affirmed Monday the death of four prisoners from Gaza Strip in Israeli occupation prisons. (KUNA)

## Prayer Timings

Fajr .....	05:17	Asr .....	14:41
Sunrise ..	06:42	Maghrib ..	16:59
Zohr .....	11:50	Isha .....	18:21

# Local

**Expected weather for next 24 hrs:**  
**By Day:** Mild and partly cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speed of 12-32 km/h.  
**By Night:** Rather cold to cold with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speed of 06-26 km/h.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	Weather
Kuwait City	20	13	Bubyan 19 11
Kuwait Airport	21	10	Jahra 21 12
Abdaly	21	09	Failaka Island 19 14
			Salmiyah 18 15
			Ahmadi 17 10
			Jal Aliyah 20 10
			Nuwaisib 19 12



National Guards and volunteers heading for duty at the Jaber Stadium.



National Guards giving out the Kuwait flags to children at the stadium. KUNA photos

## National Guards cope well with huge crowds during 'Khaleeji Zain 26'

The Kuwait National Guards have set an example for dedication and restraint in securing the Gulf Cup tournament (Khaleeji Zain 26).

The Guards have shown great capacities of dealing with the large numbers of football fans, flooding the stadiums and nearby locations. (KUNA)

### Khaleeji Zain 26

#### 'Fans interaction tourney mainstay'

## Broadcasters covering Gulf Cup event fuel enthusiasm

By Hammad Al-Mutairi

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30, (KUNA): Media commentators covering events of the ongoing Gulf Cup tournament (Khaleeji Zain 26) have been fueling enthusiasm among the spectators, watchers and listeners, with recurring emotional reactions and high-pitched rhetoric.

The broadcaster is the mastermind of interaction with details of the match, dramatizing its developments and keeping the audience posted as to a lot of details that might be missed by the average watcher (or listener). He sheds light on the players' skills and lures the spectators into the game atmosphere, thus turning his role into an inseparable part of the game.

The caster indulges in short and quick analyses, addresses the teams' strategies and tactics, presents background about the players namely the stars, mirroring a comprehensive picture of the match, thus enriching the spectator's understanding of the encounter.

Hussein Al-Ghareeb, a sports broadcaster at the Kuwaiti Channel-3, said in an inter-

view with KUNA that the broadcaster role is quite basic in covering sports events, namely football matches, injecting the atmosphere with vitality and keeping the followers, namely those using televisions or radios, glued in front of the screens or close to the radio devices throughout the match.

Some veteran commentators are able to educate the fans with in-depth information about the contending teams, the players and historic background about the competitors, Al-Ghareeb pointed out.

He expressed gratitude to the Khaleeji tournament steering committee for setting up special cabins for the broadcasters and facilitating their movement into and out of the stadiums. Khaled Al-Haddi, the sport broadcaster at Al-KAS Channel, also concurred that much of the match sensationalism hinges on skills of the commentator's eloquence and phrasing.

Interaction of the Kuwaiti soccer fans at the Gulf tournament -- along with their GCC peers -- is a main reason for the event success, he has affirmed.



Al-Haddi



Al-Ghareeb

### Other Voices

## Stifling innocent enjoyment

By Ahmad alsarraf

About forty years ago, a representative of the Muslim Brotherhood approached the Minister of Information with a discreet suggestion to ban concerts in hotels and stop piano music on their premises. This led to hotels being required to seek written approval from the Ministry of Information for every musical event.

Eventually, an additional layer of bureaucracy emerged: hotel owners were mandated to obtain approval even for an hour of piano playing in hotel lobbies.

These permits were granted monthly, but by December of the first year of this regulation, a peculiar restriction appeared -- the approval only extended from Dec 1 to Dec 23, halting during Christmas and New Year's celebrations.

This decision seemed to be a deliberate attempt to suppress festivities. Media inspectors further exacerbated the issue by intimidating restaurant patrons, forbidding applause for musicians under threat of closure.

By chance, Fahd Abu Shaar, a highly capable manager of one of Kuwait's prominent hotels, brought these challenges to the attention of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior and Defense.

Abu Shaar shared the struggles faced by hotels and their diminishing role in fostering economic activity and tourism. He emphasized that while Kuwait's hotel industry was small compared to neighboring countries, its occupancy rates were among the lowest in the Gulf.

The First Deputy recognized how facilitating visa issuance during events like the Gulf Cup led to unprecedented hotel occupancy rates

and a boom in restaurant and retail business. This raised the question: why limit such facilitation to special events when it has a clear positive impact on the economy?

In a meeting with hotel managers, the First Deputy Prime Minister was urged to eliminate the cumbersome requirement for prior approvals for private events such as weddings, corporate celebrations and musical performances. Instead, they proposed enforcing penalties only for violations of public morals or instructions.

The First Deputy responded positively, instructing government departments to allow New Year's Eve celebrations and other events to proceed without unnecessary restrictions.

He also advocated for easing and expediting visa procedures and promised to coordinate with the Minister of Information to stop deploying inspectors, especially on festive occasions. He emphasized that hotels should be held accountable for their own actions, with the government's role being to facilitate joy and ensure public enjoyment, not to stifle it.

For more than half a century, society has been burdened by excessive restrictions and extremism. The time has come for progress and openness, discarding outdated and illogical decisions.

While some may disagree with the recent steps taken by the First Deputy, it is undeniable that he has emerged as a decisive leader seeking to address long-standing grievances.

His actions demonstrate a willingness to champion change and challenge forces that have hindered progress for decades.

Gratitude is owed to Fahd Abu Shaar for raising these issues and to the First Deputy Prime Minister for his swift, pragmatic response in prioritizing the public interest over fear of regressive forces. The path forward is one of optimism and renewal.

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# Palestine's UNGA membership, Syrian gov't fall top '24 events

Arabs collectively pushed for end to Gaza carnage

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30, (KUNA): The Arab countries witnessed many events in 2024, foremost Palestine winning UN General Assembly's (UNGA) membership to join the 193 members, collapse of Syrian regime of Bashar Al-Assad, and holding urgent Arab and Islamic summits amidst critical regional circumstances.

The Palestinian cause overshadowed all issues with the Israeli occupation's ongoing aggression on the Palestinian territories and Lebanon, along with the collapse of Al-Assad's regime.

Fourteen years after the eruption of the Syrian revolution, quick political and military developments took place which allowed the opposition forces control many key areas in the north, namely Hama, Idleb and Aleppo before announcing the capture of Homs and the capital city, Damascus.

Al-Assad and his family fled the country. Later, Russia said it granted him asylum on humanitarian grounds.

The Arab countries reaffirmed their support for the Syrian people and their aspirations, as well as the importance of preserving Syria's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

#### Israeli occupation

In Gaza the Israeli occupation's war machine killed more than 10 percent of the population, committing over 9,900 massacres, used over 90,000 tons of explosives, erased some 1,410 families from the Palestinian civil records and destroyed nearly 80 percent of residential buildings.

The Israeli occupation's parliament, Knesset, passed a bill on October 28 which banned the UN Palestinian refugees agency (UNRWA), and informed the UN of the cancellation of a 1967 agree-



Some of the events which took place in the year 2024 in the Arab world. KUNA photo

ment that organized relations with the UN agency.

The Israeli occupation committed assassinations in Palestine, Lebanon and Iran, killing Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh who was on a visit to Tehran in August and Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah in a massive airstrike in southern Beirut.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh resigned in protest of the Israeli occupation's unprecedented aggression and President Mahmoud Abbas assigned Mohammad Mustafa as his successor.

The Arab countries adopted initiatives and launched mediation efforts, all aimed at ending the war on Gaza and support the Palestinian people's quest for freedom and their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Bahrain hosted in May the first Arab summit which aimed at rallying support against the regional challenges in order to achieve security and stability.

The summit called for an end

of the Israeli occupation's aggression, lifting the blockade on the Palestinians, opening all crossings and allowing UN agencies to operate.

The Arab leaders rejected forced displacement of the Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank including East Jerusalem. They also called for an immediate and lasting ceasefire.

Meanwhile, the Sino-Arab ministerial cooperation conference, held in Beijing in May, reiterated concern over the humanitarian crisis in Gaza Strip, in addition to boosting cooperation to address regional conflicts.

Arab and Islamic countries' leaders held an extraordinary summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in November, with the aim of having a united position against the Israeli occupation war in Gaza and to launch a serious political process for a comprehensive and lasting peace. They also discussed the growing humanitarian crises.

At the development front, many Arab countries adopted a series of economic reforms coupled

with development projects amidst severe pressure on economies caused by geopolitical tension.

While some countries suffered piling debts, others realized leaps in international indices.

The Arab League acted to boost inter-Arab economic integration and expand international partnerships at the economic and development levels.

#### Conference

The Arab Economic Unity Council approved, in June, the establishment of the Arab e-commerce union.

The Sino-Arab ministerial cooperation conference also adopted the 2024-26 document to promote multilateral political, economic, trade, investment, financial, environment, cultural, space, health, educational and infrastructure cooperation.

According to Ernst and Young, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) took the lion's share of acquisitions and mergers in the Middle East and North Africa, an increase of four percent than 2023.

The Arab League, on the other hand, took actions in a bid to address sticky issues like ending the conflict and stop bloodshed in Sudan, in addition to ending the military and political dispute in Libya.

In December, Turkiye brokered a conciliation agreement between Ethiopia and Somalia to end months of tension in the Horn of Africa region due to Ethiopia's quest to have a passage to the sea through Somaliland.

Iraq and the US announced in September the mandate of the international coalition fighting so-called Islamic State (IS) would end in the next 12 months.

A ceasefire between the Israeli occupation and Hezbollah entered force by end of November.

Algerian, Tunisian and Mauritanian Presidents, Abdulmajeed Tabboune and Kais Saied and Mohammad Oul Al-Sheikh Ghazwani respectively, won new presidential terms. Arab Athletes won seven gold medals at the Paris Olympics compared with five in the previous Olympic games in Tokyo.

## Bid to prevent spread of invasive species

### Coast Guard, KISR join hands to end pollution

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The General Administration of the Coast Guard has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) to strengthen cooperation in protecting the marine environment from pollution.

The MoU was signed by Director General of the General Administration of Coast Guard Brigadier General Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al-Sabah and acting Director General of KISR Dr. Faisal Salman Al-Humaidan, in the presence of directors and specialists from both institutions.

Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al-Sabah explained that the aim of the MoU is to establish a framework for collaboration that supports the Coast Guard's efforts to reduce marine pollution and prevent the spread of invasive species through the ships. He highlighted the role of ballast water, which is necessary for the ships' stability and maneuverability, especially when they are partially loaded or empty.



Dr. Al-Humaidan

"However, when discharged at the destination, this water often contains aquatic organisms; leading to significant environmental impact on local biodiversity. The Coast Guard's efforts to address these issues reflect Kuwait's commitment to the international community and its responsibility to safeguard the marine environment," he asserted.

This cooperation will also focus on research to reduce marine pollution in accordance with international regulations and conventions like the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Cooperation; International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships; and International Convention for the Control and Management of Ballast Water and Sediments from Ships.

Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al-Sabah expressed confidence that KISR will provide valuable research results, given its expertise in marine pollution studies and its deep understanding of the national and regional marine environment.

On the other hand, Dr. Faisal Al-Humaidan affirmed the commitment of KISR to continue collaborating with national institutions to overcome environmental challenges. He said the MoU will foster scientific research and facilitate the organization of conferences, seminars, workshops and lectures to help mitigate marine pollution and guarantee the safety of the marine environment.

## Staff must work 2 hours extra for overtime: Info

By Mohammad Al-Enezi  
 Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Ministry of Information has established the mechanism for the overtime work of employees assigned to office duties within a period of two months starting Jan 1, 2025.

The newspaper obtained a copy of the circular, stating that the concerned employees will be required to work an additional two hours daily beyond the official working hours.

The circular specifies that employees subject to this overtime work will not be permitted to take rest days or official holidays during the specified period. It also underscored the importance of documenting attendance through the fingerprint device by clocking in and out using the designated feature.

This directive follows the administrative decision issued on Dec 22, which mandates overtime work for employees in certain work centers, along with compensation, for fiscal 2023/2024. The overtime schedule will begin on Jan 1, 2025 and will last for two months.

## Kuwait's global reality and implications of nationality

"KUWAIT'S diplomatic journey toward securing a prominent global position with honorable achievements and guaranteed outcomes was never easy. It stems from three pivotal factors that have challenged officials since the country's independence," columnist, former permanent envoy of the State of Kuwait to the United Nations (UN), the former Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) secretary general **Abdullah Bishara** wrote for *Al-Qabas* daily.



Abdullah Bishara

"Analyzing Kuwait's record from the very first days of its sovereignty reveals its leadership's unwavering efforts to ensure the nation's safety, security, and stability.

"The foremost goal has always been fostering international goodwill through sincere intentions, rational diplomacy, and noble aspirations. This vision aimed to position Kuwait as a regional hub for mediation, promoting harmony among Arab and neighboring nations, and mitigating hostility while rejecting extremism.

"Alongside, Kuwait extended its role to supporting development initiatives, both regionally and globally, addressing the urgent needs of countries striving for progress. Kuwait's commitment to these ideals earned it a place in international development and humanitarian efforts, including disaster relief and responses to crises such as famines, diseases, and natural disasters.

"From joining the Arab League in 1961 and the United Nations in 1963, Kuwait has carried forward this humanitarian mission. It embraced its political and moral obligations, contributing significantly to global development.

"This commitment culminated in the United Nations honoring the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as the 'Humanitarian Leader' in recognition of Kuwait's steadfast dedication to global humanitarianism.

"However, Kuwait's glowing international reputation faces challenges due to administrative and policy missteps, particularly concerning the revocation of Kuwaiti citizenship for non-national wives of citizens.

"These actions, attributed to procedural errors by the Ministry of Interior, unjustly penalize individuals who bear no responsibility for these failures. Such decisions undermine Kuwait's credibility and its hard-earned reputation for fairness and humanity.

"It is imperative that First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah correct these mistakes by implementing sound procedures to prevent recurrence. Any errors in the citizenship process should be traced to the responsible individuals within the Ministry of Interior. Kuwait's reputation as a beacon of justice and rational governance must remain untarnished.

"As someone who has represented Kuwait in international organizations and championed its contributions, I find it deeply concerning to see these administrative missteps potentially harm the country's image. It is crucial that Kuwait maintains its exemplary record, avoiding actions that global media or political institutions could exploit to question its integrity.

"The First Deputy has the opportunity to address these concerns. Investigating and rectifying the underlying issues within the Ministry is vital, as is fostering dialogue with public benefit organizations and media representatives to address criticisms and clarify the situation. A dedicated response mechanism within the Ministry of Interior could prevent further damage and reassure critics.

"The decision to halt the naturalization of non-national wives reflects the challenges Kuwait has faced in managing this issue over the years. While the new policy may aim to enhance security and stability, its long-term effectiveness remains to be seen. What is crucial is that Kuwait's humanitarian legacy stays intact, unaffected by this transient controversy.

"During a recent meeting, the First Deputy's clarifications alleviated some concerns regarding the status of those affected by the decision. However, further action is needed to restore confidence in Kuwait's commitment to human rights. Optimism persists that a comprehensive and lasting solution will emerge, ensuring that Kuwait's illustrious record in development, humanitarianism, and diplomacy remains untarnished.

"Let us hope that Kuwait continues to shine as a global example of compassion and rational governance, overcoming challenges with integrity and wisdom."

### Also:

"In previous articles, we have demonstrated that naturalization was initially a calculated 'absurdity' and a misguided plan aimed at controlling the outcomes of National Assembly elections. Over time, and as some of us followed the path of the early leaders, it evolved into a source of financial gain or a means to mask the incompetence and helplessness of those in charge," columnist **Abdul Latif Al-Duajj** wrote for *Al-Jarida* daily.

"In straightforward terms, the naturalized citizens -- whose integrity, intentions, honor, and dignity were often attacked by weak-willed individuals -- did not impose themselves upon us. Instead, it was the greed of the original Kuwaitis and those who identify as the

people of Kuwait, coupled with their political frailty, that drove the erroneous and illegal naturalization, or at least justified it in its initial stages.

"The so-called national identity, which some insist on preserving, was not violated by the naturalized citizens or those derisively labeled as intruders. Regrettably, Kuwait's national identity has been undermined and distorted by those in power and their opportunistic followers.

"The anti-democratic forces did not confine their actions to political naturalization alone. The real threat and destabilizing impact of naturalization emerged when these forces supported and reinforced it through religious and societal manipulation. Political naturalization itself did not inherently harm Kuwait or its people.

"As we have consistently stated, the naturalized were an extension of the original population and were neither intruders nor strangers. They would have seamlessly integrated into Kuwaiti society, much like the Kuwaitis who came before them, sharing the same race and religion.

"However, this was not the intent of those orchestrating naturalization. Their objective was to influence and control elections by introducing voters loyal to the authorities and traditional customs that sanctify authority and enforce unquestioning obedience to the ruler.

"As a result, the entire Kuwaiti society was reshaped -- 'Kibbled,' 'Badified,' and 'Religiousized' -- to ensure it remained under the dominance of traditional, undemocratic forces. Consequently, the essence of the 'real Kuwait' was lost -- a Kuwait defined by openness, sophistication, and progress -- and replaced with a Kuwait marked by extremism, isolation, and subservience. It became a society that hears and obeys, without question, 'my master'.

"The greatest disaster is when an individual places himself in charge of the Kuwaiti people, particularly when they issue a fatwa without being asked to do so, despite having no authority in this regard," columnist, former MP and General Manager of Scope Satellite TV, **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for *Al-Seyassah* daily.

"Such interference in matters that do not concern him undermines the freedoms of others and imposes an uninvited opinion on society.

"No one asked for his fatwa, and he is not even a member of the Fatwa Committee. He is just an ordinary citizen, entitled to either speak wisely or remain silent.

"For example, issuing a fatwa that prohibits women from entering stadiums or sitting in the stands -- considering this a 'religious violation' -- is a blatant assault on freedoms and an attempt to force an opinion on the people of Kuwait.

"This is entirely unacceptable. After the defeat of the Muslim Brotherhood and their ideology, we had hoped that this extremist mindset had been eradicated. However, it has resurfaced with new figures trying to impose their convictions on the entire nation.

"What is concerning is the question: Who consulted this person, or asked for his opinion? This unwarranted interference encourages further suppression of freedoms. The Kuwaiti people are known for their commitment to religion, values, and traditions.

"Therefore, it is troubling to witness a self-proclaimed 'Grand Mufti' and others interfere in the lives of citizens merely to draw attention to their views.

"The Prophet (PBUH) said: 'Part of a person's good Islam is his leaving that which does not concern him'. Only those entrusted with authority should issue fatwas and make decisions regarding Islamic law, determining what is permissible or forbidden. The rest should refrain from interfering in matters that are not their responsibility."

"The world witnessed a series of events in 2024, including wars and crises. Among the most prominent was the escalation of conflicts in the Middle East, with Israeli wars extending to Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria," columnist **Dr. Issa Mohammad Al-Omairi** wrote for *Al-Anba* daily.



Dr. Issa Al-Omairi

"The year also saw the overthrow of the long-standing Bashar al-Assad's regime and the US presidential elections, with Joe Biden withdrawing from the race and Donald Trump surviving an assassination attempt, ultimately defeating Democratic Vice-President Kamala Harris in the presidential race.

"The world also experienced devastating earthquakes, floods and natural disasters that affected millions of people. Moreover, significant advancements in artificial intelligence were made in 2024, marking a breakthrough in this field. In space exploration, 2024 witnessed Japan's landing on the Moon and a potential discovery of life on Mars. As for the war in Ukraine, Russia made advances despite substantial human losses.

"On the environmental front, 2024 was one of the hottest years on record, with rising temperatures contributing to droughts and other natural disasters, while progress in combating climate change remained limited.

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes



KUNA photo  
First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah honors officers from the Special Security Forces for their efforts to maintain security during the football matches at the Jaber Stadium.

## 1st Deputy PM honors members of SSF

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30, (KUNA): First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah honored, Sunday, at Seif Palace, Major Fahad Al-Nuwaier, First Sergeant Hamad Al-Enezi and First Sergeant Mohammed Al-Nu-maisi from the General Department of Special Security Forces, in appreciation of their sincere efforts in promoting human values and providing

support and assistance to the public during the matches of the 26th Gulf Cup.

The recognition was in appreciation of their exceptional contributions during the Gulf 26 matches, where they displayed dedication to human values by assisting the public and maintaining order.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef commended the honorees for their sincere efforts in ensuring the comfort

of match attendees while upholding security. He emphasized their role in promoting the values of giving and support, which reflected positively on the Ministry of Interior.

The minister praised their humanitarian approach, highlighting that their actions exemplified the values the Ministry of Interior seeks to instill, contributing to a positive image for its members both nationally and regionally.

# Police arrest 12 men, women for practicing magic, sorcery

Scores nabbed in crackdown on criminal activities

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The General Department of Criminal Investigations during a nation-wide campaign against fraud, swindling and practicing magic and sorcery arrested 12 people of various nationalities (both men and women), reports *Al-Seyassah* daily.

The daily added, some of these suspects were caught red-handed and the CID men have reportedly seized from these individuals tools used in magic and sorcery including paper talismans, amulets, stones, herbs, specialized books, personal photos, as well

as money that was in their possession -- believed to be proceeds from the trade.

The arrested individuals and the confiscated items have been referred to the relevant authorities for further investigation and legal action.

The Ministry of Interior has issued a warning to both citizens and residents, urging them to be cautious and avoid falling victim to scams, especially those involving magic and sorcery, which are used as tactics to deceive and financially exploit individuals.

**Scores arrested:** The General Traffic Department reported that security and traffic campaigns conducted between December 22 and 28 led to 1,700 security operations across the country, reports *Al-Seyassah* daily.

The campaigns resulted in the arrest of 12 individuals suspected of possessing alcohol, 38 individuals who were found in a state of drug or alcohol abuse and 10 persons were arrested because they were wanted by law to serve imprisonment sentences.

This is in addition to the arrest of 56 individuals -- 42 who had overstayed after the expiry of their residence permit and 3 wanted by law.

The operations also led to the detention of 32 people because they did not carry any identification documents. The authorities also seized 71 vehicles related to civil cases.

The department also addressed 297 cases, resolved 34 disputes, and took necessary action regarding 12 reports of suspicious activity. A total of 8,072 traffic violations were recorded and 9 vehicles were impounded and towed to the GTD garage.

## Sheikh Athbi visits Gulf Cup fan zone at 'Rock Complex'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser, accompanied by several senior security officials, conducted a field inspection visit to the fan zone for the 'Khaleeji Zain 26 Cup' at The Rock Complex, opposite Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the visit was aimed to assess the security and organizational situation, and ensure the best services are provided to preserve the safety of fans and properties, as well as showcase Kuwait's capabilities in hosting major sporting events.

Sheikh Athbi expressed appreciation for the efforts of the security services, volunteer groups, and the constructive role of the private sector in contributing to the success and organization of the Khaleeji Zain 26 Cup.

In conclusion, Sheikh Athbi affirmed his commitment to meeting the needs of Gulf and Kuwaiti fans attending the event, in line with the directives of the political leadership, and to enhancing Kuwait's reputation as a host of international sporting events.



KFF photo  
The victim's car turns turtle after the accident.

## One dead, 2 injured in Mutlaa Road accident

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: A vehicle overturned on Mutlaa Road on Monday morning, resulting in the death of one individual and injuries to two others.

According to a press release issued by KFF, fire-fighting teams rushed to the location after receiving information about the accident on Mutlaa Road on Monday morning. They discovered that the accident resulted in one fatality and two injuries. The deceased was transferred to the Forensic Medicine Department, and the injured individuals were handed over to paramedics.

## Judiciary transfer orders

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Decree No. 215/2024 has been issued regarding the transfer of judicial officials, reports *Al-Anba* daily.

The decree states the following:

Article One: The following advisors shall be transferred to work in the Public Prosecution:

- Abdullah Muhammad Abdullah Al-Sanea, Deputy of the Court of Appeal to Senior Attorney General

- Tareq Khaled Nisf Al-Nisf, Deputy of the Court of Appeal to Senior Attorney General

- Abdulaziz Youssef Abdulkarim Al-Ghaith, Advisor at the Court of Appeal to Attorney General

Article Two: The Minister of Justice shall implement this decree, which will take effect from the date of its issuance and will be published in the official gazette.

## Customs seizes narcotics hidden in shoes, utensils

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Kuwait's General Administration of Customs has successfully thwarted multiple smuggling attempts across various customs ports, intercepting over 8 kilograms of narcotics and 40,000 pills concealed in household utensils and shoes, reports *Al-Seyassah* daily.

Four parcels arriving via air freight and express mail from multiple countries were intercepted. The confiscated items included:

7.5 kilograms of hashish, 550 grams of marijuana, 37,000 capsules of Larica, 780 narcotic pills

At Kuwait International Airport (T1), customs officials stopped an attempt to smuggle: 1,200 Tramadol pills, 210 grams of marijuana. Commitment to National Security.

All confiscated materials and arrested suspects have been referred to the appropriate authorities for further investigation and legal action.



Moi photo  
Drug pills found hidden in shoes.



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### Move aims to enhance transparency, completion

## MPW implements fingerprint systems on sites

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30, (KUNA): Minister of Public Works, Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, announced on Monday the commencement of implementing instructions outlined in Circular No. 8 of 2024, issued by the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT). These instructions aim to enhance oversight, improve transparency, and elevate performance in government construction projects.

In a press statement on Monday, Dr. Al-Mashaan stated that the ministry has mandated all contracting companies to implement the latest fingerprint systems at all project sites. These systems will be used to record the attendance and departure of workers in companies executing

government construction projects, thereby expediting the completion of development initiatives.

She further explained that this decision seeks to achieve optimal project implementation, contributing to increased work efficiency and ensuring the quality of execution. Dr. Al-Mashaan highlighted that the Ministry of Public Works, in co-operation with companies involved in



Dr. Al-Mashaan

government construction projects, will oversee the implementation of these systems in a manner that safeguards the public interest and promotes transparency and oversight.

She emphasized the ministry's readiness to provide all necessary support and resources to ensure the success of this initiative, which serves the nation's interests. Dr. Al-Mashaan expressed her optimism about achieving positive outcomes through the mandatory use of fingerprint systems for workers in government construction projects. She reiterated the ministry's commitment to continuously enhancing performance and transparency across all its projects.



A number of officials in the General Authority and the General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf during their participation and confirmation of interest in wildlife. KUNA photo

### Kuwait celebrates Gulf Wildlife Day

The Environment Public Authority (EPA) celebrated Monday the Gulf Wildlife Day under the theme "Sustainable Marine Wildlife," in collaboration with the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

In a speech during the event, Acting Director of the Authority, Samira Al-Kandari, said that the GCC countries have strived to find an appropriate scientific framework for environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources in line with the goals of sustainable development.

Al-Kandari explained that in 1985, the GCC leaders adopted general policies and principles for environmental protection and approved the convention on

the conservation of wildlife and its habitats in the Gulf States, recognizing the critical importance of preserving wildlife.

The Gulf Wildlife Day, celebrated on December 30 every year, hosted by Kuwait this year, with the aim of creating an annual platform to unite efforts for the preservation of wildlife, ecosystems, and endangered species. She added.

Al-Kandari stressed that Kuwait and the GCC countries are determined to face common environmental challenges and work toward a sustainable vision to ensure the preservation of their natural resources for future generations. (KUNA)

# Kuwait Municipality clarifies jurisdiction on Metro project

## Progress and challenges highlighted

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Kuwait Municipality has clarified that it is 'not the party concerned with the metro project,' emphasizing that responsibility for the technical and financial studies of the project lies with the Public-Private Partnership Projects Authority (PPP).**

This clarification came in response to inquiries by Khaled Al-Mutairi, Deputy Chairman of the Municipal Council, regarding the metro project, a key component of the government's development plan.

In addressing the issue, Al-Mutairi's first question about the metro's route and right of way, the municipality explained that these were finalized in 2011, based on recommendations from its Structural Plan Department and the Municipal Council's decision at the time.

The decision approved the allocation of routes for transportation systems, including heavy and light trains, trams and buses. The project was later transferred from the Ministry of Communications to the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport (PART) following its es-



The Metro route

PART photo

establishment in 2014.

The municipality stated that the PPP Authority is currently conducting a comprehensive study of the metro project, while the detailed final studies, including solutions for existing obstacles, will be carried out by PART.

The Roads Authority highlighted the project's importance in reducing traffic congestion and its socio-economic benefits. Once the feasibility study is complete, a comprehensive report will be submitted to the Council of Ministers for further action.

Al-Mutairi also proposed relocating a planned metro station south of 6.5 Ring Road to facilitate the establishment of a housing project accommodating approximately 3,000 units. The municipality responded that such a re-

location requires technical studies from the relevant project authority.

During the Municipal Council's recent session, Al-Mutairi requested that the municipality's responses and related documents be referred to the council's technical committee for a detailed review.

The committee will also engage relevant authorities to address the delays in implementing the project. The metro project is slated for discussion in January 2025 following the council's mid-year recess.

The Kuwait Metro project remains a vital element of national development, with efforts underway to overcome challenges and advance its implementation.

## CSC updates website and integrated systems

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Civil Service Commission has completed updates and maintenance on its website and integrated systems, making all services now fully accessible to users, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

According to informed sources, the periodic maintenance aims to improve the user experience by increasing download speed, enhancing technical performance, and reducing docu-

ment download times.

The updates also focus on data security, ensuring compatibility with modern devices, and optimizing the display of services on smartphones, tablets, and other contemporary devices.

These changes are designed to streamline access and provide a more efficient and user-friendly interface for all visitors to the website.

### Kuwait highlights transformative strategies

## KWA takes part in UAE workshop on critical role of digital transformation

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Kuwait Water Association (KWA), led by Technical Advisor and Head of the Sustainability Committee, Heba Abbas, participated in a regional workshop in Abu Dhabi focused on the critical role of digital transformation in enhancing water security and sustainable development, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The event, organized by the Department of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation at the League of Arab States and the Arab Federation for Digital Economy, brought together representatives from Arab nations and international organizations.

It underscored the importance of regional collaboration in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

During the workshop, Heba Abbas presented a comprehensive vision aimed at boosting private investments and fostering foreign partnerships in digital projects.

She emphasized the necessity of developing digital skills and encouraging technological innovation as key strategies for achieving sustainable development.

Abbas highlighted Kuwait's 'Kafa'a' project, which she described as a trans-



Al-Seyassah photo  
Heba Abbas with Dr. Ibrahim Ali, President of the UAE Environment Friends Society.

formative initiative in the management of water resources, marking a significant advancement in Kuwait's approach to sustainable water management.

The workshop reflected the growing recognition of the value of digital technology in addressing global challenges, particularly in the water sector and served as a platform for sharing knowledge and fostering collaboration across the Arab region.

### New West Funaites tanks complete

## MEW working on increasing freshwater storage to 170 million imperial gallons

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy is preparing to increase its fresh water storage capacity to 170 million imperial gallons, following the completion of the second phase of the West Funaites water tanks project by the Water Projects Sector. This development will position Kuwait as the leading country in the Gulf in terms of fresh water storage capacity, reports Al-Rai daily.

The ministry is keeping pace with the state's plans for new housing cities by implementing fresh water distribution complexes that include ground water tanks and water pumps to meet the water needs of these cities. The project to construct two water tanks in West Funaites is among the latest projects completed by the Water Projects Sector.

The daily visited the second phase of the West Funaites tanks project, which took three years to complete, in line with the contractual period. This brings the total number of tanks in West Funaites to seven, with a combined storage capacity of 570 million imperial gallons.

The project manager Eng. Khalifa Al-Enezi said, "The project involves the construction of two reinforced concrete tanks for freshwater, along with associated works in West Funaites at Egaila Water Pumping Station No. 3. Each tank has a capacity of 85 million imperial gallons."

The project began on October 6, 2021, and was completed in three years, in accordance with the established timetable and without any delays. We are now in the process of receiving the project from the contractor, in preparation for its operation, connection to the water network, and distribution to consumers.

The purpose of constructing these ground tanks is to enhance water storage capacity and increase the strategic reserve of freshwater, in line with future plans and studies being developed for new residential areas, which will lead to a geographical redistribution of the population in Kuwait.

The implementation of such projects helps expand the storage capacity of fresh water to meet the growing demand for water consumption in Kuwait."

## KIMS opens 2025/2026 training applications

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Ministry of Health, represented by the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialties (KIMS), announced the opening of applications for Kuwaiti doctors to join the "Kuwaiti Board" training programs and specialized fellowship programs for the 2025/2026 academic year. The application period will run from January 5 to 15 for a number of specialties, reports Al-Rai daily.

The training programs include specialties such as clinical biochemistry, metabolic medicine, clinical immunodiagnosics, clinical microbiology, clinical virology, third-level dentistry, root canal dentistry, family medicine, diagnostic medicine for blood

diseases, and internal medicine.

The diploma programs also include specialties such as principles of toxicology emergencies and the professional diploma in general medical practice. The fellowship programs include specialties related to adult intensive care, obesity surgery, clinical hematology, oncology, kidney diseases, and internal medicine for pregnant women.

The application requirements specify that the applicant must be a Kuwaiti national. Doctors applying must not be enrolled in another training program at the institute, nor should they be on a valid study mission or mission suspension at the time of application.



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# NCCAL Jableh project inches toward final approval

## Integration of Mubarakiya area's heritage sites to boost tourism

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Following the Municipal Council's approval during its last session, the "Jableh Cultural" project, submitted by the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, has entered the coordination phase.**

The municipality and the NCCAL are conducting the necessary traffic, economic, and environmental

studies to ensure the project aligns with the Mubarakiya development project without adverse impacts.

A key consideration in the project design is that parking spaces in the Mubarakiya area were specifically allocated to serve Mubarakiya markets, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach.

Proposed to be named 'Historical Barahat Al-Falah', the project's vision focuses on integrating the area's cultural landmarks, including the Kuwait National Museum, Kuwait National Library, the Tribal School, Beit Al-Sadu, Beit Al-Badr, Al-Khaled Building, Al-Sayer Al-Sharqi Mosque, Al-Sayer Al-Qibli Mosque, and Al-

Rahan Mosque.

This integration aims to enhance the urban fabric, improve the quality of pedestrian and visitor experiences, and promote the area as a tourist destination.

The project seeks to revitalize the neglected area adjacent to the old Mubarakiya market and municipality park, providing supporting infrastructure and facilitating transportation access.

It aligns with Kuwait's fourth master plan, Kuwait 2040, which envisions a prosperous future enriched by cultural development, diversified national income sources, and contributions to internal growth.

Spanning approximately 45,557 square meters in the

Qibla area, near the Al-Saeed and Al-Sharhan mosques, the project highlights the cultural, historical, social, and economic value of the site. The NCCAL study underscores the potential to transform the area into a vibrant cultural expression center.

Key features of the project include a public park with courtyards, open spaces, and facilities designed to revive the site. It incorporates sustainable natural elements such as local plants, shaded areas for external ventilation, and spaces for children's entertainment.

The park will also host recreational and artistic events, fostering family engagement and community enrichment.

## Saad Al-Abdullah Academy hosts cyber awareness lecture for students of WPI



Ministry of Interior photo  
Colonel Adhari Al-Safi, the Deputy Director of the Women's Police Institute

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30:** The Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences organized an awareness lecture for students of the Women's Police Institute (WPI), reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The event was attended by Colonel Iman Boland, Director of the Women's Police Institute, and Colonel Adhari Al-Safi, the Deputy Director.

The lecture, titled 'Your Digital Awareness in the World of Cyber Attacks,' was presented by Lieutenant Colonel Fatima Shashter with the aim to enhance the digital awareness and security skills of female officers and non-commissioned officers.

The Ministry of Interior emphasized that the session focused on developing the professional and ethical values necessary for female police personnel to navigate security challenges effectively, contributing to their role in maintaining societal security and stability.

## DDI to host 1st International Dasman Diabetes Institute Summit on Advanced Diabetes Care '25



The Dasman Diabetes Institute

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30:** Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI) which was established by Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Sciences invites you to the 1st International Dasman Diabetes Institute Summit (IDDS) on Advanced Diabetes Care 2025, which will be held at Waldorf Astoria hotel in Kuwait from January the 23rd until the 25th.

Esteemed professors from well-renowned institutions around the world will be presenting at our first international summit that will be organized by DDI, where prominent researchers and scientists will be leading interactive workshops as part of this summit. This is a great opportunity to keep up to date with cutting edge updates in advanced diabetes care and to network with peers for a brighter and promising future in this vital field. For registration, please visit Dasman Diabetes Institute website [www.dasmaninstitute.org](http://www.dasmaninstitute.org)

We look forward to seeing you.

Continued from Page 1

### Iran, how

Tehran had hoped. The strategic calculations of Russia and China differ from those of Iran. The Russian-Ukrainian war has become more complicated, and Moscow is focused on its own concerns. Meanwhile, Beijing is preoccupied with other priorities. Both Russia and China have also realized that their cooperation with the Gulf states is more beneficial to them than aligning with Iran.

Therefore, we can say that Tehran has lost the regional influence it once wielded through its network of "octopus arms" to blackmail the world. Strangely, the decision-makers in Iran still fail to recognize that the uprisings it faced since 1979 up to the present day have eroded the regime's internal power. With the ongoing economic and financial crisis, Iran now has no choice but to return to political reasoning for managing its relations, especially with neighboring countries that have extended cooperation multiple times, only to be met with intimidation and provocation from Tehran.

Given this reality, no wise person in the region could wish for the Iranian people anything but stability and a decent life, free from the crises that have plagued them for over four decades. It is time for the Iranian people to return to contributing to regional development, as they once did before 1979. This would benefit both Iran and its neighbors, and turn Iran into an economic power capable of helping the region escape the cycle of crises caused by the unrealistic vision of "exporting the revolution."

The Iranian regime should now learn from the Gulf Arab states, which have chosen to export knowledge, prosperity, stability, and security, not just to their people, but to the entire Arab world. Perhaps the Iranian regime could benefit from this lesson. There is a clear difference between those who choose the path of reason and development and those who take the rugged road of fugitives.

As the year ends, a year marked by disasters and senseless wars, we hope that the Iranian regime will rule with reason in the coming year, and work with its neighbors toward development, as well as move away from hollow slogans. The Iranian regime must understand that stability and cooperation with its neighbors are Iran's key to joining the world stage again.

### Amir condolences

Joe Biden expressing condolences on death of the former president, Jimmy Carter, wishing his family would be blessed with patience.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent a cable of condolences to US President Joe Biden expressing condolences on death of the former president, Jimmy Carter.

— See Also Pages 6 & 12

### No fines,

He disclosed that the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior, Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, strongly supports in facilitating these procedures.

On persons who have yet to complete the biometric fingerprints, Al-Owihan stated that 16,442 Kuwaitis, 224,000 expatriates and 88,604 bedoun have yet to complete the biometric process, noting that these are relatively small numbers considering the speed at which the ministry has completed the fingerprinting process.

### Kuwait Foreign

It also highlighted the importance of reconciliation and institution-building as key pillars for ensuring security and stability in the region. The council further called for the resumption of a comprehensive political process.

Meanwhile, Ahmed Al-Sharaa, leader of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and the Military Operations Administration in Syria, shared updates on the country's political progress.

He revealed in a televised interview that drafting a new Syrian constitution could take three years, while organizing elections might require up to four years, due to the need for a comprehensive population census.

Al-Sharaa emphasized the importance of the ongoing "National Dialogue Conference," which aims to include all components of Syrian society, form specialized committees, and proceed with voting.

Addressing concerns over the single-color appointments in the current government, he explained that these measures were necessary for harmony during this transitional stage and were not intended to exclude any group.

He also highlighted Syria's potential for long-term regional stability, stating, "Liberating Syria guarantees the security of the region and the Gulf for the next fifty years."

Al-Sharaa expressed optimism about recent Saudi statements, describing them as "very positive," and praised Saudi Arabia's efforts and potential future investments in Syria.

In other news, the first Kuwaiti planeload of relief supplies headed on Monday from Abdullah Al-Mubarak Air Base toward Syria.

Loaded with 20 tons of goods, mattresses and blankets, the cargo is destined for most in need segment in Syria, as part of the humanitarian campaign "Kuwait on your side."

Chairperson of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society Ambassador Khaled Al-Maghames said in a statement that the relief supplies were dispatched upon orders by His Highness the

Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

He affirmed that the aid effort was intended to demonstrate solidarity with the Syrian people and alleviate hardships of people in need in this country.

They will be delivered to the Syrian authorities for distribution.

### Kuwait begins

December marked the highest number of citizenship withdrawals, with 11,805 cases, representing 63 percent of the total decisions since August.

November accounted for 5,870 cases, October for 820, September for 202, and August for only 78 cases. This trend is expected to continue into January as thousands of files remain under review.

In a related development, individuals whose citizenship was revoked under Article 8 received text messages from banks confirming that restrictions on their accounts had been lifted.

This follows a pledge by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah during his open meeting last Wednesday with newspaper editors and public benefit societies.

The messages stated that all banking services, including cash withdrawals, electronic payments, and other transactions, have been reactivated, ensuring these individuals can access their accounts without hindrance.

### Namaa Charity

The charity noted that it distributed blankets and winter clothes to meet the needs of children and adults, and sponge mattresses to improve living conditions in camps for the displaced people.

It added that this donation comes as part of Namaa's commitment to stand by those affected and alleviate their suffering, especially during the difficult humanitarian conditions that Yemen is experiencing.

On his part, Secretary-General of the Humanitarian Access Society in Hadhramaut Governorate, Saeed Al-Khamer, said that the campaign came at a very sensitive time to contribute to tapering off the suffering of the most affected families and those suffering in winter with the severity of the cold and the lack of basic resources.

He expressed his gratitude and appreciation to Kuwait and its leadership, people and to the charitable societies, for standing by the Yemeni people and for everyone who contributed to the success of this campaign.



Kuwaiti writer specializing in children's literature Amal Al-Rundi during her participation in a workshop at the Isa Cultural Center in Bahrain.

Inspiring young minds through Arabic literacy

## Kuwaiti reading initiative engages young readers at Bahrain workshop

**MANAMA, Dec 30, (KUNA):** A Kuwaiti initiative that encourages children to read, innovate, and develop their Arabic language skills participated in a workshop at the Isa Cultural Center in Bahrain. Kuwaiti writer specializing in children's literature, Amal Al-Rundi, stated in a press release on Friday that this is the initiative's third participation outside Kuwait, after Jordan and Tunisia. She explained that holding its activities at an important cultural institution such as the Isa Cultural Center underscores its significance and the impact of its initiatives.

Al-Rundi, who heads the initiative called "Friends of the Library at the Arab Level," added that the participation also reflects the ambition to interact with major cultural institutions in the Arab world, just as it engages with educational institutions, with the goal of offering a distinctive activity for children.

She mentioned that she is always keen to involve Arab writers with valuable creativity in the initiative's activities, whether in Kuwait or at its events outside the country. She also pointed out that the initiative reached the children of the Azraq camp in Jordan through its collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Kuwait, with participation from initiative members Hayat Al-Yaqout, Huda Al-Shawa, Fatima Shaaban, Alaa Al-Jaber, and Muhammad Amr. Additionally, the initiative previously reached the children of Sfax in Tunisia through the Sfax International Children's Book Fair.

Al-Rundi emphasized that the "Friends of the Library Initiative" has a renewed vision to reach children across the Arab world.

For her part, the head of the children's library at the Isa Cultural Center, Iman Jabari, stated in a similar release that the initiative focuses on educating children and fostering a love of reading through enjoyable and educational programs and activities that encourage reading and the acquisition of knowledge. The initiative also aims to encourage talented children to write.

She added that writer Al-Rundi presented her new



KUNA photos  
Kuwaiti writer Amal Al-Rundi and head of the children's library at the Issa Cultural Center Iman Jabari during the workshop.

story, My Grandmother Samiha, during the workshop, which seeks to instill and spread the concept of tolerance among children in an atmosphere full of fun, singing, and joy. Jabari noted that the children thoroughly enjoyed the story program presented by the initiative.

Bahraini writer Yusra Hassan also praised her participation in the workshop dedicated to the initiative, noting that she presented her story An Annoying Yellow Spot during the event. Hassan described the initiative as a cultural bridge that connects Arab children with Arab creators, aiming to make reading an enjoyable experience.

It is worth noting that the activities of the "Arab Library Friends Initiative," which was launched from the State of Kuwait, include activities designed to encourage reading, creativity, and the development of the Arabic language among children.

In this context, the initiative moves between schools and associations, publishing its stories, songs, and educational materials, all of which contribute to motivating children to build their reading, artistic, and athletic abilities, while strengthening their connection with books and libraries.

## MEW's shift system remains unchanged

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30:** The Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy said the current shift system will remain unchanged for the time being, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The system follows a pattern of 12 working hours followed by 24 hours of rest, then another 12 working hours followed by 48 hours of rest.

There is almost a consensus within the ministry to maintain this schedule until matters are resolved with the Civil Service Council.

The system is critical for most

sectors within the ministry, and no official decisions regarding a new shift system have been issued.

The current system, which has been rejected by the Civil Service Bureau multiple times, will remain in place until an agreement is reached.

In relation to this, the Audit Bureau approved the ministry's request not to count employees working under the current shift system as absent for the year 2024.

The decision allows direct managers to monitor attendance and

departure times for employees on this shift system.

However, the continuation of this system without formal approval from the CSC would be considered a violation unless the ministry receives an exemption from Resolution No. 12 of 2012, which governs shift systems.

Furthermore, there have been multiple correspondences within the ministry to review a new shift system proposed by the CSC. These discussions aim to find a system that works across the various sectors of the ministry.





Rescue team members work at the site of a plane fire at Muan International Airport in Muan, South Korea, Monday, Dec. 30, 2024. Inset: South Korea's acting President Choi Sang-mok places a flower for the victims on a plane which skidded off a runway and burst into flames, at a memorial altar at Muan sport park in Muan, South Korea, Monday. (AP)

Transport Ministry plans to conduct safety inspections of all of 101 Boeing 737-800 jetliners

## South Korea struggles to find cause of plane crash that killed 179

SEOUL, Dec 30, (AP) — South Korean officials said Monday they will conduct safety inspections of all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by the country's airlines, as they struggle to determine what caused a plane crash that killed 179 people a day earlier.

Sunday's crash, the country's worst aviation disaster in decades, triggered an outpouring of national sympathy. Many people worry how effectively the South Korean government will handle the disaster as it grapples with a leadership vacuum following the recent successive impeachments of President Yoon Suk Yeol and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's top two officials, amid political tumult caused by Yoon's brief imposition of martial law earlier this month.

New acting President Choi Sang-mok on Monday presided over a task force meeting on the crash and instructed authorities to conduct an emergency review of the country's aircraft operation systems.

"The essence of a responsible response would be renovating the aviation safety systems on the whole to prevent recurrences of similar incidents and building a safer Republic of South Korea," said Choi, who is also deputy prime minister and finance minister.

The Boeing 737-800 plane operated by South Korean budget airline Jeju Air aborted its first landing attempt for reasons that aren't immediately clear. Then, during its sec-

ond landing attempt, it received a bird strike warning from the ground control center before its pilot issued a distress signal. The plane landed without its front landing gear deployed, overshot the runway, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into a fireball.

Alan Price, a former chief pilot at Delta Air Lines and now a consultant, said the Boeing 737-800 is a "proven airplane" that belongs to a different class of aircraft than the Boeing 737 Max jetliner that was linked to fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019.

But South Korea's Transport Ministry said Monday it plans to conduct safety inspections of all of the 101 Boeing 737-800 jetliners operated by the country's airlines as well as a broader review into safety standards at Jeju Air, which operates 39 of those planes. Senior ministry official Joo Jong-wan said representatives from the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board and Boeing were expected to arrive in South Korea on Monday to participate in the investigation.

Ministry officials also said they will look into whether the Muan airport's localizer - a concrete fence housing a set of antennas designed to guide aircraft safely during landings - should have been made with lighter materials that would break more easily upon impact.

Joo said the ministry has determined that similar concrete structures are in other domestic airports, including in

Jeju Island and the southern cities of Yeosu and Pohang, as well as airports in the United States, Spain and South Africa.

Video of the crash indicated that the pilots did not deploy flaps or slats to slow the aircraft, suggesting a possible hydraulic failure, and did not manually lower the landing gear, suggesting they did not have time, said John Cox, a retired airline pilot and CEO of Safety Operating Systems in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Despite that, the jetliner was under control and traveling in a straight line, and damage and injuries likely would have been minimized if not for the barrier being so close to the runway, Cox said.

Other observers said the videos showed the plane was suffering from suspected engine trouble but the landing gear malfunction was likely a direct reason for the crash. They said there wouldn't likely be a link between the landing gear problem and the suspected engine issue.

Earlier Monday, another Boeing 737-800 plane operated by Jeju Air returned to Seoul's Gimpo International Airport shortly after takeoff when the pilot detected a landing gear issue. Song Kyung-hoon, a Jeju Air executive, said the issue was resolved through communication with a land-based equipment center, but the pilot decided to return to Gimpo as a precautionary measure.

Joo said officials were reviewing whether there might

have been communication problems between air traffic controllers and the pilot. "Our current understanding is that, at some point during the go-around process, communication became somewhat ineffective or was interrupted, ahead of the landing and impact," he said.

Ministry officials said Monday the plane's flight data and cockpit audio recorders were moved to a research center at Gimpo airport ahead of their analysis. Ministry officials earlier said it would take months to complete the investigation of the crash.

The Muan crash is South Korea's deadliest aviation disaster since 1997, when a Korean Airlines plane crashed in Guam, killing 228 people on board.

The crash left many South Koreans shocked and ashamed, with the government announcing a seven-day national mourning period through Jan. 4. Some questioned whether the crash involved safety or regulatory issues, such as a 2022 Halloween crash in Seoul that killed 160 people and a 2014 ferry sinking that killed 304 people.

The Transport Ministry said authorities have identified 146 bodies and are collecting DNA and fingerprint samples from the other 33.

Park Han Shin, a representative of the bereaved families, said they were told that the bodies were so badly damaged that officials need time before returning them to their families.

### Poll ends military rule

## Low turnout in Chad elections boycotted by opposition

N'DJAMENA, Chad, Dec 30, (AP) — Chadians voted Sunday amid a low turnout in parliamentary and regional elections that will end a three-year transitional period from military rule but which the main opposition is boycotting after accusing authorities of not overseeing a credible electoral process.

The parliamentary election is the first in more than a decade in Chad and comes months after the junta leader, Mahamat Idriss Deby, won a disputed presidential vote that was meant to return democracy. Deby took power in 2021 following the death of his father and longtime president Idriss Deby Itno, who spent three decades in power.

Voting ended late Monday although official results won't be known for about two weeks. The election will "pave the way for the era of decentralization so long awaited and desired by the Chadian people," Deby said.

The oil-exporting country of 18 million people, among Africa's poor-

est, had not had a free and fair transfer of power since it became independent from France in 1960. The elections this year are the first in junta-led countries in Africa's Sahel region to hold a promised but delayed return to democracy.

At least 8 million voters are registered to elect 188 legislators in the Central African nation's new National Assembly. Representatives at the provincial and municipal levels will also be elected.

There was a low voter turnout in the capital N'Djamena, where only a handful of voters were seen in some polling stations.

"We hope that the people we voted for do a good job for a better Chad, a Chad with a future," said Mahamat Issa Houssein, who voted in the capital.

More than 10 opposition parties are boycotting the vote, including the main Transformers party, whose candidate, Succes Masra, came second in the presidential election.



Chad's President General Mahamat Idriss Deby arrives at the 19th Francophonie Summit, at the Elysee Palace, in Paris, Oct. 4, 2024. (AP)

The party has criticized the parliamentary election, as well as the presidential vote that many observers were

banned from, as a "charade" and a ploy for Deby to remain in power to continue a "dynasty."



Police forensics team arrive at a hotel in Bangkok, Thailand, Monday, Dec. 30, 2024 after a fire. (AP)

## Hotel fire in popular Bangkok tourist area kills 3 foreigners

BANGKOK, Dec 30, (AP) — A fire broke out at a hotel near Bangkok's Khao San Road, a popular tourist destination, killing three foreigners and injuring several other people, Thai police said Monday.

The three who died in the fire on Sunday night were all foreign tourists, Police Colonel Sanong Saengmanee told The Associated Press. One was found dead at the scene and the other two died after being transported to the hospital.

Police later identified the dead as a Brazilian woman, a Ukrainian man and an American man. Four people were hospitalized, of whom one was in critical condition.

The fire erupted on the 5th floor of the six-story Ember Hotel, police said. Khao San Road is a popular backpack-

er street in the Thai capital that's also known for its lively nightlife.

The flames were eventually contained and the cause of the blaze is under investigation.

Seventy-five people were staying at the hotel at the time of the fire.

Sreekanth Kolamala, a 37-year-old Indian national who lives in Singapore and was in Thailand on vacation, witnessed the rescue operation and said that firefighters "broke the glass over there to try to pull people out."

Sanga Ruangwattanakul, the president of the Khao San Road Business Association, stood outside The Ember Hotel on Monday, looking at the damage. He said 20,000 people were expected at a New Year's Eve countdown event on Tuesday night.

### Subcontinent

**Students clash with police in eastern India:** Police used water cannons and canes to disperse hundreds of students in India's eastern state of Bihar on Sunday.

The students who were demanding the cancellation of an examination conducted earlier this month for government jobs alleged that the question paper of the examination was "leaked." The protest had been going on for the past few days.

Several students were injured in the clash with police, and were admitted to a local hospital. (Xinhua)

**10 killed in Punjab passenger bus crash:** At least 10 people were killed and over seven others injured when a passenger bus turned turtle in the Attock district of Pakistan's eastern Punjab province on Monday, police officials said.

The accident took place on the motorway near Fateh Jang area of the district when the driver of the bus lost control of the vehicle due to a tire burst, leading to the tragic crash, officials from National Highways and Motorway Police told Xinhua.

Women and children are among the victims of the unfortunate accident, the officials said, adding that the bus was on its way to the federal capital Islamabad from the eastern Bahawalpur district when it met the accident. (Xinhua)

**Bangladesh's administrative hub reopens:** Bangladeshi government's secretariat, a key administrative hub of the country in capital Dhaka, reopened on Sunday after a temporary closure caused by a devastating fire at building No. 7 of the compound.

Several ministries which were housed in the damaged building have been relocated to alternative government offices in the capital city and elsewhere in the country. Niyaz Md Tanvir Alam, a senior Public Works Department official, told reporters that power connection has been restored to all buildings except Building No. 7. (Xinhua)

**Taliban to shut all NGOs employing Afghan women:** The Taliban say they will close all national and foreign nongovernmental groups in Afghanistan employing women. It comes two years after they told NGOs to suspend the employment of Afghan women, allegedly because they didn't wear the Islamic headscarf correctly.

In a letter published on X Sunday night, the Economy Ministry warned that failure to comply with the latest order would lead to NGOs losing their license to operate in Afghanistan.

The ministry said it was responsible for the registration, coordination, leadership and supervision of all activities carried out by national and foreign organizations.

The government was once again ordering the stoppage of all female work in institutions not controlled by the Taliban, according to the letter.

"In case of lack of cooperation, all activities of that institution will be canceled and the activity license of that institution, granted by the ministry, will also be canceled."

It's the Taliban's latest attempt to control or intervene in NGO activity.

In another development, the Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada has ordered that buildings should not have windows looking into places where a woman might sit or stand.

According to a four-clause decree posted on X late Saturday, the order applies to new buildings as well as existing ones. (Xinhua)



Akhundzada

## Market Movements 30-12-2024

		Change	Closing pts			Change	Closing pts
SAUDI	- TASI	+108.17	12,000.92	JAPAN	- NIKKEI 225	-386.62	39,894.54
DUBAI	- DFMGI	+23.60	5,153.24	EGYPT	- EGXZ 30	-269.28	29,325.20
PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	+3,898.30	115,347.81				

# Business

Enhancing over 90 services and features in 2024

## NBK Mobile App strengthened its position as Kuwait's leading digital banking platform

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Demonstrating unwavering attention to the finer details of its customers' needs and aiming to enhance their banking experience in ways that impact their daily lives, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) strengthened its digital leadership in 2024 by introducing and upgrading over 90 services and features on the NBK Mobile Banking App.

Through the introduction of new services and products, alongside enhancements to existing offerings, NBK has delivered a digital experience that not only meets but often surpasses customer expectations. The App empowers users to manage their accounts and conduct banking transactions seamlessly and securely, anytime and anywhere, eliminating the need for branch visits.

This year, the NBK Mobile Banking App introduced a host of innovative features, encompassing a wide array of services and products, including but not limited to:

### Al Jawhara Miles Credit Card

Through the NBK Mobile Banking App, NBK customers can now effortlessly apply for a Visa Infinite Credit Card, seamlessly linking it to their Al Jawhara or Al Jawhara Savings Accounts. This integration grants them access to a wide range of exclusive benefits, enhancing their banking experience.

This unique card, the first of its kind in the market, offers customers the unique opportunity to earn welcome miles equivalent to three times the card's credit limit, with a potential of up to 150,000 miles. Additionally, it amplifies the chances of winning in Al Jawhara account draws by threefold, significantly enhancing the likelihood of securing weekly and monthly prizes. Customers also gain increased eligibility for the grand prize draw, offering a staggering one million dinars, held three times a year.

### WAMD Service

Available through the NBK Mobile Banking App, this service enables customers to send and receive money seamlessly, easily, and conveniently, using only the recipient's mobile number. No additional bank account details are required, making the process simple and efficient.

### 247 Visa Platinum Prepaid Card

Through the NBK Mobile Banking App, customers can now transform their everyday purchases into a smart savings opportunity with the NBK 247 Visa Platinum Prepaid Cashback Card. This innovative card offers customers up to 24% cashback on their daily expenditures, making each transaction a step toward rewarding savings.

### Prepaid Gift Cards

NBK Mobile Banking App enables customers to effortlessly issue digital prepaid gift cards, allowing users to quickly create and load virtual cards directly through the application. These cards can be gifted to family and friends on various occasions, offering flexibility and convenience. The recipient can easily add the card to their e-wallet and begin using it immediately for purchases both within Kuwait and internationally, as well as for online transactions.

### Monthly Statement

Customers can now access their monthly statements directly from the account details page of the NBK Mobile Banking App. They have the option to customize the statement period or select specific dates and can easily share the statement via their preferred method, such as email or applications like WhatsApp, without the need to visit any of the bank's branches.

### NBK Quick Send

This service empowers NBK customers to instant send funds via the NBK Mobile Banking App. Users can generate instant payment links, sending them to both NBK customers and non-customers alike, simply by entering the recipient's name, phone number, and the desired amount.

### Load Account

A notable feature introduced this year to the NBK Mobile Banking App is the ability for users to load their NBK accounts using K-Net portal. This functionality allows for seamless top-ups at any time, from anywhere, even during weekends and public holidays, providing unparalleled convenience.

### Al Jawhara Saver Account

Customers now can apply to the first of its kind ac-



Mohammed Al-Dakheel

### Al-Dakheel:

- Committed to Elevating Digital Excellence and Delivering Customer Experience Beyond Expectations
- NBK Mobile Banking App prioritizes the smallest details of customer needs, making a meaningful impact on their daily lives.



NBK Mobile Banking App logo

(e-Dividend) transfer service. This service enables the direct deposit of cash dividend amounts into the accounts of shareholders who are registered with Kuwait Clearing Company (KCC), offering a streamlined and efficient way to receive dividends.

By offering registration for the electronic profit transfer service through the NBK Mobile Banking App, the bank aims to simplify the process for its customers, encouraging them to use their NBK accounts to subscribe to the dividend service. Notably, customers can enroll in this service via KCC using a single bank account, ensuring a seamless and efficient experience.

### Approve In App Payment:

This service is an authenticated method that provides an additional layer of security to protect against fraudulent when making transactions using cards. In this release we are providing this service for credit, prepaid and debit cards, offering users an even more secure experience when using their cards to make transactions through the app.

Interest paid in advance with NBK Flexible Term Deposit

The latest updates to the NBK Mobile Banking App provide customers with the option to open an NBK Flexible Term Deposit and earn interest in advance, with additional flexible interest payment options available on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis. Customers can open a term deposit with a minimum amount of KD 1,000, in either KD, GBP, or USD, all through the app. Interest is calculated based on the deposit duration and the selected payment frequency, offering customers greater flexibility in managing their investments.

### Personal Products and Profile Nickname

Users of the NBK Mobile Banking App can now assign a personalized name to any NBK product they hold, including accounts, cards, loans, and even beneficiaries. This feature allows users to modify or delete the product name at any time, making it easier to identify and navigate to their renamed products. As a result, users can access their products more quickly and efficiently, facilitating seamless electronic transactions. In addition to adding a personalized nickname to your profile.

### Linking Minor Accounts

You can link your minor accounts to your profile easily with NBK Mobile Banking Application, where you can manage their accounts easily in addition to creating standing orders after the linkage

### Hide Amount

NBK added a layer of security. Users now have the flexibility to hide/unhide the amount displayed of their products, such as accounts, credit cards, prepaid, loans, and all types of deposits whenever they want. This gives them more privacy when opening the application in public places. It's simple, all the customers have to do is shake their devices to hide/unhide the balances.

### Mobile Application Security Assessment (MASA)

As the first mobile banking application in the GCC, NBK Mobile Banking received the MASA Security Certificate on Google Play, verifying the security and safety of the app. NBK is committed to providing the most secure digital financial services and strives to maintain the best-in-class digital security standards.

### Submit Your Suggestions

As part of NBK's commitment to maintaining con-

tinuous communication with its customers and responding to their feedback on the bank's services, users of the NBK Mobile Banking App can now submit and send their suggestions on a range of topics, including accounts, cards, loans, payments, and transfers. This feature allows the bank to actively engage with its customers and enhance their overall banking experience.

### See All New Updates

NBK Mobile App users can explore the latest services and products in detail, including their features, benefits, and how to make the most of them. This feature ensures that users have all the information they need about new products, empowering them to make informed decisions before applying for or utilizing these offerings.

### No Minimum Balance for New Account Opening

In addition to the seamless banking solutions provided by NBK, customers can now also have the option to open a new account with zero minimum through NBK Mobile Banking App balance and enjoy a world-class digital banking experience without having the need to visit the branch.

### Numerous Improvements

In addition to the introduction of new services, NBK has made several enhancements to existing features in the NBK Mobile Banking App in 2024. Customers can now seamlessly add prepaid cards issued through the app to their Apple Wallet immediately upon issuance. Additionally, they now have the option to select their Prepaid card PIN at the time of issuance for selected card types, offering greater convenience and control over their banking experience.

The new enhancements also allow users to view the outstanding balances in their accounts, along with the remaining monthly transfer limit, all on the same screen. This feature makes it easier for customers to track their monthly transfer activity, showing both the amounts they have already transferred and what remains, thereby helping them to better manage their accounts and control their monthly transfers. In addition to that, users can capture their device name in device management page

Furthermore, for quick access to send and receive services from main dashboard. Users can make quick payment transactions or splitting invoices, the names of the sender, beneficiary, and the payment purpose are clearly displayed. Additionally, when entering the IBAN number of the recipient, their bank details automatically appear on the screen, streamlining and accelerating the transfer process for a more efficient experience.

NBK Mobile Banking users can now make their transfers faster and easier by showing their mobile number to appear as a new beneficiary for other NBK App users, so that they can transfer money using the phone number, NBK customers can customize and modify their names displayed in the NBK Mobile Banking App, where they can keep the name as it is or modify it and make it shorter or in the way they prefer to display it according to their wishes and preferences, and users can customize and modify the names of their devices displayed in the application from the option "Manage Devices", the way they prefer to display them on their screens.

Commenting on these achievements, Mr. Mohammed Al-Dakheel, Head of Digital Banking Business at NBK, stated: "At NBK, we are committed to advancing our digital excellence by continually enhancing the services offered through the NBK Mobile Banking App, a platform our customers trust to efficiently complete their banking transactions."

"Throughout 2024, we continued to introduce new services and enhancements to the App, aiming to deliver a pioneering digital banking experience that not only meets but exceeds our customers' expectations," added Al-Dakheel. He also highlighted a notable growth in banking operations completed through the App, reflecting an increase in customer satisfaction with the services it offers.

As a testament to NBK's leadership in digital banking, the NBK Mobile Banking App was awarded the "Best Mobile Banking App" in Kuwait by Global Finance. The accolade was presented during the magazine's annual ceremony in London, where it also recognized the "Best Consumer Digital Banks -2024."

## 'Proactive Maturity Management' key focus

### KIPCO repays its seven-year KD 66.5 mln bond

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: KIPCO – Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) – announced that it has fully repaid the remaining portion of its seven-year KD bond due on 28 December 2024, amounting to KD 66.5 million (US\$ 215 million).

KIPCO has an impeccable track record of meeting its financial commitments, underpinned by a strong financial position. The holding company has tapped into its own liquidity, including cash reserves built from selective divestments, to repay these bonds. This repayment brings KIPCO's total bond repayments and exchange in the past two years to US\$1.15 billion. In addition,



Adel Al Waqayan

KIPCO has fully pre-paid the US\$525 million syndicated facility

nearly one year prior to its first maturity.

Commenting on the transaction, KIPCO's Group Treasurer, Mr Adel Al Waqayan, said:

"KIPCO's prudent approach to liquidity and proactive liability management adds to our financial strength and efficiency in managing the company's debt and financing portfolio. We remain committed to our strategy of proactively managing all maturities whether through capital structure realignment, selective divestments or tapping diverse pools of liquidity in loan and debt capital markets, both conventional and Sharia'a compliant."

## Bursa sees gains across all indices

General index gains 0.15%

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait closed on a positive note on Monday, with all market indices showing gains. The general index rose by 11.30 points, or 0.15 percent, to reach 7,376.57 points, reflecting a broad-based improvement in market sentiment.

Trading activity was robust, with a total of 266.6 million shares

changing hands through 13,959 cash transactions. The total value of trades amounted to KWD 45.8 million (approximately USD 139.6 million), indicating strong investor participation across various market segments.

The main market index demonstrated significant strength, climbing 36.45 points, or 0.53 percent, to close at 6,874.22 points. This segment saw 194.9 million shares traded through 8,969 cash transactions, with a total value of KWD 22.7 million (USD 69.2 million).

In the premier market, the index edged up by 5.17 points, or 0.07 percent, reaching 7,865.93 points. Trading in this segment involved 71.6 million shares, with transactions worth KWD 23.11 million (USD 70.4 million).

The Main 50 index also posted gains, rising by 40.37 points, or 0.60 percent, to reach 6,805.52 points. This segment saw trading of 128.5 million shares through 5,782 cash transactions, valued at KWD 14.5 million (about USD 44.2 million).

## KIB to be closed during New Year's holiday, providing services through digital platforms

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced that it will continue to provide its online banking services around the clock during the New Year's holiday. The Bank aims to meet the needs of its customers, whether inside Kuwait or abroad, during the holiday.

The Bank will be closed for business during the official holiday on Wednesday, 1 January 2025, and during the official rest day on Thursday, 2 January 2025. Normal working hours will resume on Sunday, 5 January 2025.

KIB highlighted its commitment to serving its customers and enabling them to follow up on their financial



KIB new logo

affairs and complete their banking transactions with the utmost efficiency and without disruption at all times. The Bank indicated that it will continue to provide its banking services through all its digital platforms 24/7 during the holiday, which includes the KIB Mobile smartphone application that allows customers to perform most basic banking operations, in ad-

dition to the Live Chat and KIB Online services on the Bank's website www.KIB.com.kw. Customers can also reach KIB via its call center, at 1866866 for local calls and at +965 22957300 for international calls, or through its WhatsApp account registered with the local bank number 1866866 for general inquiries about products and services.

KIB also emphasized the readiness of the Bank's ATMs to accommodate the expected increased demand for cash withdrawals during the holiday, both in terms of providing sufficient liquidity and the number of machines available in different areas in Kuwait.

### Airport branch open 24/7

## Burgan Bank announces New Year holiday closure

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Burgan Bank has announced that it will be closing all branches on Wednesday, January 1, 2025, on the occasion of the New Year's holiday. The Bank will resume normal operating hours at all branches on Sunday, January 5, 2025. However, to accommodate Burgan Bank customers, the Airport Branch will continue to operate 24/7 during the holidays.

For more information about Burgan products and services during the holiday, customers can contact the Bank's contact center or WhatsApp at 1804080. Customers can also continue to conduct their financial transactions easily and securely using the Burgan Bank mobile app or the online banking platform (online.burgan.com).

Burgan Bank would like to take this opportunity to extend its warmest wishes and heartfelt greetings to everyone in Kuwait for a joyous and prosperous New Year.



Burgan Bank wishes Kuwait a Happy New Year.



Community involvement through interviews, ads, and infographics

## ABK concludes 2024 with numerous 'Let's Be Aware' initiatives



Photo taken during the interview.



One of the shots of the 'Let's Be Aware' campaign during Ramadan.



Padel tournaments throughout the year.



Bank logo and campaign during the final of His Highness the Amir Cup.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: In 2024, Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) partnered closely with the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) to support the 'Let's Be Aware' banking awareness campaign, aimed at achieving financial inclusion in Kuwait. The campaign seeks to educate customers on a variety of topics, including different types of accounts, cards, bank loans, customer rights and obligations, combating banking and financial fraud, investment and savings, digital services, and resources for individuals with special needs.

ABK took an active role in promoting the campaign by participating in and sponsoring multiple events. These included the graduation ceremony for students at Kuwait University, a tree planting campaign in Shaab Health City, and participation in the Porsche Club Kuwait event, alongside contributions to Amiri Hospital and the Kuwait Bar Association conference.

To further raise awareness, the Bank organized 'Let's Be Aware' paddle tournaments for both men and women, where participants were introduced to key topics of



ABK logo

the campaign. Cultural competitions were also held, focusing on the importance of the banking sector, ways to combat financial fraud, and the necessity of safeguarding personal banking data. ABK emphasized best practices in saving, investment methods, and the im-

portance of informing customers about secure banking options.

In addition, the Bank engaged with the community through interviews on radio stations and Kuwait TV, publishing news related to the campaign to ensure its success alongside the efforts of CBK and KBA.

Awareness videos were released on the Bank's social media platforms, website, and mobile app, garnering significant engagement from followers. The campaign's visibility was further enhanced through advertisements in cinemas and on billboards

throughout major streets, attracting the attention of both moviegoers and commuters.

The collaboration with the CBK and KBA also led to the dissemination of advice to customers in the banking sector through infographics, videos, and images, helping the campaign reach diverse segments of Kuwaiti society. Cultural competitions held in shopping malls offered opportunities for participants to win prizes while increasing awareness of the importance of protecting personal data during financial transactions.

Moreover, the Bank committed

to sending monthly text messages to customers, covering various campaign topics and enhancing their financial knowledge. This initiative reflects ABK's dedication to safeguarding customer data with the highest security standards.

ABK reaffirms its commitment to continue supporting the campaign and enhance collaboration with CBK and KBA. Together, they aim to deliver innovative strategies for communicating the campaign's goals across Kuwait and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to all citizens and residents.

### Minister praises US role

## Kuwait, US discuss economic partnerships

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30, (KUNA): Bolstering economic, trade, financial and technological collaboration between Kuwait and the United States was discussed on Sunday by Minister of Finance, and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Nora Al-Fassam, and US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara.

The two sides also focused on the mechanisms of developing investments and strategic partnerships in different sectors, the Ministry of Finance said in a statement.

Al-Fassam extolled the US partnership's positive role in backing Kuwait's economy and carrying out development projects, in addition to helping achieve Kuwait Vision 2035, in a manner that contributes to enhancing Kuwait's position as an attractive economic hub in the region, it noted.



KUNA photo  
Minister of Finance, and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Nora Al-Fassam and US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara.

Deadline set for Jan 28, 2025

## KOC floats tender for provision of technical services

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) has floated a tender for the provision of unified technical software services, with the application submission deadline set for December 29, 2024, and the final date for the tender to be January 28, 2025, according to

the announcement of the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) published on its website.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) has also issued a tender for provision of catalyst loading and unloading services at the Al-Zour Refinery. The deadline for tender submission is January 21, 2025, with the preliminary meeting scheduled for January 6, 2025.

### Saudi leads region with 38 IPOs

## Gulf IPOs raise \$12.1 billion in 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Initial public offerings (IPOs) across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries raised \$12.1 billion in 2024, with significant contributions from sectors such as retail, healthcare, energy and financial services, reports Al-Seyassah daily quoting Reuters.

Saudi Arabia led the region with 38 IPOs, followed by the UAE (7 IPOs), Oman (2) and Kuwait (1). This surge in IPO activity reflects strong investor demand for both oil and non-oil companies in the region.

The GCC saw a diverse range of companies go public, with 21 IPOs raising at least \$100 million each.

Among the largest offerings were Talabat, a food delivery company based in Abu Dhabi, which raised \$2.03 billion; OQ Exploration and Production, raising \$1.95 billion; and Lulu Retail Holdings, which raised \$1.72 billion.

Experts predict continued strong demand for IPOs in the Gulf in 2024, with expectations of similar fundraising levels to those seen in 2024.

This growth is attributed to the private sector's expanding role and economic diversification in areas such as healthcare, education, retail, and e-commerce.

## CMA advances financial inclusion & fintech development in Kuwait

Resolution 169 takes effect Jan 5, 2024

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Capital Markets Authority (CMA) has issued Resolution No. 169 of 2024, which amends certain provisions regarding the inter-registration of financial products, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The following are the key updates:

■ Definition of an Inter-Fund: The resolution adds the term "inter-fund," which refers to any fund or collective investment system established, licensed, or regulated by a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) regulatory authority. These funds are managed by a licensed person for a specific fee.

■ Amendment to Promoter Definition: The definition of a promoter has been expanded to include individuals licensed by the CMA to manage collective investment schemes or act as subscription (selling) agents. These promoters are now permitted to engage in inter-promotion activi-

ties in Kuwait upon receiving CMA authorization.

■ Amendment to Inter-Promotion Obligations: According to Article 2-1 of Chapter Two, any promoter or appointed entity must meet the conditions and obligations specified in the CMA's regulations before commencing inter-promotion of financial products in the GCC region.

■ Addition to Executive Regulations: The resolution also incorporates inter-funds into Book Eighteen (Inter-registration of Financial Products) of the Executive Regulations of Law No. 7 of 2010, which governs the establishment of the CMA and the regulation of securities activity. Additionally, the inter-fund subscription prospectus form has been updated.

■ Fee Schedule Amendment: The CMA has amended the fee schedule for its services, which can be found in Book Two of the Executive Regulations.

This resolution will come into effect on Jan 5, 2024, and will be published in the Official Gazette, the Kuwait Alyawm.

In another significant develop-

ment, the CMA announced the registration of Gulf Bank in the register for securities-based financial technology services, allowing the bank to continue offering its automated investment advisor service.

This registration is in line with Book Nineteen (Financial Technologies) of the Executive Regulations.

At the moment, three companies are registered to provide the automated investment advisor service — the National Investment Company, the Securities House Company and the Gulf Bank.

This follows the first phase of the initial implementation of Book Nineteen, during which applications for registration were accepted from February 1, 2024, to July 1, 2024.

The CMA is currently reviewing applications to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements and to prepare for the official registration of these financial technology services.

The CMA's move reflects its continued commitment to financial inclusion and the development of the financial technology sector in Kuwait.

### Forta Pool I Ltd. seeks 49% stake in Shasha Free Zone

## Kuwait CPA receives 2 requests for economic concentration processes

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Kuwaiti Competition Protection Authority announced that it has received two requests related to economic concentration processes, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Forta Pool I Limited (Cayman Islands) has requested to acquire 49 percent of the shares of Shasha Free Zone Company (United Arab

Emirates) and the National Space Company (Saudi Arabia) has requested to acquire 100 percent of the capital of UB42MBH (Germany).

These requests are part of the ongoing procedures related to economic concentration, which refers to permanent changes in control within a relevant market.

This can occur through mergers, acquisitions, or the establishment of partnerships where two or more entities combine their independent economic activities on a permanent basis.

This process is regulated under Law No. 72 of 2020 regarding the protection of competition in Kuwait.

## CBK announces new bonds, tawaruq

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30, (KUNA): The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the issuance of bonds and tawarruq worth KD 240 million (around USD 792 million).

In a statement to KUNA on Monday, CBK said that the issuance period is three months with a return rate of 4.125 percent.

According to the IMF, Africa is one of the fastest-growing regions in the global economic landscape in 2024

## An awakened Africa joins hands with Global South to advance modernization

NAIROBI, Dec. 30, (Xinhua): In 2024, Africa has taken center stage on the global development agenda, demonstrating the continent's resilience and its deepening ties with the Global South in the international arena.

From the 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement and the 3rd South Summit held in Uganda to the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Beijing Summit, Africa has showcased its determination and capability to unite the Global South in achieving shared development and pursuing modernization.

According to the International Monetary Fund, Africa is one of the fastest-growing regions in the global economic landscape in 2024. Amid rapid and profound changes in the world, the vast continent's potential and vitality have solidified its role as a key player in shaping the future.

### Growth engine of future

Amid a complex and evolving global landscape, African nations are seeking self-reliant development through regional integration.

According to the African Development Bank, Africa's economic growth is projected to rebound to 3.7 percent in 2024, exceeding the global average, and climb to 4.3 percent in 2025, making it the world's second-fastest-growing region after Asia.

Many African countries held elections this year. From the Comoros in

East Africa to Senegal in West Africa, most elections were conducted smoothly and orderly. The new governments have placed economic development at the forefront of their agendas, recognizing that self-reliance is essential for carving out a competitive position on the global stage.

To this end, African countries are accelerating the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The agreement has been enacted in several nations, including South Africa, Ghana and Kenya. According to a report by Al-Mal News, an Egyptian daily, intra-regional trade is projected to grow from 192.2 billion U.S. dollars in 2023 to 520 billion dollars by 2030 following the launch of the AfCFTA.

The World Bank forecast that the AfCFTA could increase the continent's income by 7 percent by 2035 and lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty. Meanwhile, countries are ramping up investments in technological innovation and talent development, driving industrial upgrades through initiatives such as establishing research funds and developing technology parks.

According to a report by the International Telecommunication Union, the number of internet users in Africa has surged from 181 million in 2014 to nearly 646 million in 2024, and this figure could exceed 1.1 billion by

2029, which will enable Africa to integrate more effectively into the global economy.

Africa's development is fueled not only by its strong internal momentum but also by the rise of the Global South. At this year's G20 summit in Brazil in November, China outlined its eight actions for global development, including pursuing high-quality Belt and Road cooperation and supporting African development. These pragmatic measures have been widely recognized by developing countries.

Moreover, China, Brazil, South Africa and the African Union (AU) jointly launched an Initiative on International Cooperation in Open Science to bring the benefits of global scientific and technological innovation to the Global South.

"We committed ourselves to have a vision that transcends national borders and individual interests while recognizing that the force of Africa resides in its unity," said Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairperson of the AU Commission, at the fourth Ordinary Session of the sixth parliament of the Pan-African Parliament in South Africa in November.

### Rising power of africa

In 2024, Africa has reaffirmed its strong commitment to building a more just and equitable international order. This is evident in its advocacy for reforms in global governance, efforts to mediate geopolitical crises and ad-

vancements in energy transition.

On Jan. 1, Egypt and Ethiopia officially joined BRICS, marking another African addition to BRICS cooperation following South Africa's participation.

The expansion of the BRICS membership highlights the bloc's intention to enhance multilateral cooperation and uphold the voice and interests of developing countries at various international and regional forums, said Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi.

In November, the AU participated as a full member in the G20 summit for the first time, joining others to call for a fairer international financial system, advocating for debt relief, and safeguarding the interests of developing countries. On Dec. 1, South Africa assumed the G20 presidency, becoming the first African nation to hold this position. The theme of its presidency, "Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability," reflects a distinct African vision for future global governance.

The AU's entry into the G20 "provides a platform for African nations to address critical global issues," said Balew Demissie, a communication and publication consultant at the Policy Studies Institute of Ethiopia.

"Through its participation, the AU can address challenges such as poverty, underdevelopment, and climate vulnerability while strengthening regional solidarity and increasing Af-

rica's influence on global policy decisions," Demissie said.

Analysts observed that Africa is reassessing its developmental trajectory, seeking to break free from the constraints of Western development models and striving for political, economic and cultural independence. This shift is often described as Africa's "second awakening" since the national liberation movements in the mid-to-late 20th century.

Over the past year, countries such as Niger, Senegal and Chad have called for the withdrawal of the U.S. and French military forces from their territories.

"Africa is no longer content to be the 'silent majority' and is emerging as a key force in reshaping the international order, with African leaders actively pursuing political solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within multilateral frameworks and underlining their resolve to promote global peace, development and justice."

The AU's Agenda 2063 envisions Africa as "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena." To achieve this vision, African countries are playing an active role in Global South partnerships.

"Africa has a stake in a truly multilateral global order," said Mwangi Wachira, former World Bank economist and

advisor to the Kenyan government. "Hopefully, it will have more of a token role in the ongoing drive for an equitable multilateral global order."

### United efforts toward modernization

In September, the FOCAC Summit held in Beijing marked another historic milestone in China-Africa relations and for the broader Global South. China and Africa vowed to join hands to implement 10 partnership actions to advance modernization.

As a member of the Global South, China has consistently advocated for an open global economy, and helped developing countries, particularly African nations and the least-developed countries, to actively participate in international industrial cooperation and benefit from economic globalization.

In November, the 7th China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai showcased a range of African products, including South African avocados, Tanzanian honey and Mauritian sugar, which made their debut this year. The expo highlighted China's commitment to openness and its efforts to help African products gain access to the vast Chinese and global markets.

Devesh Dukhira, chief executive of the Mauritius Sugar Syndicate, said that the Chinese market's long-term contribution will be substantial, thanks to the CIIE and the China-Mauritius Free Trade Agreement.

## Asian shares mixed after Wall Street slips, weighed down by tech giants

S. Korea's Kospi added 0.2% to 2,409.91

NEW YORK, Dec 30, (AP): Asian shares were mixed on Monday after stocks fell broadly on Friday as Wall Street closed out a holiday-shortened week on a down note.

U.S. futures were lower while oil prices were little changed.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index lost 1% to 39,894.62. The dollar gained against the Japanese yen, trading at 157.93 yen, up from 157.75 yen. The Tokyo market wrapped up trading for 2024 with a year-end ceremony as Japan began its New Year holidays, the biggest festival of the year.

South Korea's Kospi added 0.2% to 2,409.91. But shares of Jeju Air Co. lost 9% after one of the company's jets skidded off a runway, slammed into a concrete wall and burst into flames Sunday in South Korea as its landing gear failed to deploy. 179 people died in the crash.

The disaster was yet another blow for Boeing in a dispiriting year, following a machinists strike, further safety problems with its troubled top-selling aircraft and a plunging stock price.

Political turmoil persisted in South Korea as law enforcement officials requested a court warrant Monday to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol. They are investigating whether his martial law decree on Dec. 3 amounted to rebellion.

The Hang Seng in Hong Kong was flat at 20,090.30 while the Shanghai Composite index gained 0.2% to 3,407.33. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 dipped 0.3% to 8,235.00.

On Friday, the S&P 500 fell 1.1% to 5,970.84. Roughly 90% of stocks in



Nikkei 225 index is seen on screen as a TV camera crew films the site of a ceremony to mark the last trading day of the year at the Tokyo Stock Exchange Monday, Dec. 30, 2024, in Tokyo. (AP)

the benchmark index lost ground, but it managed to hold onto a modest gain of 0.7% for the week.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.8% to 42,992.21. The tech-heavy Nasdaq composite fell 1.5%, to 19,722.03.

The losses were made worse by sharp declines for the Big Tech stocks known as the "Magnificent 7", which can heavily influence the direction of the market because of their large size.

A wide range of retailers also fell. Amazon fell 1.5% and Best Buy

slipped 1.5%. The sector is being closely watched for clues on how it performed during the holiday shopping season.

The S&P 500 gained nearly 3% over a 3-day stretch before breaking for the Christmas holiday. On Thursday, the index posted a small decline.

Despite Friday's drop, the market is moving closer to another standout annual finish. The S&P 500 is on track for a gain of around 25% in 2024. That would mark a second consecutive year of more than 20%, the first time that has happened since 1997-1998.

The gains have been driven partly by upbeat economic data showing that consumers continued spending and the labor market remained strong. Inflation, while still high, has also been steadily easing.

A report on Friday showed that sales and inventory estimates for the wholesales trade industry fell 0.2% in November, following a slight gain in October. That weaker-than-expected report follows an update on the labor market Thursday that showed unemployment benefits held steady last week.

## Tips from experts to help you change your relationship with money in 2025

NEW YORK, Dec 30, (AP): With the end of 2024 around the corner, you might be reflecting on financial goals for 2025.

Whether you're saving to move out of your parents' house or pay off student loan debt, financial resolutions can help you stay motivated, said Courtney Alev, consumer advocate for Credit Karma.

"Entering a new year doesn't erase all our financial challenges from the prior year," Alev said. "But it can really help to bring a fresh-start mentality to how you're managing your finances."

If you're planning to make financial resolutions for the new year, experts recommend that you start by evaluating the state of your finances in 2024. Then, set specific goals and make sure they're attainable for your lifestyle.

Here are some tips from experts: Think about how you currently deal with finances - what's good, what's bad, and what can improve.

"Let this be the year you change your relationship with money," said Ashley Lapato, personal finance educator for YNAB, a budgeting app.

If you feel like money is a chore, that there's shame surrounding the topic of money, or like you were born being "bad at money," it's time to change that mentality, Lapato said.

To adjust your approach, Lapato recommends viewing money goals as an opportunity to imagine your desired lifestyle in the future. She recommends asking questions like, "What



The 2025 New Year's Eve numerals are displayed in Times Square, on Dec. 18, 2024, in New York. (AP)

do my 30s look like? What do my 40s look like?" and using money as a means to get there.

Liz Young Thomas, head of SoFi Investment Strategy, added that it's key you forgive yourself for past mistakes in order to move into the new year with motivation.

When setting your financial resolutions for 2025, it's important to establish the "why" of each, said Matt Watson, CEO of Origin, a financial tracking app.

"If you can attach the financial goal to a bigger life goal, it's much more motivating and more likely you'll

continue on that path," Watson said.

Whether you're saving to buy a house, pay off credit card debt or take a summer vacation, being clear about the goal can keep you motivated. Watson also recommends using a tool to help you keep track of your finances, such as an app, spreadsheet, or website.

"After three years of inflation, your pay increases are likely still playing catch up to your monthly expenses, leaving you wondering where all the money is going," said Greg McBride, chief financial analyst at Bankrate. "Make that monthly

budget for 2025 and resolve to track your spending against it throughout the year."

McBride said that you may need to make adjustments during the year as certain expenses increase, which would require cutting back in other areas.

"Calibrate your spending with your income, and any month you spend less than budgeted, transfer the difference into your savings account, ideally a high-yield savings account," he said.

"Interest rates aren't likely to come down very fast, so you're still going to have to put in the hard work of paying down debt, especially high-cost credit card debt, and do so with urgency," McBride said.

Start by taking stock of how much debt you have now relative to the beginning of the year. Hopefully you've made steady progress on paying it down, but, if you've gone in the other direction, McBride encourages making a game plan. That includes looking into 0% balance transfer offers.

"You have more power over credit card interest rates than you think you do," said Matt Schulz, chief credit analyst at LendingTree. "Wielding that power is one of the best moves you can make in 2025."

A 0% balance transfer credit card is "a good weapon" in the fight against high card APRs, or annual percentage rates, he said. A low-interest personal loan is an option as well.

## Big Lots reaches deal to keep hundreds of US stores open

NEW YORK, Dec 30, (AP): The discount chain Big Lots, which filed for bankruptcy protection in September, has reached a deal that will keep hundreds of its stores and distribution centers open.

Big Lots said Friday it will be sold to Gordon Brothers Retail Partners, a firm that specializes in distressed companies. Gordon Brothers will then transfer Big Lots' stores, distribution centers and other assets to other retailers.

Variety Wholesalers Inc., which owns more than 400 discount stores in the U.S. Southeast and Mid-Atlantic regions, plans to acquire between 200 and 400 Big Lots stores and operate them under the Big Lots brand. Variety Wholesalers will also acquire up to two distribution centers.

"This sale agreement and transfer present the strongest opportunity to preserve jobs, maximize value for the estate and ensure continuity of the Big Lots brand," Big Lots President and CEO Bruce Thorn said in a statement. "We are grateful to our associates nationwide for their grit and resilience throughout this process."

Columbus, Ohio-based Big Lots sells furniture, home decor and other items. When it filed for bankruptcy in September, it said inflation and high interest rates caused consumers to pull back on their purchases of home and seasonal products, two categories the



A shopper leaves the Big Lots store on Dec. 4, 2012 in Berlin, Vt. (AP)

chain depends on for a significant part of its revenue.

At the time, Big Lots planned to sell its assets and ongoing business operations to private equity firm Nexus Capital Management.

But on Dec. 20, Big Lots said the deal with Nexus didn't materialize. It then partnered with Gordon Brothers to conduct going-out-of-business sales at its 869 U.S. locations.

## Chinese NEVs scale new heights amid green shift, technology advancements

BEIJING, Dec. 30, (Xinhua): Despite facing challenges, China's new energy vehicle (NEV) manufacturers have made significant strides in 2024 and are poised to gain continued momentum as carbon reduction targets drive global demand for clean-energy vehicles.

For Chinese NEV manufacturers, the most significant milestone of the year came on Nov. 14, when the country's annual NEV output surpassed 10 million for the first time, making China the first country globally to achieve this feat.

"The achievement holds tremendous historical significance and is the result of the concerted efforts of Chinese-branded carmakers," said Xin Guobin, vice minister of industry and information technology.

According to industry insiders, this milestone further solidifies China's position as the world's largest producer and seller of NEVs, marking the beginning of a new phase of steady growth for the auto industry in the world's second-largest economy.

**A YEAR OF BREAKTHROUGHS** China has topped the global list for nine consecutive years in both NEV output and sales, contributing to over 60 percent of the world's NEV output and sales in 2023.

The robust sales performance has continued into 2024, with China's carmakers selling more than 11.26 million NEVs in the first 11 months, a 35.6 percent increase compared to the

previous year, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers (CAAM).

In July, China's NEV sector reached another historic milestone, with the NEV retail penetration rate exceeding 50 percent. This figure indicates that NEVs have overtaken internal combustion engine vehicles as the preferred choice among car buyers.

Cui Dongshu, secretary general of the China Passenger Car Association (CPCA), attributed this year's NEV sales growth in part to strong policy support.

According to government policies, consumers trading in an old car for an NEV are entitled to a 20,000 yuan (about 2,782 U.S. dollars) subsidy, higher than the 15,000 yuan received by those opting for a new fuel-powered car.

Chinese-branded cars have also seen significant growth this year. In October, the share of such new energy passenger vehicles in total car sales reached a record 70.1 percent, further highlighting the strong competitiveness of domestic brands.

Sales data from China's leading NEV makers confirm their increasingly strong foothold. In October, NEV giant BYD shattered the monthly sales record for Chinese auto companies in terms of NEV sales, delivering an astounding 502,657 units and setting a new monthly sales record for global car manufacturers.



A sign is displayed at an electric vehicle charging station, March 8, 2024, in London, Ohio. (AP)

## English actor breaking new ground in Hollywood

# Pierre ends his big year on a high with 'Mufasa'

LOS ANGELES, Dec 30, (AP): Aaron Pierre is closing out his big year on a literal high note.

After donning Malcolm X's distinctive browline glasses in the "Genius: MLK/X" series and getting his modern-day Rambo on in the Netflix action hit "Rebel Ridge," the 30-year-old English actor showcases his vocal talents in "Mufasa: The Lion King."

To deliver as the titular regal lion, Pierre trained under Lin-Manuel Miranda in what he calls a "wonderful singing boot camp."

"My voice was doing things I never imagined it could do. I was hitting notes that I didn't think existed for my range," Pierre said. "I'm just really hoping the footage of me singing these songs doesn't come out because I'm using all the techniques. Lin's like 'Throw the baseball!' So I'm throwing the baseball trying to hit that high note."

His Hollywood trajectory keeps going up: He's been named one of The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2024 and HBO announced in October that, opposite Kyle Chandler, Pierre will lead "Lanterns."

That'll be the broad-shouldered, hazel-eyed actor's second DC Comics-based series, following his 2018-2019 run on Syfy's "Krypton," which explored early days on Superman's home planet.

As for Pierre's own origin story: He grew up in South London as the oldest of three, with childhood aspirations of being a track star and a criminologist. At 13, he joined a lo-

cal theater troupe that performed in a warehouse, sometimes with just several people in the audience.

"That's actually where I learned some of my foundations. And one of those is irrespective of whether there is one person in the audience or 1,500 people ... you give the same performance, you give the same energy," Pierre said.

Mark "Moonlight" and "Mufasa" director Barry Jenkins down as impressed by that energy. After watching Pierre play Cassio in the Globe Theatre's "Othello," Jenkins cast him as Caesar in "The Underground Railroad." The small part grew and grew after Pierre arrived on set in Atlanta.

### Choices

"I found myself just creating scenes for him," Jenkins said. "You know, that character is in the show for much longer, much longer than his character exists in the narrative (Colson Whitehead's novel). He just keeps reappearing. And that's just because it was just a joy to work with him. And it was so clear that his presence was just immediately a part of the spiritual essence of the show."

Counting Denzel Washington, James Earl Jones and Sidney Poitier as career role models, Pierre has been deliberate with his choices as he moves deeper into stardom. Art is the end goal - not fame or even fun, really. He hopes new fans go back to watch his 2022 indie "Brother," about family bonds in 1990s Toronto.

"I always want my community to feel seen. I want them to

feel respected. I want them to feel heard and understood. And I think the projects that I choose, that's my small contribution hopefully to that manifesting itself," he said.

Pierre, now living mostly in Los Angeles, says he's been reaching out regularly to his mom back in London as he navigates the Hollywood circuit.

"Any time I speak with her, any time I'm present with her, I feel safe. I feel reassured, I feel rejuvenated," he said. "I definitely call her phone a lot and she'll answer even if she's at work. Yes, I'm 30 and 6-foot-3 and doing Terry Richmond in 'Rebel Ridge.' But like to me, I'm still her baby and I'm still her little boy and she always makes time for me, no matter what the situation."

Both on and off-set, Pierre carries himself with a sense of purpose and seriousness. "I don't know that there's anything frivolous about Aaron Pierre, even in downtime, which is - I mean that as a compliment," Jenkins said.

"He's very intellectually engaged. But he also looks like a superhero. And there's a version of him that is only viewed that way. He's always diligent about protecting against that by doing things that are maybe a bit outside the box," Jenkins added. "And for me, I just hope that he gets to grow and express himself in all the different ways that I think he's capable of."

Indeed, when asked about his aspirations for future creative collaborators, the first name out of Pierre's mouth might surprise: "Women Talking" writer-director Sarah Polley.



Aaron Pierre poses for a portrait on Aug. 29, 2024, in Los Angeles. Pierre has been named one of The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2024. (AP)

## 'Nosferatu' shines

# 'Sonic 3' vs 'Mufasa' battle at box office

LOS ANGELES, Dec 30, (AP): Two family films dominated the holiday box office this week, with "Sonic the Hedgehog 3" winning the three-day weekend over "Mufasa" by a blue hair.

Paramount's Sonic movie earned \$38 million, while "Mufasa" brought in \$37.1 million from theaters in the US and Canada, according to studio estimates Sunday. On a normal weekend counting Friday, Saturday and Sunday ticket purchases, the winner would be somewhat clear. But when the Christmas holiday falls on a Wednesday as it did this year, the studios look at two sets of numbers: The five-day earnings and the three-day weekend earnings. With the five-day tally, The Walt Disney Co.'s "Mufasa" had the edge, bringing in \$63.8 million.

It all adds up to a rather robust theatrical landscape, helped by the continued success of "Wicked" and "Moana 2," which are on their sixth and fifth weekends, respectively.

The vampire horror "Nosferatu" also debuted fairly triumphantly. Robert Eggers' modern reimagining of a 1922 silent film starring Nicholas Hoult and Lily-Rose Depp rose to the top of a starry batch of Christmas Day newcomers, which included the Bob Dylan biopic "A Complete Unknown," with Timothée Chalamet; the erotic drama "Babygirl" with Nicole Kidman; and "The Fire Inside," about boxer Claressa Shields.

"Nosferatu" landed in third place with \$21.2 million from the weekend and \$40.3 million from its first five days. Not accounting for inflation, it had the best Christmas Day opening ever for a genre film, with \$11.6 million (beating "The Faculty's" \$4.4 million in 1998). Focus Features released the R-rated film in 2,992 theaters.

It was a gamble to open "Nosferatu" on Christmas, when family films or all-ages blockbusters tend to be prioritized. But it paid off, attracting the coveted 18 to 34-year-old demographic to theaters.

"It was a risky move, but we knew that we had such a great film," said Lisa Bunnell, who leads distribution for Focus Features. "A lot of people thought we were insane. But I think the more that people thought we were crazy, the more we all felt like it was the right thing to do."

### Response

The response to the unconventional counter-programming was gratifying. The sarcophagus-inspired popcorn buckets are even reselling for over \$100.

"People keep talking about 'how do we get people back into the movies?' I think the only way you can get people to go back is to shake it up," Bunnell said. "You don't just spoon feed them the same things over and over again."

The Bob Dylan movie, directed by James Mangold, also got off to a bright start with \$11.6 million over the weekend and \$23.2 million since Christmas. The 5-day total is a record for Searchlight Pictures since Disney acquired the company in early 2019. It's been well received by both critics (96% on Rotten Tomatoes) and audiences (A on CinemaScore) and will likely get more of a boost from the awards race.

"Babygirl," an A24 release from filmmaker Halina Reijn, played on 2115 screens, earning \$4.4 million over the weekend and \$7.2 million since Christmas. The film stars Kidman as a married, buttoned-up CEO who begins an affair with a young intern at the company, played by Harris Dickinson. Kidman won the best acting prize for her performance at the Venice Film Festival.

"The Fire Inside," from Amazon MGM Studios, meanwhile got a bit lost in the mix despite strong reviews. It has earned a total of \$4.3 million, with \$2 million coming from weekend showings where it played in 2006 theaters.

Thanksgiving releases continued to perform well through the Christmas timeframe. Fourth place went to "Wicked," which earned another \$19.5 million, bringing its domestic total to \$424.2 million. On Tuesday, the lavish movie musical will also be available to rent or purchase at home. It's a move that has drawn some critics who believe making it available at home after only 40 days in theaters will cannibalize profits.

## Variety

**JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia:** The Chinese Film Night kicked off on Friday in Saudi Arabia's Jeddah, during which six Chinese films will be screened for local audiences.



Al Mulla

Highlighting the growing appeal of Chinese films in Saudi Arabia, Wang Qimin, consul general of the Chinese Consulate-General in Jeddah, said that cinema — by transcending language barriers — serves as a vital bridge for cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

He expressed hope that the event would inspire further dialogue and cooperation between Chinese and Saudi filmmakers.

Saudi Film Festival Director **Ahmed Al Mulla** said the Chinese Film Night not only brought a colorful visual feast and unique cultural experience to the Saudi audience, but also created a platform for China-Saudi Arabia film exchanges and cooperation.

The three-day event is jointly organized by China Film Administration and the Chinese Consulate-General in Jeddah, and facilitated by the China Film Archive. Over 100 guests from the diplomatic, film, cultural, and business sectors attended the opening ceremony. (Xinhua)

**BEIJING:** The box office sales of China's moviegoing season ringing in the New Year have seen rapid growth, with earnings on Saturday surpassing 228 million yuan (about 31.71 million U.S. dollars), according to the film data platform Beacon.

Domestic feature film "Big World" and domestic suspense movie "Octopus with Broken Arms" dominated the top two spots on the daily box office chart, with each raking in nearly 90 million yuan. (Xinhua)

## Film



This image released by Focus Features shows Willem Dafoe in a scene from 'Nosferatu.' (AP)

## Actor and director discuss their unique bond

# Dafoe is perfect for 'Nosferatu': Eggers

LOS ANGELES, Dec 30, (AP): When Willem Dafoe enjoys working with a filmmaker, he'll often jump at the chance to do it again.

The list of directors with whom the 69-year-old has worked with more than once is extensive, including Wes Anderson, Yorgos Lanthimos, Paul Schrader, Lars von Trier and, now for a third time, Robert Eggers. "If it's good, you come back," Dafoe said plainly.

The pair spoke with The Associated Press about Eggers' adaptation of "Nosferatu" that hit theaters last Wednesday, some of the challenges they faced making "The Lighthouse" - their first project together released in 2019 - and the unique relationship that exists between actors and directors.

The interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

**AP:** Willem, I read that you called Robert after you saw "The Witch." What did you say?

**Dafoe:** I want to meet you and I want to know who this filmmaker is.

**AP:** What is it about him that keeps bringing you back?

**Dafoe:** Well, if it's good, you come back. When I saw "The Witch," I thought, "Wow, this is a film about a period that I'm not particularly knowledgeable about, but I enter it so easily. This is relevant. It's rooted. It's my story. I'm with these people."

That's quite an incredible trick because a lot of period films, they're always pointing to themselves. They're always sending messages. They're always showing. This had a kind of energy and the kind of physicality and sensuality that I thought, "Who does this? I gotta see this guy." And then I had a wonderful experience in "The Lighthouse" and I played a part that was really fun in "The Northman." So, when he wants to do this passion project and offers me this beautiful role of Professor Von Franz, I say, "Of course."

**AP:** Robert, did you always envision Willem for that role?

**Eggers:** Yeah, I mean, I don't see how you could

have anyone else but Willem Dafoe in this role.

**AP:** Did you have a favorite role of his before the two of you worked together?

**Eggers:** That's pretty tough. But since you might ask about it, I do love "Shadow of the Vampire," where he plays Max Schreck. When I first saw "Nosferatu" as a 9-year-old, the VHS I had was made from a degraded 16-millimeter print and there was a kind of magic to it because it felt unearthed from the past and it felt, like, real. And when you watch the restored versions of "Nosferatu," you can see Max Schreck's bald cap and the greasepaint of his makeup. But in the version that I saw, he seemed like a real vampire, and that's how a lot of people experienced "Nosferatu." And so there was a legend that Max Schreck was a real vampire. And so, Willem Dafoe, in "Shadow of the Vampire," plays Max Schreck as a real vampire. And it is an incredible performance.

**AP:** We have this notion of instant connections, be them friendships or romantic relationships. Does that exist at all between directors and actors? Or does it always take time to build trust?

**Eggers:** It takes time to build trust for sure. But that instinct for me actually was really that first meeting. I was kind of blown away that one of my heroes wanted to meet with me. But then the con-



This image released by Focus Features shows director Robert Eggers on the set of 'Nosferatu.' (AP)

versation became really easy, quickly. And now I kind of know when I'm having a meeting with an actor, if it goes like that, there's a good thing here, you know? And if I'm very aware of like their celebrity and it becomes like a thing, it's not going to go well.

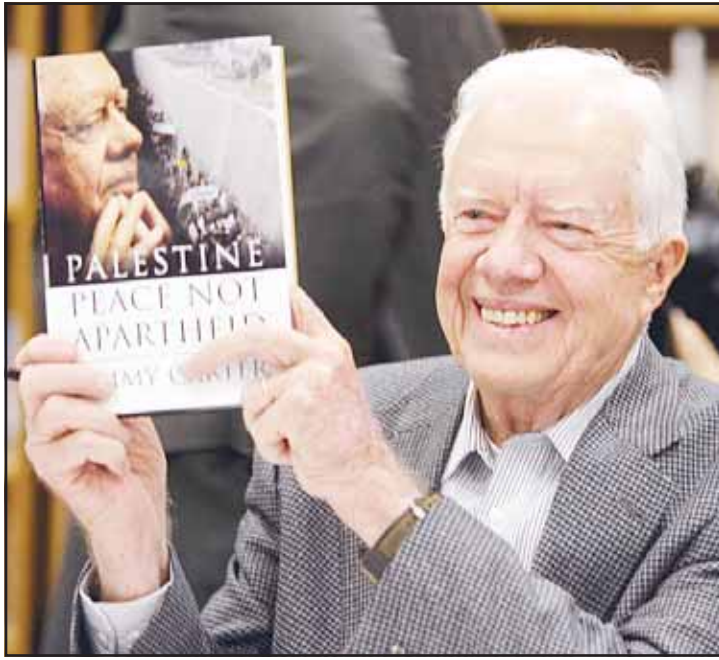
**Dafoe:** We had a lot in common. There was a language he spoke about performing, about creating things. I understood it. I thought, "I'm home," you know? And as far as the trust, there's always unforeseen challenges and difficulties. And then you see how they field them, and that's how you build trust. So clearly, something like "The Lighthouse" had its challenges. Thank God. I love a challenge. Otherwise, you tend to, you know, lose your way or think outside of the frame too much. And look, he's a nice, sweet guy, but he's really concentrated. And I like that. That kind of discipline, that kind of passion. It makes my work that I do valuable because then I want to do his bidding. I want to, you know, be an extension of him.

**AP:** Do any specific challenges from "The Lighthouse" come to mind?

(Both laugh)  
**Dafoe:** I would say a scene where I'm buried alive, I'm speaking poetic language, and it's really cold, cold, cold. But you know what? All those elements I love because they push me to a place that I've never been before. And it's not just about overcoming obstacles. It's really about getting outside of yourself and getting beyond your experience and having something happen to you that's meaningful and curious and taps into a sense of wonder. That's what you're looking for. So sometimes you've got to push it. And he's responsible. It's not like he beats me up or anything. But that's a good example of something that's tough.

**AP:** Robert, does it annoy you as much as it annoys me that Willem doesn't have an Oscar?

**Eggers:** Yeah. I mean, I think Willem is not in it for the Oscars but he certainly deserves one for sure.



Former President Jimmy Carter holds a copy of his book, 'Palestine: Peace, Not Apartheid,' at a book signing in Tempe, Ariz., Dec. 12, 2006. (AP)

Carter's legacy: A writer for peace and justice

Co-authoring a book tested Carters' marriage

NEW YORK, Dec 30, (AP): No ex-president had a more prolific and diverse publishing career than Jimmy Carter. His more than two dozen books included nonfiction, poetry, fiction, religious meditations and a children's story. His memoir "An Hour Before Daylight" was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2002, while his 2006 best-seller "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid" stirred a fierce debate by likening Israel's policies in the West Bank to the brutal South African system of racial segregation.

And just before his 100th birthday, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize Foundation honored him with a lifetime achievement award for how he wielded "the power of the written word to foster peace, social justice, and global understanding."

In one recent work, "A Full Life," Carter observed that he "enjoyed writing" and that his books "provided a much-needed source of income." But some projects were easier than others.

"Everything to Gain," a 1987 collaboration with his wife, Rosalynn, turned into the "worst threat we ever experienced in our marriage," an intractable standoff for the facilitator of the Camp David accords and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

According to Carter, Rosalynn was a meticulous author who considered "the resulting sentences as though they have come down from Mount Sinai, carved into stone." Their memories differed on various events and they fell into "constant arguments." They were ready to abandon the book and return the advance, until their editor persuaded them to simply divide any disputed passages between them.

"In the book, each of these paragraphs is identified by a 'J' or an 'R,' and our marriage survived," he wrote.

**Here is a partial list of books by Carter:**  
 "Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President"  
 "The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East"  
 (With Rosalynn Carter) "Everything to Gain: Making the Most of the Rest of Your Life"  
 "An Outdoor Journal: Adventures and Reflections"  
 "Turning Point: A Candidate, a State, and a Nation Come of Age"  
 "Always a Reckoning, and Other Poems"  
 (With daughter Amy Carter) "The Little Baby Snoogle-Fleejer"

"Living Faith"  
 "The Virtues of Aging"  
 "An Hour Before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood"  
 "Christmas in Plains: Memories"  
 "The Hornet's Nest: A Novel of the Revolutionary War"  
 "Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis"  
 "Faith & Freedom: The Christian Challenge for the World"  
 "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid"  
 "A Remarkable Mother"  
 "Beyond the White House"  
 "We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land: A Plan That Will Work"  
 "White House Diary"  
 "NIV Lessons from Life Bible: Personal Reflections with Jimmy Carter"  
 "A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power"  
 "A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety"

See Page 6

Culture



The main living room in the palace.



One of the corridors inside the palace.

Tunisia's Ennejma Ezzahra ... a unique historical site

TUNIS, Dec 30, (KUNA): Ennejma Ezzahra, "Star of Venus", the Palace of the Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger in northern Tunisia, is an outstanding example of Arab-Islamic architecture.

The historical Palace with its unique geographic location atop a cape in Sidi Bou Said, was built in 1912-1922 as the Baron's home in Tunisia, and after the independence of Tunisia in 1956, it was the first museum to open

in the country. The Baron oversaw the design and construction process drawing inspiration from a plethora of artistic movements, and borrowed the expertise of craftspeople from Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco.

The palace is home to some 2,200 rare artifacts and manuscripts. In 1991, it was turned into a concert hall for Arabic, Andalusian and Mediterranean music. (KUNA)



The Palace of Zahra Star.



A view from the Palace of Zahra overlooking the tourist city of Sidi Bou Said.



The palace's backyard overlooks the Mediterranean Sea. KUNA photos

What are the top 2025 resolutions?

Will New Year's Eve be loud or quiet?

NEW YORK, Dec 30, (AP): If you're planning on ringing in the new year quietly at home, you're not alone.

A majority of US adults intend to celebrate New Year's Eve at home, according to a new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

"As I've gotten older over the last few years, it's like if I don't make it to midnight, it's not a big deal, you know?" says Carla Woods, 70, from Vinton, Iowa.

Nearly 2 in 10 will be celebrating at a friend or family member's home, and just 5% plan to go out to celebrate at a bar, restaurant or organized event, the poll found.

But many US adults will celebrate the new year in a different way - by making a resolution. More than half say they'll make at least one resolution for 2025.

There's some optimism about the year ahead, although more than half aren't expecting a positive change. About 4 in 10 say 2025 will be a better year for them personally. About one-third don't expect much of a difference between 2024 and 2025, and about one-quarter think 2025 will be a worse year than 2024.

Kourtney Kershaw, a 32-year-old bartender in Chicago, often fields questions from customers and friends about upcoming events for New Year's Eve. She said this year is trending toward low-key.

"A majority of who I've spoken to in my age range, they want to go out, but they don't know what they're going to do because they haven't found anything or things are just really expensive," she said. "Party packages or an entry fee are like a turnoff, especially with the climate of the world and how much things

cost." As expected, younger people are more interested in ringing in the new year at a bar or organized event - about 1 in 10 US adults under 30 say they plan to do that. But about 3 in 10 older adults - 60 and above - say they won't celebrate the beginning of 2025 at all.

Anthony Tremblay, 35, from Pittsburgh, doesn't usually go out to toast the arrival of the new year, but this year he's got something special cooked up: He and his wife will be traveling through Ireland.

"I don't do anything too crazy for New Year's, usually. So this is definitely a change," he said. "I wanted to do something unique this year, so I did."

Struggling

Woods will be working New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. She answers calls on The Iowa Warmline, a confidential, noncrisis listening line for people struggling with mental health or substance use issues.

"Holidays are really hard for people, so I don't mind working," she said. "I'm passionate about it because I have mental health issues in the family and so being able to help people is rewarding to me."

Every New Year's also triggers the eternal debate about resolutions. A majority of U.S. adults say they intend to make a New Year's resolution of some type, but millennials and Gen Z are especially likely to be on board - about two-thirds expect to do so, compared to about half of older adults. Women are also more likely than men to say they will set a goal for 2025.

Tremblay hopes to lose some weight and focus more on self-care - more sleep, meditation

and breathing exercises. "It's probably a good year to focus on mental health," he said.

Many others agree. About 3 in 10 adults choose resolutions involving exercise or eating healthier. About one-quarter said they'll make a resolution involving losing weight and a similar number said they'll resolve to make changes about priorities of money or mental health.

Woods' resolutions are to stay social and active. As a mental health counselor, she knows those are key to a happy 2025 and beyond: "Probably one of my biggest resolutions is trying to make sure I stay social, try to get out at least once a week - get out and either have coffee or do something with a friend. That's not only for the physical but also for the mental health part."

Kershaw, the bartender, says weight loss and better health are the top resolutions she hears people make. "Mental health is the new one, but I think it's high up there as well as with regular health," she said.

She prefers more goal-oriented resolutions and, this time, it's to do more traveling and see more of the world: "I don't know if that's really a resolution, but that's a goal that I'm setting."

And how will she welcome the arrival of 2025? Usually, she takes the night off and stays home watching movies with plenty of snacks, but this year Kershaw has a different plan, maybe one of the most Chicago things you can do.

This die-hard sports fan will be at Wrigley Field on Tuesday watching the Chicago Blackhawks take on the St. Louis Blues. "Hockey's my favorite sport. So I will be watching hockey and bringing in the new year," she said.

Obituaries



Linda Lavin speaks at the 33rd annual Producers Guild Awards, March 19, 2022, at the Fairmont Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles. (AP)

Working class icon

Linda Lavin, Tony winner and Alice star, dies at 87

NEW YORK, Dec 30, (AP): Linda Lavin, a Tony Award-winning stage actress who became a working class icon as a paper-hat wearing waitress on the TV sitcom "Alice," has died. She was 87.

Lavin died in Los Angeles on Sunday of complications from recently discovered lung cancer, her representative, Bill Veloric, told The Associated Press in an email.

A success on Broadway, Lavin tried her luck in Hollywood in the mid-1970s. She was chosen to star in a new CBS sitcom based on "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore," the Martin Scorsese-directed film that won Ellen Burstyn an Oscar for playing the title waitress.

The title was shortened to "Alice" and Lavin became a role model for working moms as Alice Hyatt, a widowed mother with a 12-year-old son working in a roadside diner outside Phoenix. The show, with Lavin singing the theme song "There's a New Girl in Town," ran from 1976 to 1985.

The show turned "Kiss my grits" into a catchphrase and co-starred Polly Holliday as waitress Flo and Vic Tayback as the gruff owner and head chef of Mel's Diner.

The series bounced around the CBS schedule during its first two seasons but became a hit leading into "All in the Family" on Sunday nights in October 1977. It was

among primetime's top 10 series in four of the next five seasons. Variety magazine listed it among the all-time best workplace comedies.

Lavin soon went on to win a Tony for best actress in a play for Neil Simon's "Broadway Bound" in 1987.

She was working as recently as this month promoting a new Netflix series in which she appears, "No Good Deed," and filming a forthcoming Hulu series, "Mid-Century Modern," according to Deadline, which first reported her death.

Lavin grew up in Portland, Maine, and moved to New York City after graduating from the College of William and Mary. She sang in nightclubs and in ensembles of shows.

Iconic producer and director Hal Prince gave Lavin her first big break while directing the Broadway musical "It's a Bird ... It's a Plane ... It's Superman." She went on to earn a Tony nomination in Simon's "Last of the Red Hot Lovers" in 1969 before winning 18 years later for another Simon play, "Broadway Bound."

In the mid 1970s, Lavin moved to Los Angeles. She had a recurring role on "Barney Miller" and in 1976 was chosen to star in a new CBS sitcom based on Ellen Burstyn's Oscar-winning waitress comedy-drama, "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore."

Charles Shyer, comedy filmmaker, dies at 83

LOS ANGELES, Dec 30, (AP): Charles Shyer, the Oscar-nominated writer and filmmaker known for classic comedies like "Private Benjamin," "Baby Boom" and "Father of the Bride" that he made alongside Nancy Meyers, has died. He was 83.

Shyer died in Los Angeles on Friday, his daughter, filmmaker Hallie Meyers-Shyer told The Associated Press on Sunday. No cause was disclosed.

A son of Hollywood, whose father Melville Shyer was one of the founding members of the Directors Guild of America, Shyer made an indelible mark on comedies, mostly of the romantic persuasion, in the 1980s and 1990s.

Born in Los Angeles in 1941, Shyer cut his teeth writing for television, assisting Garry Marshall and working on shows like "The Odd Couple" before transitioning to films. He had writing credits on "Smokey and the Bandit," Jack Nicholson's "Goin' South" and the Walter Matthau drama "House Calls." A big breakthrough came with "Private Benjamin," the Goldie Hawn comedy about a wealthy woman who inadvertently signs up for basic training, which he co-wrote with Meyers and Har-

vey Miller. It was a script that was initially turned down by every studio in Hollywood, even with Hawn attached to star and produce.

"We went to a meeting at Paramount after they read the script, and Mike Eisner was the president of the studio, and we sat in his office with Mike and (producer) Don Simpson. And Mike said to Goldie, 'This is a mistake for you to make this movie.'" Shyer told IndieWire in 2022. "God bless Don Simpson, who spoke up and said, 'Mike, you're 100% wrong on this one.'"

The movie became one of the biggest hits of 1980. It got them an Oscar nomination and a win from the Writers Guild and also paved the way for his directorial debut "Irreconcilable Differences."

That film, which he also wrote with Meyers (they married in 1980), starred Shelley Long and Ryan O'Neal as a writing-directing duo whose relationship crumbles after success and an infatuation with a young actor played by Sharon Stone. It was partially inspired by the tabloid affairs of Peter Bogdanovich, who left his wife and producer Polly Platt for Cybill Shepherd.

"Nancy and I just laughed at the same things. We love the same movies, we kind of educate each other on the movies that each of us loved," Shyer told The Hollywood Reporter. "And Nancy really made me laugh. I think she wrote the best one-liners of anybody I know, except Neil Simon. And, we were just always in sync - as filmmakers, we had this thing."



Shyer

## Study reveals all dementia risks are preventable

## Addressing dementia risks could lower rates by 45%

By Eric B. Larson, University of Washington and Laura Gitlin, Drexel University

The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.

Nearly half of all dementia cases could be delayed or prevented altogether by addressing 14 possible risk factors, including vision loss and high cholesterol. That is the key finding of a study that we and our colleagues published in the journal *The Lancet* in August 2024.

Dementia, a rapidly increasing global challenge, affects an estimated 57 million worldwide, and this number is expected to increase to 153 million by 2050 worldwide. Although the prevalence of dementia is on the decline in high-income countries, it continues to increase in low- and middle-income countries.

This third updated report of the Lancet Commission on Dementia offers good news and a strong message: Policymakers, clinicians, individuals and families can be ambitious about prevention and reduce dementia risk; and for those living with dementia and their caregivers, support their quality of life using evidence-based approaches.

The report confirms 12 previously identified potentially modifiable risk factors from two previous reports, published in 2017 and 2020. It also offers new evidence supporting two additional modifiable risk factors: vision loss and high levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, often called "bad" cholesterol.

Our study of published evidence found that collectively, addressing 14 modifiable risk factors could potentially reduce the prevalence of dementia by 45% worldwide. Even greater risk reductions could be possible in low- and middle-income countries and for people with low income in higher-income countries given the higher prevalence of dementia, health disparities and risk factors in these populations.

The report further indicates that reducing these 14 risks can increase the number of healthy years of life and reduce the length of time with poor health in people with dementia.

Additionally, the report cites clinical trials showing that nonpharmacological approaches, such as using activities tailored to interests and abilities, can reduce dementia-related symptoms and improve quality of life.

We are a general internist and an applied sociologist and intervention scientist, and our work focuses on memory and wellness in older adults. Together with 25 other internationally recognized dementia experts under the leadership of psychiatry professor Dr. Gill Livingston, we carefully reviewed the evidence to derive recommendations for prevention, intervention and care.

The rapid growth of aging populations worldwide is a triumph of better public and personal health throughout the entire life span. Yet, given the lack of a dementia cure, this report highlights the importance of prevention as well as supporting quality of life for those with a dementia diagnosis.

In the new report, our team proposed an ambitious program for preventing dementia that could be implemented at the individual, community and policy levels and across the life span from early life through mid and late life. The key points

include:

- In early life, improving general education.
- In midlife, addressing hearing loss, high LDL cholesterol, depression, traumatic brain injury, physical inactivity, diabetes, smoking, hypertension, obesity and excessive alcohol.
- In later life, reducing social isolation, air pollution and vision loss.

Together, these add up to the Lancet Commission on Dementia's estimate that 45% of dementia risk can be reduced. And an abundance of new research shows that when risk factors are addressed, such as exposure to air pollution, they are linked with improved cognition and likely reduction of dementia risk.

New evidence supports the notion that in high-income countries, reducing dementia risk can translate to more healthy years, years free of dementia and a shorter duration of ill health for people who develop dementia. The 45% reduction in dementia risk across the world's population is based on a calculation that assumes that risk factors are causal and can be eliminated. It shows how dementia prevention is critical and the impact it would have on individuals and families.

The commission emphasized the need for more research to identify additional risk factors, test risk factor changes in clinical trials, provide guidance for public health efforts, and identify and evaluate strategies for implementing and scaling evidence-based programs that support people with dementia and caregivers.

The updated report has worldwide public health and research impact and is being widely disseminated. It serves as a guideline to clinicians and policymakers and outlines new research directions.

The Research Brief is a short take on interesting academic work. (AP)

## Heparin findings offer guidance for treatment

## Common blood thinners reduce mortality in COVID-19 patients

MANHASSET, N.Y., Dec. 30, (AP): Nearing five years since the beginning of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, scientists continue to uncover the risk factors of blood clots and potential death for hospitalized and recently discharged patients with COVID-19. A new international study reveals that therapeutic doses of the common blood thinner heparin could significantly improve the survival rate of hospitalized patients with COVID-19.

The comprehensive analysis of 22 clinical trials, 11,000 patients from 21 countries, coordinated by the World Health Organization (WHO), was published recently in *Annals of Internal Medicine*. The analysis was designed to resolve conflicting findings from earlier research on blood thinner dosages for COVID-19 and included HEP-COVID, a trial led by Alex C. Spyropoulos, MD, professor in the Institute of Health System Science at the Feinstein Institutes for Medical Research. HEP-COVID found that giving therapeutic doses of heparin could significantly impact patient outcomes.

"Our findings provide crucial guidance for doctors treating hospitalized patients with COVID-19," said Dr. Spyropoulos. "While blood thinners are already a standard part of care, this study provides evidence that giving therapeutic doses of heparin could significantly impact patient outcomes, including mortality, thromboembolic disease, and disease progression with need for higher level of supportive care. It's a delicate balance between preventing life-threatening clots and minimizing bleeding risks, highlighting the need for personalized treatment strategies based on each patient's unique situation. These results are relevant beyond the COVID-19 pandemic because they provide guidance on managing anticoagulation for patients hospitalized with viral respiratory illnesses and future pandemics."

Researchers investigated three dosage levels of heparin-based blood thinners commonly used in hospital settings — a standard low or preventative dose, an intermediate dose and a high therapeutic dose — which revealed that patients receiving the higher therapeutic dose had

a 23 percent lower risk of death within 28 days compared to patients receiving the lower-dosed thinners. These results mostly reflected patients who were in hospital wards but not in intensive care settings. However, the study also highlighted that higher doses of blood thinners were linked to increased risk of major bleeding.

"Blood clots are a dangerous complication in hospitalized patients with COVID-19," said Kevin J. Tracey, MD, president and CEO of the Feinstein Institutes and Karches Family Distinguished Chair in Medical Research. "These important new findings give guidance for therapeutic protocols to reduce morbidity and mortality."

The research was a prospective meta-analysis, a type of study that combines data from multiple clinical trials to provide a more complete understanding of a treatment's effects. This particular meta-analysis was global in scope and designed in collaboration with researchers from the individual trials before the results of those trials were known, ensuring a more unbiased, comprehensive, and definitive assessment.

## Efficient and faster administration

## FDA clears injectable Opdivo for cancer

PRINCETON, N.J., Dec. 30, (AP): Bristol Myers Squibb has announced that the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted approval for Opdivo Qvantig (nivolumab and hyaluronidase-nvhy) injection for subcutaneous use, a combination product of nivolumab co-formulated with recombinant human hyaluronidase (rHu-PH20), in most previously approved adult, solid tumor Opdivo indications as monotherapy, monotherapy maintenance following completion of Opdivo plus Yervoy (ipilimumab) combination therapy, or in combination with chemotherapy or cabozantinib. The approval is based on the results from the Phase 3 randomized, open-label CheckMate-67T trial, which demonstrated non-inferior co-primary pharmacokinetic (PK) exposures, similar efficacy in overall response rate (ORR), and showed a comparable safety profile vs. intravenous (IV) Opdivo.

"This approval of subcutaneous nivolumab gives our patients a new

option that can deliver consistent efficacy and comparable safety expected from IV nivolumab, and offers a patient-centric treatment experience," said Professor Dr. Saby George, MD, FACP, medical oncologist and director of network clinical trials at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center. Opdivo Qvantig offers faster administration, delivered in three to five minutes. It may allow patients, in consultation with their doctors, to choose another treatment method and the flexibility to receive treatment closer to home.

In the trial, noninferiority was demonstrated for the co-primary endpoints of time-averaged concentration over 28 days (Cavgd28) and minimum concentration at steady state (Cminss) of Opdivo Qvantig vs. IV Opdivo. The geometric mean ratios (GMRs) for Cavgd28 was 2.10 (90% CI: 2.00-2.20) and the GMR for Cminss was 1.77 (90% CI: 1.63-1.93). As a key-powered secondary endpoint, the over-

all response rate (ORR) in the Opdivo Qvantig arm (n=248) was 24% (95% CI: 19-30) compared with 18% (95% CI: 14-24) in the IV Opdivo arm (n=247), showing that Opdivo Qvantig has similar efficacy compared to IV Opdivo.

Subcutaneous administration may offer flexibility to receive treatment where it is best for patients and their providers, and may reduce steps required for preparation and time needed for administration. In the CM-67T trial, average administration time with Opdivo Qvantig was approximately five minutes, and most patients received all doses of the study medication without an injection interruption or dose delay. With this approval, Opdivo Qvantig is now the first and only subcutaneously administered PD-1 inhibitor, offering a faster delivery for patients to receive this immunotherapy treatment option in three to five minutes compared to 30-minute IV Opdivo.



Steve Collins, a butterfly collector and the founder of the African Butterfly Research Institute (ABRI), holds a butterfly collection box in Nairobi, Kenya, Monday, Dec. 9, 2024. (AP)

## Over 4.2 million specimens

## Butterfly collector seeks to share them for the future

NAIROBI, Kenya, Dec. 30, (AP): What began as a childhood hobby more than six decades ago has led to what might be Africa's largest butterfly collection in a suburb of Kenya's capital.

Steve Collins, 74, was born and raised in western Kenya. By the age of 5, he was fascinated by butterflies and started building a collection that has grown to more than 4.2 million, representing hundreds of species.

"My parents encouraged us to look for butterflies after visiting the Congo and were gifted a trapping net by some friends," Collins said. "By the time I was 15 years old, I was already visiting other countries like Nigeria to study more about butterflies."

During his 20-year career as an agronomist, Collins dedicated his free time to research. He established the African Butterfly Research Institute in 1997.

Now, running out of space and time, he hopes to hand it over to the next generation.

On his 1.5 acres (0.6 hectare) of land, hundreds of indigenous trees and flowering bushes form a well-knit forest. Hundreds of butterflies dance from one flower to another, at times landing on Collins' hand.

His collection is private, although it was initially open to the public when he ran it as an education center between 1998 and 2003.

Collins has 1.2 million butterflies from across Africa delicately pinned in frames and stored in rows of shelves, with another 3 million in envelopes.

"They need to be kept in dark spaces," he said. "The form of storage also en-

sures the dried butterflies are not eaten by other insects, parasites and predators. We also ensure we apply insecticides once a year to keep them safe."

Julian Bayliss, an ecologist specializing in Africa and a visiting professor at Oxford Brookes University, said he has collected butterflies for Collins over two decades.

"There is a large part of that collection that is completely irreplaceable because a large part of Africa's habitat is being destroyed," Bayliss said.

Africa is vulnerable to climate change, with periods of prolonged drought and serious flooding destroying forests and other butterfly habitats.

Bayliss suggested digitizing the collection to make it accessible worldwide.

Whoever takes it over "needs to be an institution that is well-founded, well-funded and secure," he said.

Scott Miller, an entomologist at the Smithsonian Institution, met Collins almost 30 years ago. He said such collections provide critical information that could show environmental changes over 60 years.

"These physical specimens, you can actually keep going back to them to get new layers of information as you learn more or you get a different technology or you get different questions," he said.

Collins is concerned that soon he will no longer be able to sustain his research. He said his most prized butterfly costs \$8,000 - which he keeps from sight, concerned about possible theft - and hopes to sell the collection to an individual or research institution.

## Polio cases

## Serbia reports 1st mpox case

BELGRADE, Dec. 30, (Xinhua): A 30-year-old man recently returning from West Africa was confirmed as a new case of mpox in Serbia on Friday. He is also the first confirmed mpox case in the Kosovo region, according to the regional Institute of Public Health.

The institute stated that the patient was hospitalized on Dec. 24, with symptoms including fever, chills, and skin lesions on his face and hands. His condition is stable. Authorities have traced all close contacts of the patient and issued infection control guidelines to prevent potential transmission, the institute said.

**Swine flu:** Albania's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development said on Friday that new cases of African swine fever have been found in the country.

They were detected in Ishull-Lezhe in the municipality of Lezhe, and 15 dead pigs were identified and buried to avoid further spread.

Assisted by law enforcement entities, the ministry has put the area under veterinary supervision and banned trading of live pigs there.

The site of the cases is within a surveillance zone of an earlier outbreak on Nov. 29. The zone was released from isolation on Dec. 16 after no new cases had been found.

**Polio:** Pakistan reported two more polio cases, increasing the total number of cases in the country so far this year to 67, the National Institute of Health (NIH) said on Friday.

The two cases were confirmed from the northwest district of Tank and southern district of Kashmir, the NIH said.

The NIH added that it was the fourth polio case from Tank and the second case from Kashmir this year.

**Dengue:** The number of dengue cases in Laos has surpassed 20,000, with 11 deaths reported so far this year, according to the Lao Ministry of Health on Friday.

According to a report of the ministry's Center of Information and Education for Health, the highest number was reported in the capital Vientiane with 5,761 cases.

The dengue fever has caused 11 deaths, including four in Luang Prabang province, three in the capital, two in Sekong province, and one each in Luang Namtha and Vientiane province.

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## SPORTS

## Duffy was the homeside's key bowler

## New Zealand beats Sri Lanka by 45 runs to take 2-0 series lead

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, New Zealand, Dec 30, (AP): Sri Lanka again fell short in a tough run chase as New Zealand won the second Twenty20 international by 45 runs Monday to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

The tourists were edged by eight runs chasing 172-8 in the first match two days ago and again faltered late while chasing New Zealand's 186-5 on Monday. Sri Lanka was all out for 141 in 19.1 overs.

"It's really important to finish the game, no matter how it started," Sri Lanka captain Charith Asalanka said.

"The way you finish is the most important thing. In the first game we were almost there to win and again we're disappointed."

Once again, Jacob Duffy was New Zealand's key bowler, dismissing opener Pathum Nissanka for 37 and returning to remove Kusal Perera for 48 when both batters looked well placed to

steer Sri Lanka to victory.

Nissanka made 96 in the first match in a 120-run opening partnership with Kusal Mendis before Duffy turned that match in New Zealand's favor when he took three wickets in four balls, including Mendis, to stifle the Sri Lanka chase.

He took 4-15 Monday to once again stand out as the difference between the teams.

After dismissing Nissanka, Duffy produced a superb yorker to remove Perera in the 16th over when Sri Lanka was 127-4 and still in with a good chance. He then removed Wanindu Hasaranga (1) and Maheesh Theekshana (0) in the space of three balls in the 18th over as the Sri Lanka tail again failed to fire.

Matt Henry took two wickets with consecutive balls in the 19th over before Zak Foulkes finished off the Sri Lanka innings with five balls remaining.

New Zealand depended on a century partnership between Daryl Mitchell and Michael

Bracewell to post a competitive total in the first match. It produced a more balanced batting effort Monday to reach a testing total on a tricky pitch which sometimes skidded, sometimes held up and provided a batting challenge.

A strong wind across the Bay Oval also made hitting to one side of the ground difficult and gave an edge to the bowlers.

Tim Robinson made 41 from 34 balls at the top of the New Zealand innings, hitting three fours and two sixes to impart early momentum while Rachin Ravindra failed again and was out for 1.

Mark Chapman made 42 from 29 balls batting at No. 3, then wicketkeeper Mitchell made a vital contribution with an unbeaten 41 from 19 balls at the death, including four fours and two sixes. His innings also separated the teams.

"It was good to contribute to a good score, one we were pretty happy with and to contribute to a win," Hay said.



New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell attempts to make a catch, during the second Twenty20 international cricket match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka at Mt. Maunganui, New Zealand. (AP)

## UNC beats Campbell 97-81

## Michigan rolls past W. Kentucky

ANN ARBOR, Mich., Dec 30, (AP): Vladislav Goldin and Nimari Burnett scored 17 points apiece and Tre Donaldson and Danny Wolf posted double-doubles to lead Michigan to a 112-64 romp over Western Kentucky on Sunday night, snapping a six-game win streak for the Hilltoppers.

Goldin made 7 of 8 shots with two 3-pointers and 1 of 2 free throws for the Wolverines (10-3), whose three losses this season have been by a combined five points. Burnett did most of his damage on 5-for-7 shooting from 3-point range. Donaldson totaled 12 points and 11 rebounds for his first career double-double, while Wolf finished with 12 points and 10 boards for his sixth of the season.

Sam Walters scored 13 off the bench for Michigan and Roddy Gayle Jr. pitched in with 11 points and four assists.

Don McHenry sank three 3-pointers and scored 18 to lead Western Kentucky (9-4). Julius Thedford scored 11 on 3-for-16 shooting. Enoch Kalambay added 10 points.

Freshman Ian Jackson scored a season-high 26 points, RJ Davis added 23 points, including five 3-pointers, and North Carolina beat Campbell 97-81 in the Tar Heels' final non-conference game of the season.

Elliot Cadeau added 12 points and a career-high 12 assists, Drake Powell also scored 12 points and Jalen Washington added 10 for North Carolina (8-5).

Cadeau made a jumper to spark a 15-3 run, Davis followed with a 3-pointer that gave UNC the lead for good with 16:09 left in the first half and Cadeau capped the spurt with a layup that made it 22-12 with 12:41 to go until halftime.

Colby Duggan responded with back-to-back 3-pointers for the Fighting Camels to make it 22-18 less than a minute later and Nolan Dorsey's tip-in again trimmed the deficit to four points with 7:51 left in the first half. North Carolina scored 12 of the final 17 points to take a 40-29 lead

into the intermission and Campbell got no closer than nine from there.

Cam Carter hit five 3-pointers and finished with 23 points, Vctorius Miller added 20 points and LSU never trailed in a 110-45 win over Mississippi Valley State, the Tigers' 21st consecutive victory when scoring at least 100 points.

LSU's 65-point margin of victory was its largest since the Tigers beat Grambling by 75 (112-37) on Nov. 20, 1999 and is the third biggest against a Division-I opponent in program history. The 110 points were the most by LSU since a 119-108 win over North Florida on Dec. 12, 2015.

Bennett Stirtz scored 20 points to guide Drake to a 65-46 victory over Belmont on Sunday as the Bulldogs ran their win streak to 12 to begin the season.

Stirtz made 8 of 16 shots from the floor and all four of his free throws for the Bulldogs (12-0, 2-0 Missouri Valley Conference). He added four assists and three steals. Daniel Abreu made three 3-pointers and scored 15 with five rebounds.

Braden Smith had 34 points and 12 assists to lift No. 21 Purdue to an 83-64 victory over Toledo.

Smith sank 12 of 22 shots, including 6 of 13 from 3-point range, for the Boilermakers (9-4). Trey Kaufman-Renn contributed 23 points on 11-of-14 shooting and Fletcher Loyer added 17 points for Purdue.

Smith scored 17 of his points in the opening half to guide Purdue to a 39-28 halftime advantage. Purdue used an 18-2 spurt to take a 28-14 lead with 5:39 left in the first half.

Sonny Wilson and Sam Lewis each scored 13 points, and Seth Hubbard 11 points for the Rockets (6-6). Lewis had a team-high 11 rebounds as Toledo outrebounded Purdue 40-33.

The Boilermakers shot 49.2% from the field, while the Rockets shot 40.6%. Purdue had a 15-2 edge in fast break points.

## Carlsen returns to tourney after dispute over jeans is resolved

NEW YORK, Dec 30, (AP): Top-ranked chess player Magnus Carlsen is headed back to the World Blitz Championship on Monday after its governing body agreed to loosen a dress code that got him fined and denied a late-round game in another tournament for refusing to change out of jeans.

Lamenting the contretemps, International Chess Federation President Arkady Dvorkovich said in a statement Sunday that he'd let World Blitz Championship tournament officials consider allowing "appropriate jeans" with a jacket, and other "elegant minor deviations" from the dress code.

He said Carlsen's stand - which culminated in his quitting the tournament Friday - highlighted a need for more discussion "to ensure that our rules and their application reflect the evolving nature of chess as a global and accessible sport."

Carlsen, meanwhile, said in a video posted Sunday on social media that he would play - and wear jeans - in the World Blitz Championship when it begins Monday.

"I think the situation was badly mishandled on their side," the 34-year-old Norwegian grandmaster said. But he added that he loves playing blitz - a fast-paced form of chess - and wanted fans to be able to watch, and that he was encouraged by his discussions with the federation after Friday's showdown.

"I think we sort of all want the

same thing," he suggested in the video on his Take Take Take chess app's YouTube channel. "We want the players to be comfortable, sure, but also relatively presentable."

The events began when Carlsen wore jeans and a sportcoat Friday to the Rapid World Championship, which is separate from but held in conjunction with the blitz event. The chess federation said Friday that longstanding rules prohibit jeans at those tournaments, and players are lodged nearby to make sartorial switch-ups easy if needed.

An official fined Carlsen \$200 and asked him to change pants, but he refused and wasn't paired for a ninth-round game, the federation said at the time. The organization noted that another grandmaster, Ian Nepomniachtchi, was fined earlier in the day for wearing sports shoes, changed and continued to play.

Carlsen has said that he offered to wear something else the next day, but officials were unyielding. He said "it became a bit of a matter of principle," so he quit the rapid and blitz championships.

In the video posted Sunday, he questioned whether he had indeed broken a rule and said changing clothes would have needlessly interrupted his concentration between games. He called the punishment "unbelievably harsh."

"Of course, I could have changed. Obviously, I didn't want to," he said, and "I stand by that."

## Best of the Rest

**David considering new offer:** Jonathan David is considering a new contract from Lille and says his chances of staying at the French club are "50-50."

The 24-year-old Canada striker is enjoying his fifth season at Lille and tops the league's scoring charts with 11 goals from 15 games. He is out of contract at the end of June and has reportedly been offered a two-year contract. "As the president (Olivier Letang) said several times, discussions are going on. We're talking but no decision has been reached," David told regional newspaper La Voix du Nord on Monday in an interview. "The door is never closed. It's 50-50." (AP)

## Herro leads Heat over Rockets in game marred by fight and ejections



Minnesota Timberwolves guard Donte DiVincenzo (0) works around San Antonio Spurs guard Tre Jones (33) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Minneapolis. (AP)

**OKLAHOMA CITY, Dec 30, (AP):** Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 35 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder won their 11th straight game, beating the short-handed Memphis Grizzlies 130-106 on Sunday night in a matchup of Western Conference leaders that turned lopsided before halftime.

Rookie Ajay Mitchell scored 17 points, Aaron Wiggins contributed 16 and Jalen Williams added 14 points and 10 rebounds for the Thunder (26-5), who opened a five-game lead over second-place Memphis.

Gilgeous-Alexander made 14 of 19 shots to go along with seven assists, six rebounds and a team-high four blocks. He sat most of the fourth quarter. Oklahoma City blocked nine shots, including three by center Isaiah Hartenstein.

The Thunder led 76-50 at halftime behind 23 points from Gilgeous-Alexander and 12 each from Mitchell and Kenrich Williams, who combined to go 5 for 7 on 3-point shots. Oklahoma City outscored the Grizzlies 42-19 in the second quarter to take control.

Desmond Bane had 22 points and nine rebounds for Memphis (22-11), which played without star Ja Morant (shoulder) and Zach Edey, the team's No. 9 overall draft pick, who was in concussion protocol. Jay Huff added 17 points but Jaren Jackson Jr., the team's leading scorer at 21.9 points per game, managed 13 points on 3-of-17 shooting.

**Heat 104, Rockets 100**

In Houston, Tyler Herro scored 27 points before being one of six people ejected after a fight in the final minute of the Miami Heat's 104-100



Indiana Pacers guard Tyrese Haliburton, center, drives in front of Boston Celtics guard Derrick White, left, and guard Jaylen Brown, behind right, in the first half of an NBA basketball game in Boston. (AP)

victory over the Houston Rockets.

Herro was thrown to the ground by the Rockets' Amen Thompson with 35 seconds left and the Heat leading 99-94. Players and coaches from both benches then came onto the court.

Both players were thrown out along with Rockets guard Jalen Green, coach Ime Udoka and assistant coach Ben Sullivan. Terry Rozier was also ejected for Miami.

Houston led 92-85 after Fred VanVleet's layup with 8:10 to play, but the Rockets missed their next 11 shots, allowing Miami to tie the game when Herro found Haywood Highsmith for a 3-pointer with 4:47 to play.

Herro's jumper with 1:56 to play put the Heat on top for good.

**Hawks 136, Raptors 107**

In Toronto, Trae Young had 34 points and 10 assists, De'Andre Hunter scored 22 points and the Atlanta Hawks routed the Toronto Raptors for their fourth straight win.

Clint Capela had 11 points and 13 rebounds as the Hawks opened a six-game trip by handing the reeling Raptors their 10th consecutive loss.

Scottie Barnes scored 19 points and RJ Barrett had 17, but the Raptors fell behind by more than 30 points and allowed more than 130 for the second straight game. Toronto gave up a franchise-worst 155 points in Thursday's loss at Memphis.

Young shot 7 for 13 from 3-point range, singlehandedly making as many shots from distance than the entire Raptors team, who combined to go 7 for 24.

Toronto's Bruce Brown made his season debut after sitting out the first 31 games recovering from right knee surgery. Brown soared for a one-handed dunk for his first points shortly after entering the game in the first quarter. He finished with 12 points in 19 minutes.

**Pacers 123, Celtics 114**

In Boston, Tyrese Haliburton

## Rossoneri eighth in Serie A, trailing leaders Atalanta and Napoli by 14 points

## Conceição named new Milan coach after Fonseca fired

MILAN, Dec 30, (AP): AC Milan hired Sérgio Conceição as its new coach on Monday, hours after the Serie A club fired Portuguese compatriot Paulo Fonseca.

The 50-year-old Conceição has been given an 18-month contract.

Conceição, who played in Serie A with Lazio, Parma and Inter Milan, coached Porto for six seasons before stepping down in June.

His first match in charge of Milan will be against Juventus in the Italian Super Cup semifinals in Saudi Arabia on Friday.

"The club extends a warm welcome to Sérgio and his staff, wishing a journey full of success and fulfillment," the Rossoneri said in a statement.

Conceição landed at Milan's Linate airport on Monday afternoon and is reportedly headed straight to Milan's training ground to meet the team and staff.

Fonseca's dismissal was officially announced on Monday morning after the Portuguese coach was informed following a 1-1 draw at home to Roma the previous night.

"Yes, it's true. I'm out," Fonseca told reporters when he lowered his car window as he left San Siro following Sunday's match. "That's life... I did everything I could."

Fonseca was hired in June and produced only 12 wins in 24 matches across all competitions. His last ac-

tion as Milan coach was to be sent off for dissent in the first half of Sunday's match.

Milan is eighth in Serie A, trailing leaders Atalanta and Napoli by 14 points - far worse than the second place result earned under Stefano Pioli last season. Pioli left the club at the end of the campaign after a near five-year stint that included the 2022 Serie A title.

Milan has fared better in the Champions League lately following four straight wins, including a 3-1 result at Real Madrid. The Rossoneri are in 12th place and on course to qualify for the knockout playoff round.

Fonseca was already under pressure early in the season after just one victory in his first five matches in charge but that eased following a derby victory over Inter.

There were protests from fans before and during the match against Roma but the chants were mainly aimed at the club's American owners, with the supporters urging Red-Bird founder Gerry Cardinale to sell up.

"The club extends its gratitude to Paulo for his great professionalism and wishes him the very best in his future endeavours," Milan said in a brief statement.

Fonseca went to Milan's training ground on Monday to say goodbye to the team and staff.



Roma's Evan Ndicka, left, fights for the ball with AC Milan's Samuel Chukwueze during the Serie A soccer match between AC Milan and Roma at the San Siro stadium, in Milan, Italy. (AP)

## Australia claims dramatic final-hour win against India



Australian players celebrate after winning the fourth cricket test against India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

## Aussies take 2-1 advantage ahead of final test

MELBOURNE, Australia, Dec 30, (AP): Australia took seven wickets in the final session of the final day to claim a thrilling 184-run victory in front of a record test crowd Monday at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

With less than 40 minutes remaining in the match, Nathan Lyon trapped Mohammed Siraj lbw to bowl India out for 155 in its second innings and complete a remarkable match that had more than 370,000 people attend across the five days.

Australia now takes a 2-1 advantage ahead of the fifth and final test which is scheduled to start on Jan. 3 at the Sydney Cricket Ground, where avoiding a defeat will be enough to regain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for the first time in 10 years.

"It's probably the best test match I've been involved in," said man-of-the-match Cummins, who took 3-28 off 18 overs Monday for six wickets in the match, plus playing valuable innings of

49 and 41 at No.8. "I don't know what the crowd was today, but it was huge.

"Overall, it was one of those great wins."

Earlier, India had been 25 without loss when Pat Cummins produced a double-wicket maiden, dismissing Rohit Sharma (9) and K.L. Rahul (0).

India went to lunch at a shaky 33-3, losing the crucial wicket of Virat Kohli in the final over of the session when the star right-hander was caught at first slip for five off Mitchell Starc's bowling.

Rishabh Pant (30 off 104 balls) and opener Yashvi Jaiswal added 88 runs for the fourth wicket.

But with India seemingly playing for a draw, Pant aggressively clubbed a delivery from part-time spinner Travis Head to long-on and was caught at 121-4 just after tea, sparking a calamitous seven-wicket collapse for the visitors.

India lost three wickets for nine runs as Scott Boland (3-39) removed Ravindra Jadeja (2) caught behind and first-innings century-maker Nitish Kumar Reddy (1) edged to slip off the bowling of spinner Lyon (2-37).

In a pivotal moment of the innings, Jaiswal was given out after Australia called for a review when an appeal for

caught-behind was turned down by umpire Joel Wilson. Despite no sound being picked up on 'snicko', video replays appeared to show the ball glanced off the bat and glove and Jaiswal had to depart for 84 off the bowling of Cummins (3-28) at 140-7.

With less than an over remaining before the final hour of play was due to start, Wilson again turned Australia's appeal down and the decision was overturned following a review by the hosts. Boland claimed his second wicket as Akash Deep fell, caught at bat-pad for 17 at 150-8.

Boland struck again to remove Jasprit Bumrah for a duck and Siraj was lbw to Lyon in the last over before the second new ball was due and sparked wild celebrations among the Australian players and in the stands.

But with a fifth test starting Friday and the possibility that India could still win in Sydney and draw the series 2-2 to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, Cummins said there was little time for celebrations.

"It's a short turnaround. We'll savor this for a couple of hours at least and then it will be recovery for the next three days," Cummins said. "You gear up again for the last test of the summer.

It's a mix of happiness and rest for the next three days."

A crowd of 74,362 for Monday's fifth day of play lifted the total attendance to 373,691, beating the previous record for a Melbourne test match of 350,534 in the 1936-37 Ashes series.

Australia was dismissed in its second innings for 234 on Monday morning. Bumrah (5-57) claimed his 13th five-wicket haul by bowling Lyon (41) in the second over of the morning after the home side resumed on 228-9.

Bumrah, 31, is the leading wicket-taker in the series with 30 victims at an average of 12.83.

The 44-test veteran took match figures of 9-156. Bumrah is the only player in test history with at least 200 wickets and a bowling average under 20 (203 at 19.42).

Steve Smith top-scored with 140 in Australia's first innings of 474. India replied with 369, led by Reddy's 114.

"It is pretty disappointing. We wanted to fight until the end but unfortunately we couldn't do it," India's captain Rohit Sharma said. "We had our chances. We just didn't take them and we let Australia come back into the game when we had them 91 for six (in its second innings)."

## Kuwait returns home ahead of the Handball World Cup

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: The Kuwaiti national handball team has returned home after completing its training camps in Croatia and Tunisia, marking the final phase of preparations for the 29th World Handball Championship. The tournament will take place from January 14 to February 2, 2025, across Croatia, Denmark, and Norway. Kuwait, placed in Group C, will compete against Qatar, Austria, and France.

The team will kick off its ninth World Cup appearance with a match against Austria on January 14, followed by clashes with Qatar and France.

During the preparatory phases, the technical staff focused on improving physical fitness and implementing tactical strategies for both defense and offense through a series of friendly matches. The first camp in Croatia emphasized technical drills, while the second camp in Tunisia refined team dynamics with two friendly games.

Faisal Saywan, Director of National Teams at the Handball Federation, described the Croatia camp as highly successful, highlighting the players' commitment and the technical staff's diligent efforts. Meanwhile, Abdulaziz Al-Zaabi, Director of the First Handball Team, praised the healthy com-



Players preparing for the World Cup.

petition among players during the camp, which he believes will serve the team's interests.

Both officials expressed confidence in the team's readiness, with Saywan voicing faith in the players' ability to represent Kuwait honorably, and Al-Zaabi noting that the rigorous preparations should translate into strong performances at the World Cup.

Kuwait's qualification for the tournament came after securing fourth place in the 21st Asian Championship held in Bahrain last January. This marks Kuwait's ninth World Cup appearance, with prior qualifications in 1982, 1995, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009.

## Al-Kharafi targets back-to-back wins at Atyab Al-Marshood Championship

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Kuwait's knights are gearing up to compete in the 11th "Atyab Al-Marshood" International Championship, scheduled to begin on January 9 at the Kuwait Equestrian Center track.

Leading the lineup is Kuwait Equestrian Club rider Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi, who tops the rankings of past champions. Al-Kharafi enters this year's competition aiming to retain the title he secured in the 2024 season. He has claimed the championship crown four times—in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2024. Other notable winners include Rakan Al-Hasawi, who has won twice, and Abdulrahman Al-Fuzaie, Abdullah Al-Awadhi, and Noura Al-Qaoud, each with a single title to their name.

Speaking about the event, Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi, a star of both Kuwait Club and the National Equestrian Team, emphasized

the championship's significance, calling it the most prestigious and largest equestrian event held annually in Kuwait. He highlighted the strong desire among riders to participate in this iconic competition.

Al-Kharafi also expressed heartfelt gratitude to private sector companies for their support of equestrian sports, as well as the state's contributions, which have elevated the sport in recent years. He noted the emergence of a new generation of young riders who are now competing fiercely alongside seasoned champions in the advanced categories.

He commended the efforts of Walid Sulaiman Al-Marshood, Chairman of the Supreme Organizing Committee, and Marshood Al-Marshood, the Championship Director, for their unwavering support of equestrianism over the past decade.



Organizers with some of the riders.

## Mohamed Salah: Still far away from new Liverpool contract

LONDON, Dec. 30, (Xinhua): Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah says he is focused on helping his team win the Premier League title, but admits he is still "far away" from signing a new contract.

The Egyptian scored his 20th goal of the season and helped set up Cody Gakpo for the second goal in Liverpool's 5-0 win away to West Ham on Sunday to lift them eight points clear at the top of the table.

However, with his contract due to expire at the end of June, he has not

still agree to a new contract and when asked about his future in a post-game TV interview, he admitted he and the club were still far away from that.

"I don't want to put anything in the media...The only thing on my mind is I want Liverpool to win the league and I want to be part of that." "I will do my best for the team to win the trophy. There are a few other teams catching up with us and we need to stay focused and humble and go again," commented Salah.

The forward isn't the only Liverpool player who will be able to leave

for free at the end of the campaign with defenders Virgil van Dijk and Trent Alexander-Arnold also out of contract, with Alexander-Arnold being linked with a possible move to Real Madrid.

Liverpool continued its exceptional season and strengthened its lead at the top of the Premier League with a 5-0 win away to West Ham United on Sunday.

Luis Diaz opened the scoring on the half-hour after an attempted pass bounced back to him, allowing him to drive into the area and score from 12

meters out.

Mohammed Kudus hit the post for West Ham minutes later, but Liverpool doubled the lead through Cody Gakpo in the 40th minute after some Mohamed Salah magic in the West Ham penalty area.

Salah sealed the win with a low shot a minute before halftime and Trent Alexander-Arnold made it 4-0 with a deflected shot nine minutes into the second half, before Diogo Jota rounded off another emphatic win with six minutes left.



Liverpool's Diogo Jota shoots to score his side's fifth goal during the English Premier League soccer match between West Ham United and Liverpool at the London Stadium in London. Liverpool won 5-0. (AP)

# Sports

## Kuwait faces tough Bahrain test on road to Khaleeji Zain 26 final



Great optimism from Kuwait during the last training session before facing Bahrain.

### Blues count on home support

By Khaled Al-Enezi  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30: Kuwait faces a decisive showdown against Bahrain tonight at 8:45 pm at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium in the semi-finals of the Khaleeji Zain 26.**

Kuwait advanced to this stage as the second-place team in Group A with five points, trailing Oman only on goal difference. Kuwait drew 1-1 against both Oman and Qatar and secured a 2-1 victory over the UAE. Meanwhile, Bahrain topped Group B with six points, edging Saudi Arabia on goal difference. Bahrain defeated Saudi Arabia 3-2, overcame Iraq 2-0, and suffered a 1-2 loss to Yemen.

Recent head-to-head encounters favor Bahrain, including a 4-2 win in the penultimate Gulf Cup and a 2-0 victory in the 2021 Arab Cup qualifiers. The last Gulf Cup clash between the two ended in a 1-1 draw. Kuwait's most recent win over Bahrain in an official match dates back to January 2013, a 6-1 triumph in the third-place playoff of the 21st Gulf Cup in Manama.

Kuwait is eager to capitalize on home support to secure a spot in the final — a feat the team hasn't achieved in 11 years since the 21st Gulf Cup. However, it faces challenges with Ahmed Al-Dhafiri sidelined due to card

accumulation and Hassan Hamdan out with an injury. Youssef Majed, recovering from a shoulder dislocation, remains a game-time decision.

Key players Reda Hani, Khaled Ibrahim, Yousef Nasser, Sultan Al-Enezi, and Meshari Ghannam have undergone recovery programs and are now ready for selection by Argentine coach Juan Pizzi. Pizzi is expected to employ a dynamic lineup, with Khaled Al-Rashidi in goal, a defense featuring Khaled Ibrahim, Hamad Al-Harbi, Fahad Al-Hajri, and Meshari Ghannam, and a midfield led by Reda Hani alongside Sultan Al-Enezi and either Moaz Al-Aseema, Eid Al-Rashidi, or Faisal Zayed. The attack will likely include Yousef Nasser, Mohammed Daham, and potentially Youssef Majed, with Mubarak Al-Fenini or Salman Al-Awadhi as alternatives.

Pizzi understands the significance of maintaining focus, maximizing midfield control, and executing tactical precision to overcome Bahrain's well-structured team.

Bahrain, led by Croatian coach Dragan Talajic, aims to continue its impressive run and reach the final, seeking a second Gulf Cup title after its historic triumph in the 24th edition in 2019. With key players like Mohammed Al-Marhoon, Mohammed Madan, Mahdi Abdul-Jabbar, and goalkeeper Ibrahim Lutfallah, Bahrain poses a formidable challenge for Kuwait.

Tonight's clash promises intense competition as both teams vie for glory and a spot in the Championship final.

### 'We are ready for the challenge'

## Saudi Arabia and Oman battle for final spot

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30:** The "Khaleeji Zain 26" has entered its final stages, with the semi-final matches kicking off this evening, following a month of artistic displays and football excitement since the tournament's start on December 21.

In the first semi-final, the Oman will face off against Saudi Arabia at 5:30 pm at Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium in Sulaibikhat.

Historically, Saudi Arabia has the upper hand over Oman in the Gulf Championship. The two teams have met 16 times, with Saudi Arabia winning 11 matches, Oman winning three and two games ending in a draw.

Saudi head coach Hervé Renard expressed confidence, stating that reaching the semi-finals of Khaleeji-Zain 26 was an aspiration fulfilled. Speaking at a press conference at the main media center at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Renard acknowledged the difficulty of facing Oman but

emphasized that his players are fully prepared.

Renard also addressed the Saudi fans, thanking them for their unwavering support during the Iraq match and congratulating them on qualifying for the semi-finals. He highlighted the strong performance of Abdullah Al-Hamdan in the Iraq match, noting that defense remains a crucial focus. Renard also welcomed Marwan Al-Sahafi to the team, signaling his readiness for participation.

The French coach emphasized the importance of imposing the Saudi style of play and not allowing Oman to control the match. Renard is working towards a continuous improvement in the team's performance, with the goal of reaching the Gulf 26 title to further elevate Saudi football.

Player Aoun Al-Saloli shared his optimism, confirming that the team is ready for the challenge ahead. He thanked the Saudi fans for their sup-

port and vowed that the team would give its best effort to secure a victory and reach the final.

Rashid Jaber, head coach of the Omani team, described today's match as both important and challenging, as it is a semi-final encounter against a strong team with a rich history. In his press conference at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Jaber emphasized the need for complete focus from his players to secure a spot in the final.

Jaber expressed trust in the abilities of his players, including goalkeeper Fayeze Al-Rashidi, but acknowledged the difficulty of missing key player Mohammed Al-Musalmi. Despite this, Jaber stressed that the team's strength lies in collective effort, not relying on any single player. He expressed hope that Oman could reach the final, underlining that the ultimate goal was the title.

Jaber also noted that the match could go into extra time or penalties,

and his team is prepared for all possibilities. He emphasized that focus and mental resilience would be key to success.

Regarding injuries, Jaber mentioned that Salah Al-Yahyaie and Amjad Al-Harhi are dealing with minor strains, making their participation uncertain.

Jaber explained that Oman's style of play is both defensive and offensive, adaptable to the needs of each match. While acknowledging Saudi Arabia's strength and talented players, Jaber stated that the Saudi fans' presence would not pressure his team, as they are accustomed to playing in front of large crowds.

Concluding his remarks, Jaber stated that today's training session would focus on final preparations, and emphasized that all four semi-final teams are contenders for the title, with the difference often lying in the smallest details.

### Talajic expresses deep respect for Blues

## Pizzi optimistic ahead of Kuwait's semifinal battle

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30:** Argentine Coach Juan Antonio Pizzi of Kuwait confirmed that the "Blues" are fully prepared to face Bahrain in the semi-finals of the "Khaleeji Zain 26". He expressed his optimism and satisfaction with reaching this stage, emphasizing that the team has been well-prepared for the upcoming match.

In a press conference at the main media center of the tournament at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Pizzi acknowledged the difficulty of the match for both teams and the optimism surrounding them. He also praised the crucial role played by the fans, encouraging the players to use their support to their advantage in the match.

Pizzi pointed out that Bahrain's early qualification and its decision to field reserve players in its final match against Yemen doesn't give it an upper hand over Kuwait. "The three-day period after our last match against Qatar is sufficient for recovery and preparing the players for the semi-final. We do not overlook Bahrain's improvement in recent times, as its results reflect that," he said. He also mentioned his previous success with Bahrain in the last Asian Cup but emphasized that his focus is now entirely on his work with the Kuwaiti team.

The coach stated that every team has both strengths and weaknesses and, while he didn't want to reveal its specific strategy for facing Bahrain, he assured that it would study their opponent carefully.

Regarding team news, Pizzi confirmed that Ahmed Al-Dhafiri will miss the match due to suspension. Despite his absence, Pizzi remains confident that the team has sufficient depth, with all 26 players available and ready to step up when needed.

When asked about the team's success in the Gulf Cup, Pizzi admitted that he wasn't sure of the exact reason for its strong performances but assured that the team had been preparing for the past six months to present a competitive level of play and contend for the title.

In the same press conference, player Bandar Bursli expressed his optimism about reaching the final, saying, "We are thrilled to be in the semi-finals, and we've prepared well for this match. We'll give our best to make our fans proud." He also acknowledged Bahrain's strength as the defending champions of the tournament, emphasizing the challenge ahead.

Meanwhile, Bahrain's national football team coach, Croatian Dragan Talajic, acknowledged the tough challenge his side faces in today's semi-final against Kuwait in the "Khaleeji Zain 26".

At a press conference held yesterday at the tournament's main media center at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Talajic highlighted the excitement



Juan Antonio Pizzi



Dragan Talajic

surrounding the match, predicting a packed Jaber Al-Ahmad International Football Stadium with 60,000 spectators. He emphasized that his team would strive to deliver its best performance to please the large Bahraini crowd expected to support it in Kuwait.

Reflecting on his team's performance, Talajic expressed disappointment over Bahrain's 1-2 loss to Yemen in the final group stage match, offering congratulations to the Yemeni team for its impressive display. He explained that the defeat came after rotating players, and despite the loss, the team remained focused on its goal of advancing to the final.

Talajic also expressed great respect for the Kuwaiti national team, acknowledging its technical prowess both individually and collectively. However, he reaffirmed Bahrain's determination to win and secure a place in the final.

Bahraini player Mahdi Hamidan echoed his coach's sentiments, confirming that the team is fully prepared for the semi-final clash. He emphasized the team's experience, noting that Bahrain has qualified for the semi-finals in recent Gulf Cup tournaments, providing it with valuable insights into handling the pressures of such high-stakes encounters.

Hamidan also pointed out that the loss to Yemen had only sharpened their focus, further motivating the team as they prepare to face Kuwait in this crucial semi-final match.

## Khaleeji Zain 26 exemplifies Kuwait's organizational excellence: Al-Tayyar

By Khaled Al-Enezi  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Dec 30:** Saudi media figure Ghadeer Al-Tayyar hailed the success of the "Khaleeji Zain 26", set to conclude on Saturday at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. She highlighted the exceptional media coverage by Gulf, Arab, and international outlets, which showcased Kuwait's outstanding organization and the creativity of its people in hosting what she described as the "most distinguished" edition in the history of Gulf Cup tournaments.

Al-Tayyar made these remarks during her visit to Al-Seyassah while in Kuwait to cover the tournament.

She praised the tournament's organization from day one, noting that it set a new standard for success. The participation of Gulf teams with their first ranks added a high level of technical quality to the matches, creating a competitive and fraternal atmosphere rarely seen in such events.

Reflecting on her role in covering the tournament, Al-Tayyar emphasized the importance of Saudi women in sports media. She credited the leadership in Saudi Ara-



Ghadeer Al-Tayyar

bia, particularly the Ministry of Sports under His Highness Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal, for their steadfast support of female media professionals in the sports field. She also acknowledged the efforts of the Saudi Football Federation, led by President Yasser Al-Misehal, in advancing the role of women in sports media.

Al-Tayyar expressed her hope that the tournament would conclude as successfully as it began and extended her heartfelt thanks to the Kuwaiti government and people for their exceptional organization and warm reception, which, she noted, reflects Kuwait's renowned spirit of friendship and peace.



Left-right: Saudi Arabia and Oman head coaches Hervé Renard and Rashid Jaber address the media.

