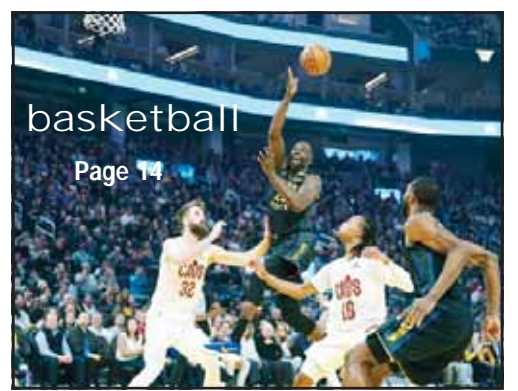




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Happy New Year to all

There will be no issue of the Arab Times on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The next issue of the Arab Times will appear on the news-stands on Sunday morning.



Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

First Deputy Prime Minister welcome to Mubarakiya

DURING his field tour of Souk Mubarakiya, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah witnessed the vibrant crowds of people from various Gulf countries who are currently visiting Kuwait for the Khaleeji Zain 26 Cup tournament.

He observed firsthand the active commercial activity in the market, which reflects the bustling scene in all Kuwaiti markets.

It is evident that these visitors are staying in the country's hotels, and enjoying their time in a country that is cherished by Gulf and Arab people. Kuwait has long been regarded as an icon of creativity, art, and joy. This was the Kuwait known to all before certain forces, which were aligned with desert locusts and radical Islamists with questionable agendas, began to dominate the country's parliamentary and ministerial decisions, and sought to impose their vision, heavily influenced by the Taliban's "Tora Bora" ideology.

At that time, they formed alliances with some MPs whose

visions are based on their personal interests. This backward alliance proceeded to close off the country, impose restrictive laws, and dictate strange decisions to the ministers.

Operating from Middle Age caves, they believed Kuwait was their own paradise, and accessible only to those they approved of. For nearly 30 years, the country suffered from this isolation, with even basic freedoms restricted such that frowning seemed to signify righteousness.

However, contrary to their beliefs, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Smiling to your brother is part of charity."

This group's approach, which sought to impose negativity, led to laws and actions that not only violated human nature but also contradicted Kuwait's rich cultural heritage.

Continued on Page 5

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AMIR WISHES HEALTH AND STABILITY FOR 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Tuesday exchanged cables of congratulations with leaders of Arab and friendly countries on the advent of 2025.

His Highness the Amir wished all world countries and peoples a happy New Year of security, peace, stability and prosperity as well as health and wellness.

Kuwait airport preps for 150,400 passenger surge

Arrivals outnumber departures

Era of chaos is over: Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef



First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef shaking hands with Deputy Editor-in-Chief Suleiman Al-Jarallah.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah addressed a gathering at Al-Dughaishem's Diwan in Abdullah Al-Salem, expressing his confidence that "the era of chaos is over," reports Al-Seyassah daily.

He emphasized that there would be no more favoritism or nepotism, noting that Kuwait is now a "state of law."

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef assured the attendees that the process of examining citizenship applications, which involves

Continued on Page 5

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: In an unprecedented development, Kuwait International Airport is experiencing an unusual trend this New Year's holiday, with the number of arrivals surpassing departures for the first time; marking a significant shift in travel patterns.

According to recent statistics exclusively obtained by the newspaper from the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the total number of passengers between

Continued on Page 5

Cabinet issues Decree-Law No. 158 of 2024, amends Kuwaiti Nationality Law



PM Diwan photo
His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the weekly Cabinet meeting on Tuesday, Dec 31.

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The Council of Ministers has issued the Decree-Law No. 158 of 2024, amending Article 16 of Amiri Decree No. 15 of 1959 on the Kuwaiti Nationality Law, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This new legislation introduces significant changes to the consequences of withdrawing, losing, or revoking Kuwaiti nationality.

The amendments stipulate that individuals whose nationality is withdrawn or revoked under specific conditions will be deprived of all benefits and rights associated with that nationality.

Specifically, the law applies to those whose nationality is revoked in accordance with Articles (1/13) and (2/1) bis, resulting in the removal of all previously granted benefits.

Continued on Page 5

New MNEs tax law takes effect Jan 1

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The Decree No. 157 of 2024, issued yesterday, pertains to the tax law regulating multinational entities (MNEs) operating in Kuwait, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The law consists of 41 articles and is designed to align Kuwait's tax system with global standards, particularly the OECD's "Pillar Two" international tax reform initiative.

Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, Noura Al-Fassam, emphasized that the implementation of this tax law reaffirms Kuwait's commitment to fostering economic development, financial sustainability and fair international tax practices.

She highlighted that it aims to reduce dependency on oil revenues, diversify income sources and build a flexible economy capable of overcoming future challenges. Additionally, she underscored the government's focus on enhancing the business environment, attracting investments and

Continued on Page 5

'Horror' unearthed

Kuwaiti, accomplices held in domestic worker death case

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The Public Prosecution has detained a citizen on charges of killing an Asian domestic worker by beating her and then burying her in the garden of his house in Saad Al-Abdullah more than a month ago.

Also, two Kuwaiti citizens and an Asian woman have been detained on charges of violating the sanctity of

the corpse and failing to report the crime.

The Public Prosecution visited the scene of the incident to inspect both the location and the body. Investigators from the General Department of Criminal Evidence and Forensic Medicine Department have been assigned to carry out their procedures. The accused individuals have been interrogated regarding the charges, and the investigation is ongoing.

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs **Abdullah Al-Yahya** discussed on Tuesday bolstering bilateral ties and expanding them across various sectors along with Turkish counterpart, **Hakan Fidan**.

A ministry statement said the aforementioned phone call discussion also included latest developments on regional and international fronts. (KUNA)

KUWAIT CITY: The Ministry of Interior, through the General Department of Security Relations and Media, has issued an urgent call for citizens and residents to assist security personnel in locating THS, a bedouin who is wanted by the security authorities in connection with multiple charges, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

He was last seen driving a silver 2008 GMC Yukon Denali with plate number 9947/23. The ministry further cautioned that the individual is armed and considered dangerous, urging the public to avoid any direct interaction with him.

For safety and to assist in his swift arrest, the Ministry has urged anyone with information to contact the emergency number 112 immediately. The cooperation of the public is essential to maintaining public security and ensuring the safety of all.

GENEVA: The UN Human Rights Office on Tuesday found that Israeli occupation's pattern of deadly attacks on and near hospitals in **Gaza** and associated combat pushed the healthcare system to the brink of total collapse with catastrophic effect on Palestinians' access to health and medical care.

According to a report published from Geneva, the OHCHR said "The appalling destruction wrought by the Israeli military's attacks on the Kamal Adwan hospital last Friday reflects the pattern of attacks documented in the report. (KUNA)



Syria urges Kuwait to restore diplomatic ties soon

AMMAN, Dec 31, (KUNA): Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs and head of GCC ministerial council **Abdullah Al-Yahya** visited Syria on Monday, the step that shows GCC commitment to backing stability and security in the region.

Speaking to KUNA in a statement, Al-Yahya said he met with Ahmad Al-Sharaa, the leader of Syria's new administration.

The visit is part of the assignment of the GCC and Secretary General to Kuwait, the current president, based on the outcomes of the extraordinary meeting held in Kuwait on December 26, 2024, Kuwait's top diplomat, accompanied by GCC Secretary General **Jasem Al-Budaiwi**, said.

The tour aims to discuss the ongoing situations in Syria and Lebanon, and show solidarity, in the name of GCC, with Syria, he noted.

It stressed GCC commitment to preserving Syria's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and rejecting foreign interference into the country's affairs, Al-Yahya affirmed.

Syria's security and stability is an integrated part of

the regional security, and the GCC states are ready to provide all types of support in all fields to that Arab country, he pointed out.

He recalled GCC leading role since the eruption of Syria's crisis in 2011, referring to the Gulf States' humanitarian efforts.

He pointed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's directives to offer food and medical aid to Syrian people, in response to urgent humanitarian needs.

During the meeting with the new Syrian leadership, political and field situations were discussed, along common priorities in backing Syrians, Al-Yahya said.

He stressed the necessity of bolstering collaboration in humanitarian and developmental fields with Syria, and achieving economy recovery.

He also called for lifting economic sanctions imposed on Syria, saying this move would contribute to improving living conditions of Syrians and helping them meet their aspirations for stability, security and development.

Al-Yahya hoped that this visit would be a start of

new period of constructive regional collaboration that backs meeting aspirations of the region's nations in security and prosperity.

Al-Yahya said on Monday his tour to Syria came within the framework of GCC States' efforts seeking to boost bonds of unity and collaboration.

Speaking in a joint news conference with his Syrian counterpart **Asaad Al-Shaibani** and GCC Secretary General **Jasem Al-Budaiwi**, Al-Yahya said the move also came to back security and stability in the region.

He reiterated solidarity with Syria, and commitment to its unity and territorial integrity, rejecting all types of foreign interference into Syria's affairs.

Meanwhile, Al-Shaibani urged Kuwait to re-open its embassy in Damascus and resume diplomatic ties very soon.

He lauded Kuwait's stances supported Syrian over the past years, affirming that boosting Arab ties will benefit Syrians and cement brotherhood among nations, and this will help Syria resume its Arab role.

Day by Day

IF only all this clamor about citizenship — who deserves it and who doesn't — could transform into noise about development and openness. The openness we are experiencing these days has brought joy, injected money into the markets and invigorated commercial activity in our country, a nation weary from restrictive laws that have stifled progress and deviated from the path of life.

Take a walk through Souq Al-Mubarakiya, call the hotels, observe the traffic, the commercial activity and the comings and goings.

Today, we witness a wave of commercial activity that had long been absent from us.

We pray to God to ease every hardship.

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

71 million increase in 2024

World hits 8.09 billion milestone

WASHINGTON, Dec 31, (AP): The world population increased by more than 71 million people in 2024 and will be 8.09 billion people on New Year's Day, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates released Monday.

The 0.9% increase in 2024 was a slight slowdown from 2023, when the world population grew by 75 million people. In January 2025, 4.2 births and

2.0 deaths were expected worldwide every second, according to the estimates.

The United States grew by 2.6 million people in 2024, and the U.S. population on New Year's Day will be 341 million people, according to the Census Bureau.

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2 Editor-in-Chief receives Syrian Chargé d'Affaires Al-Madani

3 Suspicious bag containing drugs leads to arrest of man from Gulf

8 KUFPEC maintains strategic role in Pakistan's oil sector

16 Kuwait secures 41 medals at Arab Weightlifting Championship in Qatar

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:17 Asr 14:41
 Sunrise .. 06:42 Maghrib .. 17:00
 Zohr 11:51 Isha 18:24

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Mild with light to moderate freshening at times over coastal areas northwesterly wind, with speed of 12-45 km/h.

By Night: Cold to very cold with light to moderate freshening at

Weather

times over coastal northwesterly wind, with speed of 15-42 km/h.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec		
Kuwait City	19	12	Bubyan	20
Kuwait Airport	21	13	Jahra	21
Abdaly	23	07	Failaka Island	21
			Salmiyah	20
			Ahmadi	18
			Jal Aliyah	20
			Nuwaisib	19
				13



Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah holds talks with the Syrian Chargé d'Affaires to Kuwait Tamim Al-Madani. The meeting was attended by media figure Raafat Ibrahim.



Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah receives political researcher Dr. Aid Al-Hilali.



Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah, Syrian Chargé d'Affaires to Kuwait Tamim Al-Madani, Dr. Aid Al-Hilali, an academic and researcher in political affairs, retired Major General Faisal Al-Jazzaf, Saud Al-Farhan, Director of Legal Affairs at Al-Seyassah Hamada Al-Amir, and media figure Raafat Ibrahim during the meeting.



Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah receives Dr. Aid Al-Hilali in his office. The meeting was attended by retired Major General Faisal Al-Jazzaf and Saud Al-Farhan.

Photos by Mohammad Morsi/Samer Shaqir



The Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah welcomes Syrian Chargé d'Affaires to Kuwait Tamim Al-Madani.

Al-Jarallah, Al-Hilali discuss region, Iraq situation

Editor-in-Chief receives Syrian Chargé d'Affaires Al-Madani

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah received the Syrian Chargé d'Affaires to Kuwait Tamim Al-Madani Tuesday afternoon at the Al-Seyassah Publishing and Printing House, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During the meeting, Al-Madani highlighted the difficult circumstances Syria has faced in recent years, as well as the victory of the revolution and the downfall of the former regime.

Al-Jarallah congratulated the Syrian people on this great transformation, affirming that the success of the revolution marks an important regional turning point, and is a step toward securing peace and stability for the Syrian people, who

deserve a dignified and safe life.

The attendees praised the Syrian people's liberation from the corrupt regime that spread injustice and oppression that resulted in the displacement of the country's creative elites to various parts of the world. They also noted that this new era presents a valuable opportunity for rebuilding Syria.

Al-Jarallah discussed with Al-Madani the practices of the former regime's gangs, particularly those that harmed the relations between Syria and Kuwait.

He highlighted the seizure of property and money belonging to Kuwaiti citizens, with the support of the former director of the Syrian Air Force Intelligence Directorate Jamil Al-Hassan.

Al-Jarallah affirmed that these

crimes are well-documented, and called for accountability for those responsible.

In response, Al-Madani stated that this issue would be submitted to the government in Damascus.

He pledged that the properties would be returned to their rightful owners and that those responsible for the crimes would be held accountable, irrespective of whether they received direct support from Bashar Al-Assad and his brother Maher or from other figures like Jamil Al-Hassan.

Al-Madani affirmed the deep and lasting relations between Syria and Kuwait, and expressed his gratitude for the huge support Kuwait has provided to the Syrian people throughout their ordeal.

He also highlighted the assis-

tance offered to the Syrian community in Kuwait, which numbers around 200,000 residents, as well as the humanitarian aid extended by the country.

Al-Madani concluded his remarks by thanking Kuwait, its leadership, government, and people, for their noble positions that helped alleviate the suffering of Syrians.

He stressed that the upcoming era would witness a strengthening of bilateral relations aimed at serving the interests of both brotherly nations.

The meeting was attended by Dr. Aid Al-Hilali, an academic and researcher in political affairs, retired Major General Faisal Al-Jazzaf, Saud Al-Farhan, Director of Legal Affairs at Al-Seyassah Hamada Al-Amir, and media fig-

ure Raafat Ibrahim.

The Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah also received academic and political affairs researcher Dr. Aid Al-Hilali in his office at the Al-Seyassah Publishing and Printing House.

The meeting was held in the presence of retired Major General Faisal Al-Jazzaf and Saud Al-Farhan.

After greeting the guest, Al-Jarallah engaged in a discussion on several important regional issues, with a particular focus on the political situation in Iraq. The conversation revolved around the current developments in the region and explored ways to enhance stability and cooperation among Arab countries.

Gulf Cup embodies regional heritage, vibrant sports life

Children add special flavor to tourney atmosphere

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31, (KUNA): The Arabian Gulf Cup, commonly known as the "Gulf Cup," is more than a football tournament, symbolizing the unity, connection, and shared cultural and social heritage of Gulf nations while celebrating their common identity and traditions beyond the football field.

The current edition, "Khaleeji Zain 26," hosted by Kuwait, highlights the tournament's status as a premier regional sporting event, combining thrilling matches with a celebration of Gulf nations' shared cultural spirit, honoring their past, and envisioning a united future.

Since its inception in 1970 with "Gulf 1," the Gulf Cup has been a competitive yet unifying event, fostering sportsmanship among Gulf countries. Over time, it has become a cherished part of Gulf heritage, evoking nostalgia in older generations and enthusiasm in the youth.

During the tournament, Gulf stadiums transform into festive arenas displaying the region's shared history and traditions,



KUNA photos

Top and above: Children supporting their teams with flags.

symbolizing the unity of Gulf ball as a cultural bridge. Fans, the tournament's "beat-

ing heart," bring it to life with vibrant chants, songs, and colorful flags, creating a unique atmosphere that reflects each nation's folklore and traditional music.

Spectators express their national identity by wearing traditional attire alongside innovative designs featuring their team colors.

The tournament celebrates core Gulf values such as generosity, unity, and fair competition. It also serves as a cultural exchange, with stadiums and accompanying events offering opportunities to experience Gulf art, cuisine, and dialects, enriching the bonds among Gulf communities.

Meanwhile, the watching and joy of children for the matches of the (Khaleeji Zain 26) added a special flavor to the atmosphere of the tournament held in Kuwait as their laughter and joy flooded the stadiums and entertainment venues which distinguished this huge sporting event.

Children are often seen with the face paintings of the colors of the flags and wearing the uniforms of their favorite teams, participating with enthusiasm in cheering their teams from the stands and fan zones.

They were also seen enjoying games and activities set up by the organizing committee for children such as penalty kicks, face painting and shows which helped families have unique experiences.



KUNA photo

Kuwaiti Army's Deputy Chief of Staff, Air Marshal Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets Saudi Arabia's Commander of Royal Air Force, Lieutenant General Turki bin Bander Al-Saud and his delegation.

Kuwait, Saudi eye military ties boost

RIYADH, Dec 31, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Army's Deputy Chief of Staff, Air Marshal Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah discussed on Monday joint military cooperation with Saudi Arabia's Commander of Royal Air Force, Lieutenant General Turki bin Bander Al-Saud.

Turki bin Bander Al-Saud.

This occurred during the reception of Major General Pilot Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and accompanying delegation in Riyadh, as relayed by Kuwait Army General Staff.

Audit Bureau's report exposes 'Education' financial violations

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31 : The State Audit Bureau (SAB) exposed the administrative and financial violations at the Ministry of Education in its annual report for fiscal 2023/2024.

These violations include irregularities in filling supervisory positions and improper disbursement of salaries and allowances, which contravene laws and regulations.

The report pointed out the long period of vacancy of many supervisory positions in the ministry and the educational districts; thereby, weakening internal controls and disrupting operations in some areas. It also

noted that the ministry violated Civil Service Council Resolution No. 25/2006 by filling some positions through temporary assignments, instead of following proper recruitment procedures.

In response, the ministry stated that it announced the vacant positions and was actively working to fill them. However, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) underscored need to expedite this process in order to minimize the negative impact of the situation.

In addition, the financial violations highlighted in the report include the payment of allowances and bonuses amounting to about KD63,300 to employees sent on study missions -- a violation of Civil Service Council Resolution No. 10/ 1986.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Pitfalls of hasty judgements & lessons in reflection, patience

"THE incident of a factory manager who impulsively dismissed a young man, assuming him to be an idle employee, is a classic example of how haste blinds judgement. Without verifying the facts, the manager not only embarrassed himself but also demonstrated poor leadership in front of his team," columnist **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"His rash decision to fire the pizza delivery man — a person unrelated to his workforce — emphasizes the value of critical thinking before taking action."

"This story highlights that leaders, in particular, must exercise caution and precision. Misjudgements at the leadership level not only affect individuals but can also impact team morale and the organization's reputation."

"The second tale of mistakenly compensating someone who wasn't the rightful owner of a car adds a humorous yet profound layer to the narrative. This incident underscores how assumptions, combined with a desire for quick resolution, can lead to unnecessary losses. The reluctance to verify ownership or clarify the situation, though seemingly minor, teaches us about the importance of due diligence in all aspects of life."

"The story involving the condolence message sent to Khaled is perhaps the most touching of all. It reminds us of the human tendency to assume the worst when met with silence. The misunderstanding was not due to arrogance or neglect but because of an illness that had deeply affected Khaled. This tale sheds light on the Quranic wisdom: 'Indeed, some suspicion is sin,' and the age-old advice to 'seek an excuse for your brother.'"

"It's a powerful call to exercise compassion and understanding. Behind every unanswered message or perceived slight, there may be unseen struggles that we cannot fathom. These stories collectively offer valuable lessons:

■ **Verify Before Acting:** Whether in leadership, personal, or professional contexts, taking the time to confirm details can save embarrassment, financial loss, and damaged relationships.

■ **Assume Positive Intent:** In interpersonal relationships, especially, giving others the benefit of the doubt can foster stronger bonds and reduce unnecessary conflict.

■ **Pause and Reflect:** Rash decisions often stem from a lack of patience. Taking a moment to breathe, assess, and understand the situation can lead to better outcomes.

■ **Embrace Humility:** Accepting mistakes with grace and humor, as shown in the anecdotes, is crucial for growth and maintaining harmony with others.

"Life is a series of encounters and experiences, each presenting an opportunity to learn and grow. Whether it's about exercising better judgment, showing empathy, or finding humor in our flaws, these stories remind us to live with mindfulness. They call us to slow down in a fast-paced world, ensuring our actions and thoughts align with wisdom and kindness."

"In the end, as human beings, we are all fallible. But through our mistakes, we find lessons that shape us into better individuals — more thoughtful, compassionate, and self-aware."

Also:

"After the inauguration of the 'Gulf 26' tournament, hosted by the State of Kuwait during this vibrant season and marking the fifth time since its inception in Bahrain in 1970, the spirit of Gulf unity is once again brought to the forefront," columnist **Dr. Ghadir Mohammad Asiri** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"The championship continues to embody its original purpose: fostering closer ties among the Gulf countries through activities that promote a spirit of honorable competition among the nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)."

"Kuwait proudly opens its doors to welcome its Gulf family, sharing in the joy of cooperation and celebrating the fulfillment of one of the key goals of the GCC summits."

"These summits have consistently aimed at sustainable achievements that unite the Gulf nations. The Gulf Cup is more than a sporting competition; it is a cultural and social occasion that strengthens the bonds of brotherhood and fosters collaboration among the peoples of the Arabian Gulf."

"Kuwait's hosting of the 26th Gulf Cup Championship is a milestone event, reflecting its ability to organize major sporting occasions while showcasing its commitment to sports development and Gulf unity."

"This championship brings with it a plethora of benefits that extend beyond the sports arena, encompassing economic, social, and cultural dimensions."

"Hosting a prestigious tournament like the Gulf Cup serves as a platform for Kuwait to demonstrate its capability in handling large-scale international events. It underscores the country's dedication to improving its sports infrastructure and enhancing its standing within the Gulf and regional sports arenas."

"Additionally, the tournament provides a significant boost to the local economy. Increased demand for tourism, dining, transportation, and hospitality stimulates growth in vital sectors, benefiting local businesses and creating opportunities for economic expansion."

"The construction of luxury hotels ad-

acent to key facilities such as Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium represents a strategic investment that could attract thousands of fans and media personnel. This influx not only invigorates local commerce but also establishes a foundation for long-term economic benefits."

"Perhaps the most enduring outcome of hosting this tournament is the advancement of infrastructure, upgrading stadiums, enhancing sports facilities, and improving essential services such as roads and airports are direct results of the event."

"These improvements leave a legacy that will continue to serve Kuwaiti society well beyond the championship, elevating the nation's capacity to host similar events in the future."

"The Gulf Cup Championship also plays a vital role in inspiring Kuwait's youth. By highlighting the importance of sports, it encourages greater participation in athletic activities and motivates future generations to pursue excellence in national competitions."

"This focus on youth engagement not only enhances the sports landscape but also contributes to building a healthier, more active society."

"Moreover, the tournament provides Kuwait with a unique opportunity to showcase its rich cultural heritage and diverse tourist attractions to an international audience."

"By leveraging the event to promote its identity as a vibrant and distinctive destination, Kuwait can strengthen its cultural footprint and attract global visitors, further enhancing its image on the world stage."

"At its core, the Gulf Cup Championship reflects the unity and solidarity of the Gulf nations. It is a celebration of shared values, cooperation, and camaraderie that extends beyond the stadiums and playing fields. Kuwait's hosting of 'Gulf 26' reinforces this spirit, providing a platform for meaningful engagement and mutual appreciation among the GCC countries."

"In conclusion, Kuwait's role as the host of the 26th Gulf Cup Championship is a testament to its ability to bring people together, strengthen regional ties, and create lasting impacts across sports, economy, and culture."

"As the event unfolds, it serves as a reminder of the power of sports to transcend boundaries, inspire generations, and build a legacy of unity and progress. May this occasion mark another chapter of success for Kuwait and its Gulf neighbors. May you all remain safe and prosperous."

"The Arab political movements, whether public parties or covert military organizations, have largely revolved around a singular focus: opposing or overthrowing the ruling political authority. These efforts often manifest as military coups — misleadingly termed 'revolutions' — or as popular uprisings spearheaded by ethnic, sectarian, or religious factions lacking genuine national integration or purpose," columnist **Abdul Latif Al-Duajj** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"From coup in Syria to the recent ouster of Bashar al-Assad, the pattern remains unchanged. The same objectives, actors, and symbols recur with predictable results: the removal of one ruling authority and its replacement by another, while the underlying societal structure remains untouched."

"Deep-seated backwardness, resistance to innovation, and adherence to outdated traditions persist, much like the legacies of the so-called July 23 Revolution in Egypt or the Baathist movement in Iraq. These political shifts merely substitute one autocrat for another, perpetuating a cycle of stagnation."

"The developmental shortcomings of these movements mirror their political failures. Arab political groups rarely present constructive or developmental alternatives. Instead, their agendas are dominated by criticisms of ruling administrations."

"Calls for reform — whether in education, the economy, or societal development — are loud but devoid of concrete plans, coherent philosophies, or actionable programs. Reform is reduced to a buzzword, often lacking clarity or substance."

"In Kuwait, for instance, when the government proposed the ambitious 'Dechemical' project to diversify the economy away from oil dependency, reformist groups who had long advocated for economic diversification vehemently opposed it."

"Similarly, the government's islands development project, spearheaded by the late Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad, remains shelved due to opposition cloaked in arguments about traditions and customs."

"While authoritarian rulers and individualistic governance have undeniably stunted progress across the Arab world, political movements themselves have often been the architects of even greater destruction."

"The so-called Arab Spring is a stark example, where revolutionary fervor failed to translate into meaningful reform or development, leading instead to chaos and instability."

"The Arab political movements must move beyond superficial opposition and focus on substantive, actionable solutions. Without addressing their own failures, these movements risk perpetuating the same cycles of stagnation they claim to oppose."

— **Compiled by PFX Fernandes**



Various kinds of drugs seized.



The suspicious bag found in the hotel.

Suspicious bag containing drugs leads to arrest of man from Gulf

26 juveniles arrested as traffic violations surge

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The management of a hotel in Jahra contributed to uncovering a drug cocktail with a Gulf citizen. The accused was arrested and referred to the General Department for Combating Drugs.

According to a security source, the hotel management reported the presence of a suspicious bag and that it belonged to a guest at the hotel. Upon opening the bag, it was found to contain various narcotics, including 187 Lyrica pills, 14 small pieces of hashish, and 5 needles containing an unknown substance, likely heroin, ready for use, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

On the other hand, a young man (25 years old) was detained in the **Al-Shamiya** Police

Station, and detectives were assigned to arrest and bring in two others who were with him and managed to escape. The security men also filed a case against the arrested young man for driving a vehicle in an abnormal condition and without plates and attempting to escape from security men.

According to a security source, a patrol spotted a luxurious white American vehicle without license plates in the **Shuwaikh** commercial area. When the driver was asked to stop, he tried to escape and was arrested, but two other young men fled on foot amidst cafes, restaurants and shops in the area.

26 juveniles arrested: The General Traffic Department reported significant activity during its recent traffic enforcement campaigns. Between December 21 and December 27, authori-

ties issued 33,454 traffic violations, arrested 26 juveniles for driving without licenses, and detained 49 individuals for severe infractions, subsequently referring them to police custody.

According to statistics shared on the department's official account on the X platform, there were 1,372 traffic accidents during the week. Of these, 222 incidents involved injuries or fatalities, while 1,150 were classified as minor accidents.

In addition to addressing violations and accidents, the campaign led to the impoundment of 154 vehicles and 36 motorcycles. Authorities also seized 26 vehicles flagged by the judiciary, apprehended 18 wanted individuals, and detained three persons found in abnormal conditions.

These measures highlight the department's continued commitment to ensuring road safety and enforcing traffic laws.

Kuwaiti accused of shooting compatriot sent to custody

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The Public Prosecution has ordered the detention of a Kuwaiti citizen accused of killing another citizen using a firearm in the Jabriya area, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Following the incident, the Public Prosecution visited the site to conduct an inspection and examined the deceased.

It also tasked the General Department of Criminal Evidence and Forensic Medicine with assisting in the investigation. During questioning, the accused confessed to the charges and the investigation process is ongoing.

Earlier it was reported that a famous Kuwaiti traveler in his forties was shot and killed by a citizen at his home.

The victim died before reaching the hospital and his body was referred to the Forensic Medicine Department.

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

Asian maid detained: The Public Prosecution has ordered the detention of an

Asian domestic worker accused of killing her sponsor's infant son by placing him in a washing machine, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

In an official statement shared on social media, the Public Prosecution confirmed that investigators promptly visited the scene of the crime to conduct a thorough inspection and examine the victim. The statement further revealed that the General Department of Criminal Evidence and Forensic Medicine has been assigned to assist in the investigation. The accused was interrogated regarding the allegations, and the investigation is ongoing.

KD 50,000 comp won: The Court of First Instance (Labor Division) ruled that a private sector company must pay 50,000 dinars to a former manager as compensation for his labor rights, which include annual leave balance, end-of-service gratuity and notice pay allowance, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

The case originated after the manager, who failed to reach an amicable settlement with the company through the Labor Department, filed a lawsuit seeking compensation for the dismissal he claimed was unjustified and without payment of his rights.



A fireman tackles the blaze.

Blaze erupts in Amghara iron, clothes warehouse

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: Five fire brigades were able to control a fire that broke out in a warehouse in Amghara scrapyard yesterday evening, Monday, containing scrap iron, clothes and motorcycles, reports Al-Anba daily. Fire brigades from the Tahrir, Jahra Crafts, Istiqlal, Mishref and Support Centers fought the fire and controlled it without recording any injuries.

As part of the ongoing cooperation between Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) and public benefit associations, the Public Relations and Media Department of KFF organized an awareness lecture on Monday morning at the Patients Helping Fund Society.

According to a press release issued by KFF, the lecture aimed to educate and raise awareness among the society's staff about the dangers of fires and accidents, as well as the preventive measures.

State revenue boost eyed

Vehicle 'auction market' project remains in limbo

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The vehicle auction market project, first proposed in 2019 by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, remains at zero percent completion, with plans to be fully operational by 2026, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Located in **Al-Abraq**, **Al-Naem** and **Al-Liyah**, the project spans approximately 500,000 square meters and aims to create Kuwait's first integrated car auction hub.

It will offer services to car dealers and the general public, allowing for transparent, direct bidding on used vehicles.

The facility will feature auction tracks, parking lots and a support services building. Its goals include consolidating used cars in one location, eliminating illegal car displays on public streets and reducing environmental impacts such as dust from exhaust fumes.

State revenue

Additionally, the project aims to boost state revenue, streamline the car buying and selling process and reduce brokers' operations outside legal frameworks.

The market will also house car showrooms, drawing businesses away from residential areas. Despite these ambitious plans, including the use of automated systems for remote participation in auctions, progress has stalled.

The Public-Private Partnership Projects Authority has yet to finalize the land allocation, awaiting approval from the Municipal Council, while a feasibility study for the project did not begin until August 2020.

The auction project aligns with Kuwait's vision to become a financial and economic center, expected to have significant positive economic and social impacts, attracting investment and tightening state control over the used car market.

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MoE revamps school administrative roles for modern education

New structure boosts efficiency

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The Ministry of Education has identified the tasks and responsibilities of administrative staff in schools as part of the project to develop the organizational structure of school administrations.

This initiative aims to achieve several strategic goals, primarily improving the administrative process in schools and enhancing work efficiency to align with modern educational trends.

The responsibilities of the Assistant Director of Administrative Affairs include the following:

1. Organizing and documenting files and records of school employees,
2. Managing incoming and outgoing mail, recording and archiving it,
3. Supervising service implementers and monitoring their attendance,
4. Supervising the work of storekeepers, correspondents, and switchboard officers.
5. Overseeing the school's financial fund and canteen,
6. Providing administrative supervision of the school clinic,
7. Coordinating with relevant authorities to monitor simple maintenance work,
8. Ensuring the proper management of nutrition, health, cleanliness, and security
9. Providing safety equipment, including fire fighting equipment.
10. Holding periodic meetings with heads of administrative departments,
11. Evaluating employee performance in accordance with established systems and regulations,

12. Preparing departmental achievement reports for administration, and
13. Supervising disbursement operations within the school.

The ministry has also outlined the responsibilities for the General Services Follow-up Department in schools, which falls under the Assistant Director of Administrative Affairs.

The responsibilities of the General Services Follow-up Department are:

1. Overseeing simple maintenance work in coordination with the relevant authorities,
2. Setting up the school clinic in accordance with required standards,
3. Ensuring the provision of necessary resources in collaboration with the appropriate authorities.
4. Following up on transportation, nutrition, health aspects, and cleaning and security operations in the school, and preparing reports on these matters.
5. Identifying the school's needs for furniture, devices, and equipment,
6. Supervising the classification and storage of materials according to established rules,
7. Coordinating the annual inventory with relevant authorities,
8. Holding periodic meetings for employees under its supervision,
9. Evaluating employee performance based on organizational systems and regulations and preparing regular reports on the progress of its work.

According to educational sources, this initiative is part of the efforts to reduce administrative burdens on teachers, and allow them to fully dedicate themselves to education and improve the overall educational environment.

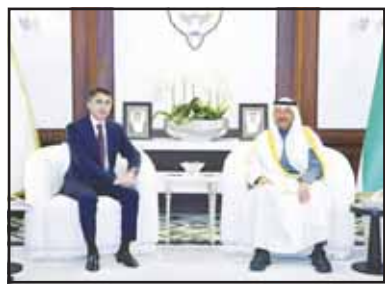
The ministry aims to focus teachers' efforts solely on the educational and pedagogical process, and enhancing the quality of education within schools.

Farwaniya Governor hosts Ambassador of Uzbekistan

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi welcomed the Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Kuwait, Dr. Ayub Khan Yunusov, to his office yesterday, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During the meeting, both parties engaged in friendly discussions, touching on various topics of mutual interest. They highlighted the strong and growing bilateral relations between Kuwait and Uzbekistan.

Ambassador Yunusov expressed his sincere gratitude for the warm reception, emphasizing his deep appreciation for the State of Kuwait.



Farwaniya Governor receives in his office the Uzbek envoy.

Contributions to strong relations praised

Kuwaiti Assistant FM condoles passing of former Indian PM Manmohan Singh

By **Fares Al-Abdan**
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Khaled Al-Yassin expressed his heartfelt condolences to the people and government of the Republic of India on the passing of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who died last Thursday at the age of 92.

In a statement he issued during his signing of the condolence book opened by the Indian Embassy for two days, Al-Yassin said, "We highly appreciate the late Prime Minister's contributions to strengthening the strong relations between Kuwait and India".

He praised his virtues, "the effects of which are still evident in Indian society".

Meanwhile, the Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Adarsh Swaika also offered his sincere condolences to the Indian government and people.

He revealed that Manmohan



Manmohan Singh – former Prime Minister of India

Singh, who served as the Prime Minister of India for two consecutive terms from 2004 to 2014, was a remarkable leader.

Ambassador Swaika indicated that India had declared a seven-day national mourning period in honor of Manmohan Singh.

He said the late Prime Minister earned the respect and admiration of leaders worldwide.

Highlighting Manmohan Singh's distinguished relationship with Kuwait, Ambassador Swaika recalled a meeting be-

tween the late Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad during the latter's visit to India.

He explained that the deceased was the architect of India's economic reforms and liberalization, and led a period of major economic transformation in India's history. These changes are still remembered by the Indian people today, as evidenced by the large number of people who attended his funeral.

In addition, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan Zubaydullah Zubaydov extended his deepest condolences to the Indian Ambassador, on behalf of himself and the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to Kuwait.

He described the late Prime Minister as "the man of the Indian economy" in reference to the vital services he provided to the Indian people and his country.

MPW seeks assistance for automating services

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: According to informed sources, the Ministry of Public Works is working on enhancing its digital transformation efforts by issuing a tender to automate its services and link them to the Sahel App and the ministry's application. This is aimed to simplify access to services and streamline routine procedures, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The ministry has scheduled a

preliminary meeting for potential bidders on Monday, January 30, at the Information Systems Center in the ministry's building located in South Surra.

During this meeting, inquiries will be addressed, and technical conditions related to the project will be clarified.

Participation in the tender is restricted to companies registered with the Communication and Information Technology Regula-

tory Authority (CITRA) and the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT). These companies must also have experience implementing similar projects for local government institutions over the past ten years.

The sources affirmed that the deadline for submitting bids is Monday, January 6, and bids received after this date will not be accepted.

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The Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Center in Bangladesh.

Kuwait Charity delegation visits Bangladesh

A delegation from the Tarahum Charity and Humanitarian Association visited the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Center in Bangladesh, which is managed by the association, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Abdul Hamid Al-Dosari, the Executive Director of the Tarahum Association, stated that the center, named after the Amir of Humanity, is one of the most prominent and largest religious institutions in Bangladesh. During the visit, the first batch of students at the center

have graduated.

It is considered an exemplary model of humanitarian and religious work, playing a key role in spreading awareness and teaching Islamic values.

Moreover, the Association's Secretary General, Dr. Saad Al-Ajmi, delivered a lecture under the title 'Two Light Words on the Tongue' emphasizing the importance of adhering to the teachings of Islam and taking pride in spiritual values.

Ministry unveils Resolution 240

MoCI tightens real estate ad standards

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has issued Ministerial Resolution No. 240 of 2024, establishing new rules for commercial advertisements related to real estate marketing, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The resolution limits real estate advertisements to companies and institutions involved in real estate brokerage within Kuwait or internationally, provided they hold a valid license. Media platforms are only responsible for publishing these ads.

The decision mandates that all advertisements include the commercial license number of the advertising company or institution, an accurate description of the property, and the selling price or initial price if it's for a project, without misleading terms like "limit," "price," or "review."

It also specifies that the advertising broker is not responsible if the property owner fails to sell at the advertised price. Additionally, the resolution prohibits the use of misleading words and requires verification that there are no legal obstacles to transferring ownership.

Advertisers must also confirm the valid-

ity of all official documents related to the property and obtain written approval from the property owner before publishing any ads.

The Ministry has waived the mandatory requirement for a property identification letter from the Kuwait Municipality, making it optional, although it is encouraged.

For international properties, companies must obtain prior approval from the property owner through a certified power of attorney or official letter, validated by the Kuwaiti embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In a separate development, the Ministry also issued Ministerial Resolution No. 242 of 2024, forming a Real Estate Appraisal Curriculum Accreditation Committee.

The committee, headed by Undersecretary Ziad Al-Najem, will be responsible for determining the curriculum points for Certified Real Estate Appraisers and Advanced Real Estate Appraisers.

It will also review and approve curricula submitted by training bodies. The committee's term is six months, with the option for extension.

KU to launch registration for new students

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The Deanship of Admission and Registration at Kuwait University has announced that registration process for new students will be held from Sunday, January 5, 2025 at 10:00 am to Monday, January 6, 2025, at 10:00 pm.

The university has urged new stu-

dents to adhere to the specified registration dates and to ensure that all required documents are prepared to facilitate the smooth completion of the registration process.

The Registration Department affirmed its commitment to providing necessary support to new students through the available communication channels and instructions provided on Kuwait University's official website.

Global challenges dominated 2024

Trump returns; Iran nuclear ambitions, rising conflicts and economic struggles

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31, (KUNA): The year 2024 witnessed many events which saw Donald Trump's return to the White House in the November 5 elections, Russia's non-stop military operations against Ukraine and resurfacing of Iran's nuclear file, and death of former US President Jimmy Carter.

The events that took place throughout 2024 left impacts on the economic, political and security affairs of the world.

The International Atomic Energy Agency adopted a resolution -- co-sponsored by US, France, Germany and Britain -- demanding Iran to fully disclose its nuclear activities.

The resolution voiced concern over "lack of transparency" over Iran's nuclear program after spotting traces of uranium in three sites, which were never declared by Tehran. The Iranian government retaliated by operating new and upgraded centrifuges and increased uranium enrichment.

Britain, Germany and France threatened to use the 2015 Iranian nuclear agreement mechanism, which triggered reinstating of sanctions against Tehran after the Islamic Republic increased its highly-enriched uranium to unprecedented levels.

The IAEA estimated Iran's stocks of enriched uranium at 32 times higher than quantities allowed, and expressed concern over the high level of stocks and level of enrichment.

The world also witnessed military confrontation between Iran and the Israeli occupation, hostilities in the Red Sea, tension between South and North Korea, and rising tension between China and Taiwan.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine expanded after the US allowed Kyiv to use long-range missiles to hit targets deep inside Russian territories, prompting Moscow to boost its nuclear deterrence and the firing of hypersonic rocket against Ukraine.



KUNA photo
2024 – Year of global conflict, political milestones and economic strain.

This was added to North Korean forces' deployment alongside Russian troops.

The global scene has been changing amidst growing challenges and building of new alliances.

Sweden joined NATO to be the 32nd member in the military alliance, while military agreements were sealed between India and France, Germany and Britain, Turkiye and Iraq, and Australia and Indonesia.

The US, Japan, Australia and Philippines held military maneuvers in the South China Sea, while Iran and Russia held war games in the Caspian Sea.

Meanwhile, the Israeli occupation stood trial before the International Criminal Court, while the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

Slovenia, Spain, Ireland and Norway recognized the State of Palestine on the 1967 borders.

Major summit took place, like the one between leaders of Japan, the US and Philippines in April, while the GCC held its first summit with the European Union (EU).

There have been strains on global economy following fragile recovery

from the Covid-19, like in the supply chain, drop in tourism levels, low economic growth projections in the Middle East region, and increasing pressure on food security.

China, the world's second largest economy, suffered setbacks in its economy, and economic and financial resources of the US and the West continued to decline because they were involved in military conflicts.

Oil prices fluctuated due to geopolitical tension in the Middle East while gold prices surged to historic levels.

Elections were held in tens of countries whose population is over four billion people combined, almost half of the earth's population, including the US where Donald Trump returned to the White House after defeating Democrat Kamala Harris.

Former US President Jimmy Carter passed away at the age of 100. The 39th President, Carter was longest-lived US president, served only one presidential term for 1977-1981, as he was famous for defending human rights issues and focused on international relations. For these efforts, Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

The Conservatives in Britain suffered successive defeats which ended with the victory of the Labor party in parliamentary elections and the control of the House of Commons, while the South African national congress lost legislative elections for the first time in 30 years.

The French parliament voted, for the first time since 1962, to withdraw confidence of Prime Minister Michel Barnier, who was opposed by 331 MPs.

South Korea saw rising political tension after President Yoon Suk Yeol imposed martial law, which was revoked by the parliament. The move was followed by attempts to impeach the president.

To be continued

Kuwait launches Loaf of Bread project to aid Gaza amid crisis



Kuwait's Namaa Charity launches 'Loaf of Bread' project to aid neediest families in Gaza. KUNA photo

Namaa Charity's lifesaving mission continues

RAMALLAH, Dec 31, (KUNA): A Kuwaiti charity launched Tuesday a relief project to provide bread to the most deprived families in the Gaza Strip, amidst the harsh humanitarian conditions caused by over a year of Israeli occupation and genocide.

The "Loaf of Bread" project, initiated by the Namaa Charity, under the Kuwait Social Reform Society, in partnership with the Wafa Microfinance and Capacity Building Foundation, aims to tackle the severe food shortage in Gaza, where

flour supplies are critically low, and hunger rates are soaring.

This initiative continues Kuwait's humanitarian mission to support the Palestinian people and embodies the spirit of solidarity that defines Kuwaiti charity work.

Marwan Muhaisen, director of Wafa, commended the partnership with Namaa, especially in their joint relief efforts to distribute thousands of loaves of bread to Gaza families.

Muhaisen said that in Gaza's harsh conditions, obtaining bread has become a daily challenge, and thanks to Namaa and their collaboration, the project has been providing bread to families for six days amid severe food shortages.

The project aims to distribute 10,000 bundles of bread, with 3,000

bundles already delivered, at a rate of 500 bundles daily, to meet basic needs amid the ongoing crisis, he added.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza has worsened due to continued genocide and a tightened blockade, causing extreme food scarcity, especially in the south, where long queues for bread symbolize the suffering, as Muhaisen emphasized the project's importance in providing essential food, as flour is crucial for survival.

Muhaisen expressed deep gratitude to Kuwait's leadership, government, and people for their strong support of Gaza, highlighting that Namaa's involvement reflects the continuous spirit of Kuwaiti generosity, while the people of Gaza also expressed thanks for Kuwait's generous support and humanitarian stance.

Continued from Page 1

First Deputy

There is no doubt that the crowd witnessed today reflects what Kuwait was like before the desertification movement. House-full hotels mean that the situation in Kuwait is thriving. In every country around the world, governments are working at full capacity to attract visitors, as they contribute to economic growth, stimulate commercial activity, and spread a joyful atmosphere.

What the First Deputy Prime Minister observed today should serve as a catalyst for revisiting and canceling the decisions issued by the Ministry of Interior that continue to hinder further openness. While it is commendable that the government has approved the new law regarding foreigners' residency, more measures are needed to restore Kuwait's status as a beacon of advancement and innovation.

One of the most important decisions that must be reversed is the ban on celebrations and public joy. Everyone has witnessed the areas designated for visitors and residents of Kuwait to bid farewell to 2024 and welcome the new year. However, the joy was incomplete because celebrations are still prohibited. How can the month of shopping and festivities during the national holidays be fully enjoyed without the freedom to celebrate?

The two weeks that Kuwait experienced during the Gulf Cup should not pass without lessons learned from this experience.

According to unofficial statistics, visitors spent around KD 500 million, equivalent to approximately 1.5 billion US dollars. If Kuwait were to return to its former glory, imagine how much revenue it could generate from tourism and visitors!

It is also essential to work on canceling the family visit restrictions that still hinder openness.

According to official statistics from the Ministry of Interior, violations of family visit visas have been minimal, as thousands who obtained them left the country on time.

Kuwait needs to boost its gross domestic product and attract entrepreneurs, both local and foreign. If a visitor is offered a job opportunity and seeks to regularize their legal status, they would become an asset to the national economy. The notion that everyone who comes to us is either a burden or seeking state-funded treatment is an argument from those who lack vision and do not wish well for the country.

We hope that the New Year will witness decisions that benefit Kuwait, and that the government will work to undo the damage left by backward agendas that have caused economic and social setbacks.

I would like to wish everyone a Happy New Year, and I hope 2025 brings prosperity to Kuwait, the Arab and Islamic world, and all of humanity.

Kuwait airport

Dec 28, 2024 and Jan 1, 2025 is expected to reach 243,000 -- 126,600 departures and 116,200 arrivals -- on board 1,661 flights.

The data also revealed that from Jan 1-4, 2025, arrivals are expected to outnumber departures, with a total of 150,400 passengers -- 79,000 arrivals and 71,300 departures.

Sources familiar with the matter

hinted that the change in travel flow could be partly attributed to the success of the Gulf Cup Championship, currently hosted by Kuwait. This event has likely encouraged many visitors to extend their stay and enjoy the festive atmosphere here, sources pointed out.

The statistics showed that Terminal One (T1) handled the highest volume of passenger traffic, followed by T4 and T5; reflecting the airport's extensive logistical preparations to ensure smooth passenger movement. The most popular destinations during the holiday are Dubai, Jeddah, Cairo, Doha and Istanbul.

Sources from Kuwait International Airport confirmed that the airport has heightened its readiness across all operations to ensure seamless travel procedures, maintaining high service efficiency to meet travelers' needs throughout the holiday period.

Cabinet issues

However, if the withdrawal or revocation is based on Articles 10, 11, and 11 bis, or clauses 2, 3, 5, and 14, the individual will be stripped of all rights and benefits that were once provided to them.

In cases where nationality is lost, withdrawn, or revoked for reasons other than those specified in the law, the Council of Ministers has the discretion to decide whether to retain certain benefits and rights, depending on the public interest.

These benefits may include healthcare, education, and a decent standard of living, but the Council of Ministers' decision on this matter cannot be appealed under any circumstances.

The explanatory note accompanying the decree explains the rationale behind these amendments. It emphasizes that the need to address the varying reasons for nationality withdrawal requires differentiated treatment.

For example, individuals whose nationality was granted fraudulently or based on false claims should be treated differently than those who lost their nationality for reasons related to national security or identity preservation. The decree aims to ensure that those who willingly acquired foreign nationality or failed to renounce it will be deprived of all benefits and rights associated with Kuwaiti citizenship, as their actions have undermined their loyalty to the state.

Furthermore, the law clarifies that the withdrawal of citizenship, particularly when tied to national security or other matters of state interest, should result in the removal of all rights and privileges associated with Kuwaiti nationality.

However, in exceptional cases where nationality is revoked for reasons not tied to these specific concerns, the Council of Ministers may decide to allow certain benefits to continue for a specified period, in line with public interest.

Since Kuwait's Constitution was adopted in 1962, the country has prioritized the protection of human rights, ensuring that citizens enjoy rights consistent with international human rights agreements.

The new decree acknowledges that although nationality is a political bond that links individuals to the state, its loss does not strip an individual of their basic human rights.

Therefore, the law guarantees that those affected by nationality withdrawal will still have access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and a decent living, reflecting Kuwait's commitment to human dignity.

The draft law stresses that the process of granting, revoking, or with-

drawing nationality is inherently a political act, one that involves considerations of national identity and security.

As such, these acts are not subject to judicial review. The decree removes the ability for citizens to challenge the Cabinet's decisions regarding the retention of certain benefits, as these decisions are deemed to be of national interest and require considerations that are beyond the scope of the judiciary's review.

The Decree-Law No. 158 is set to be published in the Official Gazette and will take effect immediately upon issuance, in accordance with the provisions of Article 178 of the Kuwaiti Constitution.

This legislative development aims to safeguard the state's sovereignty while balancing the protection of individuals' rights in a manner consistent with Kuwait's national interests and its commitment to humanitarian values.

World hits

The United States was expected to have one birth every 9 seconds and one death every 9.4 seconds in January 2025. International migration was expected to add one person to the U.S. population every 23.2 seconds. The combination of births, deaths and net international migration will increase the U.S. population by one person every 21.2 seconds, the Census Bureau said.

So far in the 2020s, the U.S. population has grown by almost 9.7 million people, a 2.9% growth rate. In the 2010s, the U.S. grew by 7.4%, which was the lowest rate since the 1930s. New MNE

Era of

reviewing 37,000 nationalities, would be thoroughly handled and only those deserving would be granted citizenship.

Regarding New Year celebrations, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef encouraged the people of Kuwait to rejoice and enjoy the occasion, adding that there would be no violations for expressing joy.

He acknowledged the previous strict regulations around public displays of happiness, but reassured the public that this would no longer be the case during the New Year celebrations.

Additionally, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef highlighted the Ministry of Interior's positive development, particularly in its efforts to organize and manage the 26th Gulf Cup.

The ministry, he said, issued 13,000 Iraqi visas for the event and all hotels in Kuwait were fully booked -- a first-time occurrence.

New MNEs

creating job opportunities. Al-Fassam mentioned that the Ministry of Finance would reach out to the affected companies to provide education on the new law through workshops and meetings, with a dedicated timeline to ensure all relevant entities are informed.

Furthermore, the Ministry plans to issue an executive regulation for the law in the near future.

The law is based on the OECD's "Pillar Two," which aims to ensure multinational companies pay a minimum tax rate on profits earned in each country they operate, thus curbing tax avoidance strategies such as profit shifting to low-tax jurisdictions.

Al-Salam charity sends 500 tons of aid to Gaza

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31, (KUNA): A convoy by Al-Salam Association for Humanitarian and Charitable Works of 20 trucks loaded with 500 tons of humanitarian aid, headed on Monday to the Gaza Strip.

The convoy was in coordination with Kuwait Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Egyptian Red Crescent Society.

Al-Salam charity representative

for the trip, Jassim Al-Tammar, told KUNA that the endeavor is continuing on Kuwait's efforts to help disadvantaged people wherever they are, especially war-torn and displaced people.

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UAE steps in as mediator amid ongoing war and humanitarian crises

Russia and Ukraine free hundreds in prisoner exchange

KYIV, Ukraine, Dec 31, (AP): Russia and Ukraine have exchanged prisoners of war in the latest such swap that saw the release of hundreds of captives and was brokered with the help of the United Arab Emirates, officials said Monday.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said 189 Ukrainian prisoners, including military personnel, border guards and national guards - along with two civilians - were freed. He thanked the UAE for helping negotiate the exchange.

Russia's Defense Ministry said that 150 Russian soldiers were freed from captivity as part of the exchange in which each side released 150 people.

The reason for the discrepancy in numbers wasn't immediately clear.

"We are working to free everyone from Russian captivity," Zelenskyy said in a statement. "We do not forget anyone." He posted pictures of Ukrainian soldiers sitting on a bus, some holding the country's blue-and-yellow flags.

Zelenskyy said that those freed from Russian captivity included defenders of the Snake Island off the Black Sea port of Odesa, which was seized by Russia in the opening days of its invasion, as well as troops who defended the city of Mariupol, that was captured by Moscow's forces early in the war after a nearly three-month siege.

"The return of our people from Russian captivity is always very good news for each of us," Zelenskyy said. "And today is one of those days: our team managed to return 189 Ukrainians home."



A Ukrainian serviceman cries upon seeing his daughter after returning from captivity during a POWs exchange between Russia and Ukraine, in Ukraine, Monday Dec. 30, 2024. (AP)

In Moscow, the Defense Ministry said that Russian servicemen were first taken to the territory of Russia's neighbor and ally Belarus, where they received "psychological and medical assistance" before moving to Russia.

Russia and Ukraine have conducted dozens of such prisoner exchanges during the nearly three-year war.

The prisoner exchange came as President Joe Biden announced Monday that the United States will send

nearly \$2.5 billion more in weapons to Ukraine as his administration works quickly to spend all the money it has available to help Kyiv fight off Russia before President-elect Donald Trump takes office.



A Ukrainian serviceman hugs his relative after returning from captivity during a POWs exchange between Russia and Ukraine, in Ukraine, Monday Dec. 30, 2024. (AP)

Former President's State funeral set for Jan 9

Jimmy Carter being mourned in his tiny hometown and around world

PLAINS, Ga., Dec 31, (AP): Johnny Jones found out about Jimmy Carter's death within a matter of minutes. That's how it works in a small town, even for a former U.S. president and Nobel Peace Prize winner known throughout the world.

"Somebody texted my wife and told her about it - that's when I found out," Jones said Monday, a day after the 39th president died at the age of 100, surrounded by family in the one-story house he and his late wife, Rosalynn, built before he launched his first political campaign more than 60 years ago.

"His presence here in Plains has really boosted the morale of everyone who lives here," said Jones, 85, as he recalled warm exchanges with "Mr. Jimmy" and "Ms. Rosalynn," who died in November 2023.

Indeed, the Carters put this town of fewer than 700 people - not much bigger than when Carter was born Oct. 1, 1924 - on the world stage. His remarkable rise to the White House, landslide defeat in 1980 and rehabilitation thereafter as a freelance diplomat and global humanitarian were reflected Monday in tributes from Plains' residents and around the world.

Not far from where Jones sat on his front porch, black ribbons hung alongside U.S. flags flying in front of the souvenir shops and cafes that make up the nucleus of Plains' main street, which spans just a few blocks from Carter's 1976 presidential campaign headquarters - the old train depot - to where the family once operated its peanut warehouses. TV cameras and news trucks lined the street that runs in front of the old gas station where the former president's late brother, Billy Carter, once would hold court with national journalists who covered his older brother.

Across the railroad tracks, Philip Kurland stood in his political memorabilia shop, which he opened years after the Carters returned from Washington, and recalled the former president not as a famous figure but an approachable neighbor who once prayed with him when he was sick.

"We're in a state of denial," he said. "I was telling people: Let's start planning for his 101st birthday."

At Maranatha Baptist Church, where the Carters long taught Sunday school, a handful of residents trickled in for a silent vigil Monday evening. A piano played softly as people lit candles at the altar, with lighted Christmas trees standing on either side.

In Washington, plans continued for the state rites that will affirm Carter's global status. President Joe Biden confirmed that Jan. 9, 2025, will be a day of national mourning, with federal offices closed for Carter's state funeral at the National Cathedral. Biden, a longtime Carter friend and political ally, will deliver a eulogy for his fellow Democrat. Congressional leaders have confirmed to the Carter family that the



Christine Mason, of Atlanta, places flowers at the entrance to The Jimmy Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta Monday, Dec. 30, 2024, in Atlanta. (AP)



A flag flies at half-mast for the late former U.S. President Jimmy Carter at the Houses of Parliament, in London, on Dec. 30, 2024. (AP)



Chris Mapes, from Iowa, signs a condolence book for former President Jimmy Carter who died on Sunday, in the lobby of The Richard Nixon Presidential Library & Museum in Yorba Linda, Calif., on Dec. 30, 2024. (AP)

former president will lie in state from Jan. 7 to Jan. 9, when his remains will be transported to the cathedral for the state funeral.

In New York, the 15 members of the U.N. Security Council stood in silent tribute to the Nobel Peace Prize winner. U.S. deputy ambassador Dorothy Shea read a statement from the U.N.'s most powerful body at the start of an emergency meeting on Yemen.

"President Carter was a peacemaker who worked tirelessly and effectively in support of conflict mediation, the furtherance of human rights and the strengthening of democracy, both while he was in office and during his many years of service thereafter," the Security Council statement said.

China's deputy U.N. ambassador, Geng Shuang, remembered Carter

as "a driving force" in establishing relations between Beijing and Washington. "We highly commend his achievements," Geng said, stating that Carter "made great contribution over the years to ... cooperation between the two countries."

Prominent Egyptian rights defender Hossam Bahgat, a fierce critic of the government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi's government, said Carter was among the first to warn of "Israeli apartheid" against Palestinians - a position that put Carter at odds with much of the U.S. foreign policy establishment.

"Such a profile of courage," Bahgat wrote on Facebook. "He warned of Israeli apartheid as early as 2007. He stood by his principles and moral standards because he understood his mission and stayed true to his beliefs without seeking to placate donors or please hedge-funder packed boards."

Back in Georgia, neighbors of the Carter Center in Atlanta congregated near the grounds where Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter would redefine what a post-presidency can be. The Carters established the Carter Center in 1982 and for four decades oversaw diplomatic missions, election monitoring and public health programs with operations that spanned five continents.

"I really appreciate him as an ex-president, what he's done since" leaving office, said Richard Hopkins, an Atlanta resident.

Hopkins said Carter's public service went beyond elected office. A Korean War veteran, Hopkins noted that Carter, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was a submarine officer after World War II. He also highlighted the Carters' work with Habitat for Humanity, which builds houses for low-income people. The Carters' Habitat involvement came in addition to their Carter Center work; they headlined their own annual builds into their early 90s.

Habitat for Humanity CEO Jonathan Reckford said the Carters were integral to Habitat's growth.

"Most people think President Carter started and ran Habitat, which is not actually true," he said Monday. "But what is true is Habitat was founded in 1976, and it was a tiny organization in 1984 when President and Mrs. Carter famously rode a bus up from south Georgia to spend a week sleeping in a church basement and rehabbing a tenement building on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. That's when the world found out about Habitat."

Jason Carter, the former president's grandson who now chairs the Carter Center's governing board, said in a recent interview that the former president formed that life-long commitment to service because of Plains.

"My grandfather could go to a village anywhere in the world," the younger Carter said, and help people without patronizing them. "Because he was from a village like that himself."

Critics question leadership

Trump endorses Johnson as Speaker despite funding rift

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., Dec 31, (AP): President-elect Donald Trump on Monday endorsed House Speaker Mike Johnson, providing crucial backing for the Louisiana Republican as he prepares for what is expected to be another contentious speakership race this week.

Trump said in a post on his social media platform that Johnson "is a good, hard working, religious man" and said he "will do the right thing, and we will continue to WIN."

"Mike has my Complete & Total Endorsement," he wrote.

Johnson thanked Trump for the endorsement and added, "The American people demand and deserve that we waste no time. Let's get to work!"

The signal of support from Trump comes despite his frustration with a spending deal Johnson pushed through the House days before Christmas that failed to achieve his central goal of raising the debt limit.

But other Republicans have been less forgiving. Far-right criticism over the spending ordeal has left Johnson's continued leadership of the incoming GOP majority once again in jeopardy. Though a deal was reached, averting a holiday shutdown, Johnson had to rely on Democrats to keep the government running, highlighting the limits of his influence and exposing cracks in his party's support.

The speaker's first two funding plans collapsed as Trump, who does not take the oath of office un-

til Jan. 20, interceded with calls to suspend or lift the government debt ceiling.

Johnson, who has worked hard to stay close to Trump over the last several months, convinced the president-elect that he would meet his demands to raise the debt limit in 2025.

Trump had remained quiet about Johnson's fate before a Jan. 3 leadership vote for over a week, even as some Republicans signaled that they may not support Johnson for the role.

Rep. Victoria Spartz, one of the Republicans who opposed Kevin McCarthy's initial bid for the speakership, said in a statement Monday that "our next speaker must show courageous leadership to get our country back on track."

The Indiana lawmaker went on to make a series of demands for the next leader of the GOP majority, which included major spending reform. Rep. Andy Harris, who is the chair of the ultra-conservative House Freedom Caucus, had also indicated that Johnson's future as speaker is not guaranteed before the holidays.

In a Dec. 20 post on X, Harris said that Republicans have not done enough to bring down "spending, deficits and inflation" since Trump's electoral victory in November.

Because of this, Harris wrote, "I am now undecided on what House leadership should look like in the 119th Congress."



Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., talks to reporters after passing the funding bill to avert the government shutdown at the Capitol in Washington, on Dec. 20, 2024. (AP)

Europe

Western-regulated insurance.

Priest sentenced to 11 years:

A Catholic priest in Belarus on Monday was convicted on charges of high treason for criticizing the government and handed an 11-year sentence, in the first case of politically-driven charges against Catholic clergy since Belarus became independent in the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

The conviction and sentencing of Rev. Henrykh Akalovich comes as Belarusian authorities have intensified their sweeping crackdown on dissent ahead of the Jan. 26 presidential election that is all but certain to hand authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko a seventh term in office. (AP)

Anchor mark links tanker:

Finnish investigators probing the damage to a Baltic Sea power cable and several data cables said they found an anchor drag mark on the seabed, apparently from a Russia-linked vessel that has already been seized.

The discovery heightened concerns about suspected sabotage by Russia's "shadow fleet" of fuel tankers - aging vessels with obscure ownership acquired to evade Western sanctions amid the war in Ukraine and operating without

The Estlink-2 power cable, which transmits energy from Finland to Estonia across the Baltic Sea, went down on Dec. 25 after a rupture. It had little impact on services but followed damage to two data cables and the Nord Stream gas pipelines, both of which have been termed sabotage. (AP)

13 indicted in canopy fall:

Serbia's public prosecutor on Monday indicted 13 people, including a former minister, over the collapse of a concrete canopy that killed 15 last month and triggered weeks of massive anti-government protests.

The suspects were charged in the northern city of Novi Sad, where the Nov. 1 collapse happened, with committing a grave criminal act against public safety and irregular execution of construction work. If convicted, they face up to 12 years in prison.

The huge concrete canopy was part of a railway station building, which was renovated twice in recent years as part of a wider infrastructure deal with Chinese companies. Many in Serbia believe that the work on the station was sloppy due to rampant corruption, and caused the canopy to crash down. (AP)

America

Sentencing delay denied: Former New Jersey Sen. Bob Menendez will be sentenced on corruption charges as scheduled at the end of January, and his wife's trial will be moved from January to February, a judge said Monday.

U.S. District Judge Sidney H. Stein in Manhattan rejected Menendez's request to delay his sentencing for his conviction on bribery and other charges until his wife finishes her trial on similar charges, possibly sometime in March. (AP)

NY beefs up security: New York State Governor Kathy Hochul on Monday announced increased security measures statewide to ensure

public safety during holiday celebrations.

The measures include increased staffing in collaboration with the State Police, the New York National Guard, and other agencies and enhanced security at airports, bridges, tunnels, and public transportation systems. (Xinhua)

4 injured in LA shootings: Four people were injured Monday night in two separate shootings within blocks of each other in downtown Los Angeles, local news outlet reported, citing police.

The first incident was reported just before 9 p.m. local time (0500 GMT Tuesday) at a shopping center, outside of a Target store, reported KABC-TV, the West Coast flagship station of the ABC television network. (Xinhua)

Chinese hackers remotely accessed US Treasury workstations and documents

WASHINGTON, Dec 31, (AP): Chinese hackers remotely accessed several U.S. Treasury Department workstations and unclassified documents after compromising a third-party software service provider, the agency said Monday.

The department did not provide details on how many workstations had been accessed or what sort of documents the hackers may have obtained, but it said in a letter to lawmakers revealing the breach that "at this time there is no evidence indicating the threat actor has continued access to Treasury information." The hack was being investigated as a "major cybersecurity incident," it added.

"Treasury takes very seriously all threats against our systems, and the

data it holds," a department spokesperson said in a separate statement. "Over the last four years, Treasury has significantly bolstered its cyber defense, and we will continue to work with both private and public sector partners to protect our financial system from threat actors."

In Beijing, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson gave China's standard response to hacking allegations.

"We have repeatedly stated our position on such groundless accusations that lack evidence," Mao Ning said at a daily briefing. "China consistently opposes all forms of hacking, and we are even more opposed to the dissemination of false information against China for political purposes."



Fireworks explode over Sydney Harbour ahead of New Year's Eve celebrations in Sydney, Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2024. (AP)

Cities across the globe prepare to welcome New Year in celebrations tinged with local traditions

WELLINGTON, Dec 31, (AP) - Cities around the world are readying to ring in the New Year with celebrations highlighting local cultures and traditions, after a year roiled by ongoing conflict and political instability.

Countries in the South Pacific Ocean will be the first to welcome 2025, with midnight in New Zealand striking 18 hours before the ball drop in Times Square in New York.

In New Zealand's largest city, Auckland, thousands were expected to throng the downtown or climb the city's ring of volcanic peaks for a fireworks vantage point - and a light display recognizing Auckland's Indigenous tribes. It follows a year marked by protests over Māori rights in the nation of 5 million.

Two hours later in Australia, more than 1 million people are expected at Sydney Harbor for the traditional fireworks. British pop star Robbie Williams will lead a singalong and Indigenous ceremonies and performances will acknowledge the land's first people.

Much of Japan has shut down ahead of the nation's biggest holiday, as temples and homes underwent a thorough cleaning, including swatting floor mats called "tatami" with big sticks.

The upcoming Year of the Snake in the Asian zodiac is heralded as one of rebirth - alluding to the reptile's shedding skin. Stores in Japan, which observes the zodiac cycle from Jan. 1, have been selling tiny figures of smiling snakes and other snake-themed products. Other places in Asia will start marking the Year of the Snake later, with the Lunar New Year.

In South Korea, celebrations were cut back or canceled as the country observes a period of national mourn-



People visit Sensoji Buddhist temple on New Year's Eve in Tokyo, Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2024. (AP)

ing following the Sunday crash of a Jeju Air flight at Muan that killed 179 people.

New Year celebrations in Jakarta will feature a dazzling fireworks display, including a drone show featuring 800 drones, followed by countdowns to midnight at the city's iconic Hotel Indonesia Roundabout.

Chinese state media covered an exchange of New Year's greetings between leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in a reminder of growing closeness between two leaders who face tensions with the West.

Xi told Putin that their countries will "always move forward hand in hand," the official Xinhua News Agency said Tuesday.

China has maintained ties and robust trade with Russia since the latter invaded Ukraine in 2022, helping to offset Western sanctions and attempts

to isolate Putin.

New Year's celebrations are likely to be subdued in Israel as its war with Hamas in Gaza grinds through a 15th month and scores of hostages remain in captivity.

Lebanon is in the grip of a severe economic crisis, and many areas were heavily damaged during the war between Israel and Hezbollah, which ended with a shaky ceasefire. Syrians are meanwhile expressing hope and uncertainty for the coming year after the overthrow of President Bashar Assad.

In Dubai, thousands are expected to attend an annual fireworks show at the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest skyscraper.

Rome's traditional New Year's Eve festivities have an additional draw: the start of Pope Francis' Holy Year, the once-every-quarter-century celebration projected to bring some



Two boys play football in front of a billboard welcoming the New Year 2025 in Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam on Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2024. (AP)

32 million pilgrims to the Eternal City in 2025.

On Tuesday, Francis will celebrate a vespers at St. Peter's Basilica, followed by Mass on Wednesday, when he is expected to once again appeal for peace amid wars raging in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the Cathedral of Saint Paul in Minnesota will host an 11 p.m. Mass followed by a champagne reception with toasts. Jan. 1 is a day of obligation for Catholics, marking the Solemnity of Mary, and many churches will hold vigil Masses on Tuesday afternoon and evening.

Hours before Germany rings in the new year, Chancellor Olaf Scholz called on the country's 84 million residents to stick together despite the many global crises and wars, the country's ailing economy and a deadly Christmas market attack that

shocked the nation.

"We are a country of togetherness. And we can draw strength from this - especially in difficult times like these," Scholz said in his prerecorded speech.

Paris will cap a momentous 2024 with its traditional festive countdown and fireworks extravaganza on the famed Champs-Élysées.

The Summer Olympics and Paralympic Games hosted in the French capital from July to September transformed the city into a site of joy, fraternity and astonishing sporting achievements, and marked another major milestone in its recovery from deadly extremist attacks in 2015 by al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

London is due to ring in the New Year with a pyrotechnic display along the River Thames and a parade through the city center on Wednesday featuring 10,000 performers.

The fireworks will explode against the backdrop of the London Eye, the massive Ferris wheel across the river from Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament.

With a storm bringing bitter weather to other parts of the United Kingdom, however, festivities in Edinburgh, Scotland - including the Hogmanay Street party, garden concert and castle pyrotechnics show - were already canceled. Rio de Janeiro will throw Brazil's main New Year's Eve bash on Copacabana Beach, with 10 ferries offshore bearing 12 straight minutes of fireworks. Thousands of tourists in six cruise ships will witness the show up close.

Rio's City Hall was closely guarding its plans for a display of lights and sounds. More than 2 million people are expected at the Copacabana, hoping to squeeze into concerts by superstar Brazilian artists such as pop singer Anitta and Grammy-award winner Caetano Veloso.

In New York City, the organization managing Times Square has tested its famous ball drop, and inspected 2025 numerals, lights and thousands of crystals, as part of a tradition going back to 1907. This year's celebration will include musical performances by TLC, Jonas Brothers, Rita Ora, and Sophie Ellis-Bextor.

The party, covering multiple blocks around the city's main tourism and theater hub, is expected to draw large crowds despite rain and chilly weather.

Meanwhile, Las Vegas will bid farewell to 2024 with old - and some new - traditions. Its annual eight-minute pyrotechnic show will be on in the Las Vegas Strip, with 340,000 people anticipated as fireworks are launched from the rooftops of nine casinos.

Court moves to conduct office, residence search

Impeached S.Korean president faces detention

SEOUL, Dec 31, (AP) - A South Korean court issued warrants Tuesday to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol and search his office and residence over allegations of rebellion in connection with his short-lived declaration of martial law.

It's the first time a warrant has been issued to detain a sitting South Korean president. But experts say there is little chance of detention or searches unless Yoon is formally removed from office.

The Seoul Western District Court issued warrants to detain Yoon and to search the presidential office and residence in central Seoul, according to a statement from the Corruption Investiga-

tion Office for High-Ranking Officials, which is leading a joint investigation with police and military authorities.

The agency says it's been investigating whether Yoon's Dec. 3 declaration amounted to rebellion.

Under South Korean law, the leader of a rebellion can face the death penalty or life imprisonment if convicted. Yoon has presidential immunity from most criminal prosecutions, but the privilege does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason.

Yoon's powers have been suspended since the opposition-controlled National Assembly voted to impeach him on Dec. 14 over his imposition

of martial law, during which hundreds of troops and police officers were deployed at the assembly. By law, a president in South Korea is allowed to declare martial law only during wartime or similar emergencies and has no right to suspend parliament's operations even under martial law.

Yoon has argued his decree was a legitimate act of governance, calling it a warning to the main liberal opposition Democratic Party - which he has called "a monster" and "anti-state forces" - that has used its legislative majority to impeach top officials, undermine the government's budget, and which he claims sympathizes with North Korea.

Lanka Police Department has been hacked.

Manathunga added the official website of the Sri Lanka Department of Government Printing has also been hacked and its data has been altered. (Xinhua)

Deadliest year for Pak forces: Pakistani security forces in 2024 suffered the highest casualties in nearly a decade while battling insurgency, an Islamabad-based think tank said.

This comes as militants attacked a security post in the country's restive northwest, which borders Afghanistan, killing a police officer and a civilian early Tuesday. (AP)

tion. The statement also said that the Quad countries collectively supported disaster preparedness and life-saving relief efforts across the Indo-Pacific in 2024 and continue to build on efforts to identify new ways to respond rapidly to humanitarian crises and disasters. (KUNA)

Sri Lanka websites hit: Several Sri Lankan government institutions have faced cyber attacks, a police spokesman told local media on Tuesday.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) K.B. Manathunga said the official YouTube channel of the Sri

Subcontinent

Quad FMs pledge collab: The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue known as Quad said on Tuesday that it is committed to work together in responding to the future needs of the Indo-Pacific region.

In a joint statement commemorating the 20th Anniversary of Quad Cooperation, the foreign ministers of the member states said that the foundational commitment to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief remains strong and all the four Quad countries continue to work side-by-side to prepare for and respond quickly and effectively to disasters across the re-

Chinese president underlines confidence, hard work in 2025 to rise above challenges

BEIJING, Dec 31, (Xinhua) - Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday called for the nation to remain confident in the coming year, saying the world's second largest economy can overcome its challenges and pressure through hard work. Xi made the remarks in his New Year message for 2025 delivered through China Media Group and the internet.

Set to fully complete its 14th Five-Year Plan in 2025, China will implement more proactive and effective policies, prioritize high-quality development, promote greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology, and maintain sound momentum in economic and social development, Xi said.

He said the Chinese economy "now faces some new conditions, including challenges of uncertainties in the external environment and pressure of transformation from old growth drivers into new ones." "But we can prevail with our hard work. As always, we grow in the wind and rain, and we get stronger through hard times. We must be confident," Xi said.

Reviewing China's footprint in 2024, Xi said the economy has rebounded and is on an upward trajectory, with the national GDP expected to pass the mark of 130 trillion yuan (about 18.08 trillion U.S. dollars) and the country's grain output surpassing 700 million tonnes.

He also noted that China has fostered new quality productive forces, and new business sectors, forms and

models have kept emerging.

Also:

BEIJING: As the Global South made new contributions to the transformation of economic globalization and improvement of global governance in 2024, China will continue to work with the Global South in solidarity for development and the cause of human progress, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said on Tuesday.

In 2024, the BRICS held their

first summit after expansion, and important international multilateral meetings, such as the 31st APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting and the 19th G20 Summit, were held in countries of the Global South including Peru and Brazil. Some observers noted that the year 2024 is a year for the Global South.

When asked to comment on the rising momentum of the Global South at a regular press briefing, Mao noted that the emergence of the Global South is a salient feature of the changing world.



Chinese President Xi Jinping delivers a New Year message through China Media Group and the internet Tuesday evening in Beijing to ring in 2025. (Xinhua)

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts
SAUDI	+35.58	12,036.50	PAKISTAN	-393.77	114,954.06
DUBAI	+5.43	5,158.67	KSE 100		
EGYPT	+415.38	29,740.58			

Business

Boursa ends year with gains across indices

Liquidity hits KD 45.8 mln

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The Boursa Kuwait experienced notable increases in its indices during the second and middle sessions of the week, reports Al-Jarida daily.

On Tuesday, which was the last trading day before the year-end holiday, the general market index rose by 0.15 percent, gaining 11.30 points, with liquidity increasing to 45.8 million dinars. A total of 266.6 million shares were traded across 13,959 transactions. Among the 127 shares traded, 42 gained, 64 lost and 21 remained unchanged.

The Premier Market Index also saw a rise of 0.07 percent, or 5.17 points, closing at 7,865.93

points, with liquidity reaching 23.1 million dinars.

A total of 71.6 million shares changed hands in 4,990 transactions, with only 9 out of 34 traded shares gaining, while 18 lost value and 7 remained stable.

The Main Market Index performed even better, gaining 0.53 percent, or 36.45 points, to close at 6,874.22 points, with liquidity of 22.7 million dinars. A total of 194.9 million shares were traded across 8,969 transactions. Of the 93 traded shares, 33 gained, 46 lost and 14 remained unchanged.

The market saw selective buying in some small stocks, particularly Maaden, KMEFIC

and Al-Madar, which led to increases in their prices.

However, the Arab Real Estate stock faced significant pressure, losing more than 20 percent by the end of the session. Other small stocks, such as Madar and Meezan, posted gains, while Bayt.com saw a minor loss. The Commercial and Cinema stocks were influential in the main market, contributing to the overall positive growth.

At the GCC level, most indices showed upward movement, with Abu Dhabi seeing the highest growth at around 1 percent. Qatar and Bahrain indices recorded slight declines, while oil prices held steady at \$73.5 per barrel.

Brent crude edges higher

Kuwait crude surges to \$76.01 pb, up 82 cents

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31, (KUNA): Kuwait crude oil edged 82 cents higher during Monday's trading sessions to reach USD 76.01 per barrel compared with USD 75.19 pb lasts Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Tuesday.

Benchmark Brent crude futures rose 22 cents to USD 74.39 pb and West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures gained 39 cents to USD 70.99 pb.

OPEC+ to extend cuts

Oil market faces multiple challenges ahead of '25

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The global oil market faces multiple challenges and uncertainties as we enter 2025, with key concerns including oil price volatility, geopolitical tensions and the influence of emerging energy sources, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The following key factors are expected to impact the oil prices in 2025.

Global Stocks and New Production -- The increase in global stocks and new production from non-OPEC countries, such as the US, Brazil and others, is expected to add around 3 million barrels per day to global oil supply.

This additional supply is putting pressure on crude oil prices.

OPEC's Role and Supply-Demand Balance -- Despite OPEC+'s efforts to maintain balance in global supply and demand, the group faces challenges in reducing global oil stocks and managing speculation in financial markets.

Moreover, the strength of the US dollar, while beneficial for oil sales priced in dollars, may hinder demand growth.

Geopolitical Factors -- Political instability, including issues between Russia and the EU and tensions in the Middle East, continue to drive oil price fluctuations.

The end of the Russia-Ukraine conflict could lead to changes in oil and gas supply routes, especially the potential resumption of energy supplies from Russia to Europe, which might affect oil prices globally.

US Oil Production and Trump's Influence -- Expectations are that the US oil production boom, which could surpass 15 million barrels per day under President Trump, will continue to exert downward pressure on global prices.

This shift could challenge OPEC's influence, as non-OPEC producers are able to produce more independently of OPEC quotas.

Alternative Energy -- Despite the media focus on alternative energy sources such as solar and wind, experts argue that these are still in the

testing phase and not yet reliable enough to significantly reduce oil demand in the near future.

Economic Growth and Oil Demand -- The global economy is expected to grow modestly in 2025, with emerging markets facing challenges. The demand for oil is largely driven by industrial activities and transportation, especially in Asia.

However, the shift towards electric vehicles and renewable energy sources may eventually reduce demand for oil, although not drastically in the short term.

OPEC+ Strategy -- OPEC+ will likely extend its production cuts through the first quarter of 2025, aiming to support the market.

The challenge remains balancing production cuts with demand fluctuations, particularly in light of increasing production from countries outside the group.

The following are the forecasts and potential scenarios:

Stable Oil Prices -- Analysts expect Brent crude prices to remain relatively stable, with forecasts varying from \$70 to \$76 per barrel, depending on the evolution of global demand, geopolitical developments and the extent of production cuts by OPEC+.

Uncertainty and Volatility -- Oil prices are expected to remain volatile, with potential for fluctuations based on unpredictable factors such as supply disruptions or geopolitical conflicts. Speculation in financial markets also adds to the unpredictability.

The outlook for oil prices in 2025 remains uncertain, with several complex factors influencing the market.

The potential for a stable but cautious global economic recovery, combined with rising production outside of OPEC and geopolitical risks, makes it challenging to predict price movements with certainty.

While OPEC+ efforts to manage supply remain important, the increasing independence of non-OPEC producers and the growth of alternative energy sources are reshaping the oil market dynamics.

Investors eye US job data & Fed minutes for market insights

Gold prices dip amid thin trading & economic uncertainty

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: Gold prices saw a decline today amid thin trading, as traders await key economic data from the United States next week and look for signals regarding the potential impact of President-elect Donald Trump's return on the Federal Reserve's policies in 2025, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Spot gold dropped 0.3 percent to \$2,611.39 an ounce, while US gold futures also fell by 0.3 percent to \$2,624.00.

The traders will focus next week on US job openings data, an employment report and the minutes from the Federal Open Market Committee's December meeting, which may offer insights into the US

economy's strength.

Gold has gained more than 27 percent this year, reaching a record high of \$2,790.15 on October 31, driven by the Fed's easing cycle and rising global tensions.

With Trump's return to the White House in January, markets are preparing for potential policy changes, including tariffs, deregulation and tax modifications.

Meanwhile, other precious metals showed mixed performance: silver remained steady at \$29.38 per ounce, platinum rose 0.4 percent to \$923.53 and palladium gained 0.1 percent to \$912.73.

Available on several channels

KFH continues to serve customers during holiday

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues to provide its banking services around the clock through a group of various technological and digital tools during the holiday.

Most of the banking services are available on several channels around the clock, whether through the bank's website, KFH.com, or via the KFHOnline mobile application, or through the KFH Go self-banking stations that are spread in many important locations, in addition to the KFH accounts on social media and many E-service channels.

The KFH Go KFH Go self-banking station is considered a new electronic channel that helps transfer normal customer transactions to an innovative automated branch, that provides capabilities that allow customers to benefit from highly efficient banking services. It includes more than 80% of the services and business provided by the branches in their traditional sense, which makes KFH Go branches the preferred choice for many segments of customers, especially the youth.

KFH GO KFH Go self-banking stations include the XTM device that allows direct video call with service personnel, as well as automatic teller machines and cash deposit machines. The cash deposit machines receive 300 notes per transaction.

Moreover, customers can perform a variety of interactive banking services through KFH Go's 10 branches located in various places in Kuwait, including Kuwait International Airport, such as: establishing "Murabaha" financing transactions, requesting credit and prepaid cards, updating data and phone numbers, activating bank cards, opening deposits and accounts, instant cheque printing, receiving gold biscuits (10 grams), opening (gold,



KFH enhances digital banking with mobile and online apps.

savings, Al-Rabeh, electron) accounts, online gold purchase and sell, cardless withdrawals using QR code through mobile, or by using Civil ID or phone number, in addition to many other financing and banking services conducted quickly, easily and safely.

The electronic banking services at KFH are also characterized by their high efficiency in addition to ease and safety. This was evident in the number of electronic banking operations that KFH customers carried out via KFHonline, on the website or through mobile applications.

The e-banking transactions includes: opening an bank account online for citizens and residents to join become a KFH customer without having to visit the branch, local and telex financial transfers, opening deposits,

adding beneficiaries, balance inquiry, cheque book request, requesting financing, opening an account, requesting Al-Kheir Card, and checking the PINs for credit and debit cards, activating new bank cards, reporting a lost credit/debit cards, checking the financing obligations and the number of installments, perusal of investment plans, receiving account balances and deposits summary, along with other wide range of digital services.

KFH has recently launched digital service in personal financing products through KFH mobile app or desktop from anywhere without having to visit the branch, instant card issuance within 3 minutes, Live FX Pricing, instant cross-border payments service at KFHTurkey using Ripple's technology and digital Wallet service through smart mobiles and watches which provides advanced and smart digital payment methods according to highly developed security standards in cooperation with Samsung, Fitbit and Garmin.

Call Center

Meanwhile, the call center continues to provide services around the clock to receive customer calls, listen to their enquiries and respond to them through a qualified and technically advanced staff. KFH provides the automated telephone service 1803333 that works with the same efficiency and speed, to respond to transfers between accounts, inquire about financial operations, pay bills, and recharge Mobile phone cards, among other services.

Social Media

KFH's social media team remains dedicated to addressing customer inquiries and assisting them at all hours through the official social media accounts @KFHGroup.

China continues to be Egypt's largest trading partner

Egypt & China celebrate 10th anniversary of strategic partnership

CAIRO, Dec. 31 (Xinhua): Egypt and China bid farewell to 2024 with stronger bilateral relations under a 2014 agreement to elevate their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership.

Marking the 10th anniversary of the partnership, 2024 has witnessed fruitful achievements of cooperation between Egypt and China in various fields.

Strategic ties

A couple of weeks before the end of the year, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with his Egyptian counterpart, Badr Abdelatty, in Beijing and they co-chaired the China-Egypt foreign ministers' strategic dialogue on Dec. 13.

During his stay in China, Abdelatty also met with Chinese officials and executives of leading manufacturers, discussing deepening cooperation and furthering Chinese investment in Egypt.

Abdelatty said that Egypt "values the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries," expressing appreciation for China's contribution to Egypt's economic and social development.

In May, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi paid a visit to China, where he announced with Chinese President Xi Jinping the launch of the 2024 China-Egypt year of partnership to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the comprehensive strategic partnership.

The growth in bilateral ties was pushed by decades of friendly interactions, as Egypt was the first Arab and African nation to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1956.

On top of the partnership, the two countries continue to strengthen their cooperation under the multilateral frameworks including the BRICS group, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF) and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).

Egypt is also a key member of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that seeks win-win cooperation among participating states in various fields.

In early September 2024, Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly visited Beijing and attended the FOCAC summit, saying that Egypt and China formed "a multi-level cooperation framework."

"Egypt is one of the first countries to join the BRI, and to support China's initiatives for global security, global development, and global civilization," he said in an interview with Xinhua. "Egypt appreciates the tangible achievements of Egypt-China cooperation in the last decade."

Economic cooperation

Not only did the outgoing year 2024 mark 10 years of their comprehensive strategic partnership, but it also witnessed growing economic cooperation under the BRI, which goes in line with Egypt Vision 2030 for sustainable development.

China has been Egypt's largest trading partner for 12 consecutive years, with Chinese investment constantly growing in the Arab country, not least in infrastructural and industrial projects.

During his visit to Beijing in September, Madbouly witnessed the signing of several contracts with Chinese companies to establish new projects in Egypt's Suez Canal Economic Zone (SCZone), according to a cabinet statement.

The new projects will join many other Chinese businesses and factories operating at an Egyptian-Chinese industrial zone built by China's giant industrial developer TEDA in the SCZone, near Egypt's vital Suez Canal.

Since its establishment in 2008, the TEDA zone has attracted about 180 investment companies, with actual investment exceeding 3 billion dollars.

SCZone chairman Waleid Gamal El-Dein said there were recent talks to expand the zone by another 3 square km to be able to accommodate new industries.

"Economic relations between the two countries are becoming deeper and qualified for further growth in the coming period," Egyptian economist Waleed Gaballah told Xinhua.

Shared vision

Egypt and China adopt similar policies on regional and international issues, such as non-interference in other countries' internal affairs, respect for sovereignty, and call for dialogue and peaceful settlement of conflicts.

This was clearly shown throughout 2024, regarding the conflicts in the Middle East, particularly the Palestine-Israel conflict in the Gaza Strip as well as the recent developments in Syria following the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government earlier in December.

During the China-Egypt foreign ministers' strategic dialogue earlier this month, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that the pressing task is to immediately cease fire, stop violence, and ease the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East.

"We support Syria in realizing peace at an early date, implementing Security Council resolution 2254, advancing the domestic political process in accordance with the "Syrian-led and Syrian-owned" principle, and finding a rebuilding plan that meets the wishes of the people through inclusive dialogue," Wang said at a joint press conference with his Egyptian counterpart Abdelatty on Dec. 13.

Former Egyptian Ambassador to China Ali el-Hefny also underscored the shared vision of Egypt and China. "Egypt and China seek an international system based on respect for the sovereignty of states, non-interference in their internal affairs, and dealing with states on the basis of equality," he said.

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) has launched a tender to seek unified technical software services.

According to the website of the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT), KOC has set December 29, 2024 as the start date for receiving of-

fers, and the deadline for submission of offers is January 28, 2025.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) has also launched a tender for providing catalyst uploading and unloading services at the Al-Zour Refinery. The deadline for submitting offers is January 21, 2025, with the preliminary meeting scheduled for January 6, 2025.

Submission deadline set for Jan 28

KOC invites bids for unified technical software services

KUFPEC maintains strategic role in Pakistan's oil sector

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31 (KUNA): Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company (KUFPEC) announced Tuesday that its subsidiaries, KUFPEC Pakistan Holdings B.V., KUFPEC Pakistan B.V., and Kirthar Pakistan B.V., have successfully divested their non-operated assets in Pakistan.

The divestment was made in favor of Petroleum Exploration (Pvt) Limited, a leading private-sector exploration and production company in Pakistan with a significant local and international presence.

In a statement to KUNA, KUFPEC emphasized that despite this divestment, it continues to be a strategic partner to the Pakistani government in oil and gas exploration and production. The company also reaffirmed its ongoing role as the operator of the Makhad Block in Pakistan.

KUFPEC further noted that it is working to diversify and expand its

operations in Pakistan, adding that in collaboration with the Directorate General Petroleum Concessions and major exploration and production companies, it is preparing for the upcoming offshore bidding round.

This strategic involvement demonstrates KUFPEC's commitment to strengthening its presence and continuing to grow within Pakistan's energy sector.

KUFPEC's Executive Vice President for Operations Tareq Ebrahim, said that this divestment is in line with the company's strategy to optimize its portfolio by streamlining assets and focusing on high-potential opportunities through strategic acquisitions, particularly in exploration and development.

KUFPEC is a wholly owned subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, engaged in the exploration, development, and production of crude oil and natural gas outside the State of Kuwait.

Union's future hinges on AI development

EU must foster its own industry and competitiveness to catch up

By Hassan F. Beidas

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The US economy as one of the biggest economies in the world outpaced the European Union economy. In year 2008 US GDP per capita was \$14,000 higher, and this gap has widened to nearly \$20,000 in 2023 despite the EU is 100 million larger in population. Furthermore per the statistics, the US economy has grown 21%

since 2008, while the EU has only grown 15%. Experts emphasize the need for the EU to foster its own industry and its competitiveness to catch up.

The EU's future hinges on AI development, as per "The European court of Auditors" who ascertained that the results of Europe's effort in the AI sector will likely determine the path of EU's future economic development. Despite this confirma-

tion, EU only attracted 6% in the first half of 2024 of the \$35 billion poured in AI start-ups globally.

Meanwhile, European businesses face crippling energy costs (nearly 18-22pence/kWh) compared to the US (6.5 pence/kWh). The US is exploring drilling increased hydrocarbons production to lower their energy prices. While the EU is still primary focused on decarbonisation and green economy.

This is illustrated when one EU country had to close 3 nuclear plants and in the US Microsoft is actively seeking to finance the reopening of the biggest nuclear plant.

Moreover, EU regulators have developed a strict framework for businesses to grow. This is evident when EU has passed 13000 pieces of legislation between 2019-2024 while the US passed only 5,500 new piece of legislation which can be burdensome

for start-ups.

While the recent Budapest declaration aims to ease regulations, the EU seeks to leverage its considerable market size to impose its rules on global companies, potentially hindering innovation. True economic growth requires a balanced approach that fosters competitiveness while addressing environmental concerns and avoiding excessive bureaucracy.



Hassan F. Beidas

Diners opted for fast food

Value-seekers drove 2024's retail trends and dead ends

WASHINGTON, Dec 31, (AP): Value was in vogue in 2024.

Shoppers and restaurant patrons in the U.S. were choosy about where and how to spend their money as they wrestled with high housing and food prices.

Well-heeled customers traded down to Walmart and Aldi. Diners opted for fast food or home cooking instead of sit-down restaurants. Department stores struggled as buyers shopped online or at cheaper chains like H&M.

Residents also moved away from buying furniture or investing in expensive renovations, opting to refresh their homes with inexpensive items like frames and candles.

Those shifts changed the buying and eating landscape in 2024. As of Dec. 20, Coresight Research tracked 48 retail bankruptcies in the U.S., compared with 25 during the same period a year ago. And at least 22 restaurant chains filed for bankruptcy this year, the highest number since 2020, according to BankruptcyData, a company that tracks filings.

Here are some of the trends - and dead ends - that The Associated Press tracked in 2024:

Walmart

The nation's largest retailer typically shines during tough times as shoppers turn to the discounter for groceries, which account for 60% of Walmart's total business. And just like during the 2008 Great Recession, Walmart saw households with incomes of \$100,000 or above making up more of its clientele. But this time around, company executives think they can keep those customers because they've expanded online services and added more stylish clothes and mannequins.

Amazon

Online juggernaut Amazon leaned into its reputation as a destination for deals to appeal to bargain-hungry buyers. In November it launched Amazon Haul, a new low-cost storefront featuring electronics, apparel and other products priced under \$20. And the company said its Prime Day event in July resulted in record sales. But Amazon could face headwinds in the coming year with threatened tariffs on products from China and labor unrest in the U.S.

Fast casual chains

It was a good year for restaurant chains like Shake Shack that are a step up from fast food but still offer good value. Cava, which specializes in fresh Mediterranean food, said its revenue surged more than 33% in the first nine months of this year as it rapidly built new restaurants. Chipotle got some heat from value-conscious diners about smaller portions, but drew customers back after retraining workers to ensure "consistent and generous" portions.

Jeans Sellers

The wide-leg jeans silhouette - the "it" style that rapidly replaced boot-cut and skinny jeans - drove sales across many different retailers this year. Macy's, Abercrombie & Fitch, Levi Strauss, Gap and Stitch Fix were among those citing the trend as a big sales booster in recent months. Value-conscious buyers could snap them up at Walmart for \$29. At the high end, Gucci had wide-leg versions for \$1,200.

McDonald's

The year didn't begin well for McDonald's. The company's sales slumped as inflation-weary customers chose to eat at home instead of grabbing fast food. But a \$5 meal deal introduced in June helped draw lower-income customers back into stores. McDonald's extended the deal through the end of this year and said more value is

coming in 2025. The fast food giant is working to get customers back after a fall E. coli outbreak linked to raw onions in Quarter Pounder hamburgers sickened at least 104 people in 14 states.

Target

Target's cheap chic fashions and home decor have long been a big attraction, but the chain faced challenges in 2024. Unlike Walmart, Target is more reliant on discretionary items like clothing because less than a quarter of its sales come from food and beverages. It has always battled a perception of being more expensive, and analysts say its merchandise has lately been in disarray. Still, Target drew crowds on Black Friday with exclusive Taylor Swift products.

Starbucks

Starbucks had a tough year. Orders are getting increasingly complex, with thousands of ways to customize drinks. That's leading to long lines and incorrect pickup times on the mobile app. New offerings like olive oil-infused coffee didn't attract customers, who also grew tired of Starbucks' high prices. Starbucks hired a new CEO, Brian Niccol, in the fall to help turn things around. But labor strife, which led to strikes in December, could continue to hurt the company in 2025.

Legacy restaurants

Several decades-old chains threw in the towel in 2024, succumbing to rising competition, changing dining patterns and big portfolios of outdated restaurants. Red Lobster, TGI Fridays and Buca di Beppo all filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection and shuttered dozens of locations. A leaner Red Lobster later exited bankruptcy under new ownership, but it remains to be seen whether older chains can turn around years of declining sales.

Big Ticket Items

At the height of the coronavirus pandemic, U.S. consumers took advantage of low interest rates and stimulus benefits to remodel their homes and make other big purchases. But last year, they pulled back. That's been a challenge for retailers like Best Buy, the nation's largest consumer electronics chain, which noted lower sales of appliances, home theaters and gaming equipment. Home Depot and Lowe's also reported lower sales of big-ticket items, particularly discretionary kitchen and bathroom remodeling projects.

Department stores

Department stores, particularly those catering to middle income shoppers, have struggled to hold onto customers as many turn to online shopping or to fast-fashion retailers. Among the worst performers: Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin-based Kohl's, which reported its 11th consecutive quarter of sales declines this year. Outgoing CEO Tom Kirschburg recently owned up to merchandising mistakes, including scaling back fine jewelry, popular store label brands and petite sizes. Customers will see those categories return in the coming year.

Macy's said it would close 150 namesake stores over three years and open 15 higher-end Bloomingdale's. Upscale Nordstrom, on the other hand, had a better than expected fiscal year due largely to soaring sales at its off-price Nordstrom Rack stores. Last week, the department store chain agreed to be acquired and taken private by Nordstrom family members and a Mexican retail group. As a private company, Nordstrom may have more leeway and less scrutiny of its efforts to reinvigorate sales.

Asian shares trade mixed, as Tokyo & Seoul shuttered for New Year holidays



A man is reflected in a window at the Australian Stock Exchange in Sydney, Friday, March 10, 2023. (AP)

Hang Seng added nearly 0.1% to 20,059.95

TOKYO, Dec 31, (AP): Asian markets shares were mixed on Tuesday, with trading closed in Tokyo and Seoul for New Year holidays.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 in Sydney skidded 0.9% to 8,159.10.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng added nearly 0.1% to 20,059.95, while the Shanghai Composite lost 0.7% to 3,383.86 after Chinese manufacturing data seemed to show that Beijing's stimulus measures have not done enough to boost the nation's sluggish economy.

China's Purchasing Managers' Index, based on a survey of factory managers, slipped to 50.1 in December from 50.3 the previous month, the National Bureau of Statistics said Tuesday. It was the third straight monthly reading above 50, a level that indicates an expansion of manufacturing activity.

Trading is set to resume in Tokyo on Jan. 6, as markets will stay closed for the rest of the week for the New Year holidays. South Korean markets will be closed for New Year's Day and resume trading Thursday.

On Monday, U.S. stocks closed broadly lower, with the S&P 500 falling 1.1% to 5,906.94, its third straight decline. Roughly 90% of stocks within the index lost ground. On the second-to-last day of 2024, the benchmark index was still on track for its second straight yearly gain of more than 20%.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1% to

42,573.73, and the Nasdaq composite ended 1.2% lower, at 19,486.78.

Big Tech companies were the heaviest weights on the market, worsening the slump. Apple and Microsoft fell 1.3%. Their pricey valuations tend to have an outsized impact on the broader market.

Elsewhere among tech stocks, Meta Platforms dropped 1.4%, Netflix slipped 0.8% and Amazon fell 1.1%.

The S&P 500's technology and communication services sectors have been the market's high flyers, notching gains of 37.1% and 39.9%, respectively, so far this year.

Boeing fell 2.3% after one of its jets skidded off a runway in South Korea, killing 179 of the 181 people aboard. South Korea is inspecting all 737-800 aircraft operated by airlines in the country.

The disaster was yet another blow for Boeing following a machinists strike, further safety problems with its troubled top-selling aircraft and a plunging stock price. Its shares have declined more than 30% this year.

Airlines that fly Boeing jets wavered in the wake of the crash. United Airlines fell 1.4% and Delta Air Lines dropped 0.9%.

Markets are nearing the close of a stellar year driven by a growing economy, solid consumer spending and a strong jobs market. Wall Street expects companies within the S&P 500 to report broad earnings growth of more than 9% for the year, according to FactSet. The final figures will be tallied following

fourth-quarter reports that start in a few weeks.

Investors were encouraged by inflation cooling throughout the year to close to the Federal Reserve's 2% target. That raised hopes that the central bank would deliver a steady stream of interest rate cuts, which would ease borrowing costs and fuel more economic growth.

The Fed cut interest rates three times in 2024, but has signaled a more cautious approach heading into 2025 as inflation shows signs of reheating. The latest report on consumer prices showed that inflation edged slightly higher, to 2.7%, in November.

President-elect Donald Trump's threats to hike tariffs have added to worries about the potential for inflation to reignite. Companies typically pass along the higher costs from tariffs on goods and raw materials to consumers.

Investors have very little corporate and economic news to review this week, which is shortened by the New Year holiday. U.S. markets will be closed on Wednesday.

On Thursday, investors will get an updated snapshot of U.S. construction spending for the month of November. On Friday, Wall Street will receive an update on manufacturing for December.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude rose 62 cents to \$71.61 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, added 59 cents to \$74.58 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar fell to 156.22 Japanese yen from 156.90 yen. The euro cost \$1.0409, little changed from \$1.0410.

E. Africa projected to lead the way as continent's fastest-growing region

African economy maintains resilient growth in 2024 amid challenges

NAIROBI, Dec. 31 (Xinhua): The African economy has maintained a steady growth in 2024, demonstrating resilience and potential despite global challenges such as geopolitical conflicts and growing protectionism.

Over the past year, African countries have intensified domestic reforms while promoting global cooperation. These efforts have resulted in significant advancements in critical sectors, laying a solid foundation for sustainable progress.

At the same time, China-Africa cooperation has continued to inject fresh momentum into the continent's development, fostering innovation and contributing to long-term growth.

Strong growth

According to the African Economic Outlook 2024 report by the African Development Bank, Africa's economy is projected to grow by 3.7 percent in 2024, outpacing the anticipated global economic growth rate of 3.2 percent. This upward trend is expected to continue, with growth climbing to 4.3 percent in 2025, positioning Africa as the world's second-fastest-growing region.

The continent's growth momentum remained robust throughout 2024, driven by increased infrastructure investment and strengthened regional cooperation.

East Africa is projected to lead the way as Africa's fastest-growing region, with real gross domestic product (GDP) growth surging from an estimated 1.5 percent in 2023 to an impressive 4.9 percent in 2024. Similarly, West Africa displayed strong dynamism, with growth forecasted to rise from 3.6 percent in 2023 to 4.2 percent in 2024.

Data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) indicate strong growth momentum across many African countries that don't rely on resources. Fueled by regional integration and infrastructure investments,

Rwanda's economy is projected to grow by 7 percent. Cote d'Ivoire, driven by robust growth in telecommunications, manufacturing investments and agricultural exports, is expected to expand by 6.5 percent. Meanwhile, Kenya's growth is forecasted to reach 5 percent, supported by a recovery in agriculture and tourism.

However, resource-dependent countries have registered comparatively sluggish growth. Nigeria, for example, is expected to record a GDP growth of 2.9 percent, hindered by challenges such as low oil production, the IMF said.

Diversified development

In 2024, the diversification of Africa's economic development has become increasingly prominent.

Regional economic integration, digital transformation, scientific and technological innovation and talent cultivation have emerged as key catalysts propelling the continent's economic growth.

Significant progress has been made in the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The AfCFTA has been launched in countries such as Cameroon, South Africa and Ghana, creating new opportunities for economic growth across the continent.

Al-Mal News, an Egyptian economic daily, reported that intra-African trade is projected to soar from 192.2 billion U.S. dollars in 2023 to 520 billion dollars by 2030, driven by the AfCFTA.

African countries have also significantly ramped up investments in digital infrastructure, fueling a surge in the development of digital economy and e-commerce.

According to the International Telecommunication Union, the number of Internet users in Africa has skyrocketed from 181 million in 2014 to nearly 646 million in 2024, with projections indicating it could

surpass 1.1 billion by 2029. This exponential growth is enabling the continent to integrate more effectively into the global economic system.

Thanks to this digital transformation, mobile payments have rapidly increased across Africa. According to a report from the Global System for Mobile Communications Association, in 2023, the number of mobile money accounts in Africa reached 856 million, accounting for 49 percent of registered accounts worldwide.

In addition, African countries are actively driving industrial upgrading and technological innovation through measures such as establishing research funds, developing technology parks, and attracting the return of overseas talent.

Enhanced cooperation

Despite steady growth in 2024, the African economy faces challenges that require concerted efforts both within the continent and through cooperation with the global community in the coming years.

The IMF said that Africa's economic outlook is under increased pressure from a turbulent global environment characterized by high inflation, rising borrowing costs, climate-induced disasters and political instability.

Kenyan economist James Shikwati has said that infrastructure development remains a bottleneck for Africa's economic progress. The continent lags behind global standards in critical sectors such as transportation, communication and energy, which not only hinders trade and investment but also slows industrialization efforts and regional connectivity.

To address these challenges, African countries are increasingly strengthening ties with BRICS countries and other emerging market economies to diversify partnerships and tap into new opportunities.

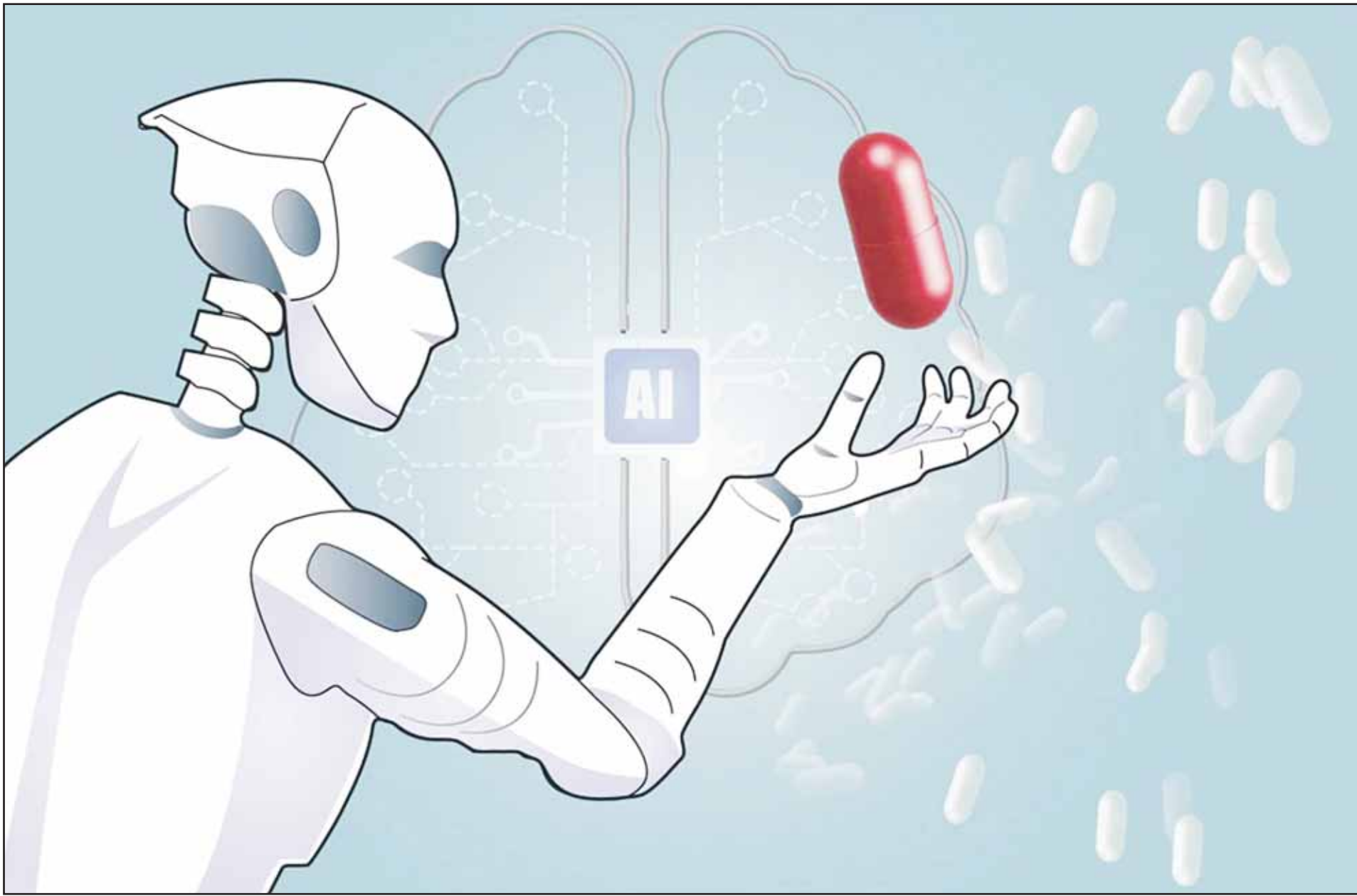


This combination image shows signage of Chipotle restaurant Feb. 8, 2016, Walmart store, in Walpole, Mass., Sept. 3, 2019, McDonald's restaurant on April 29, 2024, in Albany, Ore., a Target store sign is shown in Amherst, N.Y., Aug. 18, 2009. (AP)



Concerns over AI replacing jobs in creative industries

Generative AI faces challenges amid growing expectations



Artificial intelligence illustration. (AP)

SAN FRANCISCO, Dec. 31 (AP): If 2023 was a year of wonder about artificial intelligence, 2024 was the year to try to get that wonder to do something useful without breaking the bank.

There was a "shift from putting out models to actually building products," said Arvind Narayanan, a Princeton University computer science professor and co-author of the new book "AI Snake Oil: What Artificial Intelligence Can Do, What It Can't, and How to Tell The Difference."

The first 100 million or so people who experimented with ChatGPT upon its release two years ago actively sought out the chatbot, finding it amazingly helpful at some tasks or laughably mediocre at others.

Now such generative AI technology is baked into an increasing number of technology services whether we're looking for it or not - for instance, through the AI-generated answers in Google search results or new AI techniques in photo editing tools.

"The main thing that was wrong with generative AI last year is that companies were releasing these really powerful models without a concrete way for people to make use of them," said Narayanan. "What we're seeing this year is gradually building out these products that can take advantage of those capabilities and do useful things for people."

At the same time, since OpenAI released GPT-4 in March 2023 and competitors introduced similarly performing AI large language models, these models have stopped getting significantly "bigger and qualitatively better," resetting overblown expectations that AI was racing every few months to some kind of better-than-human intelligence, Narayanan said. That's also meant that the public discourse has shifted from "is AI going to kill us?" to treating it like a normal technology, he said.

On quarterly earnings calls this year, tech executives often heard questions from Wall Street analysts looking for assurances of future payoffs from huge spending on AI research and development. Building AI systems behind generative AI tools like OpenAI's ChatGPT or Google's Gemini requires investing in energy-hungry computing systems running on powerful and expensive AI chips. They require so much electricity that tech giants announced deals this year to tap into nuclear power to help run them.

"We're talking about hundreds of billions of dollars of capital that has been poured into this technology," said Goldman Sachs analyst Kash Rangan.

Another analyst at the New York investment bank drew attention over the summer by arguing AI

isn't solving the complex problems that would justify its costs. He also questioned whether AI models, even as they're being trained on much of the written and visual data produced over the course of human history, will ever be able to do what humans do so well. Rangan has a more optimistic view.

"We had this fascination that this technology is just going to be absolutely revolutionary, which it has not been in the two years since the introduction of ChatGPT," Rangan said. "It's more expensive than we thought and it's not as productive as we thought."

Rangan, however, is still bullish about its potential and says that AI tools are already proving "absolutely incrementally more productive" in sales, design and a number of other professions.

Some workers wonder whether AI tools will be used to supplement their work or to replace them as the technology continues to grow. The tech company Borderless AI has been using an AI chatbot from Cohere to write up employment contracts for workers in Turkey or India without the help of outside lawyers or translators.

Video game performers with the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists who went on strike in July said they feared AI could reduce or

eliminate job opportunities because it could be used to replicate one performance into a number of other movements without their consent. Concerns about how movie studios will use AI helped fuel last year's film and television strikes by the union, which lasted four months. Game companies have also signed side agreements with the union that codify certain AI protections in order to keep working with actors during the strike.

Musicians and authors have voiced similar concerns over AI scraping their voices and books. But generative AI still can't create unique work or "completely new things," said Walid Saad, a professor of electrical and computer engineering and AI expert at Virginia Tech.

"We can train it with more data so it has more information. But having more information doesn't mean you're more creative," he said. "As humans, we understand the world around us, right? We understand the physics. You understand if you throw a ball on the ground, it's going to bounce. AI tools currently don't understand the world."

Saad pointed to a meme about AI as an example of that shortcoming. When someone prompted an AI engine to create an image of salmon swimming in a river, he said, the AI created a photo of a river with cut pieces of salmon found in grocery

stores.

"What AI lacks today is the common sense that humans have, and I think that is the next step," he said.

That type of reasoning is a key part of the process of making AI tools more useful to consumers, said Vijoy Pandey, senior vice president of Cisco's innovation and incubation arm, Outshift. AI developers are increasingly pitching the next wave of generative AI chatbots as AI "agents" that can do more useful things on people's behalf.

That could mean being able to ask an AI agent an ambiguous question and have the model able to reason and plan out steps to solving an ambitious problem, Pandey said. A lot of technology, he said, is going to move in that direction in 2025.

Pandey predicts that eventually, AI agents will be able to come together and perform a job the way multiple people come together and solve a problem as a team rather than simply accomplishing tasks as individual AI tools. The AI agents of the future will work as an ensemble, he said.

Future Bitcoin software, for example, will likely rely on the use of AI software agents, Pandey said. Those agents will each have a specialty, he said, with "agents that check for correctness, agents that check for security, agents that check for scale."

"We're getting to an agentic future," he said. "You're going to have all these agents being very good at certain skills, but also have a little bit of a character or color to them, because that's how we operate."

AI tools have also streamlined, or lent in some cases a literal helping hand, to the medical field. This year's Nobel Prize in chemistry - one of two Nobels awarded to AI-related science - went to work led by Google that could help discover new medicines.

Saad, the Virginia Tech professor, said that AI has helped bring faster diagnostics by quickly giving doctors a starting point to launch from when determining a patient's care. AI can't detect disease, he said, but it can quickly digest data and point out potential problem areas for a real doctor to investigate. As with other arenas, however, it poses a risk of perpetuating falsehoods.

Tech giant OpenAI has touted its AI-powered transcription tool Whisper as having near "human level robustness and accuracy," for example. But experts have said that Whisper has a major flaw: It is prone to making up chunks of text or even entire sentences.

Pandey, of Cisco, said that some of the company's customers who work in pharmaceuticals have noted that AI has helped bridge the divide between "wet labs," in which humans conduct physical experiments and research, and "dry labs" where people analyze data and often use computers for modeling.

When it comes to pharmaceutical development, that collaborative process can take several years, he said - with AI, the process can be cut to a few days.

"That, to me, has been the most dramatic use," Pandey said.

AI lacks human creativity and common sense

Inflation declines, but Fed's 2% target remains elusive

Economists optimistic for 2025 economic growth despite risks

By D. Brian Blank

Mississippi State University

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

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Brian Blank is a finance scholar and Fed watcher who researches how companies navigate downturns and make financial decisions, as well as how markets process information. Brandy Hadley is a finance professor who leads a student-managed investment fund and studies corporate decision-making and incentives. Together, they're also the resident economic oracles at The Conversation U.S., and their forecast for 2024 held up notably well. Here, they explain what to expect from 2025.

Heading into 2024, we said the U.S. economy would likely continue growing, in spite of pundits' forecast that a recession would strike. The past year showcased strong economic growth, moderating inflation, and efficiency gains, leading most economists and the financial press to stop expecting a downturn.

But what economists call "soft landings" - when an economy slows just enough to curb inflation, but not enough to cause a recession - are only soft until they aren't.

As we turn to 2025, we're optimistic the economy will keep growing. But that's not without some caveats. Here are the key questions and risks we're watching as the U.S.

rings in the new year.

Some people expected a downturn in 2022 - and again in 2023 and 2024 - due to the Federal Reserve's hawkish interest-rate decisions. The Fed raised rates rapidly in 2022 and held them high throughout 2023 and much of 2024. But in the last four months of 2024, the Fed slashed rates three times - most recently on Dec. 18.

While the recent rate cuts mark a strategic shift, the pace of future cuts is expected to slow in 2024, as Fed Chair Jerome Powell suggested at the December meeting of the Federal Open Market Committee. Markets have expected this change of pace for some time, but some economists remain concerned about heightened risks of an economic slowdown.

When Fed policymakers set short-term interest rates, they consider whether inflation and unemployment are too high or low, which affects whether they should stimulate the economy or pump the brakes.

The interest rate that neither stimulates nor restricts economic activity, often referred to as R* or the neutral rate, is unknown, which makes the Fed's job challenging.

However, the terminal rate - which is where Fed policymakers expect rates will settle in for the long run - is now at 3%, which is the highest since 2016. This has led futures markets to wonder if a hiking cycle may be coming into focus, while others ask if the era of low rates is over.

This shift in the Federal Reserve's approach underscores a key uncertainty for 2025: While some economists

are concerned the recent uptick in unemployment may continue, others worry about sticky inflation. The Fed's challenge will be striking the right balance - continuing to support economic activity while ensuring inflation, currently hovering around 2.4%, doesn't reignite.

We do anticipate that interest rates will stay elevated amid slowing inflation, which remains above the Fed's 2% target rate. Still, we're optimistic this high-rate environment won't weigh too heavily on consumers and the economy.

While gross domestic product growth for the third quarter was revised up to 3.1% and the fourth quarter is projected to grow similarly quickly, in 2025 it could finally show signs of slowing from its recent pace. However, we expect it to continue to exceed consensus forecasts of 2.2% and longer-run expectations of 2%.

While inflation has declined from 9.1% in June 2022 to less than 3%, the Federal Reserve's 2% target remains elusive.

Amid this backdrop, several new risks loom on the horizon. Key among them are potential tariff increases, which could disrupt trade, push up the prices of goods and even strengthen the U.S. dollar.

The average effective U.S. tariff rate is 2%, but even a fivefold increase to 10% could escalate trade tensions, create economic challenges and complicate inflation forecasts. Consider that, historically, every 1% increase in tariff rates has resulted in a 0.1% higher annual

inflation rate, on average.

Still, we hope tariffs serve as more of a negotiating tactic for the incoming administration than an actual policy proposal.

Tariffs are just one of several proposals from the incoming Trump administration that present further uncertainty. Stricter immigration policies could create labor shortages and increase prices, while government spending cuts could weigh down economic growth.

Tax cuts - a likely policy focus - may offset some risk and spur growth, especially if coupled with productivity-enhancing investments. However, tax cuts may also result in a growing budget deficit, which is another risk to the longer-term economic outlook.

Count us as two financial economists hoping only certain inflation measures

fall slower than expected, and everyone's expectations for future inflation remain low. If so, the Federal Reserve should be able to look beyond short-term changes in inflation and focus on metrics that are more useful for predicting long-term inflation.

Labor markets have softened but remain resilient.

Hiring rates are normalizing, while layoffs and unemployment - 4.2%, up from 3.7% at the start of 2024 - remain low despite edging up. The U.S. economy could remain resilient into 2025, with continued growth in real incomes bolstering purchasing power. This income growth has supported consumer sen-

timent and reduced inequality, since low-income households have seen the greatest benefits.

However, elevated debt balances, given increased consumer spending, suggest some Americans are under financial stress even though income growth has outpaced increases in consumer debt.

While a higher unemployment rate is a concern, this risk to date appears limited, potentially due to labor hoarding - which is when employers are afraid to let go of employees they no longer require due to the difficulty in hiring new workers. Higher unemployment is also an issue the Fed has the tools to address - if it must.

This leaves us cautiously optimistic that resilient consumers will continue to retain jobs, supporting their growing purchasing power.

The outlook for 2025 remains promising, with continued economic growth driven by resilient consumer spending, steady job markets, and less restrictive monetary policy.

Yet current price targets for stocks are at historic highs for a post-rally period, which is surprising and may offer reasons for caution. Higher-for-longer interest rates could put pressure on corporate debt levels and rate-sensitive sectors, such as housing and utilities.

Corporate earnings, however, remain strong, buoyed by cost savings and productivity gains. Stock performance may be subdued, but underperforming or discounted stocks could rebound, presenting opportunities for gains in 2025. (AP)

Corporate earnings and AI lead optimism for 2025 stock market

2024 GCC HSE Excellence Awards ceremony held

ASSP Kuwait honors top HSE performers in the Gulf



A collage of photos from the event.



Photos from the event.



KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP) – Kuwait Chapter organized its annual prestigious ASSP Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) HSE Excellence Awards ceremony. This esteemed recognition aims to celebrate and honor private sector companies that demonstrates exceptional leadership, commitment and innovation in advancing Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) standards across the Gulf Region. This awards not only highlights their outstanding achievements but also inspires others to strive for excellence, fostering a culture of safety and sustainability throughout the region.

The awards ceremony of ASSP GCC HSE Excellence awards 2024 held in collaboration with Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) at KOC Tent, Ahmadi, Kuwait. The program was patronized by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), its subsidiaries and endorsed by Board of Certified Safety Professionals (BCSP), International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC), supported by International Regulatory agencies like by International Powered Access Federation (IPAF), Knowledge partner as Gulf Downstream Association (GDA).

The event was graced by several distinguished personalities with their esteemed presence, including:

1. Naser Al-Habab, Manager HSSE, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC)
2. Yousef Al-Qallaf, team leader HSE North Kuwait, Kuwait Oil Company (KOC)
3. Jumah Bashier, team leader Drilling 5 (N&WK), Kuwait Oil Company (KOC)
4. Zainab Hussain, team leader E&SC, Kuwait Oil Company (KOC)
5. Abdulrahman Al Hajri, team leader HSE Marine, Kuwait Oil Company (KOC)
6. Mohammed Al Rashidi, team leader Project Management 33, Kuwait Oil Company (KOC)
7. Abdulaziz Sadeq Mohammad Sadeq, Team Leader HSE, Mina Ahmadi, Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC)
8. Yousef Al Shamamri Snr. Drilling Engineer, Kuwait Oil Company (KOC)
9. Elyas, Past Section Head Operations, MAA Refinery, Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC)

Additionally, numerous other dignitaries from oil sector companies across the GCC, along with other distinguished guests, attended the event.

The inaugural ceremony was presided over by Engr. Fadhel Al Ali, Chairman of ASSP Kuwait Chapter, Engr. Faris Al Mansouri, Director & Engr. Ahmad Eissa Al-Shatti, team leader KOC and Deputy Director of the ASSP GCC HSE Excellence Awards; and Engr. Bader Mubarak Al-Hadhrami, President of ASSP Kuwait Chapter for 2024-2025.

Engr. Fadhel Al Ali, Chairman of the ASSP Kuwait Chapter, warmly welcomed all the attendees and extended his heartfelt appreciations to KPC management for their patronage and acknowledged the invaluable support of KPC, KOC, KNPC, and KIPIC management. He expressed gratitude for the remarkable participation from private companies across Kuwait and the GCC region.

The Chairman highlighted the event's pivotal role in transforming organizational attitudes toward HSE commitment, fostering a culture of excellence and sustainability in the region. In his concluding remarks, he commended the dedication and tireless efforts of the ASSP Kuwait Chapter's volunteer team and lauded the exceptional leadership of Engr. Faris Al-Mansouri and Engr. Ahmad Al-Shatti for making the event a grand success.

Engr. Faris Al Mansouri, Director of the ASSP GCC HSE Excellence Awards



A combo photo from the event.

2024, delivered a heartfelt welcome address, expressing his gratitude to all the participating companies. He emphasized the importance of embedding HSE culture as a core value within the industry, underscoring that safety must always remain a top priority. He highlighted the need for strong organizational support to empower employees in promoting a robust HSE culture.

Engr. Faris Al Mansouri also emphasized on the continual growth in participation from across the Middle East since the awards' inception in 2009, signifying the region's increasing commitment to HSE excellence. In his concluding remarks, he extended his appreciation to KPC and its subsidiaries for their unwavering patronage, commended the Evaluation Committee for upholding high standards, and acknowledged the dedication of all members involved in organizing the awards program.

Engr. Ahmad Al-Shatti, Deputy Director of the ASSP GCC HSE Excellence Awards 2024, provided an insightful overview of the GCC Awards Program, accompanied by the unveiling an engaging video capsule. He congratulated and extended his best wishes to all the winner companies, commended their commitment towards creating safe and healthy work environments, upholding high industrial standards, and achieving exceptional performance.

Engr. Al-Shatti expressed heartfelt gratitude to the organizing team, Core committee members, Evaluation Committee members, and Chapter Administrative officers for their dedication and hard work in making the event successful. He also took the opportunity to encourage companies for their active participation in the ASSP GCC Awards Program 2024, fostering a continuous journey toward HSE excellence.

Engr. Bader Al-Hadhrami, President of the ASSP Kuwait Chapter for 2024-2025,

emphasized that a steadfast commitment to HSE excellence serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration for the industry. He extended an invitation to professionals and speakers to submit their abstracts for the 12th ASSP PDC Conference & Expo, scheduled to take place on the 7th and 8th of May 2025.

Engr. Bader Al-Hadhrami also encouraged executives from various companies and organizations to actively participate in the event and seize the opportunity to gain recognition within the HSE fraternity, fostering collaboration and progress in the field. A special address was delivered by representatives of the supporting organizations, the Board of Certified Safety Professionals (BCSP) and the International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC). Mrs. Kavita Prabhu, representing BCSP, delivered an inspiring speech, while BCSP President M. Ashok Garlapati graced the event with his presence. Hisham Zebian, representing IADC, spoke about the awards program and highlighted IADC's initiatives in advancing safety standards.

Following the opening ceremony, Engr. Fadhel Al Ali, Engr. Faris Al Mansouri, and Mr. Bader Al Bader officially commenced the Awards program. Together, they distributed awards to the successful companies, recognizing their achievements in various categories, including Platinum, Gold, Gold Medal (awarded to the companies achieving Gold award for five consecutive years), Silver, and Merit awards.

A total of 51 companies from the GCC countries participated and won a total of 81 awards in the following categories:

1. HSE Excellence
2. Best Corporate Social Responsibility Program
3. Environment Excellence
4. Best HSE Initiative
5. Best Management of Driving Safety
6. Best Risk Management

All the above submissions were meticulously evaluated by a professional team of adjudicators to ensure fairness and accuracy in the selection process.

Following the awards ceremony, Engr. Fadhel Al Ali, Chairman of the ASSP Kuwait Chapter, Engr. Faris Al Mansouri, Director and Engr. Ahmad Al-Shatti, Deputy Director, extended their appreciation by recognizing the efforts of the EC Core Committee, the ASSP GCC HSE Excellence Awards organizing committee members, and the administrative staff. Each was honored with ASSP-branded memento as a token of gratitude for their dedication and contributions towards the success of the event.

The closing ceremony of the event was conducted by Mohammad Yusuff, Vice President of the ASSP Kuwait Chapter for 2024-2025. In his vote of thanks, he expressed gratitude for the overwhelming response from companies in Kuwait and across the GCC. He acknowledged the contributions of all ASSP volunteers, as well as the supporting and endorsing organizations, for their efforts in making the program a resounding success.

Engr. Noor Adel Al-Sadi and Engr. Heba Al gracefully facilitated the awards ceremony. Special thanks were extended to the exhibitors, including Raja Trading Company, Safety & Fire, Fares & Dabbous, Dalian International, ISN Software, Solas Marine Services Group, Bright International Co. and Mahatta Trading Co., for their valuable participation. Mr. Yusuff also expressed heartfelt appreciation to the volunteers who dedicated their personal time to ensure the success of the event. He commended the event organizing team from VCONEX, led by Mohammad Riaz, for their flawless execution and production of the program.



Photos from the event.



Kuwait Tamil People's Service Center holds 6th annual blood donation camp

The Kuwait Tamil People's Service Center organized the 6th annual Blood Donation Camp recently.

This event was held successfully with the esteemed presence of the prominent Kuwaiti lawyer, Lawyer Sultan Al Hatlani, Andhra social worker Jinker

Murali, and Siba Hospital Manager Gunasekaran Pillai, among others.

Some Tamil organizers and a few political representatives also participated. The event witnessed an attendance of approximately 360 people, of which 132 were deemed eligible and donated blood, which is noteworthy.

Under the leadership of Abdul Rahman, the President of the Kuwait Tamil People's Service Center, along with Secretary Gautham, volunteer Ali Bhai, and other administrators, the event turned out to be a grand success. It stands as a moment of pride for Indians, especially Tamils.



A group photo from the event.

Event highlights his legacy

OICC-Kuwait holds condolence meeting for late former Indian PM Dr. Manmohan Singh

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The Overseas Indian Cultural Congress (OICC-Kuwait) organized a condolence meeting for the late former Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh on Saturday, 28th December 2024, at the United Indian School in Abbasiya. The meeting, chaired by B.S. Pillai, General Secretary and Organization In-Charge, began with a tribute to the renowned writer M.T. Vasudevan Nair. "Dr. Manmohan Singh was one of the greatest economists and statesmen India has been privileged to have at the helm of affairs, serving as Prime Minister for two terms," Pillai said in his presidential address.

Farooq Hamadani, Vice President of KMCC, highlighted Manmohan Singh's strategy that empowering rural populations was key to alleviating poverty. "He was instrumental in guiding India out of the global economic crisis during his tenure as Finance Minister in Narasimha Rao's cabinet," Hamadani stated.

OICC official Krishnan Kadalundi shared a condolence message emphasizing Manmohan Singh's legacy, which included initiatives such as Mahatma Gandhi's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which opened opportunities for thousands of housewives.

KMCC Kozhikode District President Azeez Thikkodi, OICC National Secretary Nissam Thiruvananthapuram, and Lulu Exchange official Shafaz Ahmad Fazal also attended the event.

Representatives from OICC's district and affiliate organizations, including Binoy Chandran, Surendran Moongath, Anoop Soman, Shobin Sunny, Bathar Vaikom, Sabu Paul, Ayy Pathanamthitta, Al Ameen, Mathew Maranad, Wilson Batherly, Chinnu Roy, Anil Cheemini, Vineesh Pallak, Anil Kurlan, Reji Koruth, Ismail Malappuram, Babu Abraham, A.I. Kurian, and Nasser, extended their condolence messages during the meeting.

One of Hollywood's longest divorces ends

Jolie and Pitt reach divorce settlement after 8 years

LOS ANGELES, Dec. 31, (AP): Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt have reached a divorce settlement, apparently ending one of the longest and most contentious divorces in Hollywood history.

Jolie and Pitt signed off on a default declaration filed in Los Angeles Superior Court on Monday, saying they have entered into a written agreement on their marital and property rights. The settlement was first reported by People magazine.

"More than eight years ago, Angelina filed for divorce from Mr. Pitt," Jolie's attorney, James Simon, said in a statement. "She and the children left all of the properties they had shared with Mr. Pitt, and since that time she has focused on finding peace and healing for their family. This is just one part of a long ongoing process that started eight years ago. Frankly, Angelina is exhausted, but she is relieved this one part is over."

The filing says they give up the right to any future spousal financial support, but gives no other details. A judge will need to sign off on the agreement. An email late Monday night to Pitt's attorney seeking comment was not immediately answered.

Jolie, 49, and Pitt, 61, were among Hollywood's most prominent pairings for 12 years, two of them as a



Angelina Jolie Pitt and Brad Pitt pose for a photo at the WSJ Magazine Innovator Awards 2015 at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, on Nov. 4, 2015. (AP)

married couple. The Oscar winners have six children together.

Jolie filed for divorce in 2016, after a private jet flight from Europe during which she said Pitt was abusive toward her and their children. The FBI and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services investigated Pitt's actions on the flight and deemed no action needed to be taken against him.

A judge in 2019 declared them divorced and single, but the splitting of assets and child custody needed to be separately settled.

Soon after, a private judge that the two had hired to handle the case reached a decision that included equal custody of their children, but Jolie filed to have him removed from the case over an unreported conflict of interest. An appeals court agreed,

the judge was removed, and the couple had to start the process over.

During the long divorce fight, four of the couple's six children became adults, negating the need for a custody agreement for them. The only two that remain minors are 16-year-old twins Knox and Vivienne. In June, one of their daughters, then known as Shiloh Nouvel Jolie-Pitt, successfully petitioned to remove Pitt's name from hers.

Their other children are 23-year-old Maddox, 21-year-old Pax and 19-year-old Zahara.

Private

The couple's use of the private judge - an increasingly common move among splitting celebrities in recent years - has kept the proceedings and details of the divorce largely under wraps. There have been no official court actions in the case in nearly a year, and no indication that the two had been nearing an agreement.

Some elements of their disputes, however, have been revealed through a separate lawsuit filed by Pitt over Jolie's sale of her half of a French winery the two owned together. Pitt had wanted to buy her half of the winery, Chateau Miraval, and said she abandoned their negotiations and sold her part to the Tenute del Mondo wine group, a subsidiary

of the Stoli Group. Pitt said it was a "vindictive" and "unlawful" move that should not have been made without his consent and ruined a private space that had been a second home.

Jolie's attorneys said that Pitt had demanded she sign a wide-ranging non-disclosure agreement about him as part of the proposed deal. In court documents, she called that an attempt to cover up his physical abuse of her, which she said turned toward the children on the 2016 flight.

Along with the federal and L.A. County officials, the initial judge in the case heard testimony on the allegations before deciding to give Pitt equal custody of the children.

The divorce agreement does not affect the winery lawsuit, where the legal battle between the two stars could continue.

Publicly, both Pitt and Jolie have been extremely tight-lipped on everything surrounding their split, despite robust promotional tours and many media appearances for various projects.

Pitt said in a 2017 interview with GQ that he had had a drinking problem at the time of the plane incident and the split, but had since become sober and was going to therapy. He has not defended his behavior on the family flight.

Jolie has also declined to make any

public statements about the family issues or the divorce, though she has sought a broader examination and airing of his behavior by the courts in both the divorce and winery cases.

Both were among the most elite stars in film when they began dating in 2004, after co-starring as hitman-and-hitwoman spouses in "Mr. and Mrs. Smith," and remained atop the Hollywood A-list throughout their coupling. The daughter of Hollywood luminary Jon Voight and the star of "Maleficent" and "Lara Croft: Tomb Raider," Jolie won an Oscar for her performance in 1999's "Girl, Interrupted."

Pitt, the star of "Fight Club" and "Inglourious Basterds," thrived as both actor and producer after the split. He won his own Academy Award for 2019's "Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood," the crowning achievement in an awards season that some in media framed as a redemption and brought major public affection for him.

Jolie kept a less visible profile in the years since the divorce, though she directed several films and appeared in several more while trying to focus on raising the children. She has very much returned to the Oscar conversation this year for her portrayal of the legendary soprano Maria Callas in "Maria."

Culture

New Year

Variety

Digitization

Türkiye saves ancient works

ISTANBUL, Dec. 31, (Xinhua): Türkiye has made extensive efforts in manuscript restoration and digitization to safeguard invaluable historical treasures and ensure the preservation of centuries-old works for future generations, a Turkish expert has said.

Specializing in restoration and art history at the Turkish Manuscripts Institution, Nil Baydar, head of the organization's Conservation and Archive Department, has dedicated nearly 35 years to preserving Türkiye's priceless manuscript collection.

In an interview with Xinhua, Baydar explained how her institution oversees around 300,000 manuscripts, or some 250,000 volumes, housed in libraries across Türkiye. These ancient works, some dating back centuries, are meticulously tended with urgent repairs managed at the institution's conservatory.

The preservation of these historical works relies on a careful blend of traditional craftsmanship and modern technology, she said.

"The restoration begins with cleaning and pest eradication. If the manuscripts have been attacked by insects, we use a shock-freezing process at minus 40 degrees Celsius to eliminate them," she said. Each manuscript undergoes a thorough analysis, with restoration efforts tailored to its specific condition and urgency.

Manuscripts

Currently, 98 percent of Türkiye's manuscripts have been digitized and are accessible online. However, Baydar deemed physical preservation essential.

"We must preserve these manuscripts physically to protect the tangible evidence of our civilization," she said. "While digitization is crucial, if digital data were lost or become inaccessible, we would have to rely on the physical copies once again."

Some manuscripts, preserved for over a thousand years, contain elements of ancient materials, such as fibers, threads, and leather, that cannot be digitized or replicated in digital form.

"The dedication to both physical conservation and digital preservation reflects the nation's commitment to safeguarding its cultural legacy for the world," said the expert.

Many of the manuscripts preserved by the institution highlight the historical importance of the Silk Road.

"The manuscripts, mostly from the Ottoman Empire period, cover a wide range of topics such as geography, history, religion, trade, and culture," the expert noted.

One notable example is the renowned Ottoman traveler Evliya Celebi's travelogue, which offers a comprehensive vivid account of his journeys across the Ottoman Empire and beyond in the 17th century with ample details about the cultures, customs, landscapes, and people he encountered.

Some works, she said, placed a particular focus on China. "These include travelogues, geographical texts, and historical accounts, shedding light on its life, culture, and trade."



New Year's Eve preparations are underway in Times Square in New York, Monday, Dec. 30, 2024. (AP)

Times Square ball takes final test for New Year's Eve

The crystal-covered ball that descends down a pole in Times Square to ring in the new year was taken for a test run Monday, as New York City officials laid out their plans for the iconic New Year's Eve event.

Officials flipped a switch to light up the dazzling geodesic sphere - weighing almost 6 tons (5.4 metric tons) and featuring 2,688 crystal triangles - which then successfully ran up and down a 139-foot (42-meter) pole atop the One Times Square skyscraper.

Monday's rehearsal was just one of many pre-ball drop promotional events: On Sunday, fests

of confetti were flung toward crowds in the square in anticipation of the 3,000 pounds (1,360 kilograms) of brightly colored paper that will fill the air at midnight on New Year's Eve. Some of those pieces will include wishes written by people ahead of 2025.

"This is the crossroads of the entire planet right here in New York City," New York City Mayor Eric Adams said earlier Monday as he and law enforcement leaders discussed their plans for security at the celebration. "People tune in at different locations and celebrate as we do the countdown for the New Year."

Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said that although there were "no specific credible threats" to the Times Square celebrations, "the public can expect to see a tremendous amount of police resources deployed throughout the area and across the city." Plans range from "dedicated pickpocket teams" patrolling the square to sealing off all mailboxes and vending machines in the area.

A New Year's Eve ball has dropped in Times Square for nearly 120 years, with the exception of 1942 and 1943 when nightly "dimouts" occurred during World War II to protect the city from attacks. (AP)

Award celebrates contributions to British society

Mulligan, Ishiguro on UK's New Year Honors list

LONDON, Dec. 31, (AP): Actors Carey Mulligan and Stephen Fry and author Kazuo Ishiguro were awarded New Year Honors on Monday that celebrate artists, athletes, politicians and others who make notable contributions to British society.

Mulligan, a winner of a British Academy of Film and Television Arts award for "An Education" and a three-time Oscar nominee, was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her services to drama.

Fry, known for the BBC comedy "Blackadder" and his former comedic partnership with Hugh Laurie, was knighted along with England's former soccer manager Gareth Southgate and London Mayor Sadiq Khan.

More than 1,200 across the United Kingdom were honored in the semi-annual awards - with most going to those whose acts happen outside the spotlight cast on the famous and well known.

"Each and every day, ordinary people go out and do extraordinary things for their communities," Prime Minister Keir Starmer said. "They represent the very best of the U.K. ... The New Year Honors List celebrates more of these unsung heroes,

and I thank them for their incredible contribution."

The awards given out by monarchs as part of orders of chivalry since the Middle Ages are now vetted by a government committee before being passed on to the prime minister and King Charles III.

Fry said he was "startled and enchanted" to receive the honor for his work raising awareness about mental health and the environment. The author of several books in addition to his screen work, he is also president of the mental health charity Mind and supporter of the conservation group Fauna and Flora International.

"I think of my childhood, and my dreadful unhappiness and misery and stupidity, and everything that led to so many failures as a child," he said. "And for my parents, really, what a disaster. I mean every time the phone rang, they thought, 'Oh, God, what has Stephen done now?' It was a sort of joke in the family."

Nobel Prize-winning novelist Ishiguro, who wrote "The Remains of the Day" and was previously knighted, was made a Companion of Honor for literature.

Three-time London mayor and the

son of a bus driver who grew up in public housing and was previously elected to Parliament, Khan said he was "truly humbled" by the honor.

Khan has infuriated some motorists by expanding a policy that taxes drivers of higher-polluting vehicles and was the subject of a petition by a



Carey Mulligan poses for a portrait to promote the film "Maestro" on Dec. 13, 2023 at The Maybourne Beverly Hills in Beverly Hills, Calif. (AP)

Conservative councilor opposing his knighthood that gathered 200,000 signatures this month.

In addition to Southgate, who led the Three Lions to the finals of Euro 2020 and 2024, and the semi-final of the 2018 World Cup, several athletes were recognized, particularly for Olympic successes.

Keely Hodgkinson, who won the gold medal in the 800 meter track race in Paris, and Dina Asher-Smith, a three-time Olympic medalist who was the 200 meter world champion in 2019, were honored as Members of the Order of the British Empire, or MBE.

Two-time Olympic mountain bike champ Tom Pidcock, who has also been cyclocross world champ and won major road cycling races, was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire, or OBE.

The youngest recipients were Mikayla Beames, who was awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) for raising money for children with cancer, and swimmer William Ellard, two-time Paralympic gold medalist, made an MBE. Both are 18.

The oldest person was Colin Bell, 103, a World War II pilot awarded a BEM for public speaking and raising money for charity.

VIENNA: Anna Netrebko has withdrawn from her planned role debut in Strauss' "Ariadne auf Naxos" at the Vienna State Opera and been replaced by Lise Daviden in a switch of star sopranos.

"Ill health this month compromised the preparation time required before starting rehearsals just after the new year," Netrebko said in a statement Monday. "I am sad that I will not be interpreting this incredible new role but, because of the time unexpectedly lost, I am unable to prepare it to the standard I demand of myself."

Netrebko opened the season at Milan's Teatro alla Scala with six performances as Leonora in Verdi's "La Forza del Destino" from Dec. 7-22.

Daviden made her Ariadne role debut at England's Glyndebourne Festival in 2017. She will take over from Netrebko for four performances from Jan. 21-31 in a cast that includes Michael Spyres, Kate Lindsey and Sara Blanch, with conductor Cornelius Meister. (AP)

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BUENOS AIRES, Argentina: An Argentine judge confirmed charges against five people in connection with the death of Liam Payne, a former member of musical group One Direction, and ordered preventive prison for two of them for having supplied him with drugs.

A judicial officer confirmed Monday the judge's decision and said that one of the two people ordered to be put under preventive prison - a form of pre-trial detention - was an employee of the hotel in Buenos Aires where Payne stayed until he died after falling from the balcony of his room in October.

The officer said the other person was a waiter Payne met in a restaurant. The officer, who requested not to be identified as a condition to talk about the ruling, said that both face charges for supplying drugs and they need to present themselves before the judge.

The judge also charged three other people with manslaughter, including a businessman who was with Payne in Argentina and two managers of the hotel. The official said that they were not ordered to be held under preventive prison.

In November, prosecutors filed initial charges against three people, but they didn't reveal their names. (AP)

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BEIJING: Chinese leaders attended a 2025 New Year gala featuring traditional operas Monday evening in Beijing.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, other Party and state leaders including Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi and Han Zheng watched the show at the National Centre for the Performing Arts, alongside people from all walks of life in Beijing.

Before the performances started, Xi and other leaders shook hands with and greeted representatives of artists from the opera circle who were in the audience.

The show featured excerpts of classic operas that illustrate heroism and a love for China, as well as works highlighting contemporary ethos and vibrant ethnic cultures.

The excerpts were selected from various genres of opera, including Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera, both listed as intangible cultural heritage by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (Xinhua)

Positive thinking can boost your motivation to keep resolutions

Making resolutions? Here's how to make them stick

LONDON, Dec 31, (AP): As the new year dawns, so too does the opportunity for change.

Experts say January can be a good time to reflect on self-improvement, but acknowledge it takes work to make resolutions stick.

Studies have shown that up to 70% of people who make New Year's resolutions abandon those good intentions within months.

Here are some tips for how to keep those resolutions when your willpower starts to falter.

Psychologist Lynn Bufka suggests being realistic about any resolutions. "It's quite daunting to say that you want to lose 50 pounds and thus, will never eat dessert again," she said. "It might be more helpful to say, you're only going to have dessert on the weekends and for special occasions."

Behavioral health experts recommend breaking ambitious goals into smaller targets, like swapping at least one snack for fruit and vegetables or getting some exercise for 10 minutes every day. Once you start hitting these smaller goals, the bigger one might not seem so daunting.

It's tough to make big changes. Bufka said that simply thinking more positively about what your ultimate goal is - and what you're gaining from your changed behavior - can bolster your motivation.

"If I put money in a jar for what I would have spent on chocolate every day,

that starts to add up," explained Bufka, deputy chief of research and policy at the American Psychological Association.

Focusing on what the resolution is helping you to accomplish - rather than what you're being deprived of - can be a powerful way to reframe your thinking, experts say.

A study of New Year's resolutions published in 2020 found that people who focus on specific goals are more successful than those simply trying to kick bad habits.

Self-improvement

In a group of more than 1,000 people, scientists found the most popular resolutions involved exercise, weight loss and eating habits. Other resolutions focused on self-improvement, personal finance issues and ways to focus on mental health and reduce stress.

Among the 55% of people who said they'd kept their resolutions after one year, nearly 60% of them had made resolutions involving goals versus 47% of those focused on avoiding certain behaviors.

Involving others in your efforts, both for support and to hold yourself accountable, may also help. Someone who decides to start exercising more, for example, might find it useful to join a running group or find a gym class with friends, to

make training less of a chore.

Experts also recommended scheduling time into your calendar to help you keep your resolution, like blocking off a specific period every morning or evening.

Change is hard, so don't expect perfection. There will inevitably be times when it feels impossible to keep your resolution or you want to give up.

"A great resolution might be, 'I will be less judgmental with myself,'" said Tamara Russell of the British Psychological Society. "Research shows that the more we develop self-compassion, the more compassionate we can become towards others."

Lastly, if Jan. 1 feels like an artificial date to adopt new resolutions, make the changes on your own schedule.

Russell said it makes "no sense at all" to make resolutions pegged to the calendar year, given that winter is typically a time of hibernation for much of the natural world.

She said that spring, as a season of growth and renewal, might be a better time for most people to embrace change.

To better keep resolutions, Russell suggests reviewing each week what has and hasn't worked.

"Keep refining and don't be afraid to adjust and fine-tune what you are doing," she said. "Study your own behavior like a scientist."



This photo provided by the Shanghai Astronomical Observatory of the Chinese Academy of Sciences shows a radio telescope with 40-meter-diameter antenna in Changbai Mountain area in northeast China's Jilin Province on Dec. 23, 2024. (AP)

China's first space report

India launches satellites in space docking experiment

NEW DELHI, Dec 31, (Agencies): India came closer to joining an elite group of nations with space docking technology as Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) successfully placed two satellites in intended orbit on Monday as part of its (SpaDeX) mission.

Chairman of ISRO S. Somanath announced that the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C60) placed two satellites of Space Docking Experiment and 24 other payloads in the intended orbit. "I announce the successful launch of the PSLV-C60 for the SpaDeX mission."

The rocket has placed the satellites in the right orbit. Congratulations to the entire team of the PSLV project who put the satellites in the right orbit.

Also, the Spadex team which worked in a very innovative, novel, cost-effective docking demonstration mission using two small satellite bus architectures," Somanath said.

The rocket lifted off at 10:00:15 PM (Local Time) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota in South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

If the mission succeeds, India will join the US, Russia and China having achieved the space docking technology.

"SpaDeX (Space Docking Experiment) is a pioneering mission to establish India's capability in orbital docking, a key technology for future human spaceflight and satellite servicing missions," ISRO said.

The two satellites namely SDX01 (Chaser) and SDX02 (Target) weighing 220 each are equipped with high-resolution camera and a miniature multi-spectral payload whose imaging can be used for natural resource monitoring and vegetation studies.

ISRO said: "In-space docking technology is essential when multiple

rocket launches are required to achieve common mission objectives.

Television images showed a 44.5-meter rocket blasting off from the launch pad leaving behind thick fumes and then emitting a bright orange flame from its tail while moving upwards in the night sky.

The SpaDeX mission consists of two small spacecraft launched by PSLV-C60, independently and simultaneously, into a 470 km circular orbit at 55 degrees inclination, with a local time cycle of about 66 days.

Space report: China has released its first report detailing the progress made in scientific research and applications related to the country's space station over the past two years.

The China Manned Space Agency (CMSA), which compiled the report to "mark the two-year anniversary of the space station's full establishment," said that the report will be released annually based on the progress of ongoing space missions.

The report, released Monday, focuses on areas such as space life and human research, microgravity physical sciences, and new space technologies and applications.

It highlights 34 representative scientific research and application results selected from previously returned samples, research data, in-orbit experiments, and notable progress in scientific and application projects, as well as various science promotion activities, showcasing China's capabilities and innovative spirit in the field of space technology, according to the CMSA.

Of the representative results, 13 are related to space life and human research, 12 are related to microgravity physical science research, and nine are related to new space technology and application research.

Vaping kits

Greece building Kids Wallet app

ATHENS, Greece, Dec 31, (Agencies): Greece announced plans to enhance parental oversight of mobile devices in 2025 through a government-operated app, that will help get digital age verification and browsing controls.

Dimitris Papastergiou, the minister of digital governance, said the Kids Wallet app, due to launch in March, was aimed at safeguarding children under the age of 15 from the risks of excessive and inappropriate internet use.

The app will be run by a widely used government services platform and operate in conjunction with an existing smartphone app for adults to carry digital identification documents.

"It's a big change," Papastergiou told reporters, adding that the app would integrate advanced algorithms to monitor usage and apply strict authentication processes. "The Kids Wallet application will do two main things: It will make parental control much easier, and it will be our official national tool for verifying the age of users," he said.

A survey published this month by a Greek research organization KMOP found that 76.6% of children aged 9-12 have access to the internet via personal devices, 58.6% use social media daily, and 22.8% have encountered inappropriate content.

Smoking: The New Zealand government will provide vaping kits to New Zealand adults who want to quit smoking from next week.

The Stop Smoking Services across New Zealand will be receiving vaping starter kits, which will be provided for free to adult smokers, particularly to help those who have already tried other options to quit, Associate Health Minister Casey Costello said on Tuesday.

"Vaping has played a key role in reducing smoking rates and the government supports adults switching to vaping because vaping is far less harmful than smoking cigarettes," Costello said, adding those using quit smoking services are four times more likely to successfully stop smoking compared to those who receive no support.

Early life shaped his global health mission

Jimmy Carter made eradication of Guinea worm disease top mission

JARWENG, South Sudan, Dec 31, (AP): Nobel Prize-winning peacemaker Jimmy Carter spent nearly four decades waging war to eliminate an ancient parasite plaguing the world's poorest people.

Rarely fatal but searingly painful and debilitating, Guinea worm disease infects people who drink water tainted with larvae that grow inside the body into worms as much as 3-feet-long. The noodle-thin parasites then burrow their way out, breaking through the skin in burning blisters.

Carter made eradicating Guinea worm a top mission of The Carter Center, the nonprofit he and his wife, Rosalynn Carter, founded after leaving the White House. The former president rallied public health experts, billionaire donors, African heads of state and thousands of volunteer villagers to work toward eliminating a human disease for only the second time in history.

"It'd be the most exciting and gratifying accomplishment of my life," Carter told The Associated Press in 2016. Even after entering home hospice care in February 2023, aides said Carter kept asking for Guinea worm updates.

Carter died Sunday at age 100.

Thanks to the Carters' efforts, the worms that afflicted an estimated 3.5 million people in 20 African and Asian countries when the center



Former US President Jimmy Carter poses for photographers with a water pipe filter, that is used to combat guinea worm disease, during a news conference to mark the launch of a campaign to eradicate the disease in central London, Wednesday, Oct. 5, 2011. (AP)

launched its campaign in 1986 are on the brink of extinction. Only 14 human cases were reported across four African nations in 2023, according to The Carter Center.

The World Health Organization's target for eradication is 2030. Carter Center leaders hope to achieve it sooner. That meant recently returning to Jarweng, in a remote area of South Sudan in northeastern Africa. The village of 500 people hadn't seen Guinea worm infections since 2014, until Nyingong Aguek and her two sons drank swampy water while traveling in 2022. A fourth person also got infected.

The campaign became a model for confronting a broader range of neglected tropical diseases afflicting impoverished people with limited access to clean water, sanitation and health care. Expanding its public health mission, the center has supplied training, equipment and medicines that helped 22 countries eliminate at least one disease within their borders.

Mali became the latest in May 2023 when the WHO confirmed it had ended trachoma, a blinding eye infection. Haiti and the Dominican Republic are working to eliminate malaria and mosquito-borne lymphatic filariasis by 2030. Countries in Africa and the Americas are pursuing an end to river blindness by 2035.

Having a former US president lead the charge brought big advantages to a nonprofit that relied on private donors to fund its initiatives.

Carter's fundraising enabled the center to pour \$500 million into fighting Guinea worm. He persuaded manufacturers to donate larvicide as well as nylon cloth and specially made drinking straws to filter water. His visits to afflicted villages often attracted news coverage, raising awareness globally.

"He went to so many of the localities where people were afflicted," said Dr. William Brieger, a professor of international health at Johns Hopkins University who spent 25 years in Africa.

New tech to transform cancer treatment

KAIST develops tech to reverse colon cancer

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: South Korea's KAIST Institute has announced the development of a groundbreaking technology that can transform colon cancer cells into cells resembling normal ones, without the need to destroy them.

This innovative approach, KAIST said, could drastically change the landscape of cancer treatment, offering a potential alternative to traditional therapies like chemotherapy, which often come with severe side effects.

The new technology, pioneered by Professor Kwang-Hyun Cho from KAIST's Department of Bioengineering and Brain, leverages the concept of a "digital twin."

This digital twin simulates the genetic networks of normal cells, enabling researchers to analyze how cancer cells lose their normal characteristics and pinpoint "molecular switches" that

can restore these properties.

Through their research, the team identified that cancer cells gradually lose their normal traits due to changes in the activity of their genetic networks. Using the digital twin, the researchers were able to pinpoint key genes responsible for reversing this process and reprogramming cancer cells to behave like normal cells.

Laboratory experiments, as well as studies conducted on animals, have confirmed that applying these molecular switches to colon cancer cells results in their transformation into normal-like cells, without causing cell destruction.

Professor Kwang-Hyun Cho described the technology as a "paradigm shift in cancer treatment," noting that it targets the genetic roots of cancer, reducing the risk of relapse and minimizing damage to healthy cells.

The new approach, known as "reverse cancer therapy," could potentially be applied to treat various types of cancer, offering a safer alternative to traditional treatments.

The findings were published in the journal *Advanced Science* under the title "Controlling Cell Differentiation Pathways to Reverse Cancer."

The research marks a major step toward developing less harmful cancer treatments that could benefit patients worldwide. The study was supported by the Ministry of Science and ICT and the National Research Foundation of Korea.

The technology has since been transferred to BioRevert, a company dedicated to advancing the technology for clinical use. Although KAIST has not set a specific timeline for when this technology will be available for clinical use, the potential to revolutionize cancer treatment is undeniable.

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Wolvaardt among 4 women's finalists

Bumrah and Root in running for best men's cricketer award

DUBAI, Dec 31, (AP): England batter Joe Root and India pacer Jasprit Bumrah are among the four players in contention for the International Cricket Council's men's player of the year award.

Prolific England batter Harry Brook and Australia's Travis Head are the other two men's nominees announced by the ICC.

Bumrah has been superb with his seam bowling this year and produced another near unplayable spell when he took 5-57 in the fourth test against Australia, which finished Monday with a dramatic victory for the Australians.

It was his 13th five-wicket haul

in tests and the 31-year-old now has 203 test wickets at an average of 19.42. He took 71 wickets in 13 tests this year, averaging a remarkably low 14.92. He also captured 15 wickets as India won their second men's T20 World Cup title.

Root has enjoyed a brilliant year with the bat, scoring 1,556 runs from 17 tests with an average of 55.57.

It was the fifth time he has scored 1,000 test runs in a calendar year and his six hundreds - including a career-best score of 262 - took him to 36 test tons and joint fifth place all-time with India's Rahul Dravid. He also surpassed Alastair Cook



India's Jasprit Bumrah throws the ball at Australia's Alex Carey during play on day four of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

to become England's leading run-scorer with 12,972.

Brook compiled 1,100 runs from 12 tests at a strike rate of 85.00, showcasing both his brutal hitting and ability to improvise under pressure with some exquisite timing.

He hit four hundreds, including a superb triple century with a blistering 317 off 322 deliveries against Pakistan on an admittedly pancake-flat track in Multan - where Root made his 262 during their marathon 453-run stand.

Head, meanwhile, has stood out with his aggressive counter-attacking batting in both tests and T20s.

South Africa batter Laura Wolvaardt and Sri Lanka's all-formats captain Chamari Athapaththu are the women's nominees along with allrounders Annabel Sutherland (Australia) and Melie Kerr (New Zealand).

Wolvaardt scored 697 runs across 12 ODIs, averaging 87.12 with a highest score of 184 not out. She compiled 223 runs across three tests, averaging 37.16 with a best knock of 122.

Athapaththu hit 458 runs across nine ODIs, averaging 65.42 with a top score of 195. In T20s she scored 720 runs and took 21 wickets, with best figures of 4-29.

Fox powers Kings past Mavs, Christie earns first victory as interim coach

Knicks claim 8th straight win



Charlotte Hornets guard Isaiah Wong (21) drives to the basket while guarded by Chicago Bulls forward Matas Buzelis, right, during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Charlotte, N.C., Monday, Dec. 30, 2024. (AP)

SACRAMENTO, Calif., Dec 31, (AP): De'Aaron Fox scored 33 points, and the Sacramento Kings beat the short-handed Dallas Mavericks 110-100 on Monday night to give Doug Christie his first win as the interim head coach after the Kings fired Mike Brown last week.

The Kings went on a 17-2 run to end the third quarter and take an 83-77 lead. Sacramento started the fourth on an 11-4 run, extending the lead to double digits on a 3-pointer by Trey Lyles.

Lyles had 14 points off the bench. DeMar DeRozan also had 14 points, and Domantas Sabonis had 17 points and 17 assists.

Dallas led by 18 in the first quarter before the Kings cut it to 60-56 at halftime.

The Mavericks were without Kyrie Irving (shoulder), Klay Thompson (illness), Dereck Lively II (hip) and Naji Marshall (suspension), in addition to Luka Doncic being out for at least the next month with a calf strain.

Spencer Dinwiddie and PJ Washington both had season highs for the Mavericks. Dinwiddie scored 30 points and Washington had 28.

Knicks 126, Wizards 106

In Washington, Josh Hart had 23 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists for his third triple-double of the season, Karl-Anthony Towns had 32 points and 13 rebounds, and the New York Knicks beat the Washington Wizards for their eighth straight victory.

It was the second game in three

nights between the teams. On Saturday night, the Knicks (23-10) outlasted the Wizards 136-132 in overtime behind 55 points from Jalen Brunson.

Jonas Valanciunas equaled his season high with 22 points for Washington (5-25). Alex Sarr and Malcolm Brogdon each had 18.

There was a scary moment with 3:07 to play in the third quarter when Washington rookie guard Bub Carrington fell backward while guarding a player and hit a Knicks player's knee and then the back of his head on the court.

Carrington left in a wheelchair, covering his face and did not return with a post-traumatic headache.

Bulls 115, Hornets 108, OT

In Charlotte, Coby White narrowly missed his first career triple-double, finishing with 23 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists, and Torrey Craig scored 18 with five

3-pointers after halftime as Chicago held on to beat Charlotte in overtime.

Nikola Vucevic added 16 points and 13 rebounds for the Bulls (15-18).

Clippers 116, Pelicans 113

In New Orleans, Norman Powell scored 35 points, James Harden hit go-ahead free throws with 17.9 seconds left and Los Angeles held on to defeat New Orleans.

With the Pelicans - losers of 10 straight and 19 of 20 - trying to tie the game, Harden adroitly fouled rookie center Yves Missi, whose 12-point, nine-rebound and five-block performance was tarnished by his missed free throw that could have tied it at 114 with 4.3 seconds left.

Nuggets 132, Jazz 121

In Salt Lake City, Nikola Jokic had 36 points, 22 rebounds and 11

assists to lift Denver to a win over Utah Jazz.

Russell Westbrook also had a triple-double with 16 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists and finished 7 for 7 from the field with zero turnovers.

Jamal Murray also had 10 assists - the Nuggets had 38 as a team - to go along with 20 points.

Cavaliers 113, Warriors 95

In San Francisco, Darius Garland scored 25 points, Donovan Mitchell scored 23 and Cleveland extended their winning streak to seven games with a victory over Golden State.

Dean Wade had 10 points and 13 rebounds for Cleveland, and Jarrett Allen had 12 points and nine rebounds.

Moses Moody led the Warriors with 19 points. Jonathan Kuminga had 18 points with 10 rebounds, and Trayce Jackson-Davis had 16 points and a game-high 16 rebounds.

Dennis Schroder had 12 points, and Stephen Curry and Andrew Wiggins each added 11 for the Warriors.

76ers 125, Trail Blazers 103

In Portland, Joel Embiid had 37 points and nine rebounds as Philadelphia defeated Portland.

Tyrese Maxey added 23 points for the Sixers. Kelly Oubre Jr. had 15 points and eight steals, and Guerschon Yabusele had 16 points off the bench.

Anfernee Simons led the Blazers with 25 points on 9-of-18 shooting. Deni Avdija had 17 points but also 10 turnovers. Shaedon Sharpe, Toumani Camara and Deandre Ayton each scored 12.

Morocco dream to host WC to become a reality in 2030

RABAT, Dec 31, (KUNA): Morocco will finally live the dream of co-hosting the World Cup for soccer in 2030, alongside Portugal and Spain, after the FIFA officially approved the three countries' hosting file on October 4.

Morocco never gave up trying to host the most significant global soccer event, as the country submitted requests to host the tournament for the 1994, 1998, 2006, 2010 and 2026 editions, competing against top countries. Morocco almost won the attempt in 2010, before losing to South Africa by four points.

As the country continued to submit requests to host the event, it started working on developing its infrastructure and environment to prove itself worthy of winning the FIFA's approval. It began to build stadiums with international standards, while also developing the skills and performance of its national soccer team, resulting in reaching the semi-final in the last World Cup held in Qatar.

Moreover, Morocco attracted the FIFA's attention towards its ability to host regional and international events, including hosting three editions of the FIFA Club World Cup and the Africa Cup of Nations in 1988. It will also host the Africa Cup of Nations in the summer of 2025, the next two editions of the Women's Africa Cup of Nations in 2025 and 2026 and hosting the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup from 17

October to 8 November 2025.

In this context, President of the Royal Moroccan Football Federation Fouzi Lekjaa said in a video-meeting of the FIFA's General Assembly on December 11 that choosing Morocco to co-host the World Cup is a reflection of the country's great efforts to develop different sectors, especially the sports field and infrastructure.

The FIFA team who had recently visited Morocco to evaluate the conditions and preparations to host the tournament, gave the Moroccan stadiums, infrastructure, readiness to face challenges and threats during the event the highest positive ratings.

The country plans to host the World Cup matches in six stadiums, including Hassan II Stadium in Casablanca, which is still under construction and will be completed by 2028. The stadium is set to become the biggest in the world, with a capacity of 115,000 seats and will host either the event's opening ceremony or the final match.

On his part, FIFA President Gianni Infantino congratulated Morocco on the occasion, vowing to make the 2030 edition a "celebration for humanity." He noted in an interview published on FIFA's official website, after announcing the approval for the three countries to host the World Cup on December 11, that "we will have a great World Cup in Morocco."

Rataj leads Oregon St past Portland

Gonzaga tops Pepperdine behind Battle's 21 points

MALIBU, Calif., Dec 31, (AP): Khalif Battle scored 21 points, Braden Huff added 19 points on 9-of-10 shooting and No. 19 Gonzaga beat Pepperdine 89-82 on Monday night in the West Coast Conference opener for both teams.

Huff converted a three-point play that gave the Bulldogs the lead for good 7:10 into the first half, and Gonzaga (10-4) led 50-32 at the intermission.

Freshman Jaxon Olvera scored a season-high 27 points on 12-of-21 shooting for Pepperdine (6-9). Moe Odum added 24 points and eight assists.

After Battle made a layup to open the scoring in the second half and push Gonzaga's lead to 20 points, the Waves scored 22 of the next 26 points - including 13 points and three assists by Odum.

Gonzaga scored six in a row after that to keep Pepperdine at bay.

Michael Rataj had 28 points to lead Oregon State to an 89-79 victory over Portland.

Rataj also added five rebounds and five assists for the Beavers (11-3, 1-0 West Coast Conference). Liutauras Lelevicius scored 15 points, going 5 of 8 (3 for 5 from 3-point range). Nate Kingz had 15 points and went 6 of 9 from the field (1 for 4 from 3-point range).

Austin Rapp led the Pilots (5-10, 0-2) with 22 points and six rebounds. Portland also got 14 points and four assists from Max Mackinnon. Jermaine Ballisager Webb scored 10.

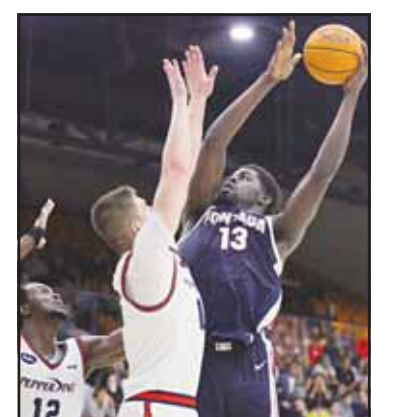
Riley Kugel scored 22 points and Josh Hubbard added 16 to lead No. 17 Mississippi State to an 87-73 victory over Bethune-Cookman.

Mississippi State (12-1) struggled to put away Bethune-Cookman (3-10) until reeling off a 16-4 run midway through the second half.

Kugel was 10 of 13 from the floor and had four rebounds before fouling out late. RJ Melendez and Claudell Harris each had 12 points for the Bulldogs, with Harris scoring all his points in the second half.

Trey Thomas and Brayon Freeman each scored 21 points for Bethune-Cookman, and Reggie Ward Jr. added 14. Thomas was ejected in the second half after getting called for his second technical foul.

Mississippi State jumped out to a 20-9 advantage but couldn't shake the



Gonzaga forward Graham Ike, right, shoots against Pepperdine forwards Boubacar Coulibaly, left, and Dovvydas Butka during the second half of an NCAA college basketball game in Malibu, Calif. (AP)

Wildcats in the first half. The margin was trimmed to 27-26 before the Bulldogs took a 52-45 halftime lead.

Bethune-Cookman shot 58% in the opening half and went 5 of 8 from 3-point range. The Wildcats were also 10 of 10 at the foul line.

Nate Calmese had 20 points, freshman Tomas Thrastarson scored a season-high 17 in his first start and Washington State beat Loyola Marymount 73-59 at Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena.

Calmese made 9 of 17 shots and both of his free throws for the Cougars (12-3, 2-0 West Coast Conference). Thrastarson buried 6 of 8 shots - 4 of 5 from 3-point range - and grabbed six rebounds. Dane Erikstrup hit three 3-pointers and scored 14. LeJuan Watts had a game-high 11 rebounds to go with eight points and eight assists.

Caleb Stone-Carrawell scored 20 and added four steals to lead the Lions (8-6, 0-2). Myron Amey Jr. had 13 points and Jan Vide scored 10.

Reserve Connor Essegian matched his career-high with six 3-pointers and scored 20 points and Nebraska dominated the first half in a 77-43 win over Southern.

Brian Williams, who averaged 24 points in the Cornhuskers' last four games, added 11 points and surpassed 1,500 for his career. Andrew Morgan had 10 points for Nebraska (11-2), which has won five straight with three opponents failing to reach 60 points.

Duplantis and Biles named AIPS Athletes of the Year

LAUSANNE, Dec 31, (Xinhua): The International Sports Press Association (AIPS) on Monday announced that American gymnast Simone Biles and Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis are the AIPS Athletes of the Year 2024, as voted by 518 journalists from 111 countries and regions.

Biles, who won three Olympic gold medals and one silver at Paris 2024, garnered 703 points to win the

Best Female Athlete of the Year award for the fifth time, ahead of Spain and Barcelona footballer Aitana Bonmati, who was recently named the Best FIFA Women's Player for a second consecutive year. Julien Alfred of Saint Lucia, the nation's first-ever Olympic gold medalist in the 100m and silver medalist in the 200m, rounded out the top three with 263 points.

Duplantis dominated the Best Male Athlete of the

Year category with 603 points. The Swede, who had finished second in the 2022 and 2023 editions of the AIPS poll, finally secured the top prize for the first time. Serbian tennis icon Novak Djokovic, who at 37 became the oldest Olympic gold medalist in men's singles and just the fifth tennis player to achieve a career Golden Slam, finished second with 368 points, while Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar, who became the first

male cyclist since 1987 to win the 'Triple Crown' of the men's Tour de France, Giro d'Italia and world title in the same year, finished third.

Having defended its Copa America title, Argentina's men's football team was voted the AIPS Best Team of the Year 2024, while the Paris 2024 Olympic Games scooped the AIPS Best Press Facilities award.

'Winter Games in Saudi Arabia will boost regional tourism'

Al-Musallam urges Gulf media to expand focus beyond regional events

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: Captain Husain Al-Musallam, Director of the Asian Olympic Council, extended a warm welcome to Kuwait's guests at the "Khaleeji Zain 26", which is set to conclude next Saturday at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. He emphasized Kuwait's tradition of embracing its Gulf neighbors during major sporting events.

Al-Musallam hosted a delegation of Gulf media professionals and journalists at the Asian Olympic Council headquarters, expressing his delight in welcoming them on the sidelines of the championship.

Speaking during the reception, Al-Musallam highlighted the unique atmosphere of the Gulf Championships, describing them as a blend of brotherhood, camaraderie, and spirited competition.

He praised the enthusiastic support from fans who have gathered to cheer for their teams and commended the organizing committee for its exceptional efforts in ensuring that both Gulf teams and their supporters have all their needs met.



Al-Musallam with the Gulf media delegation at the headquarters of the Olympic Council of Asia.

Al-Musallam acknowledged the critical role Gulf media plays in promoting sporting events, urging them to expand their coverage beyond Gulf tournaments to include Asian and international events.

This, he noted, would significantly enhance the region's sports media landscape. He also shed light on Saudi Arabia's plans to host three significant Asian Games: the Martial Arts Indoor Games in 2027, the Asian Winter Games in Trojena in 2029, and the Asian Games in 2034. Al-

Musallam stressed the importance of infrastructure development and creating a lasting legacy from these events, benefiting both society and athletes.

He noted that hosting the Winter Games poses a unique challenge but also represents an exciting opportunity for Saudi Arabia and the region to develop winter tourism.

Dismal Man United loses again at home

Ipswich upsets Chelsea as Villa draws with Brighton

LONDON, Dec 31, (AP): Alexander Isak scored for the sixth straight Premier League game as Newcastle beat Manchester United 2-0 at Old Trafford to condemn Ruben Amorim's side to its worst home run in the top tier since the 1970s.

Relegation-threatened Ipswich beat Chelsea 2-0 to win at home for the first time this season, and Aston Villa and Brighton drew 2-2.

Newcastle's commanding display marked the first time since February 1979 that Man United has lost three home league games in a row. It was also the first time since 1962 that United has lost five league matches in the same calendar month.

Isak started the misery for home fans with his eighth goal in six matches. The Sweden striker put Newcastle ahead with a header after four minutes and Joelinton doubled its lead 15 minutes later when he rose above Lisandro Martinez to head in a second. Isak had another effort disallowed after half an hour and Sandro Tonali hit the woodwork seconds later as Newcastle threatened to run riot.

Amorim withdrew Joshua Zirkzee for Kobbie Mainoo before halftime but United looked toothless - and clueless - in what was a dismal display. "We suffered a goal and then it was hard to come back," Amorim said. "They were the better team, plain and simple."

The defeat was the fifth in eight league games since Amorim joined from Sporting Lisbon in November and left United in 14th place, seven points above the relegation zone.

Newcastle is fifth and starting to entertain the possibility of a top-four finish.

"There is still a long way to go but the team is improving," Joelinton said. "Time will tell how good we are but we are enjoying football right now. We have to be humble and keep our feet on the ground." Chelsea started the day with the best away record in the league after Liverpool but it was trailing at Portman Road after just 12 minutes thanks to a mistake from goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen.

The Scandinavian replaced Robert Sanchez in the Chelsea goal but he was adjudged to have fouled Liam Delap in the box and Delap got up to convert the penalty with aplomb.

Chelsea pushed forward in search of an equalizer but it was Ipswich that doubled its lead early in the second half.

A poor pass from Axel Disasi allowed Delap to stretch the Chelsea defense and his pass set up Omari Hutchinson to score against his former club.

It was the first time this season that Chelsea has lost two games in a row. It remained in fourth place after missing a chance to go above Arsenal and Nottingham Forest into second. Ipswich moved up to 18th place in the 20-team division.

It was the first home win in the Premier League for promoted Ipswich since 2002 and coach Kieran McKenna praised his side.

"It was everything it needed to be," McKenna said. "We defended, outstanding organization throughout the game."

"There has been hope in the performances in general, we have been competing in almost every game. If you do that, you always have a chance."

Aston Villa was unbeaten in its last eight games at Villa Park but went behind after just 12 minutes against a lively Brighton side.

With the Villa defense all at sea, Simon Adingra gathered a loose ball and curled a right-footed shot past Emiliano Martinez.

Villa came roaring back and got an equalizer in the 36th through birthday boy Ollie Watkins. The 29-year-old Watkins, who returned to the side to replace the suspended Jhon Duran, converted a penalty after Morgan Rogers was adjudged to have been fouled.

It was Rogers who put Villa in front early in the second half and once again Watkins was involved. His cute chip released Rogers, who chested the ball down and scored his sixth goal of the season.

However, Tariq Lamprey fired home with eight minutes left to give Brighton a share of the points.

The result leaves Villa in ninth and Brighton in 10th.

"We've been in that position a few times this season and we've failed to see it out," a disappointed Watkins told the BBC's Match of the Day program. "We didn't lose but we should have taken all three points."



Chelsea's Noni Madueke, right, controls the ball as Ipswich Town's Leif Davis looks on during the English Premier League soccer match between Ipswich Town and Chelsea at Portman Road stadium in Ipswich, England. (AP)



Manchester United's Harry Maguire, left, tries to block a shot from Newcastle's Lewis Hall, right, during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester United and Newcastle at the Old Trafford stadium in Manchester, England. (AP)

Laughter and excitement of children have brought a unique charm

Children's joy adds vibrancy to Khaleeji Zain 26 in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: The laughter and excitement of children have brought a unique charm to the "Khaleeji Zain 26", currently being hosted in Kuwait. Their joyous presence in stadiums and entertainment areas has added a vibrant, family-friendly atmosphere to this significant sporting event.

Young fans can be seen proudly wearing team jerseys and adorning their faces with the flags of Gulf countries. They passionately cheer from the stands and enthusiastically engage in event spaces designed especially for them. Recreational activities such as interactive penalty kicks, face painting, and entertaining shows have created a festive ambiance, ensuring that the championship is as much about family bonding as it is about football.

The Arabian Gulf Cup, commonly known as the "Gulf" Championship, transcends the realm of sports. While football remains its core, the tournament serves as a



Bahrain young fans.

platform to celebrate the cultural and social unity of Gulf nations. "Khaleeji Zain 26" highlights this shared heritage, blending thrilling on-field action with off field festivities that honor the region's rich traditions and collective identity.

Since its inception with "Gulf 1" in 1970, the championship has evolved into a cherished part of

Gulf heritage. For older generations, it invokes nostalgia, while for the youth; it provides an exciting opportunity to experience Gulf unity through sport.

During the championship, Gulf stadiums transform into festive hubs, reflecting the shared history and traditions of the region. Football becomes a unifying force,

symbolizing the Gulf's cultural connections and fostering camaraderie among nations.

Fans play a pivotal role in creating the tournament's electric atmosphere. Their colorful flags, traditional attire, and innovative designs in team colors showcase national pride. Chants and cheers, often inspired by local folklore and traditional melodies, amplify the excitement, motivating players and energizing the crowds.

The "Khaleeji Zain 26" also emphasizes values such as generosity, unity, and fair competition. Cultural exchanges between fans enrich the event, allowing them to share traditional foods, folk arts, and unique dialects, further strengthening the bonds between Gulf communities.

In this way, the Gulf Cup remains a testament to the enduring unity and spirit of the Gulf nations, celebrating a shared heritage while looking toward a collective future.



Left-right: Kuwaiti children display the national flags.



Verona wins at 10-man Bologna in Serie A thanks to late own-goal

ROME, Dec 31, (AP): Benjamin Dominguez scored a brace for Bologna but a red card for Tommaso Pobega and a late own-goal by Santiago Castro sent the host team crashing to a 3-2 defeat against Verona in Serie A.

Dominguez scored in the 20th and 58th minutes, either side of a Verona double from Amir Sarr and Casper Tengstedt.

But Pobega's red card, shown for striking an opponent in an off-the-ball incident early in the second half, hampered the home side and with three minutes left on the clock, a free kick from Ondrej Duda hit Castro to wrong-foot his own goalkeeper and give Verona all three points.

The result was a blow to Bologna's hopes of securing a European place and leaves it in seventh place, four points behind Juventus.

Verona moved four points clear of the relegation zone.

Nico Paz missed a first-half penalty earlier Monday but made amends in the second period with the goal that sent Como on its way to a 2-0 win over Lecce in Serie A.

The 20-year-old Argentine international saw his weak spot kick saved by the legs of Wladimiro Falcone after half an hour but he was on target in the 50th minute when he side-footed home



Bologna's Benjamin Dominguez celebrates scoring during the Serie A soccer match between Bologna and Hellas Verona at Renato Dall'Ara Stadium, Bologna, Italy. (AP)

from just outside the box. Patrick Cutrone, who hit the bar early in the game, got a second goal with 10 minutes remaining when he seized on a rebound in the box and slotted home.

It was Como's first league win over Lecce since 1994 and lifts it into 15th place, two points and one spot above its opponent.

Djokovic, Sabalenka open new season with wins at Brisbane International

SYDNEY, Dec 31, (Xinhua): Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka opened their Australian Open campaigns with straight sets victories at the Brisbane International tennis tournament on Tuesday.

Djokovic beat Australian world number 73 Rinky Hijikata 6-3, 6-3 in one hour and 14 minutes on center court.

The Serbian 10-time Australian Open champion lost only 10 points

on his serve and never gave Hijikata a break point opportunity.

"I always expect myself to do well on the court," Djokovic said on court after the match. "Obviously, a win is a win. To start off the new season with a win is very important." Earlier on Tuesday, Sabalenka -- the world number one and two-time reigning Australian Open champion -- beat Mexico's Renata Zarazua 6-4, 6-0 in 65 minutes.



A child displays the Saudi flag during Khaleeji Zain 26 game in Kuwait. - See Page 15

Sports

Kuwait secures 41 medals at Arab Weightlifting Championship in Qatar



The Kuwait weightlifting team.

KUNA photo

DOHA, Dec 31, (KUNA): Kuwait's athletes delivered a stellar performance at the Qatar International Cup and the Arab Weightlifting Championship for men and women, concluding with an impressive haul of 41 medals: 13 gold, 10 silver, and 18 bronze.

The Kuwaiti male and female teams contributed 11 gold, nine silver, and 18 bronze medals to the tally, while

Kuwaiti weightlifter Abrar Al-Fahad added two gold and one silver medal to the country's achievements.

Talal Al-Jassar, Head of the Kuwaiti Weightlifting Federation, praised the athletes' performance and emphasized the importance of participating in such events for enhancing players' skills and developing the sport. Speaking to KUNA at the closing ceremony, he expressed gratitude

to Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, and Bashar Abdullah, Acting Head of the Public Authority for Sports, for their unwavering support of Kuwaiti sports.

"Our participation aligns with the federation's strategic efforts to elevate the sport of weightlifting in Kuwait and strengthen its presence on regional and international stages,"

Al-Jassar noted. He highlighted that the medal haul reflects the success of the federation's development plan and its commitment to enabling Kuwaiti athletes to achieve greater accolades in the future. During the closing ceremony, Kuwait's senior female team was honored for their remarkable second-place finish in the Qatar International Cup and fourth-place ranking in the Arab Weightlifting Championship.

Vision 2030 fuels rise

Saudi Arabia's 'journey' to becoming global sports hub

RIYADH, Dec 31, (Xinhua): In a momentous celebration of national pride and passion for football, Saudi Arabia recently secured the rights to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup, a victory that captivated the nation. As one of the world's most football-enthusiastic countries, this achievement marks a pivotal moment in Saudi Arabia's journey towards becoming a global sporting powerhouse.

2024 has been a year of remarkable growth and achievement in the country's sports sector. From high-profile football leagues to world-renowned motorsports and groundbreaking infrastructure projects, Saudi Arabia is not just hosting events, it's setting the stage for a future where it will be at the forefront of the global sports arena.

A year of milestones

Saudi Arabia hosted many major sports events in 2024, strengthening its ambition to become a global sports destination. Football, the most beloved sport in the country, saw exciting developments and breakthroughs.

Saudi Arabia has firmly positioned itself as a rising force in global football thanks to its significant investment in the Saudi Pro League (SPL). The SPL has attracted top-tier international players, elevating the league's competitiveness and global prestige.

As the year ended, Saudi Arabia was awarded the hosting rights for the 2034 FIFA World Cup. Hamad Albalawi, head of the Saudi World Cup bid, highlighted that this achievement reflects the country's expanding sports infrastructure and passion for football.

He emphasized the synergy between Saudi Arabia's sports ambitions and Vision 2030, the country's transformative economic and social blueprint. "We have great football, great tourism, great projects, and great infrastructure," Albalawi said. "We are naturally positioned to host the biggest football tournament in the world. We look forward to 2034 and beyond." Saudi Arabia also hosted several other internationally-renowned sporting events in 2024. In January, the country hosted the Dakar Rally for the fifth time. In March, the Formula 1 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix took place in Jeddah for the fourth consecutive year, and in May, Jeddah hosted the WTT Saudi Grand Slam, bringing professional table tennis to Saudi Arabia for the first time.

Riyadh followed in November by hosting the WTA Finals, making it the first time the city had been chosen to stage the season-ending women's tennis event. And in December, Jeddah welcomed the ATP Next Gen Finals again, further cementing Saudi Arabia's position as a rising global sports destination.

Driving forces

According to a report released by SURJ Sports Investments, Saudi Arabia's sports sector market value is projected to soar to 22.4 billion U.S. dollars by 2030, up from 8 billion U.S. dollars currently. This growth is projected to be fueled by significant investments and an increasing passion for sports across the country. Since 2019, Saudi Arabia has hosted over 100 major international events spanning 40 sports, highlighting its vibrant sporting culture.

To continue developing its sports infrastructure, Saudi Arabia unveiled plans in July for the world's tallest sports tower to be built in Riyadh as part of the Sports Boulevard project. The Global Sports Tower will stand 130 meters tall, with an internal area of 84,000 square meters, housing more than 30 facilities, including a 98-meter-high indoor climbing wall, set to be the tallest in the world.

Saudi Arabia's sports initiatives also focus on discovering new talent across various disciplines. One such program is the Saudi Scholarship Program for developing football talents, known as Future Falcons. Launched in December, this initiative is part of the Saudi Arabian Football Federation's broader strategy to develop talent in line with the country's football transformation goals.

In tennis, Arij Mutabagani, President of the Saudi Tennis Federation, emphasized that Saudi Arabia is expanding its international tournament offerings, particularly for youth development. "We're working closely with the Ministry of Sport to develop a national training center for our top players and bring young talents from across Saudi Arabia, and hopefully the Gulf region," she said.

Promising future

Saudi Arabia's growing influence in international sports is reflected in the successful hosting of major events and its ongoing development plans. According to Albalawi, in 2023, Saudi Arabia welcomed 27 million international visitors, including three million fans attending various international sporting events.

The country hosted the Esports World Cup in 2024, and will soon hold the inaugural Olympic Esports Games, along with a continuation of several major events, such as the F1 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, the WTA Finals, the ATP Next Gen Finals, the Saudi Snooker Championship and the Boxing match.

Saudi Arabia has also officially received the flag to host the 2025 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Riyadh for the first time.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia will host the 19th AFC Asian Cup in 2027. The country will also host the 2029 Asian Winter Games in the planned Trojena resort in Neom, a mountain retreat set to be completed by 2026.

Looking ahead to 2025, Saudi Arabia's goal and confidence in developing its sports industry are unwavering. Saudi Arabia's commitment to developing its sports sector is also closely tied to sustainability goals, ensuring that sports growth aligns with the country's long-term environmental and economic objectives.

Khaleeji Zain 26: A landmark in Gulf Cup history for organization and competition

Championship strengthens Gulf unity and soccer development: Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 31: With just three days left until the conclusion of Khaleeji Zain 26, this Gulf Cup stands out as one of the most well-organized and competitive tournaments since its inception 54 years ago in Bahrain.

The championship has attracted record-breaking fan attendance and extensive media coverage from the preliminary rounds to the semi-finals.

Over the course of 12 days, tens of thousands of fans flocked to Kuwait, the "Land of Friendship and Peace," to experience a sporting spectacle.

Kicking off on December 21, the tournament has received widespread praise from sports and media professionals, former stars, team staff, players from all eight participating nations, and passionate Gulf football fans.

From their warm welcome to the carnival-like atmosphere both inside and outside the stadiums, Kuwait has left an indelible mark on all attendees.

The high level of competition and fan enthusiasm did not overshadow the prevailing spirit of brotherhood, making this edition of the Gulf Cup truly exceptional.

Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali Al Khalifa, Vice President of the Bahrain Football Association, lauded the brotherly atmosphere fostered by Khaleeji Zain 26, emphasizing its



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef and Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali Al Khalifa.

role in strengthening bonds between Gulf nations. Speaking at a luncheon hosted by Sheikh Ahmad Al Yousef, he said, "The Gulf Cup tournaments always unite us, and that is the true victory of holding such events regularly."

He commended Kuwait's exceptional organizational capabilities, stating that expectations for a remarkable event were met from day one. Khalifa highlighted the tournament's pivotal role in developing football in the region and providing a platform for emerging talent.

current national team. He noted, "Football has evolved significantly, and more backing will enable our players to reach higher levels and shine in future competitions."

Saad Anad, Chairman of Al-Sulaibikhat Club, celebrated the dual success of the Gulf Cup and the opening of Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium. He highlighted how the stadium has revitalized the Al-Sulaibikhat area and garnered widespread praise as a state-of-the-art sports facility.

Emirati media figure Mohammed Al-Joker praised Kuwait's seamless organization, saying, "From the opening ceremony to accompanying events and media coverage, Gulf Zain 26 exemplified professionalism and reinforced Kuwait's position as a leader in sports, culture, and media."

Former national team star Wael Soliman declared Gulf Zain 26 as one of the best tournaments in Gulf Cup history. He attributed its success to Kuwait's expertise in hosting major events and

Former Al-Salmiya Club star Hussein Al-Khadri described the tournament as an unforgettable experience, praising the organizing committee for their meticulous attention to detail.

Former Al-Qadsiya Club player Khalaf Al-Salama highlighted the large crowds and their enthusiasm as clear indicators of the tournament's success. "Football's joy lies in its fans, and the massive attendance shows Gulf Zain 26 has excelled on every level."



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef, Sheikh Fahad Al-Nasser and Saad Anad.



Saad Al-Houti, Naeem Saad, Ahmed Eid and Ahmed Al-Fadhli.