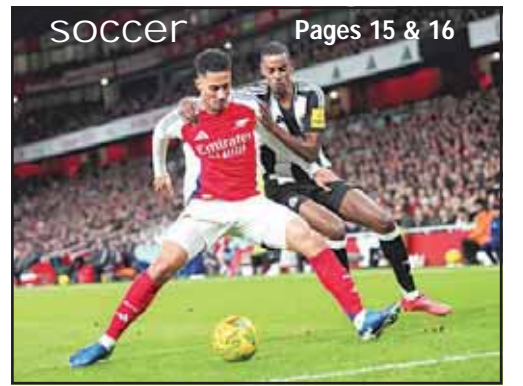




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## KUWAITI CITIZENS REQUIRED TO SHOW PASSPORTS AT BORDER CROSSINGS

# Civil ID not valid for GCC travel

Restriction in place until passport withdrawal certificate issued

By Munif Naif  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8:** The Ministry of Interior has issued a warning regarding the use of civil ID cards for traveling to and from Kuwait, stressing that it is prohibited to use the civil ID as a travel document between Kuwait and Gulf countries if the passport is invalid, lost, or withdrawn.

This restriction remains in place until the holder of a withdrawn passport obtains a certificate of withdrawal, which takes a maximum of two weeks to be issued.

According to security sources, the new decision has been implemented at all border crossing points. As a result, no male or female citizen will be allowed to leave the country using a civil ID card, especially if their passport is valid and has not been withdrawn or lost.

According to Article 1 of the ministerial resolution No. 2646/2024, the Kuwaiti civil ID card is considered a transit document that can replace the passport when traveling between Kuwait and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah presides over the weekly Cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

100 GB land corridor

### Kuwait-Europe connectivity gets upgrade with Iraq route

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8, (KUNA):** Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) announced launching a new international corridor that connects Europe with the Gulf "Iraq route", in partnership with Zajil Telecom.

In a statement to KUNA on Wednesday, the authority said that the new route provides a full land alternative to marine route for faster connection, as marine routes service gets affected by maintenance work.

The cable has a capacity of 100 GB, which will be a trusted option for big companies and international service providers, the authority said, adding that it will allow a faster and safer transferring of information from Kuwait to Europe, passing through Iraq.

On his part, the authority's acting president Abdullah Al-Ajmi said the "Iraq route" will enhance Kuwait's image as a regional pioneer in safe digital communication and will also support developing the country's infrastructure and economic growth.

He noted that local telecommunication companies have already started using the new land route to provide faster service to their clients.

Launching the route was executed in cooperation with the Iraqi Informatics and Telecommunication Public Company (ITPC), he added.

Combating academic fraud crucial: Minister Al-Jalal

## 13 face prosecution over forged certificates

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

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8:** The Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Dr. Nader Al-Jalal, has approved the recommendations of the Ministry's Legal Affairs Sector and initiated legal actions by referring 13 cases to the Public Prosecution.

These individuals were found to have submitted false or forged academic certificates in an attempt to obtain certificate equivalence.

Minister Al-Jalal emphasized that combating academic fraud is a critical responsibility towards the country and its citizens.

He reaffirmed his commitment to upholding academic integrity, ensuring that those involved in such crimes will face legal consequences.

Al-Jalal vowed to continue strengthening Kuwait's educational system and fostering a society built on knowledge, creativity, and efficiency.

Continued on Page 5

### NewsWatch

**BAGHDAD:** Iraqi President **Abdullatif Rashid** received credentials of Kuwaiti ambassador **Hasan Zaman** on Tuesday.

In a statement to KUNA, Ambassador Zaman conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir **Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah**, His Highness the Crown Prince **Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah**, and His Highness the Prime Minister **Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah** to the Iraqi President. (KUNA)

**WASHINGTON:** US warplanes raided arms depots for the Houthi militias in **Yemen**, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) declared on Wednesday.

CENTCOM said on its X account that the forces carried out multiple accurate strikes targeting two underground facilities for storing conventional weapons and for the Iran-backed Houthis in a region under their control in Yemen.

The Houthi militias had used ordnance in these warehouses to attack warships of the US Navy and Commercial ships in the South of Red Sea and Aden Gulf, the statement said, noting that the US forces suffered neither injuries nor losses in equipment. (KUNA)

## Kuwait, Turkiye forge path to deeper military alliances

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8, (KUNA):** The First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior **Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah** held talks here on Wednesday with the visiting Turkish Chief of the General Staff **General Metin Gurak** on means of boosting military

cooperation between Kuwait and Turkiye. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense said in a statement **Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef** received **Gen. Gurak** and his accompanying delegation at **Bayan Palace** during

Continued on Page 5



Ministry of Defense photo  
First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior during his meeting with the Turkish Chief of the General Staff.

Caution advised amid severe weather conditions

## Rain, fog pose hazards on Kuwait roads

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8:** The Ministry of Interior has urged drivers, road users and beachgoers to exercise caution as the country braces for scattered rain, occasional thunderstorms, strong winds, high sea waves and the possibility of fog, which may reduce visibility in some areas, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Kuwait's Meteorological Department forecasted scattered rain showers, occasionally accompanied by thunderstorms, to persist until Wednesday evening.

Acting Director of the department, **Dhirar Al-Ali**, told

Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the rain is expected to be accompanied by strong winds reaching speeds of over 50 kilometers per hour, with waves rising above six feet.

Al-Ali also noted the possibility of fog forming later in the evening, which could reduce road visibility in some areas.

The Meteorology Department has issued a warning about these weather conditions while at the same time encouraging people to use the MOI operations No 112 during emergency situations.



Photo by Samer Shiqer  
Kuwait skies darken as drivers maneuver through a highway, braving unpredictable weather conditions.

### Day by Day

A LARGE number of doctors have voiced their strong rejection of the new controversial fingerprint program, which is allegedly linked to European countries, and raised concerns about privacy violations. They claim that the system allows the fingerprint tracker and those responsible for it to potentially track an employee's location after working hours and even access their personal photographs.

This raises an important question: Who stands to benefit from causing such disruption among doctors and infringing on their privacy? Does the country really need a new crisis especially in such an important sector?

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar



**6** Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder of France's far-right dies



**9** stc focuses on enhancing employee experience through culture transformation initiatives

### Other Voices

## Kuwait's new tax law changes game for real estate investors

By Iman Abdulrahman Al-Hashash  
Real Estate Legal Consultant

With Kuwait's new tax law for multinational companies coming into effect this month, significant questions arise regarding its impact on various sectors, particularly real estate -- a cornerstone of the Kuwaiti economy.

The law imposes a 15 percent tax on profits for companies with revenues exceeding 750 million euros, potentially reshaping the real estate and economic landscape.

The real estate sector comprises a substantial share of multinational investments in Kuwait. These investments include ownership of commercial and investment properties, as well as revenues from rentals and sales.

Under the new tax regime, revenues from these real estate assets will now be subject to taxation, posing both challenges and opportunities.

The following are the key challenges:

**Increased Operating Costs** -- Real estate-reliant companies will experience higher costs due to the added tax burden on revenues, reducing net profits. This may necessitate a reevaluation of their financial and investment strategies.

**Caution in Future Investments** -- Multinational companies may adopt a more cautious approach to acquiring new properties in Kuwait. Lower post-tax returns could drive them to explore alternative markets or sectors.

**Potential Decline in Real Estate Prices** -- If companies offload real estate assets to mitigate their tax exposure, the increased market supply could push down property prices, particularly in the commercial and investment segments.

The following are the potential opportunities:

**Enhanced Transparency** -- The

new tax framework mandates detailed reporting on assets and revenues, fostering transparency. This could strengthen investor confidence and improve the real estate investment environment.

**Boost for Local Competition** -- A potential scaling down of multinational activities may provide local companies with an opportunity to expand their footprint in the real estate market.

**Investment Opportunities for Local Players** -- The divestment of assets by multinational firms could present attractive opportunities for local investors and real estate funds to acquire prime properties at competitive prices.

**Adapting to Challenges: Innovative Strategies**

**Restructuring Ownership** -- Multinational corporations may mitigate the tax impact by transferring property ownership to local entities or forming partnerships with Kuwaiti investors.

**Investment Diversification** -- Companies could shift focus toward less tax-sensitive sectors, such as technology or renewable energy, ensuring more stable returns.

**Leveraging Tax Incentives** -- Exploring potential government-offered tax exemptions or incentives could provide relief, particularly for investments in priority sectors.

Kuwait's new tax law represents a vital moment for multinational companies, especially in the real estate sector. While introducing financial and operational hurdles, the legislation also enhances transparency and creates opportunities for local market players.

Multinational firms must adapt swiftly by revising investment strategies, fostering innovation and collaborating with local stakeholders to maintain compliance while ensuring profitability. For the Kuwaiti economy, this transformation may signify a shift toward greater sustainability and competitiveness.



Al-Hashash

## Prayer Timings

Fajr ..... 05:19 Asr ..... 14:47  
Sunrise .. 06:44 Maghrib .. 17:06  
Zohr ..... 11:55 Isha ..... 18:28

# Local

## Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

**By Day:** Mild with light to moderate freshening at times northwesterly wind, with speed of 12-40 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

**By Night:** Cold with light to

## Weather

| Station        | Max Exp | Min Rec | Wind   |
|----------------|---------|---------|--|
| Kuwait City    | 19      | 12      | moderate northwesterly with speed of 12-32 km/h. |
| Kuwait Airport | 19      | 11      |  |
| Abdaly         | 20      | 12      |  |
| Bubyan         | 17      | 11      |  |
| Jahra          | 20      | 13      |  |
| Failaka Island | 19      | 14      |  |
| Salmiyah       | 17      | 14      |  |
| Ahmadi         | 15      | 09      |  |
| Jal Aliyah     | 18      | 11      |  |
| Nuwaisib       | 21      | 10      |  |

## Crown Prince, PM express commiserations

### Amir condolences with Chinese Pres. over Tibet quake victims

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences Wednesday to Chinese President Xi Jinping, over the Tibet earthquake victims.

In the cable, His Highness the

Amir expressed condolences to the victims' families, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences Wednesday to Chinese President Xi

Jinping, over the Tibet earthquake victims.

In the cable, His Highness the Crown Prince expressed condolences to the victims' families, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. (pick up Kuwait PM condolences with Chinese

Pres. over Tibet earthquake victims.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences Wednesday to Chinese President Xi Jinping, over the Tibet earthquake victims.

# Kuwaitis represent 97.7% of staff in MEW; expat workers tally dips

## New water filling station in W. Funaites on anvil

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: According to sources from the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy revealed, the ministry recently referred the tender for the construction, completion, and maintenance of a new water filling plant in West Funaites, valued at KD 1.495 million, to the State Audit Bureau (SAB) for study and audit.**

The ministry is currently awaiting SAB's approval to proceed with the signing of the con-

tract with the winning contractor.

This new water plant will serve as an alternative to the existing fresh-water filling station in Mishref for handling the long-standing challenges faced in the area.

The project has been part of the ministry's plan for several years, and is aimed at enhancing the provision of fresh water to the surrounding areas.

The new plant will help in solving the problems that the area had been suffering from due to the presence of the station, particularly given the high population density in the area.

In another development, recent statistics from the ministry revealed that 170 national employees were hired between January 2024 and November 2024, which brings the total number of employees in the ministry to 35,427, including both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti staff, up from 34,395 during the same period

in 2023.

Kuwaiti employees now represent 97.7 percent of the total workforce, while the number of non-Kuwaiti employees has decreased by 42, from 862 to 820.

**CAPT bans 8 companies:** The Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) has added eight companies to its list of those banned from participating in tenders issued by CAPT for ministries and government agencies.

The ban decisions vary, with some companies being barred from participation for one or two years, while others have been deleted from the list and banned until their disputes with the relevant authorities are resolved.

According to informed sources, the reasons for the bans include some companies' failure to fulfill tender requirements, while others

were found to be non-compliant with contractual obligations.

They affirmed the CAPT's keenness to enforce the Public Tenders Law No. 49/2016, particularly the provisions of Article 85 concerning penalties for contractors, suppliers, or service providers. This includes Clause c, which allows for companies to be deleted from the register and barred from participating in tenders for a period not exceeding five years, or permanently deleted from the register.

Also, Clause 4 stipulates that any contracting company that fails to properly execute a contract or does not fulfill it as required will be prohibited from entering into subsequent tenders until the disputed tender is resolved.

The sources highlighted that CAPT is required to circulate any penalties it imposes to the relevant parties.

## Kuwait FM condoles with China over deaths, injuries in quake

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait expressed Wednesday sympathy and solidarity with the government and people of China over the Tibet earthquake, which resulted in a score of casualties.

In a statement, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister expressed condolences to the Chinese government and people,

wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

Yesterday, China said that over 93 people have been confirmed dead, and over 130 others injured after a 6.8-magnitude earthquake jolted city of Xigaze in Xizang Autonomous Region (Tibet).

See Also Page 7



KUNA photo Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the Border Committee meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## Borders committee holds meeting

The Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chaired on Wednesday the Bor-

ders Committee meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters, discussing topics of the agenda. (KUNA)



The public draw in progress.

## Reserve list of 15 candidates finalized

# 209 selected in public draw for officer, sergeant courses

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The public draw for candidates meeting the registration and acceptance criteria for the specialized "Officer and Sergeant" courses concluded with the selection of 209 applicants out of 472 eligible individuals, reports Al-Seyassah daily. Additionally, a reserve list of 15 applicants was finalized. This initiative is a collaboration between the Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET).

The Ministry of Interior announced that the specialized courses include the Officer Agent course, which spans two years and covers three main specializations: boat captain, food inspector, and military secretary. Training will take place at PAAET, with an additional semester at the Police Institute to strengthen security and practical skills.

Meanwhile, the Sergeant course will focus on port security and will last one year. This course also involves training at PAAET, supplemented by a semester at the Police Institute.

The Ministry emphasized that these

programs aim to develop qualified national cadres with essential security and practical expertise to bolster efforts in enhancing public safety and fostering exceptional human capabilities.

The draw was held under the patronage of First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahd Al-Yousef, in line with the directives of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf. The event took place at the theater of the building named after retired Major General Abdul Latif Al-Thuwaine.

Present at the draw were Major General Fawaz Al-Sabah, Assistant Undersecretary for Education and Training Affairs; Brigadier Ali Al-Wahib, Director General of the Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences; Dr. Khaled Al-Rashid, Acting Deputy Director General for Training at PAAET; Abdulaziz Al-Dhari, Director of the Training Planning and Coordination Department; and Dr. Fawzi Al-Dokhi, Dean of Admissions and Registration, along with other security leaders.

## Municipality working on plan to beautify Kuwait

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: A member of the Municipal Council Eng. Abdul Latif Al-Daei says the proposal on Public Places Beautification Regulation, which he and the Municipal Council member Sherifa Al-Shalfan had submitted, aims to regulate individual and collective efforts to beautify various areas in Kuwait.

In a press statement, Al-Daei explained that the proposal seeks to highlight the available opportunities for improving and revitalizing public spaces. It also aims to encourage the private sector, individuals, and civil society organizations to take the initiative and participate in beautifying cities, suburbs, and public sites, all under the supervision of Kuwait Municipality, which is the authority responsible for urban development in collaboration with the Municipal Council.

Al-Daei revealed that Kuwait Municipality is currently working on setting the legal framework, conditions, and regulations for the Public Places Beautification Regulation. He said he expects the proposal to be discussed in the Municipal Council in the near future, with the goal of approving and implementing it in 2025.

The proposal sets out a clear mechanism for beautifying public places, outlined in eight basic articles, which include:

- Allowing beautification efforts by individuals, and public or private entities, under the supervision of Kuwait Municipality.

- Coordinating with relevant authorities to obtain approval if the site is under their jurisdiction.

- Proposing public sites for beautification

- Inviting both the public and private sectors to participate in the enhancement of public sites at no cost to the state's budget.

- Organizing competitions and initiatives for beautifying public spaces under the sponsorship of the private sector without any financial burden on the state.

## MoE denies blocking leave of revoked nationality teachers

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The Ministry of Education has confirmed that no bulletins, circulars, or directives have been issued regarding the suspension of leave for male and female employees whose nationality has been revoked, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This clarification comes in response to a circular issued by a girls' elementary school in one of the educational zones to prevent female teachers and administrators whose nationalities have been revoked from taking any type of leave. The move had sparked criticism within educational circles.

In an official statement, the ministry explained that it has taken legal action against certain school principals who made individual decisions that violated work regulations. Some schools had issued internal bulletins without any official directives from the relevant authorities, either from the concerned sector or the educational zone.

The ministry stressed that these internal circulars had no legal basis.

It affirmed its full commitment to the directives and instructions of the political leadership regarding employees whose nationality has been revoked.

Furthermore, the ministry confirmed its ongoing efforts to enhance transparency and ensure adherence to the regulations and laws governing work in all educational sectors.

It highlighted the importance of cooperation between school administrations and the concerned authorities to maintain smooth operations, protect the interests of all stakeholders, and ensure the fair application of the law.

In this regard, a circular dated January 7, 2025 addressed to female teachers and administrators at the aforementioned school stated that the decision was based on instructions from the educational zone.

It explicitly prohibited female employees whose nationalities have been revoked from taking any type of leave. However, it failed to provide any explanation for the decision or reference to the legal grounds on which it was based.

Several female employees expressed their dissatisfaction with the circular, considering it a violation of their legal and human rights.

## Other Voices

### Nation's future in modernity

By Ahmad alsarraf

In the contemporary landscape, the government stands at a vital juncture with the capability to either maintain the status quo, enhance the nation's trajectory, or precipitate its decline. Unchallenged in its authority, the government ostensibly endeavors to foster the well-being of its citizens.

However, underlying societal ailments suggest that allowing the populace to unilaterally dictate their preferences may not serve their best interests. Instead, a more guided approach -- akin to prescribing medicine for the unwell -- might be necessary to address these systemic issues effectively.

Historical and empirical evidence underscores that meaningful progress is inextricably linked to the adoption of scientific methodologies.

Moreover, the realms of production and creativity flourish under the aegis of freedom. These principles captivate the minds and aspirations of many, yet the prevailing advantage remains with various religious factions.

This dynamic stifles the potential for innovation and economic advancement, as religious parties often prioritize ideological conformity over progressive policies.

Liberal thought, characterized by its advocacy for individual freedoms, democratic governance and open markets, has historically posed little threat to opposing currents.

Since the inception of democracy -- and even before its formal establishment -- liberalism has been a cornerstone of Kuwait's distinguished standing. The nation's reputation for embracing liberal values has been instrumental in its development and international recognition.

Recently, a notable shift has emerged as writers and proponents of leftist political ideologies advocate for reconciliation with the Brotherhood.

This trend persists despite their acknowledgment that the Brotherhood's policies have been detrimental, leading to deterioration across numerous sectors.

Such alliances may undermine efforts to address critical issues, suggesting a complex interplay between political factions that could hinder national progress.

In light of these developments, it may be prudent for the government to consider a strategic experiment: forming alliances with established liberal currents characterized by high educational standards and robust administrative expertise.

Such partnerships could catalyze several key areas such as the leveraging liberal economic principles to pull the economy out of stagnation and foster sustainable growth; restoring education to its pivotal role in society, ensuring it leads in innovation and critical thinking and opening doors to greater freedoms, thereby enriching the arts, literature, culture and intel-

lectual discourse.

This is in addition to enhancing the nation's openness to the world, facilitating international collaboration and exchange.

The culmination of these efforts points toward a singular truth -- the nation's future lies in embracing modernity. By aligning with liberal forces that prioritize education, economic vitality and cultural richness, the government can navigate out of existing challenges and steer the nation toward a prosperous and enlightened future.

In an era where traditional structures often impede progress, modernity offers a beacon of hope, illuminating the path to national rejuvenation and global relevance.

The government's current position affords it the unique opportunity to shape the nation's destiny decisively.

By fostering alliances with liberal, educated and administratively competent groups, it can address prevailing societal ailments, stimulate economic growth and cultivate a vibrant cultural landscape.

Embracing modernity through such strategic partnerships is not merely an option but a necessity for sustained national progress and the genuine happiness of its people.

Dr. Khaled Montaser poses critical questions: Why do some individuals use the niqab when committing crimes? Is it because it serves as a disguise to conceal their identity, or because committing the act requires a means to hide?

The issue is not merely about a piece of cloth chosen to cover the face but rather about the security risk it poses.

The niqab acts as a tool for concealment and cannot be considered a matter of personal freedom. Can refusing to include a photo on a driver's license or passport be justified as a personal freedom?

If a security or passport officer at the airport requests a woman to show her face, should she refuse under the guise of personal liberty? Is carrying a weapon or removing street signs that obscure directions a matter of personal freedom?

If every individual in society adopted the hijab, could such a society function effectively? Is it feasible to live in a community where everyone is masked? Is social, security and administrative control more achievable in an open society or one where individuals are hidden?

Doesn't every member of society have the right to confirm the identity of the person they interact with, whether in conversation, transactions, or daily dealings?

What about the identity of my child's teacher -- is this person a man or a woman? Or the person treating me or my wife -- is this individual genuinely a qualified female doctor?

We all have the right to live in a society where identities are transparent, without being compelled to question or second-guess the identity of those who, often under coercion, choose to conceal their faces and obscure their identities.

□ □ □

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

## 'Collaboration, innovation keys to Kuwait sustainable development'

By Abdulrahman Al-Shimmari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: Abdul Mohsen Al-Haroun, the Executive Director of Marketing and Commercial Operations at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), emphasized the vital role of scientific research and technological innovation in driving Kuwait's sustainable development.

He stressed that the upcoming phase necessitates collaboration among scientific and research institutions to realize the nation's developmental vision.

Speaking at the launch of the 'Research and Technology Management and

its Activities' lecture series -- organized by KISR at the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) -- Al-Haroun acknowledged the significant contributions KFAS made over the past decades.

As KFAS approaches its 50th anniversary next year, he praised its enduring support for scientific research and technology, noting its instrumental role in addressing developmental challenges.

Al-Haroun lauded the partnership between KFAS and KISR, which has yielded remarkable outcomes.

Over the past five years, this collaboration funded 86 projects and research studies, including seven projects that secured patents and 52 research papers published in esteemed scientific journals.

He underscored the importance of such partnerships in fostering innovation and advancing Kuwait's research and technology sector.



Al-Haroun

## Gulf citizens go back elated in awe of openness, hospitality

"I HEARD it as a simple sentence, but its truth struck deep: politics often divides, while sports and art have the power to unite," columnist and former Deputy Director-General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) **Iqbal Al-Ahmad** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"This sentiment was expressed by one of the visitors to Kuwait during the 26th Gulf Cup Championship. He urged his compatriots to come to Kuwait and witness the true nature of Kuwaitis -- far from the conflicts and negativity often magnified on social media.

"These platforms sometimes distort reality, fostering division and obscuring the genuine bonds of love and unity that connect us.

"During the Gulf Cup, children in Kuwait displayed an extraordinary spirit that captivated everyone. Their innocent yet profound words reflected a belief that any Gulf team's victory is a victory for Kuwait, emphasizing that the Gulf nations are one. Their voices echoed unity, showcasing a love that transcends borders and rivalries.

"In past tournaments, emotions often ran high, with dissatisfaction and anger surfacing after a team's defeat. However, 'Gulf 26' in Kuwait was different. It embodied a spirit of harmony and mutual respect. These children, inspired by their parents, remind us that unity isn't just a political aspiration but a deeply rooted emotional and social reality.

"It was heartwarming to see teams and fans leave Kuwait with fond memories of the tournament, characterized by warmth, kind words and beautiful wishes. The Gulf spirit permeated stadiums, cafes, parks and streets, spreading an infectious aroma of love and respect among the Gulf Cooperation Council nations, Iraq and Yemen.

"A special highlight was Mubarakia Market, a treasure trove of Kuwait's heritage. It became a hub of joy, with flags of different colors waving together, reflecting the unity and happiness of all visitors.

"One Kuwaiti child's heartfelt wish to divide the championship cup among all participating countries symbolized this spirit of togetherness.

"Kuwait, with its neutrality and efforts to mediate disputes, stood as a beacon of peace. Despite the challenges posed by political differences, Kuwait successfully created an atmosphere of reconciliation and camaraderie. It reminded us of its true essence as a land of tolerance, peace and unity.

"To everyone who contributed to the tournament's success -- whether through a kind word, hospitality, or effort -- thank you. Your contributions helped foster an atmosphere of warmth and joy that brought much-needed relief from the cold wave.

"The Gulf Cup wasn't just about sports; it was an opportunity for economic, social and psychological recovery. It demonstrated the importance of Kuwait's openness, not as a departure from tradition but as a vital economic, social and cultural necessity.

"To everyone who made the Gulf nations happy during those remarkable days and to those who revealed the true brilliance of Kuwait -- the Pearl of the Gulf -- we extend our gratitude as vast as the sky."



Iqbal Al-Ahmad

tegrity. "When discussions about dual citizenship arise, some argue that the state's past silence on the matter legitimizes the situation. However, forgery and duplication are ongoing crimes, prosecutable at any time. Silence does not equate to acceptance.

"In cases of nationality revocation, especially involving Kuwaiti wives, misinformation and exaggeration dominate the discourse. False claims of absolute injustice fail to recognize the complexities involved.

"Some cases involve short-lived marriages rooted in suspicious deals; others concern individuals who continue to hold dual citizenship or engage in other violations; many gained citizenship through exceptions, interventions, or political pressure.

"The notion that all affected individuals will become stateless is unfounded. Most can reclaim their original nationalities or prove they never fully renounced them.

"The government has taken positive steps to address these issues, including Decree Law No. 158 of 2024, which amends Article 16 of the Nationality Law. This law provides appropriate rights and guarantees, allowing grievances to be filed and offering justice to those wrongfully affected.

"It seems that some individuals exploit the plight of Kuwaiti wives not out of genuine concern but to protect themselves. They use this issue as a shield to prevent the broader citizenship files -- containing forgers and dual citizens -- from being scrutinized. Their motives are self-serving, driven by fears of exposure.

"Credibility is lost amidst the noise of exaggeration and misinformation. While the government has taken steps to address these challenges, it is crucial to cut through the fog of deception and focus on facts, evidence and the national interest. Only by doing so can we restore trust and move forward."

"We have a question, which is far from being innocent but is one that we must direct to a large group of individuals who are still blinded by their delusions, whose eyes remain closed, and who continue to live under the illusion of national struggle and immature opposition. These individuals believe they hold the solutions, and that they are the vanguard without whom progress cannot continue. They imagine their presence at the forefront of events is essential, and that the masses are eagerly awaiting their speeches and interventions, both inside and outside the country, regarding the course of events," columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"We have every right to ask this question - Where are the supporters and financiers of that political novice who demands to rule Kuwait but lacks any clear vision? He has backed himself into a corner, severed all paths of retreat, and declared open hostility towards a country whose nationality he holds. He has spared no opportunity for sabotage, even going so far as to disrupt the official procession, and enraging all loyal Kuwaitis. Where are those who once funded him generously in exchange for his reckless actions? After his arrest, they have distanced themselves, saying, 'Your blood does not fill me', meaning, 'Do not involve me in this case, and do not mention my name as an instigator or financier'.

"As for those behind the money transfers and the so-called 'support for the opposition', their hearts are heavy with fear, as they know that if their involvement is exposed, they will soon face the consequences. It is only a matter of time before their actions come to light.

"The rule of 'Your blood does not fill me' is an old one, which comes into effect when the supporter abandons the supported out of fear of accountability. What matters most to the supporter is that their name is not implicated in the scandal in order to avoid any responsibility for the chaos they helped fuel.

"What everyone must understand is that Kuwait is currently in a phase of reorganization and correction after years of unprecedented decline. The country was entrusted to people who were not of its own, which worsened the situation to the point where we were shocked by the numbers of those who withdrew their support. The names that surfaced included individuals who had previously held positions of responsibility but were later found to be involved in deception.

"For too many years, this country was governed by outsiders while the true founders were sidelined. But now, God has provided us with someone who can save us from this reversed situation.

"The savior has arrived, and it is our duty to stand united behind him. Instead of wasting our resources on deceitful individuals and false opposition, we must focus on supporting those who truly have the country's best interests at heart."

"Examples abound. Initiatives like 'Afa Insurance,' which faced distortion and was ultimately canceled, harmed all parties involved. Similarly, the 'Labor Support' program turned into a loophole for profiteering and legal circumvention.

"The 'disability' issue has expanded to include countless individuals who do not meet the criteria, turning the matter into a farce. Even the Department of Treatment Abroad and forged educational certificates -- once the pride of Kuwait's system -- now bear the scars of these deceptive practices.

"The most contentious topic remains the issue of 'nationality.' Files are riddled with violations, including forgery, duplication, exceptions and breaches of the law.

"A friend once asked about a forged citizenship case, questioning why the descendants of a forger should suffer by losing their citizenship. My response was straightforward: Why should Kuwait and its citizens bear the burden of fraud committed by someone's ancestor? The state and its people should not be held accountable for actions that breach the nation's integrity.

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes/  
Mahmoud Attiyyeh?



Farwaniya Governorate photo

Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah with the security directors.

## Sheikh Athbi meets security directors

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received the Director General of the Farwaniya Security Directorate Brigadier General Mohammad Mutlaq Jassim Al-Mutairi, and the Director General of the Hawally Security Directorate Brigadier General Saleh Aqla Al-Azmi this morning at his office in the General Diwan of Farwaniya Governorate.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, Sheikh Athbi expressed his sincere gratitude to Brigadier Al-Azmi for his dedication and tireless efforts during his previous tenure as the Director General of the Farwaniya Security Directorate.

He commended Brigadier General Al-Mutairi for his distinguished work and wished him success in his new role as Director of Security for Farwaniya Governorate.

During the meeting, the officials discussed important security matters and future plans aimed at protecting the homeland's security.

The governor affirmed that security is the foundation of the nation, and its strengthening requires the cooperation of all.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Athbi also received Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Ishbiliya Cooperative Society Fawaz Al-Baghli, a member of the Board of Directors Dr. Awjan Al-Arada, and the cooperative society's Director General Salah Al-Badi.

During the meeting, they discussed ways to strengthen cooperation between the governorate and the cooperative society to meet the needs of the residents of Ishbiliya.

They affirmed the importance of improving services for both citizens and residents, as well as supporting initiatives aimed at enhancing service quality through distinguished cooperative services.

The guests, on their part, expressed their sincere thanks and appreciation to the Farwaniya Governor for his warm welcome and for the continuous support provided, particularly his commitment to overcoming challenges and ensuring the delivery of services.

## Narcotics, drugs items found on cop in his car

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: A policeman working in the General Department of Coast Guard was arrested from a desert spot in Jahra Governorate and referred to the Drug Control General Department after being found in possession of illicit narcotics and drug paraphernalia, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to security sources, a rescue patrol from the Jahra Police became suspicious of a vehicle that was parked in a dirt lot at night and had the lights on. When the patrol approached the vehicle, the driver attempted to flee but was quickly apprehended. The driver appeared to be in a disoriented state, and upon searching his car as a precaution, a number of items were discovered. These items included a bag containing a white substance suspected to be heroin, a second bag containing a white substance believed to be shabu, another bag with remnants of what appeared to be heroin, and a tin foil with a dark-colored, burnt substance suspected to be heroin. Drug paraphernalia was also found.

Meanwhile, Jahra support patrols arrested four drug users found in possession of shabu, hashish, chemicals, and narcotic pills, along with tools for drug use. The arrested individuals were subsequently referred to the competent authorities for further action.

In another development, personnel from the Directorate-General for Drugs Control have arrested an unidentified man, who is believed to be in his 30s, for possessing and consuming drugs, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The daily added, the suspect who has not been identified was caught in Salmiya and has been handed over to the concerned authority.

Police have also seized from the man drug consuming tools.

**Kuwaiti swindled:** A Kuwaiti citizen has filed a report at a police station in Capital Governorate that he had been defrauded by an expatriate who convinced him he would become a partner in a food supply import project, in exchange for a payment of KD 30,000, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to the citizen's complaint, his expatriate acquaintance proposed a business partnership based on which they would import food supplies, and asked him to contribute KD 30,000. After handing over the amount several months ago, the citizen later discovered that the expatriate had returned to his home country, leaving him defrauded.

# Duo acquitted of stealing, setting fire to marine boat seizure garage

19 held for doing drugs, 35 detained for 'drinking'

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

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The Criminal Court has acquitted two defendants accused of setting fire and stealing from the Kuwait Municipality's marine boat impoundment garage by climbing over its fence at night.**

The Public Prosecution charged the first and second defendants with deliberately setting fire to movable items stored in the Kuwait Municipality impoundment garage, causing damage to property. They were also accused of attempting to steal items from the state-owned garage, which is enclosed by a fence. The defendants allegedly gained access by scaling the fence at night but were apprehended after a fire broke out during the crime, thwarting their plans.

A third defendant was charged with conspiring with the first two defendants in the theft at-

tempt. The case stemmed from statements made by detectives, who reported that the three defendants had planned to steal items from a boat located in the Abdullah Port area, specifically within the Kuwait Municipality Impoundment Garage. The site was described as a fenced dirt lot.

According to the investigation, the first and second defendants entered the area by climbing the outer fence. They began dismantling the "transmission" from the boat using tools they had brought. During the process, a spark ignited, causing the boat to catch fire. The pair then fled the scene, while the third defendant waited outside to receive the stolen items, which he intended to purchase from them for resale and profit.

Defense attorney Ali Haidar, representing the acquitted defendants, argued that the charges against his client were baseless. He highlighted inconsistencies in witness testimony, asserting that unsupported statements could not be used as evidence for conviction. The court found the testimony insufficient and cleared the defen-

dants of all charges.

**35 held for 'drinking':** The General Department of Rescue Police continued its security and traffic campaigns in all governorates, which resulted in the referral of 19 individuals to the Drugs Control General Department and the detention of 35 others for being in a state of drunkenness.

According to the weekly statistics from the Rescue Police patrols, 152 individuals were arrested for violating residency laws, seven people were apprehended in possession of alcoholic substances, and 67 vehicles wanted in civil cases, and six vehicles, whose drivers committed serious violations, were seized. The patrols managed to break up 49 quarrels and successfully contain the situation, with legal measures taken against those involved. Furthermore, the patrols provided 303 humanitarian assistance.

A security source affirmed that the Rescue Police patrols will continue their security campaigns in all governorates and roads to arrest wanted individuals and maintain public order.

## Ex-MP released

## Al-Muwaizri acquitted of spreading 'untrue' news

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Faisal Al-Hassan, acquitted former MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri of the dissemination of false news regarding biometric fingerprint process and the nationality law.

The Public Prosecution had charged Al-Muwaizri with intentionally spreading false news and malicious rumors, while abroad between September 5 and 29, about the internal situation in the country.

According to the case file, Al-Muwaizri published posts on his personal social media account titled "Shuaib Muwaizri - Shuaib Al-Muwaizri" about news and rumors that could potentially undermine confidence in the state, harm its prestige and reputation, and threaten its national interests.

The prosecution claimed that the accused intentionally misused a mobile phone, a means of telecommunication, to commit the offenses described in the first and third charges.

According to the investigations, Al-Muwaizri's posts allegedly included content that could incite violations of laws and public order.

During the session at the Criminal Court, Al-Muwaizri's legal counsel Lawyer Dr. Khaled Al-Kafeefa, argued that the crime of spreading false news and malicious rumors about the country's internal situation, with its material and moral elements, did not apply to his client, as Al-Muwaizri holds political views and national visions that confirm that the posts in question were consistent with his past expressions of opinion regarding the country's affairs. Given Al-Muwaizri's prominent position as a well-known politician, it was implausible for someone of his stature to commit such a crime.

Lawyer Al-Kafeefa presented a portfolio of documents containing examples of his client's previous opinions, which closely resembled the content of the contested posts. This, he claimed, confirmed that the publications were merely expressions of his client's views, rather than false news.

He also contended that there was a lack of moral intent for the crime of spreading false information, citing the insufficiency and invalidity of the evidence gathered during the investigation.

**Ex-MP released:** The Public Prosecution has decided to release former MP Muhannad Al-Sayer on a bail of KD 1,000 after completing investigations with him in a State Security case based on a complaint filed by the Ministry of Interior concerning a video posted by Al-Sayer on social media, in which he discussed the withdrawal of citizenship.



Talal Al-Saeed

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# Municipality responds to Salwa school infractions

3 institutions violated building codes

By Inaas Awadh  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: Director of the Legal Department at Kuwait Municipality Hussein Al-Ajmi submitted a detailed statement to the Municipal Council as part of the executive body's response to a question raised by the Municipal Council member Nasser Al-Jadaan regarding private schools in Salwa.**

The statement outlined the legal procedures taken regarding the violations of private schools in Salwa.

It explained that three violation reports received by the Legal Department were referred to the Engineering Audit and Follow-up Department at Hawally Municipality. These reports were reviewed by the Legal Department and are now in preparation for further action to address the identified issues.

In response to the member's question, the municipality clarified that the building violations identified in the reports varied. They included unauthorized building extensions, construction without adhering to setback re-

quirements, misuse of property for purposes other than those for which it was licensed, and the cancellation of designated parking spaces.

It provided a list of the private schools in Salwa that were inspected, which included a total of nine schools. Violations were recorded at three of them:

**1. The British School:**

Violations included unlicensed annexes on the ground floor, the cancellation of parking spaces, and the construction of a building within the parking lot, all of which were found to violate building regulations.

**2. The English Early Education Group:**

This school was found to have expanded its building without a license, with an unauthorized addition of 800 square meters on the ground floor. The property was also being used for purposes other than its licensed function.

**3. The American Academy for Girls:**

Upon inspection, it was discovered that the school had made an unlicensed extension of 100 square meters on the first floor, leading to a violation of building regulations.

The municipality is currently taking the necessary steps to address these violations in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations.

## IRU enforces new alert system for compliance with sanctions

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: Mohammed Sulaiman Al-Otaibi, the Head of Kuwait's Insurance Regulatory Unit, has issued a circular requiring companies under the IRU supervision to subscribe to the "Mallerte" automated alert system, reports Al-Seyassah daily.**

This system will immediately notify subscribers of any changes to the UN sanctions lists concerning terrorism, the financing of the proliferation of weapons and local sanctions related to combating terrorism and preventing the proli-

eration of weapons of mass destruction, as per the national lists issued by the Special Committee.

The IRU emphasized that all entities subject to anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist financing regulations within the insurance sector must complete registration for the new system by the 15th of this month.

Failure to comply will result in potential accountability under Law No. 125 of 2019 on the regulation of insurance, its executive regulations and relevant decisions and laws.

## Scheduled roadworks at Fourth Ring Road

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The General Traffic Department has announced scheduled maintenance work at the intersection of Al Maghreb Expressway and Hussein Bin Ali Al Roumi Road (Fourth Ring Road), reports Al-Seyassah daily.**

The maintenance will be carried out in five stages, with each stage requiring a one-week closure.

In the first phase, the side exit toward the Rawda area from Morocco Street, for vehicles traveling from the city toward Ahmadi and leading to the Fourth Ring Road in the direction of Jahra, will be closed from January 9 to 17.



KFAED photo

Photo during an inspiring meeting at the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development headquarters for a group of exceptional secondary school students participating in the 14th edition of the 'Be an Outstanding Student' program.

### Students to explore global dev't milestones

## Kuwait Fund nurtures excellence with 'Be an Outstanding Student' program

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development hosted an inspiring meeting at its headquarters for a group of exceptional secondary school students participating in the 14th edition of the 'Be an Outstanding Student' program, reports Al-Seyassah daily.**

This annual initiative, organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, aims to reward excellence among students while introducing them to Kuwait's global development contributions.

Mona Al-Ayyaf, Director of the Media Department at the Fund, highlighted in her speech that this year's program includes two trips.

Male students will visit the Republics of Togo and Benin in West Africa, while female students will travel to Bosnia in southeastern Europe. Since the program's inception, over 330 students have participated in visits to more than 15 countries, including Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Turkey, Uzbekistan, China, Sri Lanka and Cuba.

Al-Ayyaf explained that the program's purpose is to showcase the Fund's developmental projects in Arab and developing countries, emphasizing Kuwait's prominent regional and global role. The initiative aligns with the Fund's commitment to social

responsibility and its ongoing support for local development efforts.

She also underlined the Fund's remarkable journey, spanning 63 years, during which it has supported development initiatives in over 105 countries. Al-Ayyaf noted the Fund's influential role in advancing Kuwait's foreign policy by generating political and economic benefits through its development contributions.

During the session, Al-Ayyaf elaborated on the Fund's achievements, strategies and operations across various sectors, including managing grants provided by Kuwait to several nations.

Locally, she highlighted the Fund's cooperation with the Public Institution for Housing Welfare and Kuwait Credit Bank to address housing issues, as well as its efforts to enhance human development through initiatives like the Kuwaiti Engineers Rehabilitation Program.

Expressing gratitude, Al-Ayyaf thanked the Ministry of Education for its ongoing cooperation and support, which has been instrumental in ensuring the program's success.

Saleh Al-Taqi, the official overseeing the students' trip to Togo and Benin, outlined the itinerary for their visit, scheduled from January 17 to January 25.

The students will explore key projects financed by the Fund and prominent historical, cultural and economic landmarks in the two African countries.

Similarly, Fatima Al-Turkait, responsible for the students' trip to Bosnia, emphasized the importance of witnessing the Fund's development projects firsthand. She hoped the experience would provide valuable insights into the Fund's contributions to the economies of beneficiary countries and their impact on local communities.

Students Shabib and Anwar Al-Shariaan expressed their excitement about visiting Togo and Benin, eager to explore the landmarks and observe Kuwait's developmental influence through the Fund's projects.

Meanwhile, student Hayat Al-Hashem shared her enthusiasm for the Bosnia trip, particularly looking forward to experiencing the snowy mountains and cable car rides during the winter season.

Launched in 2010, the 'Be an Outstanding Student' program aims to inspire high school students to excel academically while fostering an understanding of Kuwait's global standing and development efforts. It serves as a reward for their dedication and achievements, further enriching their educational journey.



# JANUARY

## Room Promotion

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KFAS photos

Photos from the event.

### Fostering creativity and technological advancements

## KFAS reaffirms commitment to support KU's 47th Engineering Design Exhibition

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 7: The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) has affirmed its commitment to supporting the 47th Engineering Design Exhibition organized by Kuwait University, which opened today at the College of Engineering and Petroleum in Sabah Al-Salem University City. This support is in line with the mission of KFAS to encourage progress in science, technology, and innovation, and stimulate societal and scientific advancements in Kuwait.**

In a press release issued on the occasion of the exhibition's inauguration, KFAS highlighted that the objectives of the event, which is held under the patronage of the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr. Nader Al-Jalal, are closely aligned with the goals of KFAS. These include encouraging Kuwaitis to engage in scientific research, nurturing creativity, and encouraging a competitive environment that enriches the scientific talents of university students.

KFAS stated that, through its support for the exhibition organized by the Col-

lege of Engineering and Petroleum, it aims to fulfill its vision of creating a vibrant scientific, technological, and innovative culture for a sustainable Kuwait. This support also focuses on investing in distinguished national talents and showcasing their creativity in the field of engineering design.

It emphasized that its continued support for the exhibition in its successive editions stems from its belief in the importance of the role the event plays in honoring outstanding engineering projects. It also aims to motivate students to create pioneering projects that can contribute to Kuwait's development and help overcome the challenges it faces in various sectors.

KFAS commended the exhibition for its role in highlighting the capabilities and skills of graduate engineers, and providing an inspiring environment for enhancing creativity and applying technological solutions to real-life challenges.

Furthermore, KFAS recognized the exhibition's potential in harnessing the energies of future engineers and benefiting from their ideas and innovations.

### MoE campaign in support of Twelfth-Grade students

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, launched a campaign Tuesday morning aimed at motivating twelfth-grade students during their examination period, reports Al-Seyassah daily.**

The initiative, supervised by the Public Relations and Educational Media Department, involved 30 public transport buses displaying advertisements, posters and motivational messages to encourage students as they prepare for their exams.

This effort reflects the ministry's commitment to supporting students and fostering a positive environment during this critical stage of their academic journey.



MoE photo

A campaign poster on a public transport bus.



Photo during the governors' meeting.

Farwaniya Governorate photo

### Officials emphasize importance of cooperation

## Kuwait's governors hold coordination meeting for National Day preparations

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah chaired the governors' meeting on Tuesday morning at the General Diwan of the Capital Governorate.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the meeting was attended by Capital Governor Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Hawally Governor Ali Salem Al-Asfar, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governor Sheikh Sabah Bader Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Jahra Governor Hamad Jassim Mohammed

Al-Habashi, Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Hamoud Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and a number of senior officials from the Ministry of Interior.

At the start of the meeting, Capital Governor Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah welcomed the attendees. The discussion focused on the special preparations for the upcoming National Day celebrations, and they affirmed the importance of activating all efforts to spread joy and happiness throughout Kuwait.

The governors also discussed

the need to enhance coordination among the governorates and collaboration among various government agencies to ensure the national holidays are celebrated in a beautiful and dignified manner.

At the end of the meeting, the Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi commended the spirit of cooperation and optimism that characterized the gathering.

He stressed that such coordination meetings enhance integration and have a positive impact on the development of work in all governorates of Kuwait.

### Two more plots in Rai and Egaila pending

## MoF transfers Mirqab land to PIFSS

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The Ministry of Finance announced the signing of an official document to transfer ownership of a 51,000 square meter land plot in the Mirqab area to the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS). This transfer is in line with Law No. 4 of 2022, specifically Article 4, which stipulates:

"The public treasury shall cover the actuarial deficit of the institution by decision of the relevant minister, with payments not less than 500 million Kuwaiti dinars at the beginning of each fiscal year starting from April 1, 2022, in cash or in-kind to the institution until the full actuarial deficit is settled. This shall be based on the financial position assessment of the institution as of March 31, 2019, approved by its Board of Directors. The valuation of in-kind payments shall be carried out by accredited appraisers from the competent authorities prior to payment and under the supervision of



Photo during the signing of an official document.

MoF photo

the Audit Bureau."

During the signing meeting, the Ministry of Finance clarified that coordination is underway with the Kuwait Municipality, the Ministry of Justice, and the Public Institution for Social Security for the transfer of two additional land plots in the Rai and Egaila areas.

It is noteworthy that the sign-

ing was attended by Ms. Aseel Suleiman Al-Munifi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Finance; Mr. Ahmed Hamad Al-Thunayan, Acting Director General of the Public Institution for Social Security; and Mr. Tariq Ali Al-Asfour, Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice.

### Move ensures compliance with budget limits

## Info ministry halts allowance requests

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The Ministry of Information has stopped accepting requests for work allowances based on the shift and location system, including shift allowances, food allowances, night shift compensation, and location allowances, until the end of the current fiscal year of 2024/2025.

According to informed sources, this decision is in line with the Civil Service Council's decisions,

particularly decision No. 12/2012 regarding overtime compensation and the shift system, decision No. 8/2010 concerning specialized engineering job cadres and location allowances, and decision No. 40/2012 regarding support engineering job cadres and location allowances.

They explained that the ministry will resume accepting requests for allowances at the beginning of the next fiscal year. This measure is part of the ministry's efforts to prepare for the

closure of financial accounts for the current year and ensure that financial dues are disbursed in accordance with established regulations and systems.

The decision aims to prevent any complications related to the settlement of financial dues or exceeding the allocated budget limits.

In addition, the sources affirmed that the ministry is committed to adhering to the Civil Service Council's decisions to regulate and manage the processes for disbursing allowances.

# KNPC and KIPIC merger achieves key milestones

## Zour Refinery hits record production peak

By Najeh Bilal  
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: Informed sources revealed ongoing efforts to accelerate and expand the merger process between the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) and the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) in the near future, as some facilities will be merged and others will be phased out, accompanied by a series of transfers and promotions.

They explained that the CEO

of KNPC Wadha Al-Khatib, who also serves as the acting CEO of KIPIC, is focusing on injecting fresh talent into mid-level positions in both companies. This initiative aims to elevate the efficiency and experience of the personnel, with the goal of boosting profits for both companies in the current fiscal year.

It was noted that KIPIC has achieved major milestones following its merger with KNPC, including its recent success in exporting a shipment of high-quality diesel that meets French specifications. This is particularly noteworthy as France mandates the delivery of completely clean diesel that complies with rigorous environmental standards.

The company has also made great progress in its digital transformation efforts, including partnering with international firms in

the field of digital technologies to enhance the use of modern digital solutions in all its operations.

The sources revealed that the liquefied gas import terminal reported zero work-related injuries in 2024, adding that it successfully received three liquefied gas shipments simultaneously, which confirms the terminal's capacity to handle all gas supplies, and ensures a continuous and reliable supply to the country.

On the other hand, they highlighted that the Zour Refinery recently achieved a success in reaching its maximum production capacity of 615,000 barrels per day through the blending of heavy and medium crude oils.

The sources commended the role of Kuwait Oil Company in this achievement, as it consistently supplies the refinery with the necessary crude oil, which helps in sustaining and increasing production levels.

## ABK announces Faisal Mohammad Al Hajri as Alfouz KD 10,000 weekly draw winner

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is excited to announce Faisal Mohammad Al Hajri as the winner of the Alfouz KD 10,000 weekly draw on Monday, 6 January 2025. The draw took place in the presence of a Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative, ensuring transparency.

From the highly coveted mega annual draw of a KD 5,000 monthly salary for 10 years to its KD 10,000 weekly prize, the account has attracted significant attention in the Kuwaiti market. Based on the account's great success, ABK decided to go above and beyond to reward customer loyalty.

With a KD 100,000 quarterly draw, in addition to an exciting KD 20,000 monthly draw, the Alfouz account continues to surpass expectations and deliver even more customer satisfaction.

To top it off, ABK has simplified the ability to open the account and win! Customers can enter the draws and get extra entry chances for every KD 10 deposited. The more you save, the higher your chance to be the next Alfouz winner!

ABK encourages everyone to open an Alfouz draw account or increase their balance to participate in the upcoming draw, which is scheduled to take place on Monday, 13 January 2025.

Open an Alfouz account today and enjoy increased oppor-



ABK - Alfouz winners 2025 weekly winner flyer

tunities to win the lifestyle you've been waiting for! To learn more about the Alfouz account and its range of exciting draws and prizes, please follow ABK's Instagram account @abk\_kuwait, visit eahli.com, contact Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899 or visit one of the Bank's branches across Kuwait.

### Temporary Debt List for the Debtor / Fahad Abdulaziz Abdulhameed Al-Sanea :

This is based on the decision of the Bankruptcy Judge in Case/Request No. 14 / 2024 for Bankruptcy Declaration, registered under automated number (240145390) on 19 / 2 / 2024 at the Bankruptcy Administration Office. The decision approved the request and initiated the bankruptcy declaration procedures submitted by the debtor himself. The court designated 8 / 1 / 2024 as the provisional date for cessation of payments. The decision was published and announced in the official gazette «Kuwait Today» Issue No. 1678, dated 10 / 3 / 2024, confirming the acceptance of the request, initiating the bankruptcy declaration, and appointing Dr. Faleh Al-Azmi as the bankruptcy trustee. Concerned parties were duly notified. The bankruptcy trustee commenced his duties by inviting creditors to submit their claims. After completing the debt verification process within the scope of the responses received and based on the debtor's statement, the following should be noted:

On 11 / 11 / 2024, a final ruling was issued by the Bankruptcy Court (the court ruled on 11 / 11 / 2024 to declare the bankruptcy of the claimant, Fahad Abdulaziz Abdulhameed Al-Sanea, and designated 8 / 1 / 2024 as the provisional date for cessation of payments. The Bankruptcy Administration was directed to record this ruling in the commercial register and publish its summary in the official gazette in accordance with the procedures in this regard, adding expenses and a fee of ten Kuwaiti Dinars for legal counsel, which shall be charged to the bankruptcy estate).

This list has been prepared, outlining the amounts deemed acceptable by the bankruptcy trustee as follows:

| #            | Creditor/Entity Name   | Debt Instrument   | Amount Due in Kuwaiti Dinar: | Notes  |
|--------------|--|---|------------------------------|--|
| 1            | Burgan Bank  | Secured Facilities Agreement  | 8,500,000                    |  |
| 2            | Kamco Investment Company   | Two Official Debt Acknowledgments   | 200,000                      |  |
| 3            | Yaqoub Youssef Ali Haidar  | Bounced Cheques   | 1,680,000                    |  |
| 4            | Ibtisam Abdulrazzaq Al-Sanea   | Debt Acknowledgment   | 335,000                      |  |
| 5            | Sheikh Abdullah Salem Abdullah Al-Sabah  | Preliminary Sale Contract for a Property in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh Owned by Hamid Al-Oqob                                  | 100,000                      |  |
| 6            | Faisal Hamad Al-Shaiji   | Preliminary Sale Contract   | 350,000                      |  |
| 7            | Letters from lawyers Mohammad Al-Marjaah and Abdulrazzaq Abdullah regarding financial claims for their clients | Various Letters and Unsorted Documents (the lawyer has been requested to specify the claim basis and the amount due). |                              | Follow-up is ongoing to present it to the debtor.  |
| 8            | An invoice for advance fees submitted by Al-Duajj & Al-Turkit Law Firm   |   | 7,500                        |  |
| <b>Total</b> |  |   | <b>11,172,500</b>            | <b>Only eleven million, one hundred and seventy-two thousand, five hundred Kuwaiti Dinars.</b> |

The total debts, as presented to us by the creditors, amount to 11,172,500 KWD (Eleven million, one hundred seventy-two thousand, five hundred Kuwaiti Dinars).

**Note: According to Article (111) of Law No. 71 of 2020 concerning the issuance of the Bankruptcy Law:** "The debtor and any creditor, even if their name does not appear in the debt list, may appeal to the Bankruptcy Department regarding the debts listed in the list, within ten days from the date of the announcement of the list. The Bankruptcy Court is competent to rule on this appeal."

Bankruptcy Trustee: Dr. Faleh Al-Azmi  
Bankruptcy Trustee's Address: Kuwait - Al-Qiblah - Block (11) - Plot (18) - Muneira Hamoud Al-Omari Building - Floor (1) Office (6)  
Phone: 99105903 - 99081109 - 0096522442424.  
We appreciate your kind attention and respect.  
mgc\_consulting@yahoo.com

### Kuwait, Turkiye

their official visit to Kuwait.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef lauded the special relations bonding the State of Kuwait with the friendly Republic of Turkiye, affirming the desire for strengthening the cooperation in various spheres particularly in the military field.

The ministry statement added that the two sides discussed latest regional and international developments related to the realms of defense and security.

The meeting was attended by Kuwait Deputy Chief of Staff Air Vice Marshal Sabah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez and a number of senior officers from the two sides.

### 13 face

In other news, the Ministry of Education has announced that it will stop receiving applications for the Complaints and Grievances Committee after the two-week period set for submissions, according to Al-Seyassah daily.

The committee has already received 41 cases highlighting serious financial and administrative irregularities, which are now being reviewed in accordance with legal protocols.

The Ministry explained that the committee is composed of representatives from four entities and is dedicated to ensuring transparency and justice in addressing the complaints.

In addition to grievances, the committee is also reviewing files related to

employees' financial and administrative issues, in line with Minister Jalal Al-Tabtabaei's directive to uphold legal standards.

The Ministry praised the efforts of its employees in facilitating the review process and reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining fairness and integrity across all sectors. Minister Al-Tabtabaei emphasized the importance of continuous cooperation to foster a fair and transparent work environment for the benefit of citizens and the public interest.

The committee will continue its work for three months, submitting monthly progress reports and a final report at the end of its term, with the possibility of requesting an extension if necessary.

## INTERNATIONAL

'We will never back down'

## Canadian PM rejects Trump's remarks on annexing Canada

WASHINGTON, Jan 8, (KUNA): The recently resigned Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau condemned late Tuesday the recent remarks by US President-elect Donald Trump on annexing Canada to become the 51 state of the United States.

Trudeau had announced on Monday that he will step down as leader of the Liberal Party and as prime minister once a successor has been chosen.

In a post on (X) Trudeau stated regarding Trump's remarks "there isn't a snowball's chance in hell that Canada would become part of the United State."

"Workers and communities in both our countries benefit from being each other's biggest trading and security partner," he added.

On her part, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly also rejected Trump's comments saying it shows a complete lack of understanding of what makes Canada a strong country, emphasizing "we will never back down in the face of threats".

Earlier today, Trump said in a press conference in Florida that he was not considering military force to annex Canada but suggested he would use



KUNA photo  
Justin Trudeau – Canadian Prime Minister

"economic force" to bring the country into the United States.

Last month, Fox News quoted unnamed sources claiming Trump had "personally raised the idea of merging with United States" with Trudeau during their meeting in Florida in late November.

Trump also posted several images on his (Truth Social) platform showing a map of the US with Canada depicted as part of it.

Controversial architect of 'French People First' leaves complex legacy

## Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder of France's far-right dies

PARIS, Jan 8, (AP): Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of France's far-right National Front who was known for fiery rhetoric against immigration and multiculturalism that earned him both staunch supporters and widespread condemnation, died Tuesday. He was 96.

One of the most polarizing figures in French politics, Le Pen made Islam and Muslim immigrants his primary target, blaming them for economic and social woes. He also repeatedly denied the Holocaust and was convicted multiple times of antisemitism, discrimination and inciting racial violence.

Despite those convictions and eventually being politically ostracized, the nativist ideas that propelled his decades of popularity - encapsulated in slogans like "French People First" - are ascendant in today's France, across Europe and beyond.

Le Pen - who reached the second round of the 2002 presidential election that Jacques Chirac went on to win in a landslide - was eventually estranged from his daughter Marine Le Pen. She renamed his National Front party, ousted him and trans-



Former far-right National Front party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen clenches his fist at the statue of Joan of Arc, Monday May 1, 2017, in Paris. (AP)

formed it into one of France's most powerful political forces while distancing herself from her father.

Jordan Bardella, president of the National Rally, as the party is now known, confirmed Le Pen's death in a post on social media platform X. Bardella's unusually warm tribute

described Le Pen as a "voice of the people" who "always served France."

The post appeared to blur the boundary the rebranded party had sought to establish between its firebrand founder and its more polished direction under Marine Le Pen.

President Emmanuel Macron, a

centrist, offered his condolences to Le Pen's family and friends in an uncharacteristically short statement issued by the presidential palace.

"A historic figure of the far right, he played a role in the public life of our country for almost 70 years, which is now a matter for history to judge," the statement read.

Marine Le Pen, thousands of kilometers (miles) away in the French territory of Mayotte, was inspecting the aftermath of destructive Cyclone Chido when her father died.

His death came at a crucial time for his daughter. She is considered a leading potential contender for the next presidential election in 2027, if she's not banned from running for office in an embezzlement case.

A former paratrooper and Foreign Legionnaire who fought to maintain French colonial rule in Indochina and Algeria, Jean-Marie Le Pen was a wily political strategist and gifted orator who used his charisma to captivate crowds.

"If I advance, follow me; if I die, avenge me; if I shirk, kill me," Le Pen said at a 1990 party congress, reflecting the theatrical style that for decades fed the fervor of followers.

FM to serve as interim leader

## Far-right leader pledges to 'govern Austria honestly'

VIENNA, Jan 8, (AP): Austrian far-right leader Herbert Kickl said in his first comments after being tasked to form a new government that he aspires to "govern Austria honestly" as he prepared for talks on a potential coalition with conservatives who criticized him sharply in the past.

Kickl said he's prepared for new elections if they fail.

His Russia-friendly, anti-immigration, euroskeptic Freedom Party won Austria's parliamentary election in September but was initially shunned by other parties. Their efforts to put together a coalition without it failed.

On Monday, Kickl received a mandate to try to form what would be the first national government led by the far right since World War II. That came after the conservative Austrian People's Party of outgoing Chancellor Karl Nehammer, who announced his resignation Saturday, made an abrupt U-turn on its previous refusal to contemplate working with the Freedom Party under Kickl.

Kickl - a 56-year-old with a provocative style - made clear he hasn't forgotten past friction with the People's Party. Nehammer has described him as a "security risk." The party's interim leader, Christian Stocker, said during the election campaign that anyone voting for Kickl "is voting for five years of high risk with radical ideas."

"Our country was driven into the wall in the past five years," Kickl said, pointing in particular to Austria's large budget deficit and what he said was "a massive trust deficit" accumulated by mainstream parties. He said he has "a very, very simple aim, and that is to govern Austria honestly."

Kickl said he is reaching out to Stocker, "and you can believe me, that isn't easy for me either - we have an

interesting past together - but it is honest."

Kickl added he has clear expectations, including "an awareness of who won the election, and who finished second and isn't the winner." He also demanded "an understanding of who is responsible for the mistakes of the past" and a partner with stable and consistent leadership.

Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg will serve as the country's interim leader while the far-right Freedom Party attempts to put together a new coalition government, the president's office said Wednesday.

Schallenberg, 55, will take on the duties of outgoing Chancellor Karl Nehammer, who announced his resignation over the weekend after his efforts to put together a coalition without the Freedom Party collapsed. Nehammer plans to step down on Friday.

President Alexander Van der Bellen's office said in a statement that the head of state will formally task Schallenberg with "continuing the management of the chancellery and leading the interim government."

It will be Schallenberg's second - and, again, likely brief - stint as Austria's leader. Schallenberg served as chancellor for less than two months in late 2021 after Sebastian Kurz resigned, before passing the job to Nehammer and returning to the Foreign Ministry.



Kickl



Water is dropped on the advancing Palisades Fire by helicopter in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles, Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025. Inset: A resident of a senior center is evacuated as the Eaton Fire approaches Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025 in Altadena, Calif. (AP)

Many structures destroyed as winds kick up: governor

## Thousands flee as wildfires burn out of control in and around Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES, Jan 8, (AP): California firefighters battled wind-whipped wildfires that tore across the Los Angeles area, destroying homes, clogging roadways as tens of thousands fled and straining resources as officials prepared for the situation to worsen early Wednesday.

The flames from a fire that broke out Tuesday evening near a nature preserve in the inland foothills northeast of LA spread so rapidly that staff at a senior living center had to push dozens of residents in wheelchairs and hospital beds down the street to a parking lot. The residents waited there in their bedclothes as embers fell around them until ambulances, buses and even construction vans arrived to take them to safety.

Another blaze that started hours earlier ripped through the city's Pacific Palisades neighborhood, a hillside area along the coast dotted with celebrity residences and memorialized by the Beach Boys in their 1960s hit "Surfin' USA." In the frantic haste to get to safety, roadways became impassable when scores of people abandoned their vehicles and fled on foot, some toting suitcases.

The traffic jam on Palisades Drive prevented emergency vehicles from getting through and bulldozer was brought in to push the abandoned cars to the side and create a path. Video along the Pacific Coast Highway showed widespread destruction of homes and



A firefighter battles the Palisades Fire as it burns a residence in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles, Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025. (AP)

businesses along the famed roadway.

Pacific Palisades resident Kelsey Trainor said the only road in and out of her neighborhood was blocked. Ash fell all around them while fires burned on both sides of the road.

"We looked across and the fire had jumped from one side of the road to the other side of the road," Trainor said. "People were getting out of the cars with their dogs and babies and bags, they were crying and screaming."

A third wildfire started around 10:30 p.m. and

quickly prompted evacuations in Sylmar, a San Fernando Valley community that is the northernmost neighborhood in Los Angeles. The causes of all three fires were under investigation.

Flames were being pushed by Santa Ana winds topping 60 mph (97 kph) in some places. The winds were expected to increase overnight, producing isolated gusts that could top 100 mph (160 kph) in mountains and foothills - including in areas that haven't seen substantial rain in months.

The situation prompted the Los Angeles Fire Department to take the rare step of putting out a plea for off-duty firefighters to help. It was too windy for firefighting aircraft to fly, further hampering the fight.

Gov. Newsom posted on X early Wednesday that California had deployed more than 1,400 firefighting personnel to combat the blazes. "Emergency officials, firefighters, and first responders are all hands on deck through the night to do everything possible to protect lives," Newsom said.

The erratic weather caused President Joe Biden to cancel plans to travel to inland Riverside County, where he was to announce the establishment of two new national monuments in the state. He remained in Los Angeles, where smoke was visible from his hotel, and was briefed on the wildfires. The Federal Emergency Management Agency approved a grant to help reimburse California for the firefighting cost.



## America

**Judge blocks report:** A federal judge on Tuesday temporarily blocked the public release of special counsel Jack Smith's report on investigations into Donald Trump as an appeals court weighs a challenge to the disclosure of a much-anticipated document just days before the president-elect reclaims office.

The ruling from U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon may represent a short-lived victory for Trump, but it's nonetheless the latest instance of the Trump-appointed jurist taking action in the Republican's favor. (AP)

**Southern US shivers:** A developing winter storm threatens to drop snow, sleet and freezing rain on parts of Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas as frigid air that escaped the Arctic plunges temperatures to subfreezing levels in some of the southernmost points of the U.S. (AP)

National Weather Service meteorologists predicted wintry precipitation across the southern Plains region starting Wednesday night, with snow likely in Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. Farther south, snow could transition to sleet and freezing rain. (AP)

## Trump Jr arrives in Greenland with message from his dad: 'We're going to treat you well'

NUUK, Jan 8, (AP): President-elect Donald Trump told residents of Greenland that "we're going to treat you well" as his oldest son visited the mineral-rich Danish territory that's home to a large U.S. military base, heightening speculation that the incoming U.S. administration could seek to acquire it.

Trump posted a video showing a plane emblazoned with the word TRUMP landing in Nuuk, the Arctic territory's capital, in a landscape of snow-capped peaks and fjords.

"Don Jr, and my Repls landing in Greenland," Trump wrote. "The reception has been great. They, and the Free World, need safety, security, strength, and PEACE! This is a deal that must happen. MAGA. MAKE GREENLAND GREAT AGAIN!" Supporters later posted video of Trump speaking by phone to locals.

In a statement, Greenland's government said Donald Trump Jr.'s visit was taking place "as a private individual"



Donald Trump Jr., center, smiles after arriving in Nuuk, Greenland, Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025. (AP)

and not as an official visit, and Greenlandic representatives would not meet with him.

Trump Jr. was in Greenland for a day trip to shoot video content for podcast-

ing, according to a person familiar with the plans who was not authorized to speak publicly. Trump's eldest son has become a prominent player in his father's political movement and has served

on his presidential transition team.

Miningua Kleist, permanent secretary of the ministry of statehood and foreign affairs, told The Associated Press that authorities were informed that Trump Jr. would stay for about four to five hours. Neither Trump Jr.'s delegation nor Greenlandic government officials had requested a meeting, Kleist said.

The visit nonetheless had political overtones. The president-elect has voiced a desire - also expressed during his first presidency - to acquire the territory in the Arctic, an area of strategic importance for the U.S., China, Russia and others.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said Tuesday that the future of Greenland would be decided by Greenland, and called the United States Denmark's most important ally. "Greenland is not for sale," Frederiksen said, adding that "we need to stay calm and stick to our principles"

## Europe

**Journalist released:** An Italian journalist detained in Iran since Dec. 19 and whose fate became intertwined with that of an Iranian engineer wanted by the United States was freed Wednesday and is heading home, Italian officials announced.

A plane carrying Cecilia Sala took off from Tehran after "intensive work on diplomatic and intelligence channels," Premier Giorgia Meloni's office said, adding that Meloni had informed Sala's parents of the news. (AP)

**FM criticizes sanctions:** Hungary's foreign minister criticized the outgoing U.S. administration and its ambassador on Tuesday for imposing sanctions on the Hungarian minister in charge of the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office, Antal Rogan.

Earlier on the day, the U.S. Department of the Treasury announced that Rogan had been sanctioned under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act for alleged involvement in corruption. (AP)

## INTERNATIONAL



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, first responders perform rescue work at a village in Changsuo Township of Dingri County in Xigaze, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region, Jan. 7, 2025. (Xinhua via AP)



Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, visits a resident injured in the earthquake at the People's Hospital of Dingri County in Xigaze City, southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region, Jan. 7, 2025. (Xinhua)



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, rescuers transfer the injured at Zhacun Village of Dingri County in Xigaze, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region, Tuesday Jan. 7, 2025. (Xinhua via AP)

## Chinese vice premier stresses all-out rescue efforts

## Tents arrive for survivors of quake that killed 126 in freezing Tibet

BEIJING, Jan 8, (Agencies): Rescuers in the freezing, high-altitude Tibet region in western China searched a second day for any remaining victims of a deadly earthquake that struck near a holy city for Tibetan Buddhists, before shifting their focus to resettling the survivors.

More tents, quilts, stoves and other relief items were being delivered Wednesday to people whose homes were uninhabitable or unsafe. Temperatures fall well below freezing overnight in an area with an average altitude of about 4,200 meters (13,800 feet).

In video aired by state broadcaster CCTV, workers could be seen erecting rows of tents with metal frames and stakes after nightfall Tuesday. Meant as temporary shelter, they were lined with quilted padding to keep out the cold. The workers distributed packaged food items to the shelter occupants, donning blue winter jackets over their orange uniforms.

The confirmed death toll stood at 126 with another 188 injured as of Tuesday evening, and no further updates were issued during the day on Wednesday. Hong Li, the director of Tibet's Emergency Management Department, told a late afternoon news conference that the work had shifted from search and rescue to resettlement and reconstruction.

The earthquake struck an outlying county in the city of Shigatse, the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, the sec-

ond-highest figure in Tibetan Buddhism. It was not immediately known whether he was in his Tashi Lhunpo Monastery at the time or how much damage Tibet's second largest city sustained. The epicenter was about 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the main part of the city, which is called Xigaze in Chinese and sprawls across a high altitude plain.

More than 500 aftershocks were recorded after the earthquake, which the U.S. Geological Survey said measured magnitude 7.1. China's earthquake center recorded a magnitude of 6.8. The quake was also about 75 kilometers (50 miles) from Mount Everest and the border with Nepal, where the shaking sent people running out of their homes in the capital.

A candlelight vigil was planned on Wednesday night in Dharamsala, India, home to the Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhism's highest figure, and a large Tibetan population. An announcement on the Dalai Lama's website said he would lead a prayer ceremony in memory of the victims on Thursday.

The Dalai Lama is viewed by the Chinese government as bent on making Tibet independent of China.

Asked about the prayer ceremony, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said, "We are very clear about the separatist nature and political schemes of the Dalai Lama and remain highly vigilant."

Guo expressed confidence that the people in the earth-

quake zone will be able to rebuild under "the strong leadership" of China's ruling Communist Party.

The Chinese government and followers of the Dalai Lama have feuded over who should hold the position of Panchen Lama since a boy appointed by the Dalai Lama disappeared in the mid-1990s and a Chinese-backed candidate was approved for the position. The Dalai Lama denounced the move and has refused to recognize the current Panchen Lama.

China's government says Tibet has been part of its territory for centuries, but many Tibetans say they were functionally independent for most of that time. China's People's Liberation Army invaded the territory in 1950 and the Dalai Lama fled to India nine years later during an uprising against Chinese rule, seen as eroding Tibet's unique Buddhist culture.

The death toll from the quake included at least 22 of the 222 residents of Gurum, the official Xinhua News Agency cited the village's Communist Party chief, Tsering Phuntsog, as saying. The victims included his 74-year-old mother, and several other of his relatives remained buried in the debris.

"Even young people couldn't run out of the houses when the earthquake hit, let alone old people and children," Tsering Phuntsog said.

More than 3,600 houses collapsed, according to a preliminary survey, and 46,000 residents had been relocated, state media said.

Tibet is generally closed to foreign journalists over reports about the ill treatment of the population by Chinese authorities.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping ordered "all-out rescue efforts to save lives and minimize casualties," Xinhua reported. Power and communications in the area have been restored, allowing smoother delivery of emergency goods, it said.

Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing has stressed all-out efforts to rescue and treat the injured after a 6.8-magnitude earthquake jolted the Xizang Autonomous Region.

Zhang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, underscored the importance of ensuring that the disaster-stricken people stay safe and warm this winter.

The strong earthquake struck Dingri County in the city of Xigaze Tuesday, leaving 126 dead and 188 others injured by midnight.

The vice premier led a team to the quake site to guide the rescue and relief efforts. Upon his arrival, Zhang immediately headed to Changsuo Township, the most severely affected area.



Ghana's President-Elect John Dramani Mahama, waves after taking the oath of office at his inauguration, at the Independence Square in Accra, Ghana, Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025. (AP)

## Mahama sworn in for historic 3rd time as Ghana faces crisis

ACCRA, Jan 8, (AP): John Mahama was sworn in as president of Ghana for a third time Tuesday against the backdrop of the country's worst economic crisis in a generation. Thousands of Ghanaians from all walks of life attended the ceremony in the capital.

Mahama, the opposition leader who started his political career as the communications minister, won the presidential election late last year after pledging to tackle the economic crisis, corruption and unemployment.

Mahama, 66, who was previously Ghana's president between July 2012 and January 2017, will replace current President Nana Akufo-Addo. Mahama was first sworn in as president when President John Evans Atta Mills died in July 2012. He served the rest of that term and then won an election in 2012.

Mahama promised to "reset" the country on various fronts during a campaign that prioritized the economy and largely appealed to a young Ghanaian who saw the vote as a way out of the country's economic crisis.

"There is a seismic shift happening

within the system of global economic dominance," he said Tuesday in his address at the Independence Square in Accra. "Now more than ever before, we need to strengthen our ties with our neighbors to ensure that we are working together to keep our sub-region safe."

The ceremony was attended by several African leaders, including Rwanda's Paul Kagame, Kenya's William Ruto, Congo's Felix Tshisekedi and Burkina Faso's Capt. Ibrahim Traore.

In his address, Mahama said he will focus on economic restoration and stabilization of the macroeconomic environment, as well as on good governance and the fight against corruption.

The election in December for both president and members of parliament was held against the backdrop of the country's worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation and was seen as a litmus test for democracy in a region shaken by extremist violence and coups. West Africa's regional bloc of ECOWAS said the election was generally peaceful, a continuing trend in Ghana.

## Bangladesh ailing former premier Zia leaves country to undergo medical treatment in UK

DHAKA, Jan 8, (AP): Bangladesh's ailing former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia left the nation's capital for London on Tuesday for medical treatment, said one of her advisers.

Zahiruddin Swapan, an adviser to Zia, told The Associated Press by phone that the three-time former premier and head of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party left Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport late Tuesday on an air ambulance.

"Our senior leaders left the airport seeing her off," Swapan said. Her ailments include liver cirrhosis, cardiac disease and kidney problems, according to her physician.

Zia left behind a South Asian nation grappling with uncertainty over its political future after her archrival, former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was ousted in a student-led mass uprising in August. Zia and Hasina are the most influential political leaders in Bangladesh.

An interim government headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus is running the country and plans to hold elections in December this year or in the first half of 2026.

## Sentenced

Zia was sentenced to 17 years in jail under Hasina's rule following two corruption cases stemming from 2001-2006 when she was prime minister. Her supporters say the charges against her were politically motivated, an allegation Hasina's administration denied. Under Yunus, Zia was acquitted in one of the cases in November and an appeal in the second case was being heard on Tuesday.

Zia, 79, was freed from prison on bail under Hasina through a government order and had been undergoing medical treatment in Bangladesh. But Hasina's administration did not allow her to travel abroad for treatment despite requests seeking approval.

The special air ambulance was sent by Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. Hundreds of her supporters gathered outside her residence in the city's upscale



Bangladesh's ailing former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, right, leaves in a car on her way to the airport in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to travel to London for medical treatment, Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025. (AP)

Gulshan area to see her off.

Zia's motorcade took nearly three hours to cross about a 10-kilometer (6-mile) stretch of road to get to the airport from her residence in Dhaka's Gulshan area as thousands of her desperate supporters greeted her on the way, creating traffic chaos. Her hours-long journey to the airport was broadcast live by television stations.

Enamul Haque Chowdhury, a close aide of Zia, told reporters that the air ambulance had arrived from Doha to take her to London, where her eldest son and heir apparent Tarique Rahman has been in exile since 2007. Rahman is the acting chairman of Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party and is expected to lead the party toward the election. The country's dynastic politics have long focused on the families of Hasina and Zia.

Zia is the wife of late President Ziaur Rahman, a former military chief. He rose to prominence during years of tumultuous politics after Hasina's father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's independence leader, was assassinated along with most of his family members in a military coup in 1975. Zia's husband was also killed in 1981 in another military coup after he formed his political party and ruled the country as president for three years. Hasina's father led Bangladesh's independence war against Pakistan, aided by India, in 1971.

Zia's personal physician, A.Z.M. Zahid Hossain, said Qatar's emir arranged the special aircraft with medical facilities for the former prime minister, whose ailments include liver cirrhosis, cardiac disease and kidney problems.

Her departure follows dramatic political developments since last August, when Hasina's 15-year rule ended. Hasina fled into exile in India as she and her close aides faced charges of killing hundreds of protesters during a mass protest movement that began in July.

Zia's departure could create a symbolic vacuum in the country's politics amid efforts by a student group that led the anti-Hasina protest to form a new political party. In the absence of Hasina and her secular Bangladesh Awami League party, the rise of Islamist political parties and other Islamist groups has been visible in the Muslim-majority country of 170 million people.

Zia's party has been bargaining with the Yunus-led government for an election sometime this year. Yunus said his government wants to make some major reforms before the election.

## Lat/Am

**González says son-in-law kidnapped:** Self-exiled Venezuelan opposition leader Edmundo González, who claims to have defeated President Nicolás Maduro in last year's presidential election, said his son-in-law was kidnapped Tuesday in Venezuela's capital.

González, who was traveling in the United States, said Rafael Tudares was kidnapped while on his way to drop off González's two grandchildren at school in Caracas.

In a post on X, González said "hooded men, dressed in black" intercepted the vehicle and loaded Tudares "into a gold-colored van." He did not say what happened to his 6- and 7-year-old grandchildren.

The kidnapping happened despite a significant increase in police and military presence since New Year's Day across Caracas ahead of Friday's swearing-in ceremony for Maduro, who the government says won a third term in the July election. The government's centralized press office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. (AP)

**Brazil bus mishap claims 7 people:** At least seven people were killed and 15 others injured when a passenger bus overturned early Tuesday in the state of Piauí in northeastern Brazil, the Federal Highway Police said.

The accident occurred between the municipalities of Sao Goncalo do Gurgueia and Corrente in southern Piauí, when the bus, en route from Tiangua to Sao Paulo, veered off the road and overturned.

Preliminary reports suggest that a mechanical failure or delayed reaction by the driver may have caused the accident.

The bus driver and six passengers died at the scene, while eight women and seven men of various ages were injured, whose current health status remains unknown. (Xinhua)

**Migrants wander in troubled resort:** About 100 migrants from various countries wandered directionless and disoriented through the streets of the troubled Pacific coast resort of Acapulco.

After walking for a couple weeks through southern Mexico with hundreds of other migrants, they accepted an offer from immigration officials to come to Acapulco with the idea they could continue their journey north toward the U.S. border. Instead, they found themselves stuck on Monday.

Two weeks ahead of President-elect Donald Trump's second inauguration, Mexico continues dissolving attention-grabbing migrant caravans and dispersing migrants throughout the country to keep them far from the U.S. border, while simultaneously limiting how many accumulate in any one place. (AP)

## Asia

**MirrorFace behind attacks:** Japan on Wednesday linked more than 200 cyberattacks over the past five years targeting the country's national security and high technology data to a Chinese hacking group, MirrorFace, detailing their tactics and calling on government agencies and businesses to reinforce preventive measures.

The National Police Agency said its analysis on the targets, methods and infrastructure of the cyberattacks by MirrorFace from 2019 to 2024 concluded they were systematic attacks linked to China with an aim of stealing data on Japanese national security and advanced technology.

The targets of the Chinese government-led cyberattacks included Japan's Foreign and Defense ministries, the country's space agency and individuals including politicians, journalists, private companies and think tanks related to advanced technology, the NPA said.

Experts have repeatedly raised concerns about the vulnerability of Japan's cybersecurity, especially as the country steps up its defense capabilities and works more closely with the United States and other partners to strengthen cyber defenses. Japan has taken steps but experts say more work is needed. (AP)

## Detention efforts slammed:

Lawyers for impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol denounced efforts to detain him over his short-lived imposition of martial law, while the country's acting leader expressed concern Wednesday over a possible clash between law enforcement agents and presidential security personnel.

As anti-corruption officials and police prepared another attempt to detain

Yoon following last week's failed effort, the presidential security service fortified Yoon's compound with barbed wire and rows of tightly placed vehicles blocking the path to his residence.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials and police say they will make a more forceful effort to detain Yoon, warning that they could arrest members of the presidential security staff if they obstruct efforts to seize the embattled president.

The office, which is leading a joint investigation with police and military, has been seeking Yoon's detention since he repeatedly ignored summons for questioning about whether his brief power grab on Dec. 3 constituted rebellion. (AP)

**Hiker found after 2 weeks:** A hiker survived on two muesli bars, foraged berries and creek water for two weeks while lost on a remote Australian mountain range, police said on Wednesday.

Hadi Nazari, a 23-year-old medical student from Melbourne, went missing on Dec. 26 when he separated from two hiking companions to take photos in the Kosciuszko National Park in the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales state.

He was rescued after he approached a group of hikers on Wednesday afternoon, telling them he was lost and thirsty, Police Insp. Josh Broadfoot said. Nazari had traveled more than 10 kilometers (6 miles) across steep and densely wooded terrain from where he was last seen. A major land and air search had been launched the day Nazari went missing. More than 300 searchers were involved.

He was reunited with his two hiking friends on Wednesday before he was flown to a hospital for a medical assessment, Broadfoot said. (AP)



Supporters of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol have their heads shaved as they attend a rally to oppose his impeachment near the presidential residence in Seoul, South Korea, Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2025. (AP)

## Kuwait oil drops to \$76.33 per barrel

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 25 cents to USD 76.33 per barrel (pb) on Tuesday, compared with USD 76.58 pb the previous day, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on

Wednesday.

At the global level, the Brent crude rose by 75 cents to USD 77.05 pb, and the West Texas Intermediate also went up by 69 cents to USD 74.25 pb.

# Business



Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi with Waleed Al-Khashti, Bashar Abdullah, Mubarak Abdulaziz, and Mishal Al-Subaie at the event.



Honoring a group of volunteers.

Organizing committee hosted event highlighting their contributions to the tournament's success

## Zain participates in ceremony honoring Khaleeji Zain 26 volunteers

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: Zain participated in a ceremony honoring the volunteers of Khaleeji Zain 26, organized by the tournament's committee at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. The event recognized the significant efforts made by volunteers to ensure the success of this Gulf sporting celebration and to highlight their contributions to delivering an exceptional edition of the region's premier football tournament.

The ceremony was attended by the Chairman of the Supreme Organizing Committee of Khaleeji Zain 26, H.E. the Minister of Information and Culture and State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Bedah Al-Mutairi; the President of the Kuwait Football Association Sheikh Ahmed Al-Yousef Al-Sabah; Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer

Waleed Al-Khashti; Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Sports Bashar Abdullah; Vice President of the Kuwait Football Association Mubarak Abdulaziz; and Tournament Director Mishal Al-Subaie.

Zain's participation in the event underscored its steadfast commitment to supporting volunteerism and promoting social responsibility values. The company took pride in recognizing the vital role played by all volunteers in ensuring the success of Khaleeji Zain 26 from an organizational perspective, particularly given the massive crowds that attended the tournament.

During the ceremony, volunteers, civil society organizations, and various government entities were honored for their contributions. The tournament's exceptional success would not have been possible without their

efforts, as they were a key factor behind its achievements.

Zain recently concluded its title partnership with the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup (Khaleeji Zain 26) on a remarkable note, congratulating Bahrain's national team on clinching its second-ever championship title after a thrilling final against Oman, which secured the runner-up position for the second consecutive time. Since announcing its partnership in September 2024, Zain has dedicated its resources and national capabilities to ensuring the success of this major regional tournament. The company expressed pride in its collaboration with the Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation, organizing a series of events and contributions throughout the tournament to deliver a memorable championship that befits Kuwait's sports legacy.

## S&P GCC composite index up 2.0%, annually, in 2024

### Markaz: Global & GCC markets end '24 strong

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" released its Monthly Market Review report for December 2024. Kuwait equities, which declined in 2023, was among the top performers in 2024.

Kuwait equity performance in 2024 was driven by positive corporate earnings across different sectors, especially in banking. Kuwait's All Share Index posted a yearly gain of 8.0%, with technology and consumer staples gaining the most for the year, rising 79.9% and 51.6% respectively. The index's gain was also supported by the banking sector index which increased by 9.9% in 2024. The rate cuts by Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) in H2 2024 shall probably result in an increase in credit growth. Among banking stocks, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) and Commercial Bank of Kuwait were the biggest gainers, with a return of 25.7% and 24.0% respectively. KIB's net profit in 9M 2024 amounted to KD 16.4 million, an increase of 137% compared to KD 6.9 million in 9M 2023.

Kuwait's Main Market index increased by 24.0% in 2024, as against an annual increase of 4.8% in the Premier Market index, driven by the performance of stocks such as Commercial Bank of Kuwait and IFA Hotels and Resorts with 2024 returns of 24.0% and 189.1%, respectively. However, the performance of the main market index had limited effect on the Kuwait All Share Index as it comprises of less than 20% of the total market capitalization of the All Share Index. Among Premier Market stocks, Mezzan Holding Company and Commercial Real Estate Company were the largest gainers, with a return of 56.5% and 48.0% respectively, for the year. Mezzan Holding Company's share price increase was driven by a positive net profit of KD 12.73 million for 2023, compared against losses in the previous year, as well as indications of higher profitability in 2024 reflected by a net profit of KD 12.01 million for 9M 2024.

GCC equity markets were up 2.0% for the year 2024, indicated by S&P GCC composite index. Individually, GCC Markets were mostly positive during the year, with only Abu Dhabi and Qatar equity indices ending the year registering losses. Dubai's equity index was the largest gainer in the GCC, surging 27.1% during the year on the back of a strong economic outlook supported by real estate and tourism sectors. The Dubai market was valued slightly above its 5-year median P/E (9.3x) but remains a relatively undervalued market compared to GCC peers. Emaar Developers and Emaar Properties (parent



company of Emaar Developers) share prices surged with a return of 91.6% and 62.2% respectively during the year. Emaar Development's property sales rose by 66% in 9M 2024 to AED 48 billion (US\$ 13.1 billion), compared to AED 28.9 billion (US\$ 7.9 billion) in 9M 2023. Saudi Arabia's equity market was positive, gaining 0.6% for the year. Amongst the blue chips, Al Rajhi Bank had a return of 9.4% for the year, while Saudi Aramco had a return of -15.0% owing to the impact of continued oil production cuts through the year. Qatar equity index declined the most, falling by 2.4% for the year. Abu Dhabi markets fell 1.7% for the year driven by poor returns in large stocks such as Emirates Telecommunications Group Company and First Abu Dhabi Bank, which declined by 16.9% and 1.6%, respectively for the year.

The Kuwaiti Cabinet endorsed a draft resolution, in December 2024, issuing a law imposing a 15% tax on multinational entities, which have business in more than one country. The new tax law which came into effect as of 1st January 2025 and aims to curb tax evasion and prevent sending tax revenues to other countries. UAE will impose a domestic minimum top-up tax (DMTT) of 15% on large multinational companies operating in the country in January to boost non-oil revenue and make tax avoidance harder.

Most GCC central banks adopted a monetary easing policy in line with the FED. Central Bank reduced interest rates by about 100 bps in H2 2024, except for Qatar which cut rates by a total of 115 bps in H2 2024 and Kuwait which cut its rates by only 25 bps in September 2024.

Global markets ended the year positively, with easing inflation leading to interest rate cuts by central banks across the world. The MSCI World and S&P 500 indices rose 17.0% and 23.3% respectively during the year. US equities were driven by further concentration amongst large technology stocks, led by the chase behind AI. The US Fed reduced interest rates by 50-bps in September 25-bps in November and 25-bps in December, following signs of easing inflation and moderation in job growth. The markets have priced in up to two 25-bps rate cuts in 2025, in line with the Fed's December projections of a terminal benchmark funds rate of 3.75% to 4.00% by the end of 2025. The MSCI EM index relatively underperformed with yearly gains of 5.1% weighed down by a negative

performance in South Korea of -9.6% for the year. This was despite the strong performance of Taiwan which grew 28.5% during the year. Chinese markets grew 12.6% in 2024, stimulated by the injection of government stimulus.

U.S headline inflation was moderate at 2.7% y/y in November 2024, compared to a 12-month high of 3.5% y/y in March 2024. There were three rate cuts during the year by the Fed, by a total of 100 bps. In the UK, headline inflation rose by 2.6% y/y in November 2024, up from 2.3% y/y in October 2024, and the highest inflation since March 2024. There was a divergence in monetary policy in December 2024, with the Bank of England keeping rates steady, while the European Central Bank cut rates by 25 bps in the month in line with the Fed.

The yield on the 10-year US Treasury notes, peaked for the year at 4.70% in April 2024, and closed the year at 4.58%. This is 70 bps higher than the 2023 close of 3.88%. The un-inversion of the yield curve, following rate cuts in H2 2024, is visible in the change in the 10Y-2Y spread which changed from -39 bps at the end of 2023 to 32.5 bps in 2024.

Oil price settled at USD 74.6 per barrel, recording a yearly decline of 3.1% in 2024. Oil prices fell despite the continuation of OPEC+ oil production cuts through 2024, owing to a decline in demand in China as well as additional production by the U.S. and other non-OPEC producers. Gold prices closed at USD 2,623.8/oz., a gain of 27.2% in 2024 driven by purchases by central banks, expectations of accommodative monetary policies by global central banks as well as geopolitical tensions. Natural gas prices were up 43.8% during 2024 with a heightened demand stemming from anticipated below-normal temperatures in Asia and Europe, coupled with an estimated decline in US inventories for the year.

The outlook for global asset classes for 2025 is dependent on the monetary policy decisions by the U.S. Fed, coupled with policy stances of the incoming U.S. President. Global markets have priced in a more measured approach by central banks with up to two 25-bps rate cuts by the Fed in 2025. The extension of OPEC+ production cuts to April 2025 is expected to support prices but continuing weak demand from China is likely to lead to range-bound oil prices in 2025. OPEC production cuts, regional geopolitical developments and the potential impact of tariffs being imposed by the current US government, are major themes that will affect GCC markets in 2025.

## Construction sector propels bank growth amid setbacks

Annual construction financing growth hits 199% in Nov

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The construction sector in Kuwait witnessed a significant increase in bank financing during November 2024, with loans provided to residents and non-residents rising by 72 million dinars (16.5 percent) compared to October, reaching 507.4 million dinars, reports Al-Seyassah daily.**

This marks a substantial annual growth of 337.9 million dinars (199.4 percent) compared to the 169.4 million dinars recorded in November 2023. Over the first 11 months of 2024, total financing for the sector reached approximately 3.4 billion dinars.

According to the Central Bank of Kuwait's monthly statistics for November, the accumulated balance of construction financing saw a slight monthly decline of 0.3 percent (10 million dinars), falling from 3.058 billion dinars in October to 3.048 billion dinars in November.

However, on an annual basis, the balance grew by 424 million dinars (16.1 percent), up from 2.624 billion dinars in November 2023.

For the entirety of 2023, aggregated financing by local banks to the construction sector rose by 14 million dinars (0.7 percent), increasing from 1.740 billion dinars in 2022 to 1.754 billion dinars.

Fluctuations in Construction Financing During 2024

Nonetheless, the construction financing fluctuated significantly throughout 2024 -- January: 156.8 million dinars, February: 416.3 million dinars, March: 313.7 million dinars, April: 137 million dinars, May: 119.2 million dinars, June: 405.6 million dinars, July: 174.6 million dinars, August: 281.5 million dinars, September: 467.9 million dinars and October: 435.4 million dinars.

The annual increase in the accumulated financing balance reached 425 million dinars, reflecting a 16 percent rise.

Despite the increase in financing, the construction sector faces significant challenges. A major issue has been the decline in project launches, contract awards, and delayed payments to contractors over the past five years.

Additionally, rising construction costs, driven by labor shortages and wage increases, have severely impacted the cost and timeline of residential projects.

Real estate experts highlight that the labor shortage is not only quantitative but also qualitative, with the market losing large numbers of experienced workers in the two years following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local banks in Kuwait saw their total assets rise by 4.84 percent (4.22 billion dinars) annually, reaching 91.41 billion dinars by the end of November 2024, compared to 87.19 billion dinars in November 2023. Monthly asset growth stood at 1.4 billion dinars.

The key contributors to this growth included:

- 12.67 percent annual increase in foreign assets to 27.53 billion dinars.
- 4.07 percent rise in claims on the private sector to 47.07 billion dinars.
- 17.67 percent increase in other assets to 3.33 billion dinars.

However, claims on public institutions declined by 5.72 percent to 3.46 billion dinars, while government demands dropped by 32.05 percent.

The value of credit facilities provided by the banks increased by 745 million dinars during November to reach 57.118 billion dinars compared to 56.373 billion dinars in October. Personal credit facilities stood at 19.273 billion dinars. Deposits also rose by 332 million dinars during November, totaling 53.690 billion dinars.

Despite these gains, the private sector deposits in foreign currencies decreased slightly by 0.1 percent, totaling 1.9 billion dinars; meanwhile, the balances of the local banks' claims on the Central Bank in dinars, represented by bonds, dropped by 25.3 percent to 1.7 billion dinars.

The substantial increase in financing for Kuwait's construction sector underscores the sector's importance to the national economy. However, persistent challenges, such as labor shortages and rising costs, call for strategic interventions to ensure sustainable growth and development.

The local banks' robust performance and asset growth provide a solid foundation for addressing these challenges and supporting the sector's recovery and expansion.

## 'Former OAPEC renamed Arab Energy Organization'

### AEO marks 57 yrs of Arab energy cooperation

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8, (KUNA): Over the past 57 years, the Arab Energy Organization (AEO), formerly known as the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), has played a pivotal role in fostering energy cooperation among Arab nations, and has become a cornerstone in advancing joint Arab action.

Founded on January 9, 1968, through an agreement signed in Beirut by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Libya, the organization was established as a specialized regional Arab body with an international character, and Kuwait was chosen as its headquarters.

Since its inception, AEO's membership has expanded, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Algeria joined in 1970, followed by Syria and Iraq in 1972, and Egypt in 1973. Tunisia joined in 1982, although its membership was suspended in 1986.

On this occasion, AEO Secretary-

General Jamal Al-Loughani told KUNA Wednesday that the organization's primary goal is to foster cooperation among member states in various economic activities within the petroleum industry, which includes strengthening relations among members and safeguarding their legitimate interests in the industry, both individually and collectively.

Al-Loughani highlighted the organization's efforts to ensure the fair and equitable delivery of petroleum to consumer markets while creating favorable conditions for the petroleum industry in member states.

He also emphasized the organization's focus on promoting shared economic benefits through initiatives such as the establishment of companies jointly owned by member states, which significantly contributes to the development of the Arab petroleum industry over the decades.

As energy industries evolve, with growing emphasis on renewable and

sustainable energy and stricter environmental regulations, AEO has adapted to these changes. In December 2022, its council issued Resolution No. 109/9 to review and modernize the organization's objectives, activities, and even its name.

After two years of extensive effort, the 113th Ministerial Meeting of AEO, held in December 2024 in Kuwait, culminated in a decision to restructure and redrafting of the agreement establishing it, modernizing its operations, and renaming it the Arab Energy Organization (AEO).

According to Al-Loughani, this decision empowers the organization's General Secretariat to continue developing its activities and the first phase of the reform project, which involved proposing amendments, has been completed.

These amendments will take effect once ratified by the legislative authorities in each member state.





His Excellency the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Acting Minister of Education, Dr. Nader Abdullah Mohammed Al-Jalal, during his inspection of the company's pavilion.



A photo of the trainees with the company employees who supervised their training.

In line with its strategy to promote transparency, inclusivity, and a culture of care through feedback-driven actions

## stc focuses on enhancing employee experience through culture transformation initiatives



stc employees visiting Huawei headquarters in China.



Trainees in a group photo with the Acting CEO of the Human Resources Sector and a number of the company's executive management.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, emphasized its ongoing commitment to enhance its internal work culture through transformative initiatives that focus on elevating the employee experience. With its strategy set on setting new standards in achieving employee well-being and promoting professional growth, stc has introduced new programs and policies aimed at further improving transparency and inclusivity while maintaining a feedback-driven and open culture at the Company. Accordingly, our last employee engagement survey reflected the positive impact of the company's efforts.

### Ideal employer of choice in Kuwait by Universum

stc was ranked the number one ideal employer of choice for engineers and IT professionals in Kuwait according to Universum's custom research in comparison with 19 of the strongest brands in Kuwait. The recognition serves as a testament to stc's progressive approach to fostering a dynamic and innovative work environment. Universum conducted a research-based report this year highlighting the most attractive employers in Kuwait based on talent's overall opinion and perception of different companies.

Abdulaziz Al-Mathkoor, Chief Human Resources Officer of stc, said, "At stc, we believe that attracting and retaining top talent is crucial for our success. Our strategy focuses on providing a supportive and inclusive environment where professionals can thrive. As a pioneer in Kuwait's telecom market and the private sector, we take pride in setting the benchmark within our industry in the engineering and IT fields in Kuwait."

### The 'WithU' Program

As part of its transformative strategy, stc introduced the 'Employee Experience Department', a specialized team that focuses primarily on overseeing the different stages within an employee's lifecycle at the Company, from hiring to retirement. The team will collect and evaluate feedback from employees regarding their unique experiences at the Company.

Upon assessing the information, suggestions will be shared through 'WithU', a program designed to share various Forum Talk touchpoints that will reach all employees, including the stc's executive management team. WithU aims to generate valuable dialogue from employees, leveraging on stc's existing open-door policy. The objective of this initiative is to ensure that employees' voices are not only heard, but their feedback can in return help shape the workplace experience, resulting in the launch of new initiatives based on their recommendations.

Commenting on stc's cultural transformation, Abdulaziz Al-Mathkoor, Chief Human Resources Officer at stc, said, "The 'WithU' program at stc was created to ensure that every employee's voice is heard and that their feedback is taken seriously across all levels of the organization. Employee well-being is a primary indicator of a prosperous work environment, and at stc, we are committed to having a culture where individuals feel valued and supported. The launch of this engaging program aligns directly with our internal strategy to positively transform our culture into a new trajectory, while focusing on transparency and inclusivity."

### Empowerment Through Mentorship

In addition to the WithU program, stc has launched a mentorship program where experienced

leaders are elected to guide and empower employees in further growing and developing their careers. Several initiatives have been launched under the mentorship program to ensure that mentees gain experience and added knowledge that can enable them to excel in their careers and develop their competencies. This collaborative approach aligns with stc's strategic approach to developing a motivating and empowering culture where employees can explore their capabilities in a nurturing and positive environment.

Al-Mathkoor, added, "At stc, our people come first, which is why we are driven to explore different approaches and initiatives to ensure that we are providing ample opportunities for our employees to grow. We have witnessed how our mentorship program has assisted employees in developing their careers. Through the guidance of experienced professionals operating in the same Company, employees can focus directly on the areas that will assist them in enhancing their roles in the Company and further contributing to the Company's success."

### Work-life Balance

In its mission to promote a work-life balance, stc introduced a remote work policy for employees, where they can complete their tasks outside the office. The policy was introduced to reduce the pressure on

employees, allowing them the option to complete their tasks irrespective of their physical presence at the office. With the launch of the remote work policy, the Company has witnessed higher levels of productivity amongst employees, as well as an increase in employee satisfaction. Aside from working remotely, stc introduced reduced working hours, becoming one of the few companies in Kuwait's private sector to implement a seven-hour workday. These measures reflect stc's ongoing commitment to supporting its employees both professionally and personally.

### Assessing Engagement

stc tracks all employee feedback, including the effectiveness of its various programs through an annual engagement survey that is shared with all employees. The survey reflects the success of each initiative through an engagement score that will determine the impact of the various efforts launched by stc. This enables the Company's involved teams to gain firsthand feedback from employees and determine where each program can be further enhanced to benefit employees. The programs that receive high engagement scores are acknowledged for their positive impact and are maintained for the benefit of employees. The survey also aligns with the Company's commitment to promoting transparency, con-

tinuous development, and open communication.

### stc's Internship Program

Aside from its strategic focus on empowering employees, stc held two internship programs throughout the year for recent graduates. The first program was held from February till May 2025, whereas the second program ran from June to August 2025. Overall, the internship programs invited 20 interns who completed a total of 120 hours. Each intern was assigned to a different department where they participated in a specific program in which they presented to the Company's executive management team and general managers. The participating interns were students in various universities in Kuwait including the American University of Kuwait, Kuwait University, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Australian University, and the American University of the Middle East.

### Training Abroad with Huawei

Leveraging its relationship with leading global organizations, stc collaborated with Huawei to host a comprehensive training session for employees at Huawei's training center in Shenzhen, China. A total of 20 employees were selected from stc to participate in the training session abroad to enhance their knowledge in various technologies. The training

### AI-Mathkoor:

stc is committed to having a culture where individuals feel valued and supported.

Our people come first, which is why we are driven to provide ample opportunities for our employees to grow.

session covered trending topics in the digital world including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, Cybersecurity, and network related topics. The employees were trained by Huawei instructors and were taken on a company tour which included visiting Huawei's Data Centers, Research and Development Campus, as well as multiple showcases that featured the technologies.

### Talent Incubator Program

By the end of the year, stc launched its 'Talent Incubator Program' for recent graduates. The program served as a unique and innovative initiative for young graduates to further develop their skills, while also gaining real-world experience. It provided participants with a comprehensive exposure of stc's work culture and various departments, including an opportunity to shadow globally recognized consultants, particularly in areas such as transformation and change management. The Company hired 18 recent graduates who were assigned to different departments as part of the one-year program. Under the 'Talent Incubator Program', stc aspires to identify and nurture local talent by providing them with the skills and opportunities that will shape graduates today to adapt and excel in a fast-paced and highly competitive industry.

Al-Mathkoor concluded, "As we continue to shape a culture that places employees at the heart of our mission, we remain dedicated to upholding our commitment to foster an environment where every individual feels empowered to thrive. Our initiatives are designed not only to elevate employee satisfaction but to cultivate a dynamic workplace that encourages growth, engagement, and excellence at every level. At stc, we believe that by investing in our people, we are investing in our collective success and future."



stc employees' participation in the Innovation Challenge Program.



Employer of Choice.



## Navy vet's lawsuit adds pressure to struggling network

# CNN defamation trial hits at low point for legacy media

NEW YORK, Jan 8, (AP): At a particularly inopportune time for legacy media and CNN, the news outlet is on trial in Florida this week, accused of defaming a Navy veteran involved in rescuing endangered Afghans from that country when the US ended its involvement there in 2021.

The veteran, Zachary Young, blames CNN for destroying his business when it displayed his face onscreen during a story that discussed a "black market" in smuggling out Afghans for high fees at the time of the Taliban takeover.

In a broader sense, the case puts the news media on the stand in journalism critic Donald Trump's home state weeks before he's due to begin his second term as president, and on the same day Facebook's parent introduced a Trump-friendly policy of backing off fact checks. Young's attorney, Kyle Roche, leaned into the press' unpopularity in his opening arguments on Tuesday.

"You're going to have an opportunity to do something significant in this trial," Roche told jurors in Florida's 14th Judicial Circuit Courts in Panama City on Tuesday. "You're going to have an opportunity to send a message to mainstream media. You're going to have an opportunity to change an industry."

That's the fear. Said Jane Kirtley, director of the Silha Center for the Study of Media Ethics and the Law at the University of Minnesota: "Everybody in the news media is on trial in this case."

Defamation trials are actually rare in the United States, in part because strong constitutional protections for the press make proving libel difficult. From the media's standpoint, taking a case to a judge or jury is a risk many executives don't want to take.

Rather than defend statements that George Stephanopoulos made about Trump last spring, ABC News last



Signage seen at the CNN Center in Atlanta on April 21, 2022. (AP)

month agreed to make the former president's libel lawsuit go away by paying him \$15 million toward his presidential library. In the end, ABC parent Walt Disney Co. concluded an ongoing fight against Trump wasn't worth it, win or lose.

### Settle

In the most high-profile libel case in recent years, Fox News agreed to pay Dominion Voting Systems \$787 million on the day the trial was due to start in 2023 to settle the company's claims of inaccurate reporting in the wake of the 2020 presidential election.

The Young case concerns a segment that first aired on Jake Tapper's program on Nov. 11, 2021, about extraction efforts in Afghanistan. Young had built a business helping such efforts, and advertised his services on LinkedIn to sponsors with funding who could pay for such evacuation. He subsequently helped four separate organizations -

Audible, Bloomberg, a charity called H.E.R.O. Inc. and a Berlin-based NGO called CivilFleet Support eV - get more than a dozen people out of Afghanistan, according to court papers. He said he did not market to - or take money from - individual Afghans.

Yet Young's picture was shown as part of CNN story that talked about a "black market" where Afghans were charged \$10,000 or more to get family members out of danger.

To Young, the "black market" label implied some sort of criminality, and he did nothing illegal. "It's devastating if you're labeled a criminal all over the world," Young testified on Tuesday.

### Implication

CNN said in court papers that Young's case amounts to "defamation by implication," and that he hadn't actually been accused of nefarious acts. The initial story he complained about didn't even mention Young until three minutes in, CNN lawyer David Axelrod argued on Tuesday.

Five months after the story aired, Young complained about it, and CNN issued an on-air statement that its use of the phrase "black market" was wrong. "We did not intend to suggest that Mr. Young participated in a black market. We regret the error. And to Mr. Young, we apologize."

That didn't prevent a defamation lawsuit, and the presiding judge, William S. Henry, denied CNN's request that it be dismissed. CNN, in a statement, said that "when all the facts come to light, we are confident we will have a verdict in our favor."

Axelrod argued on Tuesday that CNN's reporting was tough, fair and accurate. He told the jury that they will hear no witnesses who will say they thought less of Young or wouldn't hire him because of the story - in other words, no one to back up his contention that it was so damaging to his business and life.

Yet much like Fox was publicly hurt in the Dominion case by internal communications about Trump and the network's coverage, some unflattering revelations about CNN's operations will likely become part of the trial. They include internal messages where CNN's reporter, Alex Marquardt, says unflattering and profane things about Young. A CNN editor was also revealed on messages to suggest that a Marquardt story on the topic was "full of holes," Roche said.

"At the end of the day, there was no one at CNN who was willing to stand up for the truth," Roche said. "Theater prevailed."

Axelrod, who shares a name with a longtime Democratic political operative and CNN commentator, contended that the give and take was part of a rigorous journalistic process putting the video segment and subsequent printed stories together. "Many experienced journalists put eyes on these stories," he said.

It's still going to be difficult for CNN to go through. The network, with television ratings at historic lows, doesn't need the trouble.

"At a moment of wider vilification and disparagement of the press, there is every reason to believe this will be weaponized, even if CNN prevails," said RonNell Andersen Jones, a professor at the University of Utah law school and expert on libel law.

The case is putting a media organization and its key players on the stand in a very public way, which is something people don't usually see.

"I always dread any kind of libel cases because the likelihood that something bad will come out of it is very high," Minnesota's Kirtley said. "This is not a great time to be a libel defendant if you're in the news media. If we ever did have the support of the public, it has seriously eroded over the past few years."

## Variety

**LOS ANGELES:** The Screen Actors Guild Awards nominations have canceled an in-person announcement planned for Wednesday morning due to devastating wildfires and winds in the Los Angeles area.

The nominations for awards honoring the best performances in movies and television will be announced by press release instead of at a live event hosted by actors **Joey King** and **Cooper Koch**.

Homes and structures are burning in a pair of wind-swept fire in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles and Altadena, a neighborhood near Pasadena, California.



King

Kristen Bell will host the 31st annual awards ceremony, which will stream live on Netflix on Feb. 23 at 8 p.m. Eastern from the Shrine Auditorium & Expo Hall in Los Angeles. Idris Elba hosted last year's ceremony.

The SAG Awards are a reliable Oscar bellwether for the acting and best picture categories.

The fires have led to the cancellation of several entertainment events, including Wednesday's premiere of the Robbie Williams biopic "Better Man," a premiere of Jennifer Lopez's "Unstoppable" movie and the premiere of Universal Pictures' upcoming horror film "Wolf Man." (AP)

**HARBIN, China:** The opening and closing ceremonies of the Harbin 2025 Asian Winter Games will be directed by Sha Xiaolan, who was also behind the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games ceremonies.

The creative team for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Asian Winter Games made its first public appearance on Tuesday.

Du Wenxi, the Chief Director of the Asian Winter Games Main Press Center, introduced the team and revealed that the main venue for the opening and closing ceremonies will be the Harbin International Conference, Exhibition and Sports Center.

The opening ceremony is scheduled for February 7, and the closing ceremony will be held on February 14. Rehearsals for the ceremonies are currently progressing in an orderly manner, Du added.

Du also introduced the main creative personnel for the opening and closing ceremonies, led by Chief Director Sha Xiaolan.

The theme of the Asian Winter Games, "Dream of Winter, Love among Asia," is both the official slogan and the creative theme for the opening ceremony performance.

In addition, the competition schedule for the Asian Winter Games has been fully confirmed. Ice hockey and curling events will begin on February 3 and 4, respectively. (Xinhua)

**VIENTIANE:** The Lao Art Museum, the largest museum in the country, officially opened to the public, marking a significant milestone in the nation's cultural preservation efforts, which is expected to become a popular tourist attraction for both domestic and international visitors.

A grand opening ceremony was held in the Lao capital, Vientiane, on Sunday and attended by Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone.

The museum features an array of traditional Lao woodcarvings, highlighting the intricate craftsmanship that is a cornerstone of the nation's cultural identity. It also provides a platform to showcase creativity across generations, promoting sustainability, environmental awareness, and cultural preservation.

The museum is expected to create local job opportunities, support businesses, and attract global visitors. It also aims to inspire the next generation of Lao artists, fostering a deeper connection to cultural identity and creativity. (Xinhua)

## Awards



This image released by Universal Pictures shows Cynthia Erivo, (left), and Ariana Grande in a scene from the film 'Wicked.' (AP)

## Special honor for Erivo and Grande

# NBR Awards hold space for 'Wicked'

NEW YORK, Jan 8, (AP): Days after "Wicked" went home from the Golden Globes with a single award for box office achievement, the National Board of Review Awards held space for the smash hit musical, celebrating its cast and director in the New York group's annual gala Tuesday.

The untelevised but starry NBR Awards were a chance for many of the nominees who didn't win Sunday to trot out their would-be acceptance speeches, including Daniel Craig, Kieran Culkin and Nicole Kidman.

Accepting the award for best actress for her performance in the erotic thriller "Babygirl," Kidman celebrated by chugging a glass of milk, a nod to some of the film's kinky sex games. After finishing, Kidman triumphantly announced "Good girl!" and left the stage.

It also was an opportunity for some jobs at the Globes. "Isn't this room just a little bit classier than the Beverly Hilton?" quipped presenter Christine Baranski, looking around the elegant marble-columned midtown venue, Cipriani's.

Others were less impressed by the old-school New York vibe. "The bathroom attendant, that shouldn't exist anymore," Culkin said during a typically free-form acceptance speech for best supporting actor for his role in "A Real Pain."

The night belonged to Jon M. Chu's "Wicked." The musical was the board's pick for best film, best director for Chu and a special award for the creative collaboration of Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande.

The two, in back-and-forth remarks, continued their mutual praise of each other.

"Also you're welcome," added Grande. "I truly think you would have murdered anyone else."

"Probably true," responded Erivo. Chu, who was introduced by Lin Manuel-Miranda, used the moment to reflect on his yearslong journey with "Wicked," which will be followed by an already-shot part two due out this November. So lengthy has his time in Oz been that the director noted he had three children during its making, including one born the day of the movie's premiere.

"No twins, same mom," assured Chu. "I know what you guys are whispering." Ryan Reynolds, an avowed fan of the film, took up the topic in his introduction to the film's final award.

"The man missed the premiere of his own film so he could attend the birth of his fifth child," Reynolds said. "I barely made it to the inception of my own children."

### Theme

The common theme of the night was community and togetherness. Coming a day after the anniversary of the Jan. 6 Capitol riot and less than two weeks before the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump, many alluded to Hollywood's role in the coming years.

Marc Platt, producer of "Wicked," spoke about the deeper meanings of the film and having "the courage to speak truth to power

especially when that power is manifested by those who come to it by blame or divisiveness."

Craig, the best actor winner for his performance in Luca Guadagnino's William S. Burroughs' adaptation, "Queer," declared: "We are in good shape."

"If we continue to make and produce movies like this, our industry is going to continue to thrive," said Craig, who dedicated his award "to the dreamers in the room." "We need you now more than ever."

A key feature of the NBR Awards, which were founded in 1909 by film enthusiasts, is its style of award presentation. Each winner is introduced by a close friend, collaborator or admirer. Last year's surprise guest was Daniel Day-Lewis, who

presented for Martin Scorsese and the best-film winner "Killers of the Flower Moon."

This year, Robert Pattinson dropped in to introduce India Donaldson, winner of the breakthrough director award for her acclaimed debut "Good One." Pattinson called Donaldson "one of the most exciting filmmakers working today."

Sofia Coppola presented best supporting actress to Elle Fanning, who starred as a 12-year-old in 2010's "Somewhere," for her performance in "A Complete Unknown." "She's really the same person that I met when she was 11," Coppola said.

Other introductions were more surprising. John Lithgow, there as part of the "Conclave" group that won best ensemble, introduced breakthrough performance winner and "Anora" star Mikey Madison. Lithgow had only just met her but profusely praised her performance, listing a wide array of its traits, one of which drew giggles from the crowd, and the 25-year-old Madison.

"I never thought John Lithgow would call me 'sexually athletic,'" said Madison, who plays a Brooklyn sex worker in the film.

Carol Kane presented best animated film to the wondrous Latvian film "Flow," about a cat and other animals in a flooded world. She didn't, at first, seem well-suited to the job.

"I don't get animation. I like to watch people, you know," Kane said. Then she relented, calling "Flow" a revelation. "Animals, for a long time now, have been some of my favorite people."



From left: Mikey Madison, Christine Baranski and Michelle Yeoh attend the National Board of Review Awards gala at Cipriani 42nd Street on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025, in New York. (AP)



## HMPV and flu increase in line with seasonal trends

## Global respiratory virus spread poses low health risk: WHO

GENEVA, Jan 8, (KUNA): The World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that the spread of respiratory viruses globally remains within expected seasonal levels, adding that health risks are currently considered low despite reported cases in the United States and China.

Stressing that "No emergency declarations and no emergency response is triggered," WHO spokesperson Margret Harris emphasized that while individual cases such as the first reported death in the United States on January 6 are being monitored, they do not significantly

alter the global risk assessment.

The WHO noted that recent data from China reported by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC) on January 2 has showed an increase in common respiratory infections.

However this increase is expected for the winter's seasonal influenza, according to WHO, as pneumonia and COVID-19 have been noted among the respiratory infections. China's surveillance system has detected over 30 percent positivity for seasonal influenza.

"Although there is an increase in respiratory infections, hospitalizations remain below last year's levels, and no emergency response measures have been initiated," Harris confirmed. The WHO also clarified that the human metapneumovirus (HMPV), causing recent respiratory infections, is not new. It was first identified in 2001 and is a common virus that circulates during winter and spring. It typically causes mild cold-like symptoms, but can be more severe in vulnerable populations, such as newborns the elderly and those with weakened immune systems.

WHO's global surveillance also highlights a rise in seasonal influenza in Asia, Europe, Africa and parts of the Caribbean, adding that this aligns with the expected seasonal patterns.

The WHO recommended strengthening surveillance systems, sharing data among countries and ensuring preparedness for any potential changes in virus behavior. It also advised public health measures, such as vaccination, hand hygiene and staying home when symptomatic to prevent further spread.

## FMD outbreak

## Mpox death toll in Uganda hits 10

KAMPALA, Jan 8, (Xinhua): The number of laboratory-confirmed mpox deaths in Uganda has climbed to 10 after four fatalities were registered in the last five days in the East African country, according to authorities.

In a situation update report released Monday, Uganda's Ministry of Health said at least 156 new infections were registered in the last five days, bringing the total number of confirmed infections in the country to 1,571 since the outbreak was declared six months ago.

The ministry said 19 new infections were reported in the past 24 hours, with 17 cases registered in the central district of Wakiso, one in Uganda's capital of Kampala, and another in Lira.

The ministry, with support from the World Health Organization and partners, has intensified preventive measures, including enhanced surveillance, case management, conducting health meetings, risk communication and community engagement, and public awareness campaigns to curb the spread of the disease.

Mpox is an illness caused by the monkeypox virus. It is a viral infection that can spread between people, mainly through close contact. Common symptoms of mpox include a rash, fever, headache, muscle aches, back pain, low energy and swollen glands.

**FMD vaccines:** The Indonesian government has supplied 4 million vaccines, valued at 100 billion rupiahs (around 6 million US dollars), to address the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), according to the Ministry of Agriculture.

These FMD vaccines are being distributed across all regions in Indonesia through local governments.

"Farmers can obtain these vaccines for free from their local governments," stated Sudaryono, deputy minister of agriculture, on Tuesday.

Sudaryono also confirmed that the number of vaccines available is insufficient, as the outbreak in Indonesia has escalated to Alert Level 1.

Additionally, the government has urged farmers to keep their animals healthy and maintain clean enclosures to help reduce the spread of the disease.

**TCM:** By 2024, approximately 90 percent of counties in China had set up county-run traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) institutions, according to a national TCM meeting that opened on Wednesday.

TCM centers had been established in nearly every town, township, and urban community throughout China, according to statistics released at the meeting.

While expanding its TCM service network, the country is also enhancing its TCM service capabilities. According to Yu Yanhong, head of the National Administration of TCM, efforts are underway to establish 1,158 national specialized TCM centers, focusing on creating specialized center clusters in areas such as orthopedics, proctology, pediatrics and dermatology.

## 'Remarkable achievement'

## Kuwait neonatal cardiac unit earns Canadian certification

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The Ministry of Health announced a remarkable achievement as the Premature Infants and Neonatal Intensive Care Department at the Maternity Hospital received the Canadian Certificate of Excellence and Recognition from the Canadian Society for Neonatal Cardiac Ultrasound, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This certification highlights the

hospital's expertise in advanced cardiac care for newborns.

The Ministry emphasized that this recognition underscores its commitment to providing high-quality healthcare for premature babies.

The department is now accredited as a specialized center for treating heart and blood circulation diseases in neonates, addressing the critical needs of this vulnerable group.



Food and Drug Administration (FDA) building is shown in Silver Spring, Md., Dec. 10, 2020. (AP)

## Development concerns

## FDA issues new guidelines to limit toxic lead in baby foods

NEW YORK, Jan 8, (AP): The US Food and Drug Administration set maximum levels for lead in baby foods like jarred fruits and vegetables, yogurts and dry cereal, part of an effort to cut young kids' exposure to the toxic metal that causes developmental and neurological problems.

The agency issued final guidance that it estimated could reduce lead exposure from processed baby foods by about 20% to 30%. The limits are voluntary, not mandatory, for food manufacturers, but they allow the FDA to take enforcement action if foods exceed the levels.

It's part of the FDA's ongoing effort to "reduce dietary exposure to contaminants, including lead, in foods to as low as possible over time, while maintaining access to nutritious foods," the agency said in a statement.

Consumer advocates, who have long sought limits on lead in children's foods, welcomed the guidance first proposed two years ago, but said it didn't go far enough.

"FDA's actions today are a step forward and will help protect children," said Thomas Galligan, a scientist with the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "However, the agency took too long to act and ignored important public input that could have strengthened these standards."

The new limits on lead for children

younger than 2 don't cover grain-based snacks like puffs and teething biscuits, which some research has shown contain higher levels of lead. And they don't limit other metals such as cadmium that have been detected in baby foods.

Brian Ronholm, director of food policy for Consumer Reports, called the limits "virtually meaningless because they're based more on industry feasibility and not on what would best protect public health."

A spokesperson for baby food maker Gerber said the company's products meet the limits.

There's no safe level of lead exposure for children, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The metal causes "well-documented health effects," including brain and nervous system damage and slowed growth and development. However, lead occurs naturally in some foods and comes from pollutants in air, water and soil, which can make it impossible to eliminate entirely.

The FDA guidance sets a lead limit of 10 parts per billion for fruits, most vegetables, grain and meat mixtures, yogurts, custards and puddings and single-ingredient meats. It sets a limit of 20 parts per billion for single-ingredient root vegetables and for dry infant cereals. The guidance covers packaged processed foods sold in jars, pouches, tubs or boxes.

## New content policy promises more freedom

## Meta replaces fact-checking with user-written 'community notes'

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan 8, (AP): Meta chief executive officer Mark Zuckerberg announced changes to content moderation on Facebook and Instagram long sought by conservatives. Incoming President Donald Trump said the new approach was "probably" due to threats he made against the technology mogul.

The move to replace third-party fact-checking with user-written "community notes" similar to those on Trump backer Elon Musk's social platform X is the latest example of a media company moving to accommodate the incoming administration. It comes on the four-year anniversary of Zuckerberg banning Trump from his platforms after the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol.

Zuckerberg has been a target of Trump and his allies since he donated \$400 million to help local officials run the 2020 election during the coronavirus pandemic. Those donations became part of a false narrative that the 2020 election was rigged against Trump, although there has never been any evidence of widespread fraud or problems that would have changed that result. Nonetheless, Republican-controlled states have banned future donations to local elections offices and Trump himself threatened to imprison Zuckerberg in a book published in September, during the peak of the presidential campaign.

Zuckerberg released a video Tuesday using some of the language that conservatives have long used to criticize his platforms, saying it was time to prioritize "free expression" and that fact-checkers had become "politically biased." Zuckerberg said he is moving Meta's content moderation team from California, a blue state, to red state Texas, and lifting restrictions on some immigration and gender discussions. Meta had no immediate comment on how many people might be relocated.

At a press conference hours later, Trump praised the changes.

"I think they've come a long way, Meta," Trump said. When asked if he believed Zuckerberg made the changes in response to threats the incoming president has made, Trump responded: "Probably."

Meta is among several tech companies apparently working to get in



Attendees visit the Meta booth at the Game Developers Conference in San Francisco on March 22, 2023. (AP)

Trump's good graces before he takes office later this month. Meta and Amazon each donated \$1 million to Trump's inauguration fund in December, and Zuckerberg had dinner with Trump at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida.

Zuckerberg this week also appointed a key Trump ally, Ultimate Fighting Championship chief executive Dana White, to Meta's board. Amazon announced a documentary on incoming first lady Melania Trump. ABC News, which is owned by Disney, last month settled a libel suit filed by Trump with a \$15 million payment to Trump's presidential library foundation.

Brendan Nyhan, a political scientist at Dartmouth College, called the Meta changes part of "a pattern of powerful people and institutions kowtowing to the president in a way that suggests they're fearful of being targeted."

Nyhan said that's a grave risk to the country.

"We have in many ways an economy that's the envy of the world and people come here to start businesses because they don't have to be aligned with the governing regime like they do in the rest of the world," Nyhan said. "That's being called into question."

Except for YouTube, Meta's Facebook is by far the most used social media platform in the US. According to the Pew

Research Center, about 68% of American adults use Facebook, a number that has largely held steady since 2016. Teenagers, however, have fled Facebook over the past decade, with just 32% reporting they used it in a 2024 survey.

Meta began fact checks in December 2016, after Trump was elected to his first term, in response to criticism that "fake news" was spreading on its platforms. For years, the tech giant boasted it was working with more than 100 organizations in over 60 languages to combat misinformation.

The Associated Press ended its participation in Meta's fact-checking program a year ago.

Media experts and those who study social media were aghast at Meta's policy shift.

"Mark Zuckerberg's decision to end Meta's fact-checking program not only removes a valuable resource for users, but it also provides an air of legitimacy to a popular disinformation narrative: That fact-checking is politically biased. Fact-checkers provide a valuable service by adding important context to the viral claims that mislead and misinform millions of users on Meta," said Dan Evon, lead writer for RumorGuard, the News Literacy Project's digital tool that curates fact checks and teaches people to spot viral misinformation.

## Modernizing healthcare with AI, BCIs

## China eyes humanoid robots for elderly care

BEIJING, Jan 8, (Xinhua): China will promote the development of humanoid robots, brain-computer interfaces (BCI) and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies for elderly care, according to new guidelines aimed at deepening the country's elderly care service reforms.

This move is part of China's broader plan to accelerate the development and application of technology in elderly care and support major scientific and technological projects related to senior

services, as outlined in the guidelines by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council on Dec. 30, 2024.

Humanoid robots, with advantages in human-robot interaction, are rapidly evolving and hold great potential for applications in diverse fields, including healthcare and home services.

China will promote the adoption of intelligent home systems and explore services for early warning and prevention of safety risks in home-based

elderly care, according to the guidelines.

A unified national elderly care information platform will also be developed to more effectively align service supply with demand, the guidelines noted.

According to a report issued last year, China's life expectancy had reached 78.6 years. The country's population aged 65 and above totaled 216.76 million, accounting for 15.4 percent of the country's total population by the end of 2023.

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As part of its unwavering commitment to delivering exceptional services and exclusive offers to its valued customers

## NBK and SPARK Athletic Center forge an exclusive partnership

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has entered into an exclusive partnership with SPARK Athletic Center, Kuwait's premier fitness and health destination. This collaboration reflects NBK's unwavering commitment to enhancing the banking experience by providing its customers with exceptional services and tailored offers that align with diverse lifestyle preferences.

The agreement was formalized at the SPARK Athletic Center headquarters in Shuwaikh, with Mr. Hisham Al-Nusif, General Manager of the Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait, and Mr. Abdulmohsen Al-Babtain, CEO of Groupxen, signing on behalf of their respective organizations.

Under the terms of the agreement, NBK, in partnership with SPARK, will introduce a groundbreaking service to its customers at the start of 2025. This will include innovative offers and exclusive benefits, carefully crafted to align with their aspirations and needs.

On this occasion, Mr. Hisham Al-Nusif, General Manager of the Consumer Banking Group at NBK, remarked: "We are committed to continually enhancing convenience and excellence for our customers across all segments and age groups. By offering the finest services and exceptional offers, we aim to meet



Hisham Al-Nusif and Abdulmohsen Al-Babtain with officials from the National Bank of Kuwait and SPARK Athletic Center during the agreement signing ceremony.

their needs, fulfill their aspirations, and deliver a truly unique banking experience."

"We are delighted with this partnership with SPARK Athletic Center, a pioneer in the fitness industry, as it offers our customers exclusive benefits that reinforce NBK's leadership in the banking sector," added Al-Nusif. He emphasized that the bank is consistently looking to expand its net-

work of partners and leverage its strong relationships with major companies across various sectors to deliver an unparalleled banking experience, offering services and benefits that elevate the lives of its customers.

He explained that customer satisfaction and delivering the best banking experience are integral to NBK's culture. He further noted that, with the extensive experience

gained over decades, the bank is well-equipped to understand customer needs, assess their goals, and consistently exceed their expectations.

In the meantime, Mr. Abdulmohsen Al-Babtain, CEO of Groupxen, stated: "We are proud to partner with a leading banking institution and esteemed brand like NBK. This partnership marks a strong and exciting new chapter for SPARKAth-

letic Center, and we are committed to working together to raise awareness about sports and encourage the entire Kuwaiti community to embrace a healthy lifestyle."

"There is no doubt that our collaboration with NBK, a pioneer in driving tangible, qualitative advancements across various sectors, will greatly enhance our efforts to deliver SPARK's message to the widest possible audience of both

**Al-Nusif:**  
■ Customer satisfaction and delivering an exceptional banking experience are integral to NBK's core values

■ Through strategic partnerships across diverse sectors, we aim to redefine banking services and enhance customer engagement

**Al-Babtain:**  
■ We are proud to partner with a distinguished institution like NBK, renowned for its excellence and innovation

■ Together, we aspire to promote sports awareness and inspire the community to embrace healthier lifestyles

citizens and residents in Kuwait," Al-Babtain added.

Founded in 2013, SPARK Sports Athletic Center is Kuwait's premier fitness and wellness destination, providing exceptional experiences through cutting-edge facilities, innovative programs, and a results-driven approach. Catering to individuals of all fitness levels, SPARK offers a comprehensive range of services, including advanced strength training, high-performance group fitness classes, and specialized fitness programs.

## Benzema stars as Al-Ittihad edges past Al-Hilal in King's Cup thriller



Al-Ittihad players celebrate after reaching the semifinals of the King's Cup.

### Rajkovic saves 3 penalty kicks

**RIYADH, Jan 8: French star Karim Benzema delivered a standout performance, scoring twice and converting a penalty to lead Al-Ittihad Jeddah to a dramatic victory over Al-Hilal at King's Arena Stadium. The marathon clash, which ended in a penalty shootout, secured Al-Ittihad's place in the semi-fi-**

**nals of the King's Cup.**

The first half remained goalless, with a key moment in the 44th minute when Benzema's goal was disallowed for offside after referee intervention.

In the second half, Al-Ittihad broke the deadlock in the 63rd minute when Benzema netted a goal from Muhammad Al-Shanqeeti's cross. Al-Hilal responded swiftly, equalizing in the 72nd minute with a goal by captain Salem Al-Dawsari, who capitalized on a deflected ball from Brazilian midfielder Fabinho

of Al-Ittihad.

The match went into extra time, where Al-Hilal gained the lead in the 101st minute through Marcos Leonardo, assisted by Mutab Al-Harbi. However, Al-Ittihad refused to back down, and Benzema struck again in the 114th minute, this time set up by Abdulaziz Al-Bishi.

The French star's equalizer marked his fifth career goal against Al-Hilal, including one scored during the 2023 FIFA Club World Cup with Real Madrid.

Drama ensued in the 116th minute

when Al-Bishi appeared to score Al-Ittihad's third goal, but it was overturned by VAR for offside, sending the game into a penalty shootout.

In the shootout, Serbian goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic became the hero for Al-Ittihad, saving three penalty kicks to secure a 3-1 victory.

With this triumph, Al-Ittihad claimed the final spot in the semi-finals, joining Al-Qadisiyah, Al-Shabab, and Al-Raed in the "golden square." Meanwhile, Al-Hilal, the reigning champion for the past two seasons, bowed out of the competition.

### Kyrgios faces another injury setback

## Wei through to final round of Australian Open qualifying

**SYDNEY, Jan 8, (Agencies):** China's Wei Sijia is one win away from reaching the main draw at the Australian Open after winning her second round qualifying match on Wednesday.

World No. 119 Wei beat Germany's Tamara Korpatsch 6-3, 6-3 in one hour and 18 minutes, and the victory gave her the opportunity to reach the main draw at a Grand Slam for the first time with a win in the third and final round on Thursday.

Wei won 63 percent of her service points compared to Korpatsch's 49 percent, and hit 20 winners compared to 10 for the German.

It is the second straight year the 21-year-old has reached the third qualifying round at the Australian Open after falling in the final round in 2024.

Gao Xinyu was beaten in her own second round match by Croatian veteran Petra Martic 3-6, 7-6 (5), 6-4 in two hours and 38 minutes.

Gao, who reached a career-high No. 146 after leading China to the quarterfinals of the United Cup, led



In this file photo, Nick Kyrgios of Eagles returns the ball to Grigor Dimitrov of Falcons during a match of Day 3 of the World Tennis League at Coca-Cola Arena in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. (AP)

the deciding set 2-0 but could not capitalize on the advantage.

Martic, the 16th seed in the qualifying tournament, leveled the score at 2-2, before again breaking Gao's serve at 4-4 and serving out the match.

Wei will face Serbian world No.

237 Nina Stojanovic in her final qualifying match.

Meanwhile, Nick Kyrgios faces another injury setback in his planned return to Grand Slam tennis at the Australian Open after an abdominal strain forced him to withdraw from an exhibition with Novak Djokovic this week.

The 2022 Wimbledon finalist, sidelined with wrist and knee injuries since the 2022 U.S. Open, said in an Instagram post Wednesday that an ultrasound scan had revealed an abdominal strain and "unfortunately (I) won't be able to play my good friend (Djokovic) this Thursday." He signaled the injury was "not too serious" but told Australian broadcaster 7News it would limit his preparations for the Australian Open, which starts Sunday at Melbourne Park.

"I've still got five days up my sleeve so I probably won't serve for the next couple of days," Kyrgios said. "I've got a couple of practices scheduled and I'll do everything I can. It's not too serious, so I'll just

take it day by day and just give myself the best chance." The mercurial Australian, who has become a popular commentator during his lengthy stints on the injured list, made his competitive comeback last week at Brisbane, where he played one singles match and partnered with Djokovic in two doubles matches.

Djokovic and Kyrgios won their opening doubles match, a crowd-pleasing, fist-pumping affair by both players at Pat Rafter Arena before a 6-2, 3-6, 10-8 loss to Nikola Mektic of Croatia and New Zealander Michael Venus.

Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley remained confident Kyrgios would play at the year's first major.

"I think it's just precautionary, that's the word we've got from him," Tiley said Wednesday, responding to questions about the potential absence of the star Australian. "Nick's not the only one not doing some of their pre-planned matches over the next few days. There's no concerns ahead of the Open."

## Kuwait & UAE to launch joint school sports championships

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8:** Faisal Al-Maqseed, Chairman of the School Sports Federation and Higher Education, announced plans to collaborate with the UAE Federation for School and University Sports in organizing joint sports championships in 2025. He also emphasized ongoing efforts to expand cooperation in various sports initiatives.

Al-Maqseed revealed that work is underway to establish a "Gulf School Sports Federation," modeled after the Gulf Football Federation and other regional federations. This initiative aims to achieve strategic goals, foster Gulf-wide collaboration, and identify young talents in schools, enhancing their abilities to support the regional sports ecosystem. The ultimate vision is to integrate these talents into Gulf sports teams, aligning with the Gulf Cooperation Council's vision that "the future is Gulf."

He highlighted ongoing preparations for school championships, including increased coordination and the exchange of expertise. These efforts aim to implement sustainable sports programs, adopt best practices, and develop students' competitive skills to achieve talent discovery and empowerment goals.

Al-Maqseed expressed gratitude to Dr. Ahmad Belhoual Al Falasi, UAE Minister of Sports, for his support in advancing school sports initiatives in the UAE.

He also discussed a recent meeting with Ali Masri Al-Dhaheeri, a key figure in international univer-



Ali Masri Al-Dhaheeri receives a commemorative shield from Faisal Al-Maqseed.

sity sports federations, during the Zain 26th Gulf Cup in Kuwait. The meeting explored collaboration on school and university sports programs, aligning with Kuwait's "Our Talents in Our Schools" strategy for 2021-2026. Al-Maqseed shared optimism about extending this strategy across Gulf federations, citing strong support from Gulf sports leaders.

He concluded by noting that Gulf countries' strategic plans for enhancing school sports activities will yield significant and sustainable benefits, contributing to the development of a unified and robust Gulf sports vision.

## Excitement builds for the 11th Atyab Al-Marshood Champ'ship

**KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8:** The 11th edition of the "Atyab Al-Marshood" International Championship, an annual event organized by Waleed Al-Marshood, kicks off this afternoon at the Kuwait Equestrian Center. The competition will feature an elite group of male and female riders representing Kuwait, along with participants from several Gulf and European countries.

The first day's events will begin at 3:00 pm, starting with a round at 120 cm, followed by a round at 130 cm, and concluding with the grand prize round at 140 cm. On Friday, competitions will include rounds at 120 cm, 135 cm, and 140 cm, and the final day, Saturday, will feature rounds at 125 cm, 135 cm, and 145 cm.

Walid Sulaiman Al-Marshood, head of the Supreme Organizing Committee and tournament director, emphasized that the Al-Marshood Championship has become a prestigious international event, attracting top riders from around the world.

He praised the strong participation of international knights and noted the importance of private sector support in fostering competitive spirit and strengthening local championships.

He also expressed his gratitude to the Kuwait Equestrian Federation and the team managing the Kuwait Equestrian Center for their continuous efforts to promote



Walid Al-Marshood

the sport, particularly among the youth.

Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi, a prominent star of the Kuwait Club and the national equestrian team, highlighted that the Al-Marshood International Championship is the most significant and largest equestrian event in Kuwait.

He acknowledged the valuable contributions of private sector companies in supporting the sport and the state's efforts to elevate equestrian activities. Al-Kharafi also noted the emergence of a new generation of young competitors, showing strong performances alongside seasoned champions in recent years.



In this file French head coach Didier Deschamps attends the media during the UEFA preliminary draw for the 2026 World Cup. (AP)

# Sports

Zidane the favorite to succeed Didier

## Deschamps to end decade-long tenure as France coach after 2026 World Cup

PARIS, Jan 8, (AP): Didier Deschamps announced Wednesday that he won't continue as France coach after the next World Cup, bringing an end to an era in which he became the nation's most successful manager over more than a decade.

The 56-year-old Deschamps said that he will leave when his contract expires in the summer of 2026. "I've been here since 2012, I'm scheduled to be here until 2026, the next World Cup, but that's where it's going to end because it has to end at some point," Deschamps said in an interview with broadcaster TF1.

"I did my time, with the same desire and the same passion to keep the French team at the highest level, but 2026 is all very well."

Deschamps started in his role as a successor to Laurent Blanc. After a period marred by the 2010 World Cup debacle - where the players went on strike in protest against then-coach Raymond Domenech - and off-the-pitch controversies, Deschamps led France to victory at the 2018 World Cup, also reaching the final in 2022 and at the

2016 European Championship.

At the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, France lost an epic title match to Argentina.

"I'm not here for the records," said Deschamps, who also won the 2021 Nations League with France. "The most important thing is that the France team remains at the top as it has been for many years."

Deschamps is one of only three people in soccer history to have won the World Cup as both a player and a coach, along with Mario Zagallo (Brazil) and Franz Beckenbauer (West Germany). He has the highest number of wins (105) of any France coach, ahead of Michel Hidalgo and Domenech (tied on 41).

Deschamps found himself in a difficult position after the Euros last year, where France lost 2-1 to Spain in the semifinals without impressing. France was widely criticized for its pragmatic and dull style of play at Euro 2024, with Randal Kolo Muani's header against Spain the team's first and only goal from open play by a France player all tournament.

But he has kept the confidence of French federation president Philippe Diallo.

"He's still just as motivated and ready to wear the colors of the French team," Diallo told L'Equipe newspaper, adding that he did not believe Deschamps is tired of the job.

"Didier Deschamps' career has been exceptional, marked by the most prestigious titles," he said. "At the Euros, it was another semifinal in a major tournament. He was not affected by fatigue or criticism. After the competition, I asked him the question. His clear answer was that he was fully committed and energized to continue his mission. And that's exactly what he's doing, as we finished top of our group for the Nations League. He is still the greatest coach the French team has ever had."

As a player, Deschamps captained France to victory at the 1998 World Cup and 2000 European Championship. He also won the Champions League with Marseille in 1993 and Juventus in 1996.

Before taking charge of France's national team, he coached Monaco to the 2003-04 Champions League final

and guided Juventus back to Serie A. Deschamps also achieved success at Marseille, winning the Ligue 1 title in 2010.

Europe will send 16 teams to the first 48-team World Cup, being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico in the summer of 2026. Deschamps did not elaborate on his future beyond the tournament.

"There is a life afterwards," he said. "I don't know what it will be."

His planned departure will leave plenty of time for Diallo to find the right successor to Deschamps, with former France great Zinedine Zidane the overwhelming favorite if he is still interested in the job.

Zidane, who helped to lead Les Bleus as a player to their first World Cup title in 1998 and starred again when they won the European Championship in 2000, scored in two World Cup finals and was on the losing side once when he headbutted Italy's Marco Materazzi in the 2006 final on his final match as a player. As a coach, Zidane led Real Madrid to three consecutive Champions League titles.

## Newcastle moves closer to League Cup final

Isak strikes again as Magpies beat Arsenal in semifinal 1st leg

LONDON, Jan 8, (AP): Newcastle moved a step closer to a first major domestic trophy since 1955 with a 2-0 victory over Arsenal in the first leg of the English League Cup semifinals.

Goals from Alexander Isak and Anthony Gordon at the Emirates Stadium put Newcastle within reach of the final at Wembley Stadium in March. The second leg is at St James' Park on Feb. 5.

"It's a great result. It's only the first half. If we don't go through then this has no meaning, but we can't hide from the fact that this is a massive win," Isak said.

It was Newcastle's first win at the Emirates since 2010 and Arsenal's first home defeat since April.

Isak struck in the 37th minute to continue his outstanding scoring run with his 14th goal in 15 games. The Sweden international was involved in Newcastle's second in the 51st, when his shot was saved by Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya and the rebound was converted by Gordon.

Despite being bought by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund in 2021, Newcastle hasn't won a major domestic trophy since lifting the FA Cup almost 70 years ago. But it is close to second League Cup final in three years after losing to Manchester United in 2023.

Newcastle is also pushing for a return to the Champions League after missing out last season - sitting fifth

in the Premier League standings and one point outside of the qualifying places for European club soccer's elite tournament.

Victory against Arsenal was a seventh straight win in all competitions for Eddie Howe's team, which has been inspired by Isak's brilliant goal-scoring form.

He fired in off the underside of the crossbar from close range after a long free kick was played into his path by Jacob Murphy.

It was Isak's seventh goal in his last five games.

Despite in-stadium referee announcements being trialed for the match, an apparent push in the buildup to his goal did not result in referee Craig Pawson reviewing the sideline monitor.

It was Isak's sharpness that led to Newcastle's second. His effort from inside the box six minutes into the second half was parried by Raya, but Gordon was the quickest to react at the far post to fire home.

Arsenal was unbeaten in 13 games in all competitions and is second in the Premier League standings.

It had the chance to take the lead when Gabriel Martinelli burst through in the 29th and fired against the post.

Kai Havertz wasted a golden opportunity to pull a goal back when his attempted header from directly in front of goal came off his shoulder and went wide.

"We rode our luck a little bit at times, but (I'm) really pleased with the result," Howe said.



Arsenal's Declan Rice, fights for the ball with Newcastle's Dan Burn, center, during the English League Cup semifinal first leg soccer match between Arsenal and Newcastle United at the Emirates stadium in London. (AP)

## Ministry of Interior and National Guard reach semifinals



Players challenge for the ball during the league.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: The preliminary rounds of the Ministries, Authorities, and Government Institutions Football League have concluded, with the Ministry of Interior securing a spot in the semi-finals after finishing at the top of Group One with 17 points, including 5 wins, 2 draws, and 1 loss.

The National Guard also clinched the lead in Group B with the same score, ensuring both teams advanced to the semi-finals. They will face the winners of two exciting matchups: the General Administration of Customs, who finished as Group A runner-up with 13 points, against the Ministry of Electricity and Water, who placed third in Group B with 13 points.

Additionally, the Public Authority for Industry, third in Group A with 13 points, will take on the National Pe-

troleum Company, runner-up in Group B with 16 points. The National Guard team dominated the tournament with the highest scoring rate, netting 23 goals, boasting the strongest attack.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Information team had the weakest defense, conceding 25 goals. The Ministry of Interior achieved 5 victories, matching the National Guard and National Petroleum Company, while the Public Authority for Industry scored and conceded 17 goals each.

In the Ministries Futsal League, the Ministry of Electricity and Water and the Ministry of Finance emerged as the semi-finalists from Group A, while the Ministry of Interior and the National Guard advanced from Group B.

## Fans eagerly await thrilling clashes

### Kuwait Club seeks to extend league lead, Al-Qadsiya looks to keep title hopes alive

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 8: All eyes were on Mohammed Al-Hamad Stadium tonight as it hosts the much-anticipated showdown of the tenth round of the Zain Premier League. League leader Kuwait Club take on fierce rivals Al-Qadsiya, in what promises to be a thrilling encounter at 7:50 pm. The action begins earlier at 5:35 pm with Al-Tadamon facing Al-Yarmouk at Nasser Al-Osaimi Stadium.

Kuwait Club sits atop the standings with a perfect record of nine wins (27 points) in the first half of the tournament. Under Montenegrin coach Nebojsa Jovic, the team is eyeing its 20th league title and fourth consecutive championship. A victory tonight would solidify its dominance, widening the gap to 14 points over Al-Qadsiya and potentially ending its from the title hopes. Kuwait Club defeated Al-Qadsiya earlier this season with a narrow 1-0 win and will aim to repeat the feat.

The team will field a full-strength lineup, boosted by the exceptional performances of Bahraini stars Mohammed Marhoon and Mohammed Daham in the recent Khaleeji Zain 26. Marhoon emerged as the tournament's top scorer and best player, while Daham was voted the fans' favorite player. However, Jovic's men remain wary, knowing that a win will not come easily against its determined opponent.

Al-Qadsiya, currently third in the



A file photo of Kuwait Club and Al Qadsiya players in action.

standings with 16 points, has been inconsistent this season. Despite regaining form in recent rounds with four consecutive league wins and strong performances in the Gulf Champions League, it faces an uphill battle. Injuries to key players, including Khaled Ibrahim, Khaled Al-Rashidi, Youssef Al-Haqqaan, and Khaled Sabah, have compounded their challenges.

Brazilian defender Igor Rossi's potential departure has been postponed, given the team's urgent need for his services in tonight's match. Coach Zeljko Petrovic may opt to utilize Nigerian Daniel Gibula in central defense to compensate for the missing players.

The evening kicks off with Al-Yarmouk, currently in tenth place with just 3 points, still chasing its first league victory. Under the guidance of newly appointed coach Dhafer Al-Adwani, the team is determined to change its fortunes.

Meanwhile, Al-Tadamon, sixth in the standings with 11 points, aims to secure a win to distance itself from the relegation zone. A victory would provide much-needed breathing room as the league enters its second half.

As the Zain Premier League heats up, tonight's matches promise intense competition, with league standings and reputations on the line. Football fans are set for an unforgettable evening of drama and excitement.

## 'Musk has expressed interest in buying English soccer club Liverpool'

WASHINGTON, Jan 8, (AP): Elon Musk's father says his billionaire son has expressed interest in buying English soccer club Liverpool.

The Premier League club is privately owned by Fenway Sports Group, which has not indicated it wants to sell but has accepted external investment in the past.

Errol Musk, in an interview with Times Radio, acknowledged that the Tesla CEO has shown an interest in the six-time European Cup champions.

"Oh yes, but that doesn't mean he's buying it," Errol

Musk said. "He would like to, yes, obviously, anybody would want to. So would I."

He also said: "I can't comment on that. They'll raise the price."

When contacted by The Associated Press, a spokesperson for FSG said there was "No truth to these rumors."

In September 2023, FSG sold a minority stake to U.S. investment firm Dynasty Equity.

At that time, FSG president Mike Gordon said: "Our long-term commitment to Liverpool remains as strong as

ever. We have always said that if there is an investment partner that is right for Liverpool then we would pursue the opportunity to help ensure the club's long-term financial resiliency and future growth."

Under FSG, Liverpool has re-established itself as one of the leading clubs in Europe. The Merseyside club won its first English league title in 30 years in 2020 - one season after winning the Champions League title. It leads the Premier League and Champions League this season. Errol Musk said they have relatives in Liverpool and

that "we were fortunate enough to know quite a few of the Beatles because they grew up with us - my family."

Elon Musk has gotten himself involved in British politics since the center-left Labour Party was elected in July. Musk has used his social network, X, to call for a new election.

On Monday, Starmer condemned "lies and misinformation" that he said are undermining British democracy, in response to a barrage of attacks on his government from Musk.