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Kuwait Amir sends congratulations

Joseph Aoun sworn in as Lebanon's 14th president

BEIRUT, Jan 9, (Agencies): Having won the presidential post in a parliamentary session on Thursday, Joseph Aoun who had served as the army commander took the oath shortly later as president becoming the republic's 14th head of state.

Aoun arrived at the parliament building clad in a civil suit to resounding applause by the MPs who had voted for him as the new president. The vote came weeks after a tenuous ceasefire agreement halted a 14-month conflict between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and at a time when Lebanon's leaders are seeking international assistance for reconstruction.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Thursday addressed a cable of congratulations to the newly elected president of the Republic of Lebanon, Joseph Aoun.



Newly-elected Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, addresses his first speech at the Lebanese Parliament after being sworn in as new president, in Beirut, Lebanon, Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025. (AP)

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AI cams snap 18,778 violations in 15 days

Kuwait reports drop in traffic-related fatalities

By Munif Naif
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: Assistant Director of Traffic Awareness at the General Traffic Department Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah Bu Hassan says the newly installed cameras can monitor seat belt violations for both the driver and the front-seat passenger, for which citations are being recorded against the vehicle owner.

In a press statement, he affirmed the importance of the use of seat belts for both the driver and their companion.

Lt. Colonel Bu Hassan revealed that the cameras, which are also designated to detect violations related to phone use while driving, captured a total of 18,778 violations over a 15-day period in December 2024. Of these, 4,944 violations were related to the use of mobile phones while driving.

He also highlighted a decrease in traffic-related fatalities in 2024, with 284 deaths reported compared to 296 in 2023, This is a reduction of 12 cases despite the increase in the number of vehicles, roads, and driving licenses.

Lt. Colonel Bu Hassan attributed this positive trend to the ongoing efforts of the General Traffic Department, under the leadership of the Assistant Undersecretary for Traffic Affairs Major General Yousef Al-Khudda. These efforts include extensive awareness campaigns through the Traffic Awareness Department and the Ministry of Interior's Security Media Department, which continues to host events and activities aimed at educating the public about traffic laws. These initiatives have contributed to the decline in traffic fatalities compared to previous years.

Meanwhile, Director of the Security Media Department at the Ministry of Interior Colonel Othman Al-Gharib says the recent decrease in traffic-related fatalities is a direct result of the ministry's ongoing traffic awareness efforts and the proactive measures taken by the General Traffic Department to address serious violations.

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Bid to bolster state revenues

PAFN set to implement new fee structure

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Public Authority for Food and Nutrition has initiated the process of implementing a new fee structure for its services, starting in May 2025, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This move comes in response to Cabinet Resolution No. 956 of 2021, which seeks to address the depletion of liquidity in the general reserve and find solutions to the state's budget deficit.

The authority has begun engaging with relevant government departments, including the Licensing Department, to finalize the new regulation and obtain necessary approvals.

This new regulation includes a list of prices for 82 services, with fees ranging from as low as 250 fils to as high as 500 dinars per service.

The list, which was first published by Al-Seyassah in July, covers services from five key departments within the General Authority for Food. These departments are: imported foods, inspection in the governorates, inspection in slaughterhouses, specifications and standards, special food control and administrative affairs

The new fees structure addresses a variety of services provided by the authority, including the destruction and re-export of imported food, as well as accreditation and examination services.

■ Destruction of Imported Food: 50 dinars for the first 100 kilograms; 100 dinars for over 100 kg up to one ton, with an additional 50 dinars for each additional ton; a 20 dinar fee for every day of delay beyond 30 days from the notification of destruction

■ Re-exporting Imported Food: 50 dinars per transaction

■ Accrediting a Representative: 20 dinars per representative per year for companies, institutions and clearance offices

■ Accrediting a Clearance Office Authorization: 20 dinars per authorization for a single company per year

■ Renewing a Computer Number or Importer's File Number: 15 dinars

■ Importing Food Items for Non-Commercial Purposes: 1 dinar per person and 20 dinars per company per request

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Earthworks, excavation underway

Al-Mashaan pushes for timely airport completion

By Mohammed Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan chaired a meeting yesterday to review the latest developments in the New Kuwait Airport project. She stressed

the need to expedite the implementation stages and ensure that all services and facilities are operational in line with the scheduled timeline, with the goal of completing the project on time.

The meeting was attended by Chairman of the Directorate General of Civil

Aviation (DGCA) Sheikh Hamoud Mubarak Al-Hamoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, along with representatives from the Ministry of Interior.

In a press statement issued by the ministry following the meeting, Dr. Al-Mashaan said the primary objective was to closely monitor the progress of the project, deal with any challenges it may face, and work on overcoming them.

She stressed that the New Kuwait Airport is a major part of the country's ambitious national projects aimed at developing and modernizing infrastructure, in line with the vision of New Kuwait 2035.

Dr. Al-Mashaan called for the speedy completion of all works on the New Kuwait Airport project, ensuring that the required quality and efficiency are met according to the approved technical specifications and the agreed-upon timeline. She emphasized the importance of close coordination with DGCA to achieve these objectives.

Dr. Al-Mashaan highlighted that the new airport will play a major role in transforming Kuwait into a regional and global financial and commercial hub that can attract investment.

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Cabinet reviews plans for 'Kuwait - Capital of Arab Culture and Media 2025' festivities



PM Diwan photo
His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti Cabinet hailed the speech of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during his meeting with organizers of the Arabian Gulf Football Cup tourney, Khaleeji Zain 26.

The weekly Cabinet meeting, held at Bayan Palace on Wednesday, was chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, said First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

The Cabinet meeting, appreciated the efforts of the Chairman of the Higher Organizing Committee and Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, and the Chairman of the Kuwait Football Association Sheikh Ahmad Yusuf Saud Al-Sabah, as well as the efforts by members of both bodies which ensured the success of hosting the championship between December 21 and January 4.

The Cabinet members congratulated King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa and the government and people of the sisterly Kingdom of Bahrain on winning the championship trophy by their national team.

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Waste reduction key focus in overhaul

Education reform plan charts Kuwait's growth

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Kuwait Council of Ministers has reviewed the Minister of Education's reform plan, which outlines six key axes aimed at improving the educational system, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The plan includes initiatives focused on reducing waste, benefiting from the educational experiences of countries like Finland, Singapore and South Korea and fostering the development of smart schools and classrooms.

The following are the key components of the reform plan:

Administrative and Financial Axis -- Aims to issue a quality guide, reduce budget waste and direct spending towards education development and teacher training

International Standards for Education (Curricula) -- Focuses on enhancing coordination with Gulf, Arab and international organizations to align curricula with global standards

Education Development -- Leverages the educational experiences of advanced countries, plans to establish the Aspire Sports Complex, issue teacher licenses and create an office for the gifted

Engineering Axis -- Involves building smart schools and classrooms while rehabilitating and repairing old schools to modernize educational facilities

Ministry Automation -- Seeks to develop electronic communication between parents, teachers and students and enhance e-learning capabilities

-- **Initiatives:** Envisions the transformation of schools into smart institutions that use technology to improve educational experiences

The Minister of Education, Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei, has been assigned to continue advancing these efforts and to report on progress every six months. This report will outline achievements, challenges and proposed solutions, with a clear timetable for implementation.

Additionally, the Council of Ministers has tasked various government agencies to support the Higher Committee for Organizing the Activities of "Kuwait, Capital of Arab Culture and Arab Media 2025," ensuring smooth operations for this major cultural event.

Furthermore, the Council viewed a report from the Minister of Finance, Noura Al-Fassam, detailing Kuwait's ongoing efforts to combat money laundering and terrorism financing, as recommended by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

In an effort to promote sustainable development, the Council also instructed the Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, Dr. Mahmoud Boushehri, to collaborate with the Minister of Public Works, Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, to explore optimal uses of treated water.

This includes the establishment of artificial lakes and waterways in areas such as "Drakil," contributing to environmental preservation and the enhancement of Kuwait's natural landscape.

Committee revokes citizenship of 4,246

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9, (KUNA): The Supreme Committee to Investigate Kuwaiti Citizenship held a meeting on Thursday under the chairmanship of First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, who is also head of the committee.

The commission decided during the meeting to strip 4,246 individuals of the Kuwaiti citizenship. The decision would be submitted to the Cabinet.

The Ministry of Interior said in a statement that 20 of the cases had dual citizenship, 85 involve fraud, false statements and some had acquired as close relatives.

A single case stripped of the citizenship involves children of a Kuwaiti female citizen.

The decision is also applicable on 54 persons who hail from various states.

3 Syrian blogger jailed three years for insulting Kuwait, UAE on Net

8 Kuwaiti banks to maintain strong capital and funding profiles

11 'Wicked' tops SAG Awards nominations

12 Meta ends fact-checking: What it means to media

News watch

AMMAN: The State of Kuwait Ambassador to Jordan Hamad Al-Meri on Thursday delivered the annual donation to the UN refugee agency, the UNRWA, amounting to USD two million for securing necessities for Palestinians in need.

The ambassador in remarks to KUNA after handing over the donation to Tamara Al-Rifai, the UNRWA's director of external relations and media, said the financial support given by the Kuwaiti Government aims at boosting the agency's activities and programs to help the Palestinians in the region. (KUNA)

WASHINGTON: The State of Kuwait Embassy in the US on Thursday urged Kuwaiti citizens currently present in Los Angeles and its suburbs to take precautions amid the gusty winds that have caused wildfires.

The embassy in a statement affirmed necessity to abide by the safety instructions declared by the local authorities.

It also urged the citizens to contact

it and the general consulates on the following phone numbers:

-- The embassy in Washington: 2022620758

-- The general consulate in Los Angeles: 3102793644

-- The consulate in New York: 9172426688

-- The cultural office: 2023642106

-- The health office: 2023202415. (KUNA)

-- See Also Page 6

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip:

More than 46,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israel-Hamas war, Gaza's Health Ministry said Thursday, as the conflict raged into a 16th month with no end in sight.

The ministry said a total of 46,006 Palestinians have been killed and 109,378 wounded. It has said women and children make up more than half the fatalities, but does not say how many of the dead were fighters or civilians.

The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence. (AP)

Kutayba Y. Alghanim pivots strategy with sale of 32.75% Gulf Bank stake

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: Kutayba Y. Alghanim announced that he has entered into an agreement with Warba Bank to sell all the shares comprising the capital of Alghanim Trading Company LLC -- the holder of a 32.75% stake in Gulf Bank. The transfer of shares will take place upon receiving the necessary regulatory approvals.

This transaction concludes Kutayba Y. Alghanim's long-standing investment in Gulf Bank, which began in 1996 and saw the bank's total assets grow by 360%, reaching KWD 5 billion.

Reflecting on this milestone, Kutayba Y. Alghanim noted: "Our investment in Gulf Bank, spanning nearly three decades, has been an important chapter in



Kutayba Y. Alghanim

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Prayer Timings	
Fajr	05:20
Sunrise ..	06:44
Zohr	11:55
Asr	14:48
Maghrib ..	17:07
Isha	18:28

Local

Weather		Expected weather for next 24 hrs:	
Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	By Day: Mild with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, speed of 08-28 km/h.
Kuwait City	20	11	By Night: Cold with light variable wind to light to moderate
Kuwait Airport	21	10	
Abdaly	21	08	

Other Voices

Why, my dear Lafi, your decision hinders artistic work?

By Ahmad alsarraf

Brother Lafi Al-Subaie, in his capacity as Assistant Undersecretary for the Press, Publishing and Publications Sector, issued a circular at the end of 2024 directed to all owners of artistic production, advertising and publicity licenses and to all hotels, albeit indirectly, which included the following strict instructions:

■ Do not film any work unless you have obtained a license to produce the text and convert it into a visual and audio work.

■ Putting the artist's name on the artwork as it appears on the civil ID or passport, without addition or modification.

■ It is not permissible to hold singing and musical concerts unless a permit to hold the concert is obtained from the competent authorities in the country.

I honestly fail to understand the wisdom or purpose behind this circular, especially considering its vagueness. It will only burden employees in these departments with the ministry's inefficient bureaucracy, for no apparent reason.

Additionally, it's said that this decision stemmed from a complaint filed by a lawyer



alsarraf

(!!) on behalf of a Kuwaiti family, requesting that the names of those involved in artistic works be disclosed according to their civil ID or passport, while prohibiting the use of stage names.

This request is fundamentally illogical! Should another family, for example, be allowed to file a complaint through another lawyer, demanding that their children's stage names be acknowledged and 'covered up' in advertisements for artistic works?

What the ministry is demanding makes no sense. Thousands of artists around the world -- Kuwaiti, Arab and international -- have stage names that have been famous for decades. These names have not diminished their value or led to any moral or financial corruption.

We have seen examples like Gharib Al-Shatti, Shadi Al-Khaleej, Abdul Latif Al-Kuwaiti, Mahmoud Al-Kuwaiti, Saleh Al-Kuwaiti, Umm Al-Aliwi and many others.

Your decision, dear Brother Lafi, seems to hinder any innocent artistic, touristic, or entertainment activity.

It contradicts even the simplest decisions made by the Council of Ministers, which were recently issued to encourage domestic tourism, establish more entertainment projects, promote tourist attractions, facilitate the entry of visitors, leverage the successes of the 26th Gulf Championship and prepare for upcoming national celebrations and the

'Ya Hala' shopping festival, among other events.

How can these bureaucratic demands align with the government's efforts to encourage openness and entertainment?

The fundamental principle in such matters should be permissibility. Any individual or entity that violates this will be subject to penalties under the applicable laws.

However, asking hundreds of organizations to submit thousands of letters seeking approval and waiting for the ministry's review -- while restricting events like concerts and performances, especially in hotels -- creates unnecessary barriers. These demands are a waste of time and resources, unnecessary for the ministry's operations.

Continuing to impose them suggests we haven't learned from the lessons of the 26th Gulf Cup, where openness and facilitation were key to the happiness of hundreds of thousands of people.

We sincerely hope that this decision is canceled and that we can move forward on the right path, just like other countries. Those who break the law should be held accountable. It's time to end the isolation and rigidity -- our patience is running thin.



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Farwaniya Governorate photo
Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah receives Chairman of the Electronic Media Union Faisal Khalifa Al-Sawagh at the governorate's headquarters.

Farwaniya governor praises electronic media union role

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received the Chairman of the Electronic Media Union Faisal Khalifa Al-Sawagh at the governorate's headquarters this morning.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the meeting focused on improving cooperation between Farwaniya Governorate and electronic media institutions.

During the meeting, both parties discussed ways to enhance media collaboration, utilize electronic communication tools to raise public awareness, facilitate knowledge exchange, and encourage community engagement and participation.

Al-Sawagh affirmed the vital role of electronic media in promoting sustainable development, offering solutions, and dealing with challenges faced by various societies.

He highlighted the importance of focusing on cybersecurity awareness to

protect both official and personal information in the face of growing digital threats.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Athbi commended the major role played by the Electronic Media Union in enhancing communication and interaction between individuals through digital networks, applications, and other online platforms.

He stressed that these tools facilitate the exchange of ideas and opinions between citizens and government agencies.

The governor affirmed the importance of avoiding hate speech, and praised the role of local media in delivering accurate, constructive, and purposeful news that serves the interests of both the nation and its citizens.

At the end of the meeting, Al-Sawagh expressed his gratitude to Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser for the warm reception. He also thanked him for his ongoing interest and continuous support for Kuwaiti youth, as well as his encouragement of achievement and development.

'Delay in opening schools spells disaster, leads to overcrowding'

Al-Mutla'a classrooms density exceeds gov't limits

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Ministry of Education (MoE) had announced in mid-November the naming of seven new schools in Mutlaa Residential City, with plans for their opening during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. However, the educational field was recently taken by surprise with the decision to postpone the opening of these schools until the next academic year of 2025/2026 based on the needs and priorities of the educational field.

In a letter sent to the assistant undersecretary for Public Education, the undersecretary of the Ministry of Education explained that the new schools, which are affiliated with Jahra Governorate, will not open as originally planned. Instead, their operation has

been deferred to the first semester of the next academic year.

The ministry urged that the issue be given due attention and the necessary measures be taken in this regard.

In this regard, educational sources explained that the decision to postpone the opening of new schools in Mutla'a Residential City comes despite the huge challenges faced by the current schools in the area. These schools are experiencing high student densities that exceed the maximum permitted capacity for a semester.

Decision

While a previous ministerial decision set the maximum number of students per class at 25, classrooms in Mutlaa are currently overcrowded with more than 45 students. This hinders teachers from performing their educational duties effectively and negatively impacts students' ability to engage and communicate with their teachers.

School administrations have submitted reports to state that some schools in Mutlaa are serving over a thousand students, despite their design capacity being only half that number. This overcrowding has led to an increase in behavioral issues and placed immense pressure on

both school administrations and teachers.

The sources have expressed concern over the decision to postpone the opening of new schools in Mutla'a Residential City, questioning how it aligns with the best interests of the educational system.

They said the new schools were expected to ease the burden of overcrowded classrooms and help alleviate the high student densities in the region.

Observers suggest that the delay may further strain the existing schools, which are already struggling with overcrowding, and that the decision could hinder efforts to improve the quality of education and ensure a stable learning environment.

The Ministry of Education had previously announced the opening and naming of seven new schools in the region, which included one kindergarten, two elementary schools for boys and girls, two intermediate schools for boys and girls, and two secondary schools for boys and girls.

The sources said the Jahra Educational Zone was tasked with equipping these schools, including providing administrative and educational staff, the necessary technical equipment, and furniture.



KFF photo

One of the violating shops is sealed by the Kuwait Fire Force employee.

KFF to hold Arab region disaster reduction forum from Feb 9-12

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Kuwait Fire Force announced that it will host the 'Sixth Arab Regional Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction' from Feb 9 to 12, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The event will be held under the patronage of the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef.

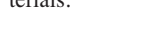
This forum aims to bring together experts and stakeholders to discuss strategies, solutions and innovations related to disaster risk reduction in the Arab region. It is expected to be a significant event for strengthening regional cooperation and enhancing disaster preparedness and response capabilities.



Violations detected: Based on direct instructions from the Chief of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) Major General Talal Mohammad Al-Roumi, an inspection campaign was held in Sabhan for identifying buildings and facilities that were not in compliance with safety and fire prevention regulations.

According to a press release issued by KFF, several facilities were found in violation of safety requirements, which led to issuance of citations and administrative closures. The violations included failure to meet necessary safety standards, the absence of required fire licenses, and the improper storage of highly flammable materials.

terials.



No to trans fats: According to informed sources, the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) has decided to mandate all food establishments, factories, and food product suppliers in Kuwait to comply with new regulations regarding hydrogenated fats. The regulation, which is aimed at eliminating industrial trans fatty acids, will come into effect starting May 2025, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The sources revealed that PAFN will hold a press conference on Sunday to outline the implementation mechanism for this regulation. Commenting on the decision, Head of the Restaurants Union Fahad Al-Arbash explained that the new rule will not significantly impact restaurants, as many already use vegetable oils. However, factories reliant on trans fats, such as those producing potato chips and various baked goods, will be directly affected by the regulation.

It is noteworthy that this decision is part of PAFN's ongoing efforts to enhance consumer safety and achieve collaboration between government agencies and the private sector for the public good. The initiative is based on Gulf Technical Regulation 2483, which addresses trans fats and product contents, and confirms the potential health risks posed to society by the consumption of industrial trans fats.

Kuwaiti passport ranks 50th globally, advances five spots

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Kuwaiti passport has made significant strides in global mobility, climbing five places to secure the 50th position in the 2025 Henley Global Mobility Index, compared to its 55th rank in 2024, reports Al-Rai daily.

The Kuwaiti citizens now enjoy visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 99 countries, reflecting steady progress over the past five years.

Among Arab and GCC countries, the UAE passport leads, ranking 10th globally, with visa-free access to 185 destinations. Other Gulf passports include Qatar at 47th (112 destinations), Bahrain at 58th (87 destinations), Saudi Arabia at 60th (86 destinations), and Oman at 61st (86 destinations).

Globally, East Asian and European countries dominate the rankings. Japan continues to hold the top spot with visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 194 destinations, followed by Singapore in second place with 193 destinations.

The third rank is shared by Germany, South Korea, Finland, Italy, Luxembourg, and Spain (192 destinations), while Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden share fourth place (191 destinations). Fifth place includes France, Ireland, Portugal, and the United Kingdom (190 destinations), followed by Belgium, the Czech Republic, New Zealand, Norway, and Switzerland in sixth place (189 destinations).

The annual Henley Index evaluates the travel freedom of passports from 199 countries, highlighting the Kuwaiti passport's enhanced global standing.

The results underline the continued global leadership of European and East Asian countries in passport strength, while Gulf nations, including Kuwait, showcase steady improvement.

'Fire hazard endangers students, staff lives'

MoE bans tents in schools; safe, secure environment eyed

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: In a recent directive, Maryam Al-Enezi, the Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Development and Activities, issued a circular banning the setting up of tents within all schools, including elementary, intermediate, secondary, religious institutes and kindergartens.

The ban is aimed at preserving the integrity of educational environments across Kuwait's schools.

Al-Enezi emphasized in the circular that schools should not only be seen as educational buildings but also as vital spaces that shape students' personalities and futures. As such, maintaining a safe and secure environment is of utmost importance.

The circular outlined the following key reasons for this new policy:

Preservation of School Facilities -- Tents, when set up within school grounds, can cause damage to planted areas, benches, and buildings. Such damage disrupts the functionality and aesthetic quality of the educational environment.

Environmental Impact -- Setting up tents leads to increased waste, contributing to environmental pollution, which goes against efforts to promote sustainability within educational institutions.

Fire Risks -- The use of cooking and lighting equipment inside tents presents a significant fire hazard, which could endanger the lives of students and staff. These risks have been identified as one of the primary concerns behind the new regula-

tion. Student Safety and Distraction Prevention -- Tents within school premises may obstruct movement and create potential safety hazards for students.

Furthermore, their presence can lead to distractions, diverting students' focus from academic activities and overall learning.

Al-Enezi called on all school administrations to adhere strictly to the directive, ensuring that no tents of any kind are erected on school campuses.

The move aims to maintain a healthy, safe, and conducive educational environment, contributing to the overall well-being and development of students. The ministry urges schools to comply with the new regulations and wishes all students and staff a safe learning experience.

Minister vows to fight corruption, uphold justice across all sectors

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila, emphasized her dedication to intensifying oversight efforts to combat corruption and uphold justice across the ministry's sectors, cooperative societies and public benefit organizations, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Speaking to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Dr. Al-Huwaila highlighted the ministry's commitment to ensuring compliance with laws and enhancing transparency to deliver services respon-

sibly and efficiently, reflecting principles of integrity and sustainable development.

The minister revealed that a specialized team, led by Assistant Undersecretary for Legal Affairs Hiba Al-Shammari and established under Ministerial Resolution No. 2087/2024 on June 25, has received 100 reports of suspected corruption.

These reports pertain to the ministry's sectors and entities under its supervision. The team has investigated these cases in collaboration with relevant departments, provided recommendations to rectify identified errors, and ensured alignment with legal provisions.

The minister affirmed the team's mandate will continue, calling on everyone to cooperate in reporting and addressing corruption to bolster accountability and trust in public institutions.



Dr. Al-Huwaila

Late arrival disallowed

Student's guardian threatens, insults officials of exam panel

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: In a concerning incident in the Farwaniya Educational District, the head of an examination committee and his deputy were subjected to insults, slander, and death threats by a student's guardian. According to informed sources, the altercation occurred when the student was denied entry into the examination hall for arriving late, with the specified start time being 8:00 am.

The sources revealed that the guardian attempted to pressure the committee's administration to allow his son to take the exam despite the delay. When his request was denied in adherence to ministerial regulations, the situation escalated into a heated verbal exchange. The confrontation culminated in serious threats directed at the examination staff.

Following the incident, the committee head and his deputy filed an official complaint at Al-Firdous police station, urging authorities to take appropriate legal measures to safeguard them and ensure the protection of examination committees moving forward.

The Ministry of Education emphasized its commitment to strictly enforcing regulations, particularly those related to exam schedules. Officials called on parents to cooperate with school administrations, highlighting the importance of adhering to established guidelines.

This incident underscores the challenges faced by educational professionals, especially during high-pressure examination periods. Educators are advocating for increased protection to maintain a safe and stable working environment, free from threats and violations.

diwaniya

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

No strong US role seen in Syria under Trump's rule

"IN THE three administrations preceding Trump's second term, including his first, Syria exemplified a broader US trend of limited engagement in the region, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific," columnist **Dr. Noura Saleh Al-Majim**, wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"This trend involved reduced military and diplomatic intervention in the Middle East's conflicts, with attention given only to select vital interests, such as the fight against terrorism, often with minimal military involvement."



Dr. Al-Majim

"Therefore, after Assad's fall, there is no expectation of a strong American role in Syria under Trump's second term. Trump has consistently advocated for reducing American involvement globally, including in the Middle East, aligning with his isolationist approach."

"Following Assad's fall, Trump explicitly stated that the US has no strategic interest in Syria, adding that 'it is not our battle' and asserting that the US should not intervene."

"Additionally, he praised Turkey's efforts, claiming it was Turkey, not the US, that orchestrated Assad's downfall through its factions and he suggested that Turkey was the main victor in Syria, holding significant influence over the situation."

"Despite Trump's policy of limited engagement, especially in the context of his primary focus on confronting the growing Chinese challenge, two key factors may pressure his Syria policy, ensuring that it does not drift into total neglect but remains vital and objective: 'Influence of Key Internal Circles -- While the US president has significant autonomy in shaping foreign policy, practical decisions are shaped by internal power centers, particularly in the State Department and Pentagon."

"These circles, which prioritize US national interests, will likely oppose a full US withdrawal from Syria. A key example of this influence is Trump's reversal of a planned full withdrawal in his first term, resulting in a limited US military presence in northern Syria."

"These internal forces view the military presence as a key leverage point, particularly against adversaries like Turkey, Russia and Iran."

"Strategic US Interests -- Several post-Assad developments intersect with US priorities, including Israel's security, the threat of ISIS resurgence and the geopolitical link between Syria and Ukraine."

"Israel stands to gain significantly from Assad's downfall, as it would eliminate Iran's most important regional ally, secure full control over the Golan Heights and potentially create a buffer zone extending to Damascus. Given Trump's strong support for Israel, it is unlikely he would abandon US involvement in supporting Israel's interests in Syria."

"Furthermore, the return of ISIS could remain a concern, especially with the regime potentially being led by figures linked to Al-Qaeda or ISIS. Additionally, Syria could serve as a bargaining chip for Trump to leverage Russia into ending its war in Ukraine, potentially in a 'Syria for Ukraine' deal."

"In conclusion, while Trump will likely maintain a limited military presence in Syria, avoiding full withdrawal, he will strategically use various pressure points to advance US interests, particularly those aligned with Israel's vision for the region, the fight against ISIS and leveraging Syria as a strategic bargaining tool in broader geopolitical negotiations."

Also:

"If the government seeks to counter accusations of stifling free speech and dismissing opposing views, a more practical approach would be to engage in dialogue," columnist **Ahmad Yaqoub Baqer** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"For instance, it could organize televised debates and discussions where government representatives explain their decisions in detail, grounded in the constitution, laws and public interest, supported by data, statistics and facts."

"Simultaneously, those with opposing viewpoints could present their arguments, grounded in their own legal reasoning, in a balanced and respectful manner, avoiding any violation of the rules."

"Such a confrontation would not only demonstrate the government's strength and position but also its willingness to entertain moderate opposing opinions."

"It would highlight its commitment to lawful, ethical dialogue and show that it supports differences in opinion as long as they are expressed within the boundaries of the law."

"Furthermore, this would set an example for how to engage in constructive debates, particularly for those who resort to offensive language or extreme rhetoric in their communication."

"I have always condemned the use of insults, misinformation and rumors in the media. I have consistently advocated for exposing and penalizing fake and offensive accounts."

"I have also opposed attempts by some MPs to alter the Press and Publications Law and the Audiovisual Law, especially provisions concerning the Amir, prophets, companions, national

figures, the judiciary and the national currency."

"Consequently, I believe that participants in such televised discussions must adhere to legal guidelines, or else they will face legal consequences."

"Thus, there is no real concern that inappropriate or offensive language would dominate these dialogues."

"Instead, it would present an opportunity to educate the public with specialized legal opinions and promote healthy debate, similar to the dialogue culture fostered in the 1980s and 1990s before the media and some segments of the National Assembly succumbed to chaos and mob rule."

"We have long lost serious, well-balanced dialogue programs like Round Table, Issues and Responses, 6/6 and others, which trained audiences and youth on engaging in healthy discussions and relying on credible information."

"These programs were eventually replaced by vulgar content and insults on social media, as well as irresponsible statements from some members of the National Assembly. The question remains: will the government bring back these vital programs, achieving multiple goals at once?"

"The political and media manipulations of the 'bankrupt Brotherhood' are no longer concealed. Their attempts to distort Islamic principles to suit their opportunistic practices -- anchored in the philosophy that 'the end justifies the means' -- are evident," columnist **Hamed Salem Al-Marri** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"As expressed by their most prominent ideologue, Yusuf al-Qaradawi: 'If the Brotherhood loves someone, they elevate him to the seventh heaven, but if they hate him, they cast him to the lowest depths.' This approach is central to their strategy of exploiting popular revolutions for their own benefit."

"In Tunisia, after the people rose up against the iron-fisted rule of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and succeeded in toppling him, the Muslim Brotherhood seized the opportunity to insert themselves into the revolution. They manipulated it to their advantage and secured political power -- only for the Tunisian people to later expose their deceit and reject them."

"A similar pattern unfolded in Egypt. Following the revolution that brought an end to Muhammad Hosni Mubarak's rule (may God have mercy on him), the Brotherhood, in collaboration with extremist groups, hijacked the movement."

"They exploited the uprising to gain power, but their true nature -- a terrorist group that monopolizes religion for its own narrow interests while disregarding the state's welfare -- was quickly revealed. The Egyptian people, recognizing this, rose again to overthrow them."

"In Libya, the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's regime was another opportunity for the Brotherhood. Despite their prior praise and glorification of Gaddafi, they opportunistically tried to claim the revolution for their own benefit."

"However, their inability to gain widespread acceptance fractured the nation into two factions: one dominated by the Brotherhood and the other by a government elected by the people and recognized internationally."

"Syria's tragedy further highlights their manipulative tendencies. When the people revolted against Bashar al-Assad's oppressive regime, the Brotherhood saw it as a chance to fuel the uprising for their gain. Over the course of 15 years, their involvement -- political, media, and military -- led to unimaginable suffering: hundreds of thousands killed, millions displaced, cities reduced to rubble, and countless imprisoned and tortured."

"Meanwhile, Brotherhood leaders lived comfortably in luxury abroad, exploiting the revolution for personal and financial gain under the guise of supporting the Syrian people."

"When the Baath regime eventually fell and Bashar al-Assad fled to Russia, the vacuum was filled by groups like 'Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham' led by Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Julani). These groups manipulated the revolution for their own purposes, even as they changed their appearance and rhetoric to mask their true intentions, remaining loyal to the Brotherhood's ideology."

"Adding fuel to this ongoing turmoil, Abdul Rahman al-Qaradawi -- son of Yusuf al-Qaradawi -- publicly insulted Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, labeling their governments as Zionist and disgraceful."

"His provocative threats of unrest and change signal that the Brotherhood continues to plot, aiming to destabilize Gulf nations despite the security, prosperity, and justice enjoyed by their citizens and residents. These nations have extended their generosity globally, offering financial and humanitarian aid to those in need."

"Syria's future under such influence appears bleak, as these factions are likely to act as mere instruments of Turkey, obeying its directives. May God protect the Syrian people from further harm and guide them toward a stable and peaceful future."

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes



The Undersecretary of the National Guard Lieutenant General Hashem Al-Rifai inspects the oil facilities security brigades, Subhan fuel depots, and the Technical Services Directorate.

KNG evaluates oil facilities security measures

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9, (KUNA): The Undersecretary of the National Guard, Lieutenant General Hashem Al-Rifai, conducted an inspection of the Second and First Facilities Protection Battalions of the Second Protection Brigade. Accompanied by the Commander of Protection and Reinforcement, Major General Hamad Salem, the visit aimed to evaluate the security measures in place for oil facilities in the central region, including the "Subhan" fuel depots, and to assess the overall progress of operations.

In a statement issued by the National Guard, Lieutenant General Al-Rifai emphasized the importance of maintaining high readiness and continuous training to support various ministries and state institutions. These efforts, he noted, are essential to ensuring the nation's security and stability under its wise leadership. He conveyed the greetings and appreciation of the

Guard's leadership, represented by the Chief of the National Guard, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Hamoud, and the Deputy Chief, Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf. He highlighted their pride in the critical role played by the National Guard personnel in safeguarding vital installations and supporting operations across all units.

Lieutenant General Al-Rifai praised the high level of preparedness demonstrated by the battalions during his inspection. He noted that the National Guard's guiding document for 2025, titled Protection and Support, underscores the significance of securing critical infrastructure and facilities.

As part of the visit, Lieutenant General Al-Rifai also inspected the Technical Services Directorate at the Liberation Camp. This inspection focused on evaluating operational progress and identifying the requirements of various units to enhance overall efficiency and readiness.

Syrian blogger jailed three years for insulting Kuwait, UAE on Net

Registration of 6 lawyers revoked

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Criminal Court sentenced a Syrian blogger to three-year imprisonment, followed by deportation, on charges of insulting the leadership of Kuwait and offending Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Tunisia on social media, as well as spreading false information.

The Public Prosecution had referred him to trial on state security-related charges after he was accused of posting offensive remarks from a pseudonymous X account.

Lawyers banned: The Kuwait Bar Association (KBA) has revoked the registration of six lawyers following final rulings by the Court of Cassation convicting them in cases involving offenses against honor and integrity, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

These convictions have resulted in the loss of eligibility for registration, as per the association's conditions.

In addition to this, the Bar Association has referred 12 other lawyers to disciplinary action for

committing significant professional violations, emphasizing its commitment to upholding the legal profession's ethical and professional standards.

This move underscores the association's dedication to maintaining accountability and integrity within the legal community.

Ex-MP detained: The Public Prosecution decided to detain former MP Saleh Al-Mulla until next Sunday to continue investigating him in the (State Security) case, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Money matters dispute: A financial dispute between a young man and three individuals - including a woman and an inmate from Central Prison - has escalated into a criminal case involving theft, assault, threats, and unlawful detention at the Maidan Hawally Police Station, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to the case file, a 1991-born citizen reported that he was lured to a house in Hawally where he was assaulted and threatened. They then took his vehicle and two bank cards.

He submitted a medical report that indicated the bruises and injuries he sustained on his body as a result of the assault.

According to security sources, as soon as the case was registered, it was immediately referred

to the investigations department to identify the defendants. Upon investigation, it was revealed that one of the accused was already incarcerated in Central Prison for a separate case. The first and second defendants were summoned for questioning.

During their interrogation, both denied the charges. They explained that the conflict stemmed from financial disputes between the complainant and the accused. They had met with the plaintiff to demand repayment of money he owed them. However, the complainant fled the house, inadvertently leaving behind a bag that contained his wallet and car keys. They promptly handed these items over to an officer at the Maidan Hawally Police Station.

In response to these new statements, the complainant was re-interviewed. He clarified that he had received the wallet, but it did not contain either the bank cards or the car keys, as the defendants had claimed.

The investigation had not provided any new evidence beyond the conflicting statements of the involved parties, with each side standing by their version of events. The cause of the injuries noted in the complainant's initial medical report remains unclear, and the detectives' report concluded that no further progress could be made.

Also, the third defendant, who is currently incarcerated in Central Prison since November 27, could not be questioned.



The vehicle involved in the accident.

KFF tours Sabhan

One dead, one hurt in four-car highway crash

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: A tragic collision involving four vehicles occurred on Damascus Street Wednesday evening, resulting in the death of one person and the injury of another, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The Martyr Center Fire Brigade responded to the scene, managing the accident and ensuring that safety measures were in place.

Once the situation was under control, the site was handed over to the relevant authorities for further investigation and necessary actions.

No injuries in fire: Fire broke out in a house in South Abdullah Al-Mubarak recently. No casualties were reported but material losses had incurred.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), when the Control Room of KFF received information about the fire accident, firefighters from Istiqlal and Sumoud fire stations rushed to the location and managed to extinguish the fire before it spread further. Investigations are ongoing to determine the cause of the fire.

PAM inspections: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) announced that its National Labor Inspection Monitoring Sector conducted periodic inspections of 909 sites in the last quarter of 2024. Also, 291 sites were issued notices to avoid violations, and 25 mobile vehicles were also inspected, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to informed sources, PAM successfully recovered salaries from 34 cases that had previously been disbursed. It reiterated its ongoing efforts to monitor and inspect institutions, companies, and projects to ensure compliance with labor regulations, particularly the registration of national workers in PAM's records and their eligibility for support, whether under the fifth or third door initiatives.


Beware exam 'cheats': Mol

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has issued a warning to students against attempting to join groups that promote the illegal facilitation of access to exam papers, either on social media platforms or other online programs, reports Al-Anba daily.

The ministry affirmed via its X account that such actions could expose students to fraud and deception.

The Ministry of Education has prepared a comprehensive plan to prevent exam leaks and protect the integrity of the educational process. This plan includes measures to ensure the confidentiality of exam development, printing, and distribution. The main initiatives include increasing the number of surveillance cameras at the central and regional secret printing presses, prohibiting the entry of smart devices (including personal phones) into these areas, and appointing a liaison officer to facilitate communication between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Interior. This officer will also report any suspicious accounts that promote the sale of exam papers, and ensure better coordination between the two ministries for securing the safe transfer of exam materials.

Meanwhile, an expatriate in his forties was rushed to Jahra Hospital after sustaining multiple fractures and injuries in a run-over accident in the Jahra Markets area, reports Al-Anba daily.




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Kuwait Red Crescent commemorates 59th year of humanitarian excellence

Ambassador Al-Mughamis reflects on milestones

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: Ambassador Khaled Al-Mughamis, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, highlighted the organization's significant contributions to humanitarian work since its establishment in 1966, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a speech on the occasion of the Society's 59th anniversary, Ambassador Al-Mughamis credited the guidance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled for supporting initiatives that strengthen the Society's local and international humanitarian role.

He emphasized that the Kuwait Red Crescent Society has successfully responded to many



KRCS photo
Ambassador Khaled Al-Mughamis – Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society

humanitarian crises over the years, focusing on preserving human dignity and restoring normalcy to those in need.

The Society's efforts include providing medical supplies, ambulances and relief aid to affected countries across the world.

Ambassador Al-Mughamis also acknowledged the continuous support of the Kuwaiti government and its partners, which play a crucial role in enabling the Society's humanitarian work.

He expressed optimism for the future, emphasizing the Society's commitment to confronting upcoming challenges and advancing its humanitarian mission.

The Kuwait Red Crescent Society remains a beacon of humanitarian giving, upholding the principle of neutrality and impartiality, and continues to serve those in need regardless of nationality, race, or religion under the slogan "Kuwait is by your side."

Government takes steps to safeguard expertise, competencies within ministries, state agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Council of Ministers has taken steps to safeguard the expertise and competencies within ministries and state agencies, particularly focusing on national cadres in various technical and practical fields, reports Al-Jarida daily.

In its recent meeting, the Council addressed the Civil Service Bureau regarding retirement pensions for state employees who have met the specified criteria for age and service duration.

It emphasized the importance of establishing a mechanism that ensures the successful implementation of the government's retirement project while minimizing the impact of departing employees on state institutions.

Sources told the daily that the Council directed the Bureau to develop a strict mechanism for managing employees eligible for retirement, both men and women.

This mechanism should prevent disruptions to government operations and ensure that agencies are not deprived of essential expertise.

The Council underscored the need for a balanced approach to manage retirements, particularly in cases where a large number of employees from a single agency may be eligible.

The Council also instructed that the regulations and controls, developed in collaboration with the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS), should align with the operational needs of government agencies while considering the state's general budget.

One key requirement is training and preparing suitable replacements for retiring employees to maintain continuity in operations and avoid skill shortages.

The Council stressed the importance of developing specific mechanisms to guide retirement decisions. This includes introducing younger talent into the workforce while ensuring that critical expertise is retained within government agencies. Supervisory roles should be filled with adequately trained personnel to replace retirees, ensuring a smooth transition without affecting the agency's functions.

The new categories eligible for retirement pensions include women aged 50 and men aged 55, with a maximum of 30 years of actual service.

The Council plans to issue its decision on these categories in an upcoming meeting, based on mechanisms and controls finalized by the Civil Service Bureau. These measures aim to retain expertise within ministries for as long as possible while ensuring the seamless handover of responsibilities.

Additionally, the Council has requested a list of employees eligible for retirement in the near term to better plan the transition.

Special attention will be given to scientific and rare specializations for which there are currently no alternatives.

The Council emphasized the need to develop suitable replacements or train current employees to take over these roles, ensuring that government operations and projects proceed without interruption.

Post-oil era evolution explored

Reconnaissance Research hosts talk on Kuwait's social, economic development

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: Reconnaissance Research hosted a discussion session featuring Professor Lisa Blaydes, a distinguished political science scholar and senior fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute at Stanford University. The session delved into pivotal topics related to Kuwait's social history and its political and economic development, with the participation of a group of academics and researchers.

Blaydes focused in her discussion on the political, economic, and social developments following the discovery of oil. She also provided an analysis of the causes behind these developments and their outcomes.

The participants praised the depth of the discussion and the engaging interaction, which lasted for three hours. They expressed their appreciation for the valuable insights provided by Professor Blaydes. In turn, Professor Blaydes thanked the center for organizing the event and emphasized the importance of fostering further academic dialogue on regional issues.

Reconnaissance Research, established in 2019, aims to promote intellectual and academic dialogue by hosting international experts and addressing critical issues relevant to Kuwait and the region.



Professor Lisa Blaydes



Reconnaissance Research logo



Group of academics and researchers

Kuwait Fund participates in Engineering Design Exhibition at Kuwait University

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development recently participated in the Engineering Design Exhibition held at the College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University on Jan 7 and 8, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The event, which was held under the patronage of Dr. Nader Al-Jalal, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, highlighted KFAED's ongoing efforts to support youth and promote scientific and engineering projects that contribute to the development of infrastructure and the local economy.

At its pavilion, KFAED showcased a variety of publications and media materials that underscored its contributions both locally and internationally.

One of the key highlights of the Fund's participation was the introduction of its "Training and Qualification Programs for Newly Graduated Kuwaiti Engineers and Architects," a program launched in 2004 aimed at supporting human development and enhancing its social responsibility within Kuwait.

This initiative provides training opportu-

nities for newly graduated engineers and architects to gain practical and scientific experience by working with major international companies both within Kuwait and abroad, across various engineering disciplines.

Dr. Khaled Al-Hazaa, the Acting Dean of the College of Engineering and Petroleum, commended the Kuwait Fund's long-standing support for the students of the College.

He praised the "Training Program for Newly Graduated Engineers and Architects," noting it as a valuable opportunity for engineers looking to gain practical experience and enhance their careers.

The exhibition also saw significant interaction from visitors with the students' engineering projects.

The event served as a platform for students to showcase their work and engage with professionals from the industry.

Next week, the Kuwait Fund will celebrate the 20th anniversary of its training and qualification program, with over 1,000 male and female engineers having graduated from the program, equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to contribute effectively to the labor market.



KFAED pavilion at the exhibition.

Awqaf Secretariat and Namaa Charity announce beneficiaries of University Student Care Project

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The General Secretariat of Awqaf, in collaboration with the Namaa Charity Society, announced the names of the beneficiaries of the University Student Care Project for the first semester of the current academic year, reports Al-Rai daily.

A total of 816 male and female students have benefited from the initiative, bringing the total number of beneficiaries since the project's inception to approximately 3,972.

The project serves as a model of strategic partnership between charitable and governmental institutions and aims to support university students who are financially unable to complete their education.

During a press conference held yesterday at Namaa Charity's headquarters in Rawda, the society's Deputy CEO Abdulaziz Al-Kandari explained that the project reflects Namaa Charity's vision of investing in people, as an advanced society cannot be built without quality education. The society not only provides financial support to students but also offers them the opportunity to realize their academic aspirations and contribute to the development of their

communities. The project aims to bridge the educational gap that hinders young people from achieving their dreams.

Meanwhile, Director of the Endowment Projects Department at the General Awqaf Secretariat Nasser Al-Khadher stated that the secretariat plays a pivotal role in managing endowment funds allocated to support education, in accordance with the donors' conditions.

He affirmed that this partnership goes beyond mere cooperation, as it represents a model of integrated collaboration that is in line with the New Kuwait 2035 vision and the goals of sustainable development.

Al-Khadher stressed that the project guarantees support for students enrolled in universities accredited by Kuwait's Ministry of Higher Education, both inside and outside Kuwait.

In addition, Head of the Projects and Development Sector at Namaa Charity Walid Al-Bassam expressed pride in the partnership with the General Awqaf Secretariat, highlighting that it aims to promote human development.



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Kuwait strongly condemns Israel's publication of alleged historical maps including parts of Arab countries

GCC states call for respecting Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity: envoy

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait strongly condemned the Israeli occupation's government publication of false maps, describing them as historical maps of Israel, including parts of the occupied Palestinian territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

In a press statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dismissed the publication of these false maps by several Israeli official accounts, as a flagrant violation of international law and international legitimacy resolutions.

The Ministry stressed that such false claims fuel tensions, conflicts and violence, and expose the Israeli policy of fait accompli that aims to solidify the occupation.

It called on the international community to assume its legal and moral responsibilities and take decisive steps to confront these illegal practices that threaten regional and international security and stability.

The Ministry reiterated Kuwait's firm and supportive stance to the Palestinian cause and the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state on the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Tariq Al-Bannai has reiterated the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Member States call for respecting Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity, rejecting foreign interference and combatting terrorism while respecting its religious and cultural diversity.

Ambassador Al-Bannai said this in a speech he delivered Wednesday, on behalf of the permanent representative of



Ambassador Tariq Al-Bannai, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN delivers his speech at the UN Security Council session.

the GCC states to the UN, at a UN Security Council session on the situation in Syria.

He pointed out the GCC states held the 46th extraordi-

nary meeting in Kuwait late last December to follow up on the developments in both Syria and Lebanon, where they reiterated the need to maintain security and stability

in Syria.

"We decided to participate today only to confirm our determination to help Syria politically, economically, developmentally and humanitarially," the Ambassador stated on behalf of the GCC states.

He emphasized the GCC states' support for a comprehensive and inclusive political transition, national reconciliation and efforts to rebuild the state in Syria.

The Kuwaiti diplomat noted that the Gulf countries also encourage national unity and comprehensive dialogue among Syria with the participation of all components of the society in order to achieve a Syrian-owned political process with the support of the United Nations.

Ambassador Al-Bannai clarified that the GCC countries also firmly believes that Syria's stability represents a fundamental pillar of security in the Middle East region.

The GCC countries categorically reject the repeated attacks of the Israeli occupation forces on Syria and call for their immediate withdrawal from the occupied Syrian territories, he stressed.

He reiterated the GCC country clear stance that the Golan is a Syrian land and condemn the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Golan.

The GCC countries call for lifting the economic sanctions on Syria and providing humanitarian support to the brotherly Syrian people, he announced, asserting that the GCC States would offer all backing to Syria and its people at all levels.

Ambassador Al-Bannai addressed the Security Council, saying, "We reiterate our full readiness to support you and your team in facilitating the work of the Council for the current month and maintaining international peace and security," expressing the support of the GCC countries for the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Egypt on behalf of the Arab Group, wishing Algeria success in assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the current month.

New rule streamlines budget process

Ministry of Commerce requires electronic certification for financial budget auditors

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: According to reliable sources, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has mandated that companies electronically certify the signatures of their financial budget auditors through the Kuwait Accountants and Auditors Association before submitting them electronically to the ministry, reports Al-Rai daily.

They explained that if the required accreditation is not attached to the submitted documents, the ministry's systems will automatically reject the budget submission.

This decision is part of the ministry's commitment to ensuring the integrity of companies' annual budgets and verifying that they are signed by auditors registered with the Kuwait Accountants and Auditors Association and included in the ministry's official auditors' register.

The required certification helps in verifying the accuracy and reliability of the data, ensuring it is validated by accredited accounting and auditing firms.

Regarding the fees charged by the Kuwait Accountants and Audi-

tors Association for certifying the signatures of budget auditors, the sources said the fee is set at KD 15 per certification.

They revealed that the total number of companies registered in the ministry's records is approximately 365,000, including individual institutions that are not required to submit an annual budget.

In line with this decision, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has tasked the Information Systems Center with sending periodic notifications through the Sahel application to remind companies of the need to submit their annual budgets. The ministry will also maintain a complete electronic record of all submitted budgets and the certified auditors' data for each budget.

Furthermore, a direct electronic link with the Kuwait Society of Accountants and Auditors will be activated via a QR Code for electronic documentation purposes.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has activated a circular to stop receiving paper budgets from companies. As

of December 1, the ministry has ceased the manual receipt of budgets for all joint-stock companies, individual businesses, including one-person companies, and limited liability companies, replacing paper submission procedures with an entirely electronic process via the ministry's website.

The sources explained that the electronic submission process involves companies uploading their financial statements to the Kuwait Business Center website (www.kbc.gov.kw) in PDF format. This eliminates the need for in-person appointments to submit paper documents, which significantly reduces the processing time from an average of three weeks to just one day, or at most three days, during which the auditors' submissions are reviewed.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has also activated the service for submitting joint-stock company budgets through the Kuwait Business Center website, following the success of an electronic pilot program for personal companies that began in July.

Strengthening fruitful cooperation

KU seeks collaboration with regulatory bodies to elevate education standards

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: Acting Secretary-General and the official spokesman for Kuwait University Dr. Mishari Al-Aifan affirmed the university's keenness to enhance cooperation with relevant regulatory bodies to improve the country's educational standards.

In a press statement issued yesterday following the visit of a delegation from the State Audit Bureau, the Fatwa and Legislation Department, the Bureau of Financial Controllers, and the Ministry of Finance to Sabah Al-Salem University City, Dr. Al-Aifan said: "This visit is part of the ongoing efforts to strengthen productive cooperation between the university and these important entities, support the university's initiatives to meet the needs of the local community, and contribute to sustainable development in line with the visionary goals of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad."

He stressed that the visit was aimed at familiarizing the delegation with the university city, showcasing the projects it has undertaken, and emphasizing its mission, vision, and role as a key educational institution.

Dr. Al-Aifan expressed his satisfac-



A delegation of leaders from the country's regulatory authorities during their visit to Sabah Al-Salem University City.

tion with the visit, indicating that the university campus stands as a milestone in the nation's development and a civilized symbol of knowledge and intellectual advancement.

He also expressed his appreciation for the delegation's keen interest in visiting Sabah Al-Salem University City, emphasizing that the visit contributes to strengthening fruitful cooperation and aligning common goals in service of the State of Kuwait.

Dr. Al-Aifan said the delegation's support for the university reflects their commitment to advancing Kuwait

University as a leading educational institution dedicated to meeting the needs of the community and fulfilling their aspirations.

In turn, the visiting delegation commended the university administration for its successful relocation to and operation of Sabah Al-Salem University City.

During the visit, the delegation and university leaders exchanged views on advancing campus projects, and highlighted the spirit of collaboration between government entities and academic institutions.

Continued from Page 1

AI cams

He urged drivers to refrain from using mobile phones while driving and to always fasten their seat belts, stressing that these simple actions are vital for their own safety and the safety of other road users.

In an interview with Kuwait Radio, Colonel Al-Gharib explained that the Security Media Department continuously monitors and deals with all public appeals, observations, and complaints related to traffic issues on social media. These concerns are promptly followed up in coordination with the General Traffic Department to ensure quick resolution.

He affirmed that the General Department of Security Relations and Media runs year-round security and traffic awareness campaigns, which include educating the public about the new artificial intelligence cameras that detect seat belt and mobile phone violations.

Cabinet reviews

During the meeting Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi - the Minister of Health and the Acting Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, gave a presentation on the final preparations for the activities marking "Kuwait - Capital of Arab Culture and Media 2025."

The festive activities are scheduled to kick-start on February 13, with several cultural and media institutions taking part.

The presentation was attended by Undersecretary of the Minister of Information Dr. Nasser Mheisen and Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature (NCCAL) Dr. Mohammad Al-Jassar.

The Cabinet also heard a presentation by Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs Noura Suleiman Al-Fassam on the monthly report of the national committee against corruption, money laundering and terror financing on the progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

On his part, Minister of Education Said Jalal Al-Tabtabaie gave a presentation on the objectives of the six-axis reform plan of his ministry.

These include, first, curtailing extravagance, promoting the quality of education and building the capacity of teachers.

Second, keeping abreast with the internationally recognized standards in terms of curricula through closer cooperation with regional and international organizations.

Third, drawing on the successful experiences of advanced countries in education, such as Finland, Singapore and South Korea.

Fourth, building smart schools and classrooms and rehabilitating the old schools.

Fifth, leveraging the e-education software to connect teachers with parents and students.

Sixth, encouraging the initiatives related to transformation to smart schools.

Hailing the plan and the efforts of the minister to modernize education, the Cabinet asked Al-Tabtabaie to report to the cabinet on a semi-annual basis on the progress of his plan to overhaul the educational system.

The Cabinet also discussed a range of domestic issues, including treatment and reuse of water and asked Minister Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Mahmoud Bushehri and Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan to work together to build artificial lakes and waterways, particularly in Al-Drakil area, to conserve treated water and use it in agriculture.

Al-Mashaan pushes

She affirmed her commitment to enhancing the country's air transport sector by adopting the best international standards in the civil aviation industry.

In a related development, the contractor for the New Kuwait Airport project has commenced earthworks and reached the excavation levels for both the food equipment building and the tunnels, in accordance with the contract's requirements. Obstacles within the project have been cleared in

coordination with the relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Electricity and Water, and other concerned agencies.

In the same context, the Ministry of Public Works has recently submitted a variation order to the State Audit Bureau (SAB), at an estimated cost of KD 1.809 million. The order pertains to the construction of package 2, which includes service buildings, roads leading to the new passenger terminal (T2), and parking lots. The ministry plans to replace the vertical motion conveyors with multi-purpose elevators as part of this update.

Sources confirmed that the ministry had previously secured approval from the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) for the award.

Joseph Aoun

His Highness the Amir in the cable expressed heartfelt felicitations to Aoun on his election as president of the republic, wishing him success for service of the country's interests and stability, as well as for attaining the aspiration toward growth, progress and prosperity for the country.

His Highness the Amir lauded the historic and distinguished relations bonding the State of Kuwait with the sisterly Republic of Lebanon, affirming his aspiration toward cementing these bonds further and promoting the mutual cooperation in various sectors.

He hoped the republic and its people would witness further promotion and development and wished the new president good health and wellbeing.

Similarly, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on Thursday addressed a cable of congratulations to the newly elected president of the Republic of Lebanon, Joseph Aoun.

His Highness the Crown Prince prayed to His Almighty (Allah) to grace His Excellency (the new president of Lebanon) with lasting health, success, and bless his country with security and stability.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also sent a cable of congratu-

lations to the newly elected president of the Republic of Lebanon, Joseph Aoun.

Aoun, no relation to former president Michel Aoun, was widely seen as the preferred candidate of the United States and Saudi Arabia, whose assistance Lebanon will need as it seeks to rebuild.

The session was the legislature's 13th attempt to elect a successor to Michel Aoun, whose term ended in October 2022.

Hezbollah previously backed another candidate, Sleiman Frangieh, the leader of a small Christian party in northern Lebanon with close ties to former Syrian President Bashar Assad. However, on Wednesday, Frangieh announced he had withdrawn from the race and endorsed Aoun, clearing the way for the army chief.

Randa Slim, a senior fellow at the Washington, D.C.-based Middle East Institute, said that the military and political weakening of Hezbollah following its war with Israel and the fall of its ally, Assad, in Syria, along with international pressure to elect a president paved the way for Thursday's result.

In a first round of voting Thursday, Aoun received 71 out of 128 votes but fell short of the two-thirds majority needed to win outright. Of the rest, 37 lawmakers cast blank ballots and 14 voted for "sovereignty and the constitution."

In the second round, he received 99 votes.

Aoun was escorted by a marching band into the parliament building in downtown Beirut where he took the oath of office.

Some streets erupted in celebratory fireworks and gunshots. In Aoun's hometown of Aichiye in Jezzine province, southern Lebanon, people waved the Lebanese flags and distributed traditional sweets, and local media showed some townspeople slaughtering a sheep in celebration.

In a speech to parliament, Aoun pledged to carry out reforms to the judicial system, fight corruption and work to consolidate the state's right to "monopolise the carrying of weapons," in an apparent allusion to the

arms of Hezbollah.

He also promised to control the country's borders and "ensure the activation of the security services and to discuss a strategic defense policy that will enable the Lebanese state to remove the Israeli occupation from all Lebanese territories" in southern Lebanon, where the Israeli military has not yet withdrawn from dozens of villages.

He also vowed to reconstruct "what the Israeli army destroyed in the south, east and (Beirut's southern) suburbs."

Lebanon's fractious sectarian power-sharing system is prone to deadlock, both for political and procedural reasons. The small, crisis-battered Mediterranean country has been through several extended presidential vacancies, with the longest lasting nearly 2 1/2 years between May 2014 and October 2016. It ended when former President Michel Aoun was elected.

The president's role in Lebanon is limited under the power-sharing system in which the president is always a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of parliament Shiite.

PAFN set

The following are the examination and documentation fees:

Laboratory Examination Fees: Chemical and microbial examinations: 5 dinars each, Viral examination: 10 dinars, Radiological examination: 5 dinars, Special examinations: 15 dinars

Document Fees: a certified copy of food shipment documents: 20 dinars, financial pledge for missing documents: 5% of the invoice value

Amendments and Renewals -- Renewal or amendment of transactions for re-exporting imported food: 20 dinars, amendments for destroying imported food products: 20 dinars, sticker installation under the authority's supervision: 10 dinars for each request (5 dinars per additional request)

Lost Documents -- Replacing a lost inspection report or trading certificate: 10 dinars, replacing a lost copy of the destruction of the imported food prod-

uct: 10 dinars

Transporting Goods for Destruction: 100 dinars for using the authority's vehicle

Letter to Whom It May Concern: 10 dinars per letter

The new fee structure is part of the government's broader strategy to address the deficit in the state budget and PAFN is working to ensure that the necessary legal steps are taken to implement this regulation by May.

With a variety of services covered, the new fees are designed to generate additional revenue while maintaining the operational effectiveness of the authority's crucial roles in food inspection, certification and compliance.

Kutayba Y. Alghanim

our journey. As we conclude this phase, we look forward to considering opportunities that build on our experiences and complement our broader strategic direction."

This transaction represents a pivotal step in Kutayba Y. Alghanim Group's efforts to realign its investments, providing the group with the opportunity to redirect its resources toward new ventures that contribute to economic activity in Kuwait and the MENA region.

It is worth noting that Kutayba Y. Alghanim Group includes Alghanim Industries, one of the largest privately-owned companies in the Middle East and North Africa region, with a legacy spanning over a century. Employing more than 15,000 people across the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia, the company operates in key sectors, including automotive, retail, services, industrial, and food and beverages. Driven by a customer-focused approach and world-class systems and practices, Alghanim Industries continues its purposeful expansion to strengthen its presence across various sectors by introducing global brands in the automotive sector with a focus on sustainable mobility and achieving notable growth in the industrial sector in the Middle East, India, and South-east Asia.

'One bill, two bills, doesn't matter, we're going to get the result'

Trump gives Republican senators no set strategy as GOP leaders struggle to craft his top priorities

WASHINGTON, Jan 9, (AP): President-elect Donald Trump likes the idea of "one, big beautiful bill" for his top legislative priorities, but he emerged from a lengthy closed-door meeting with Republican senators late Wednesday open to other strategies as GOP leaders strain to develop a plan before the party gains full power in Washington.

Trump said it "feels great" to be back inside the U.S. Capitol for the first time since he left office four years ago, after the Jan. 6, 2021, riot by his supporters. With his wife, Melania, he also paid tribute to the late President Jimmy Carter lying in state in the Rotunda ahead of funeral services Thursday.

With Trump taking the oath of office on Jan. 20, Republicans have no time to waste.

"We're looking at the one bill versus two bills, and whatever it is, it doesn't matter," Trump said about the conflicting strategies as he arrived. "We're going to get the result."

More than 90 minutes later, after bantering with GOP senators on a wide range of topics, Trump exited with the same message: "One bill, two bills, doesn't matter."

Trump's return to Capitol Hill marked a changed era in Washington as he strode through the corridors where four years ago a mob of his supporters had laid siege to the U.S. Capitol as senators fled to safety in a failed attempt to salvage Trump's election defeat to President Joe Biden.

Inside the private meeting, Trump received applause and bursts of laughter from the Republican senators, staying late into the evening to confer with him behind closed doors. He took questions as the conversation roamed - from his designs on Canada, Greenland and the Panama Canal to the fires raging in California and even the North Dakota Bison game, senators said.

At stake are tax cuts, border security, money to deport immigrants and efforts to boost oil and gas energy production - priorities for Republicans coming to the White House, House and Senate.



President-elect Donald Trump flanked by Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., left, Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W. Va., and Senate Majority Leader John Thune of S.D. talks to reporters after a meeting with Republican leadership at the Capitol on Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2025, in Washington. (AP)

He first met privately with Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., and is also expected to huddle over the weekend with House GOP lawmakers at his private club Mar-a-Lago.

Thune said afterward the Republican senators and Trump want the same results. "It's an ongoing conversa-

tion," he said.

Political capital is almost always at its peak at the start of a new presidential term, even more so because this is Trump's second and he is prevented under the Constitution from a third. Moving swiftly is all the more important because the GOP majorities are slim, particularly in the

House, where House Speaker Mike Johnson can't afford to lose hardly any votes.

Johnson, who greeted Trump at the Capitol, has said he sees himself operating as the GOP quarterback with Trump as their coach calling plays. But Republicans are quickly finding themselves in a dilemma: What happens when the coach changes his mind?

Trump has given Republicans on Capitol Hill mixed signals, flip-flopping over what is the best approach. Over the weekend, he said he wanted "one big, beautiful bill." By Monday, he had reopened the door to two.

House Republicans want a single package. Senate GOP leaders are proposing at least two.

At one point during the meeting, Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D. said he suggested, "Well, Mr. President, you love a horse race and then whatever works best is great."

Hoeven said, "He prefers one big, beautiful bill but hey you know he wants to get all this done."

Republicans are relying on perhaps the most complicated legislative tool at their disposal, the budget reconciliation process, as the vehicle to advance Trump's priorities.

It's a strategy with high risk, but also potentially high reward.

Reconciliation allows Congress to pass bills on a majority basis, without the threat of a filibuster in the Senate that could delay or kill action. But it is also a difficult, strict and time-consuming process that can fall apart at any moment. Democrats used the same tool during the Obama era to approve the Affordable Care Act in 2010 without any Republican support. Republicans used it during Trump's first term to pass the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act without Democrats.

Using reconciliation is a herculean task. Doing it twice could prove doubly difficult.

House Democratic Caucus Chairman Pete Aguilar of California said what's at stake is that Trump and the Republicans are proposing a tax giveaway to the wealthy and budget cuts that will cut social services and other programs that Americans rely on.



Smoke from the Palisades Fire is seen during a commercial flight to Los Angeles, Calif., Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2025. (AP)

Danger remains high

Out-of-control Los Angeles wildfires burn thousands of homes and other structures

LOS ANGELES, Jan 9, (AP): A fast-moving fire broke out in the hills above Hollywood Boulevard and threatened some of the most popular Los Angeles tourist spots as firefighters battled to get control on two other major blazes that killed five people, put 130,000 people under evacuation orders and ravaged communities from the Pacific Coast to inland Pasadena.

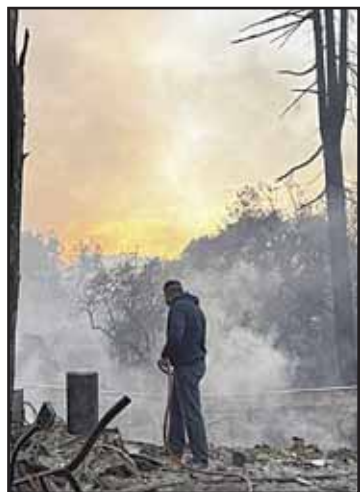
The Sunset Fire started around 5:45 p.m. Wednesday as officials were holding a news conference to update residents on efforts to fight massive blazes in Pacific Palisades and Altadena and to warn that fire danger remained high. Los Angeles Fire Department Chief Kristin Crowley made a hasty exit after announcing the new fire and soon after an evacuation order was issued.

The Hollywood Walk of Fame was bustling and the streets around the TCL Chinese Theatre and Madame Tussauds were packed with stop-and-go traffic as sirens blared and low-flying helicopters flew overhead to dump water on the flames, which were only about a mile away. People toting suitcases left hotels while some onlookers walked toward the flames, recording the fire on their phones.

Within a few hours firefighters had made major progress. Los Angeles Fire Department Capt. Erik Scott said they were able to keep the fire in check because "we hit it hard and fast and

mother nature was a little nicer to us today than she was yesterday."

A day earlier, hurricane-force winds blew embers through the air, igniting block after block in the Los Angeles coastline neighborhood of Pacific Palisades and about 25 miles (40 kilometers) to the east in Altadena, an unincorporated community near Pasadena.



A resident hoses down hot spots in a fire-ravaged property after the Palisades Fire swept through in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles, Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2025. (AP)

Nearly 2,000 homes, businesses and other structures have been destroyed in the Eaton and Palisades fires, and the number is expected to increase. The five deaths recorded so far were from the Eaton Fire.

The Palisades Fire already is the most destructive in Los Angeles history, with at least 1,000 structures burned.

More than half a dozen schools in the area were either damaged or destroyed, including Palisades Charter High School, which has been featured in many Hollywood productions, including the 1976 horror movie "Carrie" and the TV series "Teen Wolf," officials said. UCLA has canceled classes for the week.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said air operations were dousing flames. She warned they still faced "erratic winds," though not like Tuesday evening, when aircraft had to be grounded and much of the destruction occurred.

In Pasadena, Fire Chief Chad Augustin said the city's water system was stretched and was further hampered by power outages, but even without those issues, firefighters would not have been able to stop the fire due to the intense winds fanning the flames.

"Those erratic wind gusts were throwing embers for multiple miles ahead of the fire," he said.

'Borders must not be moved by force'

Trump's push for US to take control of Greenland 'not going to happen': Blinken

PARIS, Jan 9, (AP): Outgoing U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is advising the world "not to waste a lot of time" on what President-elect Donald Trump has been saying about Greenland.

Trump made clear again this week that he'd like the semi-autonomous territory of Denmark to come under U.S. control and said he would not rule out the use of military force to make that happen.

"We need Greenland for national security purposes," Trump said.

But Blinken said Wednesday that the incoming president's ambitions are unlikely to amount to anything more than talk.

"The idea expressed about Greenland is obviously not a good one," the senior U.S. diplomat said during a stop in Paris for meetings.

"Maybe more important, it's obviously one that's not going to happen. So we probably shouldn't waste a lot of time talking about it," he said.

France's foreign minister, Jean-Noël Barrot, also played down any possibility of U.S. forces being deployed against Denmark, a U.S. ally in the NATO military alliance.

But Barrot warned nevertheless that Europe must brace for turbulence ahead - as other powers throw their weight around.

"Do we think the United States will invade Greenland? The answer is, 'No,'" the French minister said. "But do we think that we're entering into a period that sees the return of the law of the strongest, the answer is, 'Yes.'"



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, left, addresses the media during a joint press conference with French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Noel Barrot, right, after their meeting at the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, France, Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2025. (AP)

Europe must become stronger militarily and more economically and commercially competitive in response, Barrot said.

In Germany, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Wednesday that the principle of inviolability of borders applies to every country no matter how powerful, in a reaction to Trump's remarks that did not mention the president-elect by name. "Borders must not be moved by force," Scholz said.

Rome meetings postponed

Biden cancels trip to Italy, meant as final foreign visit of presidency

WASHINGTON, Jan 9, (AP): President Joe Biden canceled the final overseas trip of his presidency just hours before he was set to depart for Rome and the Vatican, choosing to remain in Washington to monitor the response to devastating fires raging in California.

Biden was scheduled to leave Thursday afternoon, after eulogizing former President Jimmy Carter at a memorial service in Washington, for the three-day trip to meet with Pope Francis and Italian President Sergio Mattarella and Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni as well as a final face-to-face meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The trip was meant as a coda to the second Catholic U.S. president's time



President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden walk from Marine One as they arrive back at the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2025. (AP)

in the White House and a final opportunity to showcase the strength of American alliances before he leaves office on Jan. 20.

And the sit-down with Zelenskyy would have offered the two leaders one last chance to discuss the path ahead for Kyiv before President-elect Donald Trump takes office amid growing uncertainty about future American support for Ukraine's effort to repel Russia's invasion.

The White House had not formally announced the Biden-Zelenskyy meeting. But the two sides had agreed that the leaders would meet in Rome on Friday, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to comment publicly on the White House plan.

America

Workers union rejoins AFL-CIO: The Service Employees International Union is returning to the AFL-CIO after 20 years, betting that a united labor movement will do more to help workers overcome legal challenges to organize and join unions.

The union groups' executive boards each unanimously approved the combination on Wednesday, with plans to formally announce the affiliation at a Thursday roundtable discussion in Austin, Texas, with workers who are attempting to become union members.

There are roughly 2 million SEIU workers in the health care, janitorial and food services sectors, among others. (AP)



Ex-FBI informant gets 6 yrs in prison: A former FBI informant who fabricated a story about President Joe Biden and his son Hunter accepting bribes that became central to Republicans' impeachment effort was sentenced Wednesday to six years in prison.

Alexander Smirnov pleaded guilty last month in Los Angeles federal court to tax evasion and lying to the FBI about the phony bribery scheme in what prosecutors say was an effort to influence the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. (AP)

Greece holds state funeral for ex-PM Simitis

ATHENS, Greece, Jan 9, (AP): Mourners lined the street outside Athens' central cathedral Thursday ahead of the state funeral for former Prime Minister Costas Simitis, the architect of Greece's joining the European Union's common currency, who died last weekend at the age of 88.

Simitis will be buried with the honors of a sitting prime minister as a sign of respect to his service. A funeral service in the capital's Metropolitan Cathedral will be held at noon before his burial in Athens' First Cemetery, the resting place of numerous notable Greeks, including politicians, musicians and artists.

In accordance with the wishes of his family, Simitis' body did not lie in state, but members of the public who wanted to pay their respects gathered outside the cathedral. Streets in the center of the Greek capital were gradually being shut to traffic for the funeral and procession to the cemetery.

A committed pro-European, Simitis served as prime minister from January 1996 to March 2004 and holds the record for longevity for a Greek administration. A co-founder of the socialist PASOK party in 1974, he emerged as the leader of a modernizing wing of the party who often clashed with then party leader and Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu before eventually succeeding him in 1996.



Military officers stand next to the Greek flag-draped casket during the state funeral of the late Costas Simitis, former Prime Minister of Greece in Athens' central cathedral, Jan. 9, 2025. (AP)

Simitis considered Greece's entry into the eurozone in January 2001 as the signature achievement of his premiership. But he also helped secure the 2004 Olympic Games for Athens and presided over a vast program of infrastructure building, including a brand new airport and two subway lines, to help host the games. He also helped Cyprus join the European Union in 2004.

Europe

2 people dead in ice storm: Authorities in northern France say two people have died and 20 others are injured from a cold snap bringing snow and ice.

One of those killed slipped on a pavement and violently banged their head, authorities from the Nord region said Thursday in a statement.

The other person had no fixed address and was found dead in the town of Valenciennes, the statement said. (AP)



Body of British hiker found: Rescue crews on Wednesday found the body of a missing British hiker buried in the snow of the Italian alps, but a search for his friend was suspended by poor weather conditions.

Experienced hikers Aziz Ziriat, 36, and Sam Harris, 35, had set out on Jan. 1 for a New Year's Day excursion in Italy's Adamello range. Italy's Alpine rescue service said it received an alert about the men on Jan. 6, after they failed to make a scheduled flight home.

After two days of fog, snow and avalanche warnings hampered searches, the service said rescuers guided by the hikers' phone registrations reached the pair's last recorded location Wednesday. (AP)

INTERNATIONAL

Police block roads, gas opposition leader's supporters

Mozambique's Mondlane returns from self-imposed exile

MAPUTO, Jan 9, (AP): Mozambique's main opposition leader returned from self-imposed exile on Thursday clutching a Bible and saying he still rejects the results of a disputed election last year that has sparked more than two months of protests and a violent crackdown by security forces.

While Venancio Mondlane stepped off a plane, security forces fired tear gas at hundreds of his supporters who gathered near the main international airport to welcome him home. Mondlane arrived at Mavalane International Airport in the capital, Maputo, to applause from some airport workers and then knelt in the arrivals hall with a Bible in his left hand.

"I want to fight within this country and I will, until the very end, keep fighting for this country," Mondlane said. "I'm not willing to accept election results if they are the same as those announced up until now."

He had left the country in October following an election clouded by allegations of rigging against the long-ruling Frelimo party, which has been in power since Mozambique gained independence from Portugal in 1975.

More than 100 people have been killed by security forces, according to international rights groups, since Mozambique erupted in protests after Frelimo was declared the winner of the Oct. 9 election. Some local groups put the death toll at more than 200. Mondlane had called for people to protest the results.

Mondlane has said he left Mozambique fearing for his life after two senior members of his opposition party were killed in their car by unknown gunmen in a late-night shooting on a



Mozambique's opposition leader Venancio Mondlane arrives at the Mavalane International Airport in Maputo, Mozambique, Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025. (AP)

street in Maputo in the aftermath of the election. Mondlane's party called the killings political assassinations.

Police on Thursday also blocked roads leading to the airport after Mondlane said on social media earlier this week he would return to the southern African country. Tear gas drifted over the airport and surrounding roads and a helicopter hovered overhead. After arriving, Mondlane traveled by car to a public square in central Maputo, with large crowds following him.

Thousands of Mondlane's supporters were expected to gather in Maputo for his return, prompting the clampdown by security forces, which rights groups have accused of using excessive force against post-election protesters. Authorities have said the protests were violent and needed to be subdued, but rights groups say security forces have fired live bullets at peaceful protesters, and children were among those who were killed.

Mondlane accused authorities of

kidnapping and killing some anti-government protesters. But he also said he was willing to enter into negotiations with Frelimo to end months of unrest, which has disrupted the country of 33 million. Mozambique has also been battling a violent insurgency by jihadists in the north.

"I'm here in flesh and blood to say that if you want to negotiate, if you want to talk to me, if you want to come to the conversation table, I'm here," Mondlane said.

Attack on Chad's presidential palace leaves 19 people dead

N'DJAMENA, Jan 9, (Agencies): An attack on Chad's presidential palace left 18 assailants dead and six in custody, with one soldier killed and three wounded, state media reported Thursday.

The attack on Wednesday night occurred while Chadian President Mahamat Deby Itno was inside the palace, but authorities said the situation was quickly brought under control.

"The situation is completely under control. There is no fear." Foreign Affairs Minister Abderaman Koulamallah said while surrounded by soldiers in a live Facebook broadcast filmed inside what appeared to be a quiet presidential palace late Wednesday.

In an interview with state TV, Koulamallah praised the vigilance of the palace guards, describing the attackers as disorganized and intoxicated by alcohol and drugs. When asked if the attack was terrorism, he said it was probably not, as the attackers were local youths from the capital, N'Djamena.

Congratulated

The attack occurred the same day as a visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who congratulated Deby Itno on reestablishing constitutional order.

In the immediate aftermath, rumors spread online that the attack was the work of Islamic militant group Boko Haram.

Boko Haram, which launched an insurgency more than a decade ago against Western education, seeks to establish Islamic law in Nigeria's northeast. The insurgency has spread to neighboring West African countries including Cameroon, Niger and Chad.

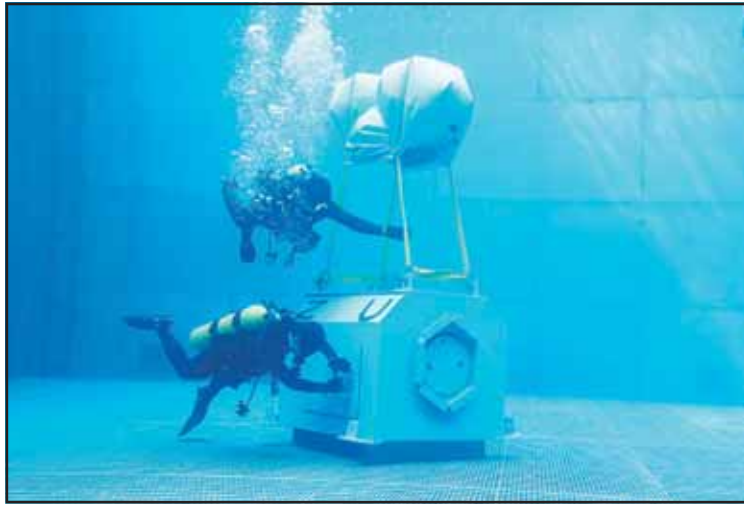
Also:

N'DJAMENA: China stands ready to work with Chad to promote the all-round development of China-Chad strategic partnership, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said here Wednesday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks when meeting with Chadian Foreign Minister Abderaman Koulamallah.

He said that the two heads of state have defined the new orientation of the strategic partnership for China-Chad relations and bilateral relations have shown broad new prospects.

This year marks the start of implementing the outcomes of the Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) held in Beijing. Based on a new orientation of China-Chad relations and a new chapter of China-Africa ties, China is willing to work with Chad to promote the all-round development of China-Chad strategic partnership, implement the outcomes of the FOCAC Beijing Summit, promote the implementation of the 10 partnership action plans in Chad, and help Chad advance modernization efforts, Wang said.



Taiwanese navy divers perform underwater mission during a drill in Kaohsiung City, southern Taiwan, Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025. (AP)



A soldier guides an MIM-104C (PAC-2) Patriot short-range anti-aircraft missile launcher rotation during a drill at an air base in Taichung City, central Taiwan, Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2025. (AP)



Deck crew of Taiwanese navy stand by on a Taiwan's domestically made Tuo Chiang patrol ship during a simulated attack drill off Kaohsiung City, southern Taiwan, Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025. (AP)

Taiwan demonstrates sea defenses against potential Chinese attack as tensions rise with Beijing

KAOHSIUNG, Taiwan, Jan 9, (AP): Taiwan on Thursday demonstrated its sea defenses against a potential Chinese attack as tensions rise with Beijing, part of a multitiered strategy to deter an invasion from the mainland.

The island's navy highlighted its Kuang Hua VI fast attack missile boats and Tuo Chiang-class corvettes in waters near Taiwan's largest port of Kaohsiung, a major hub for international trade considered key to resupplying Chinese forces should they establish a beachhead on the island.

The Kuang Hua VI boats, with a crew of 19, carry indigenous developed Hsiung Feng II anti-ship missiles and displayed their ability to take to the sea in an emergency to intercept enemy ships about to cross the 44-kilometer

(24-nautical mile) limit of Taiwan's contiguous zone, within which governments are permitted to take defensive action.

China routinely sends ships and planes to challenge Taiwan's willingness and ability to counter intruders, prompting Taiwan to scramble jets, activate missile systems and dispatch warships. Taiwan demanded on Wednesday that China end its ongoing military activity in nearby waters, which it said is undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and disrupting international shipping and trade.

Mountainous Taiwan's strategy is to counter the much larger Chinese military with a relatively flexible defense that can prevent Chinese troops from crossing the strait. Landing sites are few on Taiwan's west coast facing China, forcing

Beijing to focus on the east coast.

Hsiao Shun-ming, captain of a Tuo Chiang-class corvette, said his ship's relatively small size still allows it to "deliver a formidable competitive power" against larger Chinese ships. The Tuo Chiang has a catamaran design and boasts high speeds and considerable stealth ability.

Taiwan has in recent years reinvigorated its domestic defense industry, although it still relies heavily on U.S. technology such as upgraded fighter jets, missiles, tanks and detection equipment. U.S. law requires it to consider threats to the island as matters of "grave concern," and American and allied forces are expected to be a major factor in any conflict.

Thursday's exercise "demonstrates the effectiveness of

asymmetric warfare, and Taiwan's commitment to defense self-reliance," said Chen Ming-feng, rear admiral and commander of the navy's 192 Fleet specializing in mine detection. "We are always ready to respond quickly and can handle any kind of maritime situation."

China's authoritarian one-party Communist government has refused almost all communication with Taiwan's pro-independence governments since 2016, and some in Washington and elsewhere say Beijing is growing closer to taking military action.

China considers Taiwan a part of its territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary, while most Taiwanese favor their de facto independence and democratic status.

Subcontinent

Indian, Afghan officials meet in UAE: A top Indian foreign ministry official met with Afghanistan's acting foreign minister on Wednesday as the countries without formal diplomatic ties met for the second time in two months on practical matters like business and humanitarian aid.

India's foreign ministry said Foreign Secretary **Vikram Misri** met with acting Afghan Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi during a visit to the United Arab Emirates.

India's statement said Misri conveyed India's readiness to respond to Afghanistan's urgent humanitarian and development needs. It said they also discussed how the Afghan business community could use the Chabahar port in Iran for the import and export of goods involving India.

In November, an Indian delegation led by J P Singh, a joint foreign ministry secretary in charge of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, visited Kabul and met with acting Defense Minister Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid and other ministers. He also met former President Hamid Karzai and the heads of UN agencies.

Since the fall of Afghanistan in 2021 as U.S. and other troops withdrew, no country has recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. India says it will be guided by the United Nations on the issue.

Wednesday's meeting came amid rising tensions between Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan, which last week launched an operation to destroy a training facility and kill insurgents in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province. The strikes killed dozens of people, primarily women and children.

Islamabad often claims that the Pakistani Taliban use Afghan soil to launch attacks in Pakistan, a charge Kabul has denied. Afghanistan's Defense Ministry said Saturday its forces hit several areas inside Pakistan in retaliation.

India and Pakistan have long been rivals and have fought three wars over control of Kashmir since they won independence from Britain in 1947. (AP)

Cold wave grips most parts of Bangladesh: Intense cold wave conditions gripped again most parts of Bangladesh.

According to the latest weather bulletin from the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD), a severe temperature drop occurred in most parts of Bangladesh, starting at 9:00 a.m. local time on Wednesday.

The BMD noted that cold feelings may intensify during the day due to dense fog. On Wednesday, the country's Jashore district, some 164 km from the capital city Dhaka, recorded the country's lowest temperature at 12.8 degrees Celsius. In Dhaka, the minimum temperature was 16.3 degrees Celsius.

Over the past few days, the temperature in Dhaka has been rising by 1 to 2 degrees daily, reducing the feeling of cold during the day.

The sky over the capital and most parts of the country remained cloudy since Wednesday morning, while cars and buses are running by switching on headlights in the daytime on many Dhaka streets.

The BMD also warned that dense fog could temporarily disrupt air navigation, inland river transport, and road communication. (Xinhua)

Sri Lanka arrests 10 Indian fishermen: The Sri Lankan navy and coast guard seized an Indian fishing boat poaching in Sri Lankan waters and apprehended 10 Indian fishermen on Wednesday night, the navy said in a statement on Thursday.

The boat was seized off the seas of Kovilan Lighthouse, Karainagar in Jaffna, which is the first such seizure in 2025, the navy said.

The navy said they conduct regular patrols and operations in Sri Lankan waters to curb illegal fishing practices of foreign fishing boats, taking into account the impact of those practices on the livelihood of local fishermen.

The fishing boat and the 10 Indian fishermen were brought to the Kankesanthurai harbor and handed over to the Mailadi Fisheries Inspector for onward legal proceedings, the navy said. (Xinhua)

Venezuelan president faces his toughest challenge yet

FBI agent among mercenaries arrested: Maduro

CARACAS, Jan 9, (Agencies): Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said that a senior FBI official was among seven mercenaries captured in the country a day earlier.

A U.S. military official was also arrested in the latest operation to foil aggression against his country, and charged with planning unspecified "terrorist" acts, Maduro said.

Up to 125 foreign mercenaries of 25 nationalities have been captured as the Venezuelan authorities are dismantling "a foreign assault financed by the outgoing government of the United States," the Venezuelan president said.

On Jan. 10, Maduro is set to be sworn in as president for the 2025-2031 term following his victory in the recent elections.

Meanwhile, Maduro is facing more international rebuke than at any time in his 12 years in power.

The self-declared socialist is widely believed to have lost last year's election by a landslide. That sparked criticism by the United States and others that the vote was stolen and forced Maduro to turn to security forces to repress and arrest opponents.

Now he's set to be sworn in for a third term Friday, even as the opposition challenger who claims to have won is vowing to return from exile by then.

Maduro seems to have thrived on conflict since the late Hugo Chávez passed the torch of his Bolivarian revolution to his loyal aide in 2012. The challenges have ranged from a drone attack and mass protests over the collapse of the oil-rich economy to an international criminal investigation for human rights abuses and a \$15 million U.S. bounty tied to allegations of drug trafficking.

The history of Latin America is full of strongmen who rode out disputed elections only to find themselves ousted in short order, from Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet's attempt to tamper with votes in a 1988 referendum to Peruvian leader Alberto Fujimori's constitutionally barred third term in 2000.

Ahead is Maduro's toughest challenge yet - one that will determine the future of Venezuela's already debilitated democracy.



President Nicolas Maduro waves a Venezuelan flag during his closing election campaign rally in Caracas, Venezuela, July 25, 2024. (AP)

A biopic produced for last year's campaign recounted how Maduro grew up in a working-class barrio of Caracas torn between his love of baseball and student activism. "Make a decision," a coach tells the teenage pitcher portraying Maduro in the movie. "It's either baseball or politics."

In real life, after embracing his father's radical politics, Maduro was sent to communist Cuba in 1986 for a year of ideological instruction - his only studies after high school.

Upon returning home, he found work as a bus driver and union organizer. He embraced Chávez after the then-army paratrooper in 1992 staged a failed coup against an unpopular austerity government. Around the same time he met his longtime partner, Cilia Flores, a lawyer for the jailed leader.

After Chávez was freed and elected president in 1998, Maduro, a young lawmaker, helped push his agenda of redistributing the OPEC nation's oil wealth and political power.

In 2006, Chávez appointed Maduro foreign minister, a recognition of his work smoothing over tensions with the U.S. following a short-lived coup. In that role, he spread Venezuela's petrodollars throughout the world, building alliances.

"He was always very disciplined," said Vladimir Villegas, who has known Maduro since high school and served as his deputy foreign minister until breaking with Chávez.

When Maduro took power in 2013 following his mentor's death from cancer, he struggled to bring order to the grief-stricken nation. Without "El Comandante" in charge, the economy

entered a death spiral - shrinking 71% from 2012 to 2020, with inflation topping 130,000% - and opponents and rivals inside the government smelled blood.

He earned the nickname of "Maburro" among elites for folksy antics like claiming Chávez appeared to him as a "little bird." Less than a year into his accidental presidency, hardliner opponents launched demonstrations demanding his exit.

Leaning heavily on the security forces, Maduro crushed the protests. But with supermarket shelves empty amid widespread shortages, they resumed with more intensity three years later, leaving more than 100 people dead. In 2018, the International Criminal Court initiated a criminal investigation into possible crimes against humanity.

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts
SAUDI	+9.01	12,097.75	JAPAN	-375.97	39,605.09
DUBAI	+20.01	5,229.34	EGYPT	-341.26	29,444.65
PHILIPPINES	+14.85	6,511.57	PAKISTAN	-1,768.25	112,689.56
			Nikkei 225		
			EGX 30		
			KSE 100		

Business

Lower interest rates to aid Kuwaiti banking sector growth

Kuwaiti banks to maintain strong capital and funding profiles

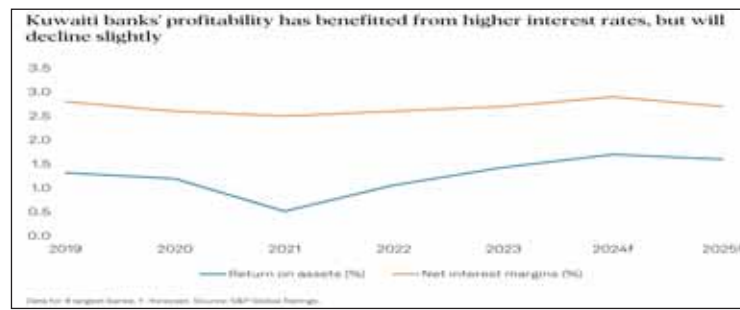
By S&P Global Ratings

Key Takeaways

- We expect Kuwaiti banks' asset quality will continue to improve thanks to a stronger economy and lower interest rates.
- We foresee stronger lending growth that will somewhat compensate the negative impact of lower interest rates on profitability.
- We expect geopolitical risk to remain in check and believe that the banking system is well positioned to deal with a potential escalation of geopolitical stress.
- Risks from high exposure to real estate remain, while the sector is benefiting from visa relaxations.
- We expect Kuwaiti banks to maintain stable and strong capital buffers and robust funding profiles.

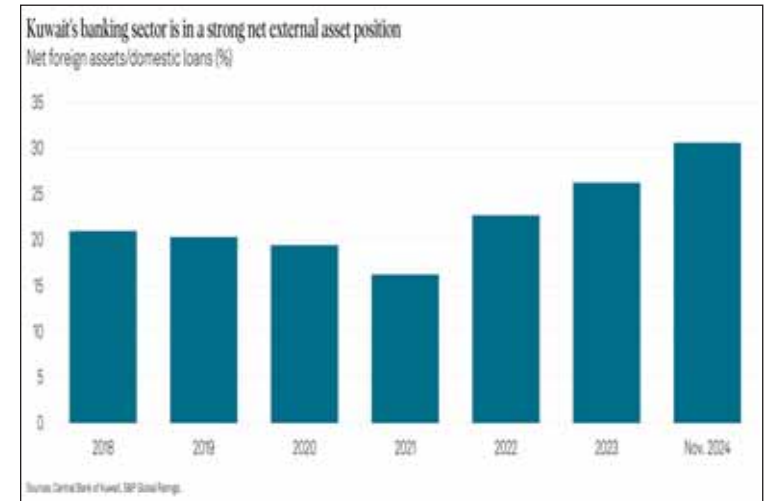
Profitability Will Reduce Slightly As Margins Ease

Lower interest rates may weaken profitability
 ■ Kuwait banks' profitability improved in the decline slightly monetary tightening cycle, as higher interest rates helped to expand margins.
 Now, amid declining interest rates, we expect profitability to follow.
 ■ This could be partially boosted by lending growth, a migration of deposits back to nonremunerated instruments, and low cost of risk.



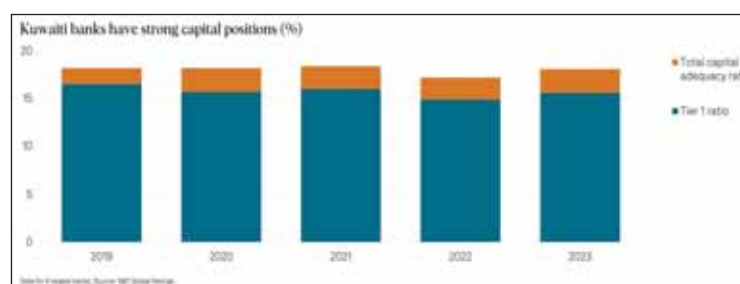
Strong Net External Asset Position

■ Kuwait's banking system is in a strong net external assets position, which strengthened to 30.6% of systemwide domestic loans on Nov. 30, 2024, as domestic lending opportunities remained limited.
 ■ This makes banks less vulnerable to potential capital outflows if geopolitical risk were to escalate.



Capitalization Remains A Supportive Factor

■ Kuwait banks operate with strong capital buffers and typically retain 50% or more of their bottom line, which supports their capitalization.
 ■ The quality of capital remains strong, with a modest share of hybrid instruments. As of end-September 2024, Additional Tier 1 instruments accounted for only 10.8% of total adjusted capital. The decline in interest rates offers banks the chance to boost hybrid issuance and replace existing instruments at a lower cost when they reach their call dates.



Strong Local Deposit Franchise Supports Funding

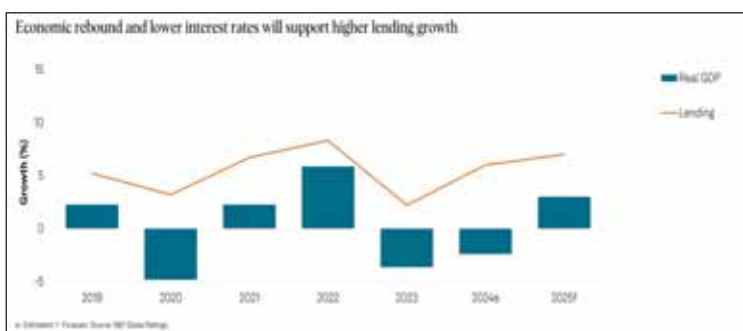
■ Kuwaiti banks' funding structures benefit from a strong core customer deposit base and a net external asset position.
 ■ Deposits from government and public institutions have experienced some volatility in the past, as these entities seek to diversify their deposits among local and foreign banks. However, we believe that government support to systemically important banks will be forthcoming if needed, given the significant role the banks play in the financing of the economy and the absence of a developed local capital market.

Kuwaiti Banking Industry Trends And Our Bank Ratings

■ Our current ratings and the stable outlook on them shows that Kuwaiti banks are on a stable path heading into 2025.
 ■ This reflects banks' strong performance deriving from improved asset quality, higher lending growth, and still high profitability, balanced by the potential downside risks from the regional geopolitical tensions and oil price volatility.
 ■ Inorganic growth has supported Kuwait's banking sector over the past few years, as banks aim to diversify and enhance their financial profiles against the backdrop of limited organic growth opportunities.
 ■ After Kuwait Finance House's (KFH) acquisition of Bahrain-based Ahli United Bank, and Burgan Bank's acquisition of Bahrain's United Gulf Bank, Boubyan Bank last year announced that it is considering a potential merger with Gulf Bank, which, if completed, would result in the creation of the third-largest bank in Kuwait, boasting over \$50 billion in assets.
 ■ Despite larger banks gaining market share from these transactions, we view this as broadly neutral for overall competitive dynamics and industry stability. Kuwait's banking market is relatively small, primarily dominated by National Bank of Kuwait and KFH, followed by a few midsize players with niche positions.

Economic Rebound Will Support Lending Growth

■ After an estimated 2.3% contraction in 2024, we expect Kuwait's GDP growth will rebound to 3.0% in 2025 as OPEC+ oil production restrictions are gradually eased, and project implementation and reform momentum improves.
 ■ Accelerated reforms following last year's political changes could improve the pace of reform and growth prospects for the economy, which in turn would support higher lending growth for the banking system. The latter would also get a boost from lower interest rates.



Asset Quality Will Remain Stable

■ We believe the banking sector's credit losses are approaching cyclical low points.
 ■ Furthermore, aided by strong provisioning buffers, we expect banks will resort to write-offs to limit the increase in the nonperforming loan ratio.
 ■ Although risks from high exposure to real estate and the geopolitical environment remain, we believe Kuwaiti banks will be relatively resilient in case of related stressors.

Real estate market achieves sixth highest value in history

Residential sector tops 1.554 billion dinars

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The real estate market in Kuwait witnessed significant growth in 2024, reaching its sixth-highest value in history with a total of 3.7 billion dinars in transactions, a 36 percent increase compared to 2023, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The fourth quarter saw the highest trading value, driven by a surge in investment sector activity, especially in December. The monthly trading averaged 309 million dinars with December marking the peak month at 442 million dinars, reflecting a 33 percent increase from November and a 126 percent rise compared to the same month in 2023.

The residential real estate accounted for 41 percent of the total transactions, experiencing a slight decline from 2023.

However, it still led in transaction value with 1.554 billion dinars, up 20.7 percent from the previous year. The residential sector's trading activity peaked in the last quarter, with October being the highest trading month.

The investment real estate saw the most substantial growth in value, reaching 1.224 billion dinars, a 49 percent increase over 2023.

Despite this, it ranked seventh historically in terms of total value, with 2014, 2007, and 2018 remaining the highest years. A relative decrease in prices in certain areas like Hawalli and Ahmadi contributed to increased trading activity in investment real estate.

The commercial real estate experienced the highest-ever trading value in 2024, reaching 745 million dinars, a 75.3 percent increase from 2023.

This sector benefited from factors like expectations of interest rate cuts, changes in anti-monopoly laws, and increased credit facilities.

The total number of transactions reached 4,950, marking a 13.6 percent increase over the previous year.

The residential sector dominated in terms of transaction numbers, accounting for 70 percent, while investment real estate accounted for 24.44 percent and commercial real estate made up 2.7 percent. Notably, December also saw the highest number of transactions, with 529 deals.

The overall demand in the market remained strong, driven by factors like increased housing applications, a return of expatriates, and legislative developments that encouraged investment in real estate.

This stability suggests that the real estate market in Kuwait continues to be a lucrative sector despite global economic challenges.

New disclosure system reduces burdens

Kuwait CMA vows to enhance capital market competitiveness

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9, (KUNA): Kuwait's Capital Market Authority (CMA) commits to invigorating the capital market, boosting its competitive edge, revamping its investment climate and promoting disclosure and transparency in line with Kuwait's development vision, said the CMA's chief.

"The CMA is currently seeking to complete the phases of the capital market system invigoration program by launching the second part of the third phase involving various and essential output," said Ahmad Al-Malhem, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners and Executive Director of the CMA in an interview to KUNA on Thursday.

In this regard, he cited the establishment of the central broker of the stock market and the completion of the monetary settlement through settlement banks and the Real Time Gross Settlement System (KASSIP).

He added that this stage also includes the promotion of brokerage business models to the qualified broker model by means of creating a stock market-registered qualified stock broker through the CMA, and providing the congenial legislative and operational atmosphere for exchange-traded funds (ETFs).

It also embraces creating sub-accounts within the combined accounts of investment firms' wallet clients and electronic trading clients, and overhauling the regulatory system for new financial and investment products and services, he remarked.

Once the second part of the third stage has been done, the CMA will



Ahmad Al-Malhem – Chairman of the Board of Commissioners and Executive Director of the CMA

seek to put in place the fourth stage of the project whose output is mainly intended to create the central broker of the derivatives market, introduce the clearance model and create the legislative and operational atmosphere for financial derivatives, Al-Malhem elaborated.

Regarding the obligatory application of electronic disclosure by using the XBRL (a standards-based way to communicate and exchange business information between business systems), he said that the move, which took effect on January 5, would promote transparency and disclosure at capital markets.

He underlined that this would be attained through unifying the concepts and elements of disclosure in a bid to make it easy for all dealers to deal with this system and to ensure accu-

rate and credible disclosed data and information.

The system, he maintained, would also contribute to cutting the burdens of commitment and review for all dealers in view of human efforts and financial expenses, as well as streamlining the exchange of data and information among dealers, including companies, individuals, audit offices and regulators.

Furthermore, the system embraces an integrated portal that provides all required tools and solutions for disclosures and dealing with data so easily and smoothly, Al-Malhem added.

The CPA chief went on saying that XBRL-used electronic disclosures allow the online publishing of data and information in order to provide resilience and smoothness for dealers to use in analyses and technical studies and comparison among different businesses in terms of performance.

The system would contribute to revamping the market performance, improving the investment climate and boosting the competitive edge of Kuwaiti financial markets compared with other markets, he stressed.

It would further bring multiple benefits to corporate shareholders and investors in general, and provide thorough, credible and timely financial and non-financial data and information, he added.

Al-Malhem concluded by saying that the system, however, includes security and technical restrictions on the user scope according to specific purposes, thus staving off any possible abuse and cutting administrative burdens.

Brent & WTI crude prices dip

Kuwaiti oil price rises to \$77.68 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9 (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by USD 1.35 to USD 77.68 per barrel (pb) on Wednesday, compared with

USD 76.33 pb the previous day, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Thursday.

At the global level, the Brent crude went down by 89 cents to USD 76.23 pb, and the West Texas Intermediate also went down by 93 cents to USD 73.32 pb.

World's tallest solar power tower completed in UAE desert

Chinese companies help drive UAE's transition to clean energy

DUBAI, Jan. 9, (Xinhua): When you drive south from Dubai toward the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park, a dazzling light sphere resembling an artificial sun comes into view from over 20 km away in the desert.

This extraordinary sight is the 263-meter-high solar power tower, the world's tallest of its kind, built by Shanghai Electric Group as part of a concentrated solar power (CSP) and photovoltaic (PV) project.

Workers poetically describe their mission: "We are light gatherers, building a tower from grains of sand, turning hopes into rivers of energy, and capturing the sun to illuminate countless homes at night."

China is harnessing solar energy through advanced technology to meet clean energy needs of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Despite its vast oil reserves, the UAE has remained committed to optimizing its energy structure and advancing a clean energy transition. The UAE Energy Strategy 2050 aims for carbon neutrality by mid-century, necessitating significant investments in renewable energy sources like solar and wind power. As a global leader in

renewable energy technology, China has become a natural partner in this ambitious endeavor.

In recent years, Chinese companies have played a pivotal role in the UAE's clean energy development, helping optimize its energy mix and serving as a model of China-UAE green collaboration. From large-scale solar projects rising in the desert to the first wind energy demonstration projects, Chinese technology and expertise have been integral to the UAE's energy transition.

One of the flagship achievements is the CSP-PV hybrid project undertaken by Shanghai Electric Group in the Dubai desert. Fully operational since December 2023, the project has already generated over 3.6 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity, providing stable green power for 320,000 local households and reducing carbon dioxide emissions by more than 1.6 million tons annually.

This project showcases the technological strengths of CSP. Unlike traditional PV plants, which cannot generate power under low sunlight conditions, CSP uses advanced thermal storage systems to enable power generation around the clock.

Another landmark project is the Al Dhafra Solar PV

Plant in Abu Dhabi, built by China Machinery Engineering Corporation. Covering 21 square km, this facility is the world's largest single-site solar PV plant, with an installed capacity of 2.1 gigawatts. Operational since June 2023, it generates enough electricity to power 200,000 households annually while reducing carbon emissions by 2.4 million tons each year. During its construction, the plant created over 5,000 local jobs.

Project manager Che Ming'an highlighted the plant's use of cutting-edge PV technology, with solar panel mounts capable of tracking the sun's trajectory to maximize energy conversion. Nearly all equipment, from PV modules to cleaning robots and unattended substations, was sourced from China, exemplifying successful green energy collaboration under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Beyond solar, Chinese enterprises are also venturing into wind energy in the UAE. In May 2023, PowerChina completed the UAE's first wind power demonstration project.

The project, which spans complex terrains including islands, deserts and mountains, covers a distance of over

700 km. The project generates enough electricity annually to meet the needs of over 23,000 households while reducing carbon emissions by 120,000 tons.

Peng Gang, general manager of PowerChina's Middle East and North Africa regional headquarters, said that the wind power demonstration project proved the economic feasibility of wind energy in the UAE, highlighting China's leading position in the field.

These clean energy initiatives mirror deepening cooperation between China and the UAE in energy transition and sustainable development. Leveraging their technological, equipment and management expertise, Chinese companies are pivotal to the UAE's energy ambition, while offering Chinese solutions to global climate challenges.

"Promoting energy conservation and emissions reduction is not only a corporate social responsibility but also a shared mission for humanity," said Zhao Hui, project manager of Shanghai Electric's Dubai CSP-PV project. "Chinese enterprises will continue to drive clean energy development through multilateral collaboration, offering more possibilities for global carbon neutrality."

Hang Seng index edged 0.1% lower

Asian shares mostly lower on revived caution over future trade friction

BANGKOK, Jan 9, (AP): Asian stocks were mostly lower on Thursday as caution revives over a likely deepening of trade friction once President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

U.S. futures fell while oil prices were higher. U.S. markets will be closed Thursday to observe a National Day of Mourning for former President Jimmy Carter.

Shares fell in Tokyo after Japan reported strong wage growth for November, data that might help persuade its central bank to raise interest rates. The Nikkei 225 index dropped 0.9% to 39,605.09, while the dollar slipped against the Japanese yen. A dollar bought 158.11 yen, down from 158.36 late Wednesday.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng index edged 0.1% lower, to 19,257.56, while the Shanghai Composite index lost 0.6% to 3,211.39. The government reported that the consumer price index rose 0.1% in December from a year earlier, while wholesale or producer prices dropped 2.3%, signaling that demand remains slack in the world's second-largest economy.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 gave up 0.2% to 8,329.20.

South Korea's Kospi edged less than 0.1% higher, to 2,521.90 despite strong gains for technology companies and automakers.

Taiwan's Taiex sank 1.4% and the Sensex in India was down 0.5%. In Bangkok, the SET slipped 1.5%.

"Investors continue to navigate the unpredictable 'what if' trading landscape molded by Trump's presidency - where the initial enthusiasm for tax cuts is now overshadowed by mounting concerns over proposed tariffs and bizarre geopolitical aspirations, like purchasing Greenland or exerting more control over the Panama Canal," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary.

On Wednesday, Wall Street was steady a day after strong reports on the economy stirred up worries that inflation and interest rates may remain higher than expected. The S&P 500 rose 0.2% to 5,918.25 to recover a bit of its 1.1% slump from the day before. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 0.3% to 42,635.20, and the Nasdaq composite edged 0.1% lower to 19,478.88. The Russell 2000 index of smaller stocks fell 0.5%.

Edison International tumbled 10.2% as massive

wildfires burned in the Los Angeles area. The company's Southern California Edison utility said Wednesday it shut off power to nearly 120,000 customers in six counties over safety concerns due to high winds and the risk of wildfires.

On the winning end of Wall Street, eBay jumped 9.9% for the biggest gain in the S&P 500. It's beginning a collaboration with Meta Platforms where a pilot of select eBay listings will appear on Facebook Marketplace in the United States, Germany, and France.

The bond market which has been a bigger focus for Wall Street recently, moved in a narrow range after Fed Governor Christopher Waller said in a speech Wednesday that he still expects the central bank to ease rates further in 2025, pushing back against speculation it may already be done after cutting three times since September.

The yield on the two-year Treasury, which tends to closely track expectations for Fed action, fell to 4.27% from 4.29% late Tuesday. The yield on the 10-year Treasury, which is the centerpiece of the bond market, eased to 4.67% from 4.69% late Tuesday. It was below 3.65% in September.



People walk in front of an electronic stock board showing Japan's Nikkei index at a securities firm Thursday, Jan. 9, 2025, in Tokyo. (AP)

US job openings rise unexpectedly to 8.1 mln in November, a sign the labor market is resilient

Layoffs rose slightly in November

WASHINGTON, Jan 9, (AP): U.S. job openings rose unexpectedly in November, showing companies are still looking for workers even as the labor market has cooled overall.

Openings rose to 8.1 million in November, the most since February and up from 7.8 million in October, the Labor Department reported Tuesday. They were down from 8.9 million a year earlier and a peak of 12.2 million in March 2022 as the economy was roaring back from COVID-19 lockdowns. But they still exceed pre-pandemic levels.

Economists had expected job openings to fall slightly in November.

Layoffs rose slightly in November, and the number of people quitting their jobs fell, suggesting that Americans are less confident in their ability to find better jobs elsewhere.

Openings were up in professional and business services, a broad category that includes managerial and technical workers, and in finance and insurance. They fell in the information industry, which includes publishers and telecommunications companies.

The American labor market has cooled from the red hot hiring of 2021-2023. Employers added 180,000 jobs a



A "help wanted" sign is seen at an Allstate insurance office in Elgin, Ill., March 19, 2022. (AP)

month in 2024 through November, not bad but down from 251,000 in 2023, 377,000 in 2022 and a record 604,000 in 2021.

When the Labor Department releases December hiring numbers on Friday, they're expected to show that

companies, government agencies and nonprofit organizations added nearly 157,000 jobs last month and that the unemployment rate remained at a low 4.2%.

The numbers were volatile during the fall: In October, hurricanes and a

strike at Boeing limited job growth to just 36,000. In November, with the strike over, payrolls bounced back, growing to 227,000.

The Federal Reserve closely monitors the labor market for clues about where inflation is headed. Fast hiring

could push up wages and prices. Weakness might suggest the economy needs a jolt from lower interest rates.

Responding to inflation that hit four-decade highs two and a half years ago, the Fed raised its benchmark rate 11 times in 2022 and 2023. Inflation came down - from 9.1% in mid-2022 to 2.7% in November, allowing the Fed to start cutting rates. But progress on inflation has stalled in recent months, and year-over-year consumer price increases are stuck above the Fed's 2% target.

At its December meeting, the Fed cut its benchmark interest rate for the third time in 2024. But the central bank's policymakers signaled that they're likely to be more cautious about future rate cuts: They projected just two in 2025, down from the four they had foreseen in September.

Economists also worry that President-elect Donald Trump's proposed policies - including taxes on foreign goods and the deportation of immigrants working in the U.S. illegally - will push prices higher.

"Despite more job openings, hiring is weakening, workers are even more reluctant to quit their jobs, and layoffs are low," said Robert Frick, economist at the Navy Federal Credit Union. "It feels like a wait-and-see scenario as employers and employees alike wait for the next administration's policies."

Fed officials at meet expect slower pace of rate cuts ahead

WASHINGTON, Jan 9, (AP): Federal Reserve officials at their meeting Dec. 17-18 expected to dial back the pace of interest rate cuts this year in the face of persistently elevated inflation and the threat of widespread tariffs and other potential policy changes.

Minutes from the meeting, released after the typical three-week lag, also showed clear division among the Fed's 19 policymakers. Some expressed support for keeping the central bank's key rate unchanged, the minutes said. And a majority of the officials said the decision to cut rates was a close call.

Ultimately, the Fed choose to cut its key rate by a quarter-point to about 4.3%. One official, Cleveland Fed President Beth Hammack, dissented in favor of keeping rates unchanged.

Still, there was widespread agreement that after reducing rates for three straight meetings, it was time to undertake a more deliberate approach to their key rate. Economists said the minutes strongly suggest that Fed officials will forego a rate cut at their next meeting in January.

Fewer rate cuts will likely mean that borrowing costs for consumers and businesses - including for homes, cars, and credit cards - will remain elevated this year.

Policymakers said that the Fed "was at or near the point at which it would be appropriate to slow the pace of policy easing," the minutes said. In projections released after the meeting, Fed officials said they expect just two cuts next year, down from an earlier projection of four.

The minutes also showed that "almost all" Fed policymakers see a greater risk than before that inflation could stay higher than they expect, in part because inflation has lingered in several recent readings and because of "the likely effects of potential changes in trade and immigration policy."

Removing unpaid medical bills from credit reports could help consumers

NEW YORK, Jan 9, (AP): Lenders will no longer be able to consider unpaid medical bills as a credit history factor when they evaluate potential borrowers in the U.S. for mortgages, car loans or business loans, according to a rule the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau finalized Tuesday.

Removing medical debts from consumer credit reports is expected to increase the credit scores of millions of families by an average of 20 points, the bureau said. The CFPB says its research showed that outstanding health care claims are a poor predictor of someone's ability to repay a loan yet often are used to deny mortgage applications.

The three national credit reporting agencies - Experian, Equifax and TransUnion - said last year that they were removing medical collections under \$500 from U.S. consumer credit reports. The government agency's new rule goes further by banning all outstanding medical bills from appearing on credit reports and prohibiting lenders from using the information.

The rule is set to take effect 60 days after publication in the Federal Register, although President-elect Donald Trump has proposed sweeping changes and limits to the CFPB's regulatory reach.

Here's what to know:

The CFPB estimates the rule will remove \$49 million in medical debt from the credit reports of 15 million Americans. According to the agency, one in five Americans have at least one medical debt collection account on their credit reports, and over half of collection entries on credit reports are for medical debts.

The problem disproportionately affects people of color, the CFPB has found: 28% of Black people and 22% of Latino people in the U.S. carry medical debt versus 17% of white people. While the national credit reporting agencies voluntarily agreed to disregard medical debt below \$500, many consumers have amounts much higher than this threshold on their reports.

The CFPB says its action will give millions of consumers increased access to loans and lead to the approval of approximately 22,000 additional mortgages a year. Americans with outstanding medical bills may see their credit scores rise by an average of 20 points, according to the bureau.

The rule was also drafted to increase privacy protections and to help keep debt collectors from using the credit reporting system to coerce people into paying bills they don't owe. The CFPB has found that consumers frequently receive inaccurate bills or are asked to pay bills that should have been covered by insurance or financial assistance programs.

What's more, lenders will be barred from using information about medical devices, such as prosthetic limbs, to make them serve as collateral for a loan and subject to repossession, according to the CFPB's announcement.

Nonprofits in the healthcare space are pleased.

"This decision is great news for everyday Americans," said Carrie Joy Grimes, founder of personal finance organization WorkMoney. "Medical debt is not a reflection of being bad with money - any one of us can experience illness or injury. With this new rule, Americans will now be able

to focus less on the strain of medical debt and more on getting back on their feet."

Patricia Kelmar, health care campaigns director for the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, said the rule would help "many financially responsible families who have accumulated medical debt from unpredictable health issues, high out-of-pocket costs, insurance claim denials and billing errors."

While high medical bills are common in the US, including for individuals and households with insurance, there are ways to get relief.

First, determine whether you qualify for charity care. Federal law requires nonprofit hospitals to lower or write off bills for individuals depending on household income. To determine if you qualify, do an internet search for the hospital or health care provider along with the phrase "charity care" or "financial assistance policy." The nonprofit organization Dollar For also provides a simplified online tool for patients.

Next, appeal under the provisions of the No Surprises Act, a federal law that says insurance companies must reasonably cover any out-of-network services related to emergency and some non-emergency medical care. If you're being charged more than you're used to or expect when you receive in-network services, that bill may be illegal.

Also: Always ask for an itemized bill. Medical billing is notoriously complicated and rife with errors. An itemized bill includes the billing codes of all care received. If something is off between these codes and the care provided, contesting your bill can yield changes.

US applications for jobless claims fall to 201,000, lowest level in nearly a year

WASHINGTON, Jan 9, (AP): U.S. applications for unemployment benefits fell to their lowest level in nearly a year last week, pointing to a still healthy labor market with historically low layoffs.

The Labor Department on Wednesday said that applications for jobless benefits fell to 201,000 for the week ending January 4, down from the previous week's 211,000. This week's figure is the lowest since February of last year. The four-week average of claims, which evens out the week-to-week ups and downs, fell by 10,250 to 213,000.

The overall numbers receiving unemployment benefits for the week of December 28 rose to 1.87 million, an increase of 33,000 from the previous week. The U.S. job market has cooled from the red-hot stretch of 2021-2023 when the economy was rebounding from COVID-19 lockdowns.

Through November, employers added an average of 180,000 jobs a month in 2024, down from 251,000 in 2023, 377,000 in 2022 and a record 604,000 in 2021. Still, even the diminished job creation is solid and a sign of resilience in the face of high interest rates.

When the Labor Department releases hiring numbers for December on Friday, they're expected to show that employers added 160,000 jobs last month.

On Tuesday, the government reported that U.S. job openings rose unexpectedly in November, showing companies are still looking for workers even as the labor market has loosened. Openings rose to 8.1 million in November, the most since February and up from 7.8 million in October.

The weekly jobless claims numbers are a proxy for layoffs, and those have remained below pre-pandemic levels. The unemployment

rate is at a modest 4.2%, though that is up from a half century low 3.4% reached in 2023.

To fight inflation that hit four-decade highs two and a half years ago, the Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest rates 11 times in 2022 and 2023. Inflation came down - from 9.1% in mid-2022 to 2.7% in November, allowing the Fed to start cutting rates. But progress on inflation has stalled in recent months, and year-over-year consumer price increases are stuck above the Fed's 2% target.

In December, the Fed cut its benchmark interest rate for the third time in 2024, but the central bank's policymakers signaled that they're likely to be more cautious about future rate cuts. They projected just two in 2025, down from the four they had envisioned in September.

Business confidence drops

UK gov't bond yields hit highest levels since 2008

LONDON, Jan. 9, (Xinhua): The British government bond yields have recently risen. The yield on 10-year UK government bonds climbed to 4.78 percent on Wednesday, the highest level since 2008, 1.002 percent higher than a year ago. Meanwhile, the 30-year government bond yield rose to 5.41 percent, the highest level since 1998, 1.021 percent higher than a year earlier.

At the same time, U.S. Treasury yields have been climbing as well. On Tuesday, the yield on the 10-year

Treasury hit 4.695 percent, marking its highest level since April 2024. Some Wall Street analysts believe there is still room for it to rise, possibly nearing 5 percent.

Though partly influenced by U.S. tariff policy declarations, the rise in UK bond yields is primarily driven by domestic factors. Britain's autumn fiscal budget, announced last October, has already affected inflation trends and economic growth forecasts, contributing to the rise in bond yields.

Under the new budget plan, the British government will expand fiscal spending, putting more inflationary pressure on the economy. Since October, UK inflation has reversed its earlier downward trend and begun rising. The Office for National Statistics reported that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased to 2.3 percent in October and further to 2.6 percent in November. Market analysts expect this rise to continue, driven by increased government spending.

Uncertainty over Trump's electric vehicle policies clouds 2025 forecast for carmakers

NEW YORK, Jan 9, (AP): Electric vehicle demand is expected to keep rising this year, but uncertainty over policy changes and tariffs is clouding the forecast.

S&P Global Mobility expects global sales of 15.1 million battery electric vehicles in 2025, which would mark a 30% jump. Battery electric vehicles are expected to make up 16.7% of the market share for light vehicles.

Tesla, BYD of China, and other manufacturers face big unknowns in 2025. Donald Trump's presidency could mean big policy shifts in tax and other incentives for both electric vehicle makers and consumers. The threat of tariffs on imports and retaliatory tariffs globally, could further complicate production and sales for electric vehicles. "There's just a lot of uncertainty in the air," said Steph-

anie Brinley, associate director of auto intelligence at S&P Global Mobility. "It's not an environment where you want to necessarily go gangbusters."

In the U.S., consumers can currently claim a federal tax benefit of up to \$7,500 for certain new electric vehicles. Carmakers also benefitted from some federal support for electric vehicle production and infrastructure. It's possible for all of that to get cut under President Trump.

Trump condemned the federal tax credit for electric vehicles while campaigning for the presidency. He called it part of a "green new scam" that would hurt the auto industry. Still, the incoming administration is expected push for broader deregulation of industries, which could potentially help carmakers.

Some of the larger electric vehicle makers had a mixed 2024 even with benefits for consumers and manufacturers. Tesla sales slipped 1.1%, its first annual sales drop in more than a dozen years. Rivian's deliveries rose 2.9%.

Tariffs are another threat to the industry. Production takes place globally, with parts getting imported and exported throughout the process. Trump has threatened to tax imports from Mexico, Canada, China and elsewhere, which would likely result in retaliatory tariffs.

China is the largest market for electric vehicles, followed by the U.S. Within the U.S., Tesla is the dominant electric vehicle maker, with about 50% of the market share.

Automakers are in a wait-and-see position along with

many other industries to see whether Trump carries out the threat of rescinding tax credits and implementing tariffs.

The broader auto industry is proceeding with caution. Overall, S&P Global Mobility expects that light vehicle production will have slid 1.6% in 2024 and will fall another 0.4% in 2025.

That's a result of automakers better matching production and demand. Overall light vehicle sales are still expected to rise 1.7% in 2025.

The ongoing transition to electric vehicles also plays a role in more tempered production. Companies like Ford and General Motors are shifting production capacity to electric vehicles in some cases instead of adding more capacity.

Bank offers KD 1,000 cash gift and free Visa Signature for life

ABK announces winner of GMC Yukon in salary transfer campaign

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently announced Donia Salaheldien Mahmoud, as the winner of the GMC Yukon vehicle in the Bank's quarterly 'Transfer Your Salary!' campaign draw, held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

On this occasion, Johair Marafi, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK, said, "I would like to begin by congratulating the winner. I am very pleased to witness the great success of our campaign, reaffirmed by the noteworthy customer turnout seeking to benefit from the numerous features offered."

Upon salary transfer, ABK awards new customers an array of benefits including a cash gift of up to KD 1,000, a free-of-charge Visa Signature credit card for life.

Marafi continued, "Our salary transfer offering represents one of the Bank's most significant campaigns designed to reward customers with worthwhile benefits. It encompasses an all-inclusive package catered to suit customer needs and desires."

In addition to attracting new customers to open accounts, she also expressed ABK's commitment and eagerness to ensure the satisfaction of its existing customers. She said,

"All our initiatives are in line with the Bank's goal to sustain our position as one of the most prominent players in the market."

Marafi affirmed, "We constantly study the best possible ways to enhance our product and service offering to thank and reward our customers for their loyalty and trust. As such, the Bank will continue to develop more sought-after promotional campaigns in the near future."

Marafi concluded with an invitation to follow the Bank's social media accounts to remain up to date with the latest marketing initiatives and to benefit from the promotions offered throughout the year.



Ms. Johair Marafi, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK



Group photo during the event.

Poetry evening celebrates life, love, and relationships

WFK concludes 2024 with creative flair

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Writers' Forum Kuwait ended year 2024 with all triumph and style at the residence of Yajuvendra Chandrakar. The meeting not only witnessed the presence of most of the members but also some eminent guests who added up to the alluring evening.

Vice President of the Forum Sayeed Nazir Kadpawi presided the meeting while Ms. Sangeeta Choubhe Pankhudi was invited to be the Chief Guest. Ms. Nazneen Ali, the General Secretary convened the meeting.

The cold December evening was all filled with the warmth of creativity when unique and captivating renditions were made during the poetry session. The opening was done through Parminder Kaur's English poem presented by Mohan Singh. While it was about the realities of life, Anupama Chaturvedi's Hindi poem Budha Waqt addressed the feeling one witnesses in old age which was further reinstated by Yajuvendra Chandrakar in his poem about old age home. Kalpana Shah brought out the realities of relationship through her poem that was well appreciated. Kavita Sarvesh added humor to the evening through her poetry on Moustache in Hindi. Pankaj Tiwari and Ameeruddin Ameer's melodious rendition were as mesmerizing as ever.

Poetic diction with well-crafted thoughts was presented through their Ghazals by Ms Nazneen Ali,

Amir Diwan, Syed Muzammil Qadar and Dr Rajesh Gupta, each being while addressing varied subjects of life, love, beauty and relationships. Pankaj Pawan's Punjabi ghazal was equally meaningful.

Young talent Ishanvi Chandrakar left everyone spell bound by her rendition of poem by Ms Sangeeta Choubhe on a very sensitive subject of molestation. Guest poet Yusuf Raza's ghazal was enjoyed by all while his father Ansar Raza's poetry was recited by Ms Rukhsar Raza. Chedkani, a poem on the subject of eve teasing was recited by Afroz Alam who took the audience down the memory lane to their young days. The presence of Ms Fatima was an icing on the cake.

After a long session of Poetry, the meeting entered into the last session where the Chief Guest Ms. Sangeeta Choubhe Pankhudi admired each of the poet mentioning that a rainbow was formed by the vivid colors of poetry presented in the evening. She then presented her Hindi poem. Veteran Urdu poet Saeed Nazir Kadpawi, president of the evening gave some valuable insights about the art of writing poetry specially Ghazal that was well received by the members. He presented a short Urdu nazm showcasing the fact that impact is created by the originality of ideas and choice of words and not by the length of the poem.

The meeting concluded with Ms Nazneen Ali expressing her gratitude to the hosts and wishing everyone a happy and prosperous new year.

Babu Francis inaugurates ONCP Kuwait charity drive

ONCP Kuwait distributes New Year gifts and food kits to expat workers

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: Overseas NCP Kuwait Committee distributed kits, including New Year gift and food to expatriate workers from India and Bangladesh at Wafra farm as a part of the association's yearly social service activities to the needy people.

Prominent Kuwaiti national and farm owner Mr. Khalid Saad Tahir AlDamak attended as chief guest of program. Govt of Kerala - Loka Kerala Sabha Representative Babu Francis Olakkankil inaugurated the program followed by ONCP Kuwait Chapter National Treasurer Biju Stephan welcome speech. Vice President Sunny Miranda (Karnataka), Joint secretary Ashokan Thiruvananthapuram, Executive members Mazhar Alam (Bihar), and Abdul Aziz Calicut led the program.

General Secretary Ratheesh Varkkala thanked attendees and those who helped to make the program was success.



Photos during the event.

IMA Kuwait announces 'Transformative Quran Retreat Workshop' in January '25

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: Indian Muslim Association (IMA) Kuwait is excited to announce its much-anticipated 'Transformative Quran Retreat Workshop' set to take place on 17th and 18th January 2025 at the prestigious Rajdhani Palace, Khaitan. This enlightening event promises to unlock the hidden gems of Quranic teachings and empower attendees with practical tools for personal growth.

Event Highlights:

- Dates: 17th & 18th January 2025
- Timings: 8AM - 5PM
- Venue: Rajdhani Palace, Khaitan
- Key Topics Include:
 - Who Am I? - Understanding Your Relationship with Allah
 - Steps in the Quran for Self-Transformation
 - Quran in Times of Crisis
 - Action Plan for Personal Growth

'Techniques for saying no at work without guilt'

Experts share strategies for setting healthy work boundaries

NEW YORK, Jan 9, (AP): When Justin Stewart started his career, he juggled several jobs to make ends meet. He poured himself into his full-time role as a news show production assistant from 3 a.m. until noon. Then he rushed to the airport where he rented cars or to the big box stores where he pulled retail shifts.

Sometimes, he slept in his car between jobs. Then he was hospitalized for exhaustion and a staph infection.

"While people around me praised my hustle, I eventually paid the price," Stewart said. "The doctor looked at me and said, 'I don't know what lifestyle you're living, but you're too young to be this stressed. You're going to have to quit something.'"

So Stewart, now 36, began setting boundaries. He gave up the side jobs, deciding he could survive without extra income. If people from the news show texted him after hours, he let them know he was off-duty and where else to call.

Setting boundaries at work, and in life, can be tricky. Many people find it difficult to say no, especially to a manager. Some get a sense of satisfaction from being needed or pleasing others.

But learning to turn down a request or invitation is essential for protecting our physical and mental health, experts say. And as with any new skill, drawing boundaries gets easier with practice.

Experts in well-being and organizational behavior, along with other workers, shared strategies for setting limits.

Adding tasks to your calendar may seem counterintuitive if scaling back is the goal, but can provide more control over your time.

Bobby Dutton, the founder of event production company GBM6, uses a technique he calls "aggressive calendaring." He schedules the task he's most likely to procrastinate on, such as handling contracts and invoices, for every Monday at 2 p.m. To keep his calendar from becoming overloaded, he also books time for recurring routine tasks like making coffee, walking the dog and eating lunch.

If you're unaccustomed to saying no, you can write down what you're going to say beforehand and rehearse it. Stewart worked

on letting colleagues know when his assignment load began feeling too heavy with phrases like "Hey, this is a lot for me" or "You gave me seven stories, I think I can get four or five done."

Cara Houser, a workplace engagement coach, says you don't have to explain yourself when declining a request. You can simply say you're not available at that time, followed by "Thanks for asking, and I hope to have more capacity next time."

If the recipient of your "no" tries to argue, you can respond, "I hear you feel that way. But for me, this is what I've decided to do for that day," Houser said.

Entrepreneur Amber Krasinski grew up in a working-class environment where saying no to a boss could mean losing a paycheck. As the founder of marketing company Ivy-Hill Strategies, Krasinski worries she'll lose clients if she turns down a project. "Not yet" is her go-to phrase when one more project is too much.

"That phrase has helped me through a lot of situations," she said.

It can be tempting to agree immediately when we're asked to chip in. But there may be times when we're better off demurring. When faced with a new work request, take five minutes to assess your workload, energy level and priorities before responding, suggests Israa Nasir, a psychotherapist in New York.

Nasir says a former boss frequently texted work-related questions at 10 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. "I didn't say, 'Don't text me,'" she recalled. "I said, 'Can we check in on Fridays before the weekend? So everything that's on your mind, you can (tell me) and then I can plan my time accordingly.'"

Pay attention to the activities and interactions that leave you feeling drained or overwhelmed, Nasir said. Put those kinds of events on a "No List." The list doesn't mean you decline every time you're asked, but don't say yes right away, she advises.

Mobile devices make it easier to work from anywhere, and harder to draw boundaries. But there are ways to adjust our devices so they're less distracting.

After noticing that she checked email far too frequently on weekends, Nasir starting

moving the Gmail app from her iPhone's homepage to the second page from Friday night to Sunday night.

An email signature is another tool you can use to manage expectations, by publishing working hours or upcoming vacation schedules, said Candice Pokk, a senior consultant in organizational effectiveness at Segal Consulting.

Pokk includes a "Well Being Notice" at the bottom of her emails which reads, "Receiving this email outside normal working hours? Managing a work-life balance is unique for everyone. I have sent this email at a time that works for me. Please respond at a time that works for you."

With the popularity of online meeting software, it's easy for others to overload your calendar with invitations. Accepting every one can leave little time for other work.

Janine Pelosi, CEO of Oslo-based video technology company Neat, thinks workers should be able to leave a meeting that's not relevant to them, if it's an environment where that's accepted.

If you're unsure it's worthwhile to attend, you can request an agenda in advance, or ask what is the desired outcome, she said.

Publisher Lori Perkins, 65, was working 12 to 16 hours daily when a cancer diagnosis halted her routine. During chemotherapy, she could only muster up enough energy to put in four hours a day, and even then felt like she was working "in a vat of molasses."

After treatment, "I realized I was going to live, and then I said to myself, 'Do I want to continue doing this?'" Perkins said.

She now caps her work as owner of Riverdale Avenue Books at about 50 hours per week, and as a result can't review as many manuscripts. Instead of sending rejection letters, she tells authors to come back in three to six months when it's less hectic.

She practices saying "no" in her head and in her journal, where she also chronicles what happened after she said it. She's gained time to visit museums, friends and the theater.

"No changed my life," Perkins said. "I am a different person than I was before I really learned to embrace no."

The Conversation

Study analyzes tailored instruction offers minimal benefit to students

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

By Virginia Clinton-Lisell
University of North Dakota

Students do better when lessons are tailored to individual learning styles - but not so much that it's worth the investment of time and money. That's the main finding of a recent peer-reviewed study I co-authored.

There has been a big push to try to tailor a teacher's instruction to a student's preferred learning style. That's because some people say they are visual learners, meaning they learn and retain content best through visual aids, such as charts and pictures. Others say they are auditory learners - they need to hear the lesson. Still others may have different learning styles.

As a result, teachers may wonder whether they should invest the time and resources into matching their instruction to each student's specific learning style.

So Christine Litzinger, a graduate student in educational foundations and research, and I analyzed data from 21 studies with more than 1,700 participants from every stage of education, from elementary school to adult courses.

In each of these studies, researchers had students learn something new with instruction either matched or unmatched to their learning styles. When we analyzed their results together, we found that, overall, students with matched instruction performed slightly better on tests compared with students given unmatched instruction.

But the benefits were not enough to justify the time and money it would take to assess every student's learning style and personalize instruction. Doing so would require substantial resources, as different groups of children would need different materials. Importantly, students would be limited to certain methods of learning and would miss out on opportunities to develop skills in other styles. For example, visual learners would miss out on developing their listening skills.

Learning styles are a contentious topic in

education. On the one hand, nearly 90% of educators agree with matching instruction to students' learning styles to accommodate their diverse needs.

Education researchers like me, on the other, take a different view. While we generally agree that students have different learning needs, we tend to discourage the practice of matching instruction to learning styles because most individual studies have found no benefits to matching.

Providing matched instruction to individual students involves a lot of time and resources, since teachers need to accurately identify each student's learning style and then find or create customized materials for each student.

Multimodal instruction - in which students learn some lessons in one modality, such as text, and another lesson in a different one, such as videos - may be more efficient, though the research is not fully clear on its benefits yet. In this method, students are exposed to a variety of modalities and learn to engage with all of them. But teachers don't need to teach every lesson in different modalities to accommodate each individual student.

Multimodal instruction can also help reach students who don't have a clear, singular learning style. Many of the studies in our meta-analysis did not include these students, so it is unclear how matched instruction would work for them.

It's possible that students may learn more with matched instruction, not necessarily because that is their learning style, but rather because they have more skills in that particular modality, such as reading text versus comprehending audio. One reason they may be more skilled in one modality over another is simple preference. If a student prefers to read rather than listen to audio, they are likely to have practiced reading more than listening and are thus more skilled at it.

So the question is, are skills - even preferences - the same as learning styles? In future research, I plan to examine how skills in a particular modality relate to learning styles, disentangling these terms. (AP)

Not taking her No. 1 spot for granted

Myha'la reflects on her breakthrough year

NEW YORK, Jan 9, (AP): Myha'la is best known for playing a steely, manipulative investment banker on HBO's "Industry," so the thought of her breaking into song seems antithetical.

Yet the graduate of Carnegie Mellon's prestigious drama school says when she told friends and former acting teachers she landed a starring role in the series, they assumed it was a stage comedy or musical.

"Nobody saw this trajectory for me. Not even me," Myha'la told The Associated Press. "This has actually been sort of like a very happy accident and surprise that I have any career at all in TV/film. But I really, really love it and I think I'm more suited for it than I thought."

Although "Industry" has been around since 2020, it's this year's third season that has received the most attention. Myha'la sees this year as the cast and creators' "collective breakthrough," but it's her own work to find vulnerability in the unshakable, calculating, risk-loving Harper Stern that makes her one of The Associated Press' Breakthrough Entertainers of 2024.

Myha'la, 28, had expected and hoped to start her career in theater when she got the part in "Industry," and says she - and most of her castmates - have learned on the job. "My first time being #1 on the call sheet was



Myha'la poses for a portrait on Nov 20, 2024 in New York. (AP)

a big deal," she said. "We'd all basically just come out of school and didn't know what we were doing."

Though Harper regularly betrays friends and colleagues for personal gain, Myha'la manages to reveal her soft edges: "I don't think I could do her justice if I didn't find the humanity in her. I think, us as human beings, we hold multitudes and contradictions.

We are the definition of a contradiction and that's what makes us human. So to find that in every character I play is the most important to me."

Besides "Industry," she's acted in film with stars who have made an impression. She played Mahershalah Ali's daughter in the Netflix science-fiction drama "Leave the World Behind," with Ethan Hawke and Julia Roberts. Myha'la says she was intimidated to work with "a bunch of legends who've been doing it way longer than I have." But she was pleasantly surprised at how they embraced her. "They treated me like I was just another person in the cast, not a child, not inexperienced, not a junior. None of that," Myha'la remembered.

Roberts has become a role model after Myha'la observed how she treated everyone on set.

"She's incredibly patient. She doesn't behave like she's the icon that she is," the actor said. "A generous, respectful person who has integrity. And I really love the way people responded to her. That's ... the person I want to be. I want to come in and command a room with kindness and do my job really well."

Doing her job well landed her roles in two notable films coming next year - "Swiped," with Lily James starring as the founder of Bumble, and "They Will Kill You," with Zazie Beetz - in addition to the fourth season of "Industry."

'Most incredible wife and mother'

Prince William praises Kate on her birthday

LONDON, Jan 9, (AP): Prince William praised the strength of the Princess of Wales after a turbulent year, offering a 43rd birthday wish on social media on Thursday that described her as an incredible wife and mother.

The brief but cheerful message alluded to the past year, which was marked by illness and recovery that sidelined Kate, as she is commonly known, for extended periods. She had abdominal surgery, was diagnosed with cancer and underwent chemotherapy in the past 12 months.

"To the most incredible wife and mother," William wrote in a joint message with their three children. "The strength you've shown over the last year has been remarkable. George, Charlotte, Louis and I are so proud of you."

Birthday wishes also came via the monarchy's official media accounts, which said: "Happy Birthday to The Princess of Wales!" followed by a birthday cake emoji.

Kate is celebrating her birthday quietly at her home in Windsor, which is about 30 miles (50 kilometers) west of London.



Kate, Princess of Wales, smiles as she waits to present the trophy to Carlos Alcaraz of Spain at the men's singles final at the Wimbledon tennis championships in London, July 14, 2024. (AP)

Variety

NEW YORK: Oprah Winfrey is beginning 2025 with an old favorite. She has selected Eckhart Tolle's "A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life Purpose" for her book club, marking the first time she has chosen a publication twice.

Winfrey, who launched her club in 1996, also picked "A New Earth" in 2008 and featured it in a series of webinars she hosted with Tolle. "A New Earth" was originally released in 2005 and has sold millions of copies.

"As we welcome a new year, I wanted to revisit the book that had more effect on me than any other book by a living author has had on my perception of

how I understand my connection to the world," Winfrey said in a statement Tuesday. "As Eckhart's work continues to speak to people from all generations, this podcast conversation is an offering to hear about his groundbreaking work 'A New Earth' and allow us all to experience brand new a-ha's."

A Winfrey-Tolle video podcast discussion, held recently at a Starbucks Reserve in the Empire State Building, can be seen on Winfrey's YouTube channel and other outlets. Last month, Winfrey launched "The Oprah Podcast," a weekly series that will include book club authors. The interviews are presented in partnership with Starbucks. (AP)

BEIJING: The Jiankou Great Wall, one of the most dangerous sections of the Great Wall, will launch its first tourist route this year, opening a previously off-limits segment to the public, according to authorities in the Huairou District of Beijing, where it is located.

The route to be opened to the public is the segment between defense towers 141 and 145. Zhang Tong, an official with the Huairou Culture and Tourism Bureau, said the route was launched to showcase restoration and archaeological achievements and to guide the public in "legally visiting the Great Wall."

The Jiankou section is one of the most dangerous parts of the Great Wall, hence an attraction to daredevil hikers. Its name, "Jiankou," is derived from its aerial shape, which resembles a drawn bow. However, occasional casualties of hikers have been reported over the years.

Since 2016, the Jiankou Great Wall has been undergoing protective restoration and has not been open to the public. (Xinhua)

VIENTIANE: The Lao Food Festival 2025 will be held in Lao capital Vientiane to promote Lao food culture and is expected to attract large crowds, both local and international.

The festival is set to take place from Jan. 22 to 26, featuring more than 180 stalls offering a diverse range of traditional Lao dishes, modern Lao cuisine, and international flavors, according to Lao Economic Daily report on Wednesday.

The festival aims to preserve and promote Lao culinary culture while embracing the digital era by enabling online sales. This initiative seeks to boost income for Lao women entrepreneurs in the food sector, fostering unity and strengthening female entrepreneurs across Laos and abroad, it said.

Additionally, the event aims to establish a distinct Lao food brand, introduce Lao cuisine to international markets, and enhance its recognition at home and globally, it added.

Among the festival's highlights will be cooking competitions, food demonstrations, a food-for-health seminar, and cultural performances, including traditional Lao music and fashion shows featuring young people dressed in traditional attire. (Xinhua)

Nominations



This image released by Searchlight Pictures shows Monica Barbaro in a scene from 'A Complete Unknown.' (AP)

Many big names are snubbed

'Wicked' tops SAG Awards nominations

LOS ANGELES, Jan 9, (AP): "Wicked" topped nominations to the 31st Screen Actors Guild Awards on Wednesday, landing a leading five nominations including best ensemble, and individual nods for Cynthia Erivo, Ariana Grande and Jonathan Bailey.

Out-of-control wildfires that swept across Los Angeles and Southern California on Tuesday night forced the Screen Actors Guild to cancel its plans to announce the nominations live Wednesday morning. The nominations were instead issued by press release by SAG, which last year began a multiyear deal with Netflix to stream the awards.

The smash hit musical "Wicked" saw its Oscar chances rise with the nominations to the SAG Awards, one of the most predictive Academy Awards bellwethers. The movie's big morning - it even scored a nod for stunt ensemble - came after a celebratory night, too. The film was honored by the National Board of Review Awards in New York on Tuesday.

The other nominees for best ensemble are "Anora," "Conclave," "Emilia Pérez" and "A Complete Unknown."

It was an especially strong showing for the Bob Dylan drama "A Complete Unknown." It came away with four nominations, including Timothée Chalamet for best male actor, and supporting nods for both Edward Norton and Monica Barbaro.

The best male lead nominees were largely as expected: Adrien Brody ("The Brutalist"), Daniel Craig ("Queer"), Colman Domingo ("Sing Sing"), Ralph Fiennes ("Conclave") and Chalamet.

Coming off her rousing victory at the Golden Globes, Demi Moore was among the nominees for best female actor in a leading role for "The Substance." She was joined by Erivo, "Emilia Pérez" breakout Karla Sofia Gascón, Mikey Madison of "Anora" and Pamela Anderson for "The Last Showgirl."

That surprisingly left out some big names. Angelina Jolie ("Maria") missed out, as did Nicole Kidman ("Babygirl"). A few of the most acclaimed female actors of the year, Marianne Jean-Baptiste ("Hard Truths") and Globe winner Fernanda Torres ("I'm Still Here"), also were overlooked.

"The Last Showgirl" had more to celebrate, too, with an unexpected nomination for Jamie Lee Curtis in supporting female actor. Her fellow nominees are Barbaro, Grande, Danielle Deadwyler ("The Piano Lesson") and Zoe Saldana ("Emilia Pérez").

Jeremy Strong was nominated for his supporting performance as Roy Cohn in the Donald Trump film "The Apprentice," but his co-star, Sebastian Stan, went unmentioned for both "The Apprentice" and his Golden Globe-winning role in "A Different Man." The other nominees for best supporting male actor were Bailey,

Norton, Yura Borisov ("Anora") and the category frontrunner, Kieran Culkin ("A Real Pain").

A few widely forecast supporting performances were snubbed there, too, including Denzel Washington ("Gladiator II") and Guy Pearce ("The Brutalist").

The SAG Awards are arguably the most telling Oscar forecast there is. Their picks don't always align exactly with those of the film academy, but they often come very close to mirroring them.

The last three best ensemble winners - "Oppenheimer," "Everything Everywhere All at Once" and "CODA" - all went on to win best picture at the Academy Awards. All but one of the SAG acting winners of the last three years has also won at the Oscars. The sole exception was Lily Gladstone, who won SAG's award for female actor last year for "Killers of the Flower Moon," but the Oscar trophy went to Emma Stone ("Poor Things").

Performances

In all likelihood, the Oscar field will look a lot like the SAG nominees. While some overlooked performances might still land an Oscar nomination, any eventual Academy Award winner, including the best picture recipient, is almost surely coming from those nominated Wednesday.

That's bad news for Brady Corbet's "The Brutalist," which triumphed at the Globes but missed out on a SAG ensemble nomination. Best picture contender "Sing Sing" also came away with a single SAG nod.

In nominations also announced Wednesday, the Directors Guild favored most of the same films. For outstanding directorial achievement, it nominated Sean Baker ("Anora"), Jacques Audiard ("Emilia Pérez"), Edward Berger ("Conclave"), James Mangold ("A Complete Unknown") and Corbet ("The Brutalist"). That left out "Wicked" filmmaker Jon M. Chu, as well as "Dune: Part Two" director Denis Villeneuve. The guild also failed to nominate a female filmmaker, like "The Substance" director Coralie Fargeat.

Those nominations only further muddied the waters in a hard-to-predict best picture race. Rarely does a film win the Academy Awards' top prize without a DGA nomination. The only exceptions in recent history are "Driving Miss Daisy" (1989) and "CODA" (2022). That means that as well as "Wicked" did with the screen actors, it still can't be called an Oscar favorite.

Here's a complete list of nominees:

Movies

■ **Ensemble:** "A Complete Unknown"; "Anora"; "Conclave"; "Emilia Pérez"; "Wicked."

■ **Male actor in a leading role:** Adrien Brody, "The Brutalist"; Timothée Chalamet, "A Complete Unknown"; Daniel Craig, "Queer"; Colman Domingo, "Sing Sing"; Ralph Fiennes, "Conclave."

■ **Female actor in a leading role:** Pamela Anderson, "The Last Showgirl"; Cynthia Erivo, "Wicked"; Karla Sofia Gascón, "Emilia Pérez"; Mikey Madison, "Anora"; Demi Moore, "The Substance."

■ **Male actor in a supporting role:** Jonathan Bailey, "Wicked"; Yura Borisov, "Anora"; Kieran Culkin, "A Real Pain"; Edward Norton, "A Complete Unknown"; Jeremy Strong, "The Apprentice."

■ **Female actor in a supporting role:** Monica Barbaro, "A Complete Unknown"; Jamie Lee Curtis, "The Last Showgirl"; Danielle Deadwyler, "The Piano Lesson"; Ariana Grande, "Wicked"; Zoe Saldana, "Emilia Pérez."

■ **Stunt ensemble:** "Deadpool & Wolverine"; "Dune: Part Two"; "The Fall Guy"; "Gladiator II"; "Wicked."

Television

■ **Drama ensemble:** "Bridgerton"; "The Day of the Jackal"; "The Diplomat"; "Shogun"; "Slow Horses."

■ **Comedy ensemble:** "Abbott Elementary"; "The Bear"; "Hacks"; "Only Murders in the Building"; "Shrinking."

■ **Male actor in a drama series:** Tadanobu Asano, "Shogun"; Jeff Bridges, "The Old Man"; Gary Oldman, "Slow Horses"; Eddie Redmayne, "The Day of the Jackal"; Hiroyuki Sanada, "Shogun."

■ **Female actor in a drama series:** Kathy Bates, "Matlock"; Nicola Coughlin, "Bridgerton"; Allison Janney, "The Diplomat"; Keri Russell, "The Diplomat"; Anna Sawai, "Shogun."

■ **Male actor in a comedy series:** Adam Brody, "Nobody Wants This"; Ted Danson, "A Man on the Inside"; Harrison Ford, "Shrinking"; Martin Short, "Only Murders in the Building"; Jeremy Allen White, "The Bear."

■ **Female actor in a comedy series:** Kristen Bell, "Nobody Wants This"; Quinta Brunson, "Abbott Elementary"; Liza Colón-Zayas, "The Bear"; Ayo Edebiri, "The Bear"; Jean Smart, "Hacks."

■ **Male actor in a limited series or TV movie:** Javier Bardem, "Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story"; Colin Farrell, "The Penguin"; Richard Gadd, "Baby Reindeer"; Kevin Kline, "Disclaimer"; Andrew Scott, "Ripley."

■ **Female actor in a limited series or TV movie:** Kathy Bates, "The Great Lillian Hall"; Cate Blanchett, "Disclaimer"; Jodie Foster, "True Detective: Night Country"; Lily Gladstone, "Under the Bridge"; Jessica Gunning, "Baby Reindeer"; Cristin Milioti, "The Penguin."

■ **Stunt ensemble:** "The Boys"; "Fallout"; "House of the Dragon"; "The Penguin"; "Shogun."



Visitors take pictures with the illuminated ice structures at the Harbin Ice and Snow World in Harbin, China's Heilongjiang province on Sunday, Jan. 5. (AP)



Visitors tour by illuminated ice structures, at the Harbin Ice and Snow World in Harbin, China's Heilongjiang province on Sunday, Jan. 5. (AP)



Visitors take selfie with the illuminated ice structures at the Harbin Ice and Snow World in Harbin, China's Heilongjiang province on Sunday, Jan. 5. (AP)

Making art and fun from the ice, snow and freezing cold in China

People are making the best of the freezing weather in northeast China: Sculptors have finely chiseled ice into elaborate structures resembling landmark castles and temples, and visitors are appreciating the artwork and the excitement of ice slides and other attractions at the annual Harbin Ice and Snow World.

The ice sculpture festival is a major tourist draw for the former industrial center that still boasts of its proximity to Russia with Tsarist-era architecture found nowhere else in China.

The riverside site features dozens of giant artworks like the Taj Mahal of India, the Osaka Castle of Japan, and Beijing's own Temple of Heaven, all carved from clear blocks of ice.

"The ice sculpture looks exactly the same (as the Temple of the Heaven), said Jin Yiting, who was visiting with her parents from Shanghai to enjoy the wintry contrast with central and southern China. "I touched the ice cube and its texture is very good. It's translucent. It looks elegant when the sunlight passes through."

Another visitor, Song Shukun, who was pushing his girlfriend in a doughnut-shaped sled, said the ice blocks offered insights into how such structures are assembled.

"We can see the internal structure of the ice. The way they are arrayed and the way they touch remind me of the bricks of the Great Wall (of China)," Song said. (AP)

The main festival covers 1 square kilometer (.6 square miles) of the city, with the sculptures using 13,000 cubic meters (460,000 cubic feet) of ice blocks cut mainly from the adjacent Songhua River. There are satellite parks elsewhere in Harbin.

"When I come here seeing all the ice sculptures and snow, it's just so wow," said Gu Junyan of Henan province which sees little snow.

Ice slides, with the longest ones reaching 521 meters (1,710 feet), are a key attraction, with visitors waiting almost an hour to get their chance. "At the beginning it was kind of steady. When I slipped off the slope, the wind was strong and I felt cold. It was very exciting," said Gong Caiyun, who just came down from the slides. (AP)

Culture



The Bajau people: A symbol of cultural diversity and harmony with nature in Eastern Malaysia.

Bajau ... Echoes of culture on endless seas

In the water of Malaysia's Sabah state, the Bajau people, known as "Sea Nomads" embody a life of harmony with nature, with wooden boats and stilt houses built over water.

Despite their modest lifestyle, Bajau people preserve rich culture and heritage passed down through generations.

Fishing and free diving are central to the Bajau way of life, as they possess extraordinary skills often diving up to 20 meters deep without breathing equipment.

Moving between islands is not merely a journey but a lifestyle reflecting their deep-rooted bond with the ocean, which serves as their playground,

livelihood, and sanctuary.

The Bajau hold vast maritime knowledge and wisdom, passed orally through generations, they master navigation and survival techniques, even under the harshest conditions, making the sea more than just a source of income.

However, they face significant challenges such as illiteracy, lack of education, and poverty due to their nomadic lifestyle, leaving their future uncertain and dependent on their ability to adapt to social and economic changes.

Their simple yet culturally and environmentally rich sea-based lifestyle makes them an icon of harmony between land and water. (KUNA)

Theater

Sing-alongs stir up debate on behavior

Movie theater etiquette in flux

WASHINGTON, Jan 9, (AP): As movie theaters worked to entice Americans back into seats after COVID-19 lockdowns and labor strikes, the industry marketed blockbuster films like "Wicked" and the dueling releases of "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" as no less than cultural events.

But when certain movies become "events" unto themselves, sometimes different behavior accompanies them.

During the theatrical run of "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour" last fall, fans danced and belted lyrics in the theaters, sharing their glee on social media. Last year, fans at early screenings of "Wicked" did the same, to the chagrin of other moviegoers. One video of a woman dressed as Glinda the Good Witch racked up over a million views on TikTok and beyond for announcing to her theater, "I'm here to hear Cynthia and Ariana sing, not you."

After a period of growing accustomed to watching movies only from the comforts of home, Americans have been slowly returning to theaters following COVID-19 lockdowns. Along the way, as attendance spikes, the question of how to behave as part of a moviegoing audience has become a topic of passionate online debate.

When asked whether it's appropriate for fans to sing in the theater, "Wicked" star Cynthia Erivo, who plays Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West, told NBC that she thinks the practice is "wonderful" and that "it's time for everyone else to join in." Dwayne Johnson, who stars as Maui in "Moana 2," told the BBC that theatergoers who have spent their "hard earned money for a ticket" should be able to sing.

Online backlash was swift, with one user retorting, "I paid my hard-earned money for a ticket too and I don't wanna hear y'all attempting to sing so what now."

It all circles around two questions that, like anything else in the culture, are constantly evolving: When you're seeing a movie in a theater, how should you behave? And when can a viewer become a participant?

Actual in-person disruptions at movie theaters appear minimal. Representatives from Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, a prominent chain known for diverse film screenings and food service, and ACX Cinemas, a family-owned chain based in the Midwest, both say they've experienced nothing major.

Instinct

The instinct to join in is hardly new. "Sing-along screenings have been a principal part of moviegoing going back over 100 years," says Ross Melnick, a professor of film and media studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. But singing, he says, typically occurs in "designated sing-along environments where it is clear that there's a collective performance of the audience."

According to Esther Morgan-Ellis, author of "Everybody Sing!: Community Singing in the American Picture Palace," American film screenings in the late 1920s and early 1930s were often preceded by sing-alongs. An organist would perform three or four popular songs and audiences were encouraged to join in, often guided by lyrics projected onto the screen. In other cases, the sing-along would be coupled with a short

film that included lyrics and a bouncing, on-screen ball that would hop across the words to help audiences keep tempo.

While singing has long been common, other behaviors were once hotly debated. When movies were a new medium, Americans quarreled over not just the content of the films themselves but the venue at which people viewed them. Was the dark room a hotbed for vice and immoral behavior? Should films be screened with the lights turned up? Should talking be allowed or forbidden? And, of course, there was segregation; movie theaters were not fully integrated until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

"We have never been a monolithic society. Not ever, and increasingly so now," Melnick says. "You can tell so much about America by looking at what's going on in its movie theaters."

In 1944, MGM, the film studio that had produced "The Wizard of Oz" just five years prior, released a short film titled "Movie Pests" that warned moviegoers against engaging in disruptive behavior. Some of the film's concerns - sticking gum under chairs, removing shoes - are still considered no-gos today. But the short also showcased etiquette of another era, such as removing jackets in the lobby and using the hat rack under your chair.

Today, acts of participation can be more ad hoc. One Ariana Grande fan account started an online firestorm after posting on X that users should share photos they'd taken of their favorite scenes from "Wicked." While some commented and posted their own photos, others responded with snarky remarks. One clap-back came from the

Alamo Drafthouse account, which retorted, "Or, don't do that." The theater chain has a no-talking or texting policy, and violators are ejected after one warning.

Chaya Rosenthal, Alamo Drafthouse's chief marketing officer, said the policy "is all about respect - respecting the films, the filmmakers and fellow moviegoers who paid for a ticket who deserve an immersive experience."

To allow visitors to choose their preferred viewing experience, theaters have offered special sing-along screenings of "Wicked." The Main Cinema in Minneapolis declared screenings on Mondays (and "Mondays only") as singing-friendly. Universal Pictures, which produced "Wicked," began holding special sing-along screenings of the film starting on Christmas Day.

When fans of Taylor Swift caused a ruckus in 2023 by dancing and singing along during screenings of "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour," Michael Barstow, the executive vice president of ACX Cinemas, saw the hoopla not as a nuisance but part of the draw.

"The reason why they paid money and went and saw that inside movie theaters was to have a dance party with other people," Barstow says. "That's something we should lean into and embrace and try not to be too much of the fun police in those auditoriums."

To draw people back to the theater, movie distributors and theater owners have expanded the types of experiences they offer. ACX Cinemas hired actors to dress as characters from "Wicked" and "Moana" to take photos with visitors and hosted a themed brunch at its affiliate restaurant.

Media

Pursuit of truth?

Meta ends fact-checking: What it means to media

NEW YORK, Jan 9, (AP): "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts," the late New York Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan memorably wrote four decades ago.

That seems like a simpler time - especially when you consider Meta's decision to end a fact-checking program on social media apps Facebook, Instagram and Threads and what the ramifications might be for an industry built to bring clarity and to seek truth itself.

Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg's announcement this week was widely seen in news verification circles as a genuflection to president-elect Donald Trump, whose first term in office popularized the phrase "alternative facts."

Meta is replacing its fact-checking system with a "community notes" system reminiscent of X, where it depends on users to correct misinformation on its platforms. In a way, that harkens back to "he said-she said" journalism, or the view of some political debate moderators that it should be the role of opponents, not journalists, to point out falsehoods. It also hints at something else: the notion that the loudest voices and the best-told stories can win the day.

The moment is a crossroads for the fact-checking industry, which will see its influence sharply curtailed when Trump takes office for his second term.

"In the short term, this is bad news for people who want to go on social media to find trustworthy and accurate information," said Angie Drobnic Holan, director of the International Fact-Checking Network. Her organization started in 2015 with about 50 members and now has 170, some of whom face staff cuts and potential closure because of Meta's move.

"In the long term," she said, "I think it's very uncertain what this will all mean."

Fact-checking is an odd industry, particularly when you consider that it's a function of all journalism. The concept bubbled up about three decades ago in part to counter "he said-she said" stories and monitor claims in political ads. The organization FactCheck.org, whose primary aim was to help reporters, started in 2003 and the more public-facing PolitiFact four years later.

Truth

PolitiFact, started by then-Tampa Bay Times Washington bureau chief Bill Adair in 2007, won a Pulitzer Prize for its 2008 campaign coverage. It called out politicians for bending or breaking the truth in ways often difficult for reporters who were protective of the sources whose voices populated their stories.

By 2012, fact-checkers were under attack, primarily by Republicans convinced many were biased and researched voting records to try and prove the point, said Adair, now a Duke University professor. Trump, he said, "sped up a trend that had already begun."

Some conservative suspicion of fact-checkers has been warranted because of mistakes that have been made, although there were some Republicans who uttered falsehoods and just didn't like being called out for it, said Steve Hayes, CEO and editor of the center-right site The Dispatch.

"The people who practice fact-checking are in some ways saying, 'We are the arbiter of truth,

period," Hayes said. "And anytime you do this, it invites scrutiny on the work that you do."

Labeling systems largely didn't help, either. Giving a misstatement the label of "pants on fire," as some fact-checkers have, may be a catchy way of attracting attention but also fostered resentment.

Holan resists the view that fact-checkers have been biased in their work: "That attack line comes from those who feel they should be able to exaggerate and lie without rebuttal or contradiction."

GOP suspicion still quickly took root. Journalism's Poynter Institute, in a survey taken in 2019, found that 70% of Republicans thought the work of fact-checkers was one-sided. Roughly the same percentage of Democrats thought they were fair. Poynter hasn't asked the same question since. Yet last year, Poynter found that 52% of Americans say they generally find it difficult to determine whether what they're reading about elections is true or not.

In a column Wednesday on the conservative watchdog site NewsBusters.org, Tim Graham wrote that during the first nine months of 2024, PolitiFact criticized Republican officials for delivering "mostly false" facts 88 times compared to 31 times for Democrats. To Graham, this proves that the idea the site is independent or nonpartisan is laughable.

But is that bias? Or is it checking facts?

Adair used to be reluctant to say what is now the title of his new book: "Beyond the Big Lie: The Epidemic of Political Lying, Why Republicans Do it More, and How it Could Burn Down Our Democracy." He's not hesitant anymore.

Liar

"Trump is unmatched as a liar in American politics," Adair said. "I'm not the first to say that. I think he has capitalized on the fact that there has been this pushback on fact-checkers, and showed other politicians that you can get away with lying, so go ahead and do that."

Tension about fact-checking played out during the recent presidential campaign, when Trump's team was furious with ABC News for calling attention to false statements by the former president during his only debate with Democrat Kamala Harris.

Trump's second victory has changed the equation at Meta. Already, X has curtailed its independent fact-checking under owner Elon Musk, a Trump ally. The moves are significant because it removes fact-checking from venues where many users might not otherwise be exposed to it.

On its own, fact-checking "doesn't reach those exposed to misinformation," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson of the University of Pennsylvania, who started FactCheck.org. "It tends to reach audiences that were already knowledgeable and wary."

On social media, fact-checking also became part of the algorithms that drove information to people, or away from them. Material labeled as false would often be downgraded so it received less exposure. To Republicans who have criticized Big Tech, that amounted to censorship. Yet to Jamieson, successful fact-checking is not censorship - "it's the process of arguing."

Jamieson expressed some optimism that other smart social media users will step up to prevent the dangerous spread of falsehoods. But for fact-checking as it is today to continue to thrive and, even, exist as a journalistic endeavor, Adair said it will likely take influential Republican figures to publicly stand up for the importance of truth.



Zuckerberg

KUNA Photo

Decluttering inbox helps keep hackers out

One tech tip: Start the new year with a clean inbox

By Kelvin Chan

LONDON, Jan 9, (AP): The new year is always a good time to make a fresh start - including with your email inbox. To kick off 2025 with a clean slate, why not clear out all those unnecessary and unwanted messages?

If you're anything like me, you'll have piles of messages that have been accumulating in your inbox: receipts, bank and credit card statements, mobile phone bills, plane tickets, restaurant bookings, reminders, security warnings, spam and more.

Mixed in with all that administrative detritus might be some personal missives from friends and family that are worth keeping.

There are several reasons to purge all that digital clutter. For one, it cuts the risk in case of a data breach. If hackers somehow gain access to your email, they won't have any personal or financial info like credit card details to pilfer.

A decluttered inbox also helps boost productivity and focus because it's easier to find important messages if you don't have to sift through reams of irrelevant ones.

Some productivity proponents advocate inbox zero, a practice that requires dealing with each email that comes

in so that by the end of the day your inbox is empty.

But who has the time and energy for that? If you're busy, it's easier to just deal with the messages that need immediate attention and ignore the rest. That is, until the backlog becomes too big.

Here are some tricks to tame your inbox by culling unwanted emails from important ones:

Ditch the attachments

Email accounts used to have limited storage space, say a gigabyte or two at most, which meant that messages with big attachments took up lots of space. Nowadays, email comes with plenty of free storage but it's still good practice to clear out oversized messages because they tend to build up over time. Do you really need to keep all those high-resolution photos of a forgotten friend's grandchildren?

In Microsoft Outlook, click on the "Size" column or button to float the biggest messages to the top, where you can go through and delete them. Outlook also lets users sort by attachment so that messages with added files show at the top. If you want to save the message itself, right click on the attachment to remove it.

In Gmail, go to the search settings to filter out mes-

sages that are "greater than" a certain size. Start at, say, 20 megabytes, and then gradually reduce the number.

Sort it

Emails from frequent automated senders, such as newsletters and mailing lists, can take up a lot of space in your inbox. Or perhaps you get a lot of security notifications from your bank that might be important in the moment but quickly become outdated.

It's often too tedious to delete them individually so filter your inbox by sender to delete them as a group. In Outlook click the "From" column or button. In Gmail or Yahoo mail, use the search bar to look for the sender's email address.

Combine this with another search trick that narrows down the date range to filter out all those old emails that you never got around to deleting. In Outlook or Gmail, you can set a date range to capture emails from, for example, 2010 to 2017, so that you can get rid of, say, all those utility bills you don't need anymore.

Keywords

Emails from mailing lists tend to include certain words or language that makes it a bit easier to filter them out. One such obvious term is "unsubscribe." Searching for a word like that, which wouldn't normally be used in emails writ-

ten by humans, will identify all the newsletters for easy deletion.

Carbon copy trick

Copying everyone onto an email chain could be viewed as polite and courteous - or annoying, depending on whether the message topic is relevant to you. Sure, it's a good idea to CC everyone in the office about an important policy that applies to all staff but maybe not about a meeting about Bring Your Child to Work Day if you don't have kids.

In Outlook there's a hack to filter out all those emails where you're not the main recipient. Go to the Home tab, click "Rules," and then "Create" a rule. Go to Advanced Options, and tick "where my name is in the cc box." For the next step, you can tick the box to move it to a folder, or even permanently delete it if you're feeling confident.

Gmail users can do something similar with the search function. Type cc: and your email address.

The nuclear option

Perhaps you've tried out all these various hacks and whittled down your backlog but still have many more that you haven't gone through. Then it could be time to consider the nuclear option: delete everything.



A Palestinian child with cancer waits to leave for treatment abroad at the Nasser Medical Hospital in the southern Gaza Strip city of Khan Younis, on June 27, 2024. (Xinhua)

Kids seek treatment abroad

Gaza mothers bid tearful goodbye to ailing children

GAZA, Jan 9, (Xinhua): "It was as if my soul had been ripped from my body, and I was left to die forever," said Abeer Abu Yousef, a mother of four, as she described the anguish of sending her child abroad for medical treatment without her.

The 40-year-old Palestinian woman told Xinhua that her son Abdullah has been plagued by kidney failure for a decade. However, Israeli attacks on hospitals in the Gaza Strip have severely limited his access to dialysis treatment, leading to a further deterioration of his health condition.

Abeer finally held on to a glimmer of hope when the Gaza-based health authorities informed her that her child could travel to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for treatment.

Abdullah was one of 45 patients who were allowed to leave Gaza through the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing on Tuesday for medical treatment in the UAE, according to local health officials. They noted the evacuation was coordinated with the World Health Organization.

However, seeking medical treatment abroad came with increasingly extensive security checks imposed by Israeli authorities amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza.

Although uninvolved in "any political or military activities," Abeer failed to get permission to travel with her son after a security check. Left with no other option, she sent her 13-year-old

daughter to attend Abdullah abroad.

"My daughter is young and doesn't know what her brother needs, and I feel sorry for her because she has to take responsibility for her brother, but we have no other choice ... I'm afraid for both, and I hope they find someone to care for them," she said.

The heartbreaking predicament was shared by Kamla Abu Kwaik, another mother who was forced to let her child, Fayeze, travel alone for treatment of his blood cancer.

"The Israeli authorities have rejected more than once requests from me and my husband to accompany our son abroad for treatment, so his grandmother traveled with him," the 39-year-old mother of four told Xinhua.

"I do not know how to spend the period when Fayeze will be receiving treatment away from me," she said in a choked voice. "Life has no color, and food has no taste, and I am counting the days waiting for my son to return to my arms."

Israel has been conducting a large-scale offensive in Gaza in retaliation for a rampage by Hamas militants through the southern Israeli border on Oct. 7, 2023, during which about 1,200 Israelis were killed and around 250 taken hostage.

The offensive has caused widespread destruction in its wake, posing significant danger to tens of thousands of civilians in Gaza, especially children and patients.

Text programs and medication help

Planning to quit vaping this year: Here's what experts recommend

By Jamie Hartmann-Boyce, UMass Amherst; Ailsa R Butler and Nicola Lindson, University of Oxford

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

Lots of people who vape want to quit, but there's very little guidance on how best to do so.

In the US, recent reports estimate that 5.9% of youth and 4.5% of adults currently vape. This proportion varies worldwide, however. In Britain, an estimated 7.8% of youth and 11% of adults vape. Vaping nicotine is addictive, and more and more research is being done to find out how best to quit.

On Jan. 8, 2025, a team of specialists on tobacco use and health policy published a report that draws together the available scientific evidence on how best to support people to quit vaping nicotine. The Conversation asked health policy professor Jamie Hartmann-Boyce from UMass Amherst and tobacco control researchers Ailsa Butler and Nicola Lindson from the University of Oxford - who all authored the report - to explain its key takeaways.

"Cochrane reviews" like this one are often considered the gold standard in evidence. They bring together all the available studies in a certain area and assess their results and how trustworthy they are. They are used by clinicians and policymakers worldwide.

Our report focuses on strategies for helping people stay vape-free for six months or longer.

We found that text message-based interventions may help young people to stop vaping nicotine. These programs typically provide encouragement, support and practical advice on quitting, delivered directly to people's cellphones.

All the evidence on these programs came from one text message-based program in particular, called This Is Quitting. People can sign up to this program, which will then send them daily automated, interactive text messages supporting them in quitting.

The length of the program depends on the individual. So far, studies have tested this intervention only in adolescents and young adults. More evidence is needed to see whether these



In this April 23, 2014 file photo, a man smokes an electronic cigarette in Chicago. (AP)

programs work in older adults and whether other text-messaging programs work as well.

Another promising approach for quitting vaping that we identified through the study is the drug varenicline, marketed as Chantix in the U.S. and some other countries. This is a pill that is available only with a prescription and that numerous studies have shown is effective for quitting smoking. Varenicline works by blocking the "rewarding" effects of nicotine. More evidence is needed to understand how effective the drug is for quitting vaping and whether it has any serious side effects when used for this purpose.

Intervention

Varenicline appeared to double the chances of successfully quitting, compared with people receiving no medication for quitting. The text-message intervention appeared to increase the chances of successfully quitting vaping by about 30%.

These were the only two strategies for which there is sufficient evidence that they can help people quit for six months or more, but more studies are underway.

For people who smoke, evidence shows that switching to nicotine vaping can improve their health and help them stay smoke-free.

However, though less harmful than smoking, nicotine vaping is likely to cause more harm than not vaping or smoking.

People who've used vaping to quit smoking are advised to ultimately quit vaping, too. There are also lots of people who vape nicotine who've never smoked - for them, vaping nicotine may be harmful.

Many people who want to quit vaping also want to save money and be addiction-free.

When it comes to pinning down the health harms of vaping nicotine, it's impossible to make sweeping statements. The risks of vaping vary a lot, depending on the device type and on what the liquid within the vape contains.

People who vape should make sure they are using products that have been regulated and tested - in the U.S., for example, the Food and Drug Administration has authorized marketing of some nicotine vaping products as appropriate for the protection of public health.

Vaping liquids with substances other than nicotine, such as cannabis or opioids, comes with very different risks than vaping nicotine.

It's hard to make firm recommendations on how to quit vaping nicotine because researchers like us don't yet have enough evidence. (AP)

Cholera shots

Five key risks for respiratory virus

NEW YORK, Jan 9, (Xinhua): Respiratory viruses impact everyone differently - some may miss a few days of work, while others face a long recovery, reported USA Today on Wednesday, adding certain risk factors can make people more vulnerable to getting very sick from COVID-19, flu and RSV.

"To stay healthy, people at high risk and their loved ones should take precautions, whether they're an active senior staying up to date on their shots or a pregnant person getting vaccinated to protect their unborn baby. Vaccines are your best defense against getting very sick," noted the report.

There are five key risk factors that one has to know: age; chronic conditions such as heart and lung disease, obesity, asthma, diabetes and kidney disease; weakened immune function; pregnancy; and vaccination status, according to the report.

"While millions of Americans get sick with respiratory viruses each year, vaccines can help keep you from being among the hundreds of thousands who need hospital care because of serious illness. Vaccines help reduce the risk of severe illness from COVID-19, flu and RSV, protecting both high-risk individuals and entire communities," it noted.

Cholera: A cholera vaccination campaign targeting 191,153 people has started in a northern Zambian district following fresh outbreaks.

According to state media reports on Wednesday, the cholera vaccination campaign in Nakonde district began Tuesday, targeting those aged one and above, with 200,000 doses received, said District Health Director Philip Munkonge.

"We are hopeful that the administration of the vaccine will be successful so that people can get immunity from contracting the disease," Munkonge was quoted by the Zambia Daily Mail as saying.

Sugar: Across the world, the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is responsible for about 340,000 deaths each year from Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, according to a study published earlier this week.

The study, in the journal Nature, also found that sugary drinks were linked to 2.2 million additional cases of Type 2 diabetes and 1.2 million cases of cardiovascular disease in 2020.

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Afghanistan hires Younis Khan as team mentor for Champions Trophy

Pakistan relocates tri-series to Lahore and Karachi as it preps to host Champions Trophy

ISLAMABAD, Jan 9, (AP) — The Pakistan Cricket Board has relocated next month's tri-series to renovated stadiums in Lahore and Karachi as it prepares to host the Champions Trophy.

The four-match tri-series, featuring Pakistan, South Africa and New Zealand, starts Feb. 8. The PCB had initially planned to host it in Multan.

"Given the advanced stage of preparations at the Gaddafi Stadium (in Lahore) and the National Bank Stadium (in Karachi), the PCB has decided to relocate the upcoming tri-nation ODI series to these two venues," the PCB said in a statement on Wednesday.

The PCB has spent millions of dollars on the renovation and upgrade of stadiums in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi for the Champions Trophy — its first major ICC tournament in 29 years.

The capacity of Gaddafi Stadium has been increased to 35,000 with two giant digital replay screens also scheduled to be installed by next week. New player

and hospitality enclosures have been built, which the PCB says will be operational by Jan. 25.

At Karachi's National Bank Stadium, new player and officials' hospitality enclosures have been constructed, as well as 5,000 new seats.

Work at the Pindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi, the third venue for the Champions Trophy, has included installing 10,000 new seats. The PCB said more than "250 workers (are) laboring day and night to meet the Jan. 25 deadline" for renovation work.

"The PCB is confident that the upgrades will elevate the fan experience and uphold Pakistan's reputation as a premier cricketing destination," the PCB said.

The Champions Trophy begins in Karachi on Feb. 19, with India playing all its matches in Dubai.

Pakistan will host 10 group matches and possibly the final at Lahore, if India doesn't qualify for it. India is in Group A with Pakistan, New Zealand and Bangladesh. Group B comprises England, Australia, South

Africa and Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has hired former Pakistan captain Younis Khan as a mentor for its men's cricket team at next month's Champions Trophy in Pakistan.

The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) said in a statement on Wednesday that the 47-year-old batting great will join the team in Pakistan ahead of the Champions Trophy and will stay with Afghanistan at the tournament.

Younis, who played 118 tests, 265 ODIs and 25 T20s for Pakistan, retired from international cricket in 2017 and briefly worked with the national team as batting coach in 2021 before quitting after differences with the Pakistan Cricket Board.

Afghanistan is in Group B with England, Australia and South Africa. It will play its first match against South Africa at Karachi on Feb. 21.



Pakistan's Saud Shakeel plays a shot while South Africa's Kyle Verreynne looks on during the fourth day of the second test match between South Africa and Pakistan in Cape Town, South Africa. (AP)



Cleveland Cavaliers center Jarrett Allen (31) reaches for a rebound with Oklahoma City Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (2) in the second half of an NBA basketball game in Cleveland. (AP)

Cavaliers halt Thunder's momentum

Pacers surge past Bulls with Bryant's season-best performance

INDIANAPOLIS, Jan 9, (AP) — Pascal Siakam scored 26 points, Thomas Bryant added a season-high 22 and two-time All-Star Tyrese Haliburton had 16 points and 13 assists in the Indiana Pacers' 129-113 victory over the Chicago Bulls on Wednesday night.

Siakam made 11 of 17 shots from the field to help Indiana win its fourth straight, all by 10 or more points. Bryant had eight rebounds as the Pacers continued climbing the Eastern Conference standing with their 10 win in 13 games.

Zach LaVine led the Bulls with 31 points. Coby White had 19 points and five assists as Chicago lost for the first time in three games and just the second time in six.

Indiana led 36-18 early in the second quarter. Chicago never got within single digits again.

The Pacers led by 34 in the third quarter. Chicago cut the deficit to 14 several times in the fourth quarter.

Cavaliers 129, Thunder 122

In Cleveland, Jarrett Allen scored 25 points, Evan Mobley added 21 and Cleveland ended Oklahoma City's 15-game winning streak by beating the Thunder in a marquee meeting between the NBA's top two teams.

The Cavs extended their winning streak to 11, improved the league's best record to 32-4 - 11-0 against the West - and moved to 19-1 at home. They did it on an off night for leading scorer Donovan Mitchell, who had just 11 points on 3 of 16 shooting.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points and Jalen Williams had 25 for the Thunder in their first loss since Dec. 1.

While it's only January and there's a lot of basketball ahead, the game's intensity had the all vibes of a Finals matchup in June. There were 30 lead changes and neither team led by more than nine.

76ers 109, Wizards 103

Philadelphia's Tyrese Maxey scored the go-ahead basket with 23.7 seconds left and finished with 29 points to lead



Denver Nuggets center DeAndre Jordan, left, fouls Los Angeles Clippers guard Norman Powell as he drives the lane in the second half of an NBA basketball game in Denver. (AP)

Philadelphia to a win over Washington.

Guerschon Yabusele scored 21 points and blocked a potential tying layup with 14 seconds left to preserve the win for the Sixers.

Joel Embiid, Paul George, Kyle Lowry and Andre Drummond all sat out for Philadelphia while Washington played without leading scorer Jordan Poole and Malcolm Brogdon.

With so many key starters out and both teams well under .500, there was a pre-season vibe at the Wells Fargo Center until the Wizards made a serious run in the fourth.

Knicks 112, Raptors 98

In New York, Karl-Anthony Towns had 27 points and 13 rebounds, OG Anunoby scored 27 points, and New York beat Toronto.

Josh Hart added 21 points and 11 rebounds while Jalen Brunson had 13 points for the Knicks, who snapped a three-game losing streak that followed nine consecutive victories.

Towns shot 9 for 14 from the field, including 3 for 3 on 3-pointers, in 34 minutes after missing Monday's loss against Orlando due to patellar tendinopathy in his right knee.

Immanuel Quickley scored 22 points

against his former team and Scottie Barnes had 18 for the Raptors, who have lost two straight and 14 of 15.

Pistons 113, Nets 98

In New York, Malik Beasley scored 23 points, Cade Cunningham had 13 points, five assists and five rebounds, and Detroit won their fifth straight game, over Brooklyn.

Detroit's bench outscored Brooklyn's 50-20, led by reserves Simone Fontecchio with 17 points and Marcus Sasser, who added 15 points. Detroit has won eight of its last nine games to climb above .500 at 19-18.

Noah Clowney finished with a game-high 29 points, and Tyrese Martin scored 12 points and had 10 rebounds for the Nets, who dropped their third straight overall and seventh in a row at Barclays Center.

Trail Blazers 119, Pelicans 100

In New Orleans, Deni Avdija scored 26 points, Shaedon Sharpe added 21 points and Portland led wire to wire in a victory over struggling New Orleans.

New Orleans played without power forward Zion Williamson, who was held out as a precaution after coming back from a left hamstring strain a night earlier. Brandon Ingram (left an-

kle) missed his 14th straight game.

Anfernee Simons scored 17 points and Toumani Camara 15 for Portland, which led 75-42 at halftime and cruised from there. Deandre Ayton scored 11 points and grabbed 13 rebounds for the Blazers, who shot 54.5% (48 of 88).

CJ McCollum scored 23 points and Dejounte Murray 20 for New Orleans, which has lost 22 of its last 25 games.

Nuggets 126, Clippers 103

In Denver, Jamal Murray had 21 points and nine assists, Russell Westbrook added 19 points and eight assists and Denver beat Los Angeles in a matchup of short-handed teams.

Clippers forward Kawhi Leonard was not available after he flew back to Los Angeles before the game to help his family deal with the wildfires.

Nuggets center Nikola Jokic was out for the second straight game due to an illness. Denver is 2-3 without him this season.

Norman Powell scored 30 points to finish with a 27.6 average in the Clippers' four games against the Nuggets. James Harden had 16 points and Ivica Zubac added 10.

Bucks 121, Spurs 105

In Milwaukee, Damian Lillard had 26 points and eight assists, Giannis Antetokounmpo had 25 points, 16 rebounds and eight assists, and Milwaukee beat San Antonio.

Brook Lopez scored 22 points, including 17 in the first half, and AJ Green and Gary Trent each added 14 as the Bucks won their second consecutive game after losing four of five.

Keldon Johnson scored 24 points to lead the Spurs. Chris Paul added 18 points, Harrison Barnes had 14 and Devin Vassell 11. Victor Wembanyama had 10 points, 10 rebounds and three blocks.

With the score tied at 33 early in the second quarter, the Bucks went on a 32-13 run to close the first half, led by the 3-point shooting of Green, Lopez and Lillard. The Spurs opened the second half on a 16-5 run to pull within 10 and Paul's third 3-pointer of the quarter pulled San Antonio within eight. However, Milwaukee pushed the lead back to 13 by the end of the third quarter.

The Bucks led by 26 in the fourth. Milwaukee shot 19 for 42 on 3s.

Squabble grows

US gov't holds back '24 funding from world anti-doping watchdog WADA

WASHINGTON, Jan 9, (AP) — The U.S. government did not pay the more than \$3.6 million due to the World Anti-Doping Agency in 2024, making good on a long-running threat anchored in unhappiness with the global watchdog's handling of cases involving Chinese swimmers and others.

Those funds, normally distributed by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, represent about 6% of WADA's annual budget.

WADA statutes say representatives of countries that don't pay are not eligible to sit on the agency's top decision-making panels. U.S. drug czar Rahul Gupta is listed as a member of the WADA executive committee.

Gupta's office did not immediately respond to requests from The Associated Press for comment.

When Gupta directed his office to send the balance of a yearly contribution in 2022, he did so with reservations, along with a letter saying the U.S. absence at the time from key policymaking positions was "a sorry state of affairs." Half of WADA's budget is covered by the International Olympic Committee, with the other half covered by governments across the world, which receive 50% of the spots on key WADA governing committees.

The U.S. contribution is double that of Canada, the home country for WADA that puts in the second most money among the more than 180 countries that contribute.

The funding fight has been going on for at least the last six years. Dissatisfied over the handling of the Russian doping scandal, the first Trump White House started asking for reforms with the potential of tying them to its annual payment. More recently, WADA's handling of cases involving 23 Chinese swimmers has been a focal point of

criticism. A government study that came out in 2020 concluded Americans didn't get their money's worth from the contribution. Shortly after, Congress gave the ONDCP discretion to withhold future funding.

In between, tensions have grown between WADA, the U.S. and the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, which runs the drug-fighting program in the United States.

"Unfortunately, the current WADA leaders left the U.S. with no other option after failing to deliver on several very reasonable requests, such as an independent audit of WADA's operations" in the wake of the Chinese doping saga, USADA CEO Travis Tygart said.

WADA, meanwhile, has chafed at the Rodchenkov Act, a law that allows the U.S. to prosecute people of any nationality involved in doping conspiracies. That bill was signed by Donald Trump at the end of his first term as president. The IOC suggested last year that investigations the law permitted could cost the U.S. a chance to host the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City in 2034.

Just as some of that rhetoric died down comes the news that the U.S. decided to stiff WADA on its 2024 obligation.

And all of it comes against the backdrop of the United States preparing to play a large role in hosting international events. The World Cup arrives in the country next year, followed by the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.

"Now is the time to get WADA right to ensure these competitions on U.S. soil are clean, safe, and a pageantry of fair competition in which we can all have faith and confidence," Tygart said.

He said WADA rules dictate that the money fight will not have any impact on U.S. athletes' ability to compete at home or abroad.



In this file photo, Witold Banka, president of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), attends a press conference at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, France. (AP)

Potter confirmed as new West Ham head coach

LONDON, Jan 9, (Xinhua) — West Ham United on Thursday named former Brighton and Chelsea boss Graham Potter as its new head coach, after sacking Julien Lopetegui.

It is Potter's first job since being sacked by Chelsea in April 2023, and he has agreed to a contract until June 2027 with the east London club.

"I am delighted to be here," Potter was quoted as saying on West Ham's website.

"It was important to me that I waited until a job came along that I felt was right for me, and equally that I was the right fit for the club I am joining." "That is the feeling I have with West Ham United. My

conversations with the chairman and the board have been very positive and constructive," continued the coach.

West Ham is 14th in the Premier League with 23 points from 20 games, and one of Potter's first tasks will be to tighten a defense that has conceded 39 league goals.

"We are on the same wavelength in terms of what is needed in the short term and then how we want to move the club forward in the medium to long term," he said.

West Ham's next game is an FA Cup tie away to Aston Villa on Friday, followed quickly by a Premier League game at home to Fulham on January 14.

Saudi Super Cup gives Atletico chance to return to La Liga summit

MADRID, Jan 9, (Xinhua) — The Spanish Super Cup with FC Barcelona, Real Madrid, Athletic Club Bilbao and Mallorca in Saudi Arabia means there is a reduced fixture list in La Liga this weekend, with eight games to be played rather than the usual 10.

That gives Atletico Madrid the chance to go back to the top as Los Colchoneros entertain Osasuna after winning the last seven matches in La Liga and the last 13 in all competitions.

Atletico may have made slightly hard work of Marbella in the Copa del Rey last weekend, but will be optimistic against a rival that has a potent threat in attack with striker

Ante Budimir, but whose last league win was at the start of November.

The round of matches kicks off on Friday night when Rayo Vallecano hosts Celta Vigo, Rayo will be looking to stretch an unbeaten run to five matches, while Celta needs to improve on some irregular form away from home, but will be without talismanic striker and captain Iago Aspas, sidelined for a month with a muscle injury.

Alaves plays at home to Girona in Saturday's first game, with the Basque side starting to look more solid since the arrival of coach Eduardo Coudet. The Vitoria side has drawn its last four games but kicks off this weekend just two points

above the relegation zone.

Alaves' position is much better than that of Real Valladolid, who sits rock bottom of La Liga ahead of a home tie with Real Betis, and after having been knocked out of the Copa del Rey by third-tier Ourense.

The arrival of new coach Diego Cocca, who has no experience of coaching in Europe, hasn't brought a change of fortune for Valladolid, and the visit offers Betis the chance to climb towards the top six.

There is another relegation battle in Cornella as Espanyol entertain Leganes in a relegation six-pointer. Espanyol has two draws and two defeats from the last four league matches,

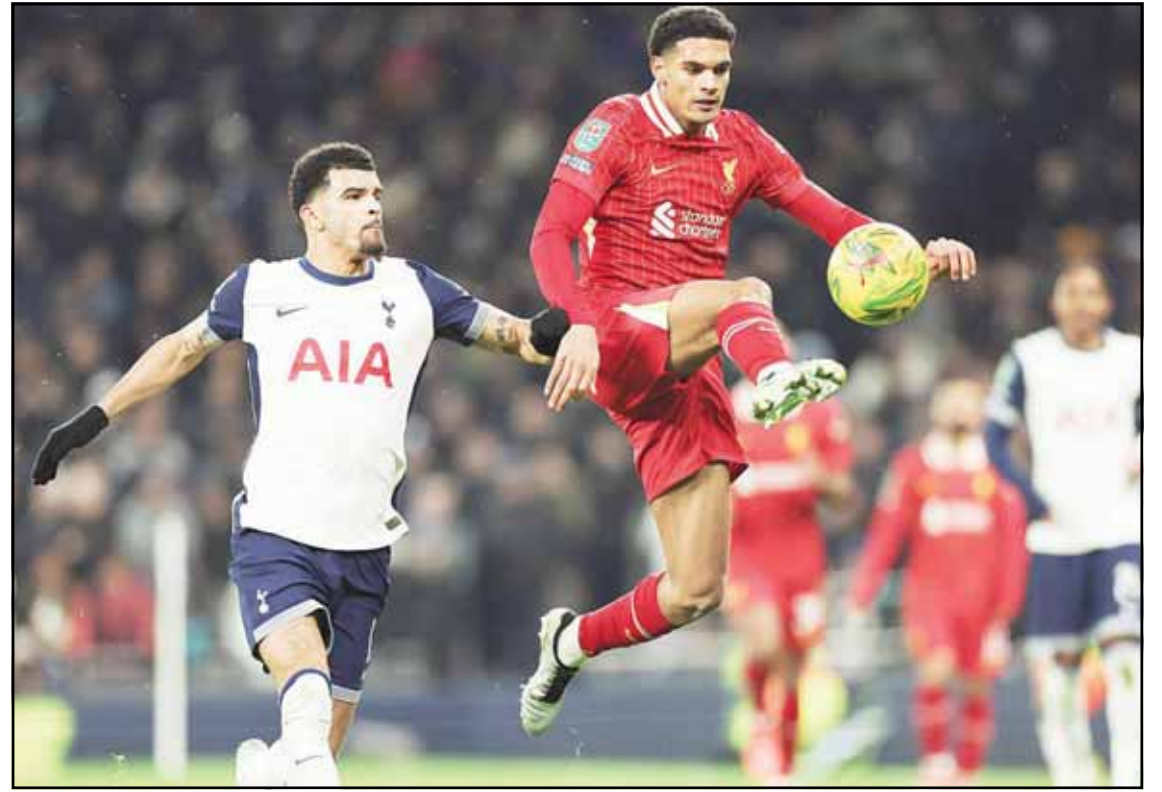
but a win could lift the club out of the bottom three.

This will be the first game of 2025 for Manolo Gonzalez's side, after having been knocked out of the Copa del Rey before Christmas, and it remains to be seen whether that will be an advantage or not for what will be a vital game.

Valencia looks to have improved under new coach Carlos Corberan, pushing Real Madrid in La Liga and qualifying for the fourth round of the Copa del Rey. However, Los Che still only have 12 points in La Liga, and now visit a Sevilla side that owes something to its fans after capitulating 4-1 away to second-tier Almeria in the Copa.



Tottenham's Djed Spence, left, jumps for the ball with Liverpool's Conor Bradley during the English League Cup semi final first leg soccer match between Tottenham and Liverpool, at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London. (AP)



Liverpool's Jarell Quansah, right, duels for the ball with Tottenham's Dominic Solanke during the English League Cup semi final first leg soccer match between Tottenham and Liverpool, at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London. (AP)

Tottenham takes slim lead over Liverpool in League Cup semis

Bentancur suffers serious injury

LONDON, Jan 9, (AP): Lucas Bergvall's first goal for Tottenham secured a 1-0 win over Liverpool in the English League Cup semifinals in a first-leg match notable for a serious-looking injury to Rodrigo Bentancur and the first in-stadium announcement by a referee in the English game.

The 18-year-old Bergvall slotted home the winner in the 86th minute following a pass from Dominic Solanke, who thought 10 minutes earlier that he had given Tottenham the lead. That goal was ruled out after a VAR check for offside and referee Stuart Attwell communicated the decision via a wireless microphone to spectators inside Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and to TV viewers.

In the sixth minute, Bentancur - the Uruguay

midfielder who plays for Tottenham - fell to the ground and lay prone after landing awkwardly when attempting a header from a corner. He was carried off on a stretcher, to applause from around the ground, after receiving treatment during a 10-minute delay.

The second leg is at Anfield on Feb. 6. Newcastle leads Arsenal 2-0 after the first leg of the other semifinal match.

Liverpool, the defending League Cup champion, saw its 24-match unbeaten run in all competitions come to an end and there was a hint of controversy about only the team's second loss of the season.

Visiting players and manager Arne Slot were unhappy that Bergvall was on the field to score what proved to be the winning goal after he escaped collecting a second yellow card for a foul on Kostas Tsimikas moments earlier. Indeed, Tsimikas was off the field, waiting to come back on having received treatment following

Bergvall's tackle, when the Sweden midfielder tucked home his finish.

Slot earned a yellow card himself for his protests, though he shook Attwell's hand after the final whistle.

"It was quite obvious it was going to be a second yellow," Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk said. "A minute later he scores the winner."

"He (Attwell) made a mistake, in my opinion."

It was a busy end to the match for Attwell, who took center stage after there was a video review following Solanke's strike in the 76th minute. After being notified that Solanke was offside, Attwell used the public address system to declare the goal had been ruled out, in an NFL-style announcement.

The League Cup semifinals were chosen to pilot a process in England that has been widely used in other sports, and in soccer at the Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand in 2023 and other FIFA events.

Wei qualifies for Australian Open with breakthrough win

Habib is 1st Lebanese player in Open era to play in Grand Slam men's singles draw

MELBOURNE, Australia, Jan 9, (Agencies): Hady Habib isn't likely to find anything too daunting at the Australian Open now that he's become the first Lebanese player in the Open era to reach Grand Slam men's singles draw.

He advanced through three rounds of the qualifying at Melbourne Park, winning his third match in a tiebreaker 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (8) over Clement Chidekh of France on Thursday to secure a place in the main draw of the tournament that starts Sunday.

It continued a rapid rise for Habib, who made his Olympic debut last year in Paris, running into eventual silver medalist Carlos Alcaraz, a four-time major winner, in the first round. It was two sets he'll long remember.

Late last year, he made history at Temuco, Chile by becoming the first ATP Challenger Tour champion from Lebanon.

The 26-year-old Habib was born in Houston, Texas and moved to Lebanon as a young child, learning how to play there. He returned to the U.S. to pursue a pro career and feels now like he's representing of the spirit of Lebanese people.

"I know it's just a sport, but I feel like representing Lebanon and sacrificing all the things I had to do to get here, it kind of resembles



In this file photo, Hady Habib of Lebanon, right, walks by Carlos Alcaraz of Spain during the men's singles tennis competition, at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, France. (AP)

how our nation has fought back," Habib told Australia's SBS News this week.

China's Wei Sijia has reached the main draw at a grand slam tournament for the first time after winning her third and final qualifying match for the Australian Open.

Wei came back from a set down to beat Serbia's Nina Stojanovic

4-6, 6-4, 7-6(9) in a two-hour and 52-minute epic at Melbourne Park on Thursday.

It means that the 21-year-old will play in the women's singles draw at a grand slam for the first time in her career at the 2025 Australian Open, which starts on Sunday.

Wei's composure in the big points proved decisive in the match.

Trailing 5-4 in the third set 10-point tiebreak, the Chinese player hit the only second serve ace of the match to level the scores.

At 8-8, she hit a forehand winner straight down the line to set up her first match point opportunity, which was denied by Stojanovic.

With the majority of the crowd supporting Wei on a hot and windy afternoon in Melbourne, she capitalized on her second match point with a forehand winner.

Stojanovic had earlier led the third set 4-2 before Wei equalized.

At 4-4, Stojanovic had a break point opportunity that would have put her in a position to serve for the match but lost consecutive points on backhand errors that were forced by Wei's play.

Each player hit 18 winners in the third set, but Wei hit only 11 unforced errors compared to Stojanovic's 16.

Wei's victory comes 12 months after she was beaten in the third round of qualifying for the 2024 Australian Open by Brenda Fruhvirtova. She also made the second round in qualifying for the French Open, Wimbledon, and US Open in 2024.

Her first round Australian Open opponent will be determined after the conclusion of the qualifying tournament.

Int'l Equestrian Federation official praises Kuwait equestrian progress

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The 11th edition of the "Atyab Al Marshoud" International Championship, organized annually by Waleed Al Marshoud, is underway at the Kuwait Equestrian Center. The event features top male and female riders from Kuwait, as well as representatives from various Gulf and European countries. The competition is intense, with several riders vying for the prestigious title.

On the second day of the championship, which begins at 2:00 pm, riders will compete in rounds set at heights of 120, 135, and 140 cm. The final day, tomorrow, will feature rounds at 125, 135, and 145 cm, with the latter being the Grand Prize event.

Karim Badaro, the Lebanese international referee representing the International Equestrian Federation, shared his thoughts on Kuwaiti equestrianism: "I have been closely following Kuwaiti equestrianism for years, and it has shown remarkable growth. Kuwait now hosts three international championships per season, with each season seeing improvements in organization. These international competitions aim to enhance the technical level of equestrianism, which is evident in the success of Kuwaiti rid-



A participant in action.

ers abroad. The quality of Kuwaiti horses has also improved, especially with the participation of foreign riders and horses in local events, creating a dynamic and competitive environment."

Badaro further emphasized that the achievements of Kuwaiti equestrianism are a result of strategic planning by the relevant authorities. He also mentioned that Kuwait will host two 3-star national championships in February, where riders can earn points to qualify for the World Cup in Riyadh next April.

Al-Salmiya eyes momentum

Al-Arabi aims to maintain pressure on Kuwait Club

By Hassan Mosa
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 9: The Zain Premier League's tenth round wraps up tonight with two crucial matches. At 7:50 PM, Al-Arabi faces Kazma at the Friendship and Peace Stadium, following the earlier clash between Al-Nasr and Al-Salmiya at 5:35 PM at Ali Sabah Al-Salem Stadium.

The round began earlier this week with Al-Fahaheel defeating Khaitan by a narrow 1-0 margin.

Al-Arabi, currently second in the standings with 24 points, is determined to maintain pressure on league leader Kuwait Club and continue its pursuit of the title. The team is riding high after a convincing 3-0 win over Al-Nasr in a previously postponed match.

Backed by a strong fan base and recent dominance over Kazma, Al-Arabi hopes to capitalize on its momentum. In head-to-head league encounters, Al-Arabi has consistently outperformed Kazma, including a 2-0 victory in the first division and two wins last season (1-0 and 4-0), alongside two draws.

Kazma, sitting in seventh place with 10 points, faces an uphill battle. Following a turbulent period marked by the resignation of Coach Mohamed Dahilis in

August, the team brought in Tunisian coach Lassad Chebbi. It has also overhauled its foreign lineup, releasing players like Reda Bencha and Rafael Guimaraes and signing African talents such as Jonas Ramalho and Simson Akinyola. Despite these efforts, Kazma remains in the "danger zone" and is desperate for improvement.

In the other fixture, Al-Salmiya (14 points) aims to continue climbing the standings from fifth place. After defeating Al-Nasr 3-1 earlier this season, it is eager to replicate that success and inch closer to the top.

Meanwhile, Al-Nasr, languishing in ninth place with just 4 points, hopes to recover from a difficult season. With only one win and a coaching change in September, the team has made significant adjustments, including terminating contracts with underperforming foreign players. Under new coach Jamil Belkacem, Al-Nasr looks to rebuild and regain form with Carlos Ventura as its sole remaining foreign player, while exploring new signings.

These two matches are set to shape the league standings as the season progresses. Fans can expect intense battles on both fronts.

Burgan players hit by influenza during Cairo training camp

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

CAIRO, Jan 9: Several players from Burgan Club's first volleyball team have been diagnosed with influenza during their current training camp in Cairo, Egypt. The team is preparing for the 43rd Arab Men's Volleyball Clubs Championship, set to take place in Doha from January 13 to 26, with 15 Arab clubs participating, including Burgan and Kuwait Club.

The medical staff is actively working to treat the affected players and ensure they are ready to resume training and make the most of the remaining days of the camp before traveling to Qatar on January 14.

So far, Burgan has played one friendly match in Cairo, drawing 2-2 with Egypt's Heliopolis. Both teams agreed to play four sets. To-

day, Burgan will face Egypt's Al-Ahly, and the friendly matches will

conclude with a game against Zamalek on January 12.



Burgan prepares for Al Arabiya during Cairo camp.

Burgan Club's Volleyball Director, Yousef Al-Hamdan, confirmed that the Cairo camp is progressing according to the plan set by the technical staff, led by Argentine coach Alejandro. The team is in full attendance, including new international players from Croatia and Serbia, although Khaled Al-Kandari is absent due to injury.

In the Arab Championship draw, Burgan is placed in Group Four alongside Gaza (Palestine), Qatar, and UAE's Al-Jazira, while Kuwait Club is in Group Two with Oman's Al-Seeb, Egypt's Zamalek, and Libya's Al-Hilal.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Club's volleyball team is continuing its preparations for the Arab Championship with daily two-session training camps in Doha. It is set to play its first friendly match against Qatar's Al-Rayyan.



Al-Arabi seeks to confirm its superiority over Kazma.



Barcelona's Gavi, front, celebrates after scoring during the Spanish Super Cup semifinal match between Athletic Bilbao and Barcelona in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

Sports

Barcelona marches into Super Cup final

Gavi returns to scoring form

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia, Jan 9, (AP): Lamine Yamal and Gavi Páez scored to lead Barcelona past Athletic Bilbao 2-0 and into the Spanish Super Cup final.

Gavi scored in the 17th minute of the semifinal for his first goal since the midfielder returned to playing in October after a serious leg injury that sidelined him for nearly a year.

Gavi then helped Yamal put the result away in the 52nd with a pass that the 17-year-old controlled while twirling toward the goal. Yamal sized up goalkeeper Unai Simón and slotted home to double the lead.

Yamal didn't reveal which rival he would prefer for the final, saying "the final will be tough, and we want to win it, that is the important thing."

Gavi got Barcelona going after he redirected in a short pass from Alejandro Balde after the left back had reached the endline in Athletic's area.

Athletic could barely muster a threat until it was behind by two goals. Iñaki Williams thought he had scored in the final minutes but it was waived off after a video review ruled him offside.

The loss ended a 15-game unbeaten streak for Ernesto Valverde's team across all competitions.

Athletic was participating in the tournament as the winner of last season's Copa del Rey. Barcelona is here as the Spanish league's runner-up. The minor trophy has become a major cash maker for the federation and competing clubs since the federation struck a deal in 2019 to hold it in the Middle Eastern kingdom.

Spain's government stepped in Wednesday to provisionally allow midfielder Dani Olmo and forward Pau Víctor to continue playing for Barcelona following the Spanish league's refusal to do so.

Barcelona appealed the decision by the league to Spain's Higher Council of Sport, a government body under the auspices of the ministry of education and sports. The council has initially ruled in Barcelona's favor to allow the two players to continue participating in official competitions while it studies the appeal and makes a definitive ruling.

Last summer, the two players were registered only through the end of 2024, and the financially troubled Barcelona failed to meet the league's financial fair-play rules by the end-of-year deadline.

Once the club got its paperwork in order, the league, with the backing of the Spanish soccer federation, said that it was rejecting Barcelona's attempt to register the players for the rest of the season. The league and the federation said in a joint statement that even though Barcelona eventually was able to meet the salary-cap rules, the players can't be registered again after already having been dropped because of the missed deadline.

Barcelona argued that the deadline for registering new players should be at the end of January, when the transfer windows closes, and not the end of December as the league requires.

Barcelona was able to finally increase its salary cap after reportedly receiving a payment last week of 100 million euros (\$103 million) for VIP seats at



Athletic Bilbao's Yuri Berchiche, left, and Barcelona's Gavi fight for the ball during the Spanish Super Cup semifinal match between Athletic Bilbao and Barcelona in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

the renovated Camp Nou stadium.

Each La Liga club has a salary cap that is calculated based on factors including revenues, costs and debts. It is proportional to roughly 70% of a club's revenues.

Barcelona has endured difficulties registering players recently because of its financial struggles. It has resorted to selling off assets in recent seasons,

including the sale of future television rights. The club's financial struggles led to the departure of Lionel Messi in 2021.

Olmo was the club's top signing of the offseason after he helped Spain win the European championship.

If Barcelona eventually loses its case with the Higher Council of Sports, it could turn to ordinary courts.

Al-Zaabi praises players' commitment ahead of World Cup

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

ZAGREB, Jan 9: Abdulaziz Al-Zaabi, the administrator of Kuwait handball team, confirmed the strong commitment of the players during their current camp in Croatia, which serves as preparation for the 29th World Cup finals. The tournament will be held from January 14 to February 2 across three countries: Croatia, Denmark, and Norway. Kuwait is placed in Group Three alongside Qatar, Austria, and France, with all the group matches taking place in Croatia. The team will begin its World Cup campaign on January 14 against Austria, followed by matches against France on January 16 and Qatar on January 18.

Al-Zaabi highlighted that the technical staff, led by Coach Saeed Hegazy, is focused on preparing the players mentally, physically, and technically for the World Cup,

stressing the players' enthusiasm to represent Kuwaiti handball with pride.

The national team recently played two friendly matches. The squad is made up of 18 players: Abdullah Al-Khamis, Abdulaziz Al-Shammari, Haidar Dashti, Mohammed Amer, Fawaz Mubarak, Abdulaziz Salmeen, Fawaz Al-Shammari, Mohammed Al-Hindal, Ali Naseer, Saif Al-Adwani, Mishaal Al-Harbi, Saleh Al-Moussawi, Mohammed Al-Sanea, Abdulrahman Al-Shammari, Mohammed Ghadanfar, Hassan Safar, Abdulaziz Al-Dhafiri, and Mohammed Bouyabes.

In other handball news, the first round of the handball activation tournament was held at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex Hall. In the matches, Al-Sulaibikhat defeated Al-Tadamon 35-20, Al-Qurain narrowly won against Al-Yarmouk 26-25, and Al-Fahaheel triumphed over Al-Nasr 34-20.



Fahaheel player makes a goal attempt against Al-Nasr.

30 days to go

Harbin gears up for return of Asian Winter Games

HARBIN, China, Jan 9, (Xinhua): As the 9th Asian Winter Games marks its 30-day countdown on Wednesday, the host city of Harbin is entering its final preparation stage, accompanied by growing enthusiasm.

"I have no doubt that the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin will be another great success in the history of the Olympic Movement in Asia," said Husain Al Musallam, director general of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA).

Located in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province, Harbin will host the Games for the second time, having previously hosted the event's third edition in 1996. According to the recently released competition schedule, ice hockey and curling events will begin earlier, on Feb. 3 and 4, respectively, with the overall schedule spanning 12 days. The first gold medal event will take place on the morning of Feb. 8.

Under the theme "Dream of Winter, Love Among Asia," the Games has so far received 1,275 athlete registrations from 34 countries and regions across Asia. This is expected to make it the edition with the highest number of participating countries, regions, and athletes.

To ensure a high-quality event, organizers have assembled numerous ice and snow professionals from both domestic and international

backgrounds. International and Asian sports federations have appointed 12 technical delegates and one assistant technical delegate from countries and regions including China, South Korea, and Japan.

The OCA has appointed 151 international technical officials, who will work alongside 685 domestic officials, many of whom have extensive experience from the Beijing Winter Olympics and other major events.

Harbin has planned 14 test events since September 2024, covering all

competition venues and events.

"The test events evaluated the operation of the venues, equipment and facilities, local support, command and coordination, as well as performance across various business areas," said Li Guang, director of the Sports Competition Department and deputy commander of the Competition Command Center for the Games.

"As we enter the final stretch, we will continue to make every effort to ensure that everything runs smoothly during the Asian Winter Games," Li

added.

Test events for snow sports are also being conducted as scheduled in the Yabuli competition area.

"In addition to the 32 events of the Asian Winter Games hosted in Yabuli, we will also host over 20 professional and amateur competitions," said Wang Keshuai, deputy commander of the Command Center for the Yabuli competition area.

Wang noted that Yabuli is taking the opportunity to host more high-level ice and snow events, accelerate infrastructure upgrades, and diversify its offerings.

Compared to summer sports, winter sports are more vulnerable to weather conditions. To address this, meteorological departments in Heilongjiang Province and Harbin have developed a comprehensive support plan that includes weather forecasting and monitoring networks.

More than 60 advanced automatic weather monitoring devices have been installed at key locations, including the opening and closing ceremony sites, competition venues, and along highways. These devices are part of a precise forecasting system designed to minimize weather-related disruptions.

In just 30 days, Harbin will welcome athletes from across Asia to pursue their dreams, while the world celebrates winter sports and the passion that drives them forward.

Musiala doubtful ahead of Bayern first game

Dortmund faces Leverkusen test as Bundesliga resumes

BERLIN, Jan 9, (Agencies): The biggest challenge yet awaits Borussia Dortmund as the 2024/2025 season resumes following an unusual and disrupted winter break.

With just 19 days off, coach Nuri Sahin's squad skipped traditional training camps and friendly matches, preparing for a critical clash against reigning champion Bayer Leverkusen this Friday.

After a tumultuous first half of the season, Sahin aimed to build team spirit by instituting two daily training sessions and a mandatory team lunch. Despite this, Dortmund currently sits sixth on 25 points, with second-placed Leverkusen (32 points) closing the gap on Bayern Munich (36 points), reigniting its title ambitions.

Leverkusen, having shaken off a shaky start to the season, is back in form under coach Xabi Alonso, and a win on Friday would keep its title hopes alive. Despite speculation about the futures of Alonso and star midfielder Florian Wirtz, the team has maintained its momentum.

For Dortmund, however, the stakes are higher. With a top-four finish a must to secure a spot in next season's UEFA Champions League, a draw against Leverkusen is seen as the minimum goal. Sahin understands the significance of the match and described it as an opportunity to demonstrate a winner's mentality.

"Leverkusen is where we want to get to - a team with a solid and determined mentality," said Sahin, whose

future with the club is closely tied to the team's performance. Alongside the league, Dortmund must also progress in the Champions League and the FIFA Club World Cup to meet expectations.

BVB CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke reinforced the importance of the match, stating, "By all respect, that's us," referring to Dortmund's claim for Germany's number two spot.

Despite the pressure, Sahin remains optimistic. Statistically, the club has been near perfect in post-winter-break home games, having not lost a Friday evening game in 39 attempts. For the young coach, this clash against Leverkusen will be a significant test of his ability to steer Dortmund back on course.

Bayern Munich may have to cope without its standout attacking midfielder Jamal Musiala in its first game of the year after he caught the flu.

Bayern said on Thursday that Musiala would have to "take a break for the time being" and couldn't train with the team ahead of playing Borussia Mönchengladbach on Saturday in the Bundesliga.

Musiala has 14 goals and six assists in 22 games across all competitions for Bayern this season. His nine goals tie him for fourth highest in the Bundesliga.

It's not clear who'll be in goal on Saturday after Daniel Peretz injured a kidney in training on Wednesday. Peretz had been covering for the injured Manuel Neuer before the winter break while Neuer recovered from a broken rib.

Peretz also played in a 6-0 friendly win over Austrian club Salzburg on Monday, when Neuer wasn't in the squad. Long-time reserve Sven Ulreich could also be an option.

Hosszu retires after stellar career

BUDAPEST, Hungary, Jan 9, (AP): Three-time Olympic champion Katinka Hosszu of Hungary, one of the greatest all-around swimmers, has announced her retirement.

Known as the "Iron Lady" of swimming for her gruelling repertoire of events, the 35-year-old Hosszu competed at five Olympic Games. She was only 15 when she made her Olympic debut at the 2004 Athens Games.

Hosszu won her three individual gold medals in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, in the 100-meter backstroke, as well as her signature 200 and 400 individual medleys. She added a silver medal in the 200 backstroke.

She also won nine individual world titles in the long course pool dating to

2009 and still holds the long course 200 individual medley world record. She won 17 golds in the world short course championships. "For thirty years, the water has been my home, a sanctuary where I found solace and strength," she said in an Instagram post.

"From the moment I first stepped foot in the pool as a child, I knew I had discovered something magical. The cool embrace of the water was like coming home, a place where gravity ceased to exist, and each stroke brought me closer to my dreams.

"Now, as I look back on my career, I feel a sense of immense fulfillment. Medals and records are precious, but what remains most deeply is my undying love for swimming."