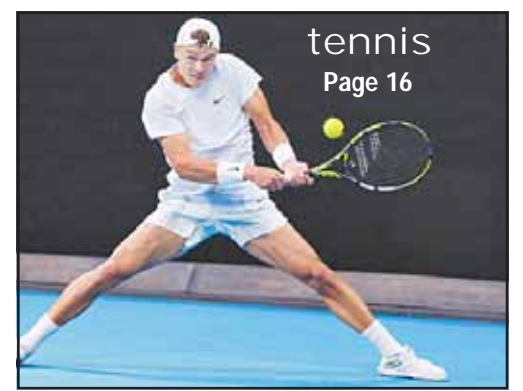




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Kuwait Amir, UK King celebrate ties with kilt-bisht exchange

HH Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad wraps up historic visit, heads home



His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Majesty King Charles III of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland exchange the Scottish kilt and Kuwaiti bisht at Dumfries House in Ayrshire, Scotland, United Kingdom.

AYRSHIRE, Scotland, Jan 16, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Majesty King Charles III of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland exchanged the Scottish kilt and Kuwaiti bisht at Dumfries House in Ayrshire, Scotland, United Kingdom.

The Scottish kilt and Kuwaiti bisht are made with a special tartan design, which combines traditional textile materials, patterns, colors and techniques from both the United Kingdom and Kuwait, to celebrate the two countries' "125 Years of Partnership".

Earlier, His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the official delegation accompanying him visited Wednesday His Majesty King Charles III of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at Dumfries House in Ayrshire, Scotland, in response to an invitation from His Majesty King Charles III.

During the meeting, both leaders held friendly talks that reflected the depth of the historical and solid relations between the State of Kuwait and the friendly United Kingdom.

They emphasized eagerness to continue work to enhance joint cooperation in all areas.

Continued on Page 5



Top and above: His Highness the Amir seen off by British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis and other officials after the historic visit.

Kuwait expels 648 in Jan sweep

Evening biometric fingerprinting until January end

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (KUNA): Kuwait's Interior Ministry detained 509 visa violators, deported 648 persons across 28 campaigns since the beginning of the year to January 13.

The Ministry's media and public relations department issued a statement mentioning that this is in line with the instructions of First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

The Ministry affirmed that it will not hesitate in implementing the law and holding violators accountable.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior, through the General Department of Criminal Evidence, has confirmed the continuation of biometric fingerprinting services at its offices across all governorates. The extended hours, from 8 am to 8 pm, will remain in effect until the end of January.

Beginning February 1, the service hours will return to the regular schedule of 8 am to 2 pm, according to a statement from the General Department of Relations and Security Media.

Kuwait set for weekend chill as fog, frost roll in



Photo by Mohammed Morsi

Kuwait's sky glows with an amber hue on Thursday, as air depression brings cooler, overcast weather this weekend.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (KUNA): The Kuwait Meteorological Department has predicted moderate daytime weather and cold nights for the upcoming weekend. The country is currently experiencing an air depression, leading to increased low and medium cloud cover and chances of light fog forming in some areas.

Speaking to KUNA, the department's director, Dirar Al-Ali, stated that Friday's weather will be moderate and partly cloudy during the day, with northwesterly winds ranging from 10 to 35 kilometers per hour. Maximum temperatures are expected to be between 20 and 22 degrees Celsius, with light to moderate sea waves reaching 2 to 5 feet.

Friday night will be cold and partly cloudy, accompanied by light fog in certain areas. Winds will remain northwesterly at speeds of 8 to 35 kilometers per hour, while temperatures will drop to a minimum of 6 to 8 degrees Celsius.

On Saturday, Al-Ali noted that moderate conditions will prevail, with scattered clouds and light to moderate northwesterly winds at speeds of 8 to 30 kilometers per hour.

Continued on Page 5

Citizenship committee strips 5,838 of Kuwaiti citizenship

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (KUNA): The Supreme Committee to Investigate Kuwaiti citizenship announced on Thursday the stripping of 5,838 citizenships with the matter referred to the Cabinet.

The decision was made during the committee's meeting on Thursday, chaired by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

A statement by the Ministry of Interior said that four of the cases had dual citizenship, 128 involved fraud, and false statements and some had acquired as close relatives, while 5,706 individuals from 54 countries had their Article 8 citizenship taken.

Kuwait ministers in bid to strengthen price controls

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (Agencies): The Minister of Commerce and Industry, Khalifa Al-Ajeel, and the Minister of Social Affairs and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, held a meeting on Wednesday to discuss joint cooperation in enhancing price monitoring and developing the strategic stockpile.

The Ministry of Commerce told KUNA that during the meeting, an agreement was made to cooperate in supporting and monitoring the unified electronic platform for regulating product prices in the Cooperative Societies Federation.

Continued on Page 5

8 Burgan Bank appoints Omar Khalifouh as Deputy GM of Digital Transformation



9 Zain's Generation Z graduate program marks 10th year with intake of seven outstanding candidates

10 NBK launches real estate financing services in Germany

72 killed in Gaza since deal announced, says health ministry

Kuwait welcomes Gaza ceasefire announcement

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (Agencies): The State of Kuwait welcomed Thursday the announcement of a ceasefire in Gaza, stressing the importance of this agreement contributing to ending the ongoing attacks against the brotherly Palestinian people.

In a statement, Kuwait's Foreign Ministry lauded the intensive efforts made by the international community, especially the State of Qatar, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the United States of America, and all parties that contributed to the success of this agreement.

The Ministry also hoped that the agreement would put an end to the suffering of the Palestinians and allow humanitarian aid to be delivered to them immediately.

Continued on Page 5

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: The Ministry of Interior declared on Thursday conclusion of the contest "disposal of explosives" that had engaged teams from the Kuwaiti Army, the MoI, the National Guard, and peers from other GCC countries.

The assistant undersecretary for special affairs security, Major General Abdullah Al-Mulla, boasted in a statement of the high-level performance by the participating teams.

The contest (January 12-16), held at the special security forces camp was marked with heated competition.

Maj. Gen. Al-Mulla honored the winners with certificates and memorial shields. (KUNA)



Children collect water from a truck at a tent camp for displaced Palestinians in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, Jan. 16, 2025. (AP)

Paris to host AI Action Summit on Feb 10: French ambassador

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (KUNA): France will host the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit on February 10 and 11, during which nearly 100 heads of state and government and 1,000 civil society actors from 100 countries will meet in Paris, said French Ambassador to Kuwait, Olivier Gauvin.

In a statement Thursday, Ambassador Gauvin said that artificial intelligence is not considered a neutral technology, but rather a political and civic issue that requires in-depth international dialogue between world leaders, researchers, institutions and civil society.

He noted that artificial intelligence represents more than just an industrial and technological revolution, as it has the potential to bring about a profound qualitative transformation in our societies and our relationship with science, work, information, culture and even language.

He therefore stated that France had accepted the responsibility of consolidating the momentum initiated by the UK and South Korea by hosting the aforementioned conference.

Further, he said that work in the horizon of the summit and what follows it aims to achieve three practical goals,

the first of which is that it is necessary to ensure that the largest number of people benefit from artificial intelligence technology in order for every person in the world to benefit from it and develop new ideas that lead to achieving its full potential.

"We will thus begin the quest to bridge the growing digital divide and counter the excessive concentration of

Continued on Page 5



KUNA photo
Olivier Gauvin, French Ambassador to Kuwait.

Prayer Timings

Fajr 05:20 Asr 14:53
 Sunrise .. 06:43 Maghrib .. 17:12
 Zohr 11:58 Isha 18:33

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:
By Day: Mild and partly cloudy with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speeds of 10-35 km/h.
By Night: Cold and partly cloudy with light to moderate

Weather		Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
northwesterly wind, with speeds of 08-35 km/h with a chance for light fog forming over some areas.	Bubyan	Kuwait City	23	10
	Jahra	Kuwait Airport	23	08
	Faialaka Island	Abdaly	22	06
	Salmiyah			
	Ahmadi			
	Jal Aliyah			
	Nuwaisib			



His Highness the Kuwaiti Amir exchanges pleasantries with dignitaries.



His Highness the Kuwaiti Amir plants a tree at the Dumfries House.



His Highness the Kuwaiti Amir and His Majesty King Charles.



His Majesty King Charles shakes hands with members of the delegation accompanying HH the Amir.



His Highness the Kuwaiti Amir visits students at the King's Foundation.

Amir's visit to Dumfries House closes joint celebrations to mark 125 years of relations

Planting tree symbol of enduring ties between Kuwait, UK: Lewis

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, visited Scotland to meet His Majesty King Charles III and formally close the United Kingdom and the State of Kuwait's joint celebrations to mark 125 years since the signing of the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement of 1899, which established official diplomatic relations between the two friendly countries, says a press release issued by the British Embassy in Kuwait.

The visit of His Highness included a tour of the historic Dumfries House estate, which serves as the headquarters of The King's Foundation and is where 10,000 students learn traditional crafts and rural skills every year; an official audience with His Majesty the King; and an exchange of gifts – a Kilt and a Bishit – manufactured using a special 'Partnership 125' tartan that combines traditional weaving materials, patterns, colors and techniques from both the UK and Kuwait, merging the two countries' cultures.

The tartan exchange formally closed out year-long celebrations to mark a century and a quarter of official UK-Kuwait diplomatic relations, throughout which the two countries' respective governments have organized numerous events, visits and initiatives reflecting on their unique shared history and seeking to enhance future cooperation.

Reflecting on the visit, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the United Kingdom, Bader Almunayekh, stated: "The visit of His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to Dumfries House is the culmination of a year full of activities celebrating 125 Years of Kuwaiti-British Partnership.

Historic

"We are very proud of the historic relations between Kuwait and the United Kingdom – and keen to build on our work over this past year to grow the relationship further across the decades and centuries to come.

"We celebrated the relationship with many academic and cultural events, as well as the signing of an agreement between the State of Kuwait and The King's Foundation, which brought to fruition a horticultural exchange program.

"We were extremely pleased with the results of the first group that joined the programme and look forward to building on it over the duration of the agreement. We value the work of the

King's Foundation and hope for further cooperation in the future."

Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the State of Kuwait, Belinda Lewis, added: "The close friendship between the UK's Royal and Kuwait's Ruling Families has long underpinned our partnership -- and it is therefore fitting that we are closing out joint celebrations to mark 125 years of official diplomatic relations with this audience and exchange of gifts between our respective Heads of State.

"The past twelve months have formed a special and memorable chapter in the UK and Kuwait's shared history, developing further -- through a series of visits, events and initiatives -- the links between our two peoples and our collaboration across areas including culture, trade, defense and security.

Partnership

"I am excited by the many opportunities to continue progressing our unique partnership over the coming year and beyond."

Kristina Murrin, Chief Executive Officer of The King's Foundation, said: "At The King's Foundation we promote traditional crafts and skills, so we are delighted to showcase this work through the creation of a special new tartan.

"Following this project, we are looking forward to continuing our horticultural exchange programme between the UK and Kuwait, with participants able to spend time in our historic gardens across the country, including Dumfries House and Highgrove Gardens."

The British Ambassador to Kuwait, HE Belinda Lewis, expressed her delight over HH the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's decision to plant a tree at Dumfries House in Ayrshire, Scotland, describing the tree as a symbol of the enduring and growing friendship between Kuwait and the UK.

This statement was made by Ambassador Lewis to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) and Kuwait TV during His Highness's visit to the King's Foundation at Dumfries House, where he and his official delegation observed the center's educational programs and activities.

She also noted that His Highness the Amir supports these initiatives through organizing mutual educational programs between the two nations, which is why his visit to Dumfries House was particularly meaningful. During his visit, His Highness toured the facilities and witnessed the ongoing activities and events at this renowned educational and cultural center.

More time needed to assess evening shift system effects

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Dr. Issam Al-Rubaian, Chairman of the Civil Service Bureau, announced that the Cabinet is progressing with the rationalization of the organizational structures of government agencies and institutions.

Speaking at the introductory seminar for the Sharjah Public Finance Award, held in collaboration with the Arab Administrative Development Organization and the Government of Sharjah, UAE, Dr. Al-Rubaian emphasized the government's commitment to optimizing organizational units that are sustainable, while studying mergers between agencies on a case-by-case basis.

In his remarks, Dr. Al-Rubaian assured that financial allowances would continue but stated that evaluations would take place throughout the year to ensure appropriateness for each entity. He also addressed the creation of new government job titles, noting that the Bureau had completed the establishment of a 'researcher in cybersecurity' position.

On the topic of evening shifts, Al-Rubaian revealed that many departments have begun implementing shifts, with a group of employees designated to serve customers during evening hours. However, he noted that a more extensive evaluation of the evening shift system would require more time, as ten days would not suffice to fully assess obstacles in some departments.

Al-Rubaian praised Kuwait's role in hosting the introductory symposium, highlighting the fruitful collaboration between regional and international institutions to promote best practices in financial and governmental management.

He emphasized that Kuwait's hosting of the event reflected its commitment to improving administrative performance and sustainable development in the Arab world.

He also noted that the Sharjah Public Finance Award focuses on financial sustainability and public finance management, offering participating countries valuable insights on how to best manage financial resources.

The award encompasses 22 categories, including both institutional and individual levels, with individual categories comprising three levels each. The symposium, which included workshops on financial management, also served as a platform for discussing the importance of financial and administrative excellence in promoting growth and prosperity.

Dr. Nasser Al-Qahtani, Director General of the Arab Administrative Development Organization and Sheikh Rashid Al Qasimi, Secretary General of the Sharjah Public Finance Award, also spoke at the event, underscoring the significance of the award in aligning public finance practices with international standards and advancing the sustainable development of the sector.

In conclusion, Al-Rubaian affirmed that Kuwait's participation in the Sharjah Public Finance Award is a testament to the country's ongoing efforts to refine public financial management, enhance governance and promote fiscal sustainability.



Dr. Al-Rubaian

Other Voices

Last survivor of Iraq royal family

By Nasser Al-Hajeri

The Iraqi Revolution of 1958 brought a violent and tragic end to the Hashemite monarchy, with most members of the royal family executed during the coup. Amid this turmoil, one member of the family, Princess Badea Ali, survived. Alongside her husband, Al-Sharif Hussein bin Ali, and their three sons – Abdullah, Mohammad, and Ali – she narrowly escaped the massacre that claimed the lives of her immediate relatives.

Princess Badea Ali was the daughter of King Ali of Hijaz and the granddaughter of Al-Sharif Hussain and a member of the Hashemite dynasty, which had ruled Iraq since 1921. On July 14, 1958, a coup led by Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim and Colonel Abdul Salam Arif stormed Al-Rihab Palace in Baghdad.

Executed that morning were King Faisal II, Crown Prince Abdul Ilah, Princess Hiyam (the Crown Prince's wife), Queen Nafeesa (Princess Badea's mother), Princess Abadiya

(King Faisal II's aunt), and several palace guards and servants.

Unlike her relatives, Princess Badea and her family were not at the palace during the coup. As violence unfolded in Baghdad, they fled to the Saudi Embassy, where they were granted refuge.

The embassy protected them from the coup leaders, who sought to eliminate the monarchy entirely.

After spending a month under the embassy's protection, Princess Badea and her family left Iraq. Their first destination was Cairo, where they stayed temporarily before moving to Lebanon. The family settled in Lebanon for some time, but the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 forced them to leave once again.

Finally, they made their home in London, where Princess Badea lived out the rest of her life.

The loss of her family and homeland deeply impacted Princess Badea, yet she remained a figure of quiet dignity in exile. Her survival preserved a connection to the Hashemite dynasty and served as a poignant reminder of the monarchy's tragic downfall.

Princess Badea Ali passed away in London, far from the country her family once ruled. Her story of survival and resilience offers a window into a tumultuous chapter in Iraq's history, highlighting both the fragility of power and the enduring human cost of political upheaval.



Princess Badea

Govt schools staff go on leave after exams end; return Feb 2

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: With the conclusion of the last school day of the first semester, approximately 105,000 teachers and school administration staff across various educational regions begin their official vacation today.

This break is part of the academic calendar approved by the Ministry of Education, providing teachers and administrators with

a well-deserved rest after the completion of the first semester's tasks, including exams and various activities.

The educational and administrative staff is scheduled to return to work on Feb 2 to prepare for the second semester and to ensure that schools are ready to resume the educational process.

The Ministry of Education is committed to creating a suitable educational environment for both teachers and students as preparations for the second semester continue.

MPW begins 4th Ring Road repairs

By Mohammad Ghanem
 Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan announced today the commencement of extensive maintenance work on the Fourth Ring Road as part of the new contracts, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

She emphasized the ministry's ongoing

efforts to implement road maintenance projects across all regions, ensuring strict adherence to quality standards and international specifications to enhance the country's infrastructure.

In this context, Abdullah Al-Naqi, the supervisor of the First Ring Road and King Faisal Road project, stated that the work at the intersection of the Fourth Ring Road and King Fahd Road includes an evaluation of the asphalt layers to identify the necessary treatments.

diwaniya

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Democracy on decline ... world has entered the 'age of tyranny'

"SINCE 2015, reports from international institutions focused on democracy have consistently highlighted the alarming decline in democratic practices worldwide. Each year, new countries join the ranks of those experiencing democratic backsliding," columnist **Dr. Noura Saleh Al-Majim** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"Surprisingly, this trend now includes several European nations such as Hungary and Poland. Even more striking is the inclusion of the United States in some of these assessments, marking an ironic shift in global democratic norms.

"These neutral institutions, which rely on precise indicators, largely agree that the world has entered what some call the 'age of tyranny' or a significant decline in democracy. This phenomenon has captured the attention of the global scientific community, sparking extensive efforts to study and understand its complexities.

"One key explanation links the decline of democracy to the rise of right-wing populism, which has swept across many regions in the past decade.

"This phenomenon, epitomized by figures such as Donald Trump in the United States, often centers around charismatic leaders like Narendra Modi in India, Lula da Silva in Brazil, Silvio Berlusconi in Italy and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands. These leaders challenge democratic systems, particularly their institutions, which they frame as corrupt and responsible for national decline.

"Another perspective attributes democratic decline to socio-economic conditions. In India, for instance, high levels of poverty, illiteracy and rampant nationalism reduce popular interest in democracy and create fertile ground for authoritarianism.

"Similarly, in many Arab Spring countries, widespread poverty has shifted public focus toward basic economic survival. Even under authoritarian regimes, meeting minimal economic needs often takes precedence over democratic aspirations.

"While these explanations hold merit, they reflect symptoms of a larger issue: the decline of democracy in Western nations and the waning commitment of Western powers, particularly the United States, to promoting democracy globally. A historical and practical analysis supports this broader perspective.

"From the 1970s to the early 2000s, the 'third wave' of democratization surged, with nearly 150 countries adopting democratic systems to varying degrees. This wave was driven in part by Western efforts-- led by the US -- to counter communism and promote democratic governance.

"However, since the early 2000s, the global democratic decline has mirrored the diminishing priority of democracy promotion on the agendas of Western powers. This shift is rooted in several factors, including the rise of China, the growing threat of terrorism and the necessity of cooperating with authoritarian states.

"For instance, the US has largely overlooked India's authoritarian turn under Modi due to its strategic need for India in countering China.

"Today, the world stands on the brink of an unambiguous era of authoritarianism. This resurgence is further bolstered by phenomena like Trump's populism in the US, which prioritizes isolationism and economic interests over normative values such as democracy promotion.

"Additionally, the democratic and liberal model has lost appeal even within Western democracies. Social and economic inequalities, coupled with rising immigration and minority populations, have fueled fears about threats to Western identity, undermining public support for liberal values.

"As the liberal democratic model wanes in popularity and Western nations retreat from their role as democracy's global champions, the world faces an uncertain and troubling future marked by increasing authoritarianism."



Dr. Noura

fires -- characterized by their speed, intensity and catastrophic consequences -- are no surprise to Southern Californians. For many, the soaring cost of renewing home insurance has served as a stark reminder of the risks.

"California's insurance market is under immense pressure. Allstate, once the state's fourth-largest home insurer, ceased issuing new policies in 2022. State Farm followed suit, canceling 30,000 policies, including 1,600 in Pacific Palisades, an area still battling active wildfires. The state laws, such as the California Insurance Premium Reform and Reduction Act of 1988, prevent insurers from pricing policies to reflect updated wildfire risks.

"This has driven companies out of the market. As a stopgap, the state offers the California FAIR Plan, a nonprofit insurance option for those unable to secure private coverage.

"However, it comes with higher premiums and reduced benefits, leaving many property owners with inadequate protection.

"Experts attribute the wildfire crisis to climate-related factors, including Hydroclimatic Fluctuations -- shifts between extreme wet and dry periods create dense, dry vegetation that acts as fuel for fires and frequent, intense winds spread embers over long distances, exacerbating the devastation.

"These wildfires highlight the urgent need for proactive environmental strategies globally. Dr. Saud Al-Rasheed, former Deputy Director General of Kuwait's Environment Public Authority, proposed establishing an environmental decision-support center.

"This center, aligned with Kuwait's 'New Kuwait' vision, would focus on integrating sustainability into national development projects and addressing foreseeable environmental challenges, such as rising temperatures.

"Dr. Al-Rasheed emphasized the importance of this center in enhancing Kuwait's role in international environmental negotiations, fulfilling its global commitments and preparing national cadres for active participation.

"He also pointed out past planning oversights, such as locating Sabah Al-Ahmad City in a flood-prone area, as a cautionary tale for future projects.

"Dr. Al-Rasheed's proposal seeks to position Kuwait as a regional leader in environmental sustainability and preparedness. His appeal to the Supreme Council for the Environment aims to prioritize environmental considerations in development plans to avoid costly mistakes and protect the nation's future.

"In conclusion, the ongoing crisis in Los Angeles serves as a global reminder of the devastating consequences of neglecting environmental risks. Kuwait, while not facing wildfires, has an opportunity to act proactively and set an example for sustainable development."

"When Ms. Wadha Al-Khatib was appointed CEO of the Kuwait National Petroleum Company, she successfully shouldered the responsibility of leading the largest oil institution in the country, which forms the backbone of Kuwait's economy. She excelled in her role with both competence and distinction -- not just as a professional but also as a trailblazing woman," columnist and former Deputy Director-General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) **Iqbal Al-Ahmad** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"Dr. Faiza Al-Kharafi, with great pride and skill, took on the leadership of Kuwait University. She managed this vital academic institution with exceptional success, proving herself as both a highly capable individual and a role model for women.

"Similarly, Ms. Sheikha Al-Bahar demonstrated unparalleled expertise when she assumed responsibility for one of the largest banks in Kuwait and the region. Her exceptional leadership in the private banking sector exemplifies her capabilities as a professional and as a woman.

"When Ms. Nabila Al-Mulla became Kuwait's first female ambassador, she represented the country with distinction, showcasing her diplomatic acumen and competence -- not just as a seasoned professional, but as a woman breaking barriers in a traditionally male-dominated field."

"The Los Angeles County is grappling with its most devastating wildfires to date. Efforts to control the raging flames are hindered by the looming threat of violent winds, which could intensify the destruction, increasing casualties and compounding economic losses," columnist **Prof. Dr. Abdul Latif Bin Nakhi** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

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"Similarly, Ms. Sheikha Al-Bahar demonstrated unparalleled expertise when she assumed responsibility for one of the largest banks in Kuwait and the region. Her exceptional leadership in the private banking sector exemplifies her capabilities as a professional and as a woman.

"When Ms. Nabila Al-Mulla became Kuwait's first female ambassador, she represented the country with distinction, showcasing her diplomatic acumen and competence -- not just as a seasoned professional, but as a woman breaking barriers in a traditionally male-dominated field."

"The Los Angeles County is grappling with its most devastating wildfires to date. Efforts to control the raging flames are hindered by the looming threat of violent winds, which could intensify the destruction, increasing casualties and compounding economic losses," columnist **Prof. Dr. Abdul Latif Bin Nakhi** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"According to *The Economist*, these

Minor girl in 2-year jail Police nab three persons for carrying, doing drugs

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Personnel from the Security Support Patrols of the Farwaniya Police Directorate have arrested three individuals in possession of drugs and drug paraphernalia at a checkpoint in Al-Ardhiya, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

While manning a checkpoint, the officers noticed a car with three individuals inside who appeared nervous and suspicious and one of them allegedly flung out of the car window a cigarette, which was found to contain narcotic substances.

Upon further precautionary search, the officers found more drugs, narcotic pills and drug-use tools in their possession.

They have been referred to the Directorate-General for Drugs Control.

Minor girl in 2-year jail: The officers from the Ahmadi Governorate's Rescue Division have referred a minor girl to the Juvenile Prosecution and Juvenile Care Administration following a two-year prison sentence slapped on her for possessing and consuming drugs, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

An official source stated the suspect was stopped in Ahmadi, and upon checking the Ministry of Interior's computer records, it was discovered that she had been sentenced to two years in prison and was wanted by law to serve the prison term.

Kuwaiti biker duo hurt: Two young Kuwaiti men were rushed to Mubarak Hospital for treatment after their motorcycle skidded off the road on Ta'awon Street in Salmiya, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to a security source, the mishap happened opposite Salwa following which emergency medical services personnel were rushed to the site while police officers oversaw the removal of the motorcycle from the road and direct traffic.

An accident case has been filed at the area police station.



Mol photo
Major Sarah Hussein presents her degree to Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior.

Support for 'scientific research' boosts security: 1st Deputy PM

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior, met with Major Sarah Hussein Al-Abdelsalam at the Ministry of Interior, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

The meeting was held in recognition of Major Sarah's recent achievement in obtaining a Master's degree from Bangor University in the UK.

Her research, titled 'Understanding Mental Illnesses by Female Police in Kuwait,' was presented to Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef in the presence of Colonel Iman Boland, Director of the Women's Police Institute.

During the meeting, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef congratulated Major Sarah on her

academic success and praised the scientific efforts reflected in her research, which offers valuable insights to improve police work.

He reiterated the Ministry of Interior's commitment to supporting scientific research that enhances security performance and encouraged Major Sarah to continue pursuing higher academic achievements.

Major Sarah, in turn, thanked the Minister for his support and encouragement of academic research, emphasizing that the Ministry's focus on academic development reflects its commitment to improving the professionalism and scientific capabilities of female police officers.

Funds frozen, assets seized of 2 persons on Prosecution request

Al-Shaheen, Abel under intensive probe

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Attorney-General Counselor Saad Al-Safran has issued a decisive order to seize and freeze all assets and properties belonging to Abdullah Al-Shaheen and Essam Abel, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This action is tied to the investigation of Judicial Assistance Request No. 107 of 2024 and is formalized under Public Prosecution Decision No. 4 of 2025.

The decision, a copy of which has been received by the **Al-Seyassah** daily, mandates the freezing of funds deposited in local and foreign bank accounts, as well as any future deposits. It also extends to securities such as stocks and bonds held in these accounts, investment funds, or portfolios managed by entities licensed by the Capital Markets Authority.

Additionally, the freeze encompasses all real estate and plots of land owned, allocated, or registered in the names of the two individuals.

This includes properties listed with the Real Estate Registration and Documentation Department, the Ministry of Finance, the Public Authority for Industry and the Public Authority for Agriculture

Affairs and Fish Resources. The order further targets movable assets, including vehicles, bicycles, boats and jet skis registered with the Ministry of Interior or the Ministry of Transport.

It also includes shares held in companies registered with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The decision prevents the accused or their representatives from disposing of, managing, or otherwise handling these assets until the judicial assistance request is resolved.

The directive, effective immediately, has been circulated to the Central Bank of Kuwait for implementation across all local and foreign banks operating within the country. Notifications have also been sent to the Ministry of Justice, the General Administration of Enforcement, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Finance, the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources, the Public Authority for Industry, the Ministry of Communications, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Capital Markets Authority and the Kuwait Stock Exchange Company.

This sweeping measure underscores the government's commitment to safeguarding the integrity of the judicial process and ensuring that all assets related to the investigation remain secured pending further legal actions.

Fake perfumes factory: The Ministry of Commerce announced the successful execution of an inspection campaign in Hawalli Governorate, leading to the discovery of a significant counterfeit perfume manufacturing and bottling operation, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

The campaign, carried out in collaboration with the Public Authority for Manpower, the Ministry of Interior and the Kuwait Fire Force, resulted in the seizure of 41,000 bottles of counterfeit perfumes.

These bottles, filled with fake international brands, were being sold under the guise of original products.

The Ministry confirmed that all legal procedures have been followed, with a seizure report filed and the violator referred to the Public Prosecution for further legal action.

The Ministry reiterated its ongoing commitment to combat commercial fraud, safeguard consumer rights and enforce the necessary measures to maintain market integrity.

Expat biker dies on road: A 25-year-old expatriate succumbed to severe injuries he sustained when the motorcycle he was riding overturned in Jahra, reports **Al-Anba** daily.



KFF photo
Chief of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) Major General Talal Al Roumi meets UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr. Matar Hamed Al-Neyadi.

Ishbiliya house on fire

KFF chief, UAE envoy talks focus on joint 'anti-fire' bid

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Chief of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) Major General Talal Mohammad Al Roumi received the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates Dr. Matar Hamed Al-Neyadi recently.

According to a press release issued by KFF, Major General Al-Roumi warmly welcomed the UAE Ambassador, and highlighted the deep and long-standing bilateral relations between the two countries.

The discussions between the two parties focused on cooperation in the fields of firefighting and civil protection, and they explored ways to strengthen and enhance these areas.

The visit was attended by KFF Deputy Chief for Fire Combating Sector Brigadier Ahmad Haif Hamoud.

House on fire: Firefighters from the Farwaniya and Ardiya fire stations extinguished a fire that broke out in a house in Ishbiliya.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), firefighters had quickly responded to the incident, and contained the fire. No casualties were reported.

Cafe complex ablaze: Firefighters from Al-Bidaa and Salmiya fire stations successfully controlled a fire at a café in a complex in Salmiya.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), one person was injured in the fire incident and he was transferred to emergency medical services for treatment.

No injuries reported: Firefighting teams from Tahrir, Jahra Crafts, Independence and Support centers extinguished a fire that broke out in a warehouse containing wood and sponge in the Amghara factories area.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), no injuries were reported.

Al-Nawaf opens special library with focus on Mol, media ties

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Lieutenant General Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, has inaugurated the specialized library of the General Department of Security Relations and Media at the Ministry's headquarters, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

During the opening, Al-Nawaf was provided with a detailed explanation about the library and its contents, as well as the advanced borrowing system that allows ministry employees to easily access references and scientific materials.



Sheikh Salem

Al-Nawaf commended the efforts behind the establishment of this pioneering scientific and security center, emphasizing that the library reflects the ministry's commitment to

developing its human resources. He highlighted its role in promoting security culture and knowledge.

The library is designed to foster a scientific environment, rich in specialized resources, that will support scientific research and enrich security thought, addressing contemporary security challenges.

He further noted that the library serves as a bridge between the past and the future, preserving the security history while providing a path for continued progress. Al-Nawaf also acknowledged the support of state institutions, which contributed valuable resources to enhance the library's role in serving the security establishment.

The library houses an integrated collection of studies, research and books focused on security fields. It also features publications from the General Department of Security Relations and Media, including awareness materials and security media campaigns aimed at enhancing community awareness on various issues.



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LOCAL

Minister Al-Mutairi pushes cultural integration amid globalization woes

'Festival marking Kuwait Capital of Arab Culture will be special'

RABAT, Jan 16, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi on Wednesday said that cultural integration through joint initiatives and projects is key to deal with the challenges of globalization, underlining such efforts as crucial towards regional unity.

Culture has long been the basis through which unity and connection are formed, Kuwaiti National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters chief Mohammad Al-Jassar said on behalf of the minister during talks organized by the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) in the Moroccan capital.

The Kuwaiti minister, who also serves as minister of culture and state minister for youth affairs, said that cultural bodies from around the wider Arab region have a significant role to play towards embracing "joint values" and addressing "matters of mutual concern."

Kuwait has been designated as the "Capital of Arab Culture" for the year 2025, which will set in



KUNA photo
Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information for the Media Services and New Media Sector and Head of the Permanent Committee for New Media at the Arab States Broadcasting Union, Saad Nafel Al-Azmi, and Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information for the Radio Sector, Youssef Abdul-Wahhab Al-Suraye.

motion a wide array of activities, all of which will help depict Kuwait in a "positive light," added the minister, ahead of the festivities that are set to kick off on February 13.

Cultural ministers and officials, alongside representatives of international organizations and relevant bodies, are assembling for the pan-Arab talks to push forward cooperation and integration efforts.

Meanwhile, two visiting Kuwaiti officials on

Wednesday affirmed that the forthcoming festivities marking Kuwait as the Capital of Arab Culture and Media (2025) would be distinguished with activities and programs.

Saad Al-Azmi, the assistant undersecretary for media services and the new media and the head of the permanent committee of the new media at the Arab States Broadcasting Union, said in a statement to KUNA the current union session coincides with designating Kuwait as the Capital of Arab Culture and Media for 2025. The Ministry of Information upon instructions by the Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi is working out plans for presenting qualitative activities mirroring the State of Kuwait's distinguished media status.

As to the deliberations during the Arab federation's session, he said that the conferees examined plans for upgrading visual-audio media. They also examined reports about training Arab cadres, boosting pan-Arab cooperation and swapping expertise.

For his part, the assistant undersecretary for the media and new media services, Yusuf Al-Suraye's, has affirmed that Kuwait is diligently seeking to bolster its media status at the Arab level through innovative initiatives and media projects depicting its unique heritage.

The festivities marking Kuwait designation as the Capital of Arab Culture will be launched in February. The planned activities include presentation of plays, poetic soirees, various artistic shows and exhibitions shedding light on Kuwait's history in the information field.



KUNA photo

KUNA Deputy Director General, Head of Egypt's National Press Authority discuss prospects for joint media cooperation.

KUNA and Egypt's SCMR to advance media cooperation

CAIRO, Jan 16, (KUNA): KUNA's Deputy Director-General Mohammad Al-Mannai and President of the Egyptian Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) Khaled Abdulaziz asserted the importance of strengthening media cooperation between Kuwait and Egypt.

Al-Mannai leads a Kuwaiti delegation on a visit to Cairo to explore ways for cooperation and experience sharing with the Egyptian side.

During his meeting with SCMR head on Wednesday, the Kuwaiti official said the media cooperation is vital in countering common challenges and reflects the strength of relations between the two sis-

terly countries in other areas.

On his part, Abdulaziz commended the role of the Kuwaiti media in the combat against extremism through enlightened national awareness.

He noted that both countries share identical views on the message of media, appreciating the role of KUNA as a credible and impartial wire service.

The Kuwaiti delegation includes KUNA's Deputy Chief Editor Oqab Al-Quba'e, Director of Administrative Affairs Adel Al-Mseilam, Cairo Bureau Chief Mohammad Al-Mutairi, head of the International Relations Division Hanouf Al-Qassar and Head of the Procurement Division Majed Al-Subai'ie.

Application period runs from January 18 to January 21

KU starts processing students' admission

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

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Dr. Fadhel Abbas Aziz, the Acting Dean of Admissions and Registration at Kuwait University, has announced that the application process for students wishing to join the Kuwait University for the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year will

begin on January 18 and run until January 21.

This applies to students who meet the admission requirements and wish to study at their own expense, including graduates of the unified system, religious institutes, American schools and English schools.

Applicants from schools within Kuwait can submit their applications electronically, while those with certificates from outside Kuwait are re-

quired to submit their applications in person at the Admissions Department located in the University Administration Building in Sabah Al-Salem University City during official working hours.

Dr. Aziz emphasized the importance of reviewing the university's online instructions and guidelines and adhering to the specified application deadlines, as no applications will be accepted after the announced period.

'Our Sea' effort wins global praise

Kuwait's Diving Team marks major environmental achievements in '24

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (KUNA): Kuwait's Diving Team announced, Wednesday, the achievement of major environmental projects during 2024, which included various volunteer activities that contributed to spreading environmental awareness within its initiative (Our Sea).

In remarks to KUNA, the team's head, Waleed Al-Fadhel, said that the team's achievements was crowned for its distinguished environmental work with the World Energy Foundation Award, based in Austria, stressing the team's determination to continue this journey to achieve more local and international achievements.

Al-Fadhel noted that the team managed to protect and monitor coral reefs, remove tons of waste and sunken ships and boats, and secure maritime navigation in cooperation with several governmental and civil entities.

He said that the team's achievements included continuous campaigns to clean the coasts and islands of Kuwait, and the installation and comprehensive maintenance of all marine anchors in coral reef sites, indicating that the team has completed 130 environmental and volunteer missions at a rate of one environmental activity every three days.



KUNA photo

Waleed Al-Fadhel, Kuwait's Diving Team head.

He also stated that the team lifted 100 tons of neglected fishing nets and waste harmful to the marine and coastal environment, covering more than 30 sites along the coasts and sea of Kuwait.

Al-Fadhel noted that the team continued to develop and update its websites and achieved great success on social media by publishing pictures and short films that highlight environmental problems and show the great achievements the team has made in serving the marine environment.

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Farwaniya Governor with the leaders Union of Cooperative Societies.

Union leaders discuss future initiatives

Farwaniya Governor stresses cooperative sector's role in improving public services

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: The Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received the Chair of the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies Gharib Al-Adhan, and Chair of the Administrative and Financial Committee Rashid Saad Al-Tasha in his office.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the governor welcomed the guests and congratulated them on their appointments to manage the affairs of the union and serve Kuwait in this vital sector.

Al-Adhan discussed the important initiatives and activities carried out by the union in collaboration with various parties, and explored opportunities for further cooperation.

He praised the governor's support, interest, and active involvement in overseeing the development of the cooperative sector.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Athbi received the Chair of the Board of Directors of Al-Firdous Cooperative Society Hattab Fahad Al-Rashidi, along with board members

Secretary Mohammad Jaithan Al-Mutairi, Treasurer Ali Saleh Al-Mutairi, Chair of the Financial and Administrative Committee Rashid Al-Tasha, and Chair of the Purchasing Committee Ahmad Mohammad Al-Mutairi.

He congratulated them on the formation of their new board and wished them success in their efforts to serve the community.

Sheikh Athbi highlighted the vital role played by cooperative societies in meeting the needs of residents and citizens, and their importance in strengthening community services.

At the end of the meeting, the guests expressed their gratitude to the governor for his warm welcome and hospitality.

They highlighted the importance of strengthening cooperative efforts, developing cooperative societies and their facilities, ensuring stronger social ties with the people of the governorate, and providing high-quality services that align with citizens' aspirations.

5th relief plane arrives in Syria with 10 tons of aid

Kuwait assistant FM chairs virtual meeting to examine conditions in Syria



Assistant Foreign Minister for GCC Affairs Ambassador Najib Al-Badr during the virtual meeting that grouped officials from GCC countries' foreign affairs departments.

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (KUNA): The assistant foreign minister for GCC affairs Ambassador Najib Al-Badr headed on Thursday a virtual meeting that grouped officials from GCC countries' foreign affairs departments, dedicated for examining conditions in Syria.

In remarks to KUNA, Ambassador Al-Badr said the meeting was held in line with efforts to enhance regional security and stability "and deal with the current

developments in Syria for serving the joint interests of regional states."

He indicated that it was a follow-up session to the special GCC ministerial meeting hosted by Kuwait on December 26.

Elaborating, Ambassador Al-Badr revealed that today's meeting aimed at working out a strategic vision to activate the GCC role in backing up security and stability in Syria.



KUNA photos

The fifth relief plane from the Kuwaiti air bridge arrives at Damascus International Airport with 10 tons of food and relief aid.

Al-Badr added that he and his peers agreed on some "measures and steps for bolstering the GCC efforts to back up political solutions and attain stability" in Syria.

Alluding to the recent visit to Syria by the Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs, he affirmed that it was "an advance step on part of the GCC for positive interaction with the developments" in this country.

Meanwhile, the fifth relief plane of the Kuwaiti air

bridge arrived on Thursday at Damascus International Airport with 10 tons of aid and food supplies, as part of "Kuwait by Your Side" humanitarian campaign.

Adib Asaad, the airport deputy manager, confirmed in a statement to KUNA the Kuwaiti aircraft arrival at the air facility, noting the ongoing dispatch of assistance from Kuwait to the country depicted the solid relations between "the two brotherly countries despite the hard and extraordinary circumstances."

Municipality issues new guidelines for transporting damaged and used tires

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: In line with the Cabinet's decision issued during its meeting on October 29 regarding the management of damaged and used tires, the acting Director General of the Municipality Manal Al-Asfour issued an administrative circular with seven articles to regulate the transportation of these tires.

Al-Asfour affirmed the need for all licensed waste transporters (solid waste, construction, and asbestos) and those seeking to transport damaged and used tires to comply with the circular.

Article 1 of the circular stresses the need to move damaged and used tires from their source locations to the designated tire recycling factories in Salmi. These factories are identified by specific coordinates and a QR-code specific for the site.

Article 2 mandates that transporters use the tire transport statement (manifest) prepared by the municipal-

ity, and ensure all required information is completed in the transport form attached to the circular.

Article 3 specifies that the recycling factories in Salmi will accept damaged and used tires around the clock.

Article 4 states that failure to transport tires as specified will result in fines and penalties according to the applicable regulations.

Article 5 requires transporters to submit a copy of the tire transport statement (manifest) at the end of each month to the Kuwait Municipality's Environmental Affairs Department in Masayah.

Article 6 strictly prohibits transporting damaged tires through unlicensed waste carriers. Only those waste carriers approved by the competent committee in the municipality are permitted to handle these tires.

Article 7, the final clause, instructs individuals with any complaints or inquiries to contact the municipality directly.

MEW to complete annual employee 'performance evaluation' by March

Bonus disbursement on track

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Sources from the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy say the annual performance evaluation process for the 35,423 employees of the ministry is expected to be completed by the end of March

for the fiscal year 2023/2024.

They indicated that the evaluation process adheres to all regulations and laws set by the Civil Service Commission (CSC) for ensuring fairness and transparency in selecting those eligible for the bonus.

The sources explained that the ministry is making great efforts to complete the evaluation and disburse the bonus on time at the beginning of each year. This reflects the ministry's recognition

and appreciation for the hard work of its employees, particularly those in the technical sectors that support electricity generation and water desalination, as well as those in administrative departments.

Some sectors have already made notable progress, such as the Administrative Affairs Sector, which has completed approximately 60 percent of its employee evaluations.

Work is ongoing to finalize the evaluations for the remaining staff, while other

sectors are also submitting their assessments in preparation for the bonus disbursement.

The sources further highlighted the ministry's commitment to ensuring that all employee-related transactions, such as rewards, allowances, and incentives, are handled promptly, with the goal of motivating employees to continue their efforts and dedication to maintaining the sustainability of electricity and water services.

Sand Cat one of the most beautiful wild creatures, spotted in Kuwait wilderness

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (KUNA): In the wilderness of Kuwait lives the sand cat, which was spotted this season specifically in the Al-Salmi desert through a Kuwaiti lens to document the diverse wildlife in the country and highlight its important role in maintaining the ecological balance.

Deputy Director General for Technical Affairs at the Environment Public Authority, Dr. Abdullah Al-Zaidan, told KUNA Thursday, that this cat was recently spotted in the Al-Salmi area.

Dr. Al-Zaidan said that the sand cat is found locally in the northeastern and border desert areas and the natural reserves of Kuwait in environments consisting of plains with little vegetation cover to valleys and rocky soil.

It is generally found in three dif-



KUNA photo

Sand cat spotted in Barr Al Salmi, Kuwait.

ferent regions of the world: the Sahara Desert in Africa, in the countries of Algeria, Niger and Morocco, and throughout the Arabian Peninsula and parts of Central Asia, indicating that its size ranges from 45 to 57 centimeters, he added.

ABK celebrates Ahmad Hussain Yaqoub's win of Apple Vision Pro in ABK Heroes account draw

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 15: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is pleased to announce Ahmad Hussain Yaqoub as the lucky winner of an Apple Vision Pro device, as part of the monthly draw for the ABK Heroes account.

This event was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, emphasizing transparency in the Bank's operations.

The ABK Heroes account represents the latest initiative by ABK, specifically designed for clients up to 16 years old. This innovative account reflects the Bank's commitment to enriching the financial journeys of young clients while encouraging responsible saving habits from an early age.

Johair Marafi, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK, expressed, "Our primary goal at ABK is to focus on sustainability and promote a culture of saving among our clients. As a responsible banking institution,

we continuously strive to innovate distinctive banking solutions and products, offering exclusive benefits that attract new members to our ever-growing family."

The launch of the ABK Heroes account showcases the Bank's dedication to children, who are vital to the future of society. Marafi congratulated the winner and invited families to open an account and participate in future draws. Account holders can look forward to numerous exclusive benefits, including the highest interest rate in the banking sector at 2%, the chance to win an Apple Vision Pro device each month, and an eco-friendly debit card. Additionally, account holders can enjoy various discounts from partners.

Marafi further emphasized that the ABK Heroes account is an ideal financial solution for parents seeking to manage their finances effectively while preparing for their children's futures. The Bank is dedicated to continuously enhancing the rewards for account holders to attract more families to its growing community.

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.



Marafi



ABK Heroes flyer.

Continued from Page 1

Kuwait set

Maximum temperatures will range between 19 and 21 degrees Celsius, and waves will remain light to moderate, between 1 and 4 feet.

Saturday night will see colder conditions, with minimum temperatures dipping to 5 to 7 degrees Celsius. Winds will shift to a variable direction at 6 to 28 kilometers per hour, and frost may form in agricultural and desert areas. Light to moderate waves are expected at 1 to 3 feet.

Residents are advised to take precautions, particularly in rural and desert regions where fog and frost are anticipated.

Kuwait ministers

The ministry added that the meeting also resulted in an agreement to accelerate the digital transformation of market monitoring and to develop inventory management strategies that support food security and market stability, based on the directives of the political leadership.

The meeting was attended by the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Consumer Cooperative Societies Federation, Gharib Al-Adhan, and a number of senior officials from both ministries.

In other news, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah, the Minister of Social Affairs, Family, and Childhood Affairs, announced the launch of the automated system for central assistance.

According to responsible sources at the Ministry, since its inception on the Jan 5, around 2,000 individuals have registered through the system and obtained user credentials.

These individuals have submitted approximately 1,000 aid requests, covering a wide range of needs, including rent allowances, student support, medical treatments, debt repayments, and other forms of assistance.

The ministry sources highlighted that various charitable organizations have activated their "usernames" on the system, enabling them to process and respond to aid requests according to the guidelines set by the Ministry.

Dr. Al-Huwailah emphasized the Ministry's commitment to ensuring that all charitable transactions are conducted solely through this centralized system, cautioning that any assistance provided outside the system will not be permitted.

"Not a single dinar will be allowed to be spent except through the centralized system," she affirmed, reinforcing the importance of adhering to the Ministry's protocols.

To ensure compliance, the Charitable Societies and Endowments Department at the Ministry carries out regular inspections of participating organizations, reviewing their operations and responding to any complaints.

Moreover, financial reports are periodically assessed to verify that all aid disbursements occur within the framework of the system.

The primary goal of the new system is to centralize and unify the charitable efforts aimed at supporting needy families, while preventing the duplication of aid by different entities.

Dr. Al-Huwailah noted that the Ministry's employees will monitor the system closely, identifying charitable organizations that fail to engage with aid requests. Organizations that do not comply will be alerted, with further actions taken as necessary.

This initiative reflects the Ministry's ongoing commitment to improving the transparency, efficiency, and accountability of social assistance efforts, ensuring that aid reaches those who need it most in a fair and organized manner.

Kuwait Amir,

For his part, His Majesty King Charles III expressed his sincere thanks to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for accepting the invitation, which reflected the depth of the strong relations between the two friendly countries and peoples.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was keen on supporting educational initiatives by organizing mutual programs between Kuwait and the UK, said British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis Thursday.

This came in a statement by Ambassador Lewis to KUNA and Kuwait TV on the visit of His Highness the Amir and an official delegation to the headquarters of the King's Foundation in Dumfries House to view its educational activities and events.

The ambassador affirmed that many educational projects were initiated by the King of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, King Charles III, at the Dumfries House in the Scottish county of Ayrshire.

She noted that Dumfries House was chosen for the visit because it provides opportunities to develop traditional and heritage skills and crafts among local residents and those from outside the UK. This indicates that all the activities held are environmentally friendly, such as sus-

tainable food production and the preservation of rare species of plants and fruits over vast areas in Scotland.

Following the visit, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation departed Scotland, the UK on Thursday. His Highness the Amir was seen off by Kuwait Ambassador to the UK Bader Abdullah Al-Munayyeh and British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis.

See Also Page 2

Paris to

the AI market with a broad initiative to put this technology at the service of the public interest in order to enhance the development of computational capacity, structured data sets, available tools, and training and sharing of future talent," Alsaghir Govan continued. "Public and private actors will participate in supporting this project."

He stressed that the world must finally build together a system for the effective and comprehensive governance of artificial intelligence technology, not limited to issues of ethics and security, while other issues are of vital importance, and must discuss all topics such as respect for fundamental freedoms, intellectual property, addressing market concentration, and obtaining data, for example.

The French ambassador noted that all topics will be addressed, from the future of work to economical artificial intelligence technology, from model security to innovation systems, and from important linguistic diversity, including cultural diversity, to the protection of personal data.

Kuwait welcomes

The Ministry affirms the State of Kuwait's firm position in supporting the Palestinian people's right to establish their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the borders of June 4, 1967.

Elsewhere, Gulf Cooperation Council permanent delegations to the United Nations urged intensifying efforts to support rebuilding initiatives in Gaza Strip, and affirmed that the just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue and to achieving peace lies in the two state solution.

Kuwaiti Permanent envoy to the UN, Ambassador Tareq Al-Bannai relayed the speech on behalf of gulf nations at the session designated for examining UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres priorities for the current year.

Ambassador Al-Bannai directed his words to Guterres and to his deputy Amina Mohammad, appreciating efforts of their astute leadership in these critical times of widely dimensional challenges, and reiterated GCC support to their efforts.

He recalled what has been pointed to in previous speeches on the need to adopt peace, dialogue, and extension of bridges to overcome challenges of the time and their forking ramifications, as well as limit catastrophes and hardships.

Al-Bannai took the opportunity to renew faith in work of the organization, as it is indispensable in the implementation of international multilateral cooperation and the promotion of joint humanitarian principles.

Ambassador Al-Bannai went on to expound on the horrific reality and the tragic conditions under which Gazans

reside, under an occupation that knows no mercy, and bloodshed for more than a year.

He hailed trilateral mediation efforts of Qatar, Egypt and the United States, underlined constructive role of UN and its organizations, honored the fallen victims who fell in protection of civilians.

Al-Bannai relayed the concern of the gulf bloc in regards to the financial gap standing in the way of response to increasing humanitarian needs.

He urged donor nations to boost support to relief efforts and underscored necessity of differentiating between humanitarian financing and financing for developmental and climate situations to guarantee efficient distribution.

Meanwhile, Gaza's Health Ministry said Israeli strikes have killed at least 72 people since the ceasefire deal was announced. It said the toll from Thursday's strikes only includes bodies brought to two hospitals in Gaza City, and that the actual toll is likely higher.

"Yesterday was a bloody day, and today is bloodier," said Zaher al-Wahedi, head of the ministry's registration department.

An Associated Press reporter on the Israeli side of the border near Gaza heard more airstrikes and artillery fire on Thursday.

Under the deal reached Wednesday, 33 of some 100 hostages who remain in Gaza are set to be released over the next six weeks in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Israeli forces will pull back from many areas, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would be able to return to what's left of their homes, and there would be a surge of humanitarian assistance.

Defense nominee and AG pick Bondi face fierce Democratic pushback

Trump's outsider Cabinet picks rapidly gaining support for confirmation

WASHINGTON, Jan 16, (AP): One by one, all the president-elect's men, and women, are falling into place in his Cabinet.

While Defense Secretary pick Pete Hegseth's nomination was teetering toward collapse just weeks ago, he now appears on track for confirmation after a fiery Senate hearing that focused on his drinking, views of women in combat and lack of high-profile management experience for the top U.S. military job.

President-elect Donald Trump's other nominees pushed Wednesday through a gauntlet of confirmation hearings with the help of allied Senate Republicans carrying them toward the finish line, despite Democratic objections. One of them, potential FBI director Kash Patel, popped into a private Senate GOP lunch Wednesday to say hello.

"These nominees are bold choices," said Sen. John Barasso of Wyoming, the GOP whip, in earlier remarks.

He predicted the Senate will begin start voting on Inauguration Day, Jan. 20, to confirm Trump's picks.

To be sure, Trump's more controversial choices of Patel, Tulsı Gabbard and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., have yet to come before senators for public questioning. Once they do, they face a long haul ahead in winning over skeptics from both sides of the political aisle, Republicans and Democrats alike.

In a letter to Republican senators Wednesday, an organization headed by Trump's former vice president, Mike Pence, said it was "deeply concerned" over Kennedy over his views on abortion, and urged senators to reject him for secretary of Health and Human Services.

But Hegseth's ability to mount a political comeback, take the fight to his critics and turn his nomination into a litmus test of Trump's Make America Great Again movement stands as a powerful example of the incoming White House's ability to get what it wants. The Trump team's allies, including billionaire Elon Musk and others, amplified support for Hegseth, pushing him forward.

"If anyone in the Senate GOP votes against confirming Pete Hegseth after his stellar performance today, there will

be a primary challenge waiting for you," wrote Trump ally Charlie Kirk on X. "You can take that to the bank."

The Senate Armed Services Committee is expected to vote on Hegseth's nomination on Monday, sending it to the full Senate for consideration, with confirmation possible later that week.

With a nod of support from GOP Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa, a combat veteran and sexual assault survivor who initially had questions for Hegseth, the former Army National Guard veteran powered past his biggest potential roadblock. Ernst faced an onslaught of personal and political attacks as she wavered on supporting Hegseth, an early signal to others.

Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., said the criticism of Hegseth was not as powerful as the image of "a warrior with dust on his boots who's actually done the things."

On Wednesday, a half dozen more Trump nominees appeared before Senate committees as his team floods the zone, senators dashing between hearing rooms to participate in as many sessions as possible.

Pam Bondi, the nominee for Attorney General, was grilled by Democrats probing whether she believed Trump lost the 2020 election, she said Biden won, or would stand up to presidential pardons for those convicted of crimes in relation to Jan. 6, 2021.

"You say the right things, that you're going to be the 'people's lawyer,'" said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.

"But I believe being the 'people's lawyer' means you have to be able to say no to the president of the United States," he said. "You have to be able to say Donald Trump lost the 2020 election, you dodged that question... You have to be able to say Jan. 6 insurrectionists who committed violence shouldn't be pardoned."

Bondi responded: "I don't have to say anything. I will answer the questions to the best of my ability, and honestly."

Another Trump nominee, Russ Vought, a Project 2025 architect tapped to lead the White House Office of Management and Budget, was asked if he would commit to releasing



This combination photo of President-elect Donald Trump's nominees who will have confirmation hearings Wednesday, Jan. 15, 2025, shows Attorney General nominee Pam Bondi, from top left, Transportation Secretary nominee Sean Duffy, Secretary of Homeland Security nominee South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, and from bottom left, CIA Director nominee John Ratcliffe, Secretary of State nominee Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., and Russell Vought, nominee for director of the Office of Management and Budget. (AP)

congressional approved funding for Ukraine. He vowed to "always commit to upholding the law."

And California Democratic Sen. Alex Padilla asked Trump's Energy nominee Chris Wright if he still believes "wildfires are just hype," in the aftermath of the devastating

Southern California fires that have killed at least 25 people and destroyed thousands of homes.

Wright said he stood by his past comments. He then said climate change is real before Padilla cut him off.

On Monday, Trump is expected to come inside the Capitol after he is inaugurated to sign the paperwork to formally nominate his picks for top Cabinet and administrative positions, launching the confirmation process.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune has said the Senate will vote on nominees as soon as they are ready.

First up could be Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., a former Trump rival for the 2016 GOP presidential nomination, who is now the president-elect's choice for secretary of state.

Rubio promised an "America First" foreign policy agenda during his own confirmation hearing Wednesday. As a well-known senator, he is expected to have broad support from Republicans, as well as Democrats. His confirmation vote could be as soon as Monday evening.

Other nominees, including Hegseth, are expected to face a tougher path to confirmation.

Republicans narrowly hold a majority in the Senate, 53-47, but they are down to 52 after Vice President-elect JD Vance resigned his seat last week ahead of taking office. That means Trump's nominees need support from almost every GOP senator for majority confirmation over objections from Democrats.

Moreover, Democrats are expected to mount procedural hurdles that would require Hegseth and other nominees to go through multiple steps before final confirmation. Consideration of Hegseth and others could drag toward the end of next week.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer all but acknowledged Democrats, as the minority, are essentially powerless to prevent Trump from getting his desired team.

"It's important to have a record of these nominees," Schumer said Wednesday as the hearings pushed ahead. "Even if they get confirmed in the end."

'Oligarchy of ultrarich in US threatens future of democracy'

Firefighters gain ground

Biden executive order aims to shore up US cyber defenses

WASHINGTON, Jan 16, (AP): President Joe Biden issued an executive order on Thursday aimed at strengthening the nation's cybersecurity and making it easier to go after foreign adversaries or hacking groups that try to compromise U.S. internet and telecommunication systems.

Provisions in the order call for the development of minimum cybersecurity standards for government technology contractors and require that contractors submit evidence that they're complying with the rules.

They also are aimed at making it easier for U.S. authorities to sanction foreign governments that target the U.S. with cyberattacks - a change that comes after several recent hacking incidents linked to China, Iran, Russia and North Korea. Among other changes, the order allows sanctions to be imposed on foreign hackers who target hospitals or other organizations with ransomware.

The order also requires federal agencies to improve cybersecurity to protect against the threat posed by powerful quantum computers, which cyber experts say could be used to easily break into many systems. It's an issue that could have direct national security implications if a foreign adversary builds a computer sophisticated enough to break American codes.

The White House issued the order just days before Biden, a Democrat, leaves office. Republican President-elect Donald Trump's administration could rescind the policy in favor of its own proposals. But deputy national security adviser Anne Neuberger said the order's twin goals - strengthening cybersecurity and punishing those responsible for cyberattacks - should win bipartisan support.

The order is intended to show that "America means business when it comes to protecting our businesses and our citizens," Neuberger said while briefing reporters on the new policies.

President Biden used his farewell address to the nation Wednesday to deliver stark warnings about an "oligarchy" of the ultra-wealthy taking root in the country and



President Joe Biden speaks from the Oval Office of the White House as he gives his farewell address Wednesday, Jan. 15, 2025, in Washington. (AP)

a "tech-industrial complex" that is infringing on Americans' rights and the future of democracy.

Speaking from the Oval Office as he prepares to hand over power Monday to President-elect Donald Trump, Biden seized what is likely to be his final opportunity to address the country before he departs the White House to spotlight the accumulation of power and wealth in the U.S. among just a small few.

"Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power and influence that literally threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms, and a fair shot for everyone to get ahead," Biden said, drawing attention to "a dangerous concentration of power in the hands of a few ultra-wealthy people and the dangerous consequences if their abuse of power is left unchecked."

Invoking President Dwight Eisenhower's warnings about the rise of a military-

industrial complex when he left office in 1961, Biden added, "I'm equally concerned about the potential rise of a tech-industrial complex that could pose real dangers to our country as well."

Biden used his 15-minute address to offer a model for a peaceful transfer of power and - without mentioning Trump by name - raise concerns about his successor.

It marked a striking admonition by Biden, who is departing the national stage after more than 50 years in public life, as he has struggled to define his legacy and to steel the country against the return of Trump to the Oval Office. This time, the president, who has repeatedly called Trump a threat to the nation's system of governance, went even further, warning Americans to be on guard for their freedoms and their institutions during a turbulent era of rapid technological and economic change.

Biden sounded the alarm about oligarchy

as some of the world's richest individuals and titans of its technology industry have flocked to Trump's side in recent months, particularly after his November victory. Billionaire Elon Musk spent more than \$100 million helping Trump get elected, and executives like Meta's Mark Zuckerberg and Amazon's Jeff Bezos have donated to Trump's inaugural committee and made pilgrimages to Trump's private club in Florida for audiences with the president-elect as they seek to ingratiate themselves with his administration and shape its policies.

Biden's speech in the Oval Office is the latest in a series of remarks on domestic policy and foreign relations he has delivered that are intended to cement his legacy and reshape Americans' grim views on his term. Earlier in the day, he heralded a long-awaited ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, which could end more than a year of bloodshed in the Middle East.

"It'll take time to feel the full impact of what we've done together but the seeds are planted and they'll grow and they'll bloom for decades to come," Biden said. It was a tacit acknowledgement that many Americans say they have yet to feel the impact of his trillions of dollars spent on domestic initiatives.

At the same time that Biden was criticizing social media companies for retreating from fact-checking on their platforms, Trump's incoming communications director and press secretary were sharing posts on X that falsely claimed the president had delivered a prerecorded speech. Biden has blamed his poor standing with the public on misinformation on social media and the challenges he has faced reaching voters in the disaggregated modern media ecosystem.

Biden offered his own set of solutions for the problems that he laid out: change the tax code to ensure billionaires "pay their fair share," eliminate the flow of hidden sources of money into political campaigns, establish 18-year term limits for members of the Supreme Court and ban members of Congress from trading stocks.

Weather eases up, steady progress on LA-area fires

LOS ANGELES, Jan 16, (AP): The windy, flame-fanning weather that put the nation's second-most-populous metropolitan region on edge eased up Wednesday as firefighters made significant gains against the two massive wildfires burning around Los Angeles.

A "Particularly Dangerous Situation" red-flag warning expired without causing explosive fire growth as feared, though forecasters said gusty winds could linger into early Thursday, mostly in the mountains. Temperatures were predicted to drop, and a deep marine layer was expected to move in over the weekend, according to the National Weather Service in Los Angeles.

Those improved conditions should help fire crews make even more headway and allow residents to return to their neighborhoods to begin rebuilding.

But Santa Ana winds could return early next week.

"Good news: We are expecting a much-needed break from the fire weather concerns to close this week," the weather service posted on social media Wednesday afternoon. "Bad News: Next week is a concern. While confident that we will NOT see a repeat of last week, dangerous fire weather conditions are expected."

Still, firefighters and police faced new challenges. Since the beginning of the outbreak last week, authorities have arrested about half a dozen people accused of setting new, small fires that were quickly knocked down.

One suspect admitted starting a fire in a tree "because he liked the smell of burning leaves," Los Angeles Police Chief Jim McDonnell said. Another said "she enjoyed causing chaos and destruction," the chief said Wednesday.



Homes along Pacific Coast Highway are seen burned and damaged while a few still stand after the Palisades Fire, Jan. 12, 2025, in Malibu, Calif. (AP)

America

Giuliani to be 1st witness: Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani is set to be the first witness at a trial over whether he can keep his Florida condominium and three World Series rings or must turn them over to satisfy a \$148 million defamation judgment awarded to two Georgia election workers.

The trial, heard without a jury, begins Thursday morning at a federal court in Manhattan.

Giuliani, 80, will testify before the same judge who last week found him in contempt for failing to turn over information on some of his assets to lawyers for the women. As punishment, Judge Lewis J. Liman banned Giuliani from introducing some evidence. (AP)

GOP Intel Chair axed: House Speaker Mike Johnson on Wednesday removed the GOP chairman of the powerful House Intelligence Committee, who was a vocal supporter of assistance for Ukraine and held other views that put him at odds with President-elect Donald Trump.

Johnson told reporters late Wednesday that Rep. Mike Turner, an Ohio Republican, would no longer lead the committee, which oversees the nation's intelligence agencies and holds tremendous influence over law enforcement and foreign policy. (AP)

WH holds exercise: Senior officials from President-elect Donald Trump's administration, including the majority of his designated Cabinet nominees, were at the White House on Wednesday to participate in a transition exercise hosted by President Joe Biden's team.

The transition tabletop exercise was chaired by Homeland Security Adviser Liz Sherwood-Randall in the White House Situation Room, the White House said, and included a substantial share of Biden's outgoing Cabinet for the two-hour session. (AP)

President whisperer or Trojan horse?

Italy's Meloni to leverage strong ties with Trump

ROME, Jan 16, (AP): After forging unexpectedly fond ties with U.S. President Joe Biden, Italy's right-wing Premier Giorgia Meloni is poised to leverage a more natural alliance with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump that positions her as a key interlocutor between the U.S. and Europe.

Weeks before his inauguration, Meloni met Trump at his Mar-a-Lago retreat, a visit that she said went "beyond expectations." The trip, she said, "was an opportunity to confirm a relationship that promises to be very solid," adding diplomatically, "I don't know if I can say privileged."

A strong trans-Atlantic relationship between two conservative governments creates "an added value, not only for Italy but for Europe as a whole," she told journalists this month.

It remains to be seen to whose advantage the relationship will be, with some observers saying that Meloni could either become a Trump whisperer, exerting influence, or a Trojan horse in Europe - for Trump's purposes.

"It's clear that if Trump is looking for a person to call in Europe when in need, Meloni is the one," said Franco Pavoncello, political science professor and president of Rome's John Cabot University. "Around her in Europe, it's a desert."

Known for its rotating governments that rarely complete full parliamentary terms, Italy is in the unusual position of being the most stable government among major European and G-7 allies, as Germany, France and even Canada struggle.

Meloni has led her once-fringe, post-fascist party from the extreme right to more mainstream positions, especially on foreign policy. She gained ground as a leading political figure in Europe after her far-right



Italy's Premier Giorgia Meloni holds the year-end press conference in Rome, Jan. 9, 2025. (AP)

Brothers of Italy party scored a sound performance in the EU election last June.

The 48-year-old Italian leader made the trip to Florida as her government was working to win the release from Iran of an Italian journalist who was arrested in mid-December. Within days of her return, the journalist, Cecilia Sala, was released in what Meloni described as "diplomatic triangulation" between the U.S., Italy and Iran. Four days later, Italy freed an Iranian citizen held on a U.S. warrant.

While Meloni denied any direct Trump involvement in the deal, her defense minister said the images of Meloni standing alongside him reinforced her "credibility" at a critical juncture.

On ideological grounds, Meloni is a natural ally for the incoming U.S. president. She has taken on migration, seeking deals with African nations to discourage departures and is determined to vet male asylum

seekers at two centers Italy built in Albania. Her government also has adopted conservative family policies, including a ban on surrogacy and has taken action meant to curb abortions.

The personal chemistry between Trump and Meloni is also evident and reinforces her chances to become his go-to leader in Europe. The two were seen locked in discussions during celebrations for the reopening of Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral on Dec. 7, when they set in motion the Mar-a-Lago visit. Meloni also has a well-documented friendship with key Trump adviser, Elon Musk.

The Italian prime minister is one of just a handful of world leaders who will likely attend Trump's inauguration ceremony on Jan. 20, confirming the strong ties with the U.S. administration.

More surprising was Meloni's strong relationship with Biden, who initially viewed Meloni's rise to power as a harbinger of a rightward

shift in global politics. But Biden's concerns about her ideology were eased by her support for Ukraine in its effort to repel Russia's grinding invasion and her openness to pulling back from Italy's participation in China's infrastructure-building Belt and Road Initiative.

The two met at least twice in Washington, highly unusual for an Italian leader in just two years in office. Biden had even planned to make his last overseas trip as president this month to Italy. That trip, however, was scrapped at the last minute so Biden could stay in Washington to oversee the federal response to wildfires devastating Los Angeles.

Instead, Biden and Meloni spoke by phone last Friday. The White House said Biden expressed his appreciation to Meloni for Italy's support for Ukraine as well as the country's leadership at the G7, NATO and European Union.

Meloni's pro-Atlantic position, which secured her ties with Biden, may prove a challenge to a Trump relationship. Trump is pushing NATO allies to increase their spending to 5% of national output, with Italy one of just eight members that falls below the 2% defense spending target.

"On Ukraine, the Trump administration will try to find a way to dialogue with Russia to reach a solution and will likely ask Europe to do more," said Mario Del Pero, expert of transatlantic relations and professor of international history at SciencesPo in Paris. "That will put Italy in a tough spot."

Meloni has already been forced to comment on Trump's recent expansionist rhetoric, telling reporters that his comments about annexing Greenland, Canada and Panama were meant as a deterrent, a "forceful message to other big global players rather than a hostile action."

Europe

UK's PM arrives in Kyiv: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived in Ukraine's capital on Thursday with a pledge to help guarantee the country's security for a century, days before Donald Trump is sworn in as U.S. president.

The British government says Starmer and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will sign a "100-Year Partnership" treaty in Kyiv covering areas including defense, science, energy and trade.

Starmer's unannounced visit is his first trip to Ukraine since he took office in July. He visited the country in 2023 when he was opposition leader, and has twice held talks with Zelenskyy in London since becoming prime minister. (AP)

Italy rail calls for probe: Italy's national railroad filed a formal complaint with law enforcement authorities Wednesday alleging that power outages up and down the peninsula that have caused days of train delays were suspicious.

"It can't be a coincidence" that the outages have occurred during peak times on lines out of Rome, Milan and elsewhere, said Ferrovie dello Stato, which runs the Trenitalia system. It didn't explicitly allege sabotage but in a statement said, "The type of failures and their frequency are raising more than a few questions." (AP)

Poland accuses Russia: Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk accused Russia on Wednesday of planning acts of sabotage worldwide that included "acts of air terror" against airlines.

Tusk spoke at a news conference in Warsaw alongside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"I will not go into details, I can only confirm the validity of fears that Russia was planning acts of air terror, not only against Poland, but against airlines around the world," Tusk said. (AP)

All survivors arrested as rescue operation winds down

S. Africa death toll rises to 87 as standoff between police and miners ends

STILFONTEIN, South Africa, Jan 16, (AP): The death toll in a months-long standoff between police and miners trapped while working illegally underground at an abandoned gold mine in South Africa has risen to at least 87, police said Thursday as they wound down a rescue operation that has pulled more than 240 survivors out from deep underground.

National police spokesperson Athlenda Mathe said that 78 bodies were retrieved from the mine in an official rescue operation that began Monday, while another nine had been recovered previously. She did not give details on how those other bodies were retrieved. Community groups have said they launched their own rescue attempts when authorities said last year they would not help the miners because they were "criminals."

The miners are suspected to have died of starvation and dehydration.

Authorities now believe that nearly 2,000 miners were underground working illegally at the Buffelsfontein Gold Mine southwest of Johannesburg since August last year. Many of them resurfaced on their own over the last few months, police said, and all the survivors have been arrested.

Police announced Wednesday that they were ending the rescue operation and believed no one else was underground. A camera would be sent down on Thursday to make certain, Mathe said. The mine is one of the deepest in South Africa and the miners were working up to 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) underground.

Mathe said at least 13 children had also come out of the mine before the official rescue operation. The vast majority of the miners are foreign nationals from neighboring countries, police said.

South African authorities have been widely criticized for their approach, having cut off food and



Left: National police spokesperson Athlenda Mathe, speaks to journalists outside an abandoned gold mine, where miners are rescued from below ground, in Stilfontein, South Africa, Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025. Right: Forensic service vehicles arrive at the site where a rescue operation continues for miners trapped in an abandoned gold mine in Stilfontein, South Africa on Wednesday. (AP)



supplies to the miners for a period of time last year in an attempt, as one Cabinet minister said, to "smoke them out."

Civic groups have said authorities have contributed to dozens of deaths, while there are calls for an independent inquiry to investigate what happened.

Police maintain that the miners were able to come out through several different shafts but many refused out of fear of being arrested. That's been disputed by groups representing the miners, who say some were trapped and left starving underground.

The surprise announcement ending the operation came a day after the police minister said it would likely last until at least next week.

Rescuers would do a final sweep of the mine on Thursday, said Maj-Gen. Patrick Asaneng, the acting police commissioner for North West province.

The announcement brought a sudden end to a disaster that has focused criticism on the South African government's decision last year to try to force out the miners

by cutting off their food and other supplies.

Civic groups say the government's refusal to stage a rescue sooner effectively left the miners to die of starvation or dehydration. It was unclear exactly how long the miners were underground for, but Asaneng said some of them had been in the mine since August. Relatives said others had been there since July.

Some of the survivors were badly emaciated and barely able to walk and had to be helped into ambulances. All of them would be arrested and charged with illegal mining and trespassing, police said.

South Africa's second biggest political party, which is part of a government coalition, has called for an independent inquiry to find out "why the situation was allowed to get so badly out of hand."

Authorities launched the rescue effort on Monday in response to a court order last week ordering them to do so.

A specialist mining rescue company had been dropping a small cage thousands of meters down a

shaft to retrieve survivors and bodies. But no personnel from the company went down because they considered it too dangerous — instead two community volunteers were in the cage to help the miners out.

Those two volunteers had searched underground Wednesday and reported there were no more bodies or survivors, Asaneng said.

However, Mzukisi Jam, a spokesperson for the South African National Civics Organisation, said that there were more bodies at another shaft and demanded to know what was going to happen with them. "What are we going to tell the relatives?" he said on TV station Newzroom Afrika.

The mine is 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) deep with multiple shafts, many levels and a maze of tunnels. Another civic group had estimated that more than 500 miners were underground when the rescue started. Police brought out 324 bodies and survivors in total.

The closed Buffelsfontein Gold Mine was the scene of a standoff in November when police tried to force the miners out by cutting off

their supplies for a period of time.

A court ruled that authorities had to allow supplies in — but civic groups argued that officials needed to do more because the miners still weren't getting enough food and water and the situation was becoming dire.

South African authorities have said that the miners were able to exit through another shaft, but some refused because they feared being arrested. Activists said that escaping for most would involve a dangerous trek underground, and many were too weak or ill after months underground with little food and water.

Police have said they were carrying out their mandate to "combat criminality" and said they seized gold, explosives, firearms and more than \$2 million in cash from the miners. They said the vast majority were foreign nationals from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Lesotho and in South Africa illegally.

One of the civic groups representing the miners released two videos over the weekend showing what it said were the dire condi-

tions underground. The videos were on a cellphone carried out of the mine by one of the miners, the group said, along with a note urging people to watch them.

In them, dozens of what appear to be dead bodies can be seen lined up in a darkened cavern and wrapped in plastic. The man filming says they are dying and begs for authorities to send them food and get them out.

Authorities are particularly under fire for their tactics last year, when they cut off food and other supplies to the miners for a period of time. It was an attempt to "smoke them out," a South African Cabinet minister said, adding that authorities would not help the miners because they were "criminals."

Rights groups condemned the plan and South Africa's second largest trade union federation called it "one of the most horrific displays of state willful negligence in recent history."

But while anger is high in the local community, the tragedy has not stoked a strong reaction across South Africa, where illegal mining is often in the news.

The practice is common at mines that companies have closed because they are no longer profitable, leaving groups of informal miners to enter in a search for leftover deposits. South Africa has an estimated 6,000 abandoned mines, and authorities said more than 1,500 people had been arrested for illegal mining in the Stilfontein area since last August.

The South African government has taken a hard-line approach to the miners — called "zama zamas" in the Zulu language, which roughly translates as "hustlers" or "chancers." They are often armed and part of criminal syndicates, the government says, and rob South Africa of more than \$1 billion a year in gold.



Cuban and American flags fly in the wind outside the American embassy in Havana, Cuba, Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2025. (AP)

Cuba starts freeing prisoners day after US said it would lift terror designation

HAVANA, Jan 16, (AP): Cuba started releasing some prisoners Wednesday as part of talks with the Vatican, a day after President Joe Biden's administration announced his intent to lift the U.S. designation of the island nation as a state sponsor of terrorism.

More than a dozen people who were convicted of different crimes — and some of them were arrested after taking part in the historic 2021 protests — were released during the day, according to Cuban civil groups following the cases of detainees on the island.

Among those freed was tattooist Reyna Yacnara Barreto Batista, 24, who was detained in the 2021 protests and convicted to four years in prison for attacks and public disorder. She was released from a prison in the province of Camagüey, and told The Associated Press that eight men were also freed along with her.

On Tuesday, the U.S. government

said it notified Congress about the intent to lift the designation of Cuba as part of a deal facilitated by the Vatican. Cuban authorities would release some of them before Biden's administration ends on Jan. 20, officials said.

Hours later, the Cuban foreign ministry said the government informed Pope Francis it would gradually release 553 convicts as authorities explore legal and humanitarian ways to make it happen.

Havana did not link the prisoners' release to the U.S. decision on lifting the designation but said it was "in the spirit of the Ordinary Jubilee of the year 2025 declared by His Holiness," referring to the Vatican's once-every-25-year tradition of a Jubilee, in which the Catholic faithful make pilgrimages to Rome.

The Cuban Observatory of Human Rights, one of the civil groups, said that by 4 p.m. EST, 18 people had been

released, including Barreto Batista.

"At three in the morning they knocked," Barreto Batista told the AP over the phone. "I was sleeping (in the cell) and they told me to gather all my things, that I was free."

She said that she and the eight men were warned it was not a pardon or a forgiveness and that they had to be on good behavior or they could be sent back to prison.

"I am at home with my mother," she said. "The whole family is celebrating."

In July 2021, thousands of Cubans took to the streets to protest widespread power outages and shortages amid a severe economic crisis. The government's crackdown on the demonstrators, which included arrests and detentions, sparked international criticism, while Cuban officials blamed U.S. sanctions and a media campaign for the unrest.



Bangladesh's former prime minister and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson Khaleda Zia, center, leaves after a court appearance in Dhaka, Bangladesh on Dec. 28, 2017. (AP)

Traditional Sakrain festival celebrated in Dhaka

Bangladesh Supreme Court acquits ex-PM Zia

DHAKA, Jan 16, (Agencies): Bangladesh's Supreme Court on Wednesday acquitted former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the last corruption case against her, paving the way for her to run in elections that an interim government says will be held either in December or in the first half of 2026.

Zia is ailing and traveled to London earlier this month for medical treatment after being cleared in another corruption case brought under former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was ousted last August in a mass uprising that ended her 15-year rule.

Zia and Hasina are archrivals who have dominated Bangladesh's politics for decades, and Hasina's ouster has created an opportunity for Zia to make a comeback.

On Wednesday, a five-member Appellate Division of the Supreme Court overturned a 10-year jail sentence handed down by the High

Court in 2018 on charges of embezzling some \$250,000 in donations meant for an orphanage trust established when Zia became prime minister in 1991.

The High Court had also sentenced Zia's son, Tarique Rahman, and four others to 10 years in prison for involvement in the case. Rahman is the heir apparent in Zia's party under Bangladesh's dynastic political system.

Wednesday's verdict by the Supreme Court also cleared Rahman and the others.

Zia's lawyers said the verdict means she will be able to contest in next election. Under Bangladesh law, anyone imprisoned for more than two years cannot run for political office for the next five years.

Zia had faced a total of 17 years in prison - 10 years in this case and seven years in the other corruption case. She was acquitted in the other case after Hasina was ousted from

office in August.

Also:

DHAKA: People in old part of the Bangladesh capital Dhaka have celebrated Sakrain festival, also known as Ghuri Utsob or Kite festival.

The festival is celebrated every year at the end of Poush, the ninth month of the Bengali calendar (Jan. 14 or 15 in Gregorian calendar).

On Tuesday, the festival transformed old Dhaka's skies into a glittery kaleidoscope of hundreds of thousands of kites.

The annual event as always featured fireworks and fire-breathing performances.

In parts of Bangladesh, the festival was also observed to mark the beginning of the harvest season.

Eating winter cakes known as "Pitha" made with new winter rice, and flying kites on the occasion are an age-old tradition.

Asia

China backs Sri Lanka development: China will actively support Sri Lanka in focusing on economic development and the two countries should jointly foster new highlights in high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, as well as cooperation in modern agriculture, digital economy and marine economy, Chinese President Xi Jinping said Wednesday.

China's efforts in further deepening reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization will bring new opportunities for Sri Lanka's development, Xi said when holding talks with Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who is in China for a state visit.

Noting that China and Sri Lanka enjoy a traditional friendship, Xi said bilateral relations have maintained healthy and stable development over the past 68 years, setting an example of friendly coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation between different countries. (Xinhua)

Yoon to reject questioning, say lawyers: Lawyers representing South Korea's impeached president said Thursday he will refuse further questioning after being detained by anti-corruption officials over his ill-fated declaration of martial law last month, maintaining that the investigation is illegal.

President Yoon Suk Yeol exercised his right to remain silent as he underwent more than 10 hours of questioning on Wednesday at the headquarters of the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, following a massive law enforcement operation to detain him at his official residence in Seoul.

Investigators are expected to move to place him under arrest in the coming days. (AP)

Tropical Thailand gets cool respite: Tropical Thailand is experiencing an



A Thai Buddhist monk wears winter hat as he waits for offerings in Bangkok, Thailand, Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025. (AP)

unusually cool stretch of weather that forecasters say could last until mid-February, leading many residents to dig out their sweaters and cardigans.

Thursday morning's forecast showed areas all over Thailand were feeling the cool, especially in the north. The Meteorological Department said temperatures in the north and northeast dropped as low as 8-9 degrees Celsius (46.4-48.2 degrees Fahrenheit), while on the mountains they hit 2 degrees Celsius.

The past few weeks have been particularly enjoyable for many people in Bang-

kok, where high temperatures in the summer can rise to 35-40 degrees Celsius.

Thursday saw a slight rise in temperatures in the city, but the lows were still measured at 19-21 degrees Celsius.

At a park in central Bangkok, many joggers were out early in the morning to enjoy the cooler temperatures and sweat-free exercise. (AP)

7 missing in Jakarta mall fire: Seven people reportedly went missing after a fire broke out on Wednesday evening in a shopping mall in the Indonesian city of Jakarta, police said on Thursday.

The incident occurred in Glodok Plaza at around 9:20 p.m. local time in the densely populated area of Tamansari sub-district. Many visitors were reportedly in the mall at the time of the fire.

The city's fire department has deployed over 40 fire engines and 200 firefighters to combat the fire at the shopping mall. As of Thursday afternoon, embers remain in one of the buildings, despite the extinguishing efforts having entered the cooling stage.

The city's police spokesperson, Ade Ary Syam Indradi, told local reporters that firefighters and police personnel are still at the location to investigate the main cause of the blaze. (Xinhua)

Australian PM reshuffles cabinet: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced a cabinet reshuffle on Thursday following a minister's early retirement ahead of the general election, which must be held by May.

Albanese announced the ministry changes of "a strong, united and stable cabinet government" following the foreshadowed resignation of Bill Shorten as National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and government services minister.

Social Services Minister Amanda Rishworth will take the additional role as the NDIS minister, one of Shorten's current ministerial portfolios, with Anne Aly to become the minister assisting the NDIS minister. (Xinhua)

Kuwait oil price stable at \$82.25 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (KUNA): Kuwait oil price settled at USD 82.25 per barrel Wednesday, compared with the same price the previous day, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on

Thursday.

At the global level, the Brent crude went up by USD 2.11 to USD 82.03 pb, and the West Texas Intermediate also rose by USD 2.54 to USD 80.04 pb.

Business

OPEC reports 0.1% monthly rise

Oil futures curves strengthen, reflecting 'optimistic outlook'

VIENNA, Jan 16, (KUNA): The oil prices went up slightly in December, sending upbeat message about the outlook of the global economy, OPEC's latest report showed on Wednesday.

In December, the OPEC Reference Basket (ORB) rose by nine cents, or 0.1 percent, m-o-m, to average USD 73.07/b, according to OPEC Monthly Oil Market Report January 2025.

The ICE (Intercontinental Exchange) Brent front-month contract fell by 27 cents, or 0.4 percent, to average USD 73.13/b, while the NYMEX WTI front-month contract rose by 16 cents, or 0.2 percent, to average USD 69.70/b.

The GME (Gulf Mercantile Exchange) Oman front-month contract increased by 68 cents, or 0.9 percent, to average USD 73.16/b.

The ICE Brent-NYMEX WTI first-month spread contracted, m-o-m, falling by 43 cents to average USD 3.43/b.

The forward curves of oil futures prices strengthened, particularly for NYMEX WTI and GME Oman, with near-month time spreads shifting into a wider backwardation, reflecting a more optimistic outlook.

The market sentiment of hedge funds and other money managers turned positive, leading to the closing of a large volume of NYMEX WTI-related short positions, the report noted.

On the global economic growth, the reports forecasts that it will grow at 3.1 percent in 2025, accelerating slightly to 3.2 percent in 2026.

"This positive outlook is underpinned by anticipated inflation normalization and corresponding adjustments to monetary policies in major economies," the report reads.

The services sector is expected to remain the main driver of growth, supported by a gradual rebound in industrial production.

For the US, the economic growth forecast in 2025 is revised upward to 2.4 percent, with 2026 forecast at 2.3 percent.

In the Eurozone, the economic growth forecast for 2025 is revised slightly down to one percent, before rising to 1.1 percent in 2026.

Japan's economic growth forecast for 2025 remains at one percent and is projected to see similar growth in 2026.

China's economic growth forecast for 2025 remains at 4.7 percent, with the economic growth forecast for 2026 at 4.6 percent.

India's economic growth forecast is revised up to 6.5 percent for 2025 and is expected to expand to 6.8 percent in 2026.

Brazil's economic growth forecast for 2025 is revised up to 2.3 percent and is expected to rise further to 2.5 percent in 2026.

Russia's economic growth forecast for 2025 is revised up to 1.9 percent and is expected to grow by 1.5 percent in 2026.

Regarding the world oil demand, the report maintains its growth fore-

cast for 2025 at 1.4 mb/d.

The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) is forecast to grow by about 0.1 mb/d, while the non-OECD is forecast to grow by about 1.3 mb/d.

"This robust oil demand growth is expected to continue in 2026. The global oil demand in 2026 is forecast to grow by 1.4 mb/d, y-o-y," it noted.

The OECD is forecast to grow by about 0.1 mb/d, y-o-y, while demand in the non-OECD is forecast to grow by about 1.3 mb/d.

Non-DoC liquids supply (i.e. liquids supply from countries not participating in the Declaration of Cooperation) in 2025 is forecast to grow by 1.1 mb/d, y-o-y, unchanged from last month's assessment.

The main growth drivers are expected to be the US, Brazil, Canada, and Norway.

The non-DoC liquids supply growth in 2026 is also forecast to grow by 1.1 mb/d, mainly driven by the US, Brazil and Canada.

Meanwhile, natural gas liquids (NGLs) and non-conventional liquids from countries participating in the DoC are forecast to grow by about 90 tb/d, y-o-y, in 2025, to average 8.4 mb/d, followed by an increase of about 0.1 mb/d, y-o-y, in 2026 to average 8.5 mb/d.

Crude oil production by the countries participating in the DoC dropped by 14 tb/d in December, m-o-m, averaging about 40.65 mb/d, as reported by available secondary sources.

In December, refinery margins dropped in the US Gulf Coast (USGC) and Singapore.

Weakness was seen across the barrel, except for jet/kerosene on the USGC and gasoline (92) in Singapore, as healthy refinery runs led to rising product availability while weak export incentives added to the pressure.

However, in Rotterdam, refining margins extended their upward trajectory amid improved travel activities during the year-end holiday season, with gasoline, gasoil, and fuel oil (one percent Sulphur) backing the monthly gain.

Global refinery intake increased further adding 1.1 mb/d, m-o-m, as offline capacities trended significantly lower in December, in line with historic data.

Global intake reached an average of 82.2 mb/d in December, and was up slightly by 100 tb/d, y-o-y.

Demand for DoC crude (i.e. crude from countries participating in the DoC) in 2025 is revised down by around 0.1 mb/d from the previous month's assessment, mainly due to changes in 2024 historical baseline data, to stand at 42.5 mb/d, around 0.3 mb/d higher than the estimate for 2024.

It is worth highlighting again that growths in the global oil demand and non-DoC supply in 2025 remain unchanged as compared to last month.

For 2026, demand for DoC crude is expected to reach 42.7 mb/d, around 0.2 mb/d higher than in 2025.

Trademark registration costs KD 310

Kuwaiti Trademark & Patent Dept. boosts national economic growth

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (KUNA): The Trademark and Patent Dept. is one of the key divisions of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, which contributes to national economic growth through protection of the intellectual property (IP) rights of innovators.

The department works to ensure effective implementation of the IP laws, improve the investment atmosphere and ensure fair competition among investors.

The IP rights are divided into two branches authors' rights or literary copyrights and industrial design rights, which includes patents and trademarks.

In an interview to KUNA, Supervisor of Trademarks and Patents at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Rashed Al-Owaihan shed light on the procedures of trademark registration and the efforts to protect the rights of inventors.

"Founded in 1962, the Trademark and Patent Dept. used to take a long

time, maybe two year, to register a trademark.

"But with the introduction of the automated trademark registration services in 2018, the process of registration takes just two months and a 60-day ultimatum for publication," he said.

The department registers an average of 1,100 trademarks a month, nearly two time the figure done in the period before transition to automated registration service, Al-Owaihan pointed out.

Regarding the revenues from the process, he said a trademark registration costs KD 310 (some USD 1,000), transfer of copyright - KD 70 (USD 226) and renewal of trademark KD 370 (USD 1,195).

The average monthly turnover of trademark registration amounts to KD 500,000 - 550,000 (USD 1.6 million - 1.7 million), he said, noting that his department handles 6,000 - 6,500 online applications a month.

Moreover, the Board recommended a cash dividend distribution of 40 percent of the nominal value of each share, which equals 40 fils per share.

This amounts to a total of 7,231,500 dinars for the fiscal year 2024. The dividends will be distributed to shareholders registered in the company's records, following the institutional procedures of the Capital Markets Authority and Boursa Kuwait.

EPS reach 49.85 fils

IPGC reports net profit of KD 9.01 million for FY '24

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: The Board of Directors of the Independent Petroleum Group Company (IPGC) has approved the results of the audited annual financial statements for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2024, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The report shows a net profit of 9.013 million dinars, with earnings per share amounting to 49.85 fils, compared to 7.818 million dinars and 43.24 fils per share in 2023.

Moreover, the Board recommended a cash dividend distribution of 40 percent of the nominal value of each share, which equals 40 fils per share.

This amounts to a total of 7,231,500 dinars for the fiscal year 2024. The dividends will be distributed to shareholders registered in the company's records, following the institutional procedures of the Capital Markets Authority and Boursa Kuwait.

KNPC plans rehab of acid gas treatment unit by '25

By Najeh Bilal
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: According to informed sources, the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) plans to rehabilitate the acid gas treatment unit at the Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery. The study for the engineering designs of this project is expected to be completed by the last quarter of 2025. The project will treat all acid gases coming from the Kuwait Oil Company and convert them into usable gases for the company. This conversion will be carried out through the liquefied gas

processing units at the Ahmadi Refinery.

KNPC aims to achieve full refining capacity at both the Mina Abdullah and Al-Ahmadi refineries by the end of 2025. Last year, their refining capacity reached over 98 percent, with only a small margin left to reach full capacity.

These efforts to increase refining output are being pursued through carefully studied plans and scientific methods, and will incorporate the best international technologies. The company is also obtaining the necessary technical approvals from Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) for these initiatives.

The CEO of KNPC, in cooperation with company leaders and teams, has raised the daily crude oil refining rate at the Ahmadi and Mina Abdullah refineries from 775.1 thousand barrels per day in 2023 to approximately 786.1 thousand barrels per day in 2024. In 2022, the refineries processed around 677.9 thousand barrels per day.

In a related development, the sources said the company has recently launched a tender for the supply, installation, and operational assistance for replacing one of the activators in the cracking unit with an inhibitor catalyst. The deadline for the tender is January 28.

Reaffirming its commitment to investing in Kuwait's top talent

Burgan Bank appoints Omar Khalifouh as Deputy GM of Digital Transformation

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Burgan Bank announced the appointment of Mr. Omar Khalifouh as Deputy General Manager of Digital Transformation, after obtaining all necessary approvals from the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK). This appointment echoes Burgan's unwavering commitment to investing in Kuwait's talented calibers as part of its holistic human capital investment strategy, in turn supporting the nationwide Kuwaitization efforts. It also marks a significant step in advancing the Bank's digital transformation journey and driving innovation across its operations.

Commenting on this announcement, Mr. Fadel Mahmoud Abdullah, CEO of Burgan Bank - Kuwait, said: "On behalf of the Board and Executive Management, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to Mr. Khalifouh on his new role. This step underscores our commitment to Burgan's expansive digital transformation and human capital development strategies as we strive to become the most modern and progressive bank in Kuwait."

He added: "Accelerating digital evolution is a pivotal element in strengthening Burgan Bank's position within the Kuwaiti banking sector. It enables us to fortify our digital infrastructure, modernize our core systems, and leverage advanced technologies to deliver modern solutions tailored to our customers' needs and the market's modern expectations. Our digital



Omar Khalifouh - Deputy General Manager of Digital Transformation at Burgan Bank

transformation efforts demand experienced professionals like Mr. Khalifouh with business acumen, nimble problem-solving skills, and an agile approach. We are confident that his expertise will play a key role in enabling us to achieve new milestones on the digital front and drive Burgan's overall growth, success, and continued innovation."

Mr. Khalifouh has nearly two decades of expansive experience in the fields of digital banking transformation and financial services innovation. Prior to joining Burgan Bank in 2024 as Acting Deputy General Manager - Digital Transformation, he built a reputation for being a forward-thinking leader in financial

technology and digital solutions, which was evident in his roles and achievements at Kuwait and Middle East Financial Investment Company (KMEFIC), Kuwait International Bank (KIB), and Warba Bank. At Burgan, he stood out for his vital role in propelling the Bank's digital transformation strategy and overseeing crucial departments, including Product Management, Design and User Experience, Business Intelligence, and Innovation.

In addition, Mr. Khalifouh offers Burgan Bank and his new role valuable insights, organizational oversight, and strategic decision-making garnered from his rich executive experience, which includes serving as Chairman of Al-Awsat AlOula Holding and Board Member of Middle East Financial Brokerage Co.

Mr. Khalifouh's academic qualifications include a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Accounting from Kuwait University, in addition to completing several prestigious executive programs at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Chicago Booth, and Harvard Kennedy School. He is a Certified Agile Leader and has extensive expertise in full-stack development and various modern development frameworks.

About Burgan Bank

Established in 1977, Burgan Bank is a Kuwait-based conventional bank with a significant focus on the corporate and financial institu-

tion sectors. From its earliest days, the Bank has significantly sought to diversify its offering to cater to its growing retail and private banking customer base.

Burgan Bank has majority-owned subsidiaries, collectively known as the "Burgan Bank Group", in the MENAT region. This Group is supported by one of the largest branch networks across the region and includes: Gulf Bank Algeria - AGB (Algeria), Tunis International Bank - TIB (Tunisia), and Burgan Bank Turkey. Furthermore, Burgan Bank has a presence in the UAE through its corporate office, Burgan Financial Services Limited.

The Bank has continuously improved its performance over the years, through an expanded revenue structure, diversified funding sources, and a strong capital base. The adoption of state-of-the-art services and technology has positioned it as a trendsetter in the domestic market and within the MENA region. Moreover, Burgan Bank's brand has been built on a foundation of real values - trust, commitment, excellence, and progression - which serve as a reminder of the high standards to which the Bank always aspires. In fact, the Bank's core philosophy of 'Driven by You' is the foundation on which its products and services are continuously developed.

Boursa Kuwait general index surges 0.08% to 7,527.46 pts

Trading volume hits 367.3 mln shares

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait ended Thursday's trading session with its general index rising by 6.17 points, or 0.08%, to close at 7,527.46 points.

Trading activity saw 367.3 million shares exchanged through 17,349 cash transactions, valued at 78.8 million dinars (approximately \$240 million).

The Main Market Index climbed 30.71 points, or 0.44%, to settle at 7,079.95 points, with 236.8 million

shares traded across 10,469 transactions worth 39.2 million dinars (about \$120.7 million).

Meanwhile, the Premier Market Index remained nearly flat, dipping by 0.03 points to 8,009.63 points. It recorded the trading of 130.4 million shares in 6,880 transactions worth

39.5 million dinars (approximately \$121.6 million).

The Major 50 Index rose 8.91 points, or 0.13%, to close at 7,057.26 points, with 161.12 million shares traded through 6,622 cash transactions valued at 30.3 million dinars (about \$93.3 million).

As part of its commitment to supporting community and sports initiatives

KIB concludes its sponsorship of FORMA HYROX fitness competition

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently concluded its sponsorship of the FORMA HYROX fitness competition, which took place in January at the Holiday Inn Kuwait Salmiya. The event brought together athletes of all levels and fitness enthusiasts, offering a dynamic competition that blends challenge with a focus on physical well-being.

KIB's sponsorship of this championship underscored its ongoing commitment to supporting sports and wellness initiatives that promote awareness of the importance of fitness and a healthy lifestyle within the community. The FORMA HYROX championship went beyond a traditional fitness race, incorporating a diverse range of challenging exercises designed to test participants' strength, speed, and agility - whether professional athletes or fitness enthusiasts.

Commenting on the sponsorship, Abdulaziz Al-Thawab, Assistant Manager - Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, said: "KIB remains committed to supporting initiatives and events that positively impact the community. Our sponsorship of the FORMA HYROX fitness championship aligns with our social responsibility programs, which promote health and fitness. Additionally, events like these serve as interactive platforms that bring the community together, fostering a focus on well-being, competitive spirit, and enjoyment."

He added: "These initiatives align with KIB's strategy to promote well-being and encourage a healthy lifestyle



Abdulaziz Al-Thawab

within the community. Furthermore, our sponsorship of this competition is part of a broader series of programs that KIB is proud to support, reflecting our commitment to fostering sports and social initiatives that enhance community engagement and contribute to the growth of sports in Kuwait."

About KIB

Kuwait International Bank (KIB) is a bank that operates according to the Islamic Shari'ah, based in the State of Kuwait. Incorporated in 1973, and originally known as Kuwait Real Estate Bank, KIB made the transition to its current Islamic operating model in 2007. In 2018, KIB embarked on a new phase of its journey full of innovation and development. As part of its new strategic direction, the Bank focuses on offering a next-level customer experience under the slogan: "Bank for Life".



KIB's FORMA HYROX fitness competition.

Through a network of branches spread across the State of Kuwait, KIB offers a broad range of banking products and services, as well as innovative digital banking solutions in line with international best standards. As part of its duty towards the community, the Bank also encompasses a leading social responsibility program that aims at positively impacting all members of the community through

a wide range of impactful initiatives and activities.

Today, KIB has taken concrete steps in implementing its new strategic objectives. The Bank has cemented its role as a key player in the local banking industry and has continued to maintain its strong financial performance; enabling it to be globally recognized for its strong credit rating and financial position.

New graduates to undergo 12-month development with Zain

Zain's Generation Z graduate program marks 10th year with intake of seven outstanding candidates

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Zain Group, a leading provider of ICT innovative technologies and digital lifestyle communications operating in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces the selection of seven talented Kuwaiti nationals to undertake the milestone 10th cycle of the highly sought-after Generation Z (GenZ) graduate training program.

Over the past nine years, Gen Z has so far developed over 45 graduates with the traits, skills, and cultural awareness, which apart from shaping and enhancing their individual and professional characters, has contributed Zain's prosperity and the economic and social prosperity of the region. Today, many of the graduates have key managerial positions across Zain Group, Kuwait and Bahrain as well having secondments in other Zain operations.

The seven selected motivated graduates will undergo a 12-month rigorous development cycle that includes guided training by Zain's talented workforce, affiliates and partners as well as participating in real-world projects across Zain's footprint and beyond. Throughout the year, the Gen Z program will emphasize skills in leadership; digital delivery; innovation; growth, agile, and scrum mindsets; UI/UX design; product and project management; and corporate excellence.

Bader Al-Kharafi:

■ The achievements and contributions of the graduate program's alumni have immensely contributed to Zain's success story over the last decade.

■ First introduced in 2016 as Zainers 2.0, the graduate program has mirrored the strategic priorities of the Group as it transformed from a digital lifestyle provider to a TechCo.

The training will also align and prepare them to support Zain's recently launched 4WARD- 'Progress with Purpose' strategy, which focuses on continuity, acceleration, collaboration and digital innovation. 4WARD is designed to foster value creation by fast-tracking the company's evolution from a predominantly mobile centric operator into a purpose driven TechCo entity.

Furthermore, the graduates will be trained by and prepared to bolster



Group photo of the talented participants in the new GenZ cycle.

Zain Kuwait's Digital Factory, the recently established operational model to centralize and accelerate the creation and managing of customer appealing digital products and services.

Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO commented, "The achievements and contributions of the graduate program's alumni have immensely contributed

to Zain's success story over the last decade. Recruiting the right talent and succession planning is the lifeblood of any progressive company,

and this program is a direct effort to continue to inject the best and most capable young minds into the organization, for them to develop into the leaders of the future. I'm very proud of the accomplishments of the Gen Z initiative over the years and I congratulate our new participants for their selection and wish them a motivating and rewarding year ahead."

Competition for the seven places in the 2025 program was fierce, with over 450 applicants to the program, of which 17 were invited to individual interviews, with the last seven selected following a gruelling week-long job assessment engagement. The seven selected Kuwait nationals for 2025 Gen Z program are: Ayah AlBahar, Dalal AlAjmi, Noura AlAyoub, Rawan Jeraq, Sama Arrar, Sami AlQaddoumi, and Sarah AlAwwad.

The decade long evolution of Zain's graduate program has reflected the company's transformation from a digital lifestyle provider to a TechCo, delivering the participants an array of hard and soft skills, as well as technical and commercial development. The Generation Z 2025 graduate program remit falls under the "Build the Youth of the Future" pillar of Zain's Corporate Sustainability strategy and the Inclusion, Diversity & Equity strategic pillar of "Zain Youth" (ZY), which fosters the growth of youth employees.

MENA credit outlook stable amid geopolitical risks

Kuwait focuses on infrastructure projects for non-hydrocarbon growth

By Moody's Ratings

Economic growth for most of MENA will be stronger in 2025, driven by oil production recovery and large investment projects. For most hydrocarbon exporters, crude oil output is set to expand as OPEC+ begins to unwind strategic production cuts, though this is subject to global demand risks. Steady economic expansion will be supported by public sector-led infrastructure and diversification projects, especially in Saudi Arabia (Aa3 stable) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE, Aa2 stable). Growth in Türkiye (B1 positive) will slow, as ongoing policy adjustment curbs domestic demand.

■ **Lower oil prices will weigh on public finances of hydrocarbon exporters, but most other MENA sovereigns will see fiscal improvements.** Broadly favourable macro-economic conditions will support public finances, although lower oil prices will drive fiscal deterioration for most hydrocarbon-exporting sovereigns. Fiscal balances in most hydrocarbon importers will benefit from consolidation efforts, often under their existing IMF programmes. Lower global interest rates will support investor appetite for issuances of lower-rated sovereigns, easing government and external liquidity pressures, but debt affordability remains a challenge.

■ **Geopolitics will remain the main source of credit risk.** The conflicts in the region have become more complex and will continue to add uncertainty to the outlook for MENA creditworthiness. The risk of escalation will persist. However, the economic and fiscal impact has so far been largely limited to Israel (Baa1 negative), the Palestinian territories, Lebanon (C stable), and Egypt (Caa1 positive).

■ **What could change the outlook.** A regional war involving Iran could disrupt energy production and trade, lead to significant tightening of financing conditions and limit longer-term growth. While not in our baseline, this would turn the outlook sharply negative. A drop in global energy demand that results in lower oil production or sharply lower prices could hurt public finances and economic activity of the region's hydrocarbon exporters, leading to a negative outlook. Conversely, a sustained de-escalation in the current conflicts and stabilisation of regional geopolitics would be positive.

Economic growth for most of MENA will be stronger, supported by oil production recovery and progress on investment projects

We expect MENA growth to accelerate to 2.9% in 2025 from an estimated 2.1% in 2024. The pickup will be driven primarily by stronger growth in the region's hydrocarbon exporters because of a partial unwinding of strategic oil production cuts under the OPEC+ agreement. Large-scale investment projects, many of them part of longer-term government development and diversification agendas, will support non-hydrocarbon economic activity across the region (Exhibit 1).

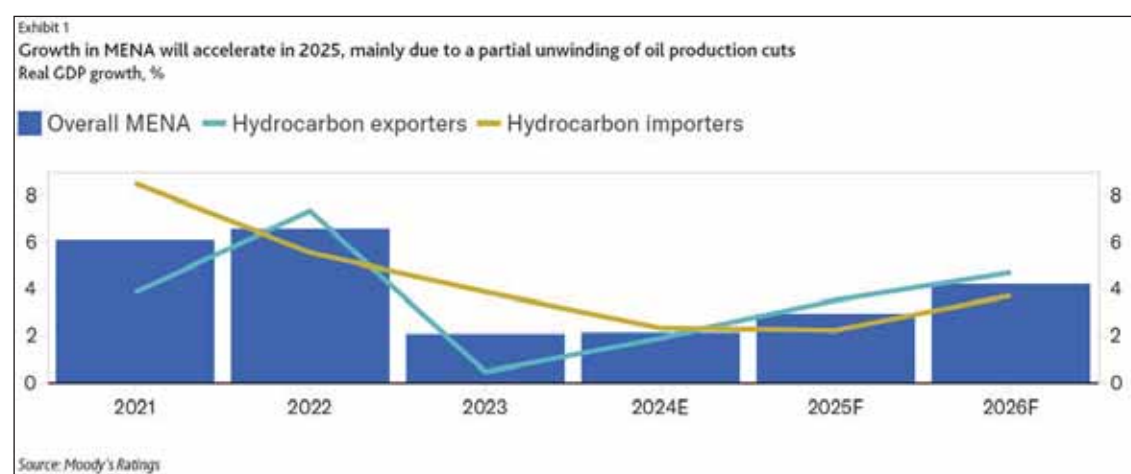
Real GDP growth for the region's hydrocarbon exporters is set to rise to 3.5% in 2025 from an estimated 1.9% in 2024 as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iraq (Caa1 stable), Kuwait (A1 stable) and Oman (Ba1 positive) begin to reverse some of the oil production cuts that were implemented in 2023. The production increase by the UAE will also reflect the agreed hike in the country's baseline OPEC+ quota, which is to be phased in during 2025.

During 2023 and 2024, oil production cuts subtracted more than 3 percentage points, cumulatively, from the growth of hydrocarbon exporters. In contrast, we expect oil production to lift the overall growth rate by around half a percentage point in 2025. However, the prospect of rising oil production volumes faces risks from moderating oil demand growth among key importers, especially China (A1 negative), and from growing oil production outside of OPEC+, especially the US (Aaa negative). Wary of these risks, in December 2024 OPEC+ announced a three month delay of its planned production increase to April 2025.

We expect non-hydrocarbon economic activity to remain robust across the MENA region, benefitting from structural reform tail winds, and large-scale investment projects, including government-sponsored economic diversification initiatives. In most cases, growth will be stronger in 2025 than during the five years before the pandemic.

The impact of large investments will be most visible in Saudi Arabia as high government and sovereign wealth fund spending related to the Vision 2030 diversification programme continues into 2025. Projects are gradually entering the implementation phase and will support strong growth in construction, real estate and non-hydrocarbon mining sectors. We also expect robust growth in retail and hospitality sectors, benefitting from various ongoing tourism related investment projects.

Growth in Qatar (Aa2 stable) will be supported by the development of the petrochemical industry and construction activity related to the expansion of the LNG production capacity, scheduled to come online during 2026-2030. In Kuwait, non-hydrocarbon growth will be driven by large projects including the construction of a new port and a new airport terminal. If improved domestic security conditions are sustained, Iraq's non-hydrocarbon growth will remain above pre-COVID averages due to gradual implementation of several transport and energy projects. These include the \$17 billion (6.5% of GDP) Iraq Development Road, a network of railways, roads, and ports linking Asia and Europe.



In the UAE, non-hydrocarbon growth will slow slightly due to the completion of some previous infrastructure projects, but will remain robust at around 5% in 2025. Structural reforms since 2020, including relaxation of foreign ownership limits, introduction of long-term residency permits and lifting of some social restrictions, have solidified the country's appeal as a global trade, transportation, tourism and financial services hub. This will anchor robust private sector activity in 2025, including in the real estate sector. Diversification programmes, such as the Abu Dhabi Industrial Strategy, are supporting growth in niche sectors benefiting from industry localisation and high-tech innovation, including AI.

Despite strong momentum on reform and investment, 2025 growth for MENA hydrocarbon importers will be similar in 2025 to the estimated 2.3% in 2024. This is well below the 2015-19 average of 3.9%, mainly because of the slowdown induced by the ongoing policy adjustment in Türkiye and Egypt, and due to economic disruptions related to the military conflict in Israel and Lebanon.

In Türkiye, the region's largest economy, growth will slow further in 2025 as the authorities remain committed to disinflation. High interest rates and tighter fiscal policy will help rebalance the economy away from unsustainably strong domestic demand and rein in inflation. Growth will marginally improve in Tunisia (Caa2 stable), following a drawn-out recovery from the pandemic. However, tight financing conditions and subdued investment will remain constraints on economic activity.

In Jordan (Ba3 stable) and Egypt, the pick up in growth we are forecasting in 2025 will be contingent on conflicts in their neighbourhood not escalating further. In Jordan, large projects financed by foreign direct investment (FDI), including from the GCC, are nearing construction stage and will support growth, but most impact will be felt from 2026 onwards. For Egypt, a stronger growth outlook for 2025 is predicated on the recovery in Suez Canal receipts, which plunged by more than 75% in 2024 following Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, shaving off more than a full percentage point from the overall GDP growth rate.

A sustained de-escalation of conflicts in the region would be positive for both Israel and Lebanon. Although we expect Israel's growth to accelerate in 2025, its economic prospects will remain dependent on the length of its military engagements and the full recovery will take time to materialize. Meanwhile, a potential return to fully functioning state institutions following the election of a new president could restore external financial support and improve Lebanon's economic outlook, which remains clouded by the effects of the military conflict and the lingering economic stress brought on by the financial meltdown in 2020.

In Morocco (Ba1 stable), climate transition-related investments have become a significant economic driver, supporting robust growth that will accelerate to 4.0% in 2025, above the pre-COVID average. Chinese companies are investing in multi-billion dollar electric vehicle (EV) battery projects in the country, expanding Morocco's existing car manufacturing infrastructure. Support from development financial institutions is helping Morocco become a regional leader in renewable energy (see "Energy diversification accelerating in the MENA region"). In 2024, the country gained access to a two-year \$1.3 billion (1% of GDP) Resilience and Sustainability Facility from the IMF for climate transition-related reforms and investments.

Energy diversification accelerating in the MENA region

Clean and renewable energy is emerging as a key area of investment for many MENA sovereigns. While most of the

Summary

■ Our outlook for credit fundamentals for sovereigns in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) remains stable. Supportive, albeit lower, oil prices and a recovery in oil production will buttress economic growth and public finances for the region's hydrocarbon exporters. Easing monetary conditions and large investment projects will underpin steady growth for the wider region, in turn supporting further fiscal adjustment and reforms. Despite having a limited economic and fiscal impact in 2024, regional geopolitical tensions remain the main source of credit risk.

region still lags behind the rest of the world in diversifying away from fossil fuels, recent investments are helping to gradually reduce the region's carbon footprint.

For MENA's hydrocarbon importers, like Jordan, Morocco and Türkiye, this also means reducing reliance on expensive imports, reducing external vulnerability risks. For hydrocarbon exporters, renewable energy projects present an opportunity to mitigate some longer-term carbon transition risks by developing green alternatives to the hard-to-decarbonize energy-intensive industrial sectors such as steel, aluminum and cement.

Substantial solar and wind generation capacity already exists in Jordan, Morocco,

Türkiye, Israel and the UAE, and several new large solar power plants capable of adding 2%-5% to the countries' current power generation capacity are near completion or in the commissioning stage in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Iraq and Kuwait. Oman launched its green hydrogen strategy in late 2022 and aims to achieve 1.4 million tonnes a year of hydrogen production by 2030 through eight FDI-funded projects worth \$49 billion (46% of GDP).

In the UAE, the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant entered full service in late 2024, contributing about 20% to the country's electricity production capacity. Saudi Arabia also plans to build a nuclear power plant, though progress has stalled even as cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency has increased. Additionally, Türkiye's hydropower plants now produce around 20-30% of the country's electricity output.

The region's geography positions it to export renewable energy to Europe. Egypt and Morocco have initiated projects to construct transcontinental transmission lines, including the EuroAfrica Interconnector connecting Egypt to southern Europe and proposed Xlinks Power Project between Morocco and the UK (Aa3 stable).

Lower oil prices will weigh on public finances of hydrocarbon exporters, but most other MENA sovereigns will see fiscal improvements

Fiscal positions will deteriorate for most hydrocarbon exporters in 2025, because increases in oil production will not fully offset weakening oil prices. Our projections assume that the Brent crude oil price benchmark averages \$75 a barrel in 2025 and \$70 a barrel in 2026, down from \$80/barrel in 2024. In contrast, we expect fiscal deficits to narrow for most hydrocarbon importers. Government debt burdens are set to increase across MENA, but only modestly for most. However, debt affordability will weaken as sovereigns continue to issue new debt and refinance existing debt at higher interest rates.

The impact of lower oil revenues on the fiscal balances of hydrocarbon exporters will vary because of differences in the importance of hydrocarbon revenue and the recent fiscal reforms, which have made some sovereigns more resilient to oil price declines. Despite lower oil prices, we expect fiscal balances to remain in surplus and debt burdens to decline in Abu Dhabi (Aa2 stable), Oman and Qatar. In the case of Abu Dhabi, the surplus will be strengthened by the proceeds from the corporate income tax introduced in mid-2023. In Saudi Arabia, last year's review of government spending plans will limit fiscal deterioration. However, continuation of robust spending on diversification projects will mean that the fiscal balance will remain in deficit.

We expect the fiscal deterioration to be the largest in Iraq, Kuwait and Qatar, which are the three sovereigns with the highest reliance on hydrocarbon revenues measured relative to their GDP. High public sector wage bills, weak expenditure controls and large off-budget spending commitments will continue to strain public finances in Bahrain (B2 stable)

and Iraq, leading to rising debt burdens in 2025. The projected debt increase in Kuwait hinges on whether the government will enact a new debt law. The absence of the law has prevented debt issuances since 2017, leading to a steady drawdown of the government's still very large financial assets.

Among hydrocarbon importers, public finance reforms will support fiscal balance improvements in Jordan and Morocco. In both countries, we expect fiscal deficits and debt burdens to decline in 2025. In Jordan, fiscal consolidation will be supported by the ongoing IMF programme and progress on public sector reforms. The measures include further digitalisation, efforts to streamline tax administration and tackle tax evasion, and strengthening financial resiliency of the state-owned water and power sectors. In Morocco, the government's medium-term fiscal strategy is gradually increasing tax revenue, eliminating subsidies, and making fiscal space for health and social security benefits.

In Türkiye, fiscal tightening will be mainly driven by the phasing out of spending related to the devastating 2023 earthquake and, to a lesser extent, a number of new revenue-raising measures approved in 2024. We expect the primary balance to turn positive during 2025 and for the overall fiscal deficit to decline to 3% of GDP from an estimated 5% of GDP in 2024. The debt burden will remain among the lowest in the region and below 30% of GDP.

In Israel, higher taxes and freezes on tax thresholds will support revenue collection, but higher defense spending and lower growth that we are forecasting will continue to strain public finances. As a result, primary deficit will decrease only marginally compared to the 2024 level and will remain much higher than historical averages. Debt will increase by about three percentage points in 2025, reaching nearly 68% of GDP in 2025, the highest in the last decade excluding 2020.

Fiscal consolidation will remain a challenge in Tunisia and Egypt, and external vulnerability and government liquidity risks are likely to remain elevated. In Tunisia, deficits will remain very high at nearly 6% of GDP, notwithstanding a continued focus on increasing tax revenue and a sustained decline in the wage bill in real terms. Dependence on domestic financing and recourse to direct monetary financing, similar to 2024, will increase risks to financial stability. Our baseline for 2025 does not include a new IMF programme, which could reduce refinancing risks and anchor the fiscal trajectory. This is due to the country's lack of political consensus.

In Egypt, the ongoing IMF programme remains key in reducing government liquidity risks and anchoring reforms that target increased tax revenues and broad reductions in primary expenditure. However, Egypt has pushed for some IMF conditionalities to be eased because of the extraordinary impact of the ongoing Middle East conflict, namely through the loss of Suez Canal receipts. We expect the fiscal deficit to widen to around 8% of GDP in fiscal years 2024/25 and 2025/26 from around 4% of GDP in 2023/24 as the one-off boost to revenue from the Ras El Hekma investment deal dissipates and higher domestic interest rates increase financing costs.

We expect debt affordability to weaken broadly throughout the MENA region as sovereigns refinance existing debt at higher interest rates. In Egypt, interest will increase to around 60% of revenue in 2025, one of the highest levels of the sovereigns we rate. In Bahrain and Sharjah (Ba1 stable), nearly 30% of government revenue will be dedicated to servicing interest costs. Overall, interest payments will consume nearly 10% of government revenues for the entire region, the highest level in the last decade excluding 2020.

As global credit conditions ease with further interest rate cuts by the US Fed, sovereigns with improving fundamentals including Oman, Türkiye and Jordan will benefit most from falling rates. So will those with established market access and regular issuances such as Bahrain, Sharjah and Israel. Lower funding costs will especially benefit sovereigns with large government borrowing needs and large share of foreign currency debt that needs to be refinanced in 2025. However, for some lower-rated sovereigns such as Tunisia and Egypt, external multilateral and bilateral support will remain key to mitigating refinancing risks and supporting investor appetite for debt issuances.

Geopolitics remain main source of credit risk, but most of the region will stay largely insulated from spillovers

While the credit environment remains broadly unchanged compared to early 2024, regional geopolitical tensions have increased and continue to pose a key event risk to MENA sovereigns. The duration and intensity of the current conflicts involving Israel, the Palestinian territories and Lebanon remain highly uncertain, and the risk of further escalation will persist in 2025.

Shifts in trade and foreign policy by the incoming US administration present another source of risk for the MENA region's outlook. A rise in global trade tensions would pose downside risks to oil demand, exacerbating economic and fiscal risks for hydrocarbon exporters.

On the other hand, a return to the "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran that curtails the country's oil exports would benefit other hydrocarbon exporters in the region, albeit this could come at the cost of heightened insecurity.

Pioneering new markets as part of its global expansion strategy

NBK launches real estate financing services in Germany

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: In a strategic move to strengthen its presence in international markets and elevate its global banking offerings, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has unveiled its mortgage services in Germany. This initiative enables NBK customers to access bespoke mortgage solutions and premium services tailored to meet their investment aspirations in key global real estate markets, including the UK, France, Spain, Portugal, Germany and UAE.

This initiative aligns with the Group's ongoing efforts to bolster its presence in real estate financing services on both regional and global fronts. Leveraging its extensive network of international branches, its prominent position in some of the world's most sought-after real estate markets, and the unparalleled trust it commands in Kuwait, the region, and

beyond, NBK continues to strengthen its role as a leading financial institution in this dynamic sector.

NBK's international mortgage services offer unparalleled convenience and efficiency, allowing customers to finalize purchases, investments, and all related transactions locally in Kuwait without the need for travel. These services are facilitated through the International Mortgage Loan Center at NBK's headquarters—the first of its kind in Kuwait—along with dedicated support at the Ras Al-Salmiya and Surra branches.

NBK's international mortgage services offer customers competitive interest rates, flexible repayment terms and high loan amount. In Germany, loans cover up to 65% of the property value and loan tenor up to 20 years. These features are designed to empower customers and investors, enabling

Highlights

- NBK provides competitive interest rates and flexible repayment terms of up to 20 years.
- The Bank offers its clients outstanding financing solutions that open doors to access some of the world's most sought-after real estate markets.

them to own properties in key financial and business hubs around the world,



A flyer announcing the launch.

while efficiently achieving their financial and investment goals.

NBK's expansion underscores its dedication to meeting the evolving needs of its customers globally, and its commitment to offering a range of mortgage financing options that cater to their individual preferences.

Beyond just real estate financing, NBK brings over 40 years of experience in international markets to help investors navigate foreign real estate opportunities. This includes providing expert advice, legal and procedural support through partnerships with local legal experts and offering real estate expenses and property management services in select countries.

Leveraging its extensive branch network spanning 13 countries, including Kuwait, NBK delivers international real estate services backed by a deep understanding of diverse market needs, fostering greater customer confidence. Moreover, NBK remains committed to

integrating the latest technologies into its services to streamline the financing process and ensure quick and efficient implementation.

The bank continues to expand its real estate financing services in international markets, paving the way for its customers to discover investment opportunities in various promising real estate markets.

Furthermore, the Group's network of overseas branches, spanning key financial and business capitals, is committed to offering top-tier products and services that empower customers to manage their personal and business needs with efficiency and ease. This extensive network brings a wide array of banking services, investment opportunities, and financing solutions directly to their fingertips, enabling seamless access to the most significant regional and global markets from Kuwait.

Why interest rates are rising when the Fed has been cutting them

Bond market worried about potentially higher inflation ahead

NEW YORK, Jan 16, (AP): What's shaking Wall Street seems so backwards.

Swings in the bond market recently sent the yield on the 10-year Treasury above 4.80% and its highest level since 2023. That's injected nervousness into the U.S. stock market and knocked indexes off their records.

The bond market's moves might seem strange given that the Federal Reserve has lowered interest rates three times starting in September. But it's a reminder that markets care more about the future than the present. And the bond market is worried about potentially higher inflation ahead, along with a U.S. economy that may not need more help from easier interest rates. That's hurting stock prices.

The Fed has cut its main interest rate by a full percentage point since September. The intent is to give the economy breathing room after the Fed earlier hiked the federal funds rate to a two-decade high in hopes of slowing the economy enough to stifle inflation.

But the Fed's influence is limited when it comes to the interest rates that are currently knocking the stock market around, chiefly the 10-year Treasury yield. The Fed controls the federal funds rate, which is a very short-term interest rate that dictates what banks charge each other for borrowing money overnight.

The moves for the 10-year Treasury yield, meanwhile, are set by investors. Those investors do take the Fed's



Trader Jonathan Mueller works on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, Monday, Jan. 13, 2025. (AP)

moves into account as they decide how much yield they'll need to earn from U.S. Treasuries before they'll lend money to the federal government. But they're also factoring in where the economy and inflation are heading.

And the 10-year Treasury yield ironically began rising in September, up from 3.65%, just about when the federal funds rate began sinking for the first time since 2020.

The 10-year yield rose, even as

the Fed was cutting overnight interest rates, because expectations for both economic growth and for inflation were rising. Much of that is due to a string of reports showing the U.S. economy remains much more solid than expected. Inflation was also more stubborn to ease, though this past week's reading offered more optimism and helped Treasury yields give back some of their big gains.

In late 2018, something similar hap-

pened in the market, but in the opposite direction. The Fed had been increasing the federal funds rate since early 2017, and the 10-year Treasury yield likewise climbed for much of that stretch. But the 10-year yield began turning lower before the end of 2018. It even continued to sink after the Fed hiked the federal funds rate in December 2018, guessing correctly that rate increases would stop before putting too much pressure on the economy.

Company said to be worth 'well north of \$100 billion'

How much is TikTok worth and who could buy it?

NEW YORK, Jan 16, (AP): The supremely popular TikTok could be banned on Jan. 19 under a federal law that forces the video sharing platform to divest itself from its China-based parent company, ByteDance, or shut down its U.S. operations.

Several parties have expressed interest in buying the platform, but ByteDance has repeatedly said it does not plan to sell. Experts have also noted the Chinese government is unlikely to approve a sale that includes TikTok's coveted algorithm.

But until the deadline passes, or until the Supreme Court takes action, the possibility of a purchase is still possible. Here's what you need to know:

Wedbush analyst Dan Ives estimates TikTok is worth "well north of \$100 billion" with the algorithm - and potentially up to \$200 billion in a "best case scenario."

"Without the algorithm it's \$40 billion to \$50 billion," Ives said, adding he does not believe that ByteDance and Beijing would sell TikTok with the algorithm.

Attorneys for the TikTok and ByteDance have claimed it's impos-



Icons for the smartphone apps Xiaohongshu and TikTok are seen on a smartphone screen in Beijing, Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2025. (AP)

ble to divest the platform commercially and technologically. They also say any sale of TikTok without the coveted algorithm - the platform's secret sauce that Chinese authorities would likely block under any divestiture plan - would turn the U.S. version of TikTok into an island disconnected from other global content.

U.S. officials warned that the proprietary algorithm is vulnerable to manipulation by Chinese authorities, who can use it to shape content on the platform in a way that's difficult to detect. Billionaire businessman and real estate mogul Frank McCourt and his internet advocacy group recently announced it had submitted a proposal

to buy the social media site from ByteDance. Famed Shark Tank investor Kevin O'Leary has also joined the effort.

The group has not disclosed details of the bid.

If a sale occurs, the former owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers said he would plan to restructure TikTok and give more agency to people "over their digital identities and data" by migrating the platform to an open-source protocol that allows for more transparency.

Former Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has also taken steps to purchase TikTok.

Shortly after Congress passed the ban, Mnuchin told CNBC he had started creating an investor group that would purchase the popular social media company. He offered no details about who may be in the group or about TikTok's possible valuation.

When Mnuchin was Treasury secretary, he helped the Trump administration broker a deal in 2020 that would have had U.S. corporations Oracle and Walmart take a large stake in TikTok on national security grounds.

Nikkei 225 added 0.5%

Asian shares up after inflation data drives a rally on Wall St

TOKYO, Jan 16, (AP): Asian shares mostly rose Thursday, following a rally on Wall Street driven by encouraging update on U.S. inflation.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 added 0.5% to 38,635.25.

Bank of Japan data showed wholesale prices in Japan rose 3.8% in December last year compared to a year earlier, adding to pressures on the central bank to raise interest rates, possibly at a monetary policy meeting next week.

In China, the Hang Seng in Hong Kong gained 1.2% to 19,516.62, while the Shanghai Composite index rose nearly 0.3% to 3,237.32. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 surged 1.4% to 8,327.00. South Korea's KOSPI gained 1.2% to 2,526.15.

On Wall Street, strong profit reports from Wells Fargo and other big U.S. banks also helped launch indexes to their best day in two months.

The S&P 500 jumped 1.8% to 5,949.91. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rallied 1.7% to 43,221.55, and the Nasdaq composite leaped 2.5% to 19,511.23.

Bank stocks helped lead the way after several reported stronger profits for the last three months of 2024 than analysts expected.

Wells Fargo jumped 6.7%, Citigroup rallied 6.5% and Goldman Sachs gained 6%. They're among the first big U.S. companies to report their results for the end of 2024, and even more focus may be on them than usual.

Treasury yields eased following an update on how much more U.S. households had to pay in December for eggs, gasoline, housing and other costs of living. The report said overall inflation accelerated to 2.9% from 2.7% in November.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury dropped back to 4.65% from 4.79% late Tuesday, which is a considerable move. It had largely been screaming higher since September, when it was below 3.65%. The two-year Treasury yield, which more closely tracks expectations for the Fed's upcoming actions, fell to 4.26% from 4.37%.

While no one wants higher inflation, the numbers were more encouraging underneath the surface. After ignoring prices for food and energy, which can zigzag sharply from month to month, underlying inflation trends slowed to 3.2% in December. Economists had thought it would remain at 3.3% for a fourth straight month, according to FactSet.

The Federal Reserve pays more attention to that underlying number than the overall figure, and it's particularly welcome following worries that improvements in inflation have halted and that it will be tough to get all the way down to the Fed's 2% target.

Wall Street has been lurching down and up for weeks as traders tear up their forecasts for what the Fed will do with interest rates in 2025. A further easing would boost the U.S. economy and prices for investments, but it could also give inflation more fuel.

Few traders expect Wednesday's data to convince the Fed to cut its main interest rate at its meeting later this month, as it's done at three straight meetings since September. But economists and analysts say it could open the door for cuts later in the year, maybe even in March, if more data comes in to show that upward pressure on inflation is abating.



A person walks in front of an electronic stock board showing Japan's Nikkei index at a securities firm Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025, in Tokyo. (AP)

Major US banks thrive

JPMorgan posts record annual profits

WASHINGTON, Jan 16, (AP): JPMorgan's net income soared 50% to more than \$14 billion in the fourth quarter as the bank's profit and revenue easily beat Wall Street forecasts, and other major banks reported banner earnings for the year as businesses and consumers continued to spend despite elevated interest rates.

JPMorgan's earnings per share rose to \$4.81 from \$3.04 a year ago. The result beat Wall Street profit projections of \$4.09 a share, according to the data firm FactSet. Total managed revenue hit \$43.7 billion, up 10%, from \$39.9 billion a year ago. Wall Street was expecting revenue of \$41.9 billion.

JPMorgan posted a record \$54 billion profit for the year, or \$18.22 per share, adjusted for one-time expenses. JPMorgan shares rose just less than 1% in morning trading.

Citigroup, Wells Fargo and Goldman Sachs also issued strong results on Wednesday.

The country's biggest banks have

benefitted from higher interest rates for the last two years, when the Federal Reserve jacked up rates to combat the inflation that took root in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government's latest consumer prices report, also issued Wednesday, showed that prices for many essentials rose, pushing the consumer price index to 2.9% in December, the highest it has been since July. But underlying inflation trends - watched closely by the Fed - slowed to 3.2% in December, better than analysts expected and a good sign for consumers and the broader economy.

That, combined with the strong bank earnings, boosted markets, with the S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrials each climbing 1.7% and the technology-heavy Nasdaq gaining 2.2%.

As great as 2024 was for markets, bank stocks did even better, despite the Federal Reserve trimming its benchmark interest rate three times between September and December.



Pedestrians approach JPMorgan Chase headquarters, Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2023, in New York. (AP)

Canadian minister warns that Americans will experience economic pain from Trump tariffs

WASHINGTON, Jan 16, (AP): Canada's energy minister came to Washington this week to warn U.S. lawmakers about President-elect Donald Trump's tariffs threat on Canada: They'd inflict economic pain on Americans, with higher prices and job losses.

Jonathan Wilkinson, Canada's minister of energy and natural resources, said he feels obligated to sound the alarm about the inflationary risks being created by a president who was elected in large part on the promise of bringing down prices.

"It will mean higher gas prices, it will mean higher food prices, it will mean higher natural gas prices for heating people's homes," he told The Associated Press on Wednesday. "It will mean higher electricity prices. That's not something Donald Trump campaigned on. He campaigned on actually reducing the price of energy."

Trump has threatened to impose sweeping 25% tariffs on Canada as well as on Mexico. He's also threatened tariffs on China and Europe, creating a



Canadian Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Jonathan Wilkinson arrives for a Liberal caucus meeting in Ottawa on Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2025. (AP)

sense of uncertainty about whether this is simply a negotiating ploy or a massive restructuring of U.S. foreign relations.

Trump and his team in recent days have doubled down on his promise to impose tariffs on other nations and downplayed the risk of higher inflation. Canada is looking at putting retaliatory tariffs on American orange juice, toilets and some steel products if Trump follows through with his threat.

When Trump imposed higher tariffs during his first term in office, Canada announced billions of dollars in new duties in 2018 against the U.S. in a tit-for-tat response to new taxes on Canadian steel and aluminum.

The dispute never triggered broader inflation across the economy, even if it exacted higher costs for some. But by targeting America's second largest trading partner after Mexico, Trump risks upending the markets for autos, lumber and oil - all of which could carry over quickly to consumers.

How to watch the star-studded event and see the red carpet

2025 Grammys to proceed with wildfire relief changes

NEW YORK, Jan 16, (AP): The 2025 Grammy Awards are right around the corner, which means it is time to get those viewing party plans in action. Allow us to help.

The 67th annual Grammy Awards will still take place Sunday, Feb. 2, at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles - though the Recording Academy has refocused its aim to support relief efforts following the devastating Los Angeles-area wildfires.

Here's what you need to know about watching the 2025 Grammys, including how to stream and where you can see music's biggest stars walking the red carpet.

The main show will air live on CBS and Paramount+ beginning at 8 p.m. Eastern. Paramount+ with Showtime subscribers can also watch live and on demand.

The Grammys can also be watched through live TV streaming services that include CBS in their lineup, like



Beyoncé Knowles holds the Grammy awards she won during the 46th Annual Grammy Awards on Feb. 8, 2004, in Los Angeles. (AP)

Hulu + Live TV, YouTube TV and FuboTV.

Paramount+ subscribers will be able to stream the Grammy Awards the day after the ceremony.

The Associated Press will stream a three-hour red carpet show with interviews and fashion footage. It will be streamed on YouTube and APNews.com.

Beyoncé leads the Grammy nods with 11, bringing her career total to 99 nominations. That makes her the most nominated artist in Grammy history.

As of 2023, she's also the most decorated artist, having earned 32 trophies across her career.

Post Malone, Billie Eilish, Kendrick Lamar and Charli XCX follow with seven nominations.

Taylor Swift and first-time nominee Sabrina Carpenter and Chappell Roan boast six nominations each.

The 2025 Grammy Awards will go on as planned but will focus its atten-

tion on wildfire relief efforts.

Each year, the Recording Academy hosts a multitude of events to welcome the music industry during Grammy week; record labels do the same. However, many institutions have canceled their plans - Universal Music Group, BMG and Warner Music Group among them - and instead are allocating resources to Los Angeles-area wildfire relief and rebuilding efforts.

On Wednesday, the Recording Academy announced it had condensed pre-Grammy week plans to just four events, each featuring a fundraising element.

Events like the annual pre-Grammy Black Music Collective event, Grammy advocacy brunch, and others scheduled to take place at the immersive pop-up Grammy house have been canceled. In all, at least 16 pre-Grammy events sponsored by the Recording Academy have been canceled.

"We understand how devastating this past week has been on this city and its people. This is our home, it's home to thousands of music professionals, and many of us have been negatively impacted," Recording Academy CEO Harvey Mason jr. said in a statement.

Last week, the Recording Academy and MusiCares launched the Los Angeles Fire Relief Effort with a \$1 million donation. According to the letter, thanks to additional contributions, they've already distributed \$2 million in emergency aid.

Universal Music Group, one of the big three major record labels, has canceled all of its Grammy-related events. Those include its annual artist showcase, held on Saturday, and its after-party on the Sunday of Grammy week. Instead, it will redirect those funds to wildfire relief.

BMG will no longer host its pre-Grammy party and a representative

for Warner Music Group confirmed to The Associated Press that the major label will not host a party this year and are instead "redirecting funds to support efforts." Earlier this week, WMG and the Blavatnik Family Foundation Social Justice Fund pledged \$1 million to Los Angeles area fire relief and rebuilding efforts.

MusiCares, an organization that helps music professionals who need financial, personal or medical assistance, holds its annual Persons of the Year benefit gala at the Los Angeles Convention Center a few days before the Grammys. The 2025 gala will still take place on Jan. 31, this year honoring the Grateful Dead with an additional commitment to wildfire relief.

"At our upcoming Persons of the Year, we will make a special appeal for donations to support our wildfire relief efforts," according to an email sent by the Recording Academy to its members on Tuesday.

Oscars

Gala canceled

Hollywood Oscar season turns into a pledge drive

LOS ANGELES, Jan 16, (AP): When the Palisades Fire broke out in Los Angeles last Tuesday, Hollywood's awards season was in full swing. The Golden Globes had transpired less than 48 hours earlier and a series of splashy awards banquets followed in the days after.

But the enormity of the destruction in Southern California has quickly snuffed out all festiveness in the movie industry's high season of celebration. At one point, the flames even encroached on the hillside above the Dolby Theatre, the home of the Academy Awards.

The fires have struck at the very heart of a movie industry still trying to stabilize itself after years of pandemic, labor turmoil and technological upheaval. Not for the first time this decade, the Oscars are facing the question of: Should the show go on? And if it does, what do they mean now?

"With all due respect during Hollywood's season of celebration, I hope any of the networks televising the upcoming awards will seriously consider not televising them and donating the revenue they would have gathered to victims of the fires and the firefighters," "Hacks" star Jean Smart, a recent Globe winner, wrote on Instagram.

The Oscars remain as scheduled, but it's certain that they will be transformed due to the wildfires, and that most of the red-carpet pomp that typically stretches between now and then will be curtailed if not altogether canceled. With so many left without a home by the fires, there's scant appetite for the usual self-congratulatory parades of the season.

Focus has turned, instead, to what the Oscars might symbolize for a traumatized Los Angeles. The Oscars have never meant less, but, at the same time, they might be more important than ever as a beacon of perseverance for the reeling movie capital.

Nominations

The film academy on Monday for the second time delayed its nominations announcement. Nominations will now be announced virtually on Feb. 23. The academy also canceled its annual nominees luncheon and said it's planning to honor frontline workers and to support relief efforts.

"We will get through this together and bring a sense of healing to our global film community," vowed Bill Kramer, academy chief executive, and Janet Yang, academy president.

The fires, one of the costliest natural disasters in US history, continue. The ongoing nature of the crisis, which has killed at least 25 people, has made re-making well-laid plans a moving target. The Critics Choice Awards have been postponed. Nominations to the Producers Guild Awards have been delayed twice with no new date set. On Tuesday, the guild established a fund to support producers affected by the fires.

The 67th Grammy Awards, scheduled to be held Feb. 2 in downtown Los Angeles, are going forward, albeit with

significant changes. Harvey Mason jr., Recording Academy chief executive and Board of Trustees chair Tammy Hurt said this year's Grammys "will carry a renewed sense of purpose: raising additional funds to support wildfire relief efforts and honoring the bravery and dedication of first responders who risk their lives to protect ours."

Some telethon-like element also seems sure to accompany the Oscars. In recent days, many throughout the industry have voiced suggestions for how the broadcast could be reconsidered. A not dissimilar process happened during the 2021 Oscars, which were postponed to late April because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Oscars have been moved a few times throughout history, including in 1938, when the show was delayed a week due to historic flooding in Los Angeles.

Personal

For the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, the wildfires have been acutely personal. Four of the academy's 55-person board of governors lost their homes, according to The Hollywood Reporter, including producer Lynette Howell Taylor, visual effects governor Brooke Breton, sound branch governor Mark P. Stoecinger and animation branch governor Jinko Gotoh. The Pacific Palisades, which was largely destroyed by the fires, was home to many stars and executives.

For potential nominees, this would normally be when they'd be at their most active, campaigning in Q&As and other events tied to the all-important nominations voting period. All of that has ground to a halt. Isabella Rossellini, who's favored to be nominated for best supporting actress for her performance in "Conclave," on Instagram posted a photograph of an Oscar lying in ashes. The photo turned out to be fake, but it accurately captured Hollywood's current mood.

"We have a lot of friends and colleagues who have either evacuated or really lost their houses," "Conclave" director Edward Berger said following Wednesday's BAFTA nominations. "So it's a very strange time to be feeling great about awards, to celebrate them. And the one thing that really picks me up is speaking to these friends and seeing how resilient they are."

Several high-profile TV series were forced to pause production because of the fires but notably few movie shoots were affected. That, in itself, is a reflection of a Hollywood that has seen the majority of film production seek tax incentives in other states.

Work throughout the film and TV industry hasn't rebounded following the 2023 strikes, leaving large numbers of crew members unemployed. So quiet are studio lots that actress Natalie Morales ("Grey's Anatomy") has advocated for studios, in the wake of the fires, to turn empty soundstages into temporary classrooms, erected by out-of-work craftspeople, for children whose schools burned down.

Film



This image released by Universal Pictures shows Julia Garner, (right), and Matilda Firth in a scene from 'Wolf Man.' (AP)

A clumsy reboot and lackluster drama

'Wolf Man' struggles to find its horror bite

LOS ANGELES, Jan 16, (AP): Blake Lovell thinks taking his wife and young daughter to rural Oregon to pack up his dead father's belongings is a good idea. It's a break from their urban life, might help repair his fraying marriage and reconnect them all with nature. "It would be good for us," he argues.

It will not, of course, because this is a Blumhouse movie called "Wolf Man." It will not be good for Blake and it will not be good for the audience. That's because this film is a terrible misfire using a classic movie monster poorly rebooted by the modern home of horror.

Slack when it should be terrifying, "Wolf Man" suffers from cheap sentimentality, laughably obvious script reveals, poor continuity and a creature that is less predatory than painful. Pity comes to mind.

Christopher Abbott stars as Blake, a father and husband whose own estranged dad was a tad unstable, constantly drilling in his son a survivalist ethic. "It's not hard to die. It's the easiest thing in the world," his dad says. He being officially declared dead 30 years after he disappeared into the forest starts this sludgy movie off.

"The Invisible Man" writer-director Leigh Whannell — who co-wrote the story with Corbett Tuck — seems to be attempting a horror movie with his new message: Being overprotective can lead to your family being assaulted by a deranged manbeast. Wait, that can't be right. Maybe it's about inheritance? It's all a little muddled.

Wilderness

A weird human-animal hybrid lurking in the Oregon wilderness — actually New Zealand pretending to be Oregon — kicks off what is supposed to be the scary part of this movie, but so much time is spent on the domestic drama set-up that the audience will be bored by the time the supposed thrill ride shows up. When it does, the filmmakers lean on creepy sounds way too much.

There's a Wolf Man out there and he's, well, underwhelming. He is largely unseen for most of the movie because seeing the monster is always a bad idea. At one point, he attacks through the cabin's doggie door, one of the most disappointing assaults on film.

Now infected inside their barricaded cabin, Blake goes through a body-horror transformation, which includes the sweats, enhanced hearing, uncontrolled peeing, teeth readjustment, mottled skin, being made mute and hair loss. That's right, hair loss. This is the first Wolf Man movie that seems to endorse Rogaine.

His wife, played by Julia Garner, is left here to sniffle and shriek, going from life partner to potential dinner. That means a lot of running and panting with a flashlight in hand. Their daughter, played by Matilda Firth, earlier so precocious, now asks really stupid questions like "What's happening?" and "What's wrong with Daddy?"

So, outside the cabin lurks a Wolf Man. And inside is potentially another, but one still kind of trying to hold onto his humanity. "Mom, he wants this to be over," the girl says of her dad-wolf. We know the feeling.

"Wolf Man," a Universal Pictures release in theaters Friday, is rated R for "bloody violent content, grisly images and some language." Running time: 103 minutes. No stars out of four.

Kuwait launches age-based movie classifications for cinema-goers

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: The Ministry of Information has introduced a new system for classifying movies, providing cinema-goers with information regarding the age appropriateness of films being shown.

Lafi Al-Subaiee, the Assistant Undersecretary for Press and Publications, announced in a press release on Wednesday that the new system defines the following age categories: "G" for films suitable for all ages, "PG" which

advises parental presence, "PG 12" indicating that children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult, "P15" for viewers aged 15 and over, "R 15" for those aged 15 and above, and "R 18" for those aged 18 and older.

This information will be included on movie tickets, and the new classification system will take effect immediately upon its publication in the official Gazette.

Actor undergoes surgery

Indian actor Saif Ali Khan stabbed by intruder at home

MUMBAI, India, Jan 16, (AP): Indian Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan was stabbed in a scuffle with an intruder at his home early Thursday and underwent surgery at a hospital, media reports said.

The 54-year-old actor was taken to the hospital from his home in Mumbai, the country's financial and entertainment capital, where he lives with his movie star wife Kareena Kapoor and two sons.

Two of the six wounds were deep, with one near his spine, the Press Trust of India news agency cited a doctor at Mumbai's Lilavati Hospital as saying.

Indian media quoted police as saying the intruder barged into the house at about 2:30 a.m. and fled after stabbing Khan. A female employee at Khan's home was also injured during the attack and was



Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan attends the trailer launch of his film Tanhaji in Mumbai, India, Nov. 19, 2019. (AP)

being treated, they said. Police are investigating and have launched a search for the attacker.

Kapoor, Khan's wife, said in a statement that his family was fine and requested "the media and fans to be patient and not speculate any further as the police is already doing their due investigations."

Khan, who is also a movie producer, has been featured in about 70 films and television series. He is the son of former Indian cricket captain Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi and Bollywood actress Sharmila Tagore.

He won multiple awards for his roles in Hindi cinema, including seven Filmfare Awards. In 2010, he received the Padma Shri, the fourth highest Indian civilian award.



Oscar statuettes appear backstage at the Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles on Feb. 28, 2016. (AP)

A legacy of reinvention and success

O'Brien to receive Mark Twain Prize for lifetime achievement

WASHINGTON, Jan 16, (AP) — Comedian and host Conan O'Brien was named the newest recipient of the Mark Twain Prize for lifetime achievement in comedy on Thursday.

O'Brien, 61, has carved out an improbable decadeslong career arc, moving from goofy television interloper to comedic elder statesman. Along the way, he survived one of the most public failures in the history of television on "The Tonight Show" — only to launch a successful, and sustained, next act.

His travel series "Conan O'Brien Must Go" sparked popular and critical acclaim, with a second season coming. In March, O'Brien will host the Academy Awards three weeks before his own Mark Twain ceremony in Washington.

Deborah Rutter, president of the John F. Kennedy Center for the

Performing Arts, in a statement called O'Brien "a master of invention and reinvention, consistently pushing the envelope in search of new comedic heights."

O'Brien offered his own tongue-in-cheek assessment, saying in the Kennedy Center statement that he would be "the first winner of the Mark Twain Prize recognized not for humor, but for my work as a riverboat pilot." He will be honored on March 23 in a special ceremony in which he will receive a bronze bust of Twain, the iconic American writer and satirist whose real name was Samuel Clemens.

Mark Twain recipients are honored with a night of testimonials and video tributes, often featuring previous award winners. The ceremony will stream on Netflix at a later date yet to be announced.

O'Brien leaped into the spotlight



Conan O'Brien arrives at a photo call for 'Conan O'Brien Must Go', April 16, 2024, at Avalon Hollywood in Los Angeles. (AP)

from near-total obscurity in 1993, when he was chosen to replace the legendary David Letterman as host of "Late Night" despite no significant on-camera experience. The former Harvard Lampoon editor had spent the previous years as

a writer for "Saturday Night Live" and "The Simpsons," appearing on camera only as an occasional background extra in "SNL" skits.

Bringing a skittish, awkward energy that contrasted with Letterman's deadpan persona, O'Brien constantly made fun of his own gangly appearance and inappropriateness for the job. He went on to host "Late Night" for 16 years, longer than any other host.

In 2009, O'Brien's career and persona took a turn. He became the man who publicly gained and lost his dream job while America watched.

O'Brien was tapped to replace Jay Leno as host of "The Tonight Show" despite public warnings from his own guests that Leno wasn't ready to cede the throne. After seven months of declining ratings, NBC executives brought

Leno back for a new show that would bump "The Tonight Show" back. O'Brien refused to accept the move, leading to a public spat that ended with a multimillion-dollar payout for O'Brien and his staff to exit the network in early 2010.

The aftermath split the comedy world, with Leno cast as the villain and O'Brien as the victim who was set up to fail.

In an emotional goodbye on his final "Tonight Show," O'Brien described himself as lucky and refused to sound bitter.

"Every comedian dreams of hosting 'The Tonight Show,' and for seven months I got to do it," he said. "I did it my way with people I love, and I don't regret one second."

He ended with a sort of generational rallying cry.

"All I ask is this one thing, par-

ticularly of young people that watch: Please do not be cynical," O'Brien said, his voice cracking. "Nobody in life gets exactly what they thought they were going to get, but if you work really hard and you're kind, amazing things will happen."

O'Brien reemerged later in 2010 with a new talk show on the cable station TBS. Despite the channel's lower profile, the show ran for 11 years while he launched parallel ventures like the podcast "Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend" and the travel show "Conan Without Borders," a precursor to his current show.

Other comedians receiving the lifetime achievement award include both Letterman and Leno, along with George Carlin, Whoopi Goldberg, Bob Newhart, Carol Burnett and Dave Chappelle.

Film



This image released by Sony Pictures Classics shows Selton Mello, (background left), and Fernanda Torres, (right), in a scene from 'I'm Still Here.' (AP)

Eunice's strength shines in Brazilian drama

Love, loss, and resilience in 'I'm Still Here'

LOS ANGELES, Jan 16, (AP) — It's easy to fall in love with the Paiva family. Filmmaker Walter Salles makes sure of that in "I'm Still Here."

He drops the audience into the warm everyday of the beautiful home of Eunice (Fernanda Torres) and Rubens Paiva (Selton Mello), in 1970s Rio de Janeiro, where their five kids run freely between the beach and their living room. Life is calmly chaotic, full of affection, gentle familial teasing and various life stages (one is about to lose a tooth, another about to go to university). Someone always seems to have wet hair, be covered in sand, or bringing in a many stray, as their youngest, Marcelo, does in the film's lovely opening. Even if their life is technically worlds away from any one person in the audience, it feels familiar and close.

Anyone coming to "I'm Still Here" will surely know that this domestic tranquility does not and cannot hold. It was about seven years into Brazil's military dictatorship, which would last until 1985. And while the film suggests that there was a semblance of normalcy

in their day to day, there are also ominous signs of change and oppression — reports of ambassadors being kidnapped on the news, and tense "random" traffic stops that their eldest daughter endures one night. Some left-leaning citizens are making plans to leave, but the Paiva family is not in a terrible rush. They're even making plans to build a new home.

So when three men in civilian clothes enter their home one afternoon and tell Rubens, a former left-leaning congressman, that he needs to come in for questioning, it happens with little incident. Everyone is on guard — they're not naive — but you sense that Eunice believes he will come back that night. Maybe even the next day. Rubens is calm changing into a collared shirt and tie and lying to his daughter that he is going into the office, even though it's a holiday. But he also savors this moment with her, perhaps because he knows he's likely to not return.

The film is based on a memoir written by Paiva's son, Marcelo, but you don't need to know that to know that it is first and foremost a memory piece. It is deeply personal

and imbued with the kind of tenderness that is extremely difficult to see or appreciate in the moment. And although it's certainly idealized and wistful, we accept any assumed white lies because we all wish that for ourselves: to truly recognize what we have before it's gone.

This story is not about the abduction, however, or what may have happened to Rubens after that day. It's about how Eunice continues on, through uncertainty, absence and, ultimately, the loss of hope. Salles chooses to tell this story in a rather straightforward manner, which works well, allowing the compelling narrative and the talented actors to carry the audience through.

At the heart of it is Torres, who has already won a Golden Globe for her performance and whose portrayal of Eunice is a true marvel. Mothers and wives often get the short shrift in movies like this, about Big Important Topics decided on by men, but Torres instills Eunice with a deep emotional and practical intelligence that's beautifully feminine, whether she's dealing with a misogynist banker, a dead

dog in the street or the thugs surveilling her home. She's fascinating and resilient in a way that so many women are in times of historical strife but rarely celebrated for.

In one particularly poignant scene, she and the kids are being photographed by a journalist hoping to tell their story. They smile together, as they did earlier in the film when Rubens was there. Now he's not, and the reporters are confused. They ask Eunice to try a more serious expression. She laughs, "They want us to look sad," and instructs her kids to keep smiling. It's a perfect encapsulation of the complex spirit of the movie. Political disappearances don't begin and end with the victim, or the toppling of a regime — they are generational traumas that live on in the survivors and alter everything in their wake.

"I'm Still Here," a Sony Pictures Classics release in limited release Friday (expanding on Jan. 24), is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for "smoking, drug use, brief nudity, some strong language, thematic content." Running time: 135 minutes. Three stars out of four.

People

Lamar's track

Drake sues UMG for defamation

LOS ANGELES, Jan 16, (AP) — A hip-hop superstar beef was cranked up another notch Wednesday when Drake sued Universal Music Group for defamation over rival Kendrick Lamar's diss track "Not Like Us."

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in New York City, alleges UMG published and promoted the track even though it included false pedophilia allegations against Drake and suggested listeners should resort to vigilante justice. Lamar is not named in the suit.

The result, the suit says, was **i n t r u d e r s** shooting a security guard at Drake's Toronto home, as well as online hate and harassment, a hit to his reputation and decreasing his brand's value before his contract renegotiation with UMG this year. The company has contracts with both stars.

"The lawsuit is not about the artist who created 'Not Like Us,'" the lawsuit says, referring to Lamar. "It is, instead, entirely about UMG, the music company that decided to publish, promote, exploit, and monetize allegations that it understood were not only false, but dangerous."

The suit later alleges, "UMG did so because it understood that the Recording's inflammatory and shocking allegations were a gold mine."

And, the suit claims, the music company has made large investments and used its connections to arrange for "Not Like Us" to be performed at next month's Super Bowl, where Lamar will be the halftime entertainment.

The lawsuit, which is seeking a trial and an undisclosed amount of money for damages, also repeated allegations in other legal filings that UMG falsely pumped up the popularity of "Not Like Us" on streaming services.

The track is nominated for five Grammys, including record of the year and song of the year.

Representatives for Drake declined to comment Wednesday. Representatives for UMG and Lamar did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

In a previous statement responding to similar allegations in pre-litigation filings, the record company said the "suggestion that UMG would do anything to undermine any of its artists is offensive and untrue. We employ the highest ethical practices in our marketing and promotional campaigns."

The feud between Drake, a 38-year-old Canadian rapper and singer and five-time Grammy winner, and Lamar, a 37-year-old Pulitzer Prize winner, is among the biggest in hip-hop in recent years, with two of the genre's biggest stars at its center.

The two were occasional collaborators more than a decade ago, but Lamar began taking public jabs at Drake starting in 2013. The fight escalated steeply last year.

Drake's lawyers, from New York-based Willkie Farr & Gallagher, said the lawsuit seeks to hold UMG accountable for knowingly promoting false and defamatory allegations against him.

"Beginning on May 4, 2024 and every day since, UMG has used its massive resources as the world's most powerful music company to elevate a dangerous and inflammatory message that was designed to assassinate Drake's character, and led to actual violence at Drake's doorstep," the law firm said in a statement.

"This lawsuit reveals the human and business consequences to UMG's elevation of profits over the safety and well-being of its artists, and shines a light on the manipulation of artists and the public for corporate gain," it said.

Variety

WASHINGTON: A host of big-name performers including Kid Rock and country singer Jason Aldean will be making their way to Washington, D.C., to perform at various presidential inauguration events over the weekend. The Trump Vance Inaugural Committee unveiled most of the lineup Wednesday.

Kid Rock, a longtime Trump supporter, and Billy Ray Cyrus will join Lee Greenwood and The Village People at the Make America Great Again Rally at Capital One Arena in downtown Washington on Sunday, along with a choir from Liberty University.

"The pageantry is wonderful. I'm excited about all of that," Greenwood told The Associated Press

Wednesday morning. "I'm excited to sing yet again for President of the United States and particularly my friend Donald J. Trump."

Aldean, a five-time Grammy nominee behind the controversial song "Try That in a Small Town," is set to perform at The Liberty Ball on Monday night, alongside The Village People and a "surprise musical guest."

The swearing-in ceremony Monday will feature previously announced performers Carrie Underwood, who is singing "America the Beautiful," opera tenor Christopher Maccio performing the National Anthem and Greenwood. Following are three inaugural balls.

"I love our country and am honored to have been asked to sing at the Inauguration and to be a small part of this historic event," Underwood said in a statement Monday.

Country group Rascal Flatts will be at the Commander-in-Chief Ball, focused on military service members, with Texas-based singer-songwriter Parker McCollum.

Rascal Flatts frontman Gary LeVox wrote on Instagram that he was "happy and humbled and grateful for the opportunity." LeVox played at Trump's first inauguration and promised that it will be a "night to remember," thanking South Dakota governor Kristi Noem in his post.

The Starlight Ball, focused on

high-dollar donors, will feature a performance from Gavin DeGraw, a singer-songwriter best known for the song "I Don't Want to Be," which was used as the theme song for the CW show "One Tree Hill." (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Two men convicted of lesser crimes connected to the killing of former "General Hospital" actor Johnny Wactor were sentenced to state prison on Wednesday.

Neither Leonel Gutierrez nor Frank Olano was charged with killing Wactor, who was shot when he interrupted three thieves stealing the catalytic converter from his car in downtown Los Angeles on May 25.

Gutierrez, 19, received four years in California state prison after pleading no contest to grand theft and attempted robbery.

Olano, 22, who was not at the

scene of the killing, was sentenced to five years and eight months in prison after pleading no contest to being an accessory after the fact and receiving stolen property.

Two co-defendants, Robert Barcelona and Sergio Estrada, both 18, are charged with the murder in the death of Wactor. Earlier this month, a judge found that there was enough evidence for them to go to trial. Both have pleaded not guilty.

Police and prosecutors said the 37-year-old Wactor had left work at a downtown LA rooftop bar with a coworker when he saw three men who had hoisted his car. One of them fired at him and killed him, authorities said.

After a long investigation that included police requests for help from the public and pleas for an intensifying probe and prosecution from Wactor's family and friends, the four men were arrested in August. (AP)



Aldean

Dr. Al-Qasimi offers insights on 'urticaria'

'Skin allergies' impact 20 pct of people, especially women, kids

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Dermatologist Dr. Mohammed Al-Qasimi says urticaria, or skin allergy, is a common condition affecting approximately 20 percent of people globally. Women are more prone to this condition than men, with higher prevalence observed in individuals under 40 years old, and lower rates in those over 70 years of age.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. Al-Qasimi explained that there are three types of urticaria: acute, chronic triggered by specific stimuli, and chronic spontaneous without a clear trigger.

The condition could sometimes be linked to a genetic disorder resulting from a deficiency in the complement enzyme C1 or the substance histamine that causes the allergic reaction. Some individuals produce little or no enzyme, making them more prone to allergies from certain foods.

Foods high in histamine include dairy products, eggs, peanuts, nuts, seafood, cheese, sausage, strawberries, tomatoes, and alcoholic beverages like beer, and are common triggers for urticaria.

Due to the importance of this condition, the World Health Organization has designated October 1 as World Urticaria Day to raise awareness about the condition and improve the quality of life for patients, as it carries significant social, economic, and psychological burdens.

Inflammatory disease

Dr. Al-Qasimi initially defined urticaria, or hives, as an inflammatory immune condition that manifests as a rash due to an allergic reaction. It appears as slightly raised spots on the skin, which may form lines, dots, arcs, or zigzag shapes in various shades of red or skin-toned colors.

He explained that individuals with urticaria normally experience severe itching, often accompanied by sensations of pins and needles, stinging, or burning. The condition may also cause swelling, known as "angioedema" which affects areas such as the eyelids, lips, and sometimes the hands and feet.

In more severe cases, the condition can worsen, spreading from the skin to internal organs and leading to "anaphylactic shock." This can cause a sudden drop in blood pressure, shortness of breath, swelling of the tongue, which leads to wheezing and difficulty in breathing, irregular heartbeat, dizziness, fainting, and gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

It is important to avoid foods high in histamine before exercising or engaging in strenuous activity, as they increase the risk of anaphylactic shock. It is recommended to leave at least six hours between consuming such foods and exercising.

Three types of Urticaria

Dr. Al-Qasimi explained that there are three types of urticaria: acute, chronic provoked, and chronic spontaneous without a clear cause. Acute urticaria tends to decrease with age, and lasts for a maximum of six weeks, with skin symptoms appearing suddenly and typically disappearing within 30 minutes to 24 hours. Angioedema may also occur but usually resolves slowly within three days. In some cases, acute urticaria may progress to an allergic shock stage.

Skin writing (Dermatographia)

The second type, chronic provoked urticaria, is triggered by specific stimuli. One common cause is "skin writing," where red lines or spots appear within minutes of scratching, cutting, or rubbing the skin. These marks typically last for 30 minutes before fading and are linked to an imbalance between beneficial and harmful bacteria in the body.

Red Spots and Triggers

Other triggers for urticaria include extreme cold, heat, vibration, cholinergic sweating, contact with local irritants, water, sunlight, and "delayed stress," which causes the symptoms to appear hours after the trigger (between 4 to 12 hours or more). This delayed reaction can occur due to factors such as standing for long periods, strenuous work, tight clothing, sitting in dry environments, high temperatures, and menstruation.

Both natural and artificial sunlight



Dr. Mohammed Al-Qasimi

can trigger allergies that interact with ultraviolet rays, leading to the appearance of red spots. This type of allergy can affect both men and women.

Spontaneous Urticaria

The third and final type is chronic spontaneous urticaria, which occurs without a known trigger. This type of urticaria lasts for more than six weeks and manifests daily with skin signs, swelling, and puffiness. It is most common in individuals aged between 20 and 40, and affects women more than men. Children are also more frequently impacted than adults.

Chronic spontaneous urticaria is one of the most severe forms of the condition in terms of side effects and clinical signs. Symptoms may last for 24 hours before disappearing, only to reappear after a day or two, continuing in cycles for more than six weeks.

This type of urticaria can be accompanied by visible skin reactions as well as internal symptoms, including headaches, fatigue, joint pain, wheezing, facial redness, changes in heart rate, and digestive issues such as nausea and vomiting.

Treatment Options

There are various treatment options available, depending on the type of urticaria—acute, chronic stimulated, or chronic spontaneous. Most treatments focus on antihistamines, biological drugs, corticosteroids, intravenous immune antibodies, light therapy, and others.

Treatments can treat chronic spontaneous urticaria by 80 percent within a year, with 20 percent of patients continuing to show improvement after five years of follow-up and treatment.

Urticaria: from myths to scientific understanding

Dr. Al-Qasimi explained that the understanding of urticaria has evolved massively over the centuries, with early explanations rooted in imagination, myth, and superstition. Throughout history, different cultures and thinkers have tried to make sense of this condition, often resorting to fantastical or supernatural explanations.

Two events during the Middle Ages highlight the intellectual backwardness of the time:

1. In the 15th century AD, English author Thomas Moore, in his book "Utopia", recounts an incident where on the day of the inauguration of King Richard III, a lord offered him a glass of strawberry juice. Shortly after drinking it, he developed severe itching and red spots. A doctor was called and he attributed the reaction to poison. This resulted in the execution of the lord.

2. In the Middle Ages in Europe, it was believed that urticaria was caused by possession by jinn (spirits). This belief led to extreme measures such as beheading or burning the supposed-possessed individuals alive.

However, with the onset of the Scientific Renaissance in Europe and America, research into the disease became more systematic. In 1769, the scientist William Cullen first formally coined the term "urticaria," which appeared in the first edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. This marked the beginning of a scientific understanding of the condition as an inflammatory immune disease.

Natural Birth and Protection Against Urticaria

Dr. Al-Qasimi highlighted that the World Health Organization has ob-

served a rise in food allergies, which have increased from three percent to seven percent globally.

He explained that children born via Caesarean section tend to have a higher sensitivity to foods compared to those born naturally.

When a child is delivered through the mother's birth canal, beneficial bacteria and other microbes are introduced into their digestive system, which helps the immune system adapt and acclimate. This process improves the immune response, and enhances the body's ability to manage allergies.

In addition, having pets in the home can reduce the likelihood of allergies. Children with older siblings also tend to have fewer allergies, as they are more likely to be exposed to various microbes that help strengthen the immune system and build immunity.

Children who frequently take antibiotics are at a higher risk of developing food allergies, as antibiotics can harm beneficial gut bacteria. On the other hand, introducing a variety of foods to young children after the age of six months has been shown to support their immune development and better prepare their bodies to adapt to potential allergens.

9 Main Stimuli and Triggers of Urticaria

Dr. Al-Qasimi explained that although 50 percent of urticaria cases remain of unknown origin, various factors or triggers can lead to the onset of urticaria, including:

1. Germs (viruses, bacteria, and parasites)
2. Foods that do not contain a high percentage of histamine.
3. Medications, such as antibiotics and anti-inflammatories.
4. Insect and reptile bites (e.g., bees and wasps).
5. Vaccines.
6. Manufactured materials like LATEX, commonly found in medical gloves.
7. Physical stimuli: sunlight, heat, and cold.
8. Physical exertion (exercise and hard work).
9. Common triggers in children: viral infections, medications, insect bites, foods, and parasites.
10. Common triggers in adults: medications, viral hepatitis, and foods.

Geographical distribution of food allergies in adults:

Asia: Shellfish, North America and Australia: Nuts such as peanuts, Central Europe: Nuts, sesame, wheat, and shellfish, Southern Europe: Fruits and vegetables, Middle East and Korea: Sesame and wheat

Immune Diseases and Chronic Spontaneous Urticaria

Although the main triggers for chronic spontaneous urticaria remain unclear, recent research has identified associations between this condition and several internal diseases, including:

- Autoimmune diseases, especially thyroid-related disorders.
- Thyroid gland dysfunction, such as hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism.
- Other autoimmune diseases, such as lupus erythematosus and arthritis.
- Bacterial infections, including stomach bacteria and viral hepatitis.
- Certain medications, such as anti-inflammatory drugs and blood pressure medications.

Brief overview about Dr. Mohammed Al-Qasimi:

- Consultant Dermatologist
 - Holder of subspecialty certificate from Harvard University, USA
 - Holder of Arab Board of Dermatology certification
 - Holder of First School certificate from the Faculty of Medicine in Tunisia
- Dr. Al-Qasimi is regarded as one of the top dermatologists in Kuwait, according to the website x.com/i/grok.

He is highly respected for his extensive experience, scientific expertise, and advanced training, particularly in specialized treatments such as laser surgery. He is also known for his accurate diagnosis of skin diseases and their cutting-edge treatments.

Proposal could save millions from smoking

FDA eyes nonaddictive cigarettes

WASHINGTON, Jan 16, (AP): Federal officials released a far-reaching proposal to make cigarettes far less addictive by capping their nicotine content, a goal long sought by antismoking advocates that is unlikely to go into effect anytime soon.

The proposed rule from the Food and Drug Administration comes in the final days of President Joe Biden's term, greatly reducing the likelihood that it will actually be enacted. President-elect Donald Trump and his health nominees have not commented on the measure, but a similar effort led by Trump's first FDA commissioner, Dr. Scott Gottlieb, was sidetracked during his first term.

Trump's health secretary nominee, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., has said little about how regulating tobacco fits into his plans to overhaul the government's approach to fighting chronic disease. Even if the effort goes ahead under Trump, tobacco companies like Reynolds American and Altria are almost certain to challenge it in court, delaying implementation.

The FDA has spent years studying the issue and said Wednesday that cutting nicotine would help nearly 13 million current smokers quit cigarettes within one year. Roughly 48 million more young people would never take up the habit because cigarettes would essentially become nonaddictive, according to agency projections.

"This action, if finalized, could save many lives and dramatically reduce the burden of severe illness and disability," FDA Commissioner Robert Califf told reporters Wednesday.

Under the agency's plan, nicotine in cigarettes would be capped at levels that "could no longer create and sustain this addiction among people who smoke." Companies would have two years to reformulate their products after the publication of a final regulation. The agency posted its 334-page proposal online Wednesday morning and said it will take public comments for nine months before taking any further steps.

Antismoking advocates overwhelm-



A man holds a lit cigarette while smoking in San Francisco, Dec. 2, 2020. (AP)

ingly back the idea and urged Kennedy to help implement it, if he is confirmed.

"Tobacco regulation is a huge part of reaching the goals he's outlined for reducing chronic disease and a really important part of the conversation we need to have in this country," said Chrissie Juliano of the Big Cities Health Coalition, which represents the heads of more than 30 metropolitan health departments.

Smoking causes more than 480,000 U.S. deaths each year due to cancer, heart disease, stroke and other smoking-related illnesses. Those conditions often take decades to develop and remain elevated today despite ongoing declines in smoking among adults and teenagers.

The idea of limiting nicotine has its roots in sweeping powers given to the FDA by Congress in 2009 to regulate the tobacco industry. But the FDA's efforts on nicotine and a host of other tobacco measures - such as adding graphic warning labels to cigarette packs - have been hampered for years by tobacco industry lawsuits.

Califf said the expectation of industry lawsuits explains the slow, deliberative pace of FDA's work on the proposal.

"The research has to be airtight to survive the challenges that we know we'll get in court," Califf said.

Under the law, the agency can

regulate nicotine but cannot remove it completely. The limits on nicotine proposed Wednesday would apply to cigarettes, cigars and pipe tobacco, but not electronic cigarettes, nicotine pouches or other lower-risk products. While many e-cigarettes have not undergone extensive testing, the FDA has endorsed several major brands, including NJOY and Vuse, as less harmful alternatives for smokers.

"We anticipate that about 50% of smokers will transition to these other products, whether that's e-cigarettes or other noncombustibles," FDA's tobacco director Brian King told reporters.

Altria, which sells both Marlboro cigarettes and NJOY e-cigarettes, said the FDA's nicotine proposal will lead to illegal markets.

The plan is "fundamentally flawed," company spokesman David Sutton said in an email.

Currently, there are no U.S. limits on nicotine, which occurs naturally in tobacco plants. There are several techniques for removing it, including chemical extraction and cross-breeding plants.

The latest FDA announcement comes as smoking in the U.S. continues to fall. Last year, the smoking rate hit another all-time low, with 1 in 9 adults saying they currently smoke.

Low-nicotine cigarettes are not a new idea. Several companies, including Philip Morris, experimented with selling the products during the 1980s and 1990s, without much success. In 2019, the FDA authorized a cigarette that contains 95% less nicotine than standard cigarettes.

The FDA has sponsored studies showing that when smokers switch to very low nicotine cigarettes they smoke less and are more likely to try quitting. That research is considered pivotal to establishing that smokers won't compensate by just smoking more cigarettes or inhaling more deeply. That was sometimes the case with "light" and "low tar" cigarettes marketed in decades past. Those products were subsequently banned as misleading.

Cancer risk cited

US bans Red No. 3 dye from foods

LOS ANGELES, Jan 16, (AP): US regulators banned the dye called Red 3 from the nation's food supply, nearly 35 years after it was barred from cosmetics because of potential cancer risk.

Food and Drug Administration officials granted a 2022 petition filed by two dozen food safety and health advocates, who urged the agency to revoke authorization for the substance that gives some candies, snack cakes and maraschino cherries a bright red hue.

The agency said it was taking the action as a "matter of law" because some studies have found that the dye caused cancer in lab rats. Officials cited a statute known as the Delaney Clause, which requires FDA to ban any additive found to cause cancer in people or animals.

The dye is known as erythrosine, FD&C Red No. 3 or Red 3. The ban removes it from the list of approved color additives in foods, dietary supplements and oral medicines, such as cough syrups. More than three decades ago, the FDA declined to authorize use of Red 3 in cosmetics and externally applied drugs because a study showed it caused cancer when eaten by rats.

"The FDA is taking action that will remove the authorization for the use of FD&C Red No. 3 in food and ingested drugs," said Jim Jones, the FDA's deputy commissioner for human foods. "Evidence shows cancer in laboratory male rats exposed to high levels of FD&C Red No. 3. Importantly, the way that FD&C Red No. 3 causes cancer in male rats does not occur in humans."



This image shows a pile of candy corn in Westchester County, N.Y., Oct. 23, 2023. (AP)

Food manufacturers will have until January 2027 to remove the dye from their products, while makers of ingested drugs have until January 2028 to do the same. Other countries still allow for certain uses of the dye, but imported foods must meet the new U.S. requirement.

Consumer advocates praised the decision.

"This is a welcome, but long overdue, action from the FDA: removing the unsustainable double standard in which Red 3 was banned from lipstick but permitted in candy," said Dr. Peter Lurie, director of the group Center for Science in the Public Interest, which led the petition effort.

It's not clear whether the ban will face legal challenges from food manufacturers because evidence hasn't determined that the dye causes cancer when consumed by humans. At a hearing in December, FDA Commissioner Dr. Robert Califf suggested that's a risk.

"When we do ban something, it will go to court," he told members of Congress on Dec. 5. "And if we don't have the scientific evidence, we will lose in court." When the FDA declined to allow Red 3 in cosmetics and topical drugs in 1990, the color additive was already permitted in foods and ingested drugs. Because research showed then that the way the dye causes cancer in rats does not apply to humans, "the FDA did not take action to revoke the authorization of Red No. 3 in food," the agency has said on its website.

Health advocates for years have asked the FDA to reconsider that decision, including the 2022 petition led by CSPI. In November, nearly two dozen members of Congress sent a letter demanding that FDA officials ban Red 3.

Lawmakers cited the Delaney Clause and said the action was especially important to protect children, who consume more of the dye on a bodyweight basis than adults, the lawmakers said.

"The FDA should act quickly to protect the nation's youth from this harmful dye, used simply to give food and drinks a bright red color," the letter said. "No aesthetic reason could justify the use of a carcinogen in our food supply."

About two-thirds of Americans favor restricting or reformulating processed foods to remove ingredients like added sugar or dyes, according to a new AP-NORC poll. Support is particularly high among U.S. adults with a college degree, as well as those with a higher household income.

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Same pitch has been prepared for the first test in Multan

Pakistan hopes its spin tactics work wonders vs Windies in 2 test series

MULTAN, Pakistan, Jan 16, (AP): Pakistan hopes its tried and tested spin template will be successful against the West Indies as the two bottom-placed teams in the World Test Championship gear up for the two-test series starting from Friday.

The same pitch has been prepared for the first test in Multan on which Pakistan spinners Sajid Khan and Noman Ali neutralized England's aggressive "Baz-ball" in October when the groundskeepers successfully dried out the 22-yard strip with the help of giant industrial-sized fans and patio heaters.

"We emphasized during the England series that home conditions are very important in test cricket," Pakistan captain Shan Masood said on Thursday. "We adapted a style of play, style of pitches, (and) now we will try how we can perform in our home grounds and carry forward the momentum of England series."

Pakistan came from behind to beat England 2-1 on engineered dry wickets of Multan and Rawalpindi after losing the first test by an innings when the tourists amassed a record-breaking 823-7 declared in the first innings.

Off-spinner Sajid and left-arm spinner Noman, who grabbed 39 of the 40 wickets in the last two test

matches against England, are both named in the 15-man squad after being overlooked for the away series against South Africa, which Pakistan lost 2-0.

Leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed, who missed the last home series against England because of illness, is also in the squad and it is likely Pakistan will go with three specialist spinners.

Pakistan has lost eight of its last 10 test matches under Masood's captaincy since he was elevated as red-ball skipper in December 2023. But the skipper believed Pakistan couldn't capitalize a number of times against Australia, Bangladesh and even against South Africa after putting opponents on the back foot.

"There are lots of test matches during last year when we lost the games after coming into a winning position," Masood said. "There were only one or two one-sided matches ... we came into good positions but couldn't finish it. The lesson for this team is how we can convert it into victories after coming into winning positions."

Pakistan will be without its in-form opening batter Saim Ayub, who was ruled out of competitive cricket for up to six weeks after fracturing his right ankle during the test match in South Africa. Imam-ul-Haq

will replace Ayub in the top order after the left-hander was recalled since last playing against Australia.

West Indies is yet to win a series in this WTC cycle. It has lost to India, England and South Africa while drawing 1-1 both against Australia and Bangladesh.

But captain Kraigg Brathwaite was hopeful that his team could finish the WTC cycle on a high.

"This series is very important for us," Brathwaite said. "Obviously (we have) two test matches left in this cycle and it's a new year ... it is important to finish this cycle strong and that's our focus."

Fast bowler Shamar Joseph was ruled of the series due to shin splits while another pacer, Alzarri Joseph preferred to play in the ILT20 league in the United Arab Emirates and skipped the test series in Pakistan.

Brathwaite said the tourists will be also be without their vice-captain Joshua Da Silva and fast bowler Kemar Roach, who were ruled out of the first test because of illness.

Multan will also host the second test, starting from Jan. 25 due to ongoing upgrades at Pakistan's two main stadiums in Karachi and Lahore for next month's Champions Trophy.



West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite, right, and his Pakistani counterpart Shan Masood pose for photo with test-series trophy, in Multan, Pakistan. (AP)

LA Clippers rout Nets for largest margin of victory in team history

Warriors stave off comeback by Timberwolves

INGLEWOOD, Calif., Jan 16, (AP): Kawhi Leonard scored 23 points, James Harden added 21 and the Los Angeles Clippers had the largest margin of victory in franchise history, routing the Brooklyn Nets 126-67 on Wednesday night.

The Clippers broke the team margin mark of 50 against Oklahoma City on April 10, 2022. It also was the worst loss in Nets' history, eclipsing a 52-point defeat to Houston on Oct. 18, 1978.

LA's largest lead was 64 points midway through the fourth quarter, despite coach Tyrone Lue emptying his bench late in the third quarter.

Leonard logged a season-high 24 minutes as he took part in his fourth game since coming back from a knee injury.

Jalen Wilson led the Nets with 16 points and Day'Ron Sharpe had 12. Brooklyn has dropped five of six.

Norman Powell added 18 points for the Clippers, who led 58-35 at halftime before opening the third quarter with scoring the first 13 points en route to a 29-3 run. At the end of the quarter, LA had a 102-51 advantage.

Warriors 116, Timberwolves 115

In Minneapolis, Stephen Curry made seven 3-pointers and scored 31 points to help Golden State stave off a furious comeback by Minnesota for a victory.

Andrew Wiggins added 24 points for a depleted Warriors team seeking a spark on the last stop on a four-game trip after falling below .500 for the first time this season in a loss Monday at Toronto.

Anthony Edwards and Donte DiVincenzo each scored 28 points for the Wolves, who trailed by 24 points late in the first quarter and fought back for a 108-all tie with 1:07 left.

After Gary Payton II stepped out in a backcourt trap, DiVincenzo took an easy layup to cut the lead to 113-112



Los Angeles Clippers guard Bones Hyland, right, tries to drive by Brooklyn Nets guard Reece Beekman during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Inglewood, Calif. (AP)

with 12.1 seconds left and promptly fouled Payton. He missed the second free throw, but Wiggins grabbed the rebound and Curry sealed it with two foul shots.

Lakers 117, Heat 108

In Los Angeles, Rui Hachimura scored 23 points and Anthony Davis had 22 points and 11 rebounds as Los Angeles snapped a three-game skid with a victory over Miami.

LeBron James finished with 22 points and nine assists and Austin Reaves added 14 points and 14 rebounds as the Lakers won for the first time since having two games postponed due to the deadly wildfires in Southern California.

Tyler Herro shot 7 for 12 from 3-point distance and scored 34 points for the Heat, who lost both games of a Los Angeles swing after falling to the Clippers on Monday. Haywood Highsmith and Nikola Jovic each scored 12 points.

Knicks 125, 76ers 119 OT

In Philadelphia, Jalen Brunson scored 16 of his 38 points in the fourth quarter and overtime, and Josh Hart had the 11th triple-double of his career

as the New York Knicks beat the Philadelphia 76ers.

Hart had 10 points, 17 rebounds and 12 assists, Mikal Bridges scored 23 points and OG Anunoby added 17 as the Knicks won a rematch of last year's first-round playoff series.

Raptors 110, Celtics 97

In Toronto, RJ Barrett had 22 points and 10 rebounds, and Toronto snapped a 10-game losing streak against Boston with a victory over the Celtics.

Jakob Poeltl added 16 points and 11 rebounds as the Raptors won consecutive games for the third time. Scottie Barnes scored 18 points.

Hawks 110, Bulls 94

In Chicago, Keaton Wallace had a career-high 27 points and short-handed Atlanta beat Chicago.

Wallace nearly doubled his previous high of 14. He made four 3-pointers and had six assists.

Daeqwon Plowden scored 19 points in his NBA debut after being called up from the G League's College Park Skyhawks.

Bucks 122, Magic 93

In Milwaukee, Damian Lillard

scored 30 points and Giannis Antetokounmpo had 26 points and 11 rebounds as Milwaukee capitalized on a fast start for the second straight night and trounced Orlando.

The Bucks (22-17) passed Orlando (23-19) to take over fourth place in the Eastern Conference. The Bucks are 3-0 against the Magic, with the finale of the season series scheduled for March 8 at Milwaukee.

Pelicans 119, Mavericks 116

In New Orleans, Dejounte Murray scored 30 points, Trey Murphy III blocked Spencer Dinwiddie's layup for the lead with 4 seconds left and New Orleans outlasted injury-depleted Dallas.

Murphy had 24 points and 10 rebounds, capped by game-sealing free throws with 2 seconds remaining, and Javonte Green added 13 points to help New Orleans (10-32) take its third victory in four games after winning just five of its first 34 contests.

Grizzlies 129, Spurs 115

In San Antonio, Ja Morant had 21 points and 12 assists to lead Memphis to a win over San Antonio.

Desmond Bane scored 21 points, Santi Aldama added 20 and Jaren Jackson Jr. 19 for Memphis, which had lost four of its last six games entering Wednesday.

Rockets 128, Nuggets 108

In Denver, Jalen Green scored 34 points, Alperen Sengun had 20 points, nine rebounds and eight assists and Houston beat short-handed Denver.

Green, who hit six 3-pointers, continued his recent scoring surge. He is averaging 32 points in Houston's last six games, including a career-best 42 points against Memphis on Monday.

Hornets 117, Jazz 112

In Salt Lake City, Mark Williams scored a career-high 31 points and had 13 rebounds to help Charlotte beat Utah.

LaMelo Ball added 27 points, nine assists and three blocks to help Charlotte snap a seven-game road losing streak. Miles Bridges had 25 points and 10 rebounds, and Brandon Miller finished with 20 points.



New York Knicks' Josh Hart (3) goes up for a dunk during the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Philadelphia 76ers in Philadelphia. (AP)

Purdue tops Washington

Miller hits game-winner as SMU rallies to stun Virginia

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va., Jan 16, (AP): Boopie Miller made two 3-pointers in the final nine seconds, including the off-balance buzzer-beater for the win, and SMU stunned Virginia 54-52 on Wednesday night.

The Mustangs blew a seven-point lead in the final five minutes, going 4 1/2 minutes without a point and falling behind 50-45 with 31 seconds left. B.J. Edwards then drained a 3-pointer to get the Mustangs within 50-48 with 25 seconds left.

After Ishan Sharma hit both ends of a one-and-one, Miller's 3-pointer got SMU within 52-51 with nine seconds left. Virginia's Taine Miller missed the front end of the one-and-one with seven seconds left and SMU called timeout with four seconds remaining. Miller got the ball on the in-bound pass in front of the SMU bench, took a couple of dribbles and hit the winning 3-pointer as the clock ticked under one second.

Virginia lost despite a 12-0 run that erased a 45-38 deficit and gave them a five-point lead in the final minute.

Miller and Chuck Harris had 12 points each and Samet Yigitoglu scored 10 for SMU (13-4, 4-2 ACC). The Mustangs were 2 for 18 from 3-point distance before hitting their last three in the final minute.

Blake Buchanan had 11 points and 15 rebounds and Sharma scored 10 for Virginia (8-9, 1-5). The Cavaliers made 4 of 26 3-pointers and 12 of 15 free throws.

There were four ties and four lead changes in the first half, which ended with SMU leading 27-25.

SMU defeated Virginia 63-51 in the inaugural ACC meeting between the teams in Dallas last month.

Trey Kaufman-Renn scored 19 points to help No. 17 Purdue dig itself out of a hole and come away with a win over Washington.

The Boilermakers (14-4, 6-1 Big

Ten) trailed by 10 late in the first half and were down by eight at the break, but opened the second period with an 11-2 surge to storm back in front.

Kaufman-Renn, who entered averaging 17.5 points per game, had a lot to do with the turnaround, scoring 13 points in the final 20 minutes.

Braden Smith added 17 points, six rebounds, five assists and five steals for Purdue. Caleb Furst had 15 points and Fletcher Loyer chipped in with 12.

The Boilermakers outscored the Huskies (10-8, 1-6) by 19 in the second half, and dominated them 40-22 in the paint.

Great Osobor led Washington with 28 points, finishing 8 of 9 from the field and a career-best 5 for 5 from beyond the arc. He also pulled down nine boards.

Purdue: The Boilermakers stretched their winning streak to six, and have won those games by an average of 20.3 points.

Javon Jackson scored 30 points and UIC beat Murray State in double-overtime.

Murray State's Terence Harcum made three free throws with three seconds left to force the first extra period tied 76-76. He drove the lane and scored with 2.8 seconds left in the first overtime to send it to a second tied at 88-all.

Harcum hit a 3-pointer to give the Racers' their last lead, 93-91, with 3:19 left. Jackson answered with a pair of free throws and a 3-pointer to help UIC pull away.

Jackson shot 12 of 20 from the floor and added five assists for the Flames (12-6, 4-3 Missouri Valley Conference). Tyem Freeman scored 21 points and Filip Skobalj finished with 15.

Alden Applewhite led the way for the Racers (10-8, 4-3) with 22 points and two steals. Kylen Milton added 15 points and four steals for Murray State. Harcum had 14 points and six assists.

PSG avoids upset

Lyon loses penalty shootout to amateur team in French Cup

PARIS, Jan 16, (AP): Amateur team Bourgoin-Jallieu upset five-time winner Lyon in a penalty shootout to reach the French Cup round of 16 on Wednesday and home fans celebrated the shock result with a pitch invasion.

Facing another amateur side, defending champion Paris Saint-Germain was made to work hard against Espaly and waited until the 88th to see Bradley Barcola put it back in the lead. Gonçalo Ramos then scored in stoppage time to seal a 4-2 win.

PSG is bidding to win the cup for a record-extending 16th time.

The Parisians were caught cold and conceded in the third minute before Warren Zaire-Emerly made it 1-1. It looked like PSG would pull away after Désiré Doué put his team in front, only for Maxence Fournel to score in the 70th minute and ensure late suspense.

PSG has not been beaten by a lower-division club in the cup since 2009.

Against Bourgoin-Jallieu, Alexandre Lacazette and Corentin Tolisso had their efforts denied after the match ended in a 2-2 draw.

"We play football for this," goalkeeper Ronan Jay told broadcaster beIN Sports. "It will stay with us for life, it's unbelievable."

Less than 50 kilometers (31 miles) separate the two cities, but the clubs have little in common. Lyon is one of the most storied clubs in French soccer, having won the league title seven times to add to its five Cup titles, while Bourgoin-Jallieu plays in the fifth division.

In the game, Mehdi Moujetzky scored both goals for Bourgoin-Jallieu, giving his team an early 1-0 lead and leveling the score at 2-2 in the 69th minute after Georges Mikautadze put Lyon ahead. Nemanja Matić scored Lyon's opener.

Moujetzky missed his penalty in the shootout but that did not prevent Bourgoin-Jallieu from sealing the historic result.

Historic gold for Finland's Inola at FISU Winter Universiade

TURIN, Italy, Jan 16, (Xinhua): Finland's Inkki Inola etched his name into the FISU Games history on Wednesday, as para cross-country skiing made its debut at Torino 2025.

Competing in the cross-country skiing men's 10km free technique event, Inola, guided by Reetu Inkila, triumphed the visually impaired category

with a time of 22:51.4 in the alpine town of Pragelato near Turin.

"This was an incredible experience," said the 25-year-old law student from the University of Eastern Finland. "It's the first time para athletes are competing alongside non-disabled athletes in the same event. I hope this inspires not only athletes in Finland, but also para

athletes around the world." Turin 2025 marked a milestone in the 76-year history of the global multi-sport event for university athletes, as it introduced para sports for the first time, including alpine and cross-country skiing. In an unprecedented move, para and non-disabled athletes competed on the same course, creating an atmosphere

of unity and inclusivity.

Inola described his journey as one of perseverance and adaptation. Born with a visual impairment that allows him to only see faces within two meters, he trains extensively in Finland, switching to roller skiing and cycling during the summer months.

"My father often follows me on a

motorcycle to ensure my safety while I train on a bike," Inola said with a smile.

After narrowly missing a medal at the Beijing Winter Paralympics, Inola has his sights set on Milano-Cortina 2026.

"This competition is an important step on my path to the Paralympics. It's been a year-long preparation, and

I'm glad it paid off." As the Winter Universiade in Turin continues, the inclusion of para sports underscores the event's commitment to diversity and innovation.

"This is just the beginning," Inola said. "I hope it leads to even more opportunities for para athletes worldwide."

SPORTS

Arsenal cuts Liverpool's lead with derby win

Isak propels Newcastle into top four

LONDON, Jan 16, (Agencies): Arsenal narrowed Liverpool's lead at the top of the Premier League to four points thanks to a 2-1 win at home to Tottenham in the north-London derby.

Mikel Arteta's side was under pressure going into the game after consecutive home defeats, and things got even worse when Son Heung-min put Tottenham ahead in the 25th minute when his volley following a corner was deflected into the net.

The goal came against the run of play and Arsenal was level five minutes from halftime when Gabriel headed home a deep Declan Rice corner, with the ball going in off Spurs' striker Dominic Solanke.

Leandro Trossard scored what turned out to be the winning goal in the 44th minute when he was given acres of space to advance down the left before beating Tottenham goalkeeper Antonin Kinsky with a bouncing shot.

Alexander Isak scored for the eighth straight league game to propel Newcastle into the top four.

The Sweden international struck twice in a 3-0 victory over Wolverhampton to take his season total to 17 in all competitions. He became the fourth player to score in eight consecutive games in the Premier League, following Ruud van Nistelrooy, Jamie Vardy and Daniel Sturridge.

Vardy scored a league record 11-straight games.

"Like most strikers, Isak wants to practice his finishing. It is an art form. He is there after training every day trying to do more," Newcastle manager Eddie Howe said.

Isak's form has pushed Newcastle into Champions League contention. He's scored 12 in his last 10 games in all competitions and Newcastle is on a nine-match winning streak.

Isak opened the scoring in the 34th against relegation-threatened Wolverhampton at St James' Park. He got his second in the 57th and Anthony maintained his own scoring form with his fourth goal in successive games.

Howe's team is now one point ahead of fifth-place Chelsea.

David Moyes' return to Everton didn't get off to the start he wanted after a 1-0 loss to Aston Villa.

Crystal Palace took a huge step towards survival with a 2-0 win away to Leicester City, who has now lost six consecutive league games.

Jean-Philippe Mateta was put through for the opening goal in the 52nd minute, and Marc Guehi doubled the lead in the 78th minute with a left-foot shot following a well-worked free kick.

Ollie Watkins ruined David Moyes' return to Goodison Park as Everton coach as he scored the only goal in Aston Villa's 1-0 win, although Everton will lament Dominic Calvert-Lewin blazing over from six yards in injury time with the goal at his mercy.

Liverpool drew 1-1 away to Nottingham Forest.



Tottenham Hotspur's goalkeeper Antonin Kinsky, centre right, clears the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur at the Emirates Stadium, London. (AP)

Nine-man Leipzig loses at Stuttgart

Sané answers critics as Bayern routs Hoffenheim to preserve 4-point lead

MUNICH, Jan 16, (AP): Leroy Sané answered critics by scoring two goals as Bayern Munich routed Hoffenheim 5-0 to restore its four-point lead in the Bundesliga.

Sané is subject to increased attention with his contract due to expire at the end of the season. Pundits including former Bayern great Lothar Matthäus say he hasn't lived up to expectations since joining from Manchester City in 2020, making a contract extension unlikely. Matthäus was speaking to broadcaster Sky before kickoff.

Sané wasted little time in responding with the opener in the seventh minute when he fired a fierce shot inside the far post after Thomas Müller laid the ball off. Sané's celebrations showed the criticism had perhaps taken its toll.

"You always want to shake him, that he just does something and doesn't think too much. And today he did a lot and didn't think too much and he looked good," Müller said.

Raphaël Guerreiro was celebrating five minutes later as a long evening beckoned for Hoffenheim. Guerreiro played a one-two with Harry Kane before scoring his first Bundesliga goal of the season.

Kane made it 3-0 with a penalty in the 26th. It was his 16th goal of



Hoffenheim's Kevin Akpoguma, left, and Munich's Harry Kane, right, go for a header during a German Bundesliga soccer match between FC Bayern Munich and TSG 1899 Hoffenheim in Munich, Germany. (AP)

the season.

Sané got his second after the break, set up by Mathys Tel, and substitute Serge Gnabry scored minutes after going on for Kane.

Sané went off to applause from the Bayern fans after Gnabry's goal.

"In the end, you get praised if you give a good performance and you might get a bit of flack if things don't go so well," Sané said. "I always try to help the team, to give a good

Deniz Undav in the buildup. Referee Sascha Stegemann booked Stuttgart assistant coach David Krecidlo for complaining.

Undav set up winter signing Jacob Bruun Larsen to equalize in the 50th and Nick Woltemade completed the comeback 10 minutes later when he poked home the rebound from an Undav effort.

Šeško and Lois Openda were sent off late as Leipzig slumped to its fifth defeat of the season. Both will miss the next match at Bochum on Saturday.

Bochum defeated St. Pauli 1-0 in the early game thanks to an acrobatic second-half strike from Philipp Hoffmann. It's Bochum's second win of the season, though it remains bottom.

Bochum is still awaiting the result of Union Berlin's appeal against the German soccer federation's decision to award Bochum a win from their game after the Bochum goalkeeper was struck by a lighter.

Union slumped to its second straight defeat under new coach Stefan Baumgart with dismal defending to blame for a 2-0 loss at home to Augsburg.

Leonardo Scienza scored in the fifth minute of stoppage time for Heidenheim's third equalizer in a 3-3 draw at Werder Bremen.

Verona becomes the 8th Serie A club under American ownership

Inter fails to take advantage of title rivals dropping points

MILAN, Jan 16, (AP): Inter Milan failed to take advantage of its title rivals dropping points as it was held to a 2-2 draw by Bologna in Serie A.

Inter nevertheless moved to within three points of Serie A leader Napoli with a game in hand.

But the Nerazzurri were only one point above third-placed Atalanta, which has drawn its past three matches.

The result also brought an end to Inter's six-match winning streak in the league.

Bologna, which remained eighth, took the lead in the 15th minute when Nikola Moro's volley from outside the area was deflected past Yann Sommer by Santiago Castro.

Denzel Dumfries leveled just four minutes later, however, and Lautaro Martínez turned the match around completely right on the stroke of halftime with his first goal at San Siro in more than two months.

Emil Holm equalized for Bologna in the 64th minute with the help of a big deflection.

Hellas Verona has become the eighth club in Serie A to be under American ownership after Texas-based Presidio Investors took full control.

Presidio, a private equity firm based in Austin, has acquired 100% ownership of Verona - bringing to an end Maurizio Setti's 13-year stint at the helm.

"We've worked hard these past months to achieve this milestone, and are excited to take our first steps in this historic city, leading a club that is an integral part of Verona and its

people," Presidio Investors managing partner Christian Puscasiu said.

"We would like to thank Maurizio Setti for his valuable stewardship of the club and for facilitating this transition. We are confident that his continued efforts ... will be an important part of the club's future success."

Setti will remain at Verona as "sen-

ior adviser of football operation" and the club has also appointed former Roma CEO Italo Zanzi as its executive chairman.

"It is a profound honor to join Hellas Verona, a club that embodies the passion and heritage of the city of Verona," Zanzi said.

"We are dedicated to honoring the club's rich traditions while working to

strengthen its operations in all areas."

Verona is one point above the relegation zone ahead of Sunday's home game against Lazio.

The other Serie A teams owned by Americans are: Inter and AC Milan, Atalanta, Fiorentina, Parma, Roma and Venezia.

Bologna is owned by Canadian Joey Saputo.



Barcelona's Lamine Yamal, center, duels for the ball with Betis' Romain Perraud, left, and Betis' Sergi Altimitra, right, during a Spanish Copa del Rey round of 16 soccer match between Barcelona and Real Betis at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

'We wanted to keep momentum'

Barca, Atletico cruise into Copa del Rey quarterfinals

MADRID, Jan 16, (AP): Barcelona followed up its rout of Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup final with a comfortable 5-1 victory over Real Betis in the round of 16 of the Copa del Rey.

Gavi and Jules Koundé scored a goal each in the first half-hour and Raphinha, Ferran Torres and Lamine Yamal added to the lead in the second half to give the Catalan club the win and a spot in the quarterfinals.

It was the fourth straight victory in 2025 for Barcelona, which on Sunday defeated Madrid 5-2 in Saudi Arabia to win the Spanish Super Cup.

"We wanted to keep the momentum from the Super Cup here at home in front of our fans," Barcelona defender Pau Cubarsí said. "We continue like this and keep the foot on the throttle. The (Christmas) break did well for us, we were able to refresh."

Barcelona had lost its last two games in 2024 before going on a winning streak against Barbaastro in the Copa del Rey and Athletic Bilbao and Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup.

Playmaker Dani Olmo, registered in the last minute after a long battle between Barcelona, the Spanish league and Spain's federation because of a missed deadline by the club, helped set up Gavi's opening goal in the third

minute at Montjuic stadium. Yamal gave the pass for Koundé's goal in the 27th.

Koundé thought he had added to the lead in first-half stoppage time but his effort was disallowed by video review because he was offside. Yamal also had one called back by the VAR because of offside early in the second half.

Barcelona's third goal finally counted when Raphinha found the net in a breakaway in the 58th. Torres scored the fourth from inside the area in the 67th, a few minutes after coming off the bench, and Yamal sealed it after a nice run in the 75th.

Vitor Roque scored Betis' lone goal by converting an 84th-minute penalty kick.

Atletico Madrid, playing without many regular starters, routed second-division club Elche 4-0 to extend its record winning streak to 15 matches.

The club had never won more than 13 games in a row across all competitions before.

Alexander Sorloth scored from close range in the eighth and converted a 29th-minute penalty kick. Rodrigo Riquelme scored the third from long range in the 61st, and Julián Álvarez closed the scoring in the 75th.

Elche played a man down from the 50th after Nicolás Fernández was sent off with a second yellow card.

Frustrated Al-Ahli supporters boo players after defeat to Al-Kholood

RIYADH, Jan 16: Al-Ahli fans voiced their frustration after a heartbreaking 1-0 loss to Al-Kholood in the 15th round of the Saudi Premier League. The defeat came in the second minute of stoppage time, dashing hopes for a goalless draw and costing Al-Ahli three crucial points.

A video circulating on the "X" platform captured the discontent of Al-Ahli supporters, who jeered at the players as they exited the field. English striker Ivan Toney bore the brunt of the criticism, with fans calling for his departure. Toney remained silent and headed directly to the locker room.

The loss snapped Al-Ahli's five-match winning streak, leaving them with 26 points and in fifth place in the league standings. Meanwhile, Al-Kholood earned a vital win, disrupting Al-Ahli's momentum.

In other matches, Al-Ettifaq triumphed over Damak 3-0, while Al-Shabab secured a 2-1 victory against Al-Riyadh. The round continues today, with Al-Khaleej facing Al-Ruba, Al-Wehda taking on Al-Qadisiyah, and Al-Nasr clashing with Al-Taawoun.

Former Al-Shabab star Ahmed Atef criticized Al-Ahli's German coach, Matthias Jaissle, and called for his dismissal. Speaking on the "Our League is Different" program, Atef argued, "Al-Ahli has the tools and big-name players to deliver positive results, but under Jaissle, there's no clear style, and no player has improved."

Atef urged the club's management to act swiftly, stating, "If Al-Ahli changes Jaissle, a new coach can manage the big names and compete for the league title. The upcoming match against Al-Ettifaq, coached by Steven Gerrard, is critical. Despite its win over Damak, Ettifaq remains underwhelming compared to other developing teams."



Bologna's goalkeeper Lukasz Skorupski, right, saves the ball from Inter Milan's Marcus Thuram, during a Serie A soccer match between Inter Milan and Bologna the San Siro stadium in Milan, Italy. (AP)



Everton's Abdoulaye Doucoure, centre, battles for the ball with Aston Villa's Boubacar Kamara, right, and Jacob Ramsey during the English Premier League soccer match between Everton and Aston Villa at Goodison Park, Liverpool, England. Villa won 1-0. (AP)
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Sports



Kuwait junior handball team.

Al-Shaheen: Junior team is the future of Kuwaiti handball

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: Yousef Al-Shaheen, Director of the Kuwait junior handball team, affirmed that the Handball Federation, in collaboration with the coaching staff and national teams, is diligently working to prepare the team for upcoming events. The team is seen as the foundation for the senior national team's future success.

The junior handball team traveled to Cairo, Egypt, for

an external training camp, during which they will participate in several friendly matches to gear up for forthcoming international competitions.

The delegation is led by Board Member Mubarak Al-Daihani and accompanied by Federation Member Talal Al-Otaibi. The technical team is headed by national coach Khaled Al-Mulla, while the administrative team is managed by Yousef Al-Shaheen alongside the players.

Al-Shaheen commended the players for their commitment and adherence to the technical and administrative

staff's guidance, both on and off the court. He stated: "We have players who are highly responsible and ambitious. They are determined to give their best and represent the Blue Team in a manner worthy of Kuwaiti handball."

Meanwhile, on the second day of matches in the 29th World Handball Championship hosted by Croatia, Denmark, and Norway, the Egyptian national team delivered a convincing victory over Argentina, winning 39-25. Other results included Croatia's 36-22 win against Bah-

rain, Germany's 35-28 triumph over Poland, Portugal's 30-21 win against the USA, the Netherlands' 40-23 victory over Guinea, and Brazil's narrow 29-26 win against Norway. Chile and Switzerland played to a 17-17 draw, as did Hungary and Macedonia, who tied 27-27.

Today's fixtures feature Bahrain against Egypt, Switzerland versus Germany, Croatia against Argentina, the Netherlands versus Macedonia, Portugal against Brazil, Guinea versus Hungary, Chile against Poland, and the USA versus Norway.

Sheikh Ali Al-Sabah memorial shooting champ'ship kicks off

KUWAIT CITY, Jan 16: The Kuwait Shooting Sports Club is hosting the annual championship honoring the late Sheikh Ali Al-Sabah for the 2024-2025 season. The event is being held at the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Range Complex and features participation from Kuwaiti shooters. The championship spans three days.

Duajj Al-Otaibi, President of the Kuwait Shooting Sports Club, stated in a press release that the championship includes six shooting and archery competitions for men, women, and junior categories. The events feature the following disciplines:

Shooting: 10-meter air pistol, 10-meter air rifle, 25-meter pistol, and 50-meter rifle.

Archery: Olympic archery and composite archery.

Al-Otaibi explained that the opening day, held yesterday, was dedi-



Duajj Al-Otaibi

cated to official training, while the finals are scheduled for today and tomorrow.

He highlighted that the club's technical and administrative teams

began preparations well in advance to ensure the success of this significant event. This included organizing training schedules, competition timetables, and preparing the shooting ranges with all necessary equipment for the participants.

The championship serves as a key milestone for Kuwait's national team shooters, allowing them to fine-tune their skills ahead of upcoming international competitions. Al-Otaibi expressed hope that all participants, male and female, would deliver outstanding performances.

He emphasized the special significance of this championship within Kuwait's shooting community, recognizing the late Sheikh Ali Al-Sabah's pivotal contributions to the sport's development in the country. He also extended his gratitude to Sheikh Ali's family for their continued dedication to organizing this annual event.

Kuwait Club and Al-Qadsiya set for opening clash in West Asia Volleyball Championship

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

MANAMA, Jan 16: The draw for the third West Asia Men's Volleyball Clubs Championship, held in Bahrain, set the stage for an exciting opening clash between two Kuwaiti teams. Kuwait Club will face Al-Qadsiya on the first day of the championship, February 7, at Isa bin Rashid Hall in Riffa.

The tournament, scheduled to take place in the Kingdom of Bahrain from February 7 to 15, features eight participating clubs: Kuwait Club and Al-Qadsiya from Kuwait, Al-Arabi and Al-Rayyan from Qatar, Iraq's North Refineries, Oman's Al-Salam, and Bahrain's Al-Ahli. Teams will compete in a single-round league format. On the opening day, Kuwait will meet Al-Qadsiya, Al-Arabi will face North Refineries, and Al-Salam will go up against Al-Ahli.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Club's first volleyball team begins its campaign today in the preliminary round of Group Two at the Arab Clubs Championship in Qatar. They are set to face Libya's Al-Hilal at 6:30 pm at the Qatari Club Hall. Also in Group Two, Oman's Al-Seeb will take on Egypt's Zamalek in the same venue. Over in Group Three at Al-Arabi Club Hall, Iraq's Arbil will play Qatar's Al-Shorta, while Bahrain's Dar Kulaib will square off against Egypt's Al-Ahly.

The Arab Clubs Championship,



Dr. Abdullah Talib with other officials.

which began two days ago in Doha, runs until January 25, featuring 15 participating teams.

Dr. Abdullah Talib, assistant coach of the Kuwait Club volleyball team, expressed confidence in the team's preparation. He stated that the players are in excellent form following their Qatari training camp, with the technical staff focusing

on refining their skills and physical readiness for the tournament. However, the team is managing the absence of coach Abdullah Bouftin due to injury.

In domestic volleyball news, a single match is scheduled tomorrow in the Women's League. Salwa Al-Sabah Club will face Al-Oyoun Girls at 6:00 pm in Al-Oyoun's hall.

Qualifier Tien stuns Medvedev in thriller



Jannik Sinner of Italy plays a forehand return to Tristan Schoolkate of Australia during their second round match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

Swiatek moves into 3rd round

MELBOURNE, Australia, Jan 16, (AP): Learner Tien, a 19-year-old qualifier from California, became the youngest American man to reach the Australian Open's third round since Pete Sampras in 1990, upsetting a racket-tossing Daniil Medvedev 6-3, 7-6 (4), 6-7 (8), 1-6, 7-6 (10-7) in a match that began Thursday night and ended in the wee hours of Friday.

The 4-hour, 49-minute contest had a bit of everything, including - hard to believe - a six-minute rain delay that interrupted play shortly before 2:30 a.m. with Tien serving at 5-all, 15-all in the fifth set. When they resumed, Medvedev broke and served for the victory at 6-5, but Tien wouldn't cede a thing, broke back, and forced the concluding first-to-10 tiebreaker that he emerged to win shortly before 3 a.m., about two hours after he failed to convert his initial match point.

The outcome was eyebrow-raising because of the wide gulf in experience and accomplishments between the two players at Margaret Court Arena. Tien is ranked 121st and owned a career Grand Slam record of 0-3 before this week: Medvedev was seeded No. 5, won the 2021 U.S. Open and was the runner-up at Melbourne Park in three of the past four years, including 12 months ago.

Iga Swiatek tends not to waste time in the first week of Grand Slams.

When the five-time Grand Slam champion dispatched Rebecca Sramkova 6-0, 6-2 in a clean hour at the Australian Open on Thursday, Swiatek was living a habit of advancing quickly through the early rounds.

She's the only player to reach the third round or better at every Grand Slam in this decade. Swiatek has won almost 12% of her sets in Grand Slams by 6-0, which puts her in

exclusive company.

When No. 49-ranked Sramkova ended a seven-game losing run by holding serve, she raised her arm to acknowledge the applause from the Rod Laver Arena crowd. It was one of the few chances she had to celebrate.

Second-seeded Swiatek next faces 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu, who recovered from an early break in the second set to hold off Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 7-5.

Defending men's champion and No. 1 Jannik Sinner was in a contest for a set and a half, then blew away Australian wild card and No. 173 Tristan Schoolkate 4-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-3.

Taylor Fritz hasn't wasted any time advancing to the third round, dropping just eight games across two rounds and spending just over three hours on court.

The 2024 U.S. Open runner-up and No. 4 seed beat Cristian Garin 6-2, 6-1, 6-0 to move into a third-round match against 38-year-old Gael Monfils, who last week became the oldest player to win an ATP Tour title.

Also advancing on the men's side were local hope Alex de Minaur, seeded 8th, No. 16 Lorenzo Musetti, No. 19 Karen Khachanov and No. 21 Ben Shelton, who beat Pablo Carreno Busta 6-3, 6-3, 6-7 (4), 6-4.

Raducanu has struggled with injuries since her breakthrough major in 2021, when she became the first qualifier to win a Grand Slam singles title.

She didn't play a warmup tournament ahead of this year's Australian Open because of a muscle strain and needed time during her match against Anisimova to get treatment on her back from a trainer.

After advancing beyond the second round for the first time at Melbourne Park, the No. 61-ranked Raducanu was confident she'd recover in time for her next challenge against Swiatek.

Swiatek is moving on from the doping infringement which led to her one-month ban last year. And she's not showing any signs of it being a distraction.