



WILL CITIZENSHIP RULES SHIFT MARRIAGE PREFERENCES IN KUWAIT?

Kuwaiti-foreigner unions under scrutiny

Financial barriers, not laws, shape marriage trend: experts

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Will withdrawing citizenship under Article 8 truly shift the balance of marriage dynamics in Kuwaiti society in favor of marriages to Kuwaiti women?

According to the latest statistics from the Public Authority for Civil Infor-

mation (PACI), the number of unmarried Kuwaiti women over the age of 29 has reached 67,794, representing 25 percent of the population. The number of married Kuwaiti women as of the end of December 2024 was 267,014. There are 30,292 Kuwaiti men married to non-Kuwaiti women, compared to 19,530 Kuwaiti women married to foreigners from all six continents.

Most of the Kuwaiti women who are married to foreigners are married to Arab nationals, totaling 18,006, while 692 are married to non-Arab Asian nationals, 50 to non-Arab African nationals, 271 to Europeans, 407 to North Americans, 65 to South Americans, and 39 to Australians. The total number of Kuwaiti women

married to Kuwaiti men is 247,484.

In this context, women's rights activist and former secretary of the Kuwait Transparency Society Manal Al-Kandari stated in an interview that withdrawing citizenship under Article 8 will make Kuwaiti men think twice about marrying non-Kuwaiti women, especially considering the several privileges that are automatically revoked from those whose citizenship is withdrawn.

She stressed that the high cost of marriage to Kuwaiti women often leads young Kuwaiti men to marry non-Kuwaitis, such that the number of such marriages has reached more than 30,000.

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Gulf urged to diversify

Trump's oil price pressure threatens Kuwait's budget

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: In response to Donald Trump's statements regarding pressure on OPEC-plus to reduce oil prices and the potential impact on the budgets of Gulf countries, including Kuwait, oil and economic experts emphasized the importance of the region's countries to be prepared for any unforeseen crisis.

In an exclusive interview with the daily, they highlighted the potential negative effects Trump's statements can have on Kuwait's budget, which is heavily reliant on oil prices.

The experts said Trump's statements are unlikely to resonate with the American public and the member states of OPEC-plus, as such actions could harm the U.S. economy.

They indicated that the United States produces more than 13 million barrels of oil per day and operates 132 oil refineries.

The experts stressed the need for Kuwait and other Gulf nations to diversify their income sources, and attract foreign investments.

Meanwhile, oil refining and marketing expert Abdul Hamid Al-Awadhi said Donald Trump's statements about oil prices and the potential imposition of taxes on certain countries could actually impact the global economy for several reasons, the first of which is that Trump is the head of the largest nation in the world that carries significant influence.

He explained that the United States plays a pivotal role in the oil sector, as it is the largest importer and consumer of oil. Currently, the U.S. produces about 13 million barrels of oil per day and operates 132 oil refineries. Even a modest ten-cent increase in the price of gasoline can cause considerable disruption in the U.S. economy. Also, oil is traded in U.S. dollars, which adds another layer of complexity to the situation.

Trump's statements about expanding U.S. oil production both on land and at sea are feasible, given America's

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Kuwait on frost watch as temps drop sharply



Vehicles make their way to Kuwait City through Thursday morning's haze, as strong winds stir up dust and reduce visibility.

Photo by Samer Shiger

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6, (KUNA): The Kuwait Meteorological Department has forecast a cold weekend, with temperatures expected to drop sharply, especially at night, increasing the likelihood of frost in agricultural and desert areas.

Director of the department Dirar Al-Ali told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Thursday that the country is under the influence of an air mass bringing cooler conditions. Winds will be northwesterly, ranging from light to moderate, occasionally strengthening in coastal areas.

Friday weather will be moderate to cold during the day, with northwesterly winds reaching speeds of 12 to 40 km/h. Scattered clouds may appear, and temperatures will range between 18°C and 20°C. Sea conditions will be light to moderate, with waves between 2 and 6 feet.

At night, the weather will turn cold to very cold, with winds shifting to a variable direction at 8 to 30 km/h. Frost formation is possible in agricultural and desert regions, with temperatures dropping to 4°C-6°C. The sea will remain light to moderate, with waves between 1 and 3 feet.

Saturday daytime temperatures will remain cold, with maximum readings between 17°C and 19°C. Winds will continue from the northwest to variable directions at 8 to 30 km/h. Light to moderate sea waves are expected at 1 to 3 feet.

By night, temperatures will fall further, with lows between 3°C and 5°C. Winds will remain light to moderate but may intensify up to 40 km/h in coastal areas. Frost is again likely in desert and farmland regions. The sea will continue with light to moderate waves.

Authorities advise residents, especially farmers, to take precautions against frost and cold conditions.

Tahboub thanks Kuwait for strong stand against displacement

Kuwait reaffirms support for Palestinian statehood

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The State of Kuwait reaffirmed its firm principled position in supporting the brotherly Palestinian people, their just cause, and their legitimate right to establish their independent state on the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In a statement Thursday, the Foreign Ministry confirmed Kuwait's categorical rejection of Israeli settlement policies, annexation of Palestinian lands, and displacement of the Palestinian people from their land, as these steps constitute a flagrant violation of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions and a threat to the region security and stability.

It also went on calling on the international community to assume its responsibilities in providing protection for the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights and ending the Israeli occupation of the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories.

Meanwhile, Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait, HE Rami Tahboub, has

emphasized that the Palestinian people and the leadership will not allow the displacement of Palestinians from their land and sacred sites.



Tahboub

to occupation, no to annexation, no to displacement." He called on the international community to continue its support for these goals, which he described as essential for peace, security and prosperity in the region.

Tahboub also stressed the immediate need to stop Israeli aggression, ensure a complete ceasefire, and demand Israel's full withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

He called for better management of aid distribution and the provision of temporary shelter, while confirming that the Palestinian government is

prepared to handle these tasks progressively without displacing any citizens from Gaza.

He thanked the government of Kuwait, particularly His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti government for their strong stance against the displacement of Palestinians, which was clearly reflected in the statement by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Tahboub also urged the international community to support Palestine's efforts and work towards a comprehensive political solution, one that honors international legitimacy, the Arab peace initiative, and Palestinian statehood with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In related news, Israel said on Thursday it has begun preparations for the departure of large numbers of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip in line with US President Donald Trump's plan for the territory. Officials meanwhile said Egypt has launched an diplomatic blitz behind the scenes to try and head off the plan.

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Rising costs drive buyers to prefab housing

'Ready-to-move-in' Kuwait homes in high demand

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Recent trends in the Kuwaiti real estate market have highlighted a growing preference for purchasing built properties over land, reflecting a significant shift in market behavior.

The real estate experts have observed that demand for ready-made buildings has surged, particularly in residential sectors, marking a notable change in consumer preferences and investment strategies. The factors driving this trend include rising construction costs, a desire to avoid the complexities of building and concerns over real estate fraud.

Experts point out that the preference for built properties is growing in response to several challenges facing the market. Alaa Behbehani, a real estate expert, emphasized the need

for the Kuwaiti real estate sector to align with global standards in urban planning and residential development.

He highlighted that the demand for built properties stems from their convenience and reliability, as these properties save buyers from the high costs and risks associated with construction.

With new real estate laws in effect, the credit and banking sectors are increasingly favoring properties already built on vacant land, contributing to the rise in demand for these properties.

Fahd Al-Momen, another expert in the field, noted that during market recessions, there is a marked increase in transactions involving built properties due to the comparable prices between vacant land and houses in certain areas.

He pointed out that the price difference between land and

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Record 90 projects

Kuwait eyes infrastructure leap with new fiscal budget

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, Noura Al-Fassam, announced that the draft state general budget for the fiscal year 2025/2026 was presented to the Council of Ministers for dis-

cussion and approval during an extraordinary session held the day before yesterday.

Al-Fassam highlighted that the new budget includes a significant number of construction projects across various sectors, in line with high-level directives from the Council of Ministers.

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News watch

KUWAIT CITY: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Thursday, with the attendance of President of the Supreme Judicial Council, Counselor Dr. Adel Maged Buresli, the First President of the Court of Cassation, the President Delegate of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary in Morocco, Counselor Mohamad Abdelnabaoui. The meeting was attended by Moroccan Ambassador to Kuwait Ali bin Essa. (KUNA)

KUWAIT CITY: Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Al-Yahya received Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait Al-iyah Mawani at his office on Thursday to discuss ways to promote the friendly relations and cooperation between their two countries. (KUNA)

GENEVA: The Permanent Representative of Kuwait to the UN and other international organizations Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayen on Thursday stressed the significance of continued cooperation to strengthen peace security and the defense of shared values and principles. His remarks came as he chaired the first meeting of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) ambassadors for 2025.

Speaking to KUNA, Ambassador Al-Hayen explained that the meeting held on Wednesday at the GCC Mission headquarters in Geneva under Kuwait's presidency reaffirmed the outcomes of the latest Gulf Summit.

He noted that the meeting focused on coordinating priorities for joint Gulf action within international organizations in Geneva adding that discussions included protecting legal frameworks and international agreements as well as ensuring unified engagement in the upcoming 58th session of the Human Rights Council scheduled to run from February 24 to April 4. (KUNA)



8 KFH promotes children's financial literacy

8 NBK warns customers against rewards points redemption scams



16 Al-Duaij, Fatima named Kuwait's Games flag bearers



Palestinians walk in the destruction caused by the Israeli air and ground offensive in Jabaliya, Gaza Strip, Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025. (AP)

Prayer Timings

Fajr	05:14	Asr	15:08
Sunrise ..	06:35	Maghrib ..	17:30
Zohr	12:02	Isha	18:49

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

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

By Night: Cold to very cold with light to moderate northwesterly

Weather

wind to variable wind, with speeds of 08-30 km/h with a chance for frost forming over agricultural and desert areas.

Station	Max Exp	Min Rec
Kuwait City	25	18
Kuwait Airport	23	17

Abdaly	26	15
Bubyan	24	18
Jahra	27	17
Failaka Island	25	19
Salmiyah	24	17
Ahmadi	23	11
Jal Aliyah	27	15
Nuwaisib	26	18

Kuwait's Amir congratulates New Zealand on National Day

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations Thursday to Governor-General of New Zealand Cindy Kiro, on the occasion of her country's National Day.

His Highness the Amir wished the pres-

ident a long healthy life, hoping for New Zealand further prosperity.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent a cable of congratulations to Governor-General of New Zealand Cindy Kiro, on the occasion of her country's National Day.

His Highness the Crown Prince wished the president a long healthy life, hoping for New Zealand further prosperity.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah then sent a cable to Governor-General of New Zealand Cindy Kiro, on the occasion of her country's National Day.



KUNA photo
Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya receives credentials of the new Sri Lankan Ambassador to Kuwait Lakshitha Ratnayake.

FM receives Lanka envoy's credentials

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya received on Thursday the credentials of Lakshitha Ratnayake who was recently appointed Ambassador of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the State

of Kuwait. During the meeting, Al-Yahya wished the new ambassador success in strengthening the bilateral ties and contributing to the progress and prosperity of both countries. (KUNA)

'Help people with special needs merge in society'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Hawalli Governor, Ali Al-Asfar, highlighted the importance of supporting individuals with special needs and enhancing their active participation in society, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

He called for creating a comprehensive environment that nurtures their talents and helps achieve their ambitions, expressing pride in the achievements of Kuwait's people that elevate the nation's reputation.

His made these remarks during the opening of the "Kuwait Giving and Loyalty" exhibition for people with special needs and volunteer teams.

The event, held under the patronage of Sheikha Intisar Al-Sabah and attended by blind media advisor Abdulrahman Al-Adwani, coincided with the celebrations of Kuwait's 64th independence anniversary and the 34th anniversary of its liberation from invasion.

Governor Al-Asfar thanked all those who contributed to organizing the exhibition, recognizing their efforts to support people with special needs and promote their participation in society.

He emphasized the importance of such events in spreading awareness and reinforcing the values of giving and loyalty in the community.



HH the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the Great Wall of China during his visit to the country.

Other Voices

Sheikh Jaber historic visit and thriving China-Kuwait bonds

By Zhang Jianwei

China Ambassador to Kuwait

The poet Al-Buhturi once wrote: "Fresh spring has come, strutting and laughing in the most beautiful image, as if it is about to speak out."

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In just a few days, we will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the historic visit of the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to China. At the time, he was serving as the Minister of Finance, Commerce and Industry.

In February 1965, Sheikh Jaber went to Beijing, crossing vast oceans swept by spring breezes. He was warmly welcomed by Chinese leaders, particularly the then President of China Liu Shaoqi, Premier of the Government Administrative Council Zhou Enlai, and Vice President Chen Yi.

Despite the absence of formal diplomatic relations between China and Kuwait at the time, the common identity of both nations as developing countries forged a bond of friendship. The encounter between Sheikh Jaber and the Chinese leadership was marked by an atmosphere of camaraderie, mutual respect, and brotherhood.

During their meetings, Sheikh Jaber took a stance of fairness and justice, and highlighted Kuwait's firm support for China's efforts to protect its unity and territorial integrity.

He strongly endorsed the one-China policy and advocated for the early restoration of China's rightful seat in the United Nations.

Sheikh Jaber had also expressed a keen desire to establish diplomatic relations with China in the near future.

In addition, the late Sheikh Jaber signed an economic assistance agreement with China, making Kuwait the first Gulf country to extend economic support to China.

Beyond the official events, Sheikh Jaber enthusiastically visited the Great Wall of China, where he expressed his admiration for the landmark.

Sheikh Jaber's visit was not only the first visit by a high-ranking Kuwaiti official to China, but also the first visit by a senior Gulf official. His visit had a profound impact on the entire Gulf region.

Six years later, China and Kuwait officially established diplomatic relations, with Kuwait becoming the first

Gulf country to exchange diplomatic representation with China.

Since the establishment of official relations between China and Kuwait 60 years ago, particularly with the launch of the strategic partnership in 2018, the two countries have made great progress and achieved excellent results in various fields of cooperation.

Thanks to the mutual trust, the friendship between Kuwait and China has deepened, and the two countries have become partners with a common vision for development. Kuwait has consistently upheld the one-China principle, and China has steadfastly supported Kuwait's efforts to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Both countries have always understood and supported each other on issues related to their core interests and major concerns.

The friendly relationship between the leaders of China and Kuwait continues to thrive to this day. President Xi Jinping met with His Highness the Amir Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah twice, first in Riyadh in December 2022 and then in Hangzhou in September 2023. These meetings resulted in important agreements on deepening the strategic partnership between the two countries.

The two leaders affirmed the importance of working together to create a brighter future for China-Kuwait relations.

Currently, both the Chinese and Kuwaiti sides are working closely to accelerate the implementation of cooperation agreements made by the leaders of the two countries. They are continuously expanding and deepening practical cooperation between the two countries, injecting new momentum into the development of the strategic partnership, and strengthening its foundation.

On February 12, the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait will host a solemn commemoration ceremony, and will invite Kuwaiti friends from all walks of life to reflect on the historical significance of the late Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visit to China and look forward to the bright future of China-Kuwait relations.

The Chinese side will work closely with the Kuwaiti side, guided by the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the World Civilization Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping, to implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of both countries.

China will also deepen the alignment of the Belt and Road project with the New Kuwait 2035 vision, which will contribute to advancing the China-Kuwait strategic partnership toward a broader and more promising future.

New plan mulled to create jobs, slash prices in co-ops

Cooperatives cornerstone of Kuwait economy: Al-Kashti

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Vice President of the Union of Cooperative Societies, Talal Al-Kashti, announced his desire to unveil a new strategy that will shape the future of the cooperative economy in Kuwait, aligning with Kuwait Vision 2035, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

He emphasized that this initiative represents a major leap in strengthening the role of cooperative societies in the national economy.

Speaking to the press after assuming his position, Al-Kashti revealed that the strategy is built on four key development pillars aimed at enhancing citizen welfare and ensuring real economic sustainability.

A key goal of the plan is to reduce unemployment by generating 10,000 job opportunities for graduates within the cooperative sector over the next five years.

The strategy also focuses on reducing consumer goods prices by 15 percent to 40 percent to ease the financial burden on citizens and residents while maintaining the profitability of cooperative

societies. This move is expected to improve living standards and ensure the availability of high-quality products at competitive prices.

Al-Kashti highlighted the significant economic influence of cooperative societies, which control around 70 percent of Kuwait's retail trade and operate major central markets serving various sectors.

He noted that with financial reserves exceeding 250 million dinars and annual sales surpassing one billion dinars, cooperatives are a cornerstone of Kuwait's economy.

He assured that the strategy would not impose additional burdens on the state budget but would instead rely on the financial strength of cooperative societies, demonstrating their capability to drive positive economic transformation independently.

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Top jobs slot still empty: The issue of 'vacant supervisory and leadership positions' in the Ministry of Education remains unresolved, with growing concerns about its impact on the performance across multiple sectors, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Within the Directorate-General of Private Education, informed educational sources confirm that a significant supervisory gap has emerged following the recent reshuffling initiated by Minister of Education Jalal Al-Tabtaba'i.

Rather than addressing the shortages, these changes have further complicated the situation, as officials transferred to other departments and edu-

cational regions have not been replaced.

According to the latest reassignments, several senior officials in the administrative section were moved to different educational districts, creating an evident administrative void within the 'Private Education' sector.

Among the most notable changes was the transfer of Ameen Tameiher, who was appointed in November 2024 to serve as Acting Director-General of Private Education (covering both private and specialized education sectors).

He was later reassigned from his position as Director of Financial and Administrative Affairs in the administration to become Director of Administrative and Technical Affairs in the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational District.

Similarly, Khaled Al-Azmi was transferred from his role as Supervisor of Arab schools to become Supervisor of Intermediate Education in the Hawalli Educational District. He was also assigned as Acting Director of Educational Affairs in the same district, in addition to his new duties.

Sources indicate that these decisions have led to a clear shortage of administrative staff within the Private Education Directorate, negatively affecting workflow and transaction processing, particularly given the absence of key leadership figures.

This leadership vacuum is expected to slow down administrative procedures and delay the resolution of private school-related issues, potentially sparking frustration among sector employees and parents concerned about its impact on the educational process.

'Admin, finance reports not submitted'

MoSA ponders dissolution of eight charity organizations

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) is planning to issue decisions to dissolve and liquidate the funds of eight charity organizations due to a lack of commitment from those responsible for managing their affairs, reports Al-Jarida daily quoting informed sources.

They explained that this brings the total number of charity organizations that were recently dissolved or are in the process of being dissolved to 23. With these dissolution decisions, the actual number of charity organizations has

decreased from 93 to 70.

The ministry's Department of Charity Societies and Donor Associations recently submitted a comprehensive memorandum to the Committee for the Publicity, Evaluation, and Dissolution of Public Benefit Societies and Charities.

The department recommended the dissolution of several charity organizations that have failed to submit their final administrative and financial reports to the ministry for several years, in violation of Clauses 6 and 7 of Article 18 of the Model Bylaws for Charity Organizations

and Article 27 of Law No. 24/1962, which pertains to clubs and public benefit societies. Also, another charity organization was recommended for dissolution due to the lack of dedication from those managing its affairs.

The sources revealed that the funds held in the accounts of these charity organizations will be transferred to the ministry after liquidation, in preparation for determining the appropriate entity to which the funds will be transferred, in accordance with Article 25 of the Model Bylaws for Charity Organizations.

PAHW opens bids for road building, repair in Mutla'a

By Mohammad Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) has opened bids for the construction and maintenance of the asphalt surface layer and related works in Mutla'a City.

Sources disclosed that nine companies participated in the bidding and the lowest bid was KD19.5 million.

Sources said the bids will be subject to a comprehensive technical and financial study in preparation for awarding the contract. They revealed that the objective of the project is to improve the infrastructure of the city's road networks.

Sources also affirmed the opening of the bidding envelopes for the consulting services for the management and supervision of the construction, completion and maintenance of infrastructure service networks and public buildings in N4 suburb in Mutla'a housing project, indicating the lowest bid was KD1.092 million.

Sources added these projects are part of the ongoing efforts to develop Mutla'a City in order to meet the needs of citizens and to be on par with the highest standard in infrastructure and services.

Governor urges patience as road repairs underway in many areas

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The Capital Governor Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Ali commended the efforts exerted by the Ministry of Public Works officials, led by Minister Noura Al-Masha'an, in carrying out extensive road maintenance projects.

He expressed hope that citizens would accept these works with patience and understanding, so that the maintenance efforts can be completed in the best possible way.

He said this during a tour he conducted the evening before last to inspect the progress of the radical road maintenance works in Faiha and Jaber Al-Ahmad.

He was accompanied by the acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works Eid Al-Rashidi, the acting Assistant Undersecretary for the Planning and Development Sector Ahmed Al-Saleh, and a

number of engineers from the ministry.

Sheikh Abdullah explained that one of the responsibilities of the governors is to oversee infrastructure projects being implemented in Kuwait's governorates. Road maintenance works are part of this responsibility.

He will continue to monitor the progress of these projects in coordination with Ministry of Public Works officials, and work alongside them to support the development of the country and ensure that the maintenance projects are completed according to the established plan.

Meanwhile, the acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works Eid Al-Rashidi highlighted the ongoing coordination between the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Interior, represented by the General Traffic Department, to ensure that maintenance work is carried out smoothly and to minimize traffic congestion at asphalt scraping and laying sites.



Kuwaiti and Mauritanian delegations during the meeting.

Kuwait, Mauritania eye ties boost

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Eng. Noura Sulaiman Al-Fasam received the Minister of Economy and Finance of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania Sid Ahmed Ould Abou and his accompanying delegation on Wednesday. According to a press release issued by the Ministry of Finance, the two parties, during the meeting, highlighted the strong relations between the two countries and explored potential opportunities for future bilateral cooperation in finance, economics, and investment sectors.

Both sides exchanged views on future collaborations aimed at achieving mutual

benefits. The meeting was attended by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Finance Aseel Al-Saad Al-Munifi, the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania Dr. Mohammad Al-Amin Ould Al-Sheikh, Assistant Undersecretary for the Economic Affairs at the Ministry of Finance Talal Namash Al-Namash, the acting Executive Director of the Public Reserve Sector at the Kuwait Investment Authority Huda Al-Mousa, acting Executive Director of the Planning and Senior Management Support Sector at the Kuwait Investment Authority Abdulaziz Al-Hudaib, and other officials from the Ministry of Finance and the Kuwait Investment Authority.

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A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

People of Gaza will not fall for same trap once again

"THE people of Gaza are steadfast in their resolve -- no amount of pressure, manipulation, or coercion will force them to abandon their land," columnist **Yaqoub Yousef Al-Omar** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"History has taught them a painful lesson, one they will not repeat. Their ancestors, deceived in 1947, left their homes under the false promise of an imminent return, only to find themselves permanently displaced.

"That 'temporary' exile became a lifetime of suffering, as they were stripped of their homes and lands while the world stood by.

"Today, the same old tactics are being deployed, but with even greater ambitions -- to expand and seize the remaining Palestinian territories and beyond. This agenda is well-documented and the United States is playing a leading role in facilitating it.

"Earlier US President Donald Trump openly backed Israel's expansionist policies by recognizing its annexation of the Golan Heights and relocating the US embassy to Jerusalem.

"Now, as pressure mounts, reports suggest that the US has approached Egypt and Jordan with the expectation that they will absorb Gaza's displaced population.

"But neither President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi nor King Abdullah II will allow such a move. The aim is clear -- depopulate Gaza, transform it into Zionist settlements and a global tourist attraction and then set sights on the West Bank.

"Even now, settlers are methodically laying the groundwork for full control through relentless attacks and encroachments.

"But the people of Gaza have sent a clear message to the world: they will not be deceived again. When they were forced to flee to the south, they returned to the north -- on foot, carrying their children through a devastated landscape, knowing fully well that their homes no longer stood.

"They returned not because they had anywhere to go, but because Gaza is their land and they refuse to be uprooted.

"Frustrated by the refusal of Egypt and Jordan to accept deported Gazans, the architects of this scheme have shifted strategies.

"Now, they dangle an insidious alternative: anyone who leaves Gaza will never be allowed to return. Meanwhile, those who stayed have been left without food, water, or shelter in the north -- deliberate tactics designed to break their will.

"Yet, the world continues to underestimate Gaza's resilience. Its people have endured 15 months of relentless hardship and they remain unyielding."

Also:

"Some people believe they are entitled to what belongs to others. They find happiness in taking what is not theirs -- sometimes by force, sometimes through deceit -- without any regard for the destruction they leave behind. But such happiness is fleeting," columnist **Dr Aref Al-Sanan** wrote for **Al-Rai** daily.

"Deep down, they try to suppress the truth: that injustice does not go unanswered. Eventually, the oppressor will taste the bitterness of his own actions, for as the saying goes, 'The world is a revolving wheel,' and 'Everything is a loan and a debt.' What one gives -- whether good or evil -- will return to him in kind.

"The wisdom of the righteous warns: 'Do not wrong anyone, for injustice is a fire that never dies in the heart of

the oppressed, even if years pass.' This fire consumes the soul, leaving wounds that time cannot heal. But divine justice prevails, for God hears the cries of the wronged and answers their prayers.

"The oppressed have the right to speak out, to expose the truth and to warn others of the oppressor's deeds. This affirms that an oppressed person may call out his oppressor without fear of sin. According to scholars, speaking about oppression is neither backbiting nor slander -- it is a legitimate act of self-defense and a warning to others.

"True repentance for an oppressor is not just a matter of words. It requires action: returning stolen wealth, restoring seized land and -- more difficult yet -- mending broken relationships and repairing the moral damage inflicted.

"What compensation can truly make up for years spent without a home, for a livelihood stolen through deceit, or for dreams shattered by false accusations? Some wounds never heal and some injustices are beyond human compensation.

"But the final judgment is not in this world. 'And never think that God is unaware of what the wrongdoers do. He only delays them until the Day when eyes will stare in horror'."

"Recently, some savage capitalist voices demanded privatizing cooperative societies. These demands are disturbing and controversial, especially since the cooperatives are, by nature, part of the private sector, and the call to privatize their management means seizing and nationalizing them in a manner contrary to their legal nature as shareholders' money. So, how do we privatize what is originally private?" **Yousef Saif** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Cooperative societies were founded on the principle of partnership. Basically, they are owned by individuals who contribute to the capital, and are managed by them as well. No one has the right to dispose of an individual's property, because it is protected by the Constitution and the law.

"Cooperative societies are considered the cornerstone of supporting the private sector, as 90 percent of their activities are directly related to the private sector. For example, the cooperatives rely on companies supplying food products. Owners of commercial or national agencies and investors operate the cooperatives and their branches.

They are the major outlet for small and medium enterprises and others. This partnership demonstrates the extent of integration between the cooperatives and the private sector.

"The private sector will be the first to be harmed by calls to privatize the management of cooperatives, considering the small and medium enterprises, entrepreneurs and shop investors pay symbolic rents.

"Relying on limited companies to manage cooperatives will limit competitiveness and opportunities. Moreover, the most important advantage of cooperatives will be eliminated, which is 'flexibility' -- the secret behind the success of cooperatives. This is the most important advantage during crises, as proven by experience as per the testimony of everyone, secretly and publicly.

"Centralization of decisions and the control of a class of investors endanger the economy, society and national food security. The specialization of management will cause a shock at the State level, the effects of which are difficult to measure. We must be aware of this.

-- Compiled by **PFX Fernandes/ Mahmoud Attiyeh**



Yaqoub Al-Omar



Yousef Saif



Al-Seyassah photo
Director-General of the General Administration of Customs, Mutlaq Al-Enezi meets the Iranian envoy Mohammad Totonji.

Customs DG, Iran envoy explore trade interests

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The Director-General of the General Administration of Customs, Mutlaq Al-Enezi, met with the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Kuwait, Mohammad Totonji, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During the meeting both sides explored bilateral relations, addressed common issues and discussed mutual trade interests.

The two sides also expressed their commitment to holding joint meetings to enhance trade facilitation and cooperation and further strengthen ties between the two nations.

Man acquitted of beating wife, stealing belongings

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 5: The First Criminal Section at the Court of Appeals, headed by Counselor Hani Al-Hamdan with counselors Mohammad Ghazi Al-Mutairi and Hamouda Nassar as members, acquitted a man of assaulting his wife and stealing the latter's mobile phone and other belongings, reports Al-Anba daily quoting sources.

The First Instance Court previously sentenced the man in absentia to four years in prison with hard labor, followed by deportation upon serving the prison term.

Case files indicate that the wife stated during investigations that at around 2:00 pm while she was attending a class at the university, she was surprised when her husband pulled her by the shoulder towards the exit stairs where he allegedly assaulted and dragged her until they were alone on the fourth floor, threatening to pull out a knife if she called for help and then he stole the abovementioned items.

When the Public Prosecution questioned the accused, he denied the accusations, stating that he met the victim at the university as she called him to discuss and solve their marital problems.

When she saw him, she asked him to accompany her to the internal stairs so that none of her friends would see them. Then, she asked him to hold her belongings until she returned from the bathroom.

Since she was in the bathroom for quite some time, he informed the security officers at the university about the

incident. They asked him to put his wife's belongings in the car, which he did, including the key and left the car open. After more than a month, he was summoned for questioning.

He told the investigators what happened and accompanied them to the location where his wife's car was parked. He said the car has been in the parking lot of the university since the incident. They found the car open and the wife's belongings were inside.

Lawyer for the defendant, Attorney Bashar Al-Nassar, appeared before the Court of Appeals with his client. He argued that the appealed ruling was unreasonable, the investigations inconclusive and inconsistent with the victim's statements.

He explained it is inconceivable that he threatened her and no one noticed, as based on her statement, she called for help. He added she could have called for help and screamed when he left her, and the security officers and some people would have helped her. It is also unreasonable that she left her car in the parking lot for about 40 days without opening or taking the vehicle.

After a thorough deliberation on the arguments presented by both sides, the Court of Appeals cancelled the four-year prison sentence imposed on the defendant and acquitted him due to the unreasonable claim of the wife that she called for help and the fact that she left her car in the parking lot for around 40 days without even trying to open it.

Appeal against polls law reform rejected

Father gets custody of 4 girls

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The advisory chamber of the Constitutional Court has ruled to reject an appeal filed by 22 Kuwaiti women against the second paragraph of Article 16 of Law No. 120/2023 regarding the elections for members of the National Assembly. The court rejected the appeal due to the lack of standing for the appellants.

The appellants said the contested paragraph, which stipulates that in order to exercise the right to vote and run for office, one must adhere to the provisions of the Constitution, the law, and Islamic Sharia, violates the principle of the gradation of legal rules by equating the Constitution with the law. They claimed it creates unjustified discrimination among citizens based on religion, violates the principle of equality, and restricts personal freedom.

The court, however, based its ruling on the fact that the appellants failed to provide evidence that they had suffered any actual harm from the application of the contested

text. It emphasized that for a ruling of unconstitutionality to remove harm or benefit appellants, they would need to demonstrate how the application of the text directly affected their position and status.

The court stated, "It is not sufficient for them to simply be registered in the electoral rolls. The appellants must demonstrate how the application of this text impacts them personally, so that a direct personal interest can be investigated in light of that."

Father gets custody: The Family Court (Appeals Division) has upheld the ruling of the Court of First Instance, revoking the mother's custody of her four daughters and transferring custody to their father.

The court ruled that the father would be responsible for their care and managing their affairs in a way that benefits them.

The mother was ordered to hand over the daughters to the father and is prohibited from interfering in custody matters.

Additionally, the court ruled to drop the alimony payments owed to the mother and required her to pay the expenses and actual attorney fees.

The case, filed by the husband through his lawyer, An'am Haider, was based on multiple concerns regarding the mother's ability to raise the children and the trustworthiness required for custody.



The drill in progress. KFF photo

KFF holds fire drill at local 'Maseela' hotel

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) carried out a practical evacuation drill at a hotel in the Al-Maseela area Wednesday morning, according to a Kuwait Fire Force press release.

The drill involved evacuating the building, rescuing the injured and containing a simulated fire scenario.

The KFF emphasized that such exercises are essential for enhancing response capabilities, ensuring quick and effective handling of emergencies to protect lives and property and strengthening overall community security in Kuwait.

Court rejects ex-MP call for bail; hearing Feb 13

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The Criminal Court has adjourned to February 13 its verdict in the case filed against former MP Anwar Al-Fikr, and denied his request for bail.

During the previous session, the court ordered Al-Fikr's arrest after he was confronted with charges of challenging the rights and powers of His Highness the Amir during an election symposium. He was subsequently referred to the central prison.

The Public Prosecution had charged Al-Fikr with undermining the authority of His Highness the Amir, encroaching upon the Amir's position, and spreading false news that could damage the country's reputation and harm its national interests. These actions allegedly took place during an election symposium he held at his electoral headquarters for the National Assembly elections.

Meanwhile, the Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Abdullah Al-Asimi, has postponed the objection of Salman Al-Khalidi to the imprisonment sentence issued in absentia in a State Security case. The session will be held on April 10 to allow for the presentation of defense, after Al-Khalidi requested the court to appoint a lawyer to defend him.

The charges against Al-Khalidi include deliberately challenging the authority of the Amir via his X account and intentionally insulting the Amir using social media. Al-Khalidi denied the charges, and his appointed lawyer requested a postponement to review and photograph the case documents.

Housemaid hangs herself to death from garden tree

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: A domestic worker, in her 40s, committed suicide by hanging in her sponsor's residence in Ghamata, reports Al-Anba daily.

A security source said the Operations Unit at the Ministry of Interior received information about the suicide incident. Police officers were dispatched to the location and they found out that the domestic worker tied a rope to a tree in the garden and hanged herself.

A case was registered and investigations are ongoing.



KUNA photo
A Kuwaiti military delegation visits the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences to enhance cooperation in the fields of education and training for women.

Team visits Sultan Qaboos Academy

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6, (KUNA): A delegation from Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy, Military Education Authority and Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences visited Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences in Oman to enhance cooperation in education and training for female personnel. Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense said Thursday, in a press statement, that the Kuwaiti military delegation was briefed during the visit on the registration and admission system and the approved education and training mechanisms at the academy.

The delegation was received by the Academy Commander Colonel Khalifa Al-Farai and made a field tour to view

the facilities and equipment used in training female security personnel. The Commander of Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy, Brigadier General Fawaz Al-Musaleem, expressed his appreciation to Colonel Al-Farai for the warm reception and generous hospitality, praising the advanced level the Academy has reached in the field of qualifying and training female personnel. The visit came within the framework of joint cooperation between the security and military institutions in the two countries, which contributes to developing national cadres and enhancing the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

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SINCE 1985

Nazaha boosts anti-corruption efforts with workshop on financial disclosure

75 government agencies take part in training

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) has organized an awareness workshop at its headquarters for the officials in the entities covered by the financial disclosure rule; with the participation of 75 government agencies, to raise awareness on financial disclosure statements and the obligated categories as per the law on establishing the authority.

In a statement after the workshop, supervisor of follow-up procedures and databases at Nazaha Talal Al-Mutairi disclosed that the workshop aims to raise awareness on the importance of financial disclosure according to Law No. 2/2016 and its executive regulations; which stipulate the conditions, deadlines for submission, and the consequences of delaying submission.

He said the other objectives are to shed light on the role of regulatory bodies in each government agency and entity, and to clarify the consequences of its application in improving job performance and raising transparency and integrity rates in government agencies.

He stressed the importance of the workshop, particularly its role in helping government agencies to oblige their officials to submit a financial disclosure statement in accordance with the law. He said the law mandates all those concerned to submit the financial disclosure statement within six



Photo during the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority's workshop.

months from the date of publication of the regulation if they are in service, update the disclosure within 60 days from the end of every three years as long as they remain in office, and then submit the final disclosure within 90 days from the date of leaving any position or the end of the term.

He pointed out that the State officials' commitment to submit the financial disclosure statement contributes to combating corruption and supports the advancement of the transparency system in performance in general, especially financial performance.

On the other hand, first coordinator at the State Audit Bureau (SAB) Ahmed Al-Dosari affirmed the signifi-

cance of the workshop in clarifying the requirements and regulations for those covered by the law. He also appreciated the efforts and role of Nazaha in this regard.

The organizers of the workshop reviewed the penalties for delayed submission of the financial disclosure statement as follows:

- Fine of not less than KD 500 but not more than KD 3,000 for delayed submission of the first disclosure. If the delay exceeds 90 days after being warned, the concerned official could be dismissed from his job.

- Fine of not more than KD 3,000 for delayed disclosure update. If the delay exceeds 90 days after being warned, or

if the official submits an incomplete or incorrect financial disclosure statement with his knowledge, he shall be imprisoned for a period not exceeding one year and fined not less than KD 3,000 but not more than KD 10,000 or one of these two penalties, in addition to the possibility of being dismissed from his job.

- If the official covered by the law does not submit the disclosure for one of his minor children or those for whom he is the guardian, trustee or custodian despite being warned, he shall be imprisoned for a period not exceeding three years and fined not less than KD 3,000 but not more than KD 30,000 or one of these two penalties; in addition to dismissal from his job.

Education Ministry holds workshop to improve institutional governance

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The Department of Administrative Development and Training at the Ministry of Higher Education recently hosted a specialized workshop on "Institutional Governance" for supervisory and executive staff, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Held on Tuesday and Wednesday, the event was part of the Ministry's ongoing efforts to enhance institutional efficiency and improve the administrative work environment.

The workshop, led by Munira Salman Al-Sabah, covered key concepts of corporate governance, emphasizing its role in ensuring integrity, transparency and improving performance within government institutions.

It also explored global best practices and strategies for applying them in the public sector to enhance administrative quality and institutional sustainability.

The workshop included interactive discussions and practical exercises designed to equip participants with modern institutional management and control methods.

Nadia Al-Eidan, Director of the Administrative Development and Training Department, highlighted the critical role of corporate governance in the advancement of modern institutions, noting that its implementation enhances administrative performance, minimizes risks and builds public trust in government entities.

Al Safa Society boosts Quranic education with Awqaf support

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Al Safa Humanitarian Society announced that its Quranic Center has received support from the General Secretariat of Awqaf to sponsor its activities all over Kuwait, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This initiative is part of a strategic partnership aimed at promoting Quranic education and values.

The support includes financial rewards for 135 male and female memorizers, as well as 16 teachers involved in the activity organized by Al Safa Humanitarian in various governorates.

Director General Abdulaziz Al-Shaya expressed gratitude for the collaboration, highlighting its role in sustaining monthly stipends for Quran teachers and offering incentives for

distinguished students.

He emphasized the society's commitment to making the Holy Quran a way of life, fostering values of moderation and ethical conduct among youth.

Last year, the society graduated 400 male and female Quran memorizers and 14 certified reciters. This year, it plans to launch the 'Elite Circle,' a 10-month program dedicated to teaching the ten minor Quranic readings.

Al-Shaya urged parents to enroll their children in these Quranic circles, which include in-person and remote learning options, Tajweed lessons and listening councils supervised by expert scholars. He also praised the General Secretariat of Endowments for its ongoing support in Kuwait and beyond.



Al-Seyassah photo

Quran students with their teacher.

PM inaugurates beacon in his honor

Late poet Al-Babtain declared as cultural icon at Al-Qurain Festival

By Medhat Allam

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: In recognition of his significant contributions to Arab and international culture and his ongoing humanitarian efforts even after his passing, the 30th Al-Qurain Cultural Festival has chosen the late poet Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain as a cultural beacon.

This honor aims to highlight just a fraction of his lasting impact on humanity, which will continue to resonate in the annals of history.

Under the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmed Al-Abdullah, the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters inaugurated a beacon in Al-Babtain Central Library for Arabic Poetry, a library founded by Al-Babtain himself. This library will serve as a destination for scholars and researchers seeking rare books and manuscripts.

Dr. Mohammed Al-Jassar, Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, delivered an opening speech that celebrated Al-Babtain's cultural legacy.

He highlighted Al-Babtain's tireless dedication to Arabic literature and poetry, believing culture to be a bridge between peoples and a means of advancing humanity.

Al-Jassar noted that this tribute

was a modest gesture compared to Al-Babtain's monumental cultural contributions, which include his foundation and prestigious literary awards.

A documentary film showcasing Al-Babtain's life and efforts was presented, reflecting his journey in establishing cultural institutions that have spread awareness, promoted peace and bridged diverse perspectives through poetry. Al-Jassar also honored Al-Babtain's family, represented by Osama Al-Babtain, with a commemorative shield.

The Al-Manara symposium, moderated by media figure Yousef Al-Jassem, featured speeches from prominent figures such as former Minister of Information Sami Al-Nisf, former Minister of Education Dr. Rashid Al-Hamad.

Dr. Rashid Al-Hamad and Dr. Abdullah Al-Tatawi from Egypt, who highlighted Al-Babtain's Arab and international contributions. The event also included testimonials from former Bahraini Minister of Information Nabil Al-Hamer and Dr. Salem Khaddada, alongside a poetic recital by Abdullah Al-Failakawi.

Additionally, attendees enjoyed a photo exhibition showcasing both historic and recent images of the late poet, as well as the opening of a special exhibition displaying publications from the Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation.



Photo during the Al-Manara symposium.

KU holds 'Scientific Forum for Social Security', tackle national challenges

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The Kuwait Society for Social Security, in collaboration with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies at the Kuwait University, organized the "Scientific Forum for Social Security" at the Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies, Sabah Al-Salem University City.

In her opening remarks, Acting Vice President of Kuwait University, Dr. Nouriya Al-Kandari, emphasized on the importance of cooperation to help Kuwait

University achieve excellence and creativity, particularly in light of the Amiri Decree appointing her President of Kuwait University.

Dr. Al-Kandari highlighted that the forum would discuss key and vital issues.

Dr. Yaqub Al-Kandari, Acting Director of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Center and Director of the conference, stressed that the center strives to provide fruitful recommendations on social security, linking it closely to the broader concept of development.

The forum featured three discussion sessions, with the first day focusing on the reality of social security in Kuwait.



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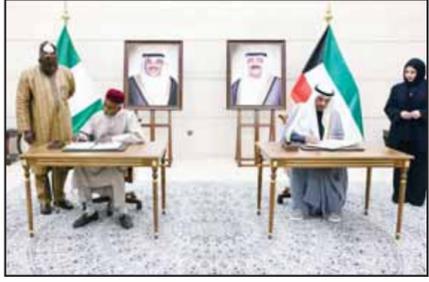
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LOCAL

Kuwait, Nigeria solidify bilateral relations with new agreements

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Kuwait's Foreign Minister, Abdullah Al-Yahya, held a meeting with Yusuf Maitama Tuggar, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal



KUNA photo
Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya and Nigerian Foreign Minister sign MoU.

Republic of Nigeria, during his official visit to Kuwait, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The two officials discussed the frameworks for further strengthening the close bilateral relations between their countries, as well as the latest regional and international developments.

Following the discussions, several important agreements were signed. These included an agreement between the Governments of Kuwait and Nigeria to establish a joint cooperation committee.

Additionally, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented by the Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Kuwaiti Diplomatic Institute and the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented by the Nigerian Diplomatic Corps Academy, aimed at enhancing cooperation in diplomatic training programs.

Another MoU was signed between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of both countries to facilitate bilateral consultations, marking a strong commitment from both nations to advance and solidify their bilateral ties.

Continued from Page 1

Kuwaiti-foreigner

Al-Kandari highlighted that factors such as the currency difference between the Kuwaiti dinar and other currencies play a role in reducing the overall cost of marrying a non-Kuwaiti.

She expressed regret over the extravagant spending in some marriage cases, as well as the exaggerated conditions set by certain families for their daughters' marriages.

Al-Kandari insisted that a pause for reflection is necessary, considering the high rate of unmarried Kuwaiti women and the increasing number of Kuwaiti women married to foreigners.

Meanwhile, women's rights activist Lawyer Sheikhha Al-Julaibi said, "Marriage is fate and destiny".

She indicated that the issue of withdrawing citizenship under Article 8 is not the main factor that could influence a Kuwaiti man's decision to marry a Kuwaiti woman over a foreigner.

Lawyer Al-Julaibi explained that the main conditions that encourage a Kuwaiti man to marry a Kuwaiti woman include the various benefits provided by the state to those who marry a Kuwaiti woman such as an increase in the marriage loan, housing priority, and other privileges that are aimed to motivate Kuwaiti youth to marry within the community.

In addition, Professor of Family Psychology Dr. Ahmed Salama explained that the decisions to withdraw citizenship under Article 8 will inevitably reduce the number of marriages between Kuwaiti citizens and non-Kuwaitis. This is particularly significant given that there were 67,794 unmarried Kuwaiti women over the age of 29 as of the end of last year.

More than 30,000 Kuwaitis have married foreigners, but with the implementation of the decisions, the marriage rate between citizens and foreigners is expected to decline. This is especially true since many foreigners sought to marry Kuwaitis to obtain citizenship.

At the same time, reducing marriages between citizens and foreigners could benefit Kuwaiti women, as the reluctance of some Kuwaiti youth to marry within their own community has led a significant number of Kuwaiti women seeking marriage with foreigners, especially from Arab countries. Some have even been compelled to marry people from all six continents, as indicated by PACI statistics.

Dr. Salama indicated that many citizens marry non-Kuwaitis due to the high demands for dowries and exaggerated marriage requirements.

He urged Kuwaiti families to adopt a more moderate approach in these matters, especially considering that the state supports Kuwaiti families after marriage through housing assistance and employment for both the husband and wife.

Dr. Salama acknowledged that some marriages between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis have been successful and stable, but a high number of such marriages have failed because they were based primarily on material interests. He cited the example of many women who divorce after obtaining citizenship as evidence of this trend.

Kuwait eyes

These projects aim to address the growing needs of the state and focus on key areas of development. The budget includes an unprecedented 69 projects for ministries and government departments, 21 projects for affiliated bodies and 34 projects for independent institutions.

In recent years, the government typically included fewer than 10 new projects in the budget. However, for the upcoming fiscal year, 90 new projects have been proposed, with a total cost of 1.7 billion Kuwaiti dinars, to be distributed over the course of the projects.

These initiatives are expected to contribute significantly to the country's development across vital sectors such as roads, sanitation, education, health, water and transportation.

The capital expenditure for the 2025/2026 fiscal year has been allocated as follows -- 1.9 billion dinars for ministries, 1.5 billion dinars for affiliated bodies, 118 million dinars for independent institutions and 253 million dinars for other agencies.

Al-Fassam emphasized that these projects are aimed at improving the quality of life for citizens, enhancing infrastructure and supporting the country's long-term development.

The projects will focus on essential sectors such as:

- Increasing the production capacity of water and electricity

- Upgrading infrastructure in key areas

- Establishing new schools at all educational levels

- Developing roads and drainage systems

- Constructing football stadiums in Al-Mutlaa and Sabah Al-Ahmad residential areas

- Building a medical campus in Sabah Al-Salem University City

- Expanding the Kuwait Cancer Center

- Constructing new power stations and purification stations

- Expanding Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port and the new Kuwait Airport

The Minister noted that government agencies will be able to begin implementing these new projects starting April 1, as all necessary financial and technical preparations have been completed to ensure the efficient execution of these initiatives alongside ongoing projects.

'Ready-to-move-in'

ready-to-move-in homes can range from 70,000 to 100,000 Kuwaiti dinars. As a result, many buyers are opting for homes rather than investing in land and construction, especially with the escalating costs of building materials and labor.

Al-Momen further explained that new housing developments, such as those in newly established cities, have also influenced this shift.

Citizens who had been allocated land in these areas have started selling their properties, making them more available for buyers looking for immediate homes.

Properties, such as villas and buildings priced between 250,000 to 350,000 dinars, have become increasingly attractive to buyers, particularly those not involved in speculative trading.

The rising preference for built properties can be attributed to several key factors:

- Direct support from the Credit Bank for the purchase of homes, offering financial aid of up to 70,000 dinars

- New regulations for construction in areas like Al-Mutla'a, West and South Abdullah Mubarak and others that require properties to be built within a specific time frame

- Limitations on financing for private housing, with eligibility for only one house per citizen

- Decrease in demand for land in certain areas such as Sabah Al-Ahmad Sea City, as most of the land has already been sold off following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic

- The scarcity of land and a lack of attractive new areas for investment

While the shift towards purchasing built properties may seem driven by market constraints, it also highlights the changing dynamics of the real estate sector in Kuwait.

With regulatory reforms, rising construction costs and evolving market preferences, this trend is expected to continue as buyers seek immediate solutions to housing needs.

Real estate professionals believe that adapting to these new realities will be key to maintaining growth and stability in Kuwait's residential real estate market in the coming years.

Kuwait reaffirms

The Trump administration has already dialed back aspects of the proposal after it was widely rejected internationally, saying the relocation of Palestinians would be temporary. U.S. officials have provided few details about how or when the plan would be carried out.

In a social media post on Thursday, Trump said Israel would turn Gaza over to the United States after the war and that no U.S. soldiers would be needed for his plan to redevelop it.

The Palestinians have vehemently rejected Trump's proposal, fearing that Israel would never allow refugees to return. Egypt has warned that an expulsion of Palestinians would destabilize the region and undermine its peace treaty with Israel, a cornerstone of stability and American influence for decades.

Saudi Arabia, another key U.S. ally, has also rejected any mass transfer of Palestinians and says it will not normalize relations with Israel - a key goal of the Trump administration - without the creation of a Palestinian state that includes Gaza.

Trump and Israeli officials have depicted the proposed relocation from war-ravaged Gaza as voluntary, but the Palestinians have universally expressed their determination to remain in their homeland.

Trump and Israeli officials have not said how they would respond if Palestinians refuse to leave. But Human Rights Watch and other groups say the plan, if implemented, would amount to "ethnic cleansing," the forcible relocation of the civilian population of an ethnic group from a geographic area.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said he has ordered the military to make preparations to facilitate the emigration of large numbers of Palestinians from Gaza through land crossings as well as "special arrangements for exit by sea and air."

There were no immediate signs of such preparations on the ground.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi has not publicly responded to Trump's stunning proposal that most of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians be relocated and the United States take charge of rebuilding the territory. Israel's 15-month campaign against the militant Hamas group had reduced large parts of Gaza to rubble before a fragile ceasefire took hold last month.

But Egyptian officials, speaking Wednesday on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door talks, said Cairo has made clear to the Trump administration and Israel that it will resist any such proposal, and that the peace deal with Israel - which has stood for nearly half a century - is at risk.

Trump's oil

capability to increase production. His goal is to restore the U.S. as the world leader in oil production and technology. His statements should not be overlooked, especially since oil constitutes 60 percent of the global economy.

Trump seeks to impose economic dominance globally, which is why he has proposed economic sanctions on South America such as Venezuela and Mexico, in addition to imposing taxes on oil imported from Canada. This is particularly significant since Canadian oil is sold in U.S. states bordering Canada, such as Chicago.

However, raising taxes on oil could have unintended consequences, as it could result in higher product prices for American consumers.

Al-Awadhi linked Trump's comments about the decline in oil prices to his interactions with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

He went on to explain that Saudi Arabia currently exports around 11 million barrels of oil per day but it has the capacity to increase production to 13 million barrels per day. Trump is trying to outwit it by encouraging Saudi Arabia to accept lower oil prices in exchange for expanding its investments in the U.S.

Trump understands Saudi Arabia's position as the largest oil producer globally and recognizes that if Saudi Arabia were to stop exporting oil, it could trigger a global economic crisis.

Al-Awadhi highlighted the 1973 war, during which the Arabs fought against Israel to liberate the occupied Arab lands, as evidence of Saudi Arabia's power in using oil as a geopolitical tool. Unlike the Arab defeat in the 1967 war, during the 1973 conflict, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states used oil as a strategic weapon by halting exports. This move played an effective role in shifting the war's course in favor of the Arabs. This Gulf-Arab strategy led to the decline of the American and European industrial and trade sectors, with oil prices skyrocketing from USD 2.7-3 per barrel to USD 12-15 per barrel for Western consumers.

Since then, the U.S. began to think strategically about how to prevent such difficult circumstances in the future by setting policies to ensure a steady supply of oil at acceptable prices, and diminishing the effectiveness of the oil embargo as a geopolitical weapon.

Regarding the economic impact of Trump's statements on the Gulf countries, Al-Awadhi highlighted the region's huge oil and gas reserves, which account for more than 44 percent of the world's total oil reserves.

He explained that the Gulf region is home to the two largest fields in the world - Saudi Arabia's "Ghazal" field and Kuwait's "Burgan" field. Also, the UAE has the second-largest fuel supply station for ships globally, which plays a crucial role in facilitating maritime travel from the Far East to the Far West. These factors make the Gulf countries strategically important and have garnered special attention from U.S. presidents, including Trump.

Al-Awadhi recalled that prior to Trump's presidency, he had written an article in 2016 in which he highlighted that Trump's election campaign was focused on oil and the Gulf countries, particularly Kuwait.

Prominent figures gather for night of camaraderie

Azayez Farm banquet unites Diwaniya owners



Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad hosts Diwaniya owners at Azayez Farm.

Photos by Rezk Taufiq

By Suzan Nasser

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad hosted a banquet at Azayez Farm in Abdally on Thursday in honor of the owners of diwanis in the country.

Aside from the owners of the diwanis; a number of political, media, social and business figures attended the event.

Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad thanked everyone who responded to the invitation, as well as those whose circumstances prevented them from attending.

"Yesterday, I was honored by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal

Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah, accompanied by a blessed group of relatives and brothers -- sons of the honorable Al-Sabah Family, in a customary friendly visit that has become a good annual tradition, and it will continue, God willing," he disclosed.

He added that "As for today (Thursday), we are honored, with warmest welcome, by the honorable brothers -- the owners of Kuwait's diwanis." He expressed his happiness "over this good gathering that included diverse segments -- from all classes of Kuwaiti society." He hopes that such friendly visits

will continue. "This confirms that Kuwaitis are one family," he asserted.

He said "the invitation is extended until Friday for the ambassadors and members of the Arab and foreign diplomatic corps in the country. I hope everyone will have a pleasant time."

It is worth noting that the folk arts groups, which attended the event and presented paintings from the authentic Kuwaiti heritage, added an atmosphere of joy and happiness for the attendees, especially with the arts of chants, sheilat, Ardha and Samri, celebrating the month of February -- the month of the glorious national holidays.

MoE urged to activate asset accounting unit

SAB flags management failures

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The State Audit Bureau (SAB) has stressed the need to activate the Asset Accounting Unit in the Ministry of Education in compliance with the financial directive to ensure effective and transparent management of State assets; while its report on the work of the ministry revealed shortcomings in the supervision of the latter's assets, valued at KD863,467,167.

The report pointed out the failure to calculate the annual depreciation of buildings and the failure to add radical maintenance costs; thereby, violating the Ministry of Finance Circular No. 3/2022 regarding the systems and policies of non-financial non-current assets, as well as the inventory and evaluation procedures.

It explained that the failure to calculate the annual de-

preciation of buildings led to inaccurate book values of fixed assets, which negatively affected the transparency of financial reports.

On the other hand, the radical maintenance costs were supposed to be added to the value of assets as per the circular, to ensure the provision of an accurate financial picture.

SAB underscored the need for the ministry to adhere to the circular; hence, it must begin calculating the annual depreciation of buildings and adding the costs of radical maintenance, if any.

It called for taking serious measures to activate the Asset Accounting Unit in the ministry, in compliance with the financial instructions; noting the non-activation of the unit despite the latter's importance in inventorying, evaluating and updating asset data.

In response, the Ministry of Education affirmed that it recently established the unit to evaluate assets, including land and buildings.

According to the ministry, the unit started its work by inventorying building data in coordination with the Asset Systems Department in its finance counterpart; along with the preparation of detailed data like the location of the building, date of operation, size, productive life and value. Once the inventory is completed, the depreciation record for the buildings will be uploaded in the Oracle system.

MoE urged to settle utilities

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy has requested the Ministry of Education to pay KD 35 million for the electricity, fresh water, and treated water consumption throughout the year, reports Al-Rai daily.

This request is based on a decision by the Cabinet that mandates all government agencies to expedite the payment of electricity and water consumption bills to the ministry.

According to informed sources, the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy submitted detailed statements to the Ministry of Education regarding the consumption of electricity, fresh water, and treated water at its facilities for the 2023/2024 fiscal year, totaling approximately KD 35 million. This amount includes the electricity and water consumption in schools, educational facilities at various levels, teachers' housing, and other related sites.

The sources affirmed the importance of enhancing energy-saving measures and implementing rationalization programs to ensure the sustainability of resources.

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This image provided by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department shows rescue hikers along the cog railway during a rescue mission, on Mount Washington, NH on Feb 2. (AP)

Hikers stuck in waist-deep snow rescued

The two friends had hiked New Hampshire's challenging Mount Washington trail a month ago. They returned and did it again Sunday after trekking through neighboring peaks in the White Mountains. Both veteran hikers, the women were an hour behind schedule on their descent and losing daylight, but they had warm clothing, headlamps and other gear.

Then the wind kicked in. The temperature dropped. They were in waist-deep snow and whiteout conditions. They were lost on the tallest mountain in the Northeast, known for its extreme, changeable weather. "That snow has nothing to stick

to," said Amy Cotter, a weather observer and education specialist with the Mount Washington Observatory at the peak at 6,288 feet (1,916 meters). "That snow gets whipped up very easily."

One of Kathryn McKee's snowshoes became stuck in a "spruce trap," a hole created in the snow underneath trees.

After about an hour of trying to rescue themselves, McKee and Beata LeLacheur called 911. McKee and LeLacheur were found a half-hour later. They had suffered frostbite, mostly to their hands. Crews set up emergency shelters for them. (AP)

Minnesota House Democratic, GOP leaders reach deal

Registered Republicans lead Democrats in Nevada

LAS VEGAS, Feb 6, (AP): Registered Republican voters have - by the narrowest of margins - overtaken Democrats in the pivotal battleground state of Nevada for the first time in nearly 20 years.

As of January, there were 187 more active voters registered as Republicans than Democrats, according to a monthly report released Tuesday by the Nevada Secretary of State's office. The last time Republicans had an edge over Democrats in voter registration was in 2007. Both parties, meanwhile, remain outnumbered by nonpartisan voters, who now make up 33% of Nevada's 2.1 million active registered voters.

The shift helps cement its status as a purple state and could make it more difficult for Democrats to defend two U.S. Senate seats and win back the presidency. That hurdle comes as the party faces a growing challenge to regain power in Washington.

Since the pandemic, Democrats have watched with alarm as their advantage in the state has eroded. Registered Democrats in January 2020 made up 38% of the state's electorate, leading GOP voters by more than 83,000. Republicans since then had been slowly closing that gap.

Now, the latest Nevada report shows, each party accounts for just under 30% of the state's registered



The Sphere concert venue glows after sunset displaying a digital sign to vote on Nov 5, 2024, in Las Vegas, Nev. (AP)

voters - 618,539 are Republican, while 618,352 are Democrats.

Not every state registers voters by party, and it can be difficult to compare trends in those that do because of differences in voter registration procedures and state political histories. Still, there's evidence of Republican registration gains in other swing states, too.

In Pennsylvania, Democrats hold their narrowest voter registration edge in at least a half-century. What was an advantage of 1.2 million voters in

2008, the year Barack Obama won the presidency, is now a gap of fewer than 200,000, according to state statistics. And in Arizona, where Democrats had been closing a registration gap with Republicans for the past decade, that trend reversed after 2022 and the party again lost ground.

Dan Lee, a political science professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, said the shift in Nevada serves as a reminder that it is a swing state, even if it voted for a Democrat in every presiden-

tial election since 2008 until President Donald Trump flipped it in November.

"It's not turning into a deep-blue state," he said.

Trump carried Nevada narrowly in the 2024 presidential election. Data from AP VoteCast showed that self-identified Republicans and Republican-leaning outnumbered Democrats voting in that election, though self-identified party can differ from party registration.

Also:

ST PAUL, Minn: Democratic and Republican leaders of the Minnesota House reached a power-sharing agreement Wednesday night to end a three-week stalemate that the state's chief justice said left the chamber "completely dysfunctional."

Details of how the arrangement will work weren't immediately released. A joint statement from the top GOP and Democratic leaders in the chamber said only that they had a deal "to organize the Minnesota House effective Thursday," and that more information would be released Thursday morning.

Democrats had stayed away from the state Capitol since the 2025 legislative session opened Jan. 14. Republicans argued that only 67 - the number of GOP elected members in the chamber - were required for a quorum.

'Musk's access to Treasury Department data concerning'

Protesters in cities across the US rally against Trump's policies, Project 2025

WASHINGTON, Feb 6, (AP): Demonstrators gathered in cities across the US to protest the Trump administration's early actions, decrying everything from the president's immigration crackdown to his rollback of rights and a proposal to forcibly transfer Palestinians from the Gaza Strip.

Protesters in Philadelphia and at state capitols in California, Minnesota, Michigan, Texas, Wisconsin, Indiana and beyond waved signs denouncing President Donald Trump; billionaire Elon Musk, the leader of Trump's new Department of Government Efficiency; and Project 2025, a hard-right playbook for American government and society.

"I'm appalled by democracy's changes in the last, well, specifically two weeks - but it started a long time ago," Margaret Wilmet said at a protest outside the Statehouse in Columbus, Ohio. "So I'm just trying to put a presence into resistance."

The protests were a result of a movement that has organized online under the hashtags #buildtheresistance and #50501, which stands for 50 protests, 50 states, one day. Websites and accounts across social media issued calls for action, with messages such

as "reject fascism" and "defend our democracy."

Outside the state Capitol in Lansing, Michigan, a crowd of hundreds gathered in freezing temperatures.

Catie Miglietti, from the Ann Arbor area, said Musk's access to Treasury Department data was especially concerning. She painted a sign depicting Musk puppeteering Trump from his outstretched arm - evoking Musk's straight-arm gesture during a January speech that some have interpreted as a Nazi salute.

"If we don't stop it and get Congress to do something, it's an attack on democracy," Miglietti said.

Demonstrations in several cities piled criticism on Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency.

"DOGE is not legit," read one poster on the state Capitol steps in Jefferson City, Missouri, where dozens of protesters gathered. "Why does Elon have your Social Security info???"

Members of Congress have expressed concern that DOGE's involvement with the US government payment system could lead to security risks or missed payments for programs such as Social Security and Medicare. A Treasury Department official says



Protestors hold signs while listening to speakers during a 50501 Protest on the south steps of the West Virginia State Capitol in Charleston, W.Va on Feb 5 during what was billed as a nationwide series of protests against President Donald Trump, Project 2025, DEI rollbacks and other recent administration initiatives. (AP)

a tech executive working with DOGE will have "read-only access."

Trump has signed a series of executive orders in the first couple of weeks of his new term on everything from trade and immigration to climate

change. As Democrats begin to raise their voice in opposition to Trump's agenda, protests have multiplied.

Demonstrators strode through downtown Austin, Texas. They assembled in Atlanta's Centennial

Olympic Park for a march to Georgia's state Capitol and gathered outside California's Democratic-dominated Legislature in Sacramento. In Denver, protests coincided with nearby operations by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and an unspecified number of people detained. Protesters in Phoenix chanted "deport Elon" and "no hate, no fear, immigrants are welcome here."

"We need to show strength," said Laura Wilde, a former public school occupational therapist in Austin. "I think we're in a state of shock."

Thousands protested in St. Paul, Minnesota, where 28-year-old Halie Patten carried a Democratic presidential campaign sign, revised to read "Harris Walz Were Right." The Minneapolis resident says she was motivated by fear.

"Fear for what is going to happen to our country if we don't all just do something about it," Patten said.

At Iowa's Capitol in Des Moines, protesters who joined the anti-Trump movement went inside to counter a registered event by the conservative parental rights group Moms for Liberty. The anti-Trump protesters shouted over the speakers in the rotunda for

about 15 minutes before law enforcement pushed them outside, removing four demonstrators in handcuffs.

Meanwhile, new Attorney General Pam Bondi on Wednesday ordered a review of the federal prosecution of Trump as she unveiled a series of directives designed to overhaul a Justice Department the president claims is biased against conservatives.

Hours after she was sworn in at the White House, Bondi called for the creation of "weaponization working group" that will scrutinize the work of special counsel Jack Smith, who charged Trump in two criminal cases. The group will also review "unethical prosecutions" stemming from the Jan 6, 2021, riot at the US Capitol, among other things, according to the memo.

The memo satisfies the longstanding contention of Trump and his allies that the Justice Department under the Biden administration had become "weaponized" against conservatives, even though some of its most high-profile probes concerned the Democratic president and his son, and there's been no evidence to support the idea that the prosecutions against Trump were launched for a partisan purpose.



Icebergs are photographed from the window of an airplane carrying NASA scientists as they fly on a mission to track melting ice in eastern Greenland on Aug 14, 2019. (AP)

Greenland's parliament OKs ban on foreign political donations

Greenland's parliament passed a bill Tuesday that bans political parties from receiving contributions "from foreign or anonymous contributors" after President Donald Trump expressed his wish that the United States take over the vast and mineral-rich Arctic island that belongs to Denmark.

The bill is aimed at protecting "Greenland's political integrity" and will take effect immediately, accord-

ing to a translation of a parliamentary document in Danish outlining the measure.

The bill "must be seen in light of the geopolitical interests in Greenland and the current situation where representatives of an allied great power have expressed interest in taking over and controlling Greenland," the document said.

Before taking office for his second term on Jan. 20, Trump said he

would not rule out the use of military force to seize control of Greenland, calling it vital to U.S. national security. His oldest son, Donald Trump Jr., visited Greenland last month and told citizens: "We're going to treat you well."

Denmark is a longtime U.S. ally and a founding member of NATO, and its semi-autonomous territory is home to a large U.S. military base. (AP)

Public safety top priority: Gov Ivey

MONTGOMERY, Ala., Feb 6, (AP): Calling public safety her top priority for the session, Alabama Gov **Kay Ivey** backed a slate of bills that include a ban on Glock switches, an effort to boost police ranks and an attempt to focus prison space on the most violent offenders.

"A safe Alabama is a secure future for Alabama, and a secured future is our goal," Ivey said in her State of the State address on the opening night of the 2025 legislative session.

The proposals come in the wake of mass shootings that rattled Alabama cities, including the shooting deaths of four people outside a Birmingham nightclub in September. The package of bills

includes a ban on Glock switches and other conversion devices that make semiautomatic weapons fire like machine guns. The devices cause a rapid, hard-to-control spray of bullets, meaning more victims and more bystanders are being wounded or killed, police say.

The package includes a mixture of tough-on-crime measures, efforts to assist police officers and a limited sentencing reform measure.



Ivey

France gov survives no-confidence vote and budget finally adopted

PARIS, Feb 6, (AP): France's government survived a no-confidence vote Wednesday and the country's 2025 budget was finally adopted, easing some of the turmoil in one of the world's biggest economies that had worried investors and hurt the 20-country eurozone.

The government has no majority in parliament, and Prime Minister François Bayrou had used special constitutional powers to get the budget bill approved without a vote by lawmakers, which triggered the no-confidence motion.

Only 128 lawmakers approved the motion, far from the 289 votes - or half the National Assembly seats - needed for it to pass. Both the Socialists and far-right National Rally lawmakers refused to support it. Under France's Constitution, the motion's failure automatically turns the 2025 budget into law.

French politics have been in disarray since President Emmanuel Macron called snap elections last year that left no party with a parliamentary majority. Bayrou, a veteran centrist, was appointed in December amid a political crisis prompted by budget disputes that led to the collapse of his predecessor's government.



French Prime Minister François Bayrou delivers his general policy speech on Jan 14, 2025 at the National Assembly in Paris. (AP)

France has been under pressure from the European Union to reduce its huge debt and deficit, which in 2024 reached 6.1% of GDP.

The government has argued the country needs an operational budget at a time when US President Donald Trump is threatening new tariffs on the EU and Russia is growing more emboldened in Ukraine.

Bayrou acknowledged Wednesday an "imperfect budget" but said its adoption was an urgent step "because our country cannot live without a budget."

Greece's defense minister calls for EU to loosen strict defense spending limits

NICOSIA, Cyprus, Feb 6, (AP): The European Union should abandon a "schizophrenic" approach of imposing very strict defense spending limits on its members if it's to adequately defend its territory and achieve military self-sufficiency, Greece's defense minister said Wednesday.

Nikos Dendias' remarks came two days after EU leaders met in Brussels for informal talks on boosting and improving military spending and ramping up Europe's defense industry. Some EU members argue that the 27-member block's fiscal rules hold them back from expanding their defense budgets as Russia continues to pursue its war in Ukraine.

Dendias called for making more money available for military expenditures after talks with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides and Cypriot counterpart Vasilis Palmas.

"Our defense autonomy, which we all desire, can't be achieved under this narrow (fiscal) framework, so I'm



Cyprus' Minister of Defence Vasilis Palmas, (left), and his Greek counterpart Nikos Dendias review a military guard of honor at the Defence ministry in capital Nicosia, Cyprus on Feb 5. (AP)

hopeful the European Union can return to reason," Dendias said.

The Greek official also went on to "assure our transatlantic friends" that

a stronger Europe militarily wouldn't take from European obligation toward NATO, but is rather "completely compatible and useful."

France delivers Mirage fighter jets

Long-range drones hit Russian airfield, says Ukraine

KYIV, Ukraine, Feb 6, (AP): Ukrainian forces struck an airfield in southern Russia that was being used to launch Iran-designed Shahed drones, Ukraine's General Staff claimed Thursday, as France said it had delivered a first batch of Mirage fighter jets to Ukraine.

The nighttime attack on the Primorsko-Akhtarsk airfield in Russia's Krasnodar region started a fire, the General Staff wrote on Facebook. The facility houses and fires drones and maintains aircraft used to attack Ukraine's Kherson and Zaporizhzhia border region.

It was not possible to independently verify the claim. The Russian Defense Ministry reported downing Ukrainian drones over Krasnodar, but it didn't say where or mention the airfield.

Ukraine has developed its own long-range drones as part of its effort to grow its domestic arms industry and become less dependent on Western help to fight its almost three-year war with Russia. The drones have at times reached deep into Russia, hitting oil refineries, weapons stores and airfields.



In this photo taken from a video distributed by Russian Defense Ministry Press Service on Feb 6, a Russian self-propelled multiple rocket launcher Uragan (Hurricane) is fired toward Ukrainian position at an undisclosed location in the Kursk region border area. (AP)

Meanwhile, French authorities said they had delivered the first fighter jets promised to Ukraine by President Emmanuel Macron last June.

"The first of them arrived in Ukraine today," Sebastian Lecornu, the minister of the armed forces, said on X. "With Ukrainian pilots on board, trained for several months in France, they will now help to defend the skies over Ukraine."

Lecornu did not say how many planes were delivered.

Ukraine has also received F-16s from European countries, though Ukrainian officials have rarely mentioned them in official comments about the fighting.

Russian forces fired 77 Shahed and other types of drones, as well as two ballistic Iskander-M missiles, at Ukraine overnight, according to Ukraine's air force. A statement said 56 drones were destroyed and 18 others were jammed and lost mid-flight.

Some buildings were damaged, but no casualties were reported.

Meanwhile, Ukraine wants to collaborate with partner countries on postwar projects worth billions of dollars not just in mining rare earth elements, but also in energy and construction sectors to help rebuild the country.

'Philippine lawmakers push baseless impeachment case to Senate'

Duterte's impeachment trial to start after Congress reopens in June

MANILA, Philippines, Feb 6, (AP): The Philippine Senate president said Thursday the impeachment trial of Vice President Sara Duterte will begin after Congress reopens in June and vowed to avoid a repeat of stalled 2001 impeachment proceedings that sparked massive protests and forced a president to step down.

The previous day, the House of Representatives impeached Duterte, daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte, on a range of accusations that include plotting to assassinate the president, large-scale corruption, and failing to strongly denounce China's aggressive actions against Filipino forces in the disputed South China Sea.

At least 215 of the House's more than 300 legislators signed the complaint - significantly more than the required number - allowing it to be transmitted immediately to the Senate, which will serve as the impeachment court. The impeachment came on the last day of congressional session before a four-month break.

Sara Duterte didn't immediately comment, but her brother Rep Paolo Duterte said the impeachment was "a clear act of political persecution." Rival lawmakers maneuvered to quickly collect signatures and push a "baseless impeachment case" to the Senate, he said.

Senate President Francis Escudero



Philippine House Speaker Martin Romualdez hears the decision of members of Congress to impeach Vice President Sara Duterte at the House of Representatives in Quezon City in Manila, Philippines on Feb 5. (AP)

said under the law an impeachment court can only be convened and senators sworn in as jurors when the Senate resumes its session on June 2.

"Legally, it cannot be done," Escudero said in a news conference when asked if a special Senate session could be called to start the impeachment trial earlier.

Nonetheless, many activists and critics argue the body could do more to

provide a swift trial.

"The Senate's foot-dragging on the impeachment process vs. Sara Duterte will be a roadblock to the pursuit of accountability," said Cristina Palabay, a leader of a human rights alliance.

The move by House legislators, many of them allies of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., deepens a bitter political rift between the two highest leaders of one of

Asia's most rambunctious democracies.

The signatories included the president's son, Rep Sandro Marcos, and House Speaker Martin Romualdez, the president's cousin. The petition asks the Senate remove Duterte from office and ban her from holding public office for life.

In a Southeast Asian country long plagued by political divisions, impeachment trials can become politically volatile. In early 2001, an impeachment trial of then President Joseph Estrada on allegations including bribery and corruption stalled over a vote not to open an envelope containing records of his suspected bank account.

Massive protests ensued, eventually forcing Estrada to step down.

Asked how that could be avoided in the impeachment trial of Duterte, Escudero said steps were being taken early to ensure "the credibility and impartiality of the impeachment court." No side should be prevented from expressing their positions, he added.

The impeachment complaint against the vice president focused on a death threat she made against the president, his wife and the House speaker last year, irregularities in the use of her office's intelligence funds and her failure to stand up to Chinese aggression in the disputed South China Sea, according to proponents of the petition.

Flurry of int'l drills around Manila prompts complaints from Beijing

TAIPEI, Taiwan, Feb 6, (AP): A flurry of naval drills surrounding the Philippines involving the United States and its partners has prompted complaints from Beijing, which claims the entire South China Sea and accuses Manila of colluding with others to destabilize the region.

The US 7th Fleet based in Japan said forces from Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and the U.S. conducted a "multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity" within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone on Wednesday.

Such drills "strengthen the interoperability of our defense/armed forces doctrines, tactics, techniques, and procedures," the fleet said in a news release. The maneuvers were taking place within the Philippines' zone, but the fleet gave no details on the exact location.

More exercises involving the US, Japan and France were planned for later this week in the Philippines Sea, which China does not claim.

That exercise "is designed to advance coordination and cooperation between French, Japanese and US maritime forces while simultaneously demonstrating capabilities in multi-domain operations," the fleet said.

The US aircraft carrier Carl Vinson, French carrier Charles De Gaulle and Japan's Izumo-class multi-functional destroyer Kaga will take part in the drill starting Saturday, along with their escorts and air wings, the fleet said.

France's participation is especially significant because of the distance from its home base, 6,000 kilometers (3,700 miles) away in Toulouse, commander of the Carrier Strike Group Rear Adm Jacques Mallard was quoted as saying.

Meanwhile, Tian Junli, spokesperson for China's Southern Theater Command, accused the Philippines of "colluding with outside countries to organize 'so-called joint patrols'," which he said "destabilize the region," Chinese state media said on Thursday.



Mallard



Zhao Leji, chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, meets with Sultan of Brunei Haji Hassanali Bolkiyah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah in Beijing, capital of China on Feb 6. (Xinhua)

China's top legislator meets with Brunei's Sultan

China's top legislator Zhao Leji met with Sultan of Brunei Haji Hassanali Bolkiyah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah in Beijing on Thursday.

Noting that China and Brunei are good neighbors, good friends and good partners who trust and support each other, Zhao, chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC)

Standing Committee, said China is willing to work with Brunei to carry forward their traditional friendship, enhance strategic mutual trust and work together for common development, thereby elevating the bilateral relations to a new level.

The NPC of China is willing to work with Brunei's Legislative Council

to follow the guidance of the important common understandings reached by the two heads of state, strengthen friendly interactions, deepen exchanges of experience in legislation, supervision and governance, and provide a legal guarantee for China-Brunei practical cooperation, said Zhao. (Xinhua)

Guatemala gives Rubio second deal for migrants being sent home from US

GUATEMALA CITY, Feb 6, (AP): Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo said Wednesday his country will accept migrants from other countries who are being deported from the United States, the second deportation deal that Secretary of State Marco Rubio has reached during a Central America trip that has been focused mainly on immigration.

Under the agreement announced by Arévalo, the deportees would be returned to their home countries at U.S. expense.

"We have agreed to increase by 40% the number of flights of deportees both of our nationality as well as deportees from other nationalities," Arévalo said at a news conference with Rubio.

Previously, including under the

Biden administration, Guatemala had been accepting on average seven to eight flights of its citizens from the U.S. per week. Under President Donald Trump it's also been one of the countries that have had migrants returned on U.S. military planes.

El Salvador announced a similar but broader agreement on Monday. Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele said his country would accept U.S. deportees of any nationality, including American citizens and legal residents who are imprisoned for violent crimes.

Both Trump and Rubio acknowledged the legal uncertainty of sending Americans to another country for imprisonment.

"I'm just saying if we had a legal right to do it, I would do it in a heartbeat," Trump told reporters Tuesday in the Oval Office. "I don't know if we do or not, we're looking at that right now."

Rubio called it a very generous offer but said there were "obviously legalities involved. We have a Constitution."

Immigration, a Trump administration priority, has been the major focus of Rubio's first foreign trip as America's top diplomat, a five-country tour spanning Panama, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic.



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, (left), accompanied by Guatemalan Interior Minister Francisco Jiménez, (second left), tours a migrant return center at La Aurora International Airport in Guatemala City on Feb 5. (AP)

Opposition lawmakers protest alleged mistreatment of Indian deportees by US

NEW DELHI, Feb 6, (AP): India's Parliament was disrupted on Thursday as opposition lawmakers protested the alleged mistreatment of 104 Indian immigrants deported by the United States.

A US military plane on Wednesday carrying 104 deported Indian migrants arrived in a northern Indian city, the first such flight to the country as part of a crackdown ordered by the Trump administration.

The lawmakers and media reports said the deportees' arms and legs were shackled while on the aircraft.

Parliament's proceedings were adjourned Thursday as the lawmakers chanted slogans and called to discuss the deportation.

Renuka Chowdhury, a lawmaker in the Congress party, said the deportees were "handcuffed, had their legs chained and even struggled to use the washroom."

Her colleague, Gaurav Gogoi, called it "degrading."

Parliament speaker Om Birla tried to calm the lawmakers, saying the trans-



India's opposition lawmakers, some of them wearing shackles, stage a protest outside the Parliament in New Delhi, to condemn the reported mistreatment of Indian immigrants during their deportation from the United States on Feb 6. The banners in Hindi language read 'Indians in shackles, will not tolerate the insult.' (AP)

portation of the deportees was a matter of U.S. foreign policy.

"The foreign country also has its own rules and regulations," he said.

The Press Trust of India news agency quoted one of the deportees, Jaspal Singh, saying deportees' handcuffs and leg chains were taken off only at the Amritsar airport in India.

Singh, 36, said they initially thought they were being taken to another camp in the U.S.

"Then a police officer told us that we were being taken to India," he said.

The U.S. government usually carries out deportations on commercial and chartered flights. The use of the U.S. military to return people to their home country is a relatively new method that started under the Trump administration.

Opposition lawmakers, including Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, also protested outside the Parliament building as they demanded a response from the government. Some wore handcuffs and carried placards that read: "Humans, not prisoners."

China and Thailand vow to crack down on scam networks that plague SE Asia

BANGKOK, Feb 6, (AP): China's leader Xi Jinping and visiting Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra vowed to crack down on the scam networks that plague Southeast Asia as the two leaders met on Thursday in Beijing.

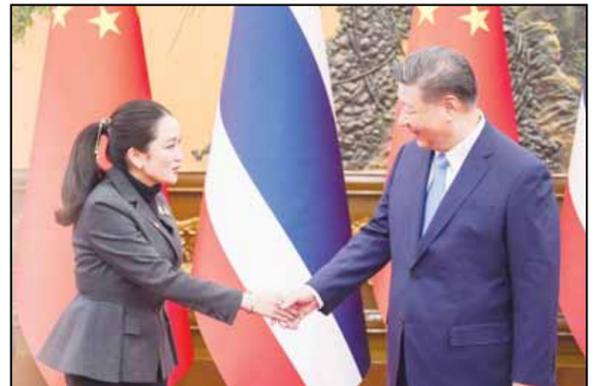
Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, which are south of China and share borders with Thailand, have become major centers of online scam operations where people lured by false advertising of well-paid jobs are trafficked to secretive compounds where they are forced to work by criminal groups that run online scams targeting people all over the world.

That has impacted Thailand's reputation, as multiple high-profile stories of Chinese people being lured to work in Bangkok only to be trafficked into a scam compound in Myanmar have surfaced, with Chinese actor Wang Xing being the latest such victim.

Thai and Chinese officials have taken public steps to address the scam issue, including a reported visit to the border region by Liu Zhongyi, China's vice minister of public security.

"China appreciates Thailand's strong measures to combat online gambling fraud. Both sides should continue to strengthen law enforcement, security, and judicial cooperation," Xi said, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Paetongtarn echoed that, saying "Thailand is willing to strengthen law



In this photo released by Thailand's Government Spokesman Office, Chinese President Xi Jinping, (right), shakes hands with Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra in Beijing, China on Feb 6. (AP)

enforcement cooperation with China and other neighboring countries and take resolute and effective measures to combat cross-border crimes such as online gambling and fraud."

Ahead of her visit, Thailand cut off electricity to some areas in Myanmar by its border to try to disrupt the operations of the scam compounds. The effect of that is unclear as the compounds often have their own generators.

The visit to China was Paetongtarn's first as prime minister and comes as the two countries celebrate 50 years of establishing diplomatic relations.

On other bilateral issues, Xi said China was willing to work on a new railway project between the countries. On Tuesday, Thailand approved a \$10 billion railway project that will eventually connect Bangkok to the Laos-China high speed railway.



Protesters use heavy machinery to demolish the residence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh's former leader and the father of the country's ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, at Dhanmondi in Dhaka, Bangladesh on Feb 6. (AP)

Turbulence in B'desh as govt grapples with aftermath of Hasina ouster

Bangladesh's new government is struggling to deal with a host of issues, including a stumbling economy and human rights violations, left behind by the ouster of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina six months ago. Hasina fled to India in August after a student-led uprising ended her 15-year rule, and an

interim government led by Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus took the helm, backed by the influential military.

Hasina's Awami League recently announced plans for protests in February, including a general strike. This infuriated student activists and anti-Hasina groups, who

on Wednesday stormed and demolished the historic home of her father, Bangladesh's independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Hasina, whose 15-year regime is blamed for widespread corruption and human rights violations, is expected to address her supporters from exile on Thursday. (AP)

Africa

S.African prez phones Musk:

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa spoke with Donald Trump's "influential" billionaire adviser Elon Musk a day after the new U.S. president promised to cut funding for South Africa over a land expropriation law, Ramaphosa's spokesperson said Wednesday.

Ramaphosa's conversation with Musk was "logical," spokesperson Vincent Magwenya said, because the South African-born Tesla and SpaceX entrepreneur has held previous investment-related discussions with Ramaphosa and is a Trump ally.

The land law, which was signed by Ramaphosa last month, is contentious because it gives the government scope to expropriate land from private parties. (AP)

M23 seizes another town: Rwanda-backed rebels gained ground in

eastern Congo on Wednesday despite the unilateral ceasefire they declared earlier this week, taking control of a town 100 kilometers (60 miles) from the provincial capital of Bukavu, civil society officials and residents told The Associated Press.

Goma remains "under occupation" by Congo's M23 rebels and the ceasefire they announced has been broken as their forces engage in heavy fighting along the main route to South Kivu's main city Bukavu, the UN's deputy representative in Congo, Vivian van de Perre said Wednesday. M23 rebels are now approximately 50 kilometers (31 miles) north of Bukavu, she added.

The M23 rebels on Monday announced the ceasefire on humanitarian grounds after pleas for the safe passage of aid and hundreds of thousands of displaced people. But Congo's government has described the ceasefire as "false communication," and the United Nations has noted reports of heavy fighting with Congolese forces in the mineral-rich region. (AP)

10 Nigerian soldiers killed: An ambush by a "group of criminals" killed at least 10 Nigerian soldiers near the country's border with Burkina Faso this week, Niger's ruling military junta said.

An intervention unit was sent to the west of the country on Monday to catch criminals stealing cattle in Takzat, a village in western Niger, according to a military statement said broadcast on Wednesday night.

"It was during the operation that a group of criminals ambushed the detachment of the internal security forces which resulted in the loss of 10 of our soldiers," it said. It did not specify who the criminals were. (AP)



Van de Perre

Kuwait oil price up to \$78.84 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti oil price rose by 96 cents to USD 78.84 per barrel (pb) on Wednesday, compared with USD 77.88 pb the previous day, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Thursday.

At the global level, the Brent crude went down by USD 1.59 to USD 74.61 pb, and the West Texas Intermediate went down by USD 1.67 to USD 71.03 pb.



KUNA photo
Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of the Capital Markets Authority, Executive Director Dr. Ahmad Al-Melhim.

'Collaboration on Islamic finance'

Kuwait CMA signs MoU with Hong Kong Financial Council

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6, (KUNA): Kuwait's Capital Markets Authority (CMA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Financial Services Development Council in Hong Kong to enhance the partnership and consolidate cooperation in the financial sectors between the two parties.

In a statement to KUNA Thursday, the Authority said that the agreement sets a framework for strengthening ties between the two regions as international financial centers and highlights cooperation, exchange of information and promotion of innovative financial services and products.

According to the statement, Chairman of the Financial Services Development Board, Benjamin Hong, said that this partnership reflects the shared vision of the Board and the Authority to enhance innovation and stimulate further growth in financial sectors.

"Through our combined efforts, we seek to provide greater opportunities in the field of Islamic finance and investment innovation, and together we will build a strong and sustainable financial ecosystem that works towards long-term economic growth," he added.

In turn, the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of the Capital Markets Authority, Executive Director Dr. Ahmad Al-Melhim, said that the Authority has sought, since its establishment and through the issuance of Law No. 7 of 2010, to develop securities activities in the country to be in line with the best international practices and principles.

The Authority has, in a short period of time, strengthened its regu-

latory and supervisory powers by joining the international community by signing several MoUs, some of which are multilateral.

He pointed out that the MoU will open new doors for cooperation between Kuwait and Hong Kong, which will benefit both parties by learning from each other and thus improving the financial services sector in the two regions.

For his part, the Consul General of Kuwait in Hong Kong and Macau, Ambassador Nasser Al-Ghanim, praised the parties that signed the agreement, noting the bilateral ties between the two parties in the areas of "economic growth, financial cooperation and exchange of expertise", which would enable Kuwait to achieve its strategic goals.

The ambassador also touched on the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on the necessity of working to strengthen bilateral relations and raise them to new horizons in addition to expanding them.

The Financial Services Development Board was established in 2013 by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region as a high-level advisory body to engage the sector in formulating proposals for the development of the financial services sector in Hong Kong and charting the strategic direction for development.

The Capital Markets Authority of Kuwait was established in accordance with Law No. 7 of 2010 on the Establishment of the Capital Markets Authority and Regulation of Securities Activities and its amendments.

Public debt weakens currency

Kuwait's public debt impacts real estate market dynamics

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The relationship between public debt and the real estate market in Kuwait cannot be overlooked, as public debt periods often coincide with periods of declining economic growth, weak global markets and reduced demand for real estate, all of which affect real estate prices.

The public debt not only influences the local market but has a ripple effect on global real estate markets, including Kuwait. As one of the largest oil producers, Kuwait is heavily dependent on oil revenues, making it particularly vulnerable to the impacts of global economic downturns.

A drop in oil demand leads to lower income and economic growth rates, which directly affects real estate prices.

Moreover, public debt can influence the strength of the local currency and as global markets deteriorate, foreign investment in real estate declines, affecting supply and demand dynamics and leading to a weakened local currency.

This decreases the purchasing power of Kuwaiti citizens, making it more expensive to purchase or invest in real estate, thus negatively impacting the

market. Despite these challenges, there are several factors that may help Kuwait mitigate the effects of public debt on its real estate market.

First, the Kuwaiti real estate market benefits from strong local demand, backed by high national income levels, which provides a cushion against the impact of public debt.

Second, Kuwait's stability, security and robust infrastructure continue to attract foreign investors, particularly during stable periods.

The real estate market in Kuwait may even present opportunities for recovery during public debt periods. When prices drop due to public debt, investors can purchase properties at lower prices and benefit from future market improvements.

In conclusion, while public debt may temporarily affect the Kuwaiti real estate market, its long-term impact is likely to be limited.

By understanding the challenges and proactively addressing them, investing in Kuwait's real estate market can remain beneficial and profitable. The country must continue to diversify its economy and income sources to support long-term stability and growth.

Business

In collaboration with Kenzi Market

KFH promotes children's financial literacy

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) participated in an innovative and interactive event to promote the principles of savings and early financial planning among children in collaboration with Kenzi Market.

The two-day educational program was held in the Assima Mall, targeting the kids segment. Through the collaboration with Kenzi Market, children had the opportunity to develop their financial awareness, strengthen their saving habits, and gain a deeper understanding of the importance and benefits of saving. This helps prepare them to handle financial responsibilities more effectively in the future.

The Bank's participation, through Baiti account program, is in line with KFH's plans of empowering the next generation and enhance the skills of children when dealing with customers and the overall community.

KFH has always been keen on supporting such initiatives as part of its commitment to constantly develop all segments of society, foster positive values among upcoming generations, and build a sustainable financial future based on awareness and planning.

Additionally, KFH offers a special program for children that provides various benefits, including Baiti savings account (from birth up to 14 years of age), and Al-Hassad account, which allows customers to take part in year-round draws and prizes. The account also features a range of offers and cultural and entertainment activities throughout the year. Moreover, it encourages children to save, promotes the use of modern technology, and



Part of the training program.



Honoring winners of the best project.



Best design winners

makes it easy to manage and track their accounts.

It is worth noting that Kenzi Market is an innovative project that targets

children, by providing a fun, educational experience to reinforce positive financial values. Kenzi Market is distinguished by its approach in which

children are encouraged to participate by introducing their own projects and showcasing products they have created themselves.

General index declines 0.06%

Boursa Kuwait sees mixed performance

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait ended Thursday's trading session with a slight decline, as the general index edged down 4.70 points, or 0.06%, to close at 7,895.39 points.

Trading activity remained strong, with 686.5 million shares exchanged through 21,232 transactions, totaling 202.19 million Kuwaiti dinars (\$622.7 million).

The Main Market Index posted gains, rising 51.64 points (0.71%) to reach 7,343.24 points. A total of 576.2 million shares were traded in 13,516 transactions, amounting to 160.6 million dinars (\$494.6 million).

Meanwhile, the Premier Market Index saw a decline, dropping 19.85 points (0.24%) to 8,423.05 points. Trading volume reached 110.2 million shares across 7,716 transactions, with a total value

of 41.5 million dinars (\$127.8 million).

The Major 50 Index also registered an increase, gaining 31.64 points (0.43%) to close at 7,339.08 points. It recorded a trading volume of 485.7 million shares in 7,063 transactions, amounting to 147.19 million dinars (\$453.3 million).

The market displayed a mixed performance, with the Main Market seeing notable gains while the Premier Market posted slight losses.

Kuwait's trade sector financing surges 33.7% in December 2024

Trade sector loans see 90% annual growth

By Mahmoud Shendi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: In December 2024, the financing provided by local banks to Kuwait's trade sector saw a remarkable increase of 117 million dinars, or 33.7 percent, reaching a total of 463.1 million dinars, compared to 346.2 million dinars in November.

This marked a significant surge on both a monthly and annual basis, with the annual growth standing at 90 percent, representing an increase of 219.5 million dinars from 243.6 million dinars in December 2023.

For the year 2024, total financing to the trade sector amounted to approximately 3.43 billion dinars. The monthly data revealed that December recorded the highest financing level of the year,

surpassing October, which held the second-highest amount at 416 million dinars, followed by September at 369.8 million dinars.

Despite a slight decrease of 1.6 percent (64 million dinars) in the accumulated balance of commercial financing from local banks, reaching 3.711 billion dinars by the end of December (down from 3.775 billion dinars in November), the year-on-year increase was notable, with a 5 percent rise amounting to 175 million dinars compared to December 2023.

The new syndicated financing for the trade sector grew significantly in 2023, up by 33.5 percent, or 766 million dinars, from 2.282 billion dinars in 2022 to 3.048 billion dinars in 2023, continuing to climb by 12.7 percent in December 2024.

Kuwait's trade financing services, which facilitate domestic and international trade through commercial transactions, letters of credit and letters of guarantee, continue to play a vital role in supporting both resident and non-resident trade activities.

The Central Bank's data also revealed that the

financing for Kuwaiti imports from local banks reached 8.13 billion dinars in 2024. December alone saw a sharp increase of 50.6 percent, or 306.2 million dinars, bringing the monthly value to 910.8 million dinars, compared to 604.6 million dinars in November.

On an annual basis, this represented an 11.2 percent rise, increasing by 91.7 million dinars from 819.1 million dinars in December 2023.

Imports financed by local banks saw the highest value in December 2024, followed by September and July, as local banks continue to provide critical financial services for the nation's import sector.

The financing in foreign currencies accounted for the largest share of the total, with the US dollar representing 80.5 percent of financing at 6.55 billion dinars, followed by other currencies such as the euro, UAE dirham and Saudi riyal.

This surge in financing, particularly for trade and imports, highlights Kuwait's continued economic activity and resilience, despite a slight decrease in overall trade surplus for the year.

Real estate transactions drop 23.6% in January 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Real estate transactions in Kuwait experienced a noticeable drop in both the number and value of deals in January 2025, with a 23.6 percent decrease in number and a 42.8 percent decrease in value, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

A total of 404 transactions were registered, valued at 252.4 million dinars, compared to 529 deals worth 441.8 million dinars in December 2024.

According to data from the Real Estate Registration and Documentation Departments at the Min-

istry of Justice, this marks a 1.7 percent decline in the number of deals and a 5.9 percent decrease in value compared to January 2024, when 411 deals were worth 268.25 million dinars.

Notable changes include a 21.2 percent drop in private residential transactions, which saw 281 deals worth 106 million dinars, compared to 357 deals in December.

Investment trading also saw a significant decline, with 108 deals valued at 119.4 million dinars in January, a decrease of nearly 30 percent in

number and 47 percent in value from December.

Conversely, craft real estate transactions saw a 70 percent increase in number and a 45.5 percent rise in value, with 10 deals worth 14.5 million dinars.

Meanwhile, commercial real estate transactions recorded a dramatic decline, dropping by 80 percent in number and 92 percent in value, with only 3 deals worth 5.2 million dinars compared to December's 15 deals worth 61.9 million dinars.

Within its ongoing promotion of the 'Let's Be Aware' banking awareness campaign

NBK warns customers against rewards points redemption scams

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Reflecting its unwavering dedication to furthering initiatives that raise community awareness by actively engaging in increasing financial inclusion and literacy among all sectors, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues its ongoing promotion of the "Let's Be Aware" campaign introduced by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with local banks and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA).

In this context, NBK highlights the importance of educating customers on the threats of phishing tactics using rewards points redemption on fraudulent links received through various channels, including phone calls, emails, or when browsing websites.

In these scams, fraudsters send phishing

emails and SMS messages that appear to be from legitimate sources like government entities, banks or telecom companies, typically asking users to open fraudulent links to update their personal information or redeem rewards points. Once opened, links redirect users to fake webpages to provide personal and banking information like bank account or credit card information in an attempt to collect victims' personal and financial information to steal their bank accounts.

Therefore, NBK urged customers to be cautious by not opening untrusted links or disclosing sensitive personal information and always verifying the sources of messages before taking any action.



Diraya logo

NBK affirms that it will never ask customers for personal information via e-mail, SMS or phone calls, warning them to respond to such phishing attempts aiming to steal their banking or sensitive information or funds.

NBK is always keen to monitor the latest fraud trends to keep customers and users informed about these threats and highlight the

required precautions through the awareness content published on its various social media platforms, where the bank always urges customers to deal only with trusted links, and ignore those from unknown sources.

NBK employs its powerful customer communication channels, leveraging its social media platforms, which are the most popular among all Kuwaiti banks, to educate the widest audience possible, thus maximizing the campaign's reach and impact.

Launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in cooperation with local banks and KBA, the "Let's Be Aware" campaign is the largest across the GCC region that aims to raise banking and financial awareness among banks' customers.

The campaign covers a variety of crucial topics including: anti-fraud tips, ways to maximize benefit from banking services, promoting the savings and investment culture, as well as other related topics.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key supporter and partner in all CBK's campaigns and initiatives aiming to increase financial and banking awareness among different sectors of society. As a leading financial institution in Kuwait and the GCC region, NBK frequently organizes various activities to raise awareness on all topics related to the banking sector, as well as various training courses for its employees to enhance their experience in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime.

Kuwait Real Estate Co. tops trading chart with 49.9% gain in January

GCC equity markets start 2025 strong, Kuwait leads with 5.7% gain

By KAMCO Invest

GCC equity markets started the year on a positive note, in line with most other global indices that witnessed gains at the start of the year, reversing the declines seen during December-2024. Kuwait was the best performing market in the GCC during the month with a gain of 5.7%, the biggest monthly gain in twelve months, highlighting gains across all segments on Boursa Kuwait. Saudi Arabia was next with a gain of 3.1% followed by UAE markets, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, with marginal gains of 1.8% and 0.4%, respectively. On the other hand, Bahrain's All Share Index witnessed the biggest decline in the GCC, falling by 5.4% during the month to the lowest level in more than 25 months, mainly led by an 18.5% fall in shares of one of the largest constituent stocks on the exchange, Aluminum Bahrain. Shares of the company declined to a four-month low after the ongoing merger talks with Saudi Arabia's Maaden ended during the month.

The monthly sector performance chart for the month showed broad-based gains during January-2025 with only the Utilities and Energy sectors in the red with marginal declines. The gainer's side was topped by the Retailing index with a gain of 8.6% followed by the Pharma index that was up 7.0%



during the month led by healthy gains in almost all constituent stocks in these sectors. The Telecom index was next with a gain of 6.2% reflecting healthy gain in shares of STC, Ooredoo and Vodafone Qatar.

Global equity markets witnessed gains with the MSCI ACWI up by 3.3% during January-2025 led by gains in most key global markets. Europe witnessed the biggest gain in 14 months at 6.5% mainly led by 9.2% gain in Germany's Dax index coupled with healthy gain in

benchmarks for France and Italy. The UK also witnessed impressive growth of 6.1%. Meanwhile, crude oil witnessed gains of 6.4% during the month despite a weak second half of the month.

Boursa Kuwait

Boursa Kuwait witnessed broad-based gains during January-2025 with all market segments recording gains. The Premier Market index breached the 8,000 points mark after consistent gains during the second half of the month to close the month at 8,300.6 points

with a gain of 5.9% while the Main 50 Index and the Main Market indices registered gains of 6.8% and 5.1%, respectively. The net impact was a gain of 5.7% for the All-Share Market Index, which was the highest monthly growth in twelve months.

The monthly sector performance chart favored gainers and was topped by the Energy index with a gain of 11.7% followed by the Real Estate and Consumer Discretionary indices with gains of 11.1% and 7.6%, respectively. On

the other hand, the Basic Materials index reported the biggest decline during the month to 3.3% followed by Insurance and Telecommunications with a decline of 0.7% and 0.4%, respectively.

In terms of monthly stock performance, Kuwait Business Town Real Estate Co. topped the chart with a gain of 49.9% followed by National Industries Co. and The Commercial Real Estate Co. with gains of 34.5% and 33.1%, respectively. On the decliners side, National International Holding Co.

topped with a fall of 30.8% followed by Al Kout for Industrial Projects Co. and Wethaq Takaful Insurance Co. with the declines of 20.8% and 19.3%, respectively.

In terms of trading activity, volume traded during the month surged by 2.1% to reach 7.1 Bn shares in January-2025 as compared to 7.0 Bn shares in December-2024. The aggregate value of shares traded during the month also increased by 31.8% to reach KWD 1.7 Bn as compared to KWD 1.3 Bn during December-2024. Kuwait Real Estate Co. topped the monthly value traded chart with KWD 170.1 Mn worth of shares traded followed by Kuwait Finance House and Arzan Financial Group at KWD 158.3 Mn and KWD 132.7 Mn, respectively.

In full year earnings releases, the banking sector started earnings releases with healthy growth in net profits. NBK reported a net profit of KWD 600.1 Mn in FY-2024, up by 7.0%, mainly led by higher net operating income coupled with lower impairment losses. Net profits for KFH reached KWD 601.8 Mn during FY-2024, up by 3.0% mainly due to the increase in the net financing which increased by 18.7%. Boubyan Bank also recorded higher net profits that reached KWD 96.8 Mn in FY-2024 compared to a net profit of KWD 80.4 Mn in FY-2023 led by the increase in net finance income.

Temu, Shein likely to see price hikes

USPS lifts ban on packages from China and Hong Kong

HONG KONG, Feb 6, (AP): The U.S. Postal Service is reversing course a day after placing a ban on all inbound packages from China and Hong Kong.

The post office had announced Tuesday that it would no longer accept parcels from the China and Hong Kong after the U.S. imposed an additional 10% tariff on Chinese goods and ended a customs exception that allowed small value parcels to enter the U.S. without paying tax. The Postal Service reversed course Wednesday but gave no reason. It said it would work with Customs and Border Protection to implement a collection process for the new China tariffs to avoid delivery disruptions.

The post office pointed to the short prepared statement on the reversal when asked for more details about the reversal Wednesday by The Associated Press.

The ban had the potential to create massive disruptions for online shopping platforms like Shein and Temu, popular with younger shoppers in the U.S. for cheap clothing and other products, usually shipped directly from China.

Cheap, direct postal service helps these companies keep costs low, as did the "de minimis" exemption that previously allowed shipments to go tax-free if their value is under \$800.

The suspension by USPS would have likely created delays in shipments and potentially higher prices for the companies that rely on rock-bottom pricing for huge sales.

One day after the U.S. Postal Service said in a notice that it would stop accepting inbound parcels from the China and Hong Kong Posts until further notice, it said Wednesday that would "continue accepting all international inbound mail and packages from China and Hong Kong."

Letters and flats - mail that measures up to 15 inches (38 centimeters) long or 3/4 inches (1.9 centimeters) thick - were not included in the brief ban.

The USPS did not give a reason

for the ban Tuesday, but the suspension came after Trump closed the "de minimis" customs exemption this week for China that allowed shoppers and importers to avoid duties on packages worth below \$800.

The exemption was removed as part of an executive order to levy a 10% tariff on Chinese goods.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection previously stated that it processes an average of over 4 million "de minimis" imports each week.

It also gave no reason for its decision on Wednesday and did not immediately respond to requests from The Associated Press for comment.

Under the new tariffs imposed by Trump on Chinese imports, analysts say consumers are likely to see price hikes and potential delays in shipments from companies like Shein and Temu.

Chinese exports of low-value packages soared to \$66 billion in 2023, up from \$5.3 billion in 2018, according to report released last week by the Congressional Research Service. In the U.S., Temu, which is owned by China's PDD Holdings, and Shein comprise about 17% of the discount market for fast fashion, toys and other consumer goods, the report said.

Alibaba's AliExpress has also commonly used the trade loophole. Neil Saunders, a managing director with research firm GlobalData, noted some businesses who sell through Shopify and other e-commerce platforms, such as Etsy, also ship packages to consumers directly from China. Amazon does the same for a subset of products sold through Amazon Haul, a low-cost online storefront it launched last year to better compete with Shein and Temu, which rely more heavily on de minimis.

Shein and Temu did not immediately comment on the USPS policy changes. On its website, Temu says it also works with private shipping companies such as FedEx and UPS. Shein notes customers can return their packages through USPS and FedEx.

Bank of England cuts interest rates again amid weak growth

Third rate cut in six months brings UK base rate to 4.50%

LONDON, Feb 6, (AP): The Bank of England has cut its main interest rate for the third time in six months with the British economy struggling to post any meaningful growth.

In a statement Thursday, the bank said the nine-member Monetary Policy Committee lowered its main interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point to 4.50%, taking it to its lowest level since mid-2023.

Seven of the members backed the cut, while the other two voted for an even bigger reduction of half a percentage point to 4.25%.

The base rate helps dictate how expensive it is for individuals to take out a mortgage or a loan, while also influencing the returns offered by banks on savings.

The latest cut reflects some concern about the outlook for the British economy, which has barely grown over the past six months. In forecasts accompanying the decision, the bank halved its growth projection for the British economy to 0.75%.

"It will be welcome news to many that we have been able to cut interest rates again today," said Bank Gov. Andrew Bailey. "We'll be monitoring the U.K. economy and global developments very closely and taking a gradual and careful approach to reducing rates further. Low and stable inflation is the foundation of a healthy economy and it's the Bank of England's job to ensure that."

The rate-setting panel is tasked with ensuring that inflation, as measured by the consumer prices index, hits a 2% target over the coming couple years or so.

Though inflation is standing at 2.5% and expected to rise in coming months, partly as a result of business tax increases from the new Labour government, most economists think it will then trend lower towards the target, hence the panel's ability to cut.

Treasury chief Rachel Reeves welcomed the cut but said she was "still not satisfied with the growth rate" and that the new Labour govern-



A man is silhouetted in front of the Bank of England in London, Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025 which is widely expected to cut interest rates for the third time in six months later Thursday. (AP)

ment will go "faster to kickstart economic growth."

The Labour government, led by Prime Minister Keir Starmer, has said growth is its number one priority as it will boost living standards and generate funds for cash-starved public services. With growth proving elusive, the party's popularity has fallen sharply since its election victory.

Luke Bartholomew, deputy chief economist at abrdn, formerly Aberdeen Asset Management, said the fact two rate-setters backed a half-point cut despite an upward revision in the near-term inflation forecasts, "gives a sense of how concerned some policymakers are about the headwinds to growth."

Inflation is way down from levels seen a couple of years ago, partly because central banks have dramatically increased borrowing costs from near zero during the coronavirus pandemic. Prices then began to shoot up, first as a result of supply chain issues and later because of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which pushed energy costs higher.

As inflation rates have declined from multi-decade highs, central banks, including the U.S. Federal Reserve have started cutting interest rates, though few, if any, economists think that rates will fall back to the super-low levels that persisted in the years after the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 and during the pandemic.

Shares fall 3% after announcing corporate split

Honeywell to split into 3 independent companies

NEW YORK, Feb 6: Honeywell, one of the last remaining U.S. industrial conglomerates, will split into three independent companies, following in the footsteps of manufacturing giants like General Electric and Alcoa.

The company said Thursday that it will separate from its automation and aerospace technologies businesses. Including plans announced earlier to spin off its advanced materials business, Honeywell will consist of three smaller entities in hopes that they will each be more agile.

"The formation of three independent, industry-leading companies builds on the powerful foundation we have created, positioning each to pursue tailored growth strategies, and unlock significant value for shareholders and customers," Honeywell Chairman and CEO Vimal Kapur said in a statement.

Honeywell had said in December that it was considering spinning off its aerospace division. The public announcement arrived about one month after Elliott Investment Management revealed a stake of more than \$5 billion in the aerospace, automation and materials company.

Elliott had been pushing for the Charlotte, North Carolina, company to separate its automation and aerospace businesses.

The board of Honeywell International Inc. had been exploring strategic options for the company since earlier in 2024.

The company, which makes everything from eye solution to barcode readers, has been seeking ways to make itself more nimble. Over the past year and a half, just after Kapur took over as CEO, Honeywell has announced plans for the advanced materials business spinoff, entered into an agreement to sell its personal protective equipment business, and made several acquisitions.

The separation of the automation and aerospace technologies businesses is expected to be completed in the second half of 2026. The spinoff of the advanced materials business is anticipated to be completed by the end of this year or early next year.

Like Honeywell, other U.S. conglomerates have been pressured by shareholders to simplify their structures, allowing each segment of the company to move more freely and

adapt to changes in their respective markets.

Iconic CEOs like Jack Welch of General Electric spent years building corporate American behemoths with the belief that with scale came power. Yet those massive companies were forced to compete with startups with a narrow focus and a more clearly defined set of goals.

Investors also wanted a more clear view of the priorities within each division, which became more murky as the companies grew.

In 2015 metals maker Alcoa said that it was splitting into two independent companies, separating its bauxite, aluminum and casting operations from its engineering, transportation and global rolled products businesses.

GE announced in 2021 that it was dividing itself into three public companies focused on aviation, health care and energy. At the time, the move was viewed as a potential signal of the end of conglomerates as a whole thanks to the move toward a digital economy.

Shares fell almost 3% before the market opened Thursday.

Crude oil prices edge up

Global shares rise following Wall Street rally

TOKYO, Feb 6, (AP): Global shares were trading mostly higher Thursday, after a Wall Street rally that followed profit reports from major companies.

France's CAC 40 edged up 0.3% to 7,912.19 in early trading, while Germany's DAX rose 0.7% to 21,710.10. Britain's FTSE 100 rose 0.8% to 8,694.89. U.S. shares were set to drift higher with Dow futures edging up 0.1% to 45,059.00. S&P 500 futures rose 0.1% to 6,093.75.

In Asia, Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 gained 0.6% to finish at 39,066.53. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 surged 1.2% to 8,520.70. South Korea's KOSPI edged up 1.1% to 2,536.75. Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 1.4% to 20,891.62, while the Shanghai Composite added 1.3% to 3,270.66.

In Japan, shares of Honda Motor Co. and Nissan Motor Corp. both rose after Japanese media said they were ditching their talks

to set up a joint holding company. Neither company confirmed the report. An update on the talks is expected by mid-February, but no date has been set.

Chinese stocks have performed well lately following news on Chinese tech startup DeepSeek, which seems to have caught up with American companies at the forefront of generative AI at a fraction of the cost.

Uncertainty is also hanging over the global economy because of President Donald Trump's tariffs. After rocking financial markets around the world at the start of this week, worries about a potentially punishing global trade war have eased a bit after Trump gave 30-day reprieves for tariffs on both Mexico and Canada. That bolstered traders' hopes that Trump sees tariffs as merely a tool for negotiation, rather than as a long-term policy.

"Traders are closely watching for potential talks between Chi-

nese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Trump. Although no call has taken place yet, markets may find some relief in the absence of new trade hostilities," said Anderson Alves at ActivTrades.

In the meantime, Trump has pressed ahead with tariffs on Chinese goods, and Mericle expects tariffs to hit autos from the European Union, among other potential moves. That could drive a one-time boost to inflation, which could leave a widely followed measure of underlying inflation trends at 2.6% in December, above the Federal Reserve's target of 2%.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude added 17 cents to \$71.20 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, rose 10 cents to \$74.71 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar inched up to 152.58 Japanese yen from 152.55 yen. The euro cost \$1.0369, down from \$1.0407.

Business Plus



Global tariff threats may damage US credibility as trade partner

Tariffs could undermine US economic leadership, expert predicts



National flags representing the United States and Mexico hang inside a textile factory that produces T-shirts, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, Tuesday, Feb. 4, 2025. (AP)

By Bedassa Tadesse

University of Minnesota Duluth

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



On Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump announced a plan to slap steep tariffs on imports from key American trading partners - 25% on goods from Mexico and Canada and 10% on imports from China. His stated reason? To curb illegal immigration and drug trafficking.

Both Mexico and Canada managed to buy some time. After urgent phone calls with Trump on Feb. 3,

their leaders each secured a one-month reprieve. But Mexico's Claudia Sheinbaum and Canada's Justin Trudeau also made it clear to their U.S. counterpart: If these tariffs go through, they'll hit back with their own trade restrictions. The world is watching the opening moves of what could become another costly trade war.

As a professor of economics, I can explain why this poses significant risks to the U.S. economy and American consumers. Economic theory suggests that tariffs distort market efficiency, raising production costs while limiting consumer choice and increasing prices.

While politicians often frame tariffs as a way to punish other

countries, they actually hit domestic consumers and businesses hardest. Whether they're facing higher grocery bills or disruptions in manufacturing, Americans will feel the strain.

When tariffs are imposed, companies must either absorb the additional costs - cutting into profits and potentially threatening jobs - or pass these costs to consumers through higher prices. Small businesses operating on thin profit margins are particularly vulnerable, as many lack the resources to quickly switch suppliers.

Worse yet, such measures commonly set off a cycle of retaliation. During past trade disputes involving the U.S., affected nations

have responded with counter-tariffs on American products, including textiles, steel and agricultural goods. Such retaliatory efforts have led to sharp declines in U.S. exports.

During the first Trump administration, for example, China imposed retaliatory tariffs on U.S. agricultural exports. As a result, the U.S. farmers lost billions of dollars, and the U.S. spent billions in government aid to offset those losses. China has already issued new tariffs on imports of U.S. goods and export controls on some of its exports to the U.S. to retaliate for Trump's current move.

History also shows that trade wars are self-defeating. The Smoot-

Hawley Tariff Act of 1930, which imposed tariffs on over 20,000 imported goods, prompted swift retaliation from trading partners and contributed to deepening the Great Depression.

Modern trade wars hit closer to home than most Americans realize. The recent tariff threat against Colombia reveals why. In 2023, Colombian farmers supplied US\$1.14 billion worth of fresh-cut flowers to U.S. florists. In a near-crisis that lasted a weekend, Trump threatened to slap steep tariffs on the South American nation, right when flower shops across America were stocking up for one of their busiest seasons: Valentine's Day.

The same tariffs would have hit Colombian coffee too, affecting everything from neighborhood cafes to grocery store prices. This shows how modern trade disputes can instantly disrupt the everyday purchases Americans make.

Other key trading partners, including the European Union, have also come into the crosshairs. On Jan. 30, 2025, the president issued a stark warning to Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - the so-called BRICS nations - threatening 100% tariffs if they continued efforts to reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar as their reserve currency.

These threats can do more than alienate strategic partners; they risk accelerating dedollarization - pushing nations to develop alternative financial systems that weaken U.S. influence in global trade.

Beyond causing immediate economic pain, constant tariff threats risk damaging America's credibility as a reliable trading partner. The U.S. helped establish the rules-based international trading system, but regular tariff threats erode global trust and push trading partners to seek alternatives to the U.S. market.

The reality is clear: No country in the modern era has successfully used tariffs to grow its economy or improve the well-being of its people. The countries that are most dependent on tariff revenues for their national budgets are among the world's poorest and least developed economies.

I believe the path to maintaining America's economic leadership lies in embracing a smarter, more strategic trade policy - one that builds alliances instead of breaking them.

A strategy that prioritizes negotiation, fosters innovation and enhances competitiveness - and that doesn't rely on protectionist tactics more often used by developing nations - would strengthen cooperation and stability, ensuring long-term economic prosperity. (AP)

‘ Trump’s tariffs could disrupt everyday purchases ’

Musk leads initiative to restructure federal government

Trump offers financial incentives for federal workers to resign

WASHINGTON, Feb 6, (AP): Thousands of miles from Elon Musk's office in the White House complex, a federal worker based in the Pacific Northwest is wondering whether to quit.

Musk, one of President Donald Trump's most powerful advisers, has orchestrated an unprecedented financial incentive for people to leave their government jobs, promising several months of pay in return for their resignation. The worker, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution, wants to take the money and move overseas.

But she's worried. What if the offer is too good to be true? What if this is really a covert effort to make a list of disloyal government employees?

Her situation is a microcosm of the uncertainty sweeping through the federal government, which is the country's single largest employer. More than 2 million workers - analysts, nurses, scientists, accountants, food inspectors and loan processors - face a deadline of 11:59 p.m. EST Thursday to decide if they should leave.

The deferred resignation program is part of Trump's plan to remake the federal government, weakening what allies describe as the "deep state" that undermined the Republican president during his first term. Administration officials said they can save taxpayer money by presenting employees with "a valuable, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to

stop working while still collecting a paycheck until Sept. 30.

On Wednesday, the administration ramped up its pressure on employees to leave, sending a reminder that layoffs or furloughs could come next.

"The majority of federal agencies are likely to be downsized through restructurings, realignments, and reductions in force," said the message from the Office of Personnel Management, which has been a nexus of Musk's efforts to downsize the government.

The email said anyone who remains will be expected to be "loyal" and "will be subject to enhanced standards of suitability and conduct as we move forward." Some employees could be reclassified to limit civil service protections as well.

"Employees who engage in unlawful behavior or other misconduct will be prioritized for appropriate investigation and discipline, including termination," the email said.

Democrats said workers shouldn't accept the deferred resignation program because it wasn't authorized by Congress, raising the risk they won't get paid. Unions have sued to stop Trump's plans, and a judge will consider whether to block the buyout offer at a hearing Thursday afternoon in Boston.

"It's a scam and not a buyout," said Everett Kelley, president of the American Federation of Government Employees.

Kelley said he tells workers that

"if it was me, I wouldn't do it."

An employee at the Department of Education, who also spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of retaliation, said the administration appeared desperate to get people to sign the agreement. However, she said there were too many red flags, such as a clause waiving the right to sue if the government failed to honor its side of the deal.

Trump put Musk, the world's richest man, in charge of the so-called Department of Government Efficiency, which is a sweeping initiative to reduce the size and scope of the federal government. The original email offering the deferred resignation program was titled "Fork in the road," echoing a similar message that Musk sent Twitter employees two years ago after he bought the social media platform.

Trump administration officials have organized question-and-answer sessions with employees as the deadline approaches.

Rachel Oglesby, the chief of staff at the U.S. Department of Education who previously worked at the America First Policy Institute, said Trump is trying to reduce the federal workforce.

"I know there's been a lot of questions out there about whether it's real and whether it's a trick," she said, according to a recording obtained by The Associated Press. "And it's exactly what it looks like. It's one of the many tools that he's

using to try to achieve the campaign promise to bring reform to the civil service and changes to D.C."

The issue was also discussed during a meeting with Department of Agriculture employees, according to another recording obtained by the AP. Marlon Taubenheim, a human resources official, acknowledged that "these are very trying times" and "there's a lot of stress."

"Unfortunately, we don't have all the answers," he said.

Jacqueline Ponti-Lazaruk, another agency leader, said employees "probably didn't have the runway of time that you might have liked to make a life-changing decision."

For those who remain, she said, "we'll just keep plugging along."

Assurances from administration officials have not alleviated concerns across a range of agencies. Some federal workers said they did not trust the validity of the offers, doubting that Trump has the authority to disburse money. Others point to his record of stiffing contractors as a New York real estate mogul.

Scattered protests have sprung up outside federal buildings, including on Tuesday at the Office of Personnel Management.

"I'm taking a risk and being bold and trying to get more federal workers to take a risk to speak out," said Dante O'Hara, who said he works for the government. "Because if we don't, then we're all going to lose our jobs and they're going to put all these loyalists or people that will

be their shock troops." Government jobs have often been considered secure positions, but O'Hara said there's fear in the workforce. The sense from his colleagues is "I don't know if I'm going to be here tomorrow because, like, we don't know what's going to happen."

Dan Smith, a Maryland resident whose father was a research scientist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, said federal workers are "so underappreciated and so taken for granted."

"It's one thing to downsize the government. It's one thing to try to obliterate it," Smith said. "And that's what's going on. And that is what is so frightening and disgusting and requires pushback."

Mary-Jean Burke, a physical therapist for the Department of Veterans Affairs in Indianapolis, said she's worried that too many people will leave, jeopardizing health care services. Burke, who also serves as a union official, said doubts have also been growing over whether to take the offer.

"Originally, I think people were like, 'I'm out of here,'" she said. But then they saw a social media post from DOGE, which said employees can "take the vacation you always wanted, or just watch movies and chill, while receiving your full government pay and benefits."

The message backfired because "that kind of thing sounded a little bit too good to be true and people were hesitant," Burke said.

editor's choice



'Wicked' star celebrated for her contribution to theater

Erivo feted as Harvard's Hasty Pudding Woman of the Year

CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Feb 6, (AP): Screaming fans lined the streets in frigid conditions Wednesday to catch a glimpse of Cynthia Erivo, the "Wicked" star who is being celebrated as Harvard University's Hasty Pudding Theatricals Woman of the Year.

Erivo, bundled in a parka and donning her trademark long fingernails, blew kisses to the crowd and mouthed "I love you" as the car she and costumed members of the Hasty Pudding Theatricals were in slowly made its way through Cambridge. One fan handed her a red rose and several held up signs praising her star power. She also got a few kisses on the cheek from the two theatrical members.

The half-hour parade also featured marching bands, a mechanical bull in the back of a pickup truck and members of the Blue Man Group, who shot colorful confetti into the air.

"She's such an icon," said On-ovughakpor Otigbige, a 21-year-old Harvard student from New York

who followed Erivo.

"She's done so much for Black women, especially in theater," Otigbige said. "As a Black woman in theater myself, it was just really amazing to finally see her in person ... Oh my gosh, I got so many selfies. Me and my friend, we were chasing her from the start to the end of the parade."

A few hours later, Erivo received her Pudding Pot award at a celebratory roast.

She endured a string of comedians that made bad jokes about "Wicked" being long before they were forced off stage. Then she took part in a finger-painting contest, scratching out an abstract painting of what was supposed to be "Wicked" co-star Ariana Grande. She then pleases a cheering crowd by belting out a few notes in a singing competition before receiving a blue Pudding Pot from members of the Blue Man Group -- one of them dressed as witch and another operating a leaf blower to make the cape flow. The real Pudding Pot followed.

Erivo told the crowd her whole



Harvard University's Hasty Pudding Theatricals Woman of the Year Cynthia Erivo hoists her award during a roast, Wednesday, Feb. 5, in Cambridge, Mass. (AP)

day was "fantastic" and afterward told reporters that it was honor to be recognized by a theater group for her work.

"It means a great deal actually because theater doesn't really leave you, the craft that you love, the work you are put through, the standard

you build," she said. "It helps to build the work you do on screen ... To be awarded for things I've done on stage means a great deal. It means it's still shining through, which is quite nice."

Along with starring in the smash hit musical, the British entertainer is a two-time Oscar nominee and an Emmy Award, Tony Award and Grammy Award winner.

Erivo burst onto the scene with her brilliant performance in the Broadway revival of "The Color Purple," winning her the 2016 Tony for best actress in a musical. She performed songs from the play on the "Today" show, earning the Daytime Emmy for outstanding music performance in a daytime program. The show's soundtrack won best musical theater album at the 2017 Grammys.

Last year, Erivo starred in and produced "Drift," which follows a young Liberian refugee who has escaped her war-torn country to a Greek island. In 2021, Erivo was nominated for an Emmy for her portrayal of Aretha Franklin in the National Geographic

series "Genius: Aretha."

"We are holding space for Cynthia Erivo's arrival," Man and Woman of the Year Events Coordinator Hannah Frazer said in a statement before Wednesday's celebrations. "We're sweeping out our broomstick closets and prepping some wicked smart humor as we eagerly await her in February. Before she flies off with her Pudding Pot, she'll have to work a little magic to earn it."

The theater group dates to 1844 and claims to be the world's third-oldest still operating. After the celebratory roast, Erivo was scheduled to attend a performance of Hasty Pudding Theatricals' 176th production, "101 Damnations."

Actor Jon Hamm, who came to fame starring as ad executive Don Draper on the AMC series "Mad Men," is the 2025 Man of the Year. He received his Pudding Pot on Jan. 31.

Every year since 1951, the Pudding has bestowed its Woman of the Year award on actors including Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts, Scarlett Johansson and Annette Bening.

Obit

Met bass

Paul Plishka dies aged 83

LOS ANGELES, Feb 6, (AP): Paul Plishka, a powerful bass with a ready smile and hearty laugh who sang 1,672 performances at the Metropolitan Opera over 51 years, has died. He was 83.

Plishka died Monday at a hospice in Wilmington, North Carolina, his wife, Sharon Thomas, said Wednesday.

His Met career spanned generations, from a debut as the Monk alongside

Renata Tebaldi, Sherrill Milnes and Rosalind Elias in Ponchielli's "La Gioconda" on Sept. 21, 1967, to his final appearance in Puccini's "La Bohème" on March 10, 2018.

"He was a beloved character at the Met," company general manager Peter Gelb said. "He is one of the major artists in the Met's history, I would say, and with an interesting arc to his career. To sort of toil in medium-size roles and small roles for years and then suddenly become a major starring presence, I can't think of any other singer who had a career arc like that."

Debut

Plishka recalled his debut during a 2012 interview with The Associated Press.

"These were idols. They were all gods for me," he said. "The thing I remember is my costume. I remember under my arms, I was so nervous the perspiration came flowing out like a fire hydrant."

He sang 88 roles at the Met, and his performance total ranks ninth in the company's history. While many were as a comprimario, a supporting part surrounding the stars, he sang all three bass roles in Mussorgsky's "Boris Godunov," Philip II in Verdi's "Don Carlo" and for his 25th anniversary with the company the title role in Verdi's "Falstaff."

"As great as 'Don Carlo' was, the 'Falstaff' really leaves everything in the dust because of the personality of the character and the music. For me, that was the top of the hill," he said. "I love what I've done over the years. I sort of jokingly say it beats working for a living."

Music

Born Aug. 28, 1941, Plishka grew up in Old Forge, Pennsylvania, and moved with his family to Paterson, New Jersey, when he was 16. He attended Eastside High School and was directed toward opera by a teacher after he performed Jud Fry in "Oklahoma!" Plishka majored in music at Montclair State College and made his opera debut at the Paterson Lyric Opera Theater.

After singing with the Met's national touring company, he debuted in that 1967 performance. In 1971, he was the Sacristan in Puccini's "Tosca" on the night conductor James Levine made his Met debut.

Plishka said that during rehearsals for those 1971 performances, baritone Peter Glossop pointed to the inexperienced singer and said sarcastically: "That's a Sacristan?" By 2012, Plishka said a colleague praised him in rehearsal for making the small role memorable, saying "Now that's a Sacristan!"

"It only took 40 years to grow into the part," Plishka said with a laugh.

Film



This image released by Antipode Films shows a scene from 'No Other Land'. (AP)

'It is a wrenching movie to see'

'No Other Land' highlights Palestinian plight

LOS ANGELES, Feb 6, (AP): The irony shouldn't be lost on anyone that "No Other Land," a documentary about the systemic demolition of Palestinian homes in the West Bank, cannot find a cinematic home, either with a distributor or a major US streamer.

Producers have opted to self-distribute this powerful, pointed look at Israel's policies in seized land despite the movie earning an Oscar nomination and wins at the Berlin International Film Festival, Gotham Awards and Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards. "No Other Land" is, in its nature, a piece of advocacy. There are no both-sidesing explored here. The filmmakers - a Palestinian-Israeli collective of four directors - make it clear they hope documenting their plight will get the United States to pressure Israel to stop the destruction.

The documentary is largely told from the perspective of Basel Adra, an activist born in Masafer Yatta, a collection of villages in the southern mountains of the occupied West Bank. The Israelis have ordered Palestinians off the land to make room for a military train-

ing ground.

Shot between 2019 and 2023 - filming ended before the Israel-Hamas war exploded - the bulldozers arrive and never stop, protected by soldiers and ripping through simple concrete homes. The residents retreat to caves, albeit with high-def TV connections. Then they try to rebuild, often under the stealth of night. Then the bulldozers return.

"They destroy us slowly. Every week, a home," goes the narration. "Every week a new family must decide: Endure, or leave their land."

Asked

Adra and Palestinian co-writer and co-director Hamdan Ballal are joined by an Israeli journalist, Yuval Abraham, who arrives in Masafer Yatta with the cinematographer Rachel Szor. Abraham is asked point blank on his arrival: "What do you think about what your country is doing to us?" His answer: "I think it's a crime."

It is a wrenching movie to see: Soldiers,

with vague permission from a court that Palestinians have no say in, push old women and children, not answering their pleas to stop and merely waving away residents whose families have lived in the region since the 1830s. The residents can't vote and their license plates set them apart from Israelis. They're hoping enough likes on social media can change their plight.

Bewildered

We see women carrying out their rugs from rubble and children bewildered as their outdoor is knocked down.

"We have no other land," says one resident, giving the documentary its name. At one point, a playground is demolished. At another, a school. Then a well is filled with concrete and water lines are cut with a chainsaw. Sometimes, nearby Israeli settlers attack as soldiers stand by.

The Palestinians are unarmed, except for cellphone cameras, which the soldiers clearly hate. When they march - a ragtag group with

a banner reading "Palestinian Lives Matter" - they are met with stun grenades.

Shaky cellphone footage of military altercations mix with archive footage, TV newscasts and dreamy, languid shots of dusty villages at night lit by naked bulbs. Sometimes current day images melt to those of a generation ago, when in home movies we see Adra's father protesting the same injustices, a never-ending cycle. His first memory is his father's first arrest.

"No Other Land" is a piece of resistance but also humanization. When Adra is about to be arrested, his mother says what mothers regularly do: "Go wear a warmer coat," she counsels. Palestinian children laugh as they play games in the street, throw snowballs in winter and sway gleefully from makeshift swings.

"I hope we'll change this bad reality," says Adra at the end. "I hope," chimes in Abraham.

"No Other Land," in movie theaters in select cities, is not rated but has language and violence throughout. Running time: 95 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four.

Variety

LOS ANGELES: A Texas crisis communications specialist has sued Blake Lively for defamation after the actor pulled him into her legal fight with co-star and director Justin Baldoni over their film, "It Ends With Us."

Jed Wallace and his company, Street Relations, filed the \$7 million lawsuit in federal court in Texas on Tuesday. It says he had nothing to do with any campaign to harm Lively's reputation as she alleged in a court filing.

Wallace is not among the defendants in Lively's federal lawsuit against Baldoni, his production company and publicists, in which she alleges sexual and other harassment during the production and a campaign to smear her after it. The

crisis specialist is named in the court papers and the New York Times story published on the day the series

of legal battles began in December when Lively filed a complaint.

Lively's lawyers said in a statement that Wallace's lawsuit "is not just a publicity stunt."

"It is transparent retaliation in response to allegations contained within a sexual harassment and retaliation complaint that Ms. Lively filed with the California Civil Rights Department," the statement said. "While this lawsuit will be dismissed, we are pleased that Mr. Wallace has finally emerged



Lively

from the shadows, and that he too will be held accountable in federal court."

In a filing last week in Hays County, Texas, that seeks a deposition from Wallace, Lively alleges he was used by publicists working with Baldoni to weaponize "a digital army around the country, including in New York and Los Angeles, to create, seed, manipulate, and advance disparaging content that appeared to be authentic on social media platforms and internet chat forums." (AP)

WASHINGTON: A federal judge is considering next steps in a slow-moving court case over whether to release documents that could spell legal trouble for Prince Harry, with an influential conservative think tank seeking to reveal if he lied on his immigration paperwork about past drug use or received special treatment to

enter the country.

The case before US District Judge Carl Nichols centers on the circumstances under which Harry - the Duke of Sussex and the son of King Charles III - entered the United States when he and his wife Meghan Markle moved to Southern California in 2020. The Heritage Foundation sued after the Department of Homeland Security largely rejected its Freedom of Information Act request to release Harry's records. Harry is not a party in the lawsuit.

"We believe the American people have a right to know whether Prince Harry was truthful on his application," said Nile Gardiner, head of the Heritage Foundation's Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom.

Heritage has argued there is "intense public interest" in whether Harry received special treatment during the application process, particu-

larly after his 2023 memoir "Spare" revealed past drug use.

Harry says in "Spare" that he took cocaine several times starting around age 17, in order "to feel." To be different." He also acknowledged using cannabis and psychedelic mushrooms.

The US routinely asks about drug use on its visa applications, and it has been linked to travel headaches for celebrities, including chef Nigella Lawson, singer Amy Winehouse and model Kate Moss. Acknowledgment of past drug use doesn't necessarily bar people from entering or staying in the country, but answering untruthfully can have serious consequences.

"If he lied, that gets you deported," Heritage's attorney Samuel Dewey told reporters after the hearing. "People are routinely deported for lying on immigration forms." (AP)



This image released by the San Francisco Opera shows composer Huang Ruo, whose 'The Monkey King,' will premiere at the San Francisco Opera on Nov. 14. (AP)

New opera brings Asian hero to San Francisco stage

Huang Ruo's 'Monkey King' to make world debut

NEW YORK, Feb. 6, (AP) — Huang Ruo watched his kids on Halloween during the coronavirus pandemic his son dressed as Spider-Man and Batman, his daughter as Elsa from "Frozen."

"I was just thinking, wouldn't it be nice to have a superhero figure from Asia so all these kids could have something from that part of the world to wear, to look up to?" the composer said.

He decided to write "The Monkey King," based on an episode from the 16th century Chinese novel "Journey to the West" in which a primate born from stone acquires supernatural powers and seeks immortality. The work, with singing in English and Mandarin, will be given its world premiere by the San Francisco Opera on Nov. 14, the company announced Tuesday.

San Francisco Opera general director Matthew Shilvoek issued the commission following the success of Bright Sheng's "Dream of the Red Chamber," which the company premiered in 2016. Librettos of both were written by David Henry Hwang, whose "M. Butterfly" won the 1988 Tony Award for best play.

"We were looking at how do we continue building this repertoire of pieces that really resonate with an Asian American audience here in San Francisco but have the potential to cross the Pacific and find resonance in Asia, as well," Shilvoek said.

voek said.

Ruo's compositions include "Bound," which premiered at the Houston Grand Opera in 2014, and "An American Soldier," first seen at the Washington National Opera later that year. He is composing "The Wedding Banquet," based on Ang Lee's 1993 movie, to appear at New York's Metropolitan Opera in 2027-28 following its premiere at the Seattle Opera.

Ruo wrote "The Monkey King" in part as a response to discrimination during the pandemic.

"That was during the time that Asians and Asian Americans were being harassed," he said. "I thought it would be good to have some positive energy."

There will be eight performances through Nov. 30, including a livestream on Nov. 18. Diane Paulus directs a production with scenic design and puppetry by Basil Twist. The title character is presented in three ways: by a singer, a dancer and a puppet. Tenor Kang Wang makes his company debut in the title role.

San Francisco's season opens Sept. 5 with a revival of Verdi's "Rigoletto" in a production originally by Mark Lamos from 1997, led by music director Eun Sun Kim and starring Amartuvshin Enkhbat, Adela Zaharia and Giovanni Sala.

Jake Heggie's "Dead Man Walking" opens Sept. 14 in

new-to-San Francisco Leonard Foglia staging from 2002 to mark the 25th anniversary of its world premiere in San Francisco. Jamie Barton is featured as Sister Helen, and Susan Graham, who sang Helen in the premiere, is Mrs. Patrick De Rocher.

A new production of Wagner's "Parsifal" directed by Matthew Ozawa opens Oct. 25 with a cast that includes Brandon Jovanovich, Kwangchul Youn and Brian Mulligan. Rossini's "Il Barbiere di Siviglia (The Barber of Seville)" starts the spring season on May 28, 2025, in an Emilio Sagi production from 2013 and will be followed by Strauss' "Elektra" starting June 7 in a Keith Warner production originally seen at the Prague National Theatre in 2016 and San Francisco the following year.

The six productions match 2024-25 and are down from eight in 2023-24. Shilvoek anticipates a \$15 million structural imbalance in this season's budget that projects \$87 million in expenses, a difference that will be covered by a greater reliance on endowment. San Francisco sold 79% of tickets for its fall season, 3% above goal, and its average audience age has dropped.

"I do take a huge amount of optimism and encouragement," Shilvoek said. "The core relationship of audiences to the artistic product is the strongest I've ever seen it."

Fashion



Janelle Monáe arrives at The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute benefit gala celebrating 'China: Through the Looking Glass' on May 4, 2015, in New York. (AP)

'Tailored for You' to focus on Black style

Suit up! Met Gala reveals dress code

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 6, (AP) — Met Gala guests, suit up!

That was the order from on high as the Metropolitan Museum of Art revealed the dress code for its annual lavish celebration of fashion in May: "Tailored for You," a nod to the accompanying exhibit's focus on suiting and menswear.

It's a suitable concept - meant to be liberally interpreted, of course - for the first Met Gala exhibit in more than 20 years to focus exclusively on menswear, specifically Black style in menswear over the centuries.

The Met's Costume Institute also announced on Tuesday that it will be reviving what it called a longstanding tradition of a "host committee" - basically a new slate of high-profile celebrities on top of the previously announced gala hosts: Pharrell Williams, Lewis Hamilton, Colman Domingo, ASAP Rocky and LeBron James. (Vogue editor Anna Wintour, who oversees the gala each year, rounds out the list.)

The new committee includes a slew of luminaries from various fields: athletes Simone Biles and husband Jonathan Owens, Angel Reese and Sha'Carri Richardson; filmmakers Spike Lee, Tonya Lewis Lee and Regina King; actors Ayo Edebiri, Audra McDonald and Jeremy Pope; musicians Doechii, Usher, Tyla, Janelle Monáe and André 3000; author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie;

artists Jordan Casteel, Rashid Johnson and Kara Walker; playwrights Jeremy O. Harris and Branden Jacobs-Jenkins; and fashion figures Grace Wales Bonner, Edward Enninful, Dapper Dan and Olivier Rousteing.

Celebrity chef Kwame Onwuachi will create the menu for the gala. A huge fundraiser for the Costume Institute, the annual event - which last year brought in a record sum of more than \$26 million - also launches the spring exhibit. This year's exhibit, "Superfine: Tailoring Black Style," will run longer than previous shows at six months, and is inspired by Monica L. Miller's book, "Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity."

"The theme this year is not only timely," said Usher, "but also speaks to our rich culture that should always be widely celebrated."

Added Richardson: "Our style isn't just what we wear - it's how we move, how we own our space, how we tell our story without saying a word." Both host committee members spoke in a statement provided by the Met.

The Met says the show "presents a cultural and historical examination of Black style from the 18th century to today through the lens of dandyism." Miller, a Barnard professor and guest curator of the show, along with the Met's star curator Andrew Bolton, noted at a museum

event last year that back in the 1780s, "dandies" were often defined as "men who paid distinct and sometimes excessive attention to dress."

"Historical definitions of dandyism range from absolute precision in dress and tailoring to flamboyance and fabulousness," Miller said. The show will focus specifically on Black dandyism; more broadly, it will chronicle the ways in which Black people have used dress and fashion over the centuries to transform their identities, the museum said.

Among the artists contributing to the exhibit design is Torkwase Dyson, who will use her signature "hyper-shapes" to create standalone monumental sculptures, or "architectural zones." Artist Iké Udé, a consultant for the show, will curate a section that highlights Julius Soubise, one of the first Black dandies who challenged societal norms in 18th-century London.

The show will be divided into 12 sections, each representing a characteristic that defines "dandy" style: ownership, presence, distinction, disguise, freedom, champion, respectability, jook, heritage, beauty, cool, and cosmopolitanism.

The Met Gala will take place May 5. "Superfine: Tailoring Black Style" will be open to the public from May 10 to Oct. 26.

with more names to be announced shortly.

"This will be the greatest heavy metal show ever," music director Tom Morello said.

In 2020, Osbourne revealed he had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and he paused touring in 2023 after extensive spinal surgery. He has struggled with health issues since 2003 following a near-fatal quad bike crash, injuries that were aggravated in 2019 when he fell at home. (AP)

MILAN: Gucci announced on Thursday that its creative director of under two years, **Sabato De Sarno**, has left the position just two and a half weeks before the next runway show, and that the new collection would be created by the design team.

The abrupt announcement of De Sarno's departure comes as Gucci prepares to open Milan Fashion Week with a combined womenswear and menswear collection on Feb. 25. His replacement will be an-



De Sarno

nounced "in due time," the statement said.

Gucci's new CEO, Stefano Cantino, expressed gratitude for De Sarno's focus on "Gucci's craftsmanship and heritage," while Kering deputy CEO Francesca Belletini said he had "further strengthened Gucci's fundamentals."

De Sarno, 42, was named creative director of the storied Italian fashion house two years ago after the surprise departure of Alessandro Michele, who powered brand sales and owner Kering's earnings with gender-fluid, eclectic and romantic collections that rewrote Gucci's codes.

De Sarno's tenure was marked by a return to more essential silhouettes and wardrobe basics that sought broader public appeal - but ultimately had disappointing sales. Kering earnings have been slipping, with third quarter revenues down 15% to 3.8 billion euros as Gucci revenue plunged 26% to 1.6 billion euros. Kering announces its full-year earnings next week.

Gucci's heritage as a luggage and leathergoods maker founded more than 100 years ago in Florence has given successive creative directors the potential for great leeway to interpret the brand's codes - starting with Tom Ford's sexy silhouettes of the 1990s.

This is not the first time the Gucci has taken a dramatic late-season creative shift. (AP)

Dance

30th 'versary tour

Sibling duo powers 'Riverdance' revival

NEW YORK, Feb. 6, (AP) — Before they hit the stage every night, Irish siblings Anna Mai and Fergus Fitzpatrick share a special ritual: A hug and a low five.

"Like a high five, but instead of going high with it, we go lower just to be different," Fergus Fitzpatrick says laughing.

It's a sweet way to check in for a brother and sister dancing duo who are propelling "Riverdance 30 - The New Generation," a touring celebration of the show that put Irish dance on the global map and has deepened their bond.

"Me and Anna Mai have grown up dancing together. So we're like siblings, but we're also like best friends," says Fergus. "We always have that support system."

Both were veteran winners of Irish dance competitions when they joined "Riverdance" in 2017, Fergus a few weeks ahead of Anna Mai.

"That was an incredible feeling - to get to share the stage and have that experience together," she says. "It's hard to describe it to another person. There's an understanding of that feeling between us."

The "Riverdance" tour that kicks off this month in Florida will visit over 40 North American cities, including two weeks at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., and performances at Radio City Music Hall in New York City. There also are stops scheduled for Chicago, Philadelphia, Toronto, Boston, Indianapolis and Kansas City.

Rejuvenated

The tour has rejuvenated the original show with updated costumes, lighting and projections, featuring a new set of dancers - none were born when the show began 30 years ago.

"It's a new group of performers, which is an exciting thing to keep that timelessness but also rejuvenate and update that little bit," Anna Mai says. "We have now a group of people that never knew life without 'Riverdance.'"

Anna Mai and Fergus come from a family in County Meath with seven siblings. She was the first to be attracted to traditional Irish step dancing, in which the arms and body move little while the feet create the sound and action.

"I was one of those children that did a bit of everything. I did ballet, I did running, I did gymnastics, and Irish dance was the one that really stuck," she says.

It will come as no shock that her passion was cemented after her mother took her to see "Riverdance" live.

"I had been going to Irish dancing classes once a week, but that really set the foundation for 'Oh my goodness, this is something that's so beautiful to watch and that I want to be a part of.'"

Championships

Fergus followed soon after, and both began competing, with Fergus winning the World Irish Dance Championships in 2017 and his sister winning the All-Ireland Championships, Great Britain Championships and the British Nationals. They've been part of several U.S. tours and went to China before the pandemic.

"Riverdance" first premiered on the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest as a seven-minute segment. It opened at Dublin's Point Theatre on Feb. 9, 1995, at a time of renewed Irish optimism and pride surrounding the onset of the booming "Celtic Tiger" economy.

The show is loosely based on the story of Irish culture and mass immigration to America, the story woven through music and dance styles including flamenco and tap.

While on tour, the Fitzpatricks like to go out and explore each city they land in, and they enjoy joining the company team building events, like escape rooms or go-karting.

"We love to get out and see the city. We love to do touristy things," says Fergus. "If there's a good museum, if there's sightseeing or anything like that to do, we'll try and get out and do that."



Siblings Anna Mai Fitzpatrick, (left), and Fergus Fitzpatrick appear during a performance of 'Riverdance 30 - The New Generation.' (AP)

Variety

LONDON: Ozzy Osbourne will reunite with all of the original members of Black Sabbath for the first time in 20 years, in a gig that will be his last and that's being billed as the "greatest" heavy metal show ever, promoters said Wednesday.

The band, one of the most influential of all heavy metal bands, will headline "The Back to the Beginning" show on July 5 at Villa Park, home of the Aston Villa Football Club in Birmingham, England.

"It's my time to go back to the beginning ... time for me to give back to the place where I was born," Osbourne said in a statement. "How blessed am I to do it with the help of people whom I love. Birmingham is the true home of metal. Birmingham forever."

Osbourne, who was the band's front man during its peak period in the 1970s and who was widely known as the "Prince of Darkness," will deliver his own short set before Sabbath bandmates, Tony Iommi, Geezer Butler and Bill Ward, join him for the first time in two decades.

The all-day event will also feature a host of major metal bands including Metallica, Slayer and Alice In Chains,

Essential tips for staying on top of diabetes app alerts

Patients using diabetes apps can miss critical alerts: FDA

WASHINGTON, Feb 6, (AP): Patients who use smartphone apps to manage their diabetes could face serious health problems if they miss notifications needed to control their blood sugar, US health officials warned.

The Food and Drug Administration said Wednesday it has received multiple reports of users missing or not hearing important medical alerts from their phones, leading to cases of dangerously low blood sugar and even death.

The agency's warning applies to a growing field of wearable devices that track patients' sugar levels or automatically deliver insulin, the hormone that helps manage glucose in the blood and break it down into energy.

These days, many devices are programmed through apps on patients' phones. But the FDA warns that certain

phone settings, such as pausing notifications, may cause patients to miss critical updates. In other cases, connecting the phone to a new audio source, such as a car stereo, could change the volume of the alerts users are accustomed to hearing.

"Even if configured correctly, certain hardware or software changes can interrupt the expected operation of these critical devices, which can lead to patient harm if undetected," said Courtney Lias, a division director in the FDA's device center, in a release.

Roughly 37 million Americans have diabetes. People with the disease either don't make enough insulin or they have become resistant to it.

Continuous glucose monitors are small devices that

use a sensor under the skin to measure blood sugar, sending regular readings to a smartphone or smartwatch. Automated insulin pumps deliver the hormone through a catheter attached to the abdomen and can be programmed to deliver extra insulin before meals.

FDA regulators recommend:
 ■ Turn off automatic updates on your smartphone until you've confirmed the new operating system is compatible with your diabetes app.
 ■ After connecting your smartphone to a new accessory, such as Bluetooth headphones, confirm that app alerts are still being delivered and can be heard clearly.

■ Once a month, double check that your smartphone's notification settings haven't changed.

Since the introduction of iPhone and Android devices, thousands of apps have launched claiming to help users manage their health, from calorie counters to mental health apps.

The FDA doesn't regulate the vast majority of them because they don't pose much risk to consumers if they malfunction, according to regulators. The agency mostly enforces safety requirements on apps that turn smartphones into the equivalent of devices, for example, by monitoring heart rhythms or other critical medical readings.

The FDA said Wednesday it is talking to "manufacturers to ensure that smartphone alert configurations of their devices are carefully evaluated prior to use by patients."

'Activate location tracking as needed'

One tech tip: How to block your phone from tracking your location

LONDON, Feb 6, (AP): Smartphones are useful tools for everyday life, but they're privy to nearly everything about you, including all the places you've been - if you let them.

When you use a map app to find the new restaurant your friend recommended, or your phone's browser to check the price of something you saw while window shopping, you could be unwittingly allowing your phone to track your location and share that information with others.

Phones use various signals to find your location, including cell tower pings, Wi-Fi access points, Bluetooth and GPS.

Sometimes your phone needs to know your location to provide a useful service, like telling the Uber driver where to pick you up. But in other cases, there's little justification for tracking your whereabouts, which then can be exploited by apps, ad services or even hackers.

"From fitness tracking to navigation, every location ping potentially reveals details about our routines and movements - which could be risky in the wrong hands," said Daren Guccione, CEO of Keeper Security. "Users should turn on location tracking only when necessary, such as during navigation, emergencies or sharing updates with trusted contacts, and disable it immediately afterward."

Control

Experts warn location data could be used to track people who visit abortion clinics. Or "a disgruntled ex could use location sharing to stalk someone, or a current, abusive partner could force you into location sharing as a means of control," said David Ruiz, senior privacy advocate at cybersecurity company Malwarebytes.

Here are some tips to make sure location tracking is kept to a minimum:

Head to your phone's control panel to check permissions.

iPhone users can go to the Privacy & Security tab, and then to Location Services to check settings for individual apps. It's not a good idea to let apps always use your location in the background, according to cybersecurity experts. Instead, get the app to either ask first before using your location, use it only while you've got the app open, or even never let it use your location.

While you're in Location Services, you might notice little ar-

rows that indicate which apps have used your location. Purple means recently, while grey indicates the past 24 hours.

It's a little different for Android phones because there are so many different versions by various device manufacturers. In general, go to settings, and then tap the Location icon, which lets you turn it on or off for all apps.

To tweak settings for individual apps, tap App location permissions, where you'll get choices similar to those in iOS.

Apple has other tools to cut down on third-party tracking that might include location information. On the iPhone's Privacy & Security setting, under the Tracking tab, there's a toggle to Allow Apps to Request to Track. With this switched off, any new app requests will be automatically denied and they will also be stopped from accessing your phone's ad identifier.

Identifier

Privacy experts recommend blocking your Google or Apple device's in-house ad identifier, which enables third-party tracking on most devices for better ad targeting.

On iPhones, go to the Privacy setting then scroll down to Apple Advertising, and then switch off Personalized Ads. On newer Android phones, go to the Privacy setting, then to Ads, where you can tap Delete Advertising ID.

Whether you use Android or iOS, they both have settings to allow precisely pinpointing your location by combining wireless signals with data from onboard sensors such as the gyroscope, accelerometer and barometer. This helps to estimate the phone's position if, for example, you're inside a building blocking a GPS signal.

One reason to use this function is to show someone you're meeting exactly where you are. Google says its signals are randomized so they can't be associated with a specific person or account. In any case, you might not want every app to know this, so you can tell your phone to only share its general location.

On Android phones, turn off the Location Accuracy setting for all apps. On iPhones, switch it on or off for individual apps.

Along with app permissions for your device, it's also a good idea to check your Google account. Google was forced to be more transparent about its location tracking

practices after a 2018 Associated Press story that found the company continued to track people's location data even after they opted out of such tracking by disabling a feature the company called "location history."

Go to myaccount.google.com and then to the Data & Privacy section, where you'll find the Location History controls. Under recent changes, the history will be deleted after three months, though you can change that default setting.

Delete

Popular smartphone web browsers like Safari or Chrome could give away your location, so try using one that doesn't store information about you, like DuckDuckGo, Firefox Focus or Ecosia.

If a privacy-focused browser needs to access your location through your IP address, they will ask first. It will also let you easily delete your cookies and other web browsing data.

Phones or tablets can also be tracked with Apple's Find My or Google's Find My Device features for recovering lost devices. You can turn this feature off if you think someone has gained access to your Apple or Google account.

Some cybersecurity websites recommend using airplane mode, but it doesn't always shut off all signals so you shouldn't rely on it.

A signal-blocking Faraday pouch would be a better bet, but be sure to test it to make sure it's actually jamming all signals. And, keep in mind, you'll need to take the device out of the bag to use it.

There are so many possible ways for smartphones - and other devices like smartwatches - to track our location that it's hard to provide an exhaustive checklist.

Our default relationship with apps, companies, and platforms is for them to track us, "which absolutely makes it harder for us to scrutinize all the channels through which our data is being sent," said Ruiz.

"The unfortunate truth is that, to shut everything down, we have to go into our device settings and check each app, line by line, and make individual decisions for how those apps collect our location data," said Ruiz. "It's either that, or turn off all location data entirely," which could result in inconveniences like having to manually enter your address on ride-hailing apps, or not getting live directions from mapping apps, he said.

New variant linked to first death in the US

Concerns raised as second type of bird flu detected in US dairy cows

NEW YORK, Feb 6, (AP): Dairy cattle in Nevada have been infected with a new type of bird flu that's different from the version that has spread in US herds since last year, Agriculture Department officials said Wednesday.

The detection indicates that distinct forms of the virus known as Type A H5N1 have spilled over from wild birds into cattle at least twice. Experts said it raises new questions about wider spread and the difficulty of controlling infections in animals and the people who work closely with them.

"I always thought one bird-to-cow transmission was a very rare event. Seems that may not be the case," said Richard Webby, an influenza expert at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

A version of the H5N1 bird flu virus known as B3.13 was confirmed in March after being introduced to cattle in late 2023, scientists said. It has infected more than 950 herds in 16 states. The new version, known as D1.1, was confirmed in Nevada cattle on Friday, according to USDA. It was detected in milk collected as part of a surveillance program launched in December.

"Now we know why it's really important to test and continue testing," said Angela Rasmussen, a virus expert at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada, who helped identify the first spillover.

The D1.1 version of the virus was the type linked to the first US death tied to bird flu and a severe illness in Canada. A person in Louisiana died in January after developing severe respiratory symptoms following contact with wild and backyard birds. In British Columbia, a teen girl was hospitalized for months with a virus traced to



Dairy cows stand in a field outside of a milking barn at the US Department of Agriculture's National Animal Disease Center research facility in Ames, Iowa, on Tuesday, Aug. 6, 2024. (AP)

poultry.

At least 67 people in the US have been infected with bird flu, mostly those who work closely with dairy or cattle, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

USDA officials said they would post genetic sequences and other information about the new form of the virus to a public repository later this week. Scientists said that would be key to understanding whether the spillover was a recent event or whether the virus has been circulating, perhaps widely, for longer.

"If this turns out to have been something that crossed into cattle a couple months ago, a couple months is a long time not to detect it," said Michael Worobey, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Arizona who has

studied the H5N1 virus in cattle.

He added that it's important for federal officials to share promptly information about a virus that has the potential to trigger a pandemic that could "make COVID seem like a walk in the park."

Meanwhile, US health officials on Wednesday urged Americans traveling to Uganda to take precautions because of an Ebola outbreak - and said they are helping Ugandan health officials respond to the threat.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention travel alert does not call on travelers to steer clear of Uganda, but it does urge enhanced precautions, such as avoiding people with symptoms and skipping visits to health care centers unless travelers have an urgent medical need.

RapidAI unveils Lumina 3D

FDA OKs new AI 3D head, neck imaging

SAN MATEO, Calif., Feb 6, (AP): RapidAI, the global leader in AI-driven medical imaging analysis and coordinated care, has received FDA 510(k) clearance for Lumina 3D by RapidAI - an industry-first, automated 3D imaging reconstruction solution designed to replace manual workflows with an AI-powered approach based on the latest groundbreaking AI technology advances.

"Obtaining high-quality 3D images within minutes of a CTA scan marks a significant advancement and milestone in neuroradiology," stated Vivek Yedavalli, M.D., chief of neuroradiology at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. "When radiologists require a detailed view of the vasculature for an accurate diagnosis, challenges related to quality, availability, time, and

cost present major obstacles. As Head and Neck CTA volumes increase, we continue to face a shortage of CT technicians and neuroradiologists. Lumina 3D addresses these issues by providing near real-time, crystal-clear 3D views, vessel segmentation, and bone removal. This technology can assist in detecting anomalies, dissections, and stenosis more swiftly and accurately, potentially improving patient outcomes, significantly enhancing neuro-radiologists' workflows, and supporting the radiology community."

Manual CTA reconstructions take considerable time, even with available resources, and turnaround times may stretch to hours, which can delay critical diagnoses and significantly hinder radiologists and neuro-interventionalists. Lumina 3D accomplishes this

in minutes and runs in real-time. It is designed for large-scale applications, ensuring 24/7 availability for hospitals of all sizes. Engineered for speed, accuracy, and efficiency, Lumina 3D alleviates the workload for imaging technologists and radiologists, boosts productivity, and can accelerate diagnosis and treatment processes, ultimately enhancing patient care and hospital throughput.

"Having immediate access to high-quality 3D images of vascular structures marks a significant advancement in neuro-interventional surgery. Previously, navigating challenging anatomy required a process of trial and error. Lumina 3D changes the paradigm by removing the guesswork with near-instantaneous visualization of complex anatomy.

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Gilgeous-Alexander scores 50, NBA-leading OKC routs Suns



Utah Jazz center Walker Kessler (24) and Oscar Tshiebwe go for a loose ball, during the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Utah Jazz in Salt Lake City. (AP)

Magic spoil LaVine's Kings debut

OKLAHOMA CITY, Feb 6, (AP): Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 50 points and the NBA-leading Oklahoma City Thunder routed the Phoenix Suns 140-109 on Wednesday night to improve to 40-9.

The Thunder said Gilgeous-Alexander became the ninth player in NBA history to score at least 50 points three times in a seven-game span. He had a career-high 54 against Utah on Jan. 29 and 52 at Golden State a week ago.

Phoenix's Kevin Durant sat out with a sprained left ankle. The 36-year-old All-Star forward remains 26 points short of 30,000 for his career.

Magic 130, Kings 111

In Sacramento, Franz Wagner had 31 points, Paolo Banchero added 23 and the Orlando Magic beat Sacramento to spoil Zach LaVine's Kings debut and end a four-game losing streak.

LaVine had 13 points. He went from Chicago to Sacramento on Sunday in a three-team trade that sent De'Aaron Fox from the Kings to San Antonio.

Cavaliers 118, Pistons 115

In Detroit, Darius Garland hit a 31-foot 3-pointer at the buzzer to give the Cleveland Cavaliers win over the Detroit Pistons.

The Cavaliers, playing without All-Star Donovan Mitchell who missed the game with a shoulder contusion, overcame nine points from Detroit's Cade Cunningham in 11 seconds.

Cunningham made it 112-109 with a 3-pointer with 16 seconds left, but Garland hit a free throw to make it a two-possession game.

Spurs 126, Hawks 125

In Atlanta, Victor Wembanyama broke a tie with a free throw with 2.4 seconds left and De'Aaron Fox scored 24 points in his first game for San Antonio, leading the Spurs to victory over

the Atlanta Hawks.

Fox arrived from Sacramento in a three-team trade Sunday and started in his San Antonio debut as Wembanyama's new point guard.

Nuggets 144, Pelicans 119

In Denver, Michael Porter Jr. tied a career high with 39 points on the eve of the trade deadline, Nikola Jokic added 38 and the Denver Nuggets beat the struggling New Orleans Pelicans for their fourth straight win.

Porter finished 16 of 23 from the field, including five 3-pointers, and had 12 rebounds. His name has been mentioned in trade speculation ahead of Thursday's deadline, but coach Michael Malone recently dismissed the notion.

Jokic added 10 assists and eight rebounds for the short-handed Nuggets, who were missing Russell Westbrook (hamstring) and Peyton Watson (knee). Aaron Gordon matched a career best with 12 assists.

Jazz to 131, Warriors 128

In Salt Lake City, Jordan Clarkson scored 31 points and Keyonte George added 26 to lead

the Utah Jazz to a victory over the Golden State Warriors.

Isaiah Collier added 20 points and 11 assists. Walker Kessler chipped in 15 points and 18 rebounds and John Collins added 19 points.

Stephen Curry led Golden State with 32 points and seven assists. Brandin Podziemski added a career-high 29 points and Buddy Hield chipped in 18.

Golden State played with a shortened rotation after trading for Jimmy Butler earlier in the day.

Grizzlies 138, Raptors 107

In Toronto, Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 32 points, Ja Morant had 16 of his 26 in the third quarter and the Memphis Grizzlies won their fourth straight game, routing the Toronto Raptors.

Making his first professional appearance in his home city, Grizzlies rookie Zach Edey had 13 points and 14 rebounds for his eighth double-double and third in three games.

Timberwolves 127, Bulls 108

In Minneapolis, Anthony Edwards scored 49 points, including 20 in the third quarter, as the



Sacramento Kings guard Zach LaVine (8) shoots over Orlando Magic center Goga Bitadze (35) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Sacramento, Calif. (AP)

Joe Schmidt to stand down as Wallabies coach

SYDNEY, Feb 6, (AP): Joe Schmidt has agreed to continue as head coach of the Wallabies until after the 2025 Rugby Championship to allow Rugby Australia time to find a replacement.

Schmidt replaced Eddie Jones as head coach after Australia's dismal performance at the 2023 Rugby World Cup. He was contracted until the end of the three-test series against the British and Irish Lions in July and August with potential to extend the role through the 2027 Rugby World Cup, which

Australia is hosting.

But Rugby Australia issued a statement Thursday saying the 59-year-old Schmidt would coach the Wallabies in the annual series against World Cup champion South Africa, New Zealand and Argentina before standing down in early October.

"After noting the positive impact Joe has made with the Wallabies playing and coaching staff, we were keen that he stay on after the Lions series," Peter Horne, Australia's director of high performance, said in a statement. "Joe expressed to

us that he was enjoying his work with the Wallabies while also making clear his need to spend more time at home with his family."

The new head coach will be in place for the Wallabies' test match in Japan on Oct. 25 ahead of their European tour to round out 2025. The new coach would be the fifth Wallabies mentor in six years.

The Wallabies kick off their international season against Fiji on July 6 before taking on the British and Irish Lions on consecutive weekends in Brisbane,

Minnesota Timberwolves beat the short-handed Chicago Bulls.

Edwards hit six 3-pointers and was 17 of 18 from the free-throw line and also added nine rebounds. He tied Kevin Garnett for the second-most 30-point games and tied Karl-Anthony Towns for the most 40-point games in team history.

Heat 108, 76ers 101

In Philadelphia, Tyler Herro scored 30 points Wednesday, and Bam Adebayo had 18 points and 13 rebounds as the Miami Heat defeated the Philadelphia 76ers on the night the Heat traded Jimmy Butler to Golden State.

The game played out amid on-line reports in the first half that Butler would be traded to the Warriors. Butler was suspended by the team for the game, and Josh Richardson, also reportedly part of the deal, was out with a foot injury.

Wizards 119, Nets 102

In New York, Jordan Poole scored 19 points to lead the Washington Wizards to win over the Brooklyn Nets.

Poole was one of six Wizards (9-41) to finish in double-figure scoring as Washington won its third straight game. Kyshawn George and Corey Kispert each had 17 while Bub Carrington chipped in 16.

Keon Johnson scored 25 points and Cam Johnson added 17 for Brooklyn (17-34).

Bucks 112, Hornets 102

In Charlotte, Damian Lillard had 29 points and 12 assists, Bobby Portis had 23 points and 17 rebounds in his first game since Jan. 23 and the Milwaukee Bucks defeated the Charlotte Hornets in their first game since trading longtime guard Kris Middleton.

Brook Lopez added 14 points on four 3s as the Bucks snapped a four-game losing skid.

Nick Smith Jr. had 23 points on four 3s for Charlotte, which has lost six straight.

Melbourne and Sydney starting July 19.

That will be followed by Rugby Championship tests between Aug. 16 and Oct. 4.

Schmidt started his Wallabies tenure with three consecutive wins and continued to bring new players into the national squad as he tested combinations and depth of talent. The performances and confidence generally improved and a 2024 season that included a win over England at Twickenham ended with a narrow 22-19 loss to Ireland in Dublin and a 6-7 win-loss record.

Madsen leads quartet in double figures

Utah keeps Colorado winless

SALT LAKE CITY, Feb 6, (AP): Gabe Madsen scored 17 points, Lawson Lovering scored 12 points and Utah kept Colorado winless in the Big 12 beating the Buffaloes 72-59 on Wednesday night.

Ezra Ausar and reserve Mason Madsen each scored 10 points for the Utes (13-9, 5-6 Big 12).

Colorado (9-13, 0-11) reserve Javon Ruffin scored 13 points and Bangot Dak scored 11.

Utah led 32-20 at halftime before the Buffaloes used the first 10 minutes of the second half to get within 45-42 with Dak scoring nine points in a span in which Colorado outscored Utah 22-10.

Later, Assane Diop made a pair of foul shots to get Colorado within 48-46 with 8:01 left. Madsen made a 3-pointer to give Utah a 55-50 advantage with 4:15 left and the Utes closed it out with a 20-9 run.

Utah has now won five of its last eight while Colorado has lost 11 in a row. Five of Colorado's nine remaining games are against teams currently ranked in the Top 25.

Jovan Bercksher Jr. scored 18 points, Jeremiah Wilkinson added 14 points, and California defeated N.C. State 74-62.

The Golden Bears held the Wolfpack to 2 of 12 shooting, including nine misses in a row, over the final 6 1/2 minutes.

Rytis Petraitis hit a 3-pointer to give Cal a 47-46 lead with 13 minutes left and his next basket put the Bears up 62-54 with a little under seven minutes to go.

The Bears then wrapped it up with a 10-0 run that gave them a 72-57 lead with about 90 seconds remaining.

Joshua Ola-Joseph scored 13 points for Cal (12-11, 5-7 ACC) and Mady Sissoko grabbed 13 rebounds. Andre Stojakovic made his return from an illness and scored six points in his first action since Cal defeated N.C. State 65-62 on Jan. 18 in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Brice Williams scored 23 points

and Juwan Gray scored 17 points and Nebraska stormed back in the second half to beat Washington 86-72.

Reserve Connor Essegian scored 16 points for Nebraska (15-8, 5-7 Big Ten), which shot 52.7% (29 for 55).

Mekhi Mason scored 23 points and Great Osobor scored 17 points for the Huskies. Tyler Harris scored 14 and grabbed 11 rebounds and Zoom Diallo had 10 points.

The Huskies (11-11, 2-9) started 7-for-7 shooting from beyond the 3-point line in the first seven-and-a-half minutes but went 3 for 18 from deep for the remainder. Washington used the hot start to build a 31-18 lead in the first nine-and-a-half minutes and led 47-37 at halftime.

Jhonnell Davis scored a season-high 24 points and Arkansas made 11 of 13 free throws in the last 62 seconds to hold off Texas 78-70.

Adou Thiero added 14 points for the Razorbacks (14-8, 3-6 Southeastern Conference), who controlled the game with the confidence gained from an 89-79 win at No. 12 Kentucky on Saturday. D.J. Wagner had 13 points and Zvonimi Ivisic had 12 rebounds, four blocks and scored nine points.

Tre Johnson finished with 25 points for the Longhorns (15-8, 4-6). Arthur Kaluma had 12 points and 13 rebounds, Julian Larry had 11 points and Kadin Sherrick 10 despite missing a long stretch with back spasms.

The Razorbacks had a 23-point lead with less than 13 minutes left, but fueled by Johnson's 18 points - including six in an 11-0 run - the Longhorns got within five in the final minute.

Arkansas had an 11-0 run to open a double-figure lead near the midway point of the first half and Thiero made five free throws in the last minute for a 35-24 at the break.

The Razorbacks then scored the first 10 points of the second half, with Davis hitting two 3-pointers. Davis hit another 3 with 11:07 to play to make it 58-37.

A national treasure who lost his way

Rashford begins a career relaunch at Villa in FA Cup



In this file photo, Manchester United's Marcus Rashford, right, shoots the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester United and Aston Villa at the Old Trafford stadium in Manchester, England. (AP)

LONDON, Feb 6, (AP): It has been almost two months since Marcus Rashford was seen on a soccer field.

In that time, his dedication to the game has been derided, his status as one of England's most cherished players has been damaged, and he has been ushered out of his boyhood club - the team of his dreams - in quite brutal fashion.

It's time to discover if new surroundings can ignite his career. Fitness permitting, Rashford is expected to make his debut for Aston Villa on Sunday in an FA Cup fourth-round match against Tottenham, a week after completing his loan move from Manchester United.

Who knows what shape Rashford is in, physically or mentally, after an unhappy last few months at United where his new coach, Ruben Amorim, accused the striker of not putting in the requisite effort in practice. Amorim even suggested he would rather play his 63-year-old goalkeeping coach than someone who didn't train hard, clearly referring to Rashford.

That comment surely marked the end for Rashford at United, at least for the time being. Now, it appears, he's on a journey of rediscovery at Villa.

"I've had to choose somewhere where I feel my style of football is suited to, and can help them and help me rediscover and improve as a player," Rashford said ahead of his Villa debut.

"It's only short term I'm here, so I want to make the most of my time, and the only way to do that is by using my attributes and my skillset to help the team." That would suggest Rashford sees his future elsewhere come the end of the season, so he is in the shop window during these next few months. Not in the Champions League, with Villa having qualified directly to the last 16.

United wasn't even in Europe's top competition. No wonder Rashford spoke of Villa's "constant ambition" being attractive to him.

"It's an ambitious time for this club and a great opportunity for me to join the team and help them keep pushing forward," he said. "I'm excited, can't wait for the first training session and obviously the first game." Fans across England will likely wish Rashford well. After all, this was the guy who became a national treasure when he took on the British government during the pandemic and forced lawmakers into a U-turn over funding meals for poor students after their initial resistance. A little over two years ago, English soccer fans were cheering Rashford for scoring for the national team at the World Cup in Qatar.

It remains to be seen how Rashford will be used by Villa manager Unai Emery, who has remodeled his attack during the winter transfer window by offloading three forwards - Jhon Duran, Emi Buendia and Jaden Philogene - and bringing in three more in Rashford, Donyell Malen and Marco Asensio.

Here's what else to look out for in the latest round of FA Cup games, which will be played across Friday to Tuesday: As an appetizer for the Super Bowl on Sunday, NFL great Tom Brady may have an eye on the soccer team he has a minority shareholding in.

Brady is among the investors in U.S.-based Knighthead Capital Management, the owner since 2023 of Birmingham City - a third-tier club which hosts Newcastle on Saturday.

Brady is clearly retaining an interest in Birmingham, commenting on social media last week after an important league win for the team.

Newcastle is looking for a cup double, having reached the English League Cup final on Wednesday.

Four and a half months after Rodri's season-ending knee injury, Man City finally has a like-for-like replacement for its key holding midfielder.

Nico Gonzalez signed for City from Porto late on the final day of the transfer window and the 23-year-old Barcelona academy graduate might be handed his debut for the match at third-tier Leyton Orient on Saturday.

Central midfield has been a problem area for City in Rodri's absence so Gonzalez is under pressure to hit the ground running.

Other Premier League teams facing lower-league opposition include Liverpool, which must make the long journey south on Sunday to play second-tier Plymouth - a team recently managed by Wayne Rooney until his firing in December. Nottingham Forest also travels far to play Exeter on Tuesday.

Al-Nasr faces Al-Tadamon in crucial Farwaniya Derby

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The 14th round of the Zain Premier League begins tomorrow with two matches. Al-Nasr will face Al-Tadamon at Ali Sabah Al-Salem Stadium at 6:00 pm, while Al-Fahaheel takes on Al-Salmiya at Al-Shabab Stadium at 8:15 pm.

The action continues on Sunday as Khaitan hosts Al-Arabi, and Kuwait Club meets Al-Yarmouk.

The round concludes on Monday with a high-profile clash between Al-Qadisiya and Kazma at Mohammed Al-Hamad Stadium.

In a much-anticipated "Farwaniya Derby," ninth-placed Al-Nasr (6 points) is desperate for a win to close the gap with sixth-placed Al-Tadamon (14 points).

A victory could help Al-Nasr escape the danger zone, while a loss might push it to the bottom of the table if Al-Yarmouk (10th, 5 points) secures a positive result.

Al-Nasr also seeks redemption after suffering a narrow 1-0 defeat to Al-Tadamon in their first encounter this season.

Meanwhile, Al-Tadamon aims to bounce back from a three-match losing streak, which saw it drop to seventh place after a crushing 4-0 defeat against Kazma in the last round.

The second match of the round sees Al-

Salmiya (4th, 23 points) take on Al-Fahaheel (5th, 20 points) in a crucial battle for the fourth spot.

Both teams need a win after suffering defeats in the previous round – Al-Salmiya fell 2-1 to Al-Qadisiya, while Al-Fahaheel lost 3-1 to Al-Arabi.

With the second phase of the season approaching, neither team can afford to drop points, especially as Kazma is gaining momentum and pushing for a top-six finish.

Al-Salmiya and Al-Fahaheel, who played out a thrilling 2-2 draw in their first meeting, are determined to avoid slipping into the relegation zone and solidify their place in the championship race.



Players battling for the ball during Zain Premier League game.

Newcastle back in League Cup final in bid to end wait for domestic trophy

Arsenal beaten 4-0 on aggregate

LONDON, Feb 6, (AP): Newcastle is back in the English League Cup final for another chance to end its 70-year wait for a major domestic trophy.

The Saudi-controlled northeast club beat Arsenal 2-0 in the second leg of the semifinals to advance 4-0 on aggregate. Jacob Murphy and Anthony Gordon scored the goals at a boisterous St. James' Park.

Newcastle will play either Tottenham or Liverpool in the March 16 final at Wembley Stadium. Tottenham leads 1-0 after the first leg, with the return match at Anfield on Thursday.

For Newcastle, it marks another opportunity to capture a first piece of silverware since being bought by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund in 2021. Newcastle's last trophy was the now-defunct Inter-Cities Fairs Cup in 1969 and the most recent domestic title was the FA Cup in 1955.

Newcastle reached the 2023 League Cup final, but lost 2-0 to Manchester United.

"Play like that and we can dream big," Newcastle captain Bruno Guimaraes said after the Arsenal match. "It would be amazing in my first season as the captain to lift a trophy, it is my dream."

Arsenal arrived buoyed by a 5-1 thrashing of Manchester City in the Premier League on Sunday and looking to overturn a 2-0 deficit from the first leg against Newcastle at Emirates Stadium last month.

Mikel Arteta's team failed to handle the lively atmosphere inside St. James', with its usually solid defense looking fragile and almost conceding after just four minutes when Alexander Isak was played through on goal and finished

into the top corner. It was disallowed for offside following a video review and the decision was announced to fans inside the stadium by the referee via a wireless microphone - a practice being trialed in the English League Cup ahead of use in the Premier League.

After Martin Odegaard hit the post for Arsenal, Newcastle took the lead in the 19th when Isak struck a shot against the post and Murphy converted the rebound.

Arsenal's remote chances of a comeback were further hit when Gabriel Martinelli went off with a muscle injury before halftime, and Gordon virtually secured Newcastle's place in the title match by scoring the second after Arsenal midfielder Declan Rice was dispossessed outside his area by a sliding Fabian Schar.

The ball flew straight to Gordon, who swiveled and shot into the bottom corner past stranded goalkeeper David Raya.

Arsenal, a two-time League Cup winner, was looking to reach the final for the first time since 2018, when it lost 3-0 to Man City.

Newcastle fans taunted Arsenal's manager in the last few minutes, singing: "Mikel Arteta, it must be the ball." It was a reference to Arteta saying after the first leg that the ball used in the League Cup was "very different to a Premier League ball" after his team missed several chances.

And Gordon appeared to deliver a post-match dig at Arsenal, whose players and fans had delighted in goading Man City striker Erling Haaland on Sunday for his "stay humble" comment in the previous match between the teams.

"It is important for us to stay humble now," Gordon said ahead of the final. "It will be a big occasion but it's so far away."



Arsenal's Ethan Nwaneri and Newcastle's Anthony Gordon, right, challenge for the ball during the English League Cup soccer match between Newcastle United and Arsenal at St. James' Park stadium in Newcastle, England. (AP)

Madrid avoids upset against Leganes

Real reaches Copa semifinals on Garcia's late goal

MADRID, Feb 6, (AP): Gonzalo Garcia scored in stoppage time as Real Madrid avoided an upset by defeating Leganes 3-2 to reach the semifinals of the Copa del Rey.

Madrid had taken a two-goal lead at halftime with Luka Modric and Endrick before the hosts rallied to even the match in the second half.

The 20-year-old Garcia, a striker who usually plays with Madrid's "B" team, sealed the victory with a header three minutes into stoppage time after a cross by Brahim Diaz.

Another setback would have been troublesome for Madrid after it lost 1-0 at Espanyol in the Spanish league on Saturday for its second defeat in 15 matches across all competitions. Madrid had needed extra time to eliminate Celta Vigo at home in the round of 16 of the Copa last month.

Modric opened the scoring with a strike from close range in the 18th and Endrick doubled the lead after picking up a loose ball inside the area in the 25th.

The hosts rallied with Juan Cruz converting a penalty kick in the

39th and finding the net with a shot that deflected on a defender in the 59th.

Madrid nearly moved ahead again when Diaz's flick over the goalkeeper struck the crossbar in the 75th.

Atletico Madrid had become the



Real Madrid's Gonzalo Garcia, left, heads the ball to score his side's third goal during a Spanish Copa del Rey, or King's Cup, quarter-final soccer match between CD Leganes and Real Madrid at Butarque stadium, in Leganes, outside Madrid. (AP)

first team to reach the semifinals when it routed Getafe 5-0 at home on Tuesday with a pair of goals by Giuliano Simeone, the 22-year-old son of Atletico coach Diego Simeone.

In the other two quarterfinals on Thursday, it will be Real Sociedad

hosting Osasuna and Barcelona playing at Valencia.

Madrid was depleted in defense because of recent injuries to Antonio Rudiger and David Alaba. Eder Militao and Dani Carvajal had already been out with long-term ailments.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti used youngsters Jacobo Ramon and Raul Asencio as the central defenders, and improvised midfielder Federico Valverde in the right back position.

Ancelotti also rested some regular starters ahead of the Spanish league derby against Atletico at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium on Saturday. Madrid leads Atletico by one point at the top of the standings.

Madrid last won the Copa in 2022-23. It was eliminated by Atletico in the round of 16 last season.

Leganes only made it to the Copa semifinals in 2017-18, when it was eliminated by Sevilla. It is winless in three matches in all competitions and sits in 16th place in the Spanish league.

Al-Nasr secures golden square spot after win over Al-Yarmouk

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Al-Nasr Club's first basketball team secured a spot in the league's golden square after defeating Al-Yarmouk 73-65 in their final preliminary round match at Union Hall in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex.

Meanwhile, the match between Kuwait Club and Al-Qadisiya was postponed due to Kuwait Club's participation in the West Asia Super League (WASL) Gulf region qualifying play-offs.

With its victory over Al-Yarmouk, Al-Nasr raised its tally to 13 points, securing fourth place and a semi-final berth alongside Kuwait Club, Al-Qadisiya, and Kazma.

The postponed clash between Kuwait Club and Al-Qadisiya will determine the top two seeds in the



Al-Nasr player is fouled as he goes for a basket.

preliminary round, shaping the semi-final matchups, where the first seed will face the fourth and the second will play the third in a best-of-three play-off series.

Al-Qadisiya opens campaign against Qatar's Al-Rayyan

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

MANAMA, Feb 6: The West Asia Men's Clubs Championship organizing committee conducted a redraw after Kuwait Club withdrew due to injuries to center player "Al-Riffain" during the "White" team's recent participation in the Arab Clubs Championship in Qatar last month, with no available substitutes for them.

Al-Qadisiya, representing Kuwait in the tournament, will begin its campaign at 5:00 pm today, against Al-Rayyan of Qatar. On Saturday it will play Al-Salam of Oman, and meets Al-Arabi of Qatar on Sunday.

The tournament follows a single-round league format, with Al-Qadisiya having prepared for the event



The organizing committee conducts the redraw.

through an external training camp in Doha.

Vonn hooks gate at worlds

Venier wins women's super-G

SAALBACH-HINTERGLEMM, Austria, Feb 6, (AP): Stephanie Venier gave host nation Austria its first gold medal of the Alpine skiing world championships by beating the pre-race favorites in the women's super-G which Lindsey Vonn didn't finish after hooking a gate on Thursday.

Federica Brignone of Italy was 0.10 seconds behind to take the silver medal, and Lauren Macuga of the United States and Kaja Vickhoff Lie of Norway shared bronzes, 0.24 off the lead.

"It's just a dream, and it's just amazing in front of the home crowd. Nothing can beat this," Venier said. "It was just a good run, I think my best ever. I am a world champ, it's so unreal. Crazy, crazy."

On a course set by U.S. ski team coach Alex Hoedlmoser, Vonn posted the 16th fastest time at the first split when she hooked a gate with her right arm. She avoided falling and was able to stop but then grasped her arm in apparent pain.

The gate pressed on her forearm, locked her elbow by her side and pushed the whole arm back with pressure on her shoulder.

"I am OK, I hit my nerve somehow and I hit the gate and lost feeling in my arm but it's coming back slowly," Vonn said after her first appearance at the worlds in six years.

The American said a day before the race she was feeling sick with a cold or the flu.

"I'm sick, I'm a little banged up. I know I skied the top well, I thought. Been playing with my material, my boots ... just I was a little too aggressive to the gate and then it happened."

Spectators in the area let out a collective gasp of astonishment and grew silent with concern. Vonn skied down to the finish and waved to the crowd.

She stayed out to join American teammate Macuga in the medal celebrations.

"I am really excited for Lauren, she skied amazing, I'm really proud of her," Vonn said.

Vonn retired in 2019 after winning bronze in downhill in Are, Sweden, following several injuries, but returned to the circuit this season with a new titanium right knee.

Macuga won her first career World Cup last month in a super-G at another Austrian ski resort, St. Anton.

Mikaela Shiffrin is coming back from abdominal surgery in December and plans to start only the giant slalom



Austria's Stephanie Venier speeds down the course during a women's Super-G, at the Alpine Ski World Championships, in Saalbach-Hinterglemm, Austria. (AP)

and slalom next week.

The super-G started in mostly sunny conditions, but more clouds came in after the first half hour. More parts of the course were in the shadow when Vonn started in 30th position.

Venier was the 2013 junior world champion in super-G but a silver in downhill from the 2017 worlds was her only medal in a senior race before Thursday's triumph.

"It sounds unreal. I slept so bad last night, I was so nervous," Venier said. "I was extremely nervous at the start, I didn't know how to handle, but it was probably a good omen."

Venier has three career World Cup wins, including one in a super-G in Switzerland a year ago.

Silver medalist Brignone's teammate and fellow pre-race gold favorite Sofia Goggia lost time on Venier at all splits except at the bottom, where she could make up only a fraction and missed the podium by six-hundredths in fifth.

Lara Gut-Behrami, who leads the World Cup super-G standings this season, was slowed by a similar incident to Vonn's. The Swiss skier hooked a gate with her left arm halfway down her run and finished 0.70 behind in eighth.

Olympic champion Ester Ledecka seemed on medal course for most of her run, but came wide in a few turns near the bottom of the course and finished in seventh position.

Thursday's opening individual race at the worlds took place exactly one year before the 2026 opening ceremony for the Milan-Cortina Olympics.



Brazil's Neymar controls the ball during his debut for Santos FC in a Sao Paulo league soccer match against Botafogo-SP, in Santos, Brazil. The match ended 1-1. (AP)

Sports



Sheikha Naima poses with the winning teams.

Geneva Club denies Salwa Al-Sabah Club home title

Sheikha Naima lauds successful tournament

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: The women's volleyball team of the Swiss Geneva Club claimed the title of the second international championship of the Salwa Al-Sabah Volleyball Club after defeating the host team, Salwa Al-Sabah, in the final with a commanding 3-0 victory.

Lebanon's Al-Shabiba Al-Bouchrieh secured third place after overcoming the Tunisian team with the same score in the third-place playoff.

The Iraqi Akkad Ankoa finished fifth, followed by the Emirati Fatima Bint Mubarak Academy in sixth, Saudi Arabia's Al-Ola Club in seventh and the Qatari team in eighth.

Held under the patronage of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governor Sheikh Sabah Badr Al-Sabah, the championship concluded with a closing ceremony attended by Sheikha Naima Al-Ahmad, President of Salwa Al-Sabah Club, along with Board of Directors members. Also pres-

ent at the final match were Dr. Jaber Al-Marri, President of the Kuwaiti Volleyball Federation, Assistant Secretary-General Nayef Al-Khamili, members of the Swiss Embassy's diplomatic corps in Kuwait, and representatives of the participating delegations.

Sheikha Naima Al-Ahmad praised the high technical level displayed, particularly in the semi-finals and final, highlighting the championship's success both in organization and competition. She emphasized the importance of hosting such international events, noting the strong participation from Kuwaiti, Gulf, Arab, and international teams.

She expressed her gratitude to the participating teams, the Kuwait Volleyball Federation, and all organizing committees for their contributions to the tournament's success.

Dr. Jaber Al-Marri echoed these sentiments, stating that the championship was a success even before it began, thanks to the meticulous organization by Salwa Al-Sabah Club. He emphasized the Federation's commitment to developing women's volleyball at the club level and fostering an environment that enables players to excel and represent Kuwait on the international stage.

The 9th Asian Winter Games officially open

Al-Duaij, Fatima named Kuwait's Games flag bearers

HARBIN, China, Feb 6: The 9th Asian Winter Games officially open this evening in Harbin, China, featuring around 1,500 athletes from 34 countries, including Kuwait.

The tournament, which runs until February 14, includes various individual and team Winter Olympic events for both men and women. Among the participating nations are six other Arab countries – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Jordan, and Lebanon. Notably, some competitions, such as ice hockey and curling, commenced before the official opening due to their extended schedules.

The opening ceremony will take place in an indoor arena in Harbin, showcasing performances that highlight friendship, peace, and

unity among Asian athletes. The ceremony will conclude with the parade of participating delegations, including Kuwait, which is competing in four events.

Fahid Al-Ajmi, director of the Kuwaiti delegation, expressed pride in Kuwait's participation in Asia's premier winter sports event, emphasizing the honor of raising the national flag during the opening ceremony.

Al-Ajmi announced that Kuwait's flag bearers for the ceremony will be ice hockey player Mohammed Al-Duaij and curling team member Fatima Abdul Latif. He also expressed confidence in China's ability to deliver an exceptional opening ceremony and a well-organized tournament.

Discussing Kuwait's performance, Al-Ajmi noted that the national ice hockey team secured a crucial victory against Singapore but narrowly lost to Kyrgyzstan in extra time due to a golden goal. Meanwhile, the curling team marked a historic milestone by defeating Mongolia in its first-ever international match, despite facing challenges in subsequent games.

He commended the dedication of Kuwaiti athletes, acknowledging the tough competition against seasoned teams from East and Central Asia, where winter sports have a long-established presence. Al-Ajmi expressed hope that Kuwait's teams will achieve strong results and gain valuable experience from the tournament.



A Kuwaiti in action during a curling game at the Asian Winter Games in China.

Petrovic praises young players after big win

Al-Qadsiya dominates Qatar's Al-Arabi to keep Gulf Clubs Championship semis dreams alive

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 6: Al-Qadsiya's Montenegrin coach, Zeljko Petrovic, credited his team's 3-0 victory over Al-Arabi of Qatar in the Gulf Clubs Championship to its early goal in the first half. However, he noted that the performance was not "convincing at the start of the match."

The victory strengthened Al-Qadsiya's position near the semi-finals, keeping them in second place in Group Two with 8 points. On the other hand, Al-Arabi sits at the bottom with only 1 point and has been eliminated from the qualification race.

The second qualification spot is now a contest between Al-Qadsiya and Bahrain's Al-Riffa, who is on 7 points after defeating Al-Ettifaq of Saudi Arabia 2-1. Al-Ettifaq, with 12 points, had already secured first place and qualification before that match.

Al-Qadsiyah now faces a decisive match against Al-Ettifaq on February 18th in Al-Sharqiya, where a win will guarantee qualification, regardless of the outcome of the Al-Riffa vs Al-Arabi match on the same day. A draw will also suffice if Al-Riffa loses or draws, as long as Al-Riffa is defeated by Al-Arabi.

Petrovic expressed satisfaction with his players' performance, particularly praising the contribution of younger players such as Jassim Al-Matar, who scored the second goal, as well as Abdullah Al-Ghinman, Abdullah Mutawa, and Ahmed Bodi.

The coach also thanked the Al-Qadsiya support-

ers for their continued encouragement, highlighting their presence as a driving force behind the team's motivation. He stressed that the victory over Al-

Arabi was a significant step toward qualifying for the semi-finals and that Al-Qadsiya aims to progress as far as possible in the Gulf Championship.



Al-Qadsiya's Jassim Al-Matar vies for the ball with an opponent.

SFA unveils marathon route, venues & sponsors for events

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia, Feb 6, (AP): The Saudi Sports for All Federation (SFA) has announced key details for the inaugural 2025 SFA International Sporting Events, which include the SFA Expo and Riyadh Marathon. The SFA Expo will take place from February 5-7, 2025, at Riyadh's JAX District, while the Riyadh Marathon is set for Saturday, February 8, 2025.

The SFA Expo will serve as the marathon's bib collection hub and will feature interactive zones focused on sports, health, and fitness, showcasing cutting-edge equipment, wellness activities, and emerging technologies. The event will also include a B2B lounge for industry networking, and workshops on mindfulness and nutrition. Another highlight will be the Primal Race on Friday, February 7, a functional fitness challenge featuring a series of high-intensity activities interspersed with 400m group runs.

The Riyadh Marathon will offer four race categories: the full marathon (42km), half marathon (21km), 10km, and a family-focused 4km race. The routes will pass key Riyadh landmarks, including Boulevard City and Wadi Hanifia, starting around Boulevard World and finishing near Kingdom Arena.

The SFA Expo and Riyadh Marathon will also be supported by a strong lineup of sponsors and partners. Saudi Awwal Bank (SAB) returns as presenting partner, with ASICS and Tawuniya as headline sponsors for both events. Gatorade, Aquafina, and PepsiCo will provide hydration for marathon runners, while Dr. Sulaiman Al Habib Medical Services Group (HMG) will offer medical support at the Expo.

The Riyadh Marathon will also be supported by Ford, providing race vehicles, KAFD, hosting pre-event activations, and MDL, bringing DJs to energize the event. Calo, JP Morgan, Centrum, and Kayanee will contribute as supporting partners, as will Joe & The Juice, which has introduced a special Riyadh Marathon drink. BAE Systems and Kudu are official partners, helping to promote the marathon, and Huawei will provide mass participant awards. JAX District serves as the Expo's venue partner, while ASICS provides official sports apparel to race participants.

As part of the broader Vision 2030 goals, these events reinforce SFA's commitment to promoting fitness and physical activity as key pillars of Saudi Arabia's evolving sports culture.

The Saudi Sports for All Federation (SFA), a proactive community sport and wellness organization founded to promote a healthy lifestyle in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, aims to provide access to opportunities for all members of society to practice physical activity. Partnering with government organizations, sports delivery bodies, sports federations, and the wider public and private sector to achieve its goals, the SFA focuses on increasing physical activity and health and wellness metrics across the country.