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Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

This is the solution to the housing crisis

THE housing issue in Kuwait has become a chronic crisis due to improvised solutions. Those responsible for devising housing strategies are either unconvinced by their own plans or appear to be serving the interests of powerful real estate magnates who profit from the rising prices of plots. This situation continues to prolong the suffering of citizens who are in need of housing.

Kuwait was a pioneer in adopting the housing welfare system, but it has since fallen behind its regional counterparts, especially other Gulf nations and some Arab countries that have developed this system with a forward-thinking vision and thus managed to solve their housing problems within just a few years.

Over the past three decades, the crisis in Kuwait has become more complicated due to the involvement of several factors including the greed of real estate owners, the political interference of National Assembly members, their mismanagement of the housing file, poor selection of those responsible for this file, constant changes in

the ministerial position, prolonged bureaucratic processes for providing land, and ongoing disputes between the Ministry of State for Housing Affairs, Kuwait Municipality, the Ministry of Oil, and the Ministry of Finance. In addition, unreasonable demands from citizens who seek huge houses that far exceed their actual needs have only deepened the crisis.

Therefore, while realistic solutions have been successfully implemented in many countries, they have been notably absent in Kuwait, which allowed the crisis to persist.

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Amir receives Crown Prince, Acting Prime Minister



HH the Amir



HH the Crown Prince

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah Sunday morning at Seif Palace.

His Highness also welcomed Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah at Seif Palace.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also met with Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah at Seif Palace.

Experts laud new law for investment potential

Gov't amends expats property ownership rules

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: Real estate and investment experts have praised the issuance of Decree Law No. 7/2025 amending the provisions of Decree Law No. 74/1979,

which regulates non-Kuwaitis' ownership of real estate properties.

These experts confirmed to the newspaper that the decision will contribute to the development of investment in the real estate sector, and achieve economic and social development goals in a way that benefits the local economy

by attracting more foreign investments and providing job opportunities for Kuwaitis.

The Real Estate Union said the decision was issued in appreciation of the nature of economic life, its variables and the dynamics of change

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Kuwait intensifies inspections to protect expatriate workers

PAM strengthens oversight to regulate labor market

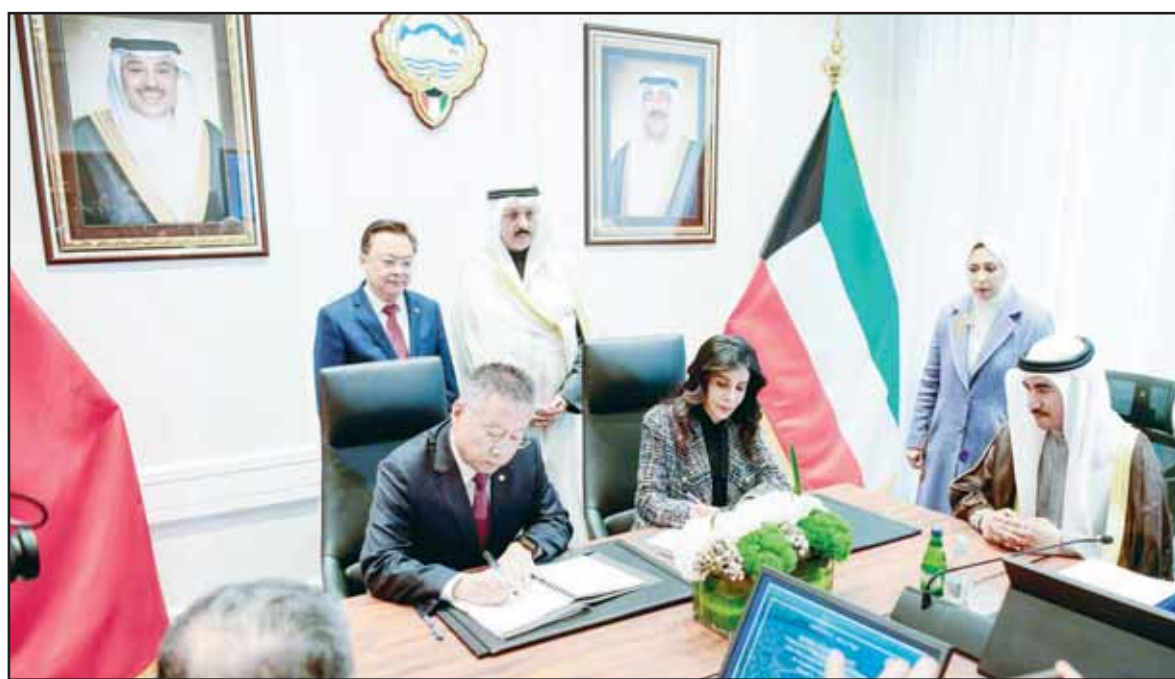


Photo by Rezk Tawfik

Kuwait's Minister of Public Works, Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, signs the government contract on behalf of the State of Kuwait, with Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Chinese company, Chen Zhong.

Project set to transform northern economy

Kuwait secures Chinese expertise for Mubarak Port

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan on Sunday awarded a contract for studying, designing and providing pre-implementation services for the completion of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project to the State Construction and Transportation Company Limited, which is affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Transport and was nominated by the Chinese government.

This agreement is in line with Decree-Law No. 155/2024 on the approval of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Kuwait and China to cooperate in the implementation of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project.

It is also in line with Decree-Law No. 22/2025 that stipulates the transfer of jurisdiction and financial appropriations for the port's completion, management and operation to the Ministry of Public Works. All necessary approvals from regulatory authorities have been secured.

In a press statement after the contract signing, Al-Mashaan disclosed that the project aims to establish a commercial port in the country to be a regional center for transportation within the strategic transformation vision -- Kuwait 2035; as well as to develop the northern region as an integrated economic and urban system based on the comprehensive and integrated vision for developing the State, which takes into account all economic and urban aspects.

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2,300-yr-old Hellenistic relics discovered on Failaka Island

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (KUNA): The National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL) announced the discovery of a courtyard and building west of Al-Qurainiya site on Failaka Island, dating back 2,300 years to the Hellenistic period.

Acting Secretary-General for the Antiquities and Museums Sector at NCCAL Mohammad bin Redha stated to KUNA that

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KUNA photo

An artifact unearthed at the Al-Qurainiya site, shedding light on Kuwait's ancient history.

Cold snap extends into spring's onset

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (Agencies): Al-Ojairi Scientific Center has announced that the second period of the Scorpions season, which marks the last phase of the winter season in Kuwait, will begin on February 23, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

It explained that winter is ending, and the transition to spring will begin, though the cold weather may still linger.

The first week of Ramadan will coincide with the third ascendant of the Scorpion season, known as the "Fat Scorpion." This will coincide with the start of the "Hameemin" season, also known as "Saad Al-Saud", which will begin on March 8 and last for 13 days. This period will be interspersed with what is known as the "cold days of the old woman" as people will experience a brief return of relatively cold weather after some warm days.

The name "Fat Scorpion" is derived from the period when cattle's stomachs are full of abundant grass, causing them to gain weight.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Meteorological Department forecasted that Sunday morning saw light to moderate rain with thunderclouds in some areas.

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By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: Deputy Director General of the Protection of Expatriate Workers Sector at the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) Dr. Fahad Al-Murad confirmed that the authority has formed a proactive inspection team to monitor suspected human trafficking cases and ensure that employers adhere to the regulations.

Al-Murad made the announcement during the joint educational program held Sunday at the authority's headquarters in Riggae to explain the mechanisms for protecting expatriate workers. Representatives of diplomatic missions in the country attended the event.

According to Al-Murad, the team's major tasks include proactive inspection of workers and employers in private and government establishments and sites,

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NewsWatch

Kuwait takes down trafficking network

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ministry of Interior (MoI), through the General Department of Residency Affairs Investigations, announced on Sunday the arrest of a citizen, a Chinese and two Egyptian nationals on charges of human trafficking.

In a press statement, the ministry said the arrest comes within the framework of the ongoing security efforts made by the Ministry of Interior to combat the phenomenon of human trafficking, under the directives of Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT CITY: The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry condemned on Sunday the aggression on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which resulted in the injury of one of its personnel.

In a statement, the ministry reiterated the State of Kuwait's clean-cut denunciation of all acts of aggression and violence against UNIFIL, stressing the importance implementing international laws including UNSC resolution 1701. (KUNA)



Photo by Mohammad Morsi

Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Noura Al-Fassam speaks during the General Budget Conference on Sunday.

Kuwait's 2025/2026 budget to boost non-oil and job creation

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: The Ministry of Finance Sunday held the General Budget Conference for the fiscal year of 2025/2026 under the patronage of the Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Noura Al-Fassam and in the presence of the Undersecretary of the ministry Aseel Al-Munaifi, Assistant Undersecretary for General Budget Affairs Saad Al-Alati, and other relevant leaders from the ministry.

In a speech delivered at a press conference on Sunday morning regarding the new budget draft, the minister highlighted that non-oil revenues are expected to rise, and expenditures will continue to be rationalized.

She said the draft budget for the upcoming fiscal year of 2025/2026 reflects the government's commitment to achieving financial balance through the

implementation of financial and economic reforms, as well as improving administrative efficiency.

Al-Fassam affirmed that the focus will be on capital projects and infrastructure that directly benefit citizens, revealing that 15,853 new jobs are set to be created in the upcoming fiscal year.

She revealed that the expected budget deficit is KD 6.3 billion, with anticipated revenues reaching around KD 18.2 billion and expenditures estimated at KD 24.5 billion.

Al-Fassam indicated that the budget deficit could increase due to the decline in oil prices, as Kuwait remains heavily reliant on oil revenue.

She also revealed that oil revenues amounted to KD 15.305 billion, and non-oil revenues KD 2.926 billion.

The minister stressed that the government is actively working towards diversifying income sources by increasing non-oil revenues.

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9,464 stripped of 'citizenship'

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: The official gazette 'Kuwait Al-Yaum' Sunday published four decrees and two decisions to revoke Kuwaiti citizenship from 9,464 individuals, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The four decrees are:
■ Decree No. 24/2025 stipulated the withdrawal of Kuwaiti citizenship from 5,694 women and those who acquired it through dependency.

■ Decree No. 26/2025 revoked Kuwaiti citizenship from 38 individuals.

■ Decree No. 27/2025 ordered the withdrawal of citizenship from three individuals and those who acquired it subsequently.

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Partial power cuts from Feb 16 to 22

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: The Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy announced that maintenance work will be carried out on sub-transformer power plants in 23 areas, resulting in partial power outages in some residential areas.

The outages will begin today and continue until February 22 for a duration of four hours from 8:00 am each day.



2 Oman ambassador hosts luncheon for 1 visiting minister



9 Gulf Bank reports 2024 financial performance in year-end webcast

10 Burgan Bank celebrates its third Kanz millionaire, Yousef Mohammad Dashti, winner of the KD 1,500,000 cash prize

Prayer Timings

Fajr	05:07	Asr	15:13
Sunrise ..	06:27	Maghrib ..	17:38
Zohr	12:02	Isha	18:55

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Mild with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speeds of 12-35 km/h.

By Night: Cold with light to moderate freshening over coastal

Weather

areas northwesterly wind, with speeds of 10-40 km/h.	Abdaly	19	06
	Jahra	19	11
	Salmiyah	17	14
	Jal Aliyah	18	18
	Nuwaisib	17	10
	Wafra	18	10



Oman Ambassador Dr Saleh Al-Kharousi (left) receiving Minister Dr Abdullah Al-Harrasi.



Hosts and guests pose for a remembrance picture.



Minister Dr Al-Harassi and colleague Madi Al-Khamis.



Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah and Dr Nasser Mohsen during a discussion.



Counselor Salem Al-Rawas and colleague Mohammad Al-Barjas.



Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah presents his book, 'The pen that moves mountains' to the minister.



From right to left: Ambassador Dr Saleh Al-Kharousi, Dr Khaled Al-Hudaiban, the guest minister and Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Al-Jarallah.

Ambassadors, media professionals attend event

Oman ambassador hosts luncheon for visiting minister

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: Omani Ambassador to Kuwait Dr. Saleh Al-Kharousi hosted a luncheon at his residence in honor of Omani Information Minister Dr. Abdullah Al-Harrasi, who is leading the Sultanate's delegation to the Qurain Cultural Festival.

Present at the event were ambassadors, diplomats, editors-in-chief of various newspapers, media professionals and public figures.

Al-Kharousi expressed his gratitude to all those present for attending the event. He also acknowledged the warm reception given to the Omani delegation participating in the Qurain Cultural Festival.

He emphasized the significance of the festival as a platform for cultural and media exchange between countries, as well as the deep-rooted fraternal and historical relations between Kuwait and the Sultanate of Oman.

'Licenses of charities violating donation rules will be revoked'

Transparency crucial in new immediate orders

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: Director of the Charitable Societies and Endowments Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs Abdulaziz Al-Ajmi issued a stern warning regarding charitable societies found to be in violation of donation collection regulations, indicating their licenses will be suspended immediately.

This is a significant change from previous years, when licenses were revoked only if violations were repeated.

Al-Ajmi underscored the need to inform charities, their employees and donation collectors in mosques about these new regulations.

The 'Committed' initiative, launched in partnership with the Union of Kuwaiti Charitable Societies and Charities, aims to ensure compliance and address violations that occurred during Ramadan in the past.

Chairman of the Union of Charitable Societies and Foundations Saad Al-Otaibi commended the initiative. He pointed out that adhering to laws and regulations fosters respect for the legal system and boosts public trust in charitable organizations.

He affirmed that transparency is crucial for institutional charitable work, as it promotes

fairness and equality in donation collection.

Head of the Accounts Unit in the Charitable Societies Department Salma Al-Mutairi, outlined specific controls for Ramadan donation collection. He said these controls include using K-Net devices in mosques and ensuring that donation receipts clearly display the association's name.

Al-Mutairi also underscored the need to record donors' identities through electronic cash deposit machines and to properly stamp and record deduction books in mosques.

Overall, the new regulations aim to uphold the integrity of charitable work in Kuwait by preventing violations and promoting transparency in donation collection, especially during Ramadan.

'Comply with CSC regulations'

Audit Bureau raises queries on MoE expenditures

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: The State Audit Bureau (SAB) revealed that the Ministry of Education spent about KD67,095 -- the total value of supervision allowance, job level bonuses and incentives for those occupying some specialized positions -- "without justification", stressing the need to take the necessary measures to stop such disbursements and recover the amounts disbursed in an unjustified manner.

SAB urged the ministry to strictly comply with the decisions of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), immediately take

measures to prevent similar cases, and provide information on the measures taken to correct these violations. It explained in a report that the aforementioned amount is the total value of the supervision allowance (KD 36,376) and job level bonuses and incentives for those occupying certain specialized positions (KD 30,719).

The bureau elaborated that the ministry paid supervision allowance to a number of employees who are receiving personal monthly bonuses, in violation of CSC Resolution No. 11/2012 whose Article Four states that "it is not permissible to combine the supervision allow-

ance with any allowance or bonus paid on a personal basis." This supports the position of the bureau in demanding the suspension and recovery of the amounts spent illegally.

In its response to the bureau, the ministry pointed out that CSC Letter No. 216/30/40 on the disbursement of monthly bonus to some employees in the Minister's Office did not indicate the inadmissibility of combining the bonus with the supervision allowance; as it rather limited its observation to not combining this allowance with the bonuses allocated for engineers, lawyers and accountants.



KUWAIT photo
Kuwait Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya met with Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA.

Kuwait FM meets UNRWA chief, discusses hurdles faced in Gaza

MUNICH, Germany, Feb 16, (KUNA): Kuwait Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya met with Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, on Saturday on the sidelines of the 61st Munich Security Conference, being held on February 14-16.

They discussed the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip, and the challenges UNRWA faces, the targeting of its personnel by the Israeli occupation forces and obstacles to its humanitarian efforts.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs held talks with his counterparts Ali Al-Sherif - of Sudan, Baiba Braze - of Latvia, and Dominique Hasler - of Liechtenstein, as well as Director General of the International Organization for Migration Amy Pope and US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking.

The meetings, held separately on Saturday on the fringes of the 61st Munich Security Conference (MSC 2025), dealt with the relations between Kuwait, on one hand, and Sudan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, the United States and the IOM, on the other.

Several regional and international issues of common interest featured prominently in the talks.

Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs also held talks with EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Gulf Region Luigi Di Maio in Munich, Germany, on Saturday.

The talks, held on the sidelines of the 61st Munich Security Conference (MSC 2025), focused on the relationship between the State of Kuwait and the European Union and ways to enhance cooperation in various fields as well as the latest developments in the region and beyond.

Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya met on Saturday with his Albanian counterpart Iglj Hasani on the margins of the 61st Munich Security Conference, being held on February 14-16.

During their meeting, the ministers reviewed the relations between their two respective countries and ways to enhance collaboration across various fields.

They also engaged in discussions regarding pertinent regional and international issues and the evolving developments in the region.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Progress, youth role vital for brighter Kuwait future

"WHAT makes Kuwait unique? What makes us always say that Kuwait is different? I will not allow arrogance or euphoria to take over as I discuss this topic. I must remain objective and impartial in seeking the true underlying reasons without letting emotions cloud my judgment," columnist **Iqbal Al-Ahmad** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"The first aspect I cannot overlook, regardless of how long this topic has been discussed, is the political developments that we did not desire. However, they may be necessary to correct their course after straying from their original goal, which is democracy and political life.

"Our parliamentary political experience is one of the oldest and strongest in the region. The National Assembly, with its genuine legislative and supervisory powers, has granted Kuwaiti citizens a more prominent role in decision-making.

"Kuwait is also distinguished by the effectiveness and influence of its soft power, represented by the media, diwanias, civil society organizations, as well as cultural, literary, artistic, and social gatherings, along with other specialized platforms. These platforms offer their views on any developments in local affairs, both positively and negatively.

"No one can deny Kuwait's leadership in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in the fields of media, art, and literature in the Gulf. It was during this time that the first newspapers and magazines were launched, and the first TV series and plays were aired, many of which are still remembered and quoted throughout the Gulf.

"Political commentary, whether critical or supportive, in many theatrical performances during that period, played an important role in shaping the Kuwaiti political scene. Media freedom is the defining trait that elevated Kuwait in the Arab world. By setting high standards for media institutions, Kuwait ensured they adhered to strong ethical principles. Even though some have misused this freedom, it remains more advanced than in many other places.

"Kuwait was one of the first Gulf countries to establish the Future Generations Fund, one of the oldest and largest sovereign wealth funds in the world. This fund provides Kuwait with economic strength and financial sustainability, even in the face of fluctuations that may impact its primary source of national income.

"The Kuwaiti people possess a strong sense of community and deeply rooted traditions, with diwanias continuing to play a significant role in both social and political life, reflecting a unique characteristic in the interactions among members of society.

"Kuwaiti youth stand out for their success and distinction in local and regional ventures in various fields. This, combined with the uniqueness of the Kuwaiti people, has been shaped by their past experiences in all sectors. The important question here is: How long will we continue to rely on and repeat this legacy from time to time and on every occasion?

"It is no longer enough to say, 'We were,' 'We were,' and 'We were.' It is time for us to say, 'We will be,' 'We will be,' and 'We will be.'"

"Often, the path to future success and excellence is much easier when built on a firm, solid, and strong foundation... This is what truly distinguishes Kuwait. This is Kuwait."

Also :

"I have strong fraternal and professional relations with my brothers in Lebanon -- from the North to the South, and from the mountains to the seas," **M. Adel Al-Jarallah Al-Kharafi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"I am elated that beautiful Lebanon is now preparing to return to its former glory, God willing; and face the challenges of development and stability after the election of His Excellency the President of the Republic, and the selection of the Prime Minister.

"Amid this positive development, there is an important, indeed very important, statement from former Prime Minister Saad Hariiri who announced his return, and that of the 'Future Movement' to political work. Without a doubt, this will be an important and positive addition to the stage of reconstruction and reform in Lebanon in the coming days.

"The importance of this lies in several matters, the most significant of which is that Hariiri has vast political and national experience. He has gone through a lot and faced challenges over the past three decades. He maintains international relations and extensive contacts, where he can invest in the interest of Lebanon in the next stage.

"The return of the 'Future Movement' is of particular importance in terms of continuing to build the State, consolidate its pillars, and restore balance in the political scene and between the three authorities. Undoubtedly, all of these are in the interest of Lebanon.

"At this stage, Lebanon is facing difficult challenges, most notably the results of the Israeli aggression on Gaza and Lebanon itself, reconstruction, and refuting the causes of tension, especially with the state of ambiguity and uncer-

tainty surrounding Lebanese tourism, along with the orientations and policies of the new US administration, which turned out to be carrying unpleasant surprises in terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and on Lebanon itself.

"This is in addition to the economic difficulties that Lebanon has been suffering from, its need for development funding, and the financial pressures on the Lebanese government.

"Here lies the importance of the Arabs rallying around Lebanon, providing it whatever support possible, and enabling it to maintain its independence and security, as well as its full return to the Arab ranks."

□ □ □

"The mortgage project carries numerous risks that must be thoroughly studied and addressed. One of the most critical concerns is the proposed increase in the loan amount to 200,000 or 210,000 dinars, as reported," columnist **Ahmad Yaqoub Baqer** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"This is an enticingly high sum that will likely encourage most applicants for housing assistance to take out such loans, potentially leading to financial strain.

"Another significant risk lies in the repayment structure, where monthly installments could reach up to 50 percent of the combined salaries of both spouses.

"This repayment commitment extends for a period of 25 years, meaning that borrowers -- who typically purchase homes or obtain government plots after the age of 40 -- will still be repaying their loans well into retirement.

"By that time, their salaries will have decreased by approximately 30 percent or more, and additional financial burdens may arise due to potential increases in electricity, water, and other service fees. This scenario raises the likelihood of borrowers defaulting on their loans.

"In such cases, will banks proceed with home foreclosures as seen in other countries with mortgage-based systems? Or will the government step in to provide assistance, as it has done in the past?

"It is worth recalling that during the 2008 financial crisis in the United States, banks seized four million homes due to mortgage defaults.

"Kuwait's own history also provides cautionary lessons. In previous financial crises, a large number of borrowers had installment payments consuming 50 percent of their monthly income, leading to widespread defaults due to various factors such as retirement, rising fees, and inadequate financial planning.

"Recognizing this risk, the Central Bank of Kuwait had taken corrective measures, reducing the maximum installment limit for total consumer and installment loans to 40 percent of an employee's salary and 30 percent for retirees. Additionally, the government introduced support mechanisms such as the Defaulters' Fund and later the Family Fund to rescue struggling borrowers.

"A similar problem arose when the government returned ownership documents for government-subsidized homes. Some citizens sold their houses and rented alternative residences, leading to public pressure and government intervention, which resulted in the passage of the 'Whoever Sold His House' law.

"Such historical experiences highlight the necessity of implementing strict measures to regulate mortgage lending, rather than leaving loan amounts and installment structures to individual discretion. Without such oversight, excessive borrowing and competitive spending on appearances may become widespread, requiring another costly government bailout in the future.

"To avoid these pitfalls, I propose that the maximum mortgage loan amount should not exceed 70,000 dinars, in addition to the Credit Bank loan, bringing the total to 140,000 dinars. This sum is sufficient to construct a high-quality home, especially given that the state provides the land.

"Furthermore, monthly installment payments should be capped at the existing limits of 40 percent of an employee's salary and 30 percent for retirees to prevent financial distress.

"Additionally, the government must enforce strict monitoring measures to ensure compliance with building regulations.

"The mortgage law should also be closely linked to the real estate developer law, which oversees infrastructure preparation for residential plots. It is essential to promote the construction of practical, expandable homes based on multiple design models using the mass production method.

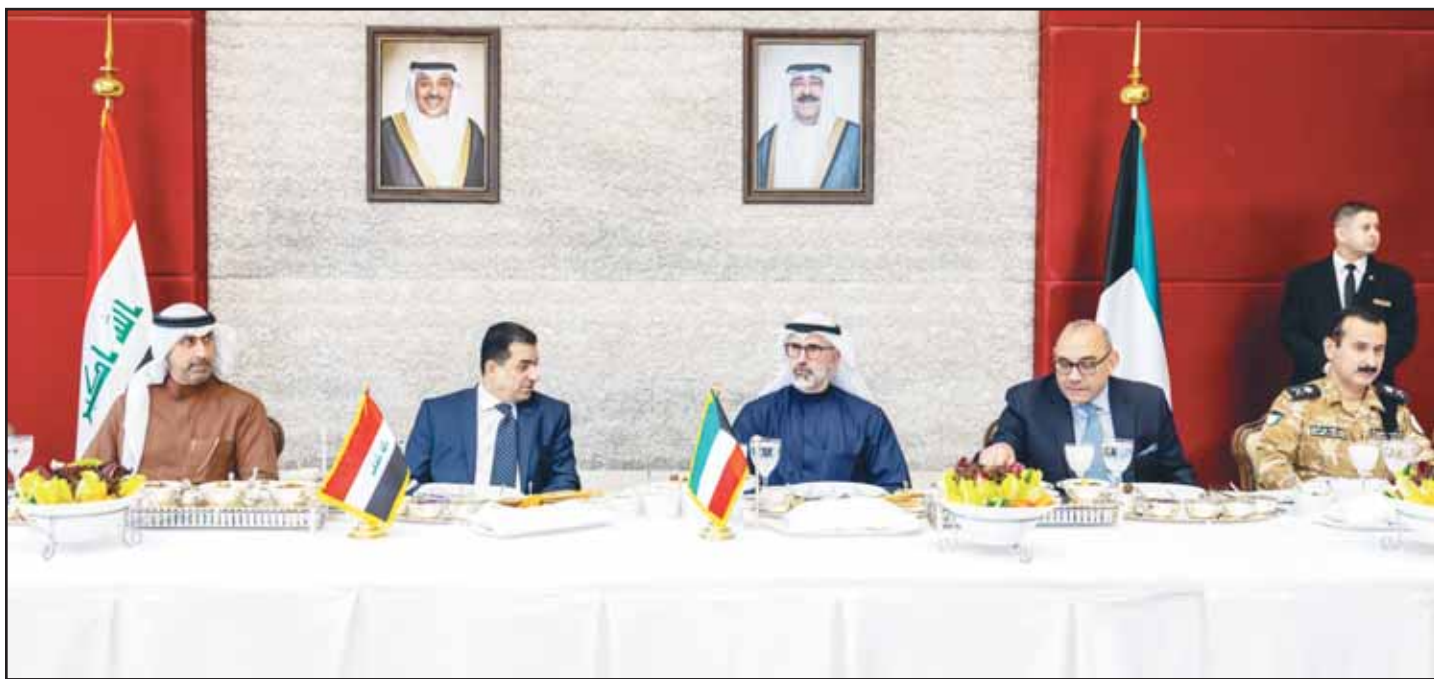
"This approach would significantly reduce construction costs, given that the land is already state-supplied, making loan repayment more manageable for citizens.

"Ultimately, the goal is to establish a sustainable and financially secure mortgage system that balances homeownership aspirations with economic stability. May God grant success."

— **Compiled by Mahmoud Attiyeh/Saeed Mahmoud**



Iqbal Al-Ahmad



Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Deputy National Security Advisor Dr. Issam Al-Saadi during the meeting.

Kuwait-Iraq legal, technical committee holds meeting

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (KUNA): The eighth meeting of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi joint legal and technical committee concerned with completing the demarcation of the maritime borders beyond Mark 162nd was held on Sunday.

The Kuwaiti delegation was headed by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, while the Iraqi delegation was headed by Deputy National Security Advisor Dr. Issam Al-Saadi. The two sides discussed topics on the committee's agenda, note a ministry statement.

Man acquitted in drugs case

Grocery staff beaten, hunt launched

By **Jaber Al-Hamoud**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: The Court of Cassation overturned the ruling of a lower court that imposed a 15-year prison sentence with hard labor on an individual accused of drug trafficking and consumption.

This led to the acquittal of the accused, as the higher court affirmed that the night search procedures which led to the charges are invalid.

The Public Prosecution charged the defendant with possession of hashish and psychotropic substances -- methamphetamine, amphetamine and tramadol -- with the intent to trade, without providing evidence that he is legally allowed to do so.

The defendant's lawyer, Attorney Abdullah Al-Alanda, argued in the Court of Cassation that the search of his client's residence was invalid because it took place at night. The defendant was not in a state of flagrante delicto, and there were no urgent circumstances to justify the search, violating Article 85 of the Criminal Procedures and Trials Law, he added.

Al-Alanda emphasized that homes have sanctity guaranteed by the Constitution, citing Article No. 38, which states it is not allowed to enter homes without the permission of inhabitants, except in certain cases outlined by law. Article 78 of the Criminal Procedures and Trials Law provides protection for individuals, their homes and their correspondence, he concluded.

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Airport fees amended: The First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah issued Decision No. 180/2025 for imposing new fees and amending the fees collected for some transactions carried out by the General Administration of Nationality and Travel Documents of Kuwait, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The decision included setting the fees for immediate issuance or renewal of a passport at the airport for a period of five years at KD 13 and for a period of ten years at KD 16, effective starting from the date of its publication in the Official Gazette on Sunday, February 16.

□ □ □

Grocery workers beaten: Hawally detectives have started the search for three unidentified individuals who assaulted four employees inside a grocery at a shopping mall in Nugra, reports Al-Anba daily.

The legal representative of the shopping mall provided the detectives with video clips, showing the accused beating the employees. However, the legal representative did not specify the reasons for the assault -- whether it was related to a defective product or an attempt to retrieve a product.

Case files indicate that the legal representative informed police that four employees were beaten at around 9:45 pm recently, affirming the assault did not cause injuries which necessitate the submission of a medical report.

A misdemeanor case was registered and investigations are ongoing to arrest the suspects.

Which category of criminals to lose Kuwaiti nationality?

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: The Supreme Nationality Investigation Committee has decided to revoke Kuwaiti nationality in accordance with Article 13, Paragraph 2 of the Kuwaiti Nationality Law No. 15/1959 and its amendments, in 16 cases involving various types of crimes including crimes against honor and trust, reports Al-Rai daily.

These cases are the following:

■ Census of 1965:

1. Committed the crime of forgery in official documents and money laundering, for which a final court ruling was issued.

2. Conviction for drug trafficking, resulting in a 15-year prison sentence.

■ Children of Kuwaiti women:

1. Conviction in a case of sexual assault of a

woman without her consent, and several other cases that resulted in final judicial rulings.

2. Conviction for drug trafficking and theft cases, all resulting in final rulings.

3. Conviction for theft involving violence, for which a prison sentence is being served.

4. Conviction for money laundering, with a final sentence of 10 years in prison.

■ Those granted Kuwaiti citizenship for exceptional services to Kuwait:

1. Conviction for embezzling public funds, with a five-year prison sentence.

2. Conviction for forging official documents, with a five-year prison sentence.

■ Children of naturalized individuals who subsequently obtained Kuwaiti citizenship:

1. Over 18 years old and has a final judgment for possessing narcotic substances for trafficking and use.

2. Convicted of kidnapping by force and threat, sentenced to 10 years in prison, then committed premeditated murder and was sentenced to death.

3. Son of a Kuwaiti woman convicted of rape and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

4. Convicted of forgery in an official document

5. Convicted of drug use and dumping the body of a drug user who died from an overdose.

6. Convicted by a final judgment in a drug trafficking case.

7. Sentenced to death for premeditated murder.

8. Convicted to 15 years in prison for drug trafficking.

Diving team begins drive to clean beaches in south

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: The Kuwait Dive Team, affiliated with the Environmental Voluntary Foundation, has completed the first phase of its project to clean the southern coasts of Kuwait, reports Al-Rai daily.

Head of the team Waleed Al-Fadhel explained to KUNA that the team cleaned the coasts of Bnaider, Al-Zour, Khairan, and Nuwaiseeb, and removed three stranded buoys that posed a danger to maritime navigation. This initiative was prompted by strong seasonal southern winds that caused high waves, which in turn led to the displacement of waste.

As the winds shifted to the north, the waste ended up along the coasts, necessitating the cleanup efforts.

He affirmed that plastic waste is a huge threat to both the environment and marine life, citing a United Nations report that reveals plastic causes the deaths of one million birds and a quarter of a million marine animals, including endangered turtles, annually.

Al-Fadhel said the team used specialized equipment, boats, and vehicles to remove the waste.

He assured that the cleanup efforts will continue in collaboration with the Environment Public Authority (EPA), along with the beach cleanup campaigns for students every Tuesday.

Al-Fadhel highlighted the team's ongoing cooperation with various governmental, private, and voluntary organizations, as well as regional and global stakeholders, to share knowledge and learn from successful projects.

He called for strict adherence to the Environmental Protection Law to prevent violations and preserve the marine ecosystem.

Female expat embezzles KD17,000 from company

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: An expatriate, born in 1967, has been added to the list of persons wanted by law for embezzling KD17,000 from a company, reports Al-Anba daily.

A security source revealed that the legal representative of the company, who has a power of attorney for the company owner -- a citizen born in 1971, lodged a complaint at a police station against an employee who allegedly stole KD17,000 from the company. This employee is said to have turned off her mobile phone and the company failed to determine her residence.

He added the company's annual inventory led to the discovery that the employee embezzled such a huge amount.



Ahmad Baqer



Al-Fadhel



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Relief goods are loaded on the plane.

Two planeloads with tons of relief goods leave for Syria

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (KUNA): The 28th planeload of humanitarian aid took off from Kuwait to Damascus International airport on Sunday carrying on board 10 tons of various relief materials for the most needy groups, as part of the "Kuwait by Your Side" campaign.

In remarks to KUNA, Director General of Al-Salam Charity Society Hamad Al-Aoun said that Al-Salam Charity's continued provision of humanitarian support to the Syrian brothers stems from Kuwait's long history of providing relief to the needy.

He expressed his thanks to the entities supporting Kuwaiti charitable work, stressing that this comes as a translation of the lofty

directives aimed at helping countries in the most difficult circumstances.

Earlier, the 27th planeload of humanitarian aid took off from Kuwait to Damascus International airport on Sunday carrying on board 40 tons of medical necessities. This was organized by Kuwaiti Relief Society in cooperation with other charities and coordination with various state bodies. Chief of the Relief Society's board of directors, Dr. Ibrahim Al-Saleh told KUNA that this is as per the directives of Kuwait leadership to supply Syrian people with the medicine, foodstuff and shelter essentials they need, especially considering the state of unrest and lack of adequate infrastructure.



The 28th planeload of humanitarian aid took off from Kuwait headed for Syria. KUNA photos

12th British Week to be opened in Kuwait today at Capital Mall

UK, Kuwait trade value hits £ 6 billion per annum

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: Under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad, the 12th British Week in Kuwait will be inaugurated Monday evening at the Capital Mall in celebration of the long-standing Kuwaiti-British relations.

In a press release, the British Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis highlighted that trade relations, which are now valued at approximately six billion pounds annually, are a vital component of the shared history between the United Kingdom and Kuwait.

She revealed that British companies have been operating in Kuwait for 250 years.



Belinda Lewis



Ahmad Behbehani



Sheikh Nasser

Meanwhile, Chair of the organizing committee Ahmad Ismail Behbehani stated that the 250-year-old Kuwaiti-British relationship serves as a unique model of cooperation founded on historical friendship.

He referred to the signing of the Kuwaiti-British Treaty of 1899 by the late Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, which confirmed Kuwait's independence and kept it away from major

international conflicts.

Behbehani said, "There is no doubt that His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad's sponsorship of the event reflects the deep-rooted and historic nature of Kuwaiti-British relations, as well as His Highness's keenness to support initiatives that strengthen these ties with Britain."

Behbehani indicated that this

year's 12th British Week holds special significance, as it coincides with the 64th anniversary of Kuwait's Independence Day and the 34th anniversary of its Liberation Day.

He highlighted that British Week in Kuwait is one of the most important economic events of the year, affirming that British companies play a pivotal role in various sectors in Kuwait, including industry, services, real estate, and tourism.

Behbehani noted that the success of previous editions has played a major role in driving increased British and Kuwaiti participation in this economic event.

He said this important annual gathering spans several sectors, including British industries, oil, automotive, healthcare, aviation, education, and banking services, and includes global and renowned brands.



A view of an onstage performance by youth. KUNA photo

Youth Theater Days festival opened, to conclude Feb 23

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (KUNA): The Director General of the Public Authority for Youth, Nasser Al-Sheikh, inaugurated on Saturday the 15th edition of Youth Theater Days festival, which will continue until February 23, at the Abdullhussain Abdurredha Theater.

Al-Sheikh, who represented Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, as the sponsor festival, said that the Youth Theater Days Festival has become a milestone in the cultural and artistic scene in Kuwait.

The event, as Al-Sheikh put it has become an open venue for young energies to unleash their creativity in a competitive atmosphere that contributes to enriching the theatrical movement and strengthening the cultural identity in the country.

He added that such theater is a mirror that reflects the aspirations of societies and a free voice that expresses the ideas and aspirations of youth, noting that Kuwaiti youths are leading the

theater movement in the country and have proven that they have the ability to innovate and renew and contribute to pushing the wheel of arts and culture towards new horizons.

He stated that holding the festival this year in conjunction with the coronation of the country as the Arab Capital of Culture for the year 2025 carries a special significance and confirms its historical position as a beacon of thought and creativity and its ancient cultural heritage, stressing the Authority's belief that theater and arts are an important part of this cultural journey.

Al-Sheikh noted that the Authority, under the directives of the Minister of Information and Culture, is keen to develop this festival to form an integrated experience that contributes to empowering young talents and providing them with real opportunities to grow and shine, as well as giving them the opportunity to display, learn, develop and make a difference.

Other Voices

The price of a life: 3,000 rupees

ONE of the civilized behaviors many people in our societies often lack is the virtue of admitting mistakes. Instead, there is an insistence on stubbornness under the belief that the inevitable can be ignored, and a resistance to personal development. However, correcting a mistake late is always better than never correcting it at all!

Before and after 2010, I wrote several articles on the topic of honor crimes, particularly focusing on Article 153 of the Penal Code, which permits lenient sentences for those who commit what are deemed "honor crimes", a term that is far from honorable.

Except for a few exceptions, Islamic countries handle honor crimes with a disturbing level of leniency. In these cases, a woman or girl is killed by a brother, husband, father, or sometimes an uncle or cousin, often due to suspicions about her relationship with a man, or even just a rumor that tarnishes the family's honor.

This concept of honor is tied to certain areas of the human body, influenced by educational, cultural, and ideological factors. The accusation, however, has little to do with the true virtues of honesty, integrity, patriotism, and morality.

It is deeply troubling to think that someone would be willing to kill their own child based solely on suspicion. In the name of "honor," thousands of murders have been and continue to be committed. This is made easier by the tolerance of certain laws toward the perpetrators of these heinous crimes, even when investigations often reveal the victim's innocence in any wrongdoing.

As long as society remains backward and its laws allow leniency toward the perpetrators, these killings will continue. Spending only a few months in prison or paying a small fine of 3,000 rupees (or KD 225) guarantees the criminal a false sense of honor in the form of a permanent reputation of masculinity in the eyes of some.

To avoid the damaging effects of this tolerance for heinous and inhumane crimes, Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait revealed a government move to abol-

ish Article 153 of the Penal Code. Under this proposed change, a man who kills a woman in an honor killing would be treated the same as anyone accused of murder.

The current text of Article 153 creates discrimination between men and women, and its harms far outweigh its benefits. While we know that some may argue there is a religious legal basis for this punishment, it is enough to cancel it because it violates human rights.

For 65 years, Article 153 granted special treatment to the murderer in honor killing cases. We have repeatedly called for the cancellation of this article, but it seems as though our calls had been falling on deaf ears or with responses such as "To whom do you read your psalms, Ahmed," and "To whom do you write when the majority either do not read or do not care about what they read?"

It would have been ideal if we had taken the initiative years ago to abolish this article, rather than waiting for signals or external pressure to "humanize" our laws and make them more consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We should not have waited for criticisms from international organizations regarding Kuwait, as highlighted in the statement by the Minister of Justice.

With the cancellation of this article, a man who kills a woman will be treated the same as anyone accused of murder, and the provisions of the Penal Code will apply to him.

It may be surprising to note that the cancellation of Article 153 was in line with the Constitution, which in Article 29 guarantees equality among people in human dignity, as well as in public rights and duties. The Constitution also prohibits discrimination based on gender, origin, language, or religion.

I am puzzled as to how the minister did not notice that both Article 135 of the Penal Code and Article 29 of the Constitution have been clearly visible to all the lawmakers and officials for the past 60 years. Why did no one pay attention to them or care about what we have repeatedly written?

Despite the past inaction, we can only express our gratitude to the Justice Minister and the Council of Ministers for this important humanitarian step. We hope this marks the beginning of more reforms in this new era.

Better late than never ... The truth is finally here, even if it took 60 years!

□ □ □

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Tastes, tunes, and traditions captivate Salmiya

Bharat Mela brings India's vibrant culture to life in Kuwait



Photos by Samer Shaqira

A vibrant celebration of Indian culture with the 'Bharat Mela - A Celebration of Indian Tastes, Tunes and Traditions' on Saturday, February 15, at the cricket ground in Boulevard Park, Salmiya.

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Dr. Adarsh Swaika stated that the India Day celebrations aim to strengthen bonds and friendships within the diverse Indian community, while fostering a vital connection between India and Kuwait.

The Indian community, the largest expatriate community in Kuwait, is known for its diplomacy, diligence and trustworthiness. The community actively participates in various cultural activities, with nearly 700 members showcasing non-stop cultural performances during the Bharat Mela festival.

Swaika pointed out the spread of Indian culture in Kuwait; including films, dance, music and cuisine, attributing it to centuries of exchange between

two countries. He is hoping for further strengthening cultural ties through diverse events that highlight the strong bond between the two nations.

The mega event entitled, "Celebration of Indian Tastes, Melodies and Traditions," featured a continuous display of diverse art forms by over 700 artists; captivating an audience of more than 7,000 people.

The event venue included 25 stalls offering authentic Indian cuisine and a variety of Indian products like handicrafts, Ayurveda and textile.

Continued from Page 1

This is

If there is a real desire to resolve this issue, the solution can be achieved within just a few years, as seen in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, Qatar, Morocco, and Egypt.

In these countries, the government provides land and necessary services, and sets building models that both real estate developers and citizens in each region must adhere to. Housing banks offer loan facilities and cover half of the interest. Financial institutions provide loans under long-term plans, with the government bearing half of the loan interest.

This task should be entrusted to the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of State for Housing Affairs, Kuwait Municipality, and the Kuwait Credit Bank. Commercial banks can also play a role in this solution and will undoubtedly embrace it, as it promises substantial long-term profits.

Families should cooperate in repaying the loan, especially since the current housing care system allocates the house in the names of both the husband and wife. According to scientific reports, solving the problem would require approximately KD 20 billion.

However, if the situation remains unchanged, there will not be enough space for housing, as every citizen seeks to build large, palace-like homes.

Countries like Saudi Arabia have implemented systems that focus on building comfortable apartments for families and developing villa compounds.

All countries focus on providing land and necessary services, and facilitating loans for citizens who must build within a specific time frame, as the plot would be reclaimed otherwise. These countries also allocate land to real estate developers and require them to build specific models. The government then provides the completed houses to citizens, who repay the cost in installments over 30 to 40 years, with the state covering the loan's interest. These housing areas are self-sufficient in all services.

This efficient system has yet to be implemented in Kuwait because the housing loans provided to citizens are often insufficient to build the homes they desire. Many citizens seek to build large palaces or multiple rental floors, instead of homes for just their personal use. As a result, we see "jungles of concrete" rather than organized, civilized areas. Service issues have also risen because land designated for one thousand families is now overcrowded with ten thousand.

The solution to the housing crisis is simple, provided the decision-makers are convinced by these solutions. However, if they are more interested in benefiting from their position or serving the influential, the crisis will continue as it is.

Cold snap

Acting Director of the Meteorological Department, Dhirar Al-Ali, told

KUNA that weather conditions are expected to gradually improve by evening, with rain chances decreasing and possible fog formation in some areas.

The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) urged on Sunday the public to be cautious due to unstable weather affecting the country.

In a press statement, the KFF called upon people to contact the 112 Hotline in case of emergency.

Kuwait's 2025/2026

Al-Fassam said the first phase of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project is expected to be completed by 2028, Kuwait International Airport Terminal 2 by 2027, and the Umm Al-Hayman power station and its complementary works by 2025.

Regarding the Public Debt Law, the minister explained that its issuance is imminent and currently in its final stages. The purpose of the law is to fund capital projects aimed at diversifying Kuwait's income sources.

Kuwait intensifies

verification of the conditions of workers in the housing allocated to them, and application of the national referral system on the workers in order to regulate the labor market in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations. He revealed this move is part of PAM's plans to enhance control over the labor market.

Meanwhile, Al-Murad announced that a new shelter for male expatriate workers in an area measuring 10,000 square meters will open soon. He affirmed that this step aims to protect the workers' rights and prevent any violation related to exploitation or human trafficking.

He added the authority is keen on creating a suitable work environment for all expatriate workers in the country from the ethical, constitutional and legal standpoints in accordance with international agreements ratified by Kuwait regarding the protection and preservation of workers' rights.

Kuwait secures

She confirmed that the project will contribute significantly to diversifying sources of national income, increasing the gross domestic product (GDP); and restoring Kuwait to its regional commercial and financial status, as the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Sea Port project on Bubiyan Island is one of the main pillars of development.

She stated that the port will help expand economic and commercial activities in the field of export and import; secure the necessary resources to advance the local products, continue prosperity and economic growth; and advance the role of the State to reach

the highest level of efficiency in managing the development process.

She added the port will provide a wide range of commercial, professional development and job opportunities for citizens by creating different types of jobs that will be necessary for the success of its operations -- whether during the establishment and construction of the port or in the operation and production stages.

Gov't amends

it requires; thus, enabling it to address a sterile situation that has harmed companies listed on Boursa Kuwait, as it prevented them from owning real estate properties and engaging in commercial activities as per their founding contracts and basic systems. It added that the decision will solve this complex and important problem, and prevent damages and dire consequences.

Head of the union Ibrahim Al-Awadhi revealed that listed companies in general, and real estate companies in particular, were unable to buy or sell real estate properties and transfer ownership through the Real Estate Registration Department at the Ministry of Justice due to the presence of foreign owners among their shareholders for the past five years. He said this is considered an unjustified disruption in their work and a clash with the reality imposed by previous laws that were not implemented at the time and a step backwards in the State's efforts to attract and encourage foreign capital to participate in such types of investments.

9,464 stripped

Decree No. 28/2025 revoked Kuwaiti citizenship from 3,724 women and those who acquired it consequently.

The two Cabinet decisions for withdrawal of citizenship based on Article 21-bis of the Nationality Law are:

Resolution No. 54 /2025 called for the withdrawal of citizenship from four individuals and those who acquired it subsequently.

2,300-yr-old

the Kuwaiti-Italian archaeological mission made this discovery during its work at Al-Qurainiya site.

Al-Qurainiya is considered one of the most significant sites for archaeological excavation since 2014, which spans for multiple historical periods, from pre-Islamic times to the early and later Islamic periods, located in the northern part of Failaka Island, directly overlooking the sea.

Bin Redha highlighted the collaboration between NCCAL and the University of Perugia in Italy, under the supervision of the head of the Italian mission, Dr. Andrea Di Miceli.

Ministerial decisions provide local products edge in housing tenders

Amendments aim to boost national economy

By Mohammed Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff
KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs, and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) Abdul Latif Al-Mishari issued two ministerial decisions for

amending certain provisions of the tenders and direct contracting regulations.

In a significant move to protect the Kuwaiti product and enhance its role in tenders for PAHW, Al-Mishari issued these decisions to grant priority to local products in PAHW's tenders.

The two decisions require the relevant committee in supply tenders or similar contracts to apply the provisions of preference (prior-

ity) for local or national products as outlined in Law No. 49/2016 regarding public tenders and its amendments.

The first decision adds a new article, numbered 23-bis, to the tenders regulations, stating: "The committee in supply tenders or the like shall apply the provisions of 'priority' stipulated for local or national products in Law No. 49/2016 regarding public tenders and its amendments."

The second decision amends the previous text by replacing it with the text of Article 18 of the direct contracting regulations.

Kuwait, Azerbaijan eye trade growth

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (KUNA): Kuwait Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifah Al-Ajeel and Azerbaijan Deputy Foreign Minister Yalchin Rafiyev discussed enhancing economic ties between the two countries.

In a press statement Sunday, the Ministry of Commerce said the meeting discussed the two parties' desire to increase trade and economic relations in light of the diplomatic and political relations between the two countries.



KUNA photo
Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifah Al-Ajeel during his talks with Minister of Investment, Industry and Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan Laziz Kudratov.



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KUNA celebrates Kuwait's National, Liberation Days

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (KUNA): Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) celebrated the country's 64th National Day and 34th Liberation Day anniversaries on Sunday.

The event featured a variety of cultural and artistic displays, and a classic car exhibition.

The Kuwaiti Army Brass Band delivered a special performance, while Kuwaiti folklore musical troupes amused the audience with the 'Ardha' and 'Bahri' arts, reflecting the nation's heritage.

The celebration also included a modern interpretation of Sadu weaving designs by artist Manal Al-Maimouni alongside other handicrafts, while the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature participated with a collection of publications related to the joyous occasion.

Attending the celebration were KUNA's Deputy Director General for Administrative, Financial and Communications' Affairs Mohammad Al-Mannai, along with several department directors and staff.

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INTERNATIONAL

Justice Dept fires 20 immigration judges from backlogged courts

SAN DIEGO, Feb 16, (AP): The Trump administration fired 20 immigration judges without explanation, a union official said Saturday amid sweeping moves to shrink the size of the federal government.

On Friday, 13 judges who had yet to be sworn in and five assistant chief immigration judges were dismissed without notice, said **Matthew Biggs**, president of the International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers, which represents federal workers. Two other judges were fired under similar circumstances in the last week.

It was unclear if they would be replaced. The US Justice Department's Executive Office for Immigration Review, which runs the courts and oversees its roughly 700 judges, did not immediately respond to a request for comment Saturday. Immigration courts are backlogged with more than 3.7 million

cases, according to Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, and it takes years to decide asylum cases. There is support across the political spectrum for more judges and support staff, though the first Trump administration also pressured some judges to decide cases more quickly.

The Trump administration earlier replaced five top court officials, including Mary Cheng, the agency's acting director. Since Owen, the current leader and previously an appellate immigration judge, has issued a slew of new instructions, many reversing policies of the Biden administration.

Last month, the Justice Department halted financial support for nongovernmental organizations to provide information and guidance to people facing deportation but restored funding after a coalition of nonprofit groups filed a federal lawsuit.

The firings touch on two top Trump priorities: mass deportations and shrinking the size of the federal government. On Thursday, it ordered agencies to lay off nearly all probationary employees who had not yet gained civil service protection, potentially affecting hundreds of thousands of workers.



Biggs

Sen McConnell tests strengths and limits of power opposing trio of Trump's Cabinet nominees

WASHINGTON, Feb 16, (AP): No longer in charge, Sen. Mitch McConnell has been speaking his mind, the long-serving GOP leader rejecting President Donald Trump's more high-profile Cabinet nominees - alone at times, among the Republicans, casting his no votes.

When it came to Pete Hegseth, now the defense secretary, who faced allegations of excessive drinking and aggressive behavior toward women, McConnell said the combat veteran had "failed, as yet, to demonstrate" he was ready for the job.

The "desire to be a change agent is not enough," McConnell said.

On Tulsi Gabbard, who was sworn in this week as director of national intelligence, he said she has displayed "a history of alarming lapses in judgment," citing in particular her views toward Russia, China and the security breach by former government contractor Edward Snowden.

And as Senate Republicans confirmed Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, McConnell, a survivor of childhood polio who used a wheelchair during the vote, opposed.

"A record of trafficking in dangerous conspiracy theories and eroding trust in



US Sen Mitch McConnell, R-Ky, boards a train in the Senate subway at the Capitol, Jan 23 in Washington. (AP)

public health institutions does not entitle Mr. Kennedy to lead these important efforts," the Kentucky senator said.

This is McConnell unplugged, three weeks into the Trump administration, and his new role as no longer the Senate GOP leader but one of 100 senators. It is testing the strength, but also the limits, of his influence on the insti-

tuition, where he has been a monumental presence for nearly 40 years.

McConnell is far from an anti-Trump Republican and hardly the face of the GOP opposition to the White House. He has voted to confirm Trump's other nominees and said he expects to support Trump's agenda.

But his opposition to the trio of

Trump's most controversial nominees stands out. Taken together, McConnell's votes against Hegseth, Gabbard and RFK Jr. provide a window into the type of leader he intends to be outside the stately leadership office. And it shows the shifts in his power, as few other Republicans joined him, leaving him often on his own, with Democrats, unable to stop Trump's choices.

"McConnell's votes on the Trump nominees reflect, at least in part, the fact that he is more free to vote in accord with personal preferences than he was when he was responsible for serving as the leader and voice for Senate Republicans," said Frances Lee, a professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton.

Just two other Republicans, the independent-minded Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, also voted against Hegseth. "Now that he is no longer in leadership, Sen. McConnell enjoys more freedom to simply exercise his own individual judgment and personal discretion," Lee said.

Trump lashed out after the latest votes, calling McConnell "bitter" and "not equipped mentally" during a lengthy rant in the Oval Office late Thursday, after Kennedy was sworn into office.

US president tours Boeing plane

Trump moves with dizzying speed on to-do list

WASHINGTON, Feb 16, (AP): As US President Donald Trump approaches the first-month mark in his second term, he has moved with dizzying speed and blunt force to reorder American social and political norms and the economy while redefining the US role in the world.

At the same time, he has empowered Elon Musk, an unelected, South African-born billionaire, to help engineer the firing of thousands of federal employees and potentially shutter entire agencies created by Congress.

Those efforts have largely overshadowed Trump's crackdowns on immigration and the US-Mexico border, and his efforts to remake social policy by wiping out diversity, equity and inclusion programs and rolling back transgender rights.

The president has also imposed scores of new tariffs against US trade partners and threatened more, even as economists warn that will pass costs on to U.S. consumers and feed inflation.

Here's a look at the first four weeks:

The Trump administration fired thousands of workers who were still in probationary periods common among new hires. Some had less than an hour to leave their offices.

Those potentially losing jobs include medical scientists, energy infrastructure specialists, foreign service employees, FBI agents, prosecutors, educational and farming data experts, overseas aid workers and even human resources personnel who would otherwise have to manage the dismissals.

At the Consumer Financial Protec-



US President Donald Trump boards Air Force One at Joint Base Andrews, Md on Feb 14 en route to West Palm Beach, Fla. (AP)

tion Bureau, which was created to protect the public after the 2008 financial crisis, employees say the administration not only wants to cut nearly the entire workforce but also erase all its data from the past 12 years. The administration agreed to pause any further dismantling of the agency until March 3, under a judge's order.

Also:
WEST PALM BEACH, Fla: US President Donald Trump toured a Boeing airplane to check out new hardware and technology features and highlight the aircraft maker's delay in deliver-

ing updated versions of the Air Force One presidential aircraft, the White House said Saturday. Trump visited the 13-year-old private aircraft parked at Palm Beach International Airport.

"President Trump is touring a new Boeing plane to checkout the new hardware/technology," said **Steven Chung**, the White House communications director. "This highlights the project's failure to deliver a new Air Force One on time as promised."

Air Force One is a modified Boeing 747. Two exist and the president flies on both of the more than 30-year-old planes.



In this photo provided by Donnie Smith, a kayaker navigates floodwaters on Feb 15, in rural Knox County, Ky. (AP)

Flooding in US Southeast leaves 2 dead

Much of the US faced another round of biting winter weather on Sunday, with torrential rains causing intense flooding in Kentucky and resulting in at least two deaths. The Northern Plains faced life-threatening cold, and tornado watches were issued for parts of Georgia and Florida.

A 73-year-old man was found dead in floodwaters in Clay County, WKYT-TV reported. Clay County Emergency Management Deputy Director Revelle Berry confirmed the fatality but did not provide additional details.

Severe storms also swept through parts of Florida and Georgia, where tornado watches were in effect early Sunday, the National Weather Service said.

Elsewhere, bone-chilling cold is expected for the Northern Plains with low temperatures into the minus 30s F near the Canadian border. Dangerously cold wind chill temperatures in the Dakotas and Minnesota of minus 40 Fahrenheit (minus 40 Celsius) to minus 50 F (minus 45.6 C) are expected. Heavy snowfall amounts were

expected in parts of New England and northern New York. In some areas, wind gusts could reach 60 mph (about 97 kph) and create "hazardous whiteout conditions," the NWS said.

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife said there was an investigation into a death and a rescue operation was underway in Hart County, WKYT-TV reported. The station reported a youth died and a second victim was missing in flooding Saturday evening. (AP)

Stubb urges Europe to firm up Ukraine's hand for US-sought talks with Russia to end war

MUNICH, Feb 16, (AP): Finland's president on Sunday urged the rearming of Ukraine and putting "maximum pressure on Russia" through sanctions and asset freezes in the run-up to possible negotiations sought by the US on ending the war.

Alexander Stubb and other European leaders at the final day of the Munich Security Conference on Sunday sought to firm up how the European Union can move from talk to more action and stay relevant as Washington pushes to stop the fighting. He laid out three phases: "pre-negotiation," cease-

fire and long-term peace negotiation.

"The first phase is the pre-negotiation, and this is a moment when we need to rearm Ukraine and put maximum pressure on Russia, which means sanctions, which means frozen assets, so that Ukraine begins these negotiations from a position of strength," he said.

U.S. President Donald Trump's push for a quick way out of the Ukraine war has stirred concern and uncertainty in Munich. After a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin last week, Trump said he and Putin would

likely meet soon to negotiate a peace deal over Ukraine. Trump later assured Zelenskyy he also would have a seat at the table. US officials have indicated that European nations, however, would not be involved.

"Don't underestimate Trump as a negotiator, I genuinely believe that Putin is baffled and afraid what might be coming from there," Stubb said. "Right now, the ball is in our court here in Europe. We need to convince the Americans where's the value added, and then get back into the table."

"I think in Europe we need to talk less and do more," he added later.

President Edgars Rinkevics of Latvia, which like Finland borders Russia, agreed that "if we are strong, if we have something to offer ... then we are going to be interesting to the United States. If you are just continue having those nice conferences, talking and whining, then we are not going to be interesting to our own publics very soon."

The three-day conference was a hub of crisscrossing diplomacy on issues of politics, economics, and defense and security, with top envoys on hand from places as diverse as Syria and Saudi Arabia, and Japan and South Korea, as well as many European leaders.

On Saturday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for the creation of an "armed forces of Europe" to better stand up to an expansionist Russia that could threaten the European Union, too.



Norway's Finance Minister Jens Stoltenberg meets the press at the annual security conference in Munich, Germany on Feb 16. (AP)

Defiant Canadians mark flag's 'versary

VANCOUVER, British Columbia, Feb 16, (AP): Canadians on Saturday marked the 60th anniversary of the inauguration of their flag with a defiant sense of patriotism that people said was prompted by U.S. President Donald Trump's threats of tariffs and suggestions that the country become the 51st U.S. state.

Deborah Weismiller said she decided to hang a Canadian flag in the window of her Edmonton home for the first time.

"We share a passion for our country and although we have a reputation as being discreetly patriotic, we are suddenly driven to announce it loudly and clearly," said Weismiller, 69, a retired journalist.

"Certainly the vast majority of Canadians are horrified at the very thought of becoming a 51st state at the best of times, let alone at a time when that country is in a frightening state of chaos," she added.



Local youth skate with a large Canadian flag on the Rideau Canal to launch celebrations for the 60th Anniversary of the National Flag of Canada Day, on Feb 14, in Ottawa. (AP)



People attend a protest triggered after a concrete canopy on a railway station in the northern city of Novi Sad collapsed on Nov. 1, 2024 killed 15 people, in Kragujevac, Serbia on Feb 16. (AP)

Serbia's protesting students, supporters of Vucic hold rallies

Serbia's striking students and supporters of populist President Aleksandar Vucic held parallel rallies Saturday as both marked a major holiday in the country with notably contrasting messages.

The student-led protest is the latest in a nationwide anti-graft movement that reflects mounting calls for fundamental political changes in the Balkan state, triggered after a concrete canopy on a railway

station in the northern city of Novi Sad collapsed on Nov. 1, killing 15 people.

The rally in the central industrial city of Kragujevac drew tens of thousands of people who, besides demanding justice over the tragedy, have been demanding that officials root out rampant endemic corruption and respect for the rule of law.

Students chose Kragujevac for

Saturday's rally because of its history.

In 1835, Serbia was still part of the Ottoman Empire, and people in Kragujevac announced a new constitution that sought to limit the powers of the then rulers. The date is now celebrated as Statehood Day, a national holiday.

People from all over the country streamed into Kragujevac for Saturday's gathering. (AP)

'Suspect had terror motive'

Man stabs six passersby, killing one in Austria

VIENNA, Feb 16, (AP): Austrian authorities said the man accused of stabbing six passersby in broad daylight, killing a 14-year-old boy and wounding five others, was motivated by "Islamic terrorism."

The suspect, a 23-year-old Syrian man, was arrested after the attack in the southern city of Villach on Saturday.

Interior Minister Gerhard Karner said Sunday he felt "anger about an Islamist attacker who indiscriminately stabbed innocent people here in this city."

Karner told reporters in Villach that the attacker had ties to the Islamic State group and radicalized himself online within a very short time.

State governor Peter Kaiser thanked a 42-year-old man, also a Syrian working for a food delivery company, who drove toward the suspect and helped prevent the situation from getting



A person lights a candle at the site of a stabbing attack in Villach, Austria on Feb 16. (AP)

worse. "This shows how closely terrorist evil but also human good can be united in one and the same nationality."

This marks the second deadly jihadi attack in Austria in recent years. In November 2020, a man who had previously attempted to join the Islamic State group carried out a rampage in Vienna, armed with an automatic rifle and a fake explosive vest, killing four people before being fatally shot by police.

Austria's President Alexander Van der Bellen called the attack "horrific." "No words can undo the suffering, the horror, the fear. My thoughts are with the family of the deceased victim and the injured," he posted on X.

The Free Syrian Community of Austria issued a statement on Facebook distancing itself from the attack and expressing its deepest condolences to the victims' families.

'Honor promises of removing Typhon missile system'

US aircraft makes emergency landing in Manila

MANILA, Philippines, Feb 16, (Xinhua): A US navy aircraft made an emergency landing on a small island off Quezon province, east of Manila, due to so-called engine trouble, local police said Sunday. According to the police, the aircraft was forced to land on Balesin Island on Saturday noon after its engine reportedly failed.

The people on board were safe, the police said. Two US navy aircraft from a military base in Subic on the west coast of Luzon Island flew mechanics to the island to repair the stalled aircraft, local media reported on Sunday.

The US embassy has not issued any statement on the incident.

Meanwhile, a Chinese military spokesperson on Friday denounced the Philippines for using the deployment of the Typhon mid-range missile system as a bargaining chip on the South China Sea issue, warning that such actions endanger the well-being of its people, and regional peace and stability.

Zhang Xiaogang, spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defense, made the remarks in response to a me-



Two Philippine Air Force FA-50 fighter jets fly with two US Air Force B-1 bomber aircraft during a joint patrol and training over the South China Sea on Feb 4. (AP)

dia query regarding the remarks from the Philippine side that it would return the Typhon system to the United States so long as China stops its territorial claims.

Noting that the Typhon missile system is a strategic asset and an offensive weapon, Zhang said that the Philippine

side had repeatedly gone back on its words and brought in the system to cater to the US side.

Such a decision would only place its national security and defense in the hands of others, and lead to geopolitical confrontation and risks of an arms race in the region, Zhang added.

Stating that the territory of the Philippines is defined by a series of international treaties, Zhang said that China's Nansha Qundao and Huangyan Dao fall outside Philippine territory.

"It's legitimate, lawful and beyond reproach for the Chinese side to conduct law-enforcement activities in relevant waters," he said.

"We require the Philippine side to remove the Typhon missile system as soon as possible to honor its open promises, and return to the right track of dialogue and consultations at an early date," Zhang said, adding that China will continue to take necessary measures to resolutely counter provocations and infringements and safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

Asia

29 arrested in Myanmar: Authorities arrested 29 suspects in eastern Myanmar's Tachileik township for illegal online gambling and financial fraud on Feb. 12 and Feb. 13, according to a statement from the State Administration Council's Information Team late Friday.

The group included seven Thai nationals and 22 Myanmar nationals. Along with the suspects, officials seized 440 computers, 390 mobile phones, two undocumented vehicles, and drug-related items, the statement said.

According to the suspects, the Thai nationals had entered Myanmar via the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge No. 1 for work and travel. They were later recruited by individuals involved in illegal online gambling and financial fraud, it said. (Xinhua)

Melbourne shooting injures 1: Police in Melbourne are searching for two people after a man was seriously injured in a shooting in the city's southeast. Victoria Police said on Sunday that an altercation broke out when three men attended a property in Pakenham, 50 km southeast of central



A dragon dance show is staged in Ruhong Village of Chun'an County, east China's Zhejiang Province on Feb 15. The Lantern Festival falls on the 15th day of the first lunar month, marking the end of the Chinese New Year celebrations. (Xinhua)

Melbourne, shortly after 1 a.m. local time on Sunday.

During the altercation with an occupant of the property, one of the three men was shot, police said.

Emergency services were called to the scene and the man was taken to a nearby hospital with serious injuries under police guard. (Xinhua)

10 suspects held in Thailand: Authorities in Thailand have arrested

10 Chinese suspects in connection with the case involving Chinese actor Wang Xing and have handed them over to the immigration department for repatriation to China, the Thai police said on Friday.

According to a statement released by the Thai police, investigations found that the 10 arrested suspects belonged to a criminal gang that had long been conducting telecommunications fraud targeting Chinese citizens in Myawaddy, Myanmar. (Xinhua)

Germany to strengthen exchanges, cooperation with China: Scholz

China to deepen cooperation with France in various fields, says foreign minister

MUNICH, Germany, Feb 16, (Xinhua): China is ready to work with France, guided by the important consensus reached by their heads of state, to continuously advance cooperation in diverse fields, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said here on Saturday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during a meeting with his French counterpart Jean-Noel Barrot after attending the Munich Security Conference.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's milestone visit to France last year, marking the 60th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic ties, has opened a new chapter in China-France relations, Wang said.

China and France are both permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council and major countries of global influence, Wang said, adding that their relationship has strategic value and exemplary significance beyond the bilateral level. He noted that this year marks the 80th anniversary of the victory in the World Anti-Fascist War and the founding of the UN.

Wang said that the two sides should uphold their tradition of independence and self-reliance, adhere to openness and win-win cooperation and act as stabilizing forces in maintaining international order and promoting global growth.

Noting that trade frictions are issues in the process of cooperation between China and the European Union (EU), Wang expressed confidence that as comprehensive strategic partners, China and France -- as well as China and the EU -- have the wisdom and capability to properly resolve these issues.

The top Chinese diplomat said he hopes the EU will uphold open cooperation, support free trade, and work with China in the same direction while accommodating each other's legitimate concerns. China, he added, stands ready to continue constructive dialogue with the EU on this matter.

Barrot said France appreciates China's firm and clear voice in support of multilateralism at the Munich Security Conference and values China's role as a stabilizing force in global governance. He added that France and China should work together to play a leadership role in upholding multilateralism and improving international governance.

France will continue to adhere to the one-China policy and is ready to strengthen high-level exchanges with China, making full use of the high-level



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz meets with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, in Munich, Germany on Feb 15. (Xinhua)

dialogue mechanism, Barrot said. He added that France supports deepening strong economic and trade relations between France and China, as well as between the EU and China, properly handling trade differences, and jointly resisting protectionism.

The two officials exchanged views on artificial intelligence, climate change, and maritime cooperation, agreeing to strengthen cooperation in global govern-

ance and promote international solidarity in addressing global challenges.

They also discussed the Ukraine issue, with Wang reiterating China's position and principles. He expressed hope for steady progress in peace talks based on consensus among all parties and the establishment of a balanced, effective and sustainable European security framework to ultimately achieve long-term peace and stability on the continent.

The two sides agreed to strengthen communication and coordination on the Gaza conflict, promote de-escalation, and return to the "two-state solution."

They also exchanged views on the Iran nuclear issue and other matters.

Also:

MUNICH, Germany: German Chancellor **Olaf Scholz** pledged to enhance exchanges, dialogue and cooperation with **China** during his meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister **Wang Yi** on Saturday.

Wang, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, conveyed cordial greetings from the Chinese leadership to Scholz.

Wang said that high-level interactions between China and Germany have been frequent and bilateral pragmatic cooperation has maintained good momentum and yielded positive results, which served the fundamental and long-term interests of both peoples.

He stressed that as strategic partners, China and Germany, as well as China and the European Union (EU), should further strengthen unity, coordination and cooperation to uphold free trade, practice multilateralism, and safeguard the authority of the United Nations.

China is pleased to see Germany playing a significant role in a multipolar world and is willing to deepen comprehensive cooperation with Germany to advance bilateral relations in a positive direction, safeguard global peace and stability, and provide greater certainty to an increasingly turbulent world, he added. This year marks the 50th anniversary of China-EU diplomatic ties, Wang said, adding that the two sides should enhance complementary advantages and deepen pragmatic cooperation to jointly usher in the next 50 years of even stronger China-EU relations.

At least 18 people dead after stampede at New Delhi railway station in India

NEW DELHI, Feb 16, (AP): At least 18 people, including 14 women, were killed in a stampede at a railway station in India's capital of New Delhi, the Press Trust of India news agency reported Sunday.

Many of the victims were Hindu pilgrims who were traveling to the Maha

Kumbh festival in Prayagraj in northern India, according to Delhi's caretaker chief minister, Atishi, who uses only one name.

The stampede happened late Saturday while thousands of people were gathered at the New Delhi railway station waiting to board a train. The in-

cident occurred after some passengers slipped and fell on others while coming down from a footbridge that connects train platforms, authorities said.

Sheela Devi, who was at Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narain Hospital in New Delhi to collect her daughter-in-law's body, said an announcement about a change of train platforms created confusion among the passengers that led to the stampede.

"The crowd went out of control and no one could control it," said Nikhil Kumar, a shopkeeper who witnessed the crowd surge.

Also:

NEW DELHI: A court in India on Friday found a 31-year-old man guilty of raping and murdering an Irish woman at a popular tourist resort in 2017.

Vikat Bhagat was found guilty of the crime by Judge **Kshama Joshi** at the District and Sessions Court in western **Goa state**. Joshi said she will pronounce sentencing on Monday.

The body of 28-year-old **Danielle McLaughlin** was found by a farmer on a beach popular with holidaymakers in the western state of Goa in March 2017. An autopsy showed that cerebral damage and constriction of the neck caused her death.



Relatives of a passenger who died during a stampede took place Saturday at New Delhi railway station, console each other as they wait to collect the body from a hospital, in New Delhi, India on Feb 16. (AP)



This photo taken on Feb. 15, 2025, shows the venue of the 38th Ordinary Session of the African Union (AU) Assembly of the Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. (Xinhua)

African leaders elect Djibouti's foreign minister as new leader of AU Commission

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia, Feb 16, (Agencies): African leaders on Saturday elected Djibouti's foreign minister to become the next leader of the commission that runs the continent-wide African Union.

Mahmoud Ali Youssouf defeated Raila Odinga, a former prime minister of Kenya, and Richard Randsamandratro, an ex-foreign minister of Madagascar, in a vote at the AU summit in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital.

The AU has 55 member states. Presidents or heads of government pick the commission's leader, who is effectively the chief executive of the Addis Ababa-based secretariat running the AU.

Youssouf, who will serve a four-year term, replaces Moussa Faki of Chad, who has held the post since 2017.

The result is a blow for the high-profile Odinga, who sought support among allies at home and abroad.

The 80-year-old Odinga has sought

Kenya's presidency five times over three decades, and the AU post would have been his last foray in public affairs. His long and colorful career in local politics peaked with his rise to the position of prime minister in 2008 after tense negotiations to end post-election violence in which at least 1,000 people were killed in Kenya.

Odinga remains a beloved figure in Kenya, but some saw his recent political alliance with William Ruto, the current president of the country, as a betrayal of a decades-long fight for good governance in the east African country.

As head of the AU Commission, Youssouf inherits challenges ranging from the rise of military juntas in east Africa to a violent rebellion in eastern Congo, where rebels backed by Rwanda have taken two major cities in recent days.

Youssouf has been Djibouti's foreign affairs minister since 2005.

The AU is frequently criticized for

perceived inaction or lack of serious response to armed conflicts in different parts of Africa.

Meanwhile, Xi Jinping on Saturday sent a message to the 38th African Union (AU) summit, extending warm congratulations to African countries and people.

In the face of the current complex and intertwined international situation, the Global South, represented by China and Africa, has grown significantly, Xi noted.

Over the past year, the AU has united and led African countries in vigorously advancing integration, actively responding to regional and global challenges, and speaking in unison as the "voice of Africa," Xi said.

Noting that these efforts have led to a continuous boost in Africa's international status and influence, he sincerely wishes African countries and people even greater success on the path of independence, self-reliance and development.

Africa

M23 reaches center of Bukavu: Rwanda-backed rebels reached the center of east Congo's second largest city, Bukavu, on Sunday morning and took control of the South Kivu province administrative office after little resistance from government forces, many of whom fled the rebels' advance.

Congo's President **Felix Tshisekedi** held a security meeting in the faraway capital of Kinshasa, where officials noted that Bukavu was "briefly" invaded by M23 but remains under the control of the Congolese army and allies from local militia, the



Tshisekedi

presidency said on X. There were no signs of fighting or of Congolese forces in most parts of Bukavu on Sunday.

Tshisekedi has warned of the risk of a regional expansion of the conflict. Congo's forces are being supported in Bukavu by troops from Burundi and in Goma by troops from South Africa. (AP)

Mali mine collapse kills 48: At least 48 people, most of them women, were killed on Saturday when an "illegally operated gold mining site" collapsed in western Mali, according to consistent eyewitness accounts from the area.

The tragedy occurred in Bilalkoto, a village in the commune of Dabia, located in the Kenieba district of the Kayes region. A local official, who spoke to Xinhua anonymously, said that a Caterpillar machine allegedly fell onto an artisanal mine where a group of women were working in search of gold. (Xinhua)



From left: Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira attend the Outreach/BRICS Plus format session at the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia on Oct 24, 2024. (AP)

Brazil to host BRICS summit in Rio de Janeiro in July

The Brazilian government announced Saturday that the next BRICS summit will take place in Rio de Janeiro on July 6-7.

Brazil will chair the bloc of developing economies through 2025 and said it will focus on promoting global governance reform and cooperation among Global

South countries, according to a statement from the federal government.

BRICS was established in 2009 by Brazil, Russia, India, and China, with South Africa joining in 2010 as a counterbalance to the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations. (AP)

Boursa Kuwait general index up by 0.11%

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait closed trading on Sunday with its general index rising by 8.91 points, or 0.11 percent, to settle at 8,027.94 points. A total of 866 million shares were exchanged through 21,166 cash transactions, with a total market value of KD 221.3 million (ap-

proximately USD 681.6 million).

The Main Market Index recorded a significant increase of 48.68 points, or 0.66 percent, closing at 7,452.95 points. Trading volume reached 465.9 million shares, transacted through 13,644 deals, amounting to KD 155.5 million (about USD 478.9 million).

Business



NBK officials host 'Tamakan' graduation ceremony at headquarters.

Organized by Creative Confidence with the sponsorship & strategic support of the bank

NBK hosts graduation ceremony for 'Tamakan' participants

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: The activities of the "Tamakan" training program for Kuwaiti fresh graduates, organized by Creative Confidence for the sixth consecutive year, with the sponsorship and strategic support of the National Bank of Kuwait, concluded.

The closing ceremony of the program, which was held at the bank's headquarters, was attended by the executive management of the National Bank of Kuwait. A discussion session was held during which the executive management listened to a presentation given by the program's trainees on their distinguished graduation projects, which contained creative ideas and visions.

The "Tamakan" Program, in its sixth edition and over the course of 10 weeks, aimed to develop the personal skills needed to become compelling candidates, in addition to motivating Kuwaiti youth to explore their potentials and energies. It also unleashes the creativity of young talent through workshops about creativity and innovation, design thinking, business model design, career exploration and innovative de-risking solutions.

NBK hosted the trainees at its different departments. It gave participants an exceptional opportunity to benefit from the expertise of NBK's executive management, through the open discussions held for participants with the bank's leaders who have extensive experience spanning long years in the

- Trainees presented their distinguished graduation projects that carried creative ideas and visions
- The program provided participants with an exceptional opportunity to benefit from the experiences of the executive management at NBK

banking industry. This allowed the trainees to benefit from these experiences for a successful and sustainable career.

"Tamakan" is an innovative training experience for Kuwaiti fresh graduates to achieve professional self-development in pursuit of emerging as active and efficient workforce and finding promising job opportunities in the private sector. The program gives the opportunity for Kuwaiti fresh graduates to acquire many skills and put theories and rules into action, in addition to developing personal and professional skills.

NBK's continuing sponsorship of this first of its kind program, which received "The Social work Pioneer Project Award" in the private commercial

sector from the GCC Council of Ministers of Social Affairs and Labor in 2022, reflects its firm belief in the importance of nurturing the Kuwaiti youth by attracting and developing talents and providing all means of support to help them navigate their way confidently into the labor market.

The trainees expressed their happiness to participate in "Tamakan" program, and thanked Creative Confidence for organizing the program and the National Bank of Kuwait for its support, sponsorship, and provision of its extensive expertise in order to develop their skills and qualify them for the labor market in a professional manner, thanks to the bank's institutional approach characterized by high professionalism.

They confirmed that they witnessed significant development during the program and gained knowledge that constitutes an added value to their future career path, describing the "Tamakan" program as a bridge for them from the academic stage to the professional stage.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is a key sponsor of different social initiatives that align with the goals of Kuwait National Development Plan and of Kuwait Vision 2035, in terms of driving growth and providing job opportunities for the Kuwaiti youth in the private sector, considering them Kuwait's most valuable resource, and the keystone for national development.

Construction sector faces project delays, rising costs

Labor shortage drives rising construction costs

By Mahmoud Shendi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: The construction sector in Kuwait is facing many challenges, the most important of which is the decline in the launch and award of projects, as well as the signing of contracts in the last five years. There have also been delays in payments owed to contractors.

The sector is also grappling with the worsening issue of rising construction costs, driven by a labor shortage that has led to an unprecedented increase in wages.

Real estate experts have confirmed that the labor shortage is not only a matter of quantity but also quality.

The real estate market has witnessed the departure of a large number of experienced workers over the past two years, following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, local banks' financing for the construction sector for residents and non-residents decreased by KD 61.8 million, or 12.1 percent, on a monthly basis in December, reaching KD 445.5 million compared to KD 507.3 million in November.

However, financing increased on an annual basis by KD 211.4 million, or 90.3 percent, compared to KD 234.1 million in December 2023.

The total financing provided by banks to the construction sector in 2024 amounted to approximately KD 3.86 billion.

According to the monthly statistics issued by the Central Bank of Kuwait for December, the accumulated balance of construction financing provided by local banks to residents and non-residents declined by 6.8 percent, or KD 208 million, from KD 3,048 billion in November to KD 2,840 billion in December.

On an annual basis, the balance increased by KD 261 million (10.1 percent) compared to KD 2,579 billion in December 2023.

The statistics also revealed that the total financing provided by local banks to the construction sector during 2023 rose to KD 1,754 billion, a 0.7 percent increase compared to KD 1,740 billion in 2022.

On the other hand, data from the Central Bank of Kuwait revealed an increase in the volume of deposits in local banks for both residents and non-residents during 2024, rising by about KD 816 million, or 1.5 percent, to reach KD 53,823 billion by the end of December 2024, compared to KD 53 billion in December 2023.

Government deposits increased by approximately KD 390 million, reaching KD 5,083 billion by the end of December 2024, compared to KD 4,694 billion at the end of December 2023.

Private sector deposits also rose by about KD 795 million, reaching KD 41,485 billion by the end of December 2024, compared to KD 40,690 billion in December 2023.

The financial data at the end of December 2024 also showed an increase in the balances of bank credit facilities for economic sectors, rising by KD 3.6 billion to reach KD 57.17 billion.

costs rose by 1% year-on-year, the first increase in six months, driven by smaller declines in gasoline and fuel oil prices. Prices for used cars and trucks rebounded, while transportation costs accelerated, and the decline in new vehicle prices slowed. Food inflation remained steady at 2.5%, while shelter inflation eased slightly to 4.4%. On a monthly basis, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 0.5%, higher than the previous month's 0.4% and above forecasts of 0.3%, with shelter costs accounting for nearly 30% of the increase. Meanwhile, core inflation unexpectedly climbed to 3.3% annually, surpassing expectations of a decline to 3.1%, while the monthly core rate rose by 0.4%.

US Retail Sales Show Weak Start to 2025

The latest US Advance Monthly Sales for Retail and Food Services report reveals a 0.9% decline in January 2025, following a revised 0.7% increase in December 2024. Despite this monthly decline, overall sales were 4.2% higher than in January 2024. Retail trade sales dropped 1.2% from December 2024, though they remained 4.0% higher year-over-year. Key sector highlights include a 6.4% annual increase in motor vehicle and parts sales and a 5.4% rise in food services.

The US Dollar index closed the week at 106.710.

Europe

Switzerland Inflation Slows in January

The Switzerland consumer price index rose 0.4% y/y in January 2025, lower than expectations and the previous

CEO highlights AI's impact on investment strategies

UIC holds workshop on strategic AI adoption in investment sector

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: The Union of Investment Companies (UIC) organized a workshop titled "AI - Introduction to Strategic Adoption in Investment Companies," in collaboration with RTS and its partner Assentify at the UIC headquarters.

According to a press release issued by UIC, the workshop was aimed at enhancing participants' understanding of artificial intelligence concepts and exploring their practical applications in the investment sector.

Secretary General of UIC Fadwa Darwish affirmed that the rapid pace of digital transformation and the ongoing technological advancements require the investment sector to adopt innovative solutions that keep pace with these changes.

She said equipping professionals in the sector with the knowledge to strategically implement AI technologies can significantly contribute to enhancing operational efficiency, improving analytical and decision-making processes, and strengthening forecasting and risk management strategies, all of which contribute to building a more advanced and flexible investment environment.

The workshop began with an introduction to artificial intelligence. Its basic concepts and the growing impact it has on the investment sector were cov-



UIC hosts workshop on AI adoption.

ered. This was followed by the evolution of artificial intelligence, and the stages it has passed through to reach its current advanced state.

The workshop also provided an overview of AI applications in investment companies, including practical activities that allowed participants to explore how to benefit from this technology in a real investment environment. The main areas of focus included market analysis, investment portfolio management, risk management and compliance, predictive modeling, market forecasting, and anti-money laun-

dering efforts.

Also, the role of data in AI was emphasized, with discussions on how data is important for developing smart models.

In addition, founder and CEO of RTS Sarah Abdel Samad highlighted the importance of AI in transforming investment strategies.

She affirmed that artificial intelligence is reshaping the financial landscape, unlocking new opportunities for enhancing efficiency, mitigating risks, and making data-driven decisions.

Tariffs and inflation challenge central banks amid trade war fears

By National Bank of Kuwait

United States

President Trump Speaks

President Trump signed an executive order imposing 25% tariffs on steel and aluminium imports, with no exceptions. Plans for additional tariffs raised fears of a global trade war, potentially increasing inflation and limiting the Federal Reserve's ability to cut interest rates. Investors were also focused on Fed Chair Jerome Powell's testimony for insights into future rate policies.

Jerome Powell Testifies

U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell recently spoke before Congress for the first time since President Donald Trump took office. He praised the strong economy Trump inherited but avoided answering questions about tariffs, Elon Musk's involvement in government, bank safety, and other issues highlighting the administration's rocky start. Powell's biannual visits to Congress often cover more than just the economy and monetary policy, which are his main focus. With unemployment at 4%, inflation close to the Fed's 2% target, and steady growth, Powell said the economy is in a "pretty good place." He mentioned the Fed isn't rushing to cut interest rates further but will act if inflation drops or the job market weakens. However, during his two-hour appearance before the Senate Banking Committee, led by new chair Tim Scott, the Fed's core goals of stable prices and maximum employment took a backseat. Senators asked about the future of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which Trump wants to reduce or dismantle, whether Musk's team tried to access Fed systems, if bank accounts are safe given Musk's Treasury role, and steps to ease bank regulations. They also pressed Powell on whether Trump's new tariffs could raise inflation, a concern for the Fed, though policymakers avoid directly judging such policies. Powell stated that free trade still makes sense logically but emphasized that it's not the Fed's role to set or comment on tariff policy. Instead, the Fed aims to respond to such policies thoughtfully.

US Inflation Rises, Fuelling Rate Speculation

In January 2025, the annual inflation rate in the US increased to 3.0% from 2.9% in December, exceeding market expectations and signalling stalled progress in controlling inflation. Energy

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	Forward
EUR	1.0322	1.0279	1.0514	1.0491	1.0400	1.0690	1.0540
GBP	1.2394	1.2329	1.2630	1.2585	1.2500	1.2800	1.2585
JPY	151.25	151.24	154.79	152.33	150.50	153.00	150.80
CHF	0.9092	0.8969	0.9155	0.8991	0.8800	0.9080	0.8900

Asia-Pacific

Chins Inflation Hits Five-Month High

China's consumer inflation rose to a five-month high in January, while producer price deflation persisted, highlighting uneven consumer demand and weak industrial activity. The consumer price index (CPI) increased by 0.5% year-on-year, up from December's 0.1% gain and exceeding economists' forecast of 0.4%. Meanwhile, the producer price index (PPI) fell by 2.3% annually, matching December's decline and extending a 28-month deflationary trend in factory-gate prices. Despite these economic signals, the government is unlikely to adjust monetary or fiscal policies before the annual parliamentary session in March.

The USD/CNY currency pair closed the week at 7.2530.

Australia Business Confidence Rebounds in January

Australia's NAB business confidence index rose to 4 in January 2025, its highest level since early 2023, rebounding from -2 in December. The increase was driven by broad-based industry growth, though business conditions softened due to declines in sales, profitability, and capacity utilization. Some industries, like mining, retail, and finance, contracted, while wholesale, transport, and manufacturing expanded. Labor and purchase costs rose slightly, and while demand remained stable, the overall economic outlook remained weak, according to NAB's chief economist.

Australia Inflation Expectations Rise Ahead of RBA's Upcoming Meeting

In February 2025, Australia's consumer inflation expectations rose to 4.6% from 4.0%, the highest since April 2024, ahead of the Reserve Bank's first policy meeting of the year. The central bank kept the cash rate at 4.35% in December, citing it as sufficiently restrictive to guide inflation while supporting employment. Meanwhile, monthly CPI rose 2.5% in December as government energy rebates faded, though annual inflation for Q4 2024 fell to 2.4%, the lowest since early 2021. The trimmed mean CPI increased 3.2%, below forecasts but still above the central bank's 2-3% target.

The AUD/USD currency pair closed the week at 0.6350.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30885.

United Kingdom

UK Economy Ends 2024 With Modest Growth

The UK economy showed modest growth in December 2024, with GDP rising by 0.4%, driven primarily by the services sector, which saw a 0.4% increase in output. The production sector also expanded by 0.5%, while construction output declined slightly by 0.2%. Over the three months leading to December, GDP grew by 0.1%, reflecting steady but limited economic momentum. On an annual basis, GDP expanded by 0.8% in 2024 compared to the previous year, with services as the main driver, growing by 1.3%, while production output declined by 1.7%. These figures suggest a gradual economic recovery, though sectoral disparities remain.

The GBP/USD currency pair closed the week at 1.2585.

Loan growth up by 4%, corporate book surges 10%

Gulf Bank reports 2024 financial performance in year-end webcast

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: Gulf Bank held its year-end 2024 earnings webcast on Thursday 13th February 2025, to present and discuss the Bank's financial performance. The webcast was organized by EFG Hermes and presented by Waleed Mandani, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Gulf Bank, and David Challinor, Chief Financial Officer of Gulf Bank. The discussion was moderated by Dalal AlDousari, Head of Investor Relations at Gulf Bank.

Operating Environment

Mr. Waleed Khaled Mandani, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Gulf Bank, commenced the webcast with key updates regarding Gulf Bank's operating environment during the year 2024. Mandani stated: "The global economic landscape in 2024 experienced considerable fluctuations. Central banks worldwide started to recalibrate monetary policies to address shifting financial conditions. However, Kuwait's financial system continues to demonstrate resilience, supported by stable oil prices, ambitious government initiatives toward economic diversification, and a commitment to fiscal reform."

Mr. Mandani added "Against this backdrop, Gulf Bank has played a key role in supporting Kuwait's economic development and Vision 2035 aspirations. Operationally, we have achieved remarkable progress in enhancing efficiency and elevating customer experiences. A key milestone was the successful completion of Phase II of our core banking system.

Our digital transformation efforts have been further reinforced by the launch of a new mobile banking application, designed to provide a secure and intuitive platform that caters to the diverse needs of our clients. In parallel, we have made meaningful progress in improving operational efficiency, which will remain integral to our strategic approach."

He added: "Looking ahead to 2025, we remain steadfast in pursuing our strategic goals. A key focus will be the continued exploration of the feasibility of transforming Gulf Bank into a Sharia-compliant institution.

Simultaneously, we will work to expand our product offerings, enhance our competitive position, and maintain our robust financial performance."

Loan Growth

When questioned about the loan growth



Waleed Khaled Mandani



David Challinor



Dalal AlDousari

Waleed Khaled Mandani:

- Kuwait's financial system continues to demonstrate resilience, supported by stable oil prices, ambitious government initiatives toward economic diversification, and a commitment to fiscal reform.
- Gulf Bank plays a key role in supporting Kuwait's economic development and Vision 2035 aspirations.
- A key focus in 2025, will be exploring the feasibility of transforming Gulf Bank into a Sharia-compliant institution.

David Challinor:

- The loan growth this year has been dominated by our corporate book which grew almost 10%, a significant turnaround from 2023.
- Our stage 2 loans further dropped to 2.8%, which is probably the lowest in the Kuwaiti banking system, and certainly the lowest Gulf Bank has seen since the introduction of IFRS 9.
- We will continue our cost optimization journey and are targeting a fall in the full year cost to income ratio.

during the year 2024, Mr. Challinor noted: "Gross loans and advances have grown 4% this year.

And the growth this year has been dominated by our corporate book which grew almost 10%, a significant turnaround from 2023 where we saw a degrowth in corporate of 1%. In terms of the market growth, we saw corporate grow by around 9.3%, so we've outperformed the market." He added: "On the retail side, the market has been slow which is a function of the higher rate environment as the retail loans are fixed rate. Looking forward into 2025, I'd expect full year loan growth to be around mid-single digits."

Operating Expenses

In terms of cost to income ratio Mr. Challinor mentioned: "We guided at the beginning of the year that we would look to move this lower in 2024.

And when you look at this ratio for the first 9 months of the year, it was in line when compared to 2023. But in Q4 we did see a

step up in the quarterly costs, which meant that for the full year 2024, our cost to income ratio exceeded where it was in 2023." He added: "Now, looking forward into 2025 we will continue our cost optimization journey and are targeting a fall in the full year cost to income ratio, but as I said we may experience elevated levels in the other expense category for a while."

Margins

Regarding margins and the impact from the recent rate cut, Mr. Challinor remarked: "Clearly the biggest driver of margin going forward will be the timing and size of rate cuts. We've disclosed in our financial statements the impact of a 25-basis point change to our net interest income. And for our KD book this is 1.5 million and for our USD book its 1.1 million.

Which gives a total of 2.6 million KD for every 25 points. And this also assumes a parallel shift across both sides of the balance sheet. So, in 2025 we will likely see further margin reductions driven by bench-

mark rate cuts, but to provide guidance on the quantum of such reductions, given the uncertainties around size and timing, is very difficult."

Credit Cost

When asked about the credit cost and reasons behind the pickup this year, Mr. Challinor noted: "In 2024 there's been a lot of dynamics and complexity at play when we look at the banks credit costs. However, just to recap they were higher by 13.3 million or 46% than in 2023. And our full year cost of risk was 75 basis points which exceeded the top end of the guidance we gave at the start of the year of 70." He added: "However, our stage 2 percentage went from 4.6% at the end of 2023 to 2.8% at the end of 2024.

And not only is this the lowest the bank has seen since the introduction of IFRS 9, but it's the lowest of any bank in Kuwait. Looking forward into 2025 I think credit costs may be lower than what we saw in 2024. I'd expect the corporate book to perform better given many of the legacy accounts are now behind us, however retail may remain elevated for some time. So, on balance I think an annual credit cost in the 60-70 basis point range could be achievable."

Conversion to a Sharia compliance

Mr. Challinor commented on a question regarding the potential conversion to Islamic banking by stating: "Currently, the feasibility study is underway. Upon completion, the findings will be presented to the Board of Directors and then to the Central Bank of Kuwait. Ultimately, the decision will be brought to our shareholders at the AGM for their approval."

Judge skeptical of Musk's claims

OpenAI unanimously rejects Musk's \$97.4b takeover bid

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb 16, (AP): OpenAI says its board of directors has unanimously rejected a \$97.4 billion takeover bid by Elon Musk.

"OpenAI is not for sale, and the board has unanimously rejected Mr. Musk's latest attempt to disrupt his competition," said a statement Friday from Bret Taylor, chair of OpenAI's board.

OpenAI attorney William Savitt in a letter to Musk's attorney Friday said the proposal "is not in the best interests of OAI's mission and is rejected."

Musk, an early OpenAI investor, began a legal offensive against the ChatGPT maker nearly a year ago, suing for breach of contract over what he said was the betrayal of its founding aims as a nonprofit.

OpenAI has increasingly sought to capitalize on the commercial success of generative AI. But the for-profit company is a subsidiary of a nonprofit entity that's bound to a mission - which Musk helped set - to safely build better-than-human AI for humanity's benefit. OpenAI is now seeking to more fully convert itself to a for-profit company, but would first have to buy out the nonprofit's assets.

Throwing a wrench in those plans, Musk and his own AI startup, xAI, and

a group of investment firms announced a bid Monday to buy the nonprofit that controls OpenAI. Musk in a court filing Wednesday further detailed the proposal to acquire the nonprofit's controlling stake.

Savitt's letter Friday said that court filing added "new material conditions to the proposal. As a result of that filing, it is now apparent that your clients' much-publicized 'bid' is in fact not a bid at all." In any event, "even as first presented," the board has unanimously rejected it, Savitt said.

Musk has alleged in the lawsuit that OpenAI is violating the terms of his foundational contributions to the charity. Musk had invested about \$45 million in the startup from its founding until 2018, his lawyer has said.

He escalated the legal dispute late last year, adding new claims and defendants, including OpenAI's business partner Microsoft, and asking for a court order that would halt OpenAI's for-profit conversion. Musk also added xAI as a plaintiff, claiming that OpenAI was also unfairly stifling business competition. A judge is still considering Musk's request but expressed skepticism about some of his claims in a court hearing last week.

Mercedes-Benz to deepen ties with China

China calls for increased European auto investment and collaboration

BEIJING, Feb 16, (Xinhua): Auto industries in China and Europe have solid foundations and great potential for cooperation, Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao said on Friday.

China welcomes European car manufacturers to increase investments and deepen their presence in the Chinese market, Wang said during a video call with Ola Kallenius, president of the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA) and chairman of the board of management of Mercedes-Benz Group AG.

Wang said that a proper settlement of the European Union's anti-subsidy case against Chinese electric vehicles aligns with the interests of both China and Europe, as well as the broader ex-

pectations of the industry.

The ACEA and Mercedes-Benz Group should continue to play an active role and urge the European Commission to make a political decision as soon as possible, Wang said, while also expressing the hope that the European side will work with China and reach a constructive solution acceptable to both sides at the earliest date possible.

While expressing his support and expectation for the two sides to resolve differences through dialogue and consultation at an early date, Kallenius said that Mercedes-Benz Group will uphold its long-term commitment to the Chinese market and further deepen its cooperation with China.

Zelensky rejects US proposal on rare earth minerals, cites lack of security guarantees

White House calls Zelensky's minerals deal rejection 'short-sighted'

MUNICH, Feb 16, (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky says he directed his ministers not to sign off on a proposed agreement to give the United States access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals because the document was too focused on U.S. interests.

The proposal, which was a key part of Zelensky's talks with U.S. Vice President JD Vance on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on Friday, did not offer any specific security guarantees in return, according to one current and one former senior Ukrainian official familiar with the talks.

Zelensky's decision not to sign a deal, at least for now, was described as "short-sighted" by a senior White House official.

"I didn't let the ministers sign a relevant agreement because in my view it is not ready to protect us, our interest," Zelensky told The Associated Press on Saturday in Munich.

The proposal focused on how the U.S. could use Kyiv's rare earth minerals "as compensation" for support already given to Ukraine by the Biden administration and as payment for future aid, current and former senior Ukrainian officials said, speaking anonymously so they could speak freely.

Ukraine has vast reserves of critical minerals that are used in the aerospace, defense and nuclear industries. The Trump administration has indicated it is interested in accessing them to reduce dependence on China but Zelensky said any exploitation would need to be tied to security guarantees for Ukraine that would deter future Russian ag-



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky speaks during the Munich Security Conference at the Bayerischer Hof Hotel in Munich, Germany, Saturday, Feb. 15, 2025. (AP)

gression.

"For me is very important the connection between some kind of security guarantees and some kind of investment," the Ukrainian president said.

Zelensky did not go into details about why he instructed his officials not to sign the document, which was given to Ukrainian officials on Wednesday by U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bassant on a visit to Kyiv.

"It's a colonial agreement and Zelensky cannot sign it," the former senior official said.

White House National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes did not explicitly confirm the offer, but said in a statement that "President Zelensky is being short-sighted about the excellent opportunity the Trump administration has presented to Ukraine."

The Trump administration has grown weary of sending additional U.S. aid to Ukraine and Hughes said a minerals deal would allow American taxpayers to "recoup" money sent to Kyiv, while growing Ukraine's economy.

Hughes added that the White

House believes "binding economic ties with the United States will be the best guarantee against future aggression and an integral part of lasting peace." He added: "The U.S. recognizes this, the Russians recognize this, and the Ukrainians must recognize this."

U.S. officials in discussions with their Ukrainian counterparts in Munich were commercially minded and largely concentrated on the specifics of exploring the minerals and how to form a possible partnership to do that with Ukraine, the senior official said.

The potential value of the deposits in Ukraine has not yet been discussed, with much unexplored or close to the front line.

The U.S. proposal apparently did not take into account how the deposits would be secured in the event of continuing Russian aggression. The official suggested the U.S. did not have "ready answers," to that question and that one of their takeaways from discussions in Munich will be how to secure any mineral extraction operation in Ukraine involving people and infrastructure.

Any deal must be in accordance

with Ukrainian law and acceptable to the Ukrainian people, the senior Ukrainian official said.

"Subsoil belongs to Ukrainians under the Constitution," Kseniia Orynychak, founder of the National Association of Mining Industry of Ukraine, previously told the AP, suggesting a deal would need popular support.

Zelensky and Vance did not discuss the details of the U.S. document during their meeting Friday at the Munich Security Conference, the senior official said. That meeting was "very good" and "substantive," with Vance making it clear his and Trump's main goal was to achieve a durable, lasting peace, the senior official said.

Zelensky told Vance that real peace requires Ukraine to be in a "strong position" when starting negotiations, stressed that the U.S. negotiators should come to Ukraine, and that the U.S., Ukraine and Europe must be at the negotiating table for talks with Russia.

But Gen. Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, all but cut Europeans out of any Ukraine-Russia talks, despite Zelensky's request.

"You can have the Ukrainians, the Russians, and clearly the Americans at the table talking," Kellogg said at an event hosted by a Ukrainian tycoon at the Munich Security Conference. Pressed on whether that meant Europeans won't be included, he said: "I'm a school of realism. I think that's not going to happen."

Ukraine is now preparing a "counter proposal" which will be delivered to the U.S. in "the near future," the official said.

"I think it's important that the vice president understood me that if we want to sign something, we have to understand that it will work," Zelensky told the AP.

That means, he said, "it will bring money and security."



A group photo of the Burgan team.

In line with its dedicated strategy for rewarding loyal customers and elevating their banking experience

Burgan Bank celebrates its third Kanz millionaire, Yousef Mohammad Dashti, winner of the KD 1,500,000 cash prize



Members of the Executive Management of Burgan Bank during the event.



Mr. Manaf Al-Menaifi, Acting General Manager – Retail Banking at Burgan Bank, and Mr. Mohammed Al Yaseen, Deputy General Manager – Retail Banking Department, holding the winner's check for the annual mega Kanz prize of KD 1,500,000.

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: At what has become one of its signature annual events, Burgan Bank announced the winner of its Kanz annual draw amid vast festivities at The Avenues Mall, crowning Yousef Mohammad Dashti as the third Kanz millionaire and winner of the KD 1,500,000 cash prize. This comes as part of the Bank's robust strategy for rewarding loyal customers, enhancing their banking experience, and enabling them to fulfill their aspirations.

"Our consistent growth would not have been possible without our loyal customers who have trusted us for decades, and whose dreams and aspirations have inspired our product and service innovations, constantly pushing us to advance further and remain abreast of their growing needs," said Mr. Manaf Al-Menaifi, Acting General Manager – Retail Banking at Burgan Bank. "To express our gratitude for the pivotal role customers, play in our success, we are equally committed to our dedicated strategy for rewarding customers as we are to innovating banking solutions."

He added: "Everything at Burgan begins with our vision to become the most modern

and progressive bank in Kuwait, and we continue to base our business innovations and overall banking experience advances on the needs and aspirations of our customers and our community.

We seek to lead with inno-

vation to deliver the absolute best customer experience: a comprehensive banking journey that provides solutions for daily needs alongside added value rewards and next-level products, Kanz being the lead amongst our suite of products

to deliver on that promise.

The account is one key component of our entire banking experience, one which delivers a comprehensive suite of smart solutions, tailored products and ongoing benefits." "Kanz is more than just a draw, it's a sav-

ings tool and a chance to change someone's life.

The annual mega Kanz prize of KD 1,500,000 is our way to give back to one lucky customer and bring them one step closer to their dreams," Mr. Al-Menaifi concluded.

On his part, Mr. Hamad Haji, Executive Manager – Products and Segments at Burgan Bank, said: "On behalf of Burgan management, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to Mr. Yousef Mohammad Dashti on winning the life-altering cash prize of KD 1,500,000. As a Bank that's 'Driven by You', our prime objective is to add value to our customers through innovative and forward-looking products and services, such as our flagship draw account Kanz. Beyond the annual draw and the final mega prize, Kanz rewards all its customers year-round, first with its savings potential and then with our ongoing program of draws."

"To round up the genuine joy of celebrating and crowning our third millionaire, it was important for us that we create a bigger moment of celebration with our customers and the public at large this time around. Which is why we organizing a day-long program of engaging activities and fun events at The Avenues Mall, with plenty of winning opportunities to celebrate the essence of Kanz: value and reward," Mr. Haji added.



Moment of the grand prize winner announcement.

Continued on Page 11



An attendee trying to win the 'Spin the Wheel' game.



One of the attendees attempting to retrieve a large gold coin from the box.



MC Abdullah MalAllah opening the event.



A large audience in attendance during the celebration.

Continued from Page 10

Bringing about as much flair as the cash prize itself, the daylong activations invited the audience to participate in different interactive games and engaging installations for a chance to win one of many valuable gifts. The celebrations also included a Seen Jeem (Q&A) segment with the audience, as well as a lively band performance that set the stage for the grand KD 1,500,000 cash prize announcement.

It serves to note that Kanz remains one of Burgan's most recognizable and celebrated accounts for its numerous yearlong opportunities to win cash prizes, whether monthly, semi-annual, or annual. Each month, 20 draw win-

ners receive a KD 2,000 cash prize each, while the semi-annual draw awards one winner a cash prize worth KD 500,000, and the annual lucky Kanz draw winner receives a KD 1,500,000 cash prize.

To participate in upcoming Kanz draws, existing and potential customers can open a Kanz account by depositing a minimum of KD 200, whereby every KD 25 accounts for a coupon. By topping up their savings through the Bank's mobile application, website, or at the nearest Burgan branch, Kanz customers have a bigger chance of winning one of the yearlong draws. It's worth noting that all draws are selected electronically and randomly under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and external auditors, and

in adherence to the standards and regulations of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK).

To find out more about Kanz and its draws, please visit Burgan's website (www.burgan.com), call the Bank's customer support at 1 80 40 80, or visit any of its nationwide branches.

About Burgan Bank

Established in 1977, Burgan Bank is a Kuwait-based conventional bank with a significant focus on the corporate and financial institution sectors. From its earliest days, the Bank has significantly sought to diversify its offering to cater to its growing retail and private banking customer base.

Burgan Bank has majority-owned subsidiaries, collectively known as the "Burgan Bank

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

The Bank has continuously improved its performance over the years, through an expanded revenue structure, diversified funding sources, and a strong capital base. The adoption of state-of-the-art services and technology has positioned it as a trendsetter in the domestic market and within the MENA region. Moreover, Burgan Bank's brand has been built on a

foundation of real values – trust, commitment, excellence, and progression – which serve as a reminder of the high standards to which the Bank always aspires. In fact, the Bank's core philosophy of 'Driven by You' is the foundation on which its products and services are continuously developed.

Burgan Bank has achieved the LEED v4.1 O+M: EB Gold Certification for its Head Office in Kuwait City. The Bank has also obtained the ISO/IEC 27001: 2022 Information Security Management Systems certificate (ISMS), ISO /IEC 27701:2019 Privacy Information Management Systems (PIMS), ISO/IEC 20000-1: 2018 Information Technology Service Management System (ITSMS) and was re-certified with the presti-

gious ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System (QMS), making it one of the few banks in the GCC and Kuwait to receive such certification for five consecutive times. At the same time, the Bank has the distinction of being the only Bank in Kuwait to have won the JP Morgan Chase Quality Recognition Award for twenty consecutive years. Moreover, in a testament to its dedication to the development of its human capital, Burgan Bank is the first bank in Kuwait to be certified as a Great Place to Work®, earning the distinct honor in 2023.

Burgan Bank is a majority-owned subsidiary of KIPCO (Kuwait Projects Company), one of the largest holding companies in the MENA region.



A part of the celebrations during the event with a live band performance.



Photos from the medical camp for LuLu Hypermarket staff members.

Lulu Hypermarket conducts comprehensive medical camp for employees in Kuwait

Lulu Hypermarket Kuwait organized a large-scale medical camp for its employees at the Regional Office in collaboration with the Indian Doctors Forum Kuwait and the Indian Nurses Federation of Kuwait (INFOK). This initiative aimed to promote employee well-being by providing essential health screenings and consultations across multiple medical specialties.

The camp featured over 10 specialized departments, including General Medicine, Cardiology, Radiology, Gynecology, ENT, Physical Medicine, Orthopedics, General Surgery, Ophthalmology, and Oncology. More than 30 experienced doctors and over 25 nurses participated, ensuring high-quality medical support for Lulu employees.

Employees benefited from comprehensive health checkups, including blood glucose, cholesterol, and blood pressure tests, along with advanced diagnostic services such as ultrasound and ECG. Lulu Kuwait remains committed to prioritizing the health and wellness of its workforce, reinforcing its dedication to employee care and corporate social responsibility.



Pakistan Women's Forum Kuwait members with Hamza Tauqeer, Community Welfare Attaché at the Pakistani Embassy.

Fareeha Mazhar elected president

PWF elects new General Body for 2025-2026

By Mahrukh Omer

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: On Feb 13, the Pakistan Women's Forum Kuwait (PWF), a representative organization for Pakistani women in Kuwait, successfully conducted its electoral campaign to form a new General Body for the 2025-2026 tenure. The event, organized by former President Mrs. Nighat Tariq and her Executive Team (2022-2024), took place at the Embassy of Pakistan in Kuwait.

Hamza Tauqeer, Community Welfare Attaché (CWA) at the Embassy of Pakistan in Kuwait, graced the event as the chief guest.

The event commenced with a warm welcome by Ms. Marukh Omer, who invited Mrs. Nighat Tariq to share a few words of gratitude. Contesting candidates then presented their briefings before the gathering. Following the elections, the newly appointed lead-



Hamza Tauqeer, CWA Pakistan Embassy, delivers a speech.

ership for 2025-2026 was announced: President: Mrs. Fareeha Mazhar; Vice

President: Mrs. Bushra Nouman; General Secretary: Mrs. Shazia Arshad and Treasurer: Mrs. Hina Pervaiz

Mrs. Nighat Tariq was elevated to the position of Advisory & Executive Member, while the honorary advisory includes Mrs. Sabiha Ubaid Arain.

The occasion also featured an awards ceremony to honor the dedication and efforts of the outgoing team and subcommittee team while officially welcoming the newly elected. Awards and certificates of appreciation were presented by Hamza Tauqeer and Mrs. Nighat Tariq.

Hamza Tauqeer was invited to address the attendees. He commended PWF's efforts, particularly in charitable work and cultural exhibitions, which help foster a positive image of Pakistan in Kuwait.

The event concluded with a group photo session, followed by refreshments for all attendees.

Kuwait's best account with highest returns, prizes

KIB announces weekly draw winners of Al Dirwaza account's 2025 campaign

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced the winners of the weekly draw held under the Al Dirwaza account's 2025 campaign, which is distinguished by the highest expected annual return and winning chances. The second weekly draw in February, based on customers' January deposits, recently took place in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from the Bank. The KD 1,000 prize was awarded to Mohammad Hamad Mayah Alotaibi, Mohammad Hassan Mohammad Alherab, Rodaynah Mohammad Sanad Alfadhah, Yaqoub Abdulrazzaq Jassim Alabdulsalam, and Abdullah Abdulrahman Almelhem, whilst the KD 500 prize was awarded to Suad Yousef Mohammad, Mohammad Hussain Kadhem Mohammad, Mohammad Ali Abdulattif Alkazezi, Masoumah Yousef Qambar Jaafar, Rami Waseem Faheem Yousef, Doha Ayed Abdullah Althuwaimer, Fatemah Mohammad Yousef Almusaileem, Anas Faleh Mubarak Alenezi, and Ibrahim Mubarak Mohammad Alismail.

It is worth noting that the Al Dirwaza account is a savings account for individual customers, based on the Wakala investment principle, which was launched by KIB as part of its suite of banking products intended for individuals. The account is currently the best of its kind in the sector, with annual expected profits of up to 2% disbursed on a monthly basis, where the customer gets an expected profit of 2% for the first three months from the account opening date and up to 1% expected rate onward. The expected profits are automatically deposited into the customer's account within the first day of the beginning of each month.

In addition to being a savings account, eligibility for the Al Dirwaza draws requires a minimum balance of KD 100, which must remain in the account for a full month before the weekly and monthly draws, with chances calculated based on the lowest balance of the previous month. As for the quarterly and annual draws, the amount must be maintained for two full months, with chances based on the lowest balance of the two preceding months. A key feature of the 2025 campaign is the doubling of winning chances to encourage customers to increase their deposits in the Al Dirwaza account. Customers will receive one chance per KD 1 if their lowest monthly balance is less than KD 2,000, two chances per KD 1 for balances between KD 2,000 and



less than KD 5,000, three chances per KD 1 for balances between KD 5,000 and less than KD 10,000, and four chances per KD 1 for balances of KD 10,000 or more. Terms and conditions apply.

The Al Dirwaza account is in compliance with the provisions of Islamic Sharia and approved by KIB's Sharia Supervisory Board. Furthermore, the account comes with a wide range of benefits, including the ease of opening the account, which does not require a salary transfer. Customers can conveniently open the account remotely via KIB Online on the Bank's website, the KIB Mobile application, or through the KIB Digital Onboarding service, without having to visit a branch.

Additionally, the Al Dirwaza account automatically grants customers instant issuance of an ATM card, with a KD 2,000 ATM daily withdrawal limit, as well as the ability to issue credit cards against the cash collateral in the account. To open the account and participate in its draws, a minimum of KD 100 is required and can only be withdrawn upon account closure.

The Conversation

How AI to impact society

ChatGPT-style tech about to change our world: experts

By Daniel Merino and Nehal El-Hadi

The Conversation

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

ChatGPT burst onto the technology world, gaining 100 million users by the end of January 2023, just two months after its launch and bringing with it a looming sense of change.

The technology itself is fascinating, but part of what makes ChatGPT uniquely interesting is that it essentially overnight, most of the world gained access to a powerful generative artificial intelligence that they could use for their own purposes. In this episode of The Conversation Weekly, we speak with researchers who study computer science, technology and economics to explore how the rapid adoption of technologies has, for the most part, failed to change social and economic systems in the past - but why AI might be different, despite its weaknesses.

Spending just a few minutes playing with new, generative AI algorithms can show you just how powerful they are. You can open up Dall-E, type in a phrase like "dinosaur riding motorcycle across a bridge," and seconds later, the algorithm will produce multiple images more or less depicting what you asked for. ChatGPT does much the same, just with text as its output.

These models are trained on huge amounts of data taken from the internet, and as Daniel Acuna, an associate professor of computer science at the University of Colorado, Boulder, in the US explains, that can be a problem. "If we are

feeding these models data from the past and data from today, they will learn some biases," Acuna says. "They will relate words - let's say about occupations - and find relationships between words and how they are used with certain genders or certain races."

The problem of bias in AI is not new, but with increased access, more people are now using it, and as Acuna says, "I hope that whoever is using those models is aware of these issues."

With any new technology there is always a risk of misuse, but these concerns are usually accompanied by hope that as people gain access to better tools, their lives will improve. That theory is exactly what Kentaro Toyama, a professor of community information at the University of Michigan, has studied for nearly two decades.

"What I ultimately discovered was that it is quite possible to get research results that were positive, where some kind of technology would enhance a situation in a government or school, or in a clinic," explains Toyama. "But it was nearly impossible to take that technological idea and then have it have impact at wider scales."

Ultimately, Toyama came to believe that "technology amplifies underlying human forces. And in our current world, those human forces are aligned in a way that the rich get richer and inequality keeps growing." But he was open to the idea that if AI could be inserted into a system that was trying to improve equality, then it would be an excellent tool for that.

Technologies can change social and economic systems when access increases, according to Thierry Rayna, an economist who studies innovation and entrepreneurship. (AP)

By M. Irfan Shafiq

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: The Pakistani Banking and Finance Professionals in Kuwait (PBFPPK) successfully held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) marking a transition in leadership with the announcement of the newly elected Executive Committee.

The meeting commenced with the recitation of the Holy Quran, followed by a warm welcome from the stage secretary. The election officer, Masroor Siddiqui, formally announced the results, introducing the newly elected Executive Committee for the upcoming term of two years 2025-2026. The new committee comprises of Ahsan Ashraf (President), Mohammad Saqib Aftab (Vice President), Irtaza Hassan (General Secretary), ArqumJavaid (Treasurer & Joint Secretary), Shahzad Z Khan (Member - Audit Sector),



The Pakistani Banking and Finance Professionals in Kuwait members.

Ajmal Ansari (Member - Banking Sector), Osama Abdul Jalil Munshi (Member - Investment Sector) and Hassan Bilal (Member - Corporate Sector).

Following the announcement,

the outgoing President, Tariq Mirza presented a comprehensive review of the organization's achievements and milestones over the past three years. He expressed gratitude to the departing Execu-

tive Committee and members for their unwavering support and contributions to PBFPPK.

The newly appointed President, Ahsan Ashraf, extended his appreciation and gratitude to the outgoing President and committee members for their dedicated service. He also thanked the members for their trust and support, reaffirming his commitment to furthering the organization's mission and objectives.

The AGM provided an interactive platform for members to share their feedback and raise questions. The outgoing President and Executive Committee actively addressed their queries, ensuring a smooth transition of leadership.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to the outgoing President and members and with a resolve by the new President to raise the bar of PBFPPK.

Nonprofits see boost in donations with diverse appeals

By Abhishek Bhati
Bowling Green State University

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

When nonprofits use multiple strategies during their online fundraising campaigns, such as thanking donors for their support, telling the public about their missions and conveying how they are helping people, they receive more donations than if they stick to only one kind of post.

That's what I, a nonprofit management professor, found after conducting a study with Diarmuid McDonnell, a Scottish statistician.

We figured this out after analyzing data from 752 nonprofits that participated in Omaha Gives, an online 24-hour fundraising event in 2015 and 2020. While reviewing the Facebook posts shared during those events, which have since been discontinued, we saw that these appeals fell into six categories:

Beneficiaries: Explaining how the group helps people.

Goals: Encouraging donors to help reach a fundraising goal.

Gratitude: Thanking donors for their gifts.
Mission: Focusing on how the organization helps people.

Social media engagement: Asking donors to share the post or change their profile picture to boost the campaign.

Solicitation: Asking for donations.
We also considered the size of the nonprofits' budgets, what they do, how long they've been operating, their prior experience in online fundraising, the total number of likes their Facebook profiles have garnered, the number of posts they made during the fundraising events, and how many times these posts were shared. The impact of having a mix of fundraising messages was consistent regardless of these other factors.

In addition to determining that using different types of messaging works best, we found that when nonprofits frequently share messages of gratitude or that highlight progress toward their goals, they tend to raise more money than if they just ask for donations.

Previous research, including our own, has found that when nonprofits frequently post on social media platforms, they can encourage donations by engaging followers as well as their extended networks.

Taking the strategy our study supports - making different kinds of posts - could help nonprofits beyond simply getting more donations. We suspect that it may also reduce donor fatigue. That is, it could make it less likely that donors will become so overwhelmed by the repetition of the same requests that they stop supporting a group they used to fund.

Online giving has grown in importance in recent years. It amounted to an estimated 12% of all nonprofit fundraising in 2023, the most recent year for which data is available. Social media campaigns are an important part of online fundraising strategies, even though nonprofits still raise much more money through email.

It's unclear how much of what we found is specific to Facebook. Had we examined fundraising data from other social media platforms, the results might have been different. We also didn't assess the nonprofits' other fundraising activities, such as how engaged their board members were in these campaigns, or the extent of their other strategies, such as direct mail.

We aim to conduct a future study that will look at both offline and online fundraising efforts to isolate the impact of social media posts on fundraising. (AP)



Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi



Participants at the anesthesia conference.

KUNA photos

'Kuwaiti doctors better equipped to handle complex cases'

Health minister highlights progress in anesthesia field in Kuwait

By Marwa Al-Bahravi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi announced that the field of anesthesia in Kuwait has witnessed significant advancements, leading to doctors with greater skills and expertise, particularly in handling complex cases.

This has enabled anesthesia departments in various hospitals to perform more intricate surgeries, the minister added.

"To further support this field, the Ministry of Health has partnered with the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) to introduce an anesthesia technician specialization program. This initiative aims to develop qualified nationals in rare specializations that are currently proven to be challenging to source locally," he explained.

Al-Awadhi emphasized that this program will produce national professionals who will support the ministry in providing comprehensive medical services to citizens.

He pointed out that advancements in anesthesia have resulted in a noticeable reduction in post-surgery complications, contributing to high-quality patient care.

He added that anesthesia departments played a key role in increasing the number of kidney transplants, with a new record of 149 transplants at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital in 2024, as well as expanding pain treatment clinics.

"Furthermore, the implementation of modern work policies through the Ministerial Policies Committee and the Departments Council has streamlined workflows and en-

hanced medical services, particularly for cancer patients, through innovative techniques like non-surgical interventions," he asserted.

He said the development extends beyond medical services to include investment in human resources, with numerous workshops and collaborations with international anesthesia organizations to facilitate knowledge exchange and encourage scientific research. "The addition of new hospitals to the health system has also increased the number of operating rooms and decreased patients' waiting period," the minister affirmed.

What about other artificial food dyes?

US bans Red 3 over cancer concerns

NEW YORK, Feb 16, (AP): The US Food and Drug Administration banned the dye known as Red 3 from the nation's food supply in January, setting deadlines for stripping the brightly hued additive from candies and cough syrup, baked goods and frozen treats. The agency said it was taking the action because studies found that the dye, also known as erythrosine, caused cancer in lab rats. A federal statute requires FDA to ban any additive found to cause cancer in animals, though officials stressed that the way Red 3 leads to cancer in rats doesn't happen in people.

But the dye is only one of several synthetic colors widely found in common foods and other products.

As their use is questioned by experts and consumers, here's what you need to know:

Synthetic dyes are petroleum-based chemicals that don't occur in nature. They're widely used in foods to "enhance the visual appeal" of products, according to Sensient Food Colors, a St. Louis-based supplier of food colors and flavorings.

Nine dyes, including Red 3, have been allowed in US food. The other common color additives in food are Blue 1, Blue 2, Green 3, Red 40, Yellow 5 and Yellow 6. Two permitted colors are used more rarely: Citrus Red 2 and Orange B.

The FDA certifies synthetic color additives and regulates their use.

With the FDA's recent order on Red 3, manufacturers have until January 2027 to remove the dye from their products. Makers of ingested drugs like cough syrups have until January 2028.

Consumer advocates, including the Center for Science in the Public Interest, had long lobbied to ban Red 3 from food because of the rat-cancer link. The dye was prohibited for decades in cosmetics,



An assortment of Kellogg's Froot Loops, Corn Pops, Apple Jacks, and Honey Smacks in Mt. Lebanon, Pa., June 25, 2010. (AP)

but not in food or ingested medications. Other research has tied artificial colors to behavioral problems in some children, including hyperactivity and impulsivity, particularly for those at risk for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD.

"Artificial colors are not the main cause of ADHD, but they may contribute significantly to some cases," said Dr. L. Eugene Arnold, an emeritus psychiatry professor at Ohio State University who studied dyes and their effect on behavior and now advises CHADD, a support group for people with ADHD.

The FDA says it has reviewed and evaluated the effects of color additives on children's behavior. It says its scientists believe that most children suffer no adverse effects when consuming them, though it acknowledges some children may be sensitive to them.

About two-thirds of Americans favor restricting or reformulating processed foods to remove ingredients like added sugar or dyes, according to a recent AP-NORC poll.

Momentum is building for the removal of synthetic dyes in foods.

Last year, California became the first state to ban six artificial food dyes from food served in public schools. More than a dozen state legislatures may take up bills this year that would ban synthetic dyes in foods, either for school lunches or in any setting. In October, protesters demanded that WK Kellogg Co. remove artificial dyes from cereals such as Apple Jacks and Froot Loops.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., recently confirmed as the U.S. secretary of health and human services, campaigned on a promise to "Make America Healthy Again," including a focus on artificial dyes and other chemicals in food.

WPV1 detected

New US human case of bird flu

NEW YORK, Feb 16, (Agencies): An older woman in southeast Wyoming is hospitalized with bird flu, state health department officials said Friday.

It's the state's first human case of Type A H5N1 influenza, which is spreading through animals and some people. Nearly 70 people in the US have been reported infected with bird flu in the last year, according to data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, though researchers and studies suggest that's likely an undercount.

The woman had a backyard flock of chickens that got sick and died, a CDC spokesperson said Saturday. The state health department said the woman, who lives in Platte County, Wyoming, likely had direct contact with the flock. It said she also has other health conditions and is hospitalized in another state.

Wild poliovirus: Wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) has been detected in environmental samples collected from eight districts of Pakistan between Jan. 15 and Jan. 24, 2025, the National Institute of Health (NIH) said in a statement on Saturday.

According to the latest data released by the Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication at the NIH, sewage samples collected from four districts of the country's southwest Balochistan province and three districts of northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province tested positive for WPV1 as of Friday.

39 lectures and 13 workshops

Kuwait's 24th Ophthalmology Conference starts February 20

KUWAIT, Feb 16, (KUNA): Dr. Ahmad Al-Foudari, head of the ophthalmology department at the Ministry of Health (MoH), announced the launch of the 24th conference on ophthalmology and eye surgery, scheduled from February 20 to 22, under the sponsorship of Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, with international participation.

In a press statement on Sunday, Dr. Al-Foudari described the conference as a platform aimed at highlighting the latest advancements in ophthalmology and eye surgery. The event will feature over 39 scientific lectures and 13 workshops to enhance medical expertise.

He emphasized that the conference brings together over 60 experts from



Dr. Ahmad Al-Foudari

foreign, Gulf, and Arab countries to discuss cutting-edge treatments and surgical techniques for eye diseases.

Natural supplement

China creates rice strain that boosts heart health

BEIJING, Feb. 16, (Xinhua): Chinese scientists have used gene editing to develop a novel strain of rice that can produce coenzyme CoQ10, offering consumers heart-healthy nutrients.

CoQ10 is an antioxidant that our bodies naturally produce, and it is essential for overall health, especially heart health. As people age, the body's ability to produce this fat-soluble antioxidant diminishes, which means that adding extra supplements to the diet can be beneficial.

However, cereal food crops like rice, as well as certain vegetables and fruits, primarily synthesize CoQ9.

After conducting an evolutionary analysis of natural variations in Coq1 enzymes across more than 1,000 terrestrial plant species and applying machine learning techniques, the researchers in this study used gene editing to modify five key amino acids of the Coq1 enzyme in rice, creating new rice varieties that are capable of synthesizing CoQ10.

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Miami's Herro wins All-Star 3-point contest

McClung pulls off unprecedented 1st NBA dunk contest three-peat

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb. 16, (AP): Mac McClung pulled off four perfect dunks for an unprecedented NBA dunk contest three-peat.

The G League star and dunk maven put on a remarkable show at NBA All-Star Saturday night by recording perfect scores of 50 on all four of his jaw-dropping, creative dunks to become the first player to win three straight dunk contests.

Nate Robinson is the only other player to win the dunk contest three times, taking it in 2006 and then repeating in 2009-10.

McClung needed to be nearly perfect to top San Antonio's Stephon Castle in the final round after Castle followed up a 49.6 with his first dunk with a 50 on his second when he went behind his back to switch from his right hand to left before the slam.

But McClung was up to the task and now has as many dunk contest wins in his career as he does dunks in NBA games, according to Sportradar, as he has only played five games in the NBA.

For his final dunk, McClung stationed 6-foot-11 Evan Mobley on a platform in front of the basket. With Mobley holding the ball behind his head, the 6-2 McClung jumped over him, tapped the rim with the ball before slamming it home to the delight of the crowd and judges.

McClung's first dunk in the final round featured him taking one ball in midair for a windmill dunk with his right hand while slamming home another stationed near the rim with his

left. McClung also received two perfect scores in the opening round. On the first, a car was parked in the lane with a person standing through the sun roof with a ball. McClung jumped over the car, took the ball and did a reverse, behind-the-head dunk drawing gasps from the crowd and a 50.

McClung didn't disappoint on his next try despite having already clinched a spot in the final. He jumped over a person holding the ball and did a twisting, no-look dunk, getting baseball star Barry Bonds to jump out of his seat for another 50.

Castle advanced with more traditional dunks that earned him a total score of 95.

Chicago's Matas Buzelis and Milwaukee's Andre Jackson Jr. were eliminated in the first round.

Miami's Tyler Herro edged out Golden State's Buddy Hield to win the 3-point contest at the NBA's All-Star Saturday night.

Damian Lillard missed a chance to join Larry Bird and Craig Hodges as the only players to three-peat as 3-point champions with his score of 18 falling one point short of Herro for the final spot in the three-person final.

Herro followed up his third-place performance in the opening round to set the pace in the final with 24 points. He made both special shots worth 3 points and then three of five from the money ball rack worth two points each to end it.



Osceola Magic guard Mac McClung dunks over a car during the slam dunk contest at the NBA basketball All-Star Saturday night festivities Saturday, Feb. 15, 2025, in San Francisco. (AP)

Hield followed up a scintillating opening round with 31 points but missing his first six shots in the final. But he got going after that to the delight of his home crowd and had a chance

to pull out the win by making six straight money balls to end it.

He made four in a row before one shot rimmed out. He made the final shot to end with

23 points. Darius Garland came in third with 19 points in the final round.

Brooklyn's Cam Johnson, Norman Powell of the Clippers, Detroit's Cade Cunningham and New York's Jalen Brunson also all failed to advance out of the first round.

Cleveland duo Evan Mobley and Donovan Mitchell teamed up to knock off hometown heroes Moses Moody and Green to win the NBA's Skills Challenge crown.

The final game after San Antonio's duo of Victor Wembanyama and Chris Paul was disqualified for trying to cheat the rules in the obstacle course that features players speeding through stations with various passing and shooting drills.

The Cavaliers went first in the final round and raced through the course in 1 minute, 0.3 seconds as Mobley and Mitchell easily made almost all of their shots from three spots on the floor on their first attempt.

Moody made it through the first round easily for the Golden State's duo but Green missed all three chest passes and struggled to make his shots. He couldn't even make it to the final two stations before time ran out to match the time set by Cleveland.

Wembanyama and Paul went first in the opening round and were loudly booed for not even trying to make real attempts on their shots, just tossing the balls off the racks. They were ultimately disqualified.

Haaland's knee injury scare clouds City's 4-0 victory against Newcastle

Everton's strong run continues with 2-1 win at Palace

MANCHESTER, England, Feb. 16, (AP): Star striker Erling Haaland was substituted after appearing to hurt his knee late in Manchester City's 4-0 win over Newcastle on Saturday in the Premier League.



Haaland

Haaland sat down clutching his right knee and grimacing in pain but was able to walk off the field unassisted in the 87th minute before taking a seat on the team bench. He did

not appear to receive any immediate medical attention and seemed unaffected when he shook hands with players on the field after the game.

City manager Pep Guardiola said he was hopeful that Haaland avoided a serious injury.

"When he was down everyone was scared," Guardiola said. "He got up, walked, smiling like always. I didn't speak to him, but the doctors didn't come with bad news."

Still, the incident raised concerns about the Norway striker's availability for City's Champions League game at Real Madrid on Wednesday.

City trails 3-2 in the first leg of the playoff round, with the winner advancing to the round of 16.

The good news for City was that it may have found another reliable goal-scorer. January signing Omar Marmoush scored a hat trick in the first half for his first goals since joining from Eintracht Frankfurt for a reported 70 million euros (\$73 million).

Unlike Arsenal, City did bring in



Manchester City's Omar Marmoush scores their side's second goal of the game during the Premier League match between Manchester City and Newcastle at the Etihad Stadium, Manchester, England, Saturday Feb. 15, 2025. (AP)

reinforcements in January and Marmoush showed just why the club spent a reported 70 million euros (\$73 million) on the former Eintracht Frankfurt player.

The Egypt forward netted his first goal for the club after running onto a long ball from goalkeeper Ederson and calmly lobbing it over Martin Dubravka.

It was Ederson's sixth career Premier League assist, a record for goalkeepers. Marmoush netted his second just five minutes later after being teed up in the area by Ilkay Gundogan, and completed his hat trick in the 33rd after Savinho broke into the area and squared for the Egyptian to slot home.

Substitute James McAtee completed

the rout in the 84th, but there was a late scare for City as Erling Haaland went off after appearing to hurt his knee late on.

Nottingham Forest's hopes of a surprising top-four finish took a blow as the team's pattern of inconsistency continued at Fulham.

Forest's last two league results were a 5-0 loss at Bournemouth followed by a 7-0 win over Brighton and the team was largely outplayed by a Fulham team that had not won at home since early December.

Calvin Bassey headed home the winner for Fulham after Forest's Chris Wood canceled out the opener by Emile Smith Rowe.

Everton's resurgence under David

Moyes continued as Carlos Alcaraz scored an 80th-minute winner to secure a 2-1 victory at Crystal Palace. That makes it four wins and a 2-2 draw against archrival Liverpool in Everton's last five league games after Moyes returned to the club last month. The team was up to 13th place, tied with Palace on 30 points.

In other results, Aston Villa managed only 1-1 at home against relegation struggler Ipswich despite Ipswich defender Axel Tuanzebe being sent off for a second booking in the 40th. Ipswich took the lead through Liam Delap in the 56th and Ollie Watkins equalized.

Brentford won at West Ham 1-0, while Bournemouth beat last-placed Southampton 3-1.

Duke dominates Stanford 106-70

Broome's 19 pts leads Auburn past Alabama in rivalry thriller

TUSCALOOSA, Ala., Feb. 16, (AP): Johni Broome had 19 points and 14 rebounds and five teammates scored in double figures as No. 1 Auburn beat in-state rival and second-ranked Alabama 94-85 on Saturday in a matchup of top-ranked teams.

Mark Sears scored 18 points and Grant Nelson added 12 points and 12 rebounds for Alabama, which rallied from a double-digit deficit in the second half, but failed to complete the comeback.

Denver Jones scored 16 points, Chad Baker-Mazara and Miles Kelly added 15 points apiece, Chaney Johnson had 14 and Tahaad Pettiford 13 for Auburn (23-2, 11-1 Southeastern Conference).

Labaron Philon and Aden Holloway each scored 10 for Alabama (21-4, 10-2).

Duke 106, Stanford 70

In Durham, N.C., Tyrese Proctor scored 23 points, Cooper Flagg contributed 19 points, six assists and five rebounds, and No. 3 Duke beat Stanford 106-70.

Khaman Maluach had 17 points, Sion James finished with 14 and Caleb Foster scored 10 for the Blue Devils (22-3, 14-1 Atlantic Coast Conference).

Duke shot a season-best 62.5% and hit 14 3-pointers. Proctor tied a career-high with five 3s while Flagg hit three.

Maxime Raynaud led Stanford (16-10, 8-7) with 19 points and seven rebounds. Oziyah Sellers added 11 points and Donavin Young 10.

Tennessee 81, Vanderbilt 76

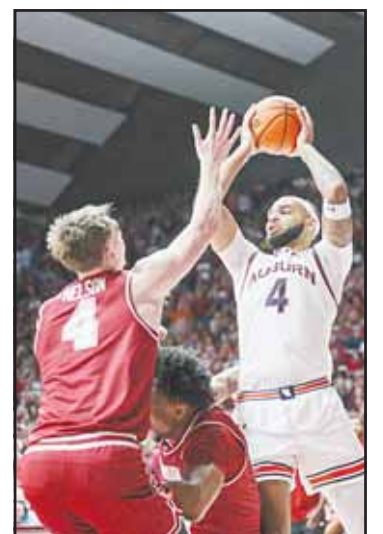
In Knoxville, Tenn., Zakai Zeigler scored 22 points, all in the second half, and No. 5 Tennessee rallied from a 16-point first-half deficit to beat Vanderbilt 81-76.

Chaz Lanier added 21, for the Volunteers (21-5, 8-5 Southeastern Conference).

Jason Edwards led the Commodores (17-8, 5-7) with 24 points. Jaylen Carey came off the bench to score 18 before fouling out with 4:13 left in the game.

Wisconsin 94, Purdue 84

In West Lafayette, Ind., John Tonje scored 22 of his 32 points in the second half and Max Klesmit added 17 points and six assists to help No. 16 Wisconsin beat No. 7 Purdue 94-84.



Auburn's Johni Broome (4) shoots over Alabama forward Grant Nelson (4) during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game, Saturday, Feb. 15, 2025, in Tuscaloosa, Ala. (AP)

Tonje scored 10 straight points during a key second-half stretch that gave Wisconsin a lead it never relinquished.

The Badgers (20-5, 10-4) won their fourth straight despite losing backup guard Kamari McGee late in the first half when a replay review resulted in a flagrant 2 call and an ejection after McGee's hand hit Trey Kaufman-Renn below the waist as he tried to guard Purdue's Braden Smith.

Texas A&M 69, Arkansas 61

In College Station, Texas, Wade Taylor IV scored 18 points and No. 8 Texas A&M extended its winning streak to five games with a 69-61 victory over Arkansas.

The game was tied with less than 10 minutes to go before the Aggies (20-5, 9-3 Southeastern Conference) used a 9-0 run to take a 59-50 lead with five minutes left. Taylor got things going with a 3-pointer and Anderson Garcia added four points in that stretch to help Texas A&M build the lead.

Karter Knox ended an Arkansas scoring drought of almost seven minutes with about 4 1/2 minutes left, but Jace Carter had a layup for the Aggies seconds later.



Sun Long (left) of China competes during the men's 500m final A at the ISU Short Track World Tour 2024-2025 in Milan, Italy, Feb. 15, 2025. (Xinhua)

China's Sun Long delivers golden performance ahead of Milan '26

MILAN, Feb. 16, (Xinhua): Chinese skater Sun Long claimed the gold medal in the men's 500 meters with a time of 40.777 seconds at the 2024-2025 ISU Short Track Speed Skating World Tour Milan leg on Saturday, while the Chinese women's team secured a bronze medal in the 3000m relay race.

Serving as a test event for the upcoming Milan 2026 Winter Olympics, the competition in Milan has been highly valued by all participating teams. In the absence of Lin Xiaojun, who had won the 500m gold and 1,500m silver at the Winter Asian Games in Harbin before withdrawing from the rest events of the season due to injury, the Chinese team has fielded nearly all of its top skaters in Milan.

In the men's 500m final, Sun took

the lead early and maintained his position to cross the finish line first. Dutch skater Teun Boer won the silver ahead of local favorite Pietro Sighele of Italy, who came in third.

The men's 1,500m final saw Dutch skater Jens Van'T Wout execute a well-timed strategy, surging ahead in the final laps to land the victory. Japan's Hayashi Kosei finished second, followed by South Korea's Jang Sungwoo in third.

Following their dominating performance at the recent Asian Winter Games, the South Korean skaters struggled in Milan with Jang's bronze in the 1,500m being their only podium finish of the day. The team cited fatigue and limited recovery time as key factors affecting their results.

Dortmund stumbles again, fall to Bochum

Leverkusen frustrated in 0-0 draw with Bayern

BERLIN, Feb. 16, (AP): Bayern Munich might have won the Bundesliga with a draw.

Bayer Leverkusen did everything but score as Bayern held on for a 0-0 draw that kept it eight points clear at the top of the German league on Saturday.

Bayern was pegged back for the whole game but Leverkusen - with center forwards Patrik Schick and Victor Boniface watching from the substitutes' bench - failed to score for the second consecutive game.

"We're satisfied with the result. Let's just say that," Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer said after a busy game.

Leverkusen coach Xabi Alonso sent Schick on only in the second minute of stoppage time, after star player Florian Wirtz went agonizingly close to winning the match when he shot just wide of the left post after Neuer saved Amine Adli's effort.

Bayern failed to manage a single shot on target for the whole game. It's only the second time on record, according to statistician Opta, which said the other time was against Wolfsburg in May 2008.

Leverkusen, the defending champion, twice hit the crossbar in the first half.

It was the fifth time Alonso, a former Bayern player, faced his former team as a coach in the Bundesliga and the fifth time he remained un-

beaten. His team also knocked Bayern out of the German Cup earlier this season.

"It could be better," Alonso said, "but there are still 12 games in the Bundesliga."

Georgios Masouras scored twice

in two minutes for bottom club Bochum to upset Borussia Dortmund 2-0 in their derby.

Masouras stunned the visitor with his first goal for Bochum since his winter switch from Olympiakos, then capitalized almost straight

away on a huge error from Dortmund defender Niklas Süle to grab his second in the first half.

Süle, who made his first start since December after recovering from an ankle injury, sent a back pass straight into Masouras' path for the Greek forward to fire the ball past Gregor Kobel in the Dortmund goal.

Bochum's win lifted the team off the bottom till Sunday at least, pending fellow struggler Holstein Kiel's visit to Eintracht Frankfurt.

It was the second defeat in as many Bundesliga games for Dortmund under new coach Niko Kovač. Dortmund stayed 11th and risked falling further behind in its quest for Champions League qualification.

Bochum had a host of injuries with four important players including first-choice goalkeeper all out.

Stuttgart failed to capitalize on Leipzig's draw in Augsburg the night before as it lost at home to Wolfsburg 2-1 despite substitute Nick Woltemade's wonderful opener in the 72nd minute.

Leipzig remained fourth, while Stuttgart dropped two points off the last place for Champions League qualification.

Borussia Mönchengladbach won at Union Berlin 2-1, and Freiburg won at St. Pauli 1-0 thanks to a late own goal from Philipp Treu.



Bochum's Tim Oermann, left, and Dortmund's Jamie Gittens, right, challenge for the ball during the German Bundesliga soccer match between VfL Bochum and Borussia Dortmund in Bochum, Germany, Saturday, Feb. 15, 2025. (AP)

Barcelona eyes chance to match Madrid

10-man Real draws at Osasuna after Bellingham red card

BARCELONA, Spain, Feb 16, (AP): Jude Bellingham's use of an English expletive to curse at the referee left Real Madrid a man down and unable to defend a lead as the La Liga leaders drew at Osasuna 1-1 on Saturday.

Kylian Mbappé put Madrid ahead in the 15th minute with his 11th goal in as many league games. But Madrid was outnumbered after Bellingham's red card for using an expletive while protesting the refereeing five minutes before halftime.

Osasuna pulled level after the referee awarded a penalty after a video review and booked Eduardo Camavinga for stomping the foot of Ante Budimir in the box. Budimir slotted the 58th-minute equalizer past Thibaut Courtois to unleash celebrations at El Sadar Stadium.

The draw in Pamplona put Madrid's league lead in jeopardy. While Atletico Madrid failed to take advantage of the slip and stayed one point behind the front-runners, Barcelona can pull level with its top rival if it beats Rayo Vallecano on Monday. Next up for Madrid is a home game against Manchester City on Wednesday when it will try to make good on its 3-2 win in their first meeting of the Champions League knockout rounds playoff.

In what seemed to be a stretch of linguistic analysis, coach Carlo Ancelotti tried to defend his player by claiming that referee José Luis Munuera made a translation error of Bellingham's use of an English expletive.

"Bellingham didn't do anything that deserved a sending off," Ancelotti said. "He said '(expletive) off,' not '(expletive) you.' I don't think that was meant to be offensive."

Munuera wrote in his refereeing report that Bellingham told him "from just a few meters away, '(expletive) you.'"

Bellingham said "I don't want to go into details of what was said" but insisted he was unfairly treated, saying the referee made a translation error and that there was indeed a degree of difference between the expletive when combined with "off" or "you."

"It is clear that he made a mistake and there was a miscommunication," said the



Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappé controls the ball during a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Osasuna and Real Madrid at El Sadar stadium in Pamplona, Spain, Saturday, Feb. 15, 2025. (AP)

England midfielder, who got a two-game ban last season after receiving a red card for using an expletive in English protesting a ref's call.

Ancelotti was also shown a yellow card early after he complained excessively for what he thought was a handball by an Osasuna player in the host's area.

Following its loss at Espanyol, the powerhouse sent a scathing letter to Spain's soccer federation to decry what it considered "adulterated" refereeing that favored other teams. The league president responded by saying that the 36-time champion had "lost its mind."

The decisions by Munuera aggravated Madrid's sense of grievance regarding the refereeing in La Liga.

"Things have happened in the last three games that everyone has seen," Ancelotti said. "The VAR has reviewed plays in our area and not in the opponent's area. ... We just have to keep fighting. We played a good game today and we will try to do so again on Wednesday and in the next La Liga game."

Mbappé had an up and down first few months while adapting to Madrid, but he has been scoring at ease in recent weeks and has 17 league goals, second only to the 19 by Barcelona striker Robert Lewandowski.

Mbappé had an opportunity to bag an injury-time winner but Osasuna goalkeeper Sergio Herrera blocked his shot from an angle.

Osasuna, which beat Barcelona 4-2 in September when the Catalan club was leading the league, moved into seventh place.

Budimir's goal let the Croatia striker equal an Osasuna club record of 57 career goals in La Liga, a mark set by Sabino Andonegui.

"It is always very special to enter the history of a club that is over 100 years old. I am very proud," Budimir said. Atletico Madrid remained a point behind Madrid after it was also reduced to 10 men and needed a late goal from substitute Alexander Sorloth to draw at home with Celta Vigo 1-1.

Pablo Barrios hurt Atletico's chances when he saw a direct red card for a studs-first slide into the lower leg of Pablo Durán just seven minutes into the match.

Borja Iglesias earned a penalty when fouled by Robin Le Normand in the area, sending substitute Iago Aspas to the spot to put Celta ahead in the 68th.

Sorloth salvaged a point for the hosts when the Norway striker won a long ball and rifled it home in the 81st.

China loses to Indonesia at Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships final

QINGDAO, China, Feb 16, (Xinhua): Host China failed to defend its title after a 3-1 loss to Indonesia in the final of the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships 2025 on Sunday.

Indonesia claimed the opening point as Rinov Rivaldy and Siti Fadia Silva Ramadhanti cruised past Gao Jiaxuan and Wu Mengying 21-11, 21-13 in the mixed doubles. Alwi Farhan then triumphed in the men's singles, defeating Hu Zhean in straight games to extend Indonesia's lead.

"Today I didn't perform well, especially in terms of tactical discipline," said Hu, who played four matches in the tournament, winning three. "I've learned a lot these days. I didn't give

up when I was behind, and I tried my best to catch up every time. Also, I'm more confident now."

In the women's singles, Xu Wenjing delivered a commanding performance, beating Putri Kusuma Wardani 21-12, 21-13 to narrow the gap for China.

"I did feel nervous on the court, but I had already thought about all kinds of difficulties I might face and how to handle them. So nothing could affect my performance. I'm very proud that I earned one point for my team," said 17-year-old Xu. The men's doubles match saw Muhammad Shohibul Fikri and Daniel Marthin ease past Chen Xujun and Huang Di 21-15, 21-9, securing the championship for Indonesia.

Meillard wins slalom for 2nd gold at world championships

Noel's misstep ends France's medal hopes

SAALBACH-HINTERGLEMM, Austria, Feb 16, (AP): Loic Meillard won his second world title and became the first Swiss skier in 75 years to take gold in the men's slalom at the Alpine skiing world championships on Sunday.

Meillard beat silver medalist Atle Lie McGrath of Norway by 0.26 seconds. Linus Strasser of Germany was 0.52 behind in third and took the bronze.

"It's crazy, I know slalom can be tough and sometimes so many people can ski fast, so that it worked out today, it's incredible," Meillard said.

Meillard earned his third medal after winning the team combined with Franjo von Allmen and placing third in the giant slalom.

It was the eighth medal for the Swiss men's team, which has won four of the five men's events. Sunday's race was the final event of the worlds.

The last Swiss winner of slalom gold was Georges Schneider, who took gold at the 1950 worlds in Aspen, Colorado. No Swiss skier had won a medal in the event for the past 22 years.

Olympic champion Clement Noel, who led after the first run, straddled a gate near the end of his second run and



Switzerland's Loic Meillard competes in a men's slalom, at the Alpine Ski World Championships, in Saalbach-Hinterglemm, Austria, Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025. (AP)

did not finish.

"You never wish to win with an 'out' for someone else," Meillard said.

Noel won the 2022 Olympic title but is yet to win a medal at the worlds. His best result was fourth two years ago, when he missed the podium by three-

hundredths of a second.

Noel's mistake meant France ended the world championships with no medals. The team was without other main medal hopes Alexis Pinturault and Cyprien Sarrazin because of injuries.

Silver was McGrath's first medal at

a major championship. He had to sit out the 2023 worlds with a knee injury.

His Norwegian teammate and defending champion Henrik Kristoffersen, who leads the World Cup season standings in the discipline, finished 13th.



China's Li Fanghui, center, celebrates her victory with second place finisher Britain's Zoe Atkin, left, and third place finisher Canada's Rachael Karker on the podium, following the women's World Cup freeski halfpipe event in Calgary, Alberta, Saturday, Feb. 15, 2025. (AP)

Chinese Fanghui claims women's halfpipe gold medal at FIS WCup

BEIJING, Feb 16, (Xinhua): Chinese freeskiier Li Fanghui captured the women's halfpipe gold medal at the FIS Freeski World Cup stop in Calgary, Canada, on Saturday, securing her first-ever World Cup victory and clinching the season's halfpipe Crystal Globe.

Li and Britain's Zoe Atkin finished the season tied atop the halfpipe World Cup standings with 305 points each. According to FIS, this marks the first time in freeski World Cup history that two athletes have shared the Crystal Globe.

Li secured the season title with a dominant performance in Calgary, where she scored 90.50 points to claim her first World Cup gold. Atkin finished second with 87.75 points, while Canada's Rachael Karker took bronze with 87.00 points.

"I was really happy and excited. Last season, I didn't perform very well, but I've been making progress all year, and I'm proud of myself," Li said, admitting she didn't immediately realize she had secured the season title after the event.

Monaco crushes Nantes 7-1

Gouiri inspires Marseille's big win, PSG stays 10 points clear

PARIS, Feb 16, (AP): Amine Gouiri is proving to be an inspired signing by Marseille.

The livewire forward scored two superb goals and played a part in the other three as second-placed Marseille routed Saint-Etienne 5-1 in Ligue 1 on Saturday. Gouiri also has three assists in the three games he's played since joining from Rennes in the January transfer window.

Marseille's win was spectacular but changed nothing at the top because unbeaten Paris Saint-Germain maintained its 10-point lead after scraping a 1-0 win at Toulouse.

PSG drew away and lost at home to Toulouse last season, and this was another hard-fought contest.

Toulouse goalkeeper Guillaume Restes made a smart save from winger Bradley Barcola late in a gritty first half.

Restes went off close to halftime with an apparent leg-muscle injury and was replaced by Kjetil Haug. He was beaten in the 52nd when Fabián Ruiz hooked the ball in after William Pacho's header came off the crossbar.

Earlier, Gouiri gave Marseille the lead with a fine solo effort.

He cut in from the left and, after using Adrien Rabiot as a decoy runner to fool a defender, curled a superb shot into the top right corner from 20 meters in the 27th minute.

Then, early into the second half, Gouiri's



Gouiri

pass from the left led to a defender's handball and Mason Greenwood converted the penalty to make it 2-0 and his 14th goal of the season.

Gouiri was also involved in the third goal, which came after Gouiri and Quentin Merlin had shots saved before the ball fell to defender Amir Murillo, who slotted it.

After Saint-Etienne lost the ball in midfield, Gouiri latched onto a pass from Pierre-Emile Höjbjerg and expertly lobbed goalkeeper Gautier Larssonneur.

Marseille's fifth goal saw Gouiri pick out Amar Dedic with a curling pass from the right and Dedic head the ball back across goal to give Rabiot a tap in.

Lucas Stassin pulled a late goal back.

Elsewhere, Mika Biereth scored a hat trick as third-placed Monaco crushed Nantes 7-1 after falling behind to an early goal.

Two weeks after netting an eight-minute hat trick at home against Auxerre, he helped himself to another treble at Stade Louis II. The London-born Danish striker has seven goals in six league games since joining from Sturm Graz.

The 200 traveling fans from Nantes enjoyed a bright start when striker Matthijs Albine scored after four minutes, but defender Nicolas Coanza's red card shortly after changed the game.

Biereth and Japan forward Takumi Minamino scored just before the break and the goals flowed.

Midfielder Eliesse Ben Seghir scored in the 49th before Biereth added two more goals and 18-year-old striker George Ilenikhena pounced twice late on.

Monaco stayed six points behind Marseille.



KUNA photo

American player Amanda Anisimova

Italian duo win doubles title

American Anisimova wins Qatar TotalEnergies Open

DOHA, Feb 16, (KUNA): American Amanda Anisimova won the 23rd Qatar TotalEnergies Open on Saturday, defeating Latvian Jelena Ostapenko in straight sets in Doha.

In the final match held at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex, the American player succeeded in winning her first title in Qatar, defeating the Latvian 6-4, 6-3 in one hour and 20 minutes.

In the doubles category of the Qatar TotalEnergies Open 2025, the Italian duo Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini won the title after defeating the Chinese duo Jiang Xinyu and Wufang Xian of Chinese Taipei in straight sets (7-5, 7-6).

It is noteworthy that the Qatar TotalEnergies Women's Open 2025, organized by the Qatar Tennis Federation at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex in Doha, kicked off on the ninth of this month.

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Fiorentina's Marin Pongracic, right, fights for the ball with Como's Assane Diao during the Serie A soccer match between Fiorentina and Como at the Artemio Franchi stadium in Florence, Italy, Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025. (AP)

Sports

Relegation hopes revived

Diao's strike leads Como to crucial victory

MILAN, Feb 16, (AP): Teenager Assane Diao could very well prove to be Como's savior. The 19-year-old scored again on Sunday to set relegation-threatened Como on its way to a 2-0 win at Fiorentina in Serie A.

It was Diao's fourth goal in his seven matches since joining from Real Betis last month and the win lifted Cesc Fàbregas' team five points above the drop zone. Fiorentina was four points below fourth-placed Lazio.

Current Serie A leader Napoli drew again on Saturday. Como broke the deadlock four minutes before halftime with a rapid counterattack. A Fiorentina free kick was headed out of the area when Diao gathered the ball deep inside

his own half and raced forward to beat home goalkeeper David De Gea one on one. Nico Paz doubled Como's lead in the 66th with a shot that took a slight deflection to curl in off the top of the left post.



Al-Salmiya SC player heads the ball during their match against Khaitan at Thamer Stadium.

Kuwait, Al-Arabi draw in thrilling stalemate, maintain top 2 spots

Al-Salmiya edges Khaitan 1-0 to secure crucial win

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (KUNA): The summit of the 15th round of the Zain Premier League between Kuwait and Al-Arabi, held at Sabah Al-Salem Stadium in Al-Arabi Club on Saturday, ended in a goalless draw.

Thus, the battle for the top spot continues between the two teams, who shared the points after an exciting and competitive match that lasted until the final minutes. Both sides tried to seize victory by launching attacks and diversifying their offensive strategies, in addition to the attempts of both coaches to make substitutions to change the outcome. However, all efforts proved futile as the match ended without goals.

With this result, Kuwait increased its points to 40, maintaining the top spot in



Kuwait and Al-Arabi players vie for the ball during their match at Sabah Al-Salem Stadium.

the standings, while Al-Arabi reached 38 points, staying in second place.

The results of the other matches in the same round saw victories for Al-Nasr, Al-Qadisiyah, and Al-Salmiya over Al-Yarmouk, Al-Tadamon, and Khaitan, respectively, while Kazma tied with Al-Fahaheel.

Meanwhile, Al-Salmiya SC defeated Khaitan 1-0 in the 15th round of the Zain Premier League on Saturday at Thamer Stadium. The home team scored the only goal of the match through Al-Sanousi Al-Hadi in the 19th minute, earning three valuable points.

Al-Salmiya held onto the lead until the final whistle, despite Khaitan's efforts to equalize. However, Khaitan was unable to convert their attempts into goals.

Al-Salmiya increased their points to 27, securing fourth place, while Khaitan remained with eight points in ninth place.

Benzema and Bergwijn shine

Al-Ittihad stays top of Saudi League preps for crucial clash with Al-Hilal



Saudi Arabia's Al-Ittihad players celebrate after a big win against Al-Wehda.

JEDDAH, Feb 16, (KUNA): Saudi Arabia's Al-Ittihad defeated Al-Wehda 4-1 on Saturday in the 20th round of the Saudi Roshen Professional Football League.

Al-Ittihad opened the scoring in the 35th minute of the match, held at King Abdulaziz Sports City Stadium in Makkah, through Muhammad Al-Shanqeeti, while Al-Wehda's equalizer came from Moroccan Jawad El Yamiq in the 42nd minute.

Before the end of the first half, French star Karim Benzema gave Al-Ittihad the lead by scoring a goal in the 45th minute.

In the second half, Dutch star Steven Bergwijn strengthened his team's lead with a third goal in the 60th minute, while Algerian Houssein Aouar concluded his team's goals with a fourth goal in the fifth minute of stoppage time.

With this result, Al-Ittihad continues to lead the league with 52 points, four points ahead of its pursuer, Al-Hilal, which will meet Al-Ittihad in the next round scheduled for next Saturday.

In other matches of the same round, Al-Taawoun defeated Al-Khaleej 1-0 in the match held at Prince Mohammed bin Fahd Stadium in Dammam, while Al-Fayha defeated Al-Raed 2-0 in the match held at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium in Buraidah.

Jockey O'Sullivan dies after race fall

CORK, Ireland, Feb 16, (AP): Irish jockey Michael O'Sullivan died on Sunday from injuries sustained in a fall at a race earlier this month, the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board said. He was 24.

O'Sullivan was riding on Wee Charlie when he was one of three riders to fall at the final fence during a race held in Thurles, Ireland, on Feb. 6. He was treated on the track before being taken to Cork University Hospital.

"On behalf of the O'Sullivan family, it is with profound sadness that the IHRB confirms the passing of Michael O'Sullivan," the IHRB said in a statement Sunday.

"The Directors and staff of the IHRB wish to extend their sincere condolences to Michael's family, partner, friends, his colleagues in the weighroom and the wider racing community at this time."

Dr. Jennifer Pugh, the IHRB's chief medical officer, said he died early Sunday morning with his family around him at Cork University Hospital.

Kuwaiti Adel Al-Gharib elected VP of Asian Squash Federation

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 16, (KUNA): Adel Al-Gharib, Kuwait Squash Federation's board member, was elected Vice President of the Asian Squash Federation for the 2025-2029 term.

This came on the sidelines of the 22nd Asian Junior Championship in Hong Kong, with representatives from 27 member countries in attendance.

In a press statement on Sunday, Al-Gharib expressed that his new role came with great responsibility, emphasizing his commitment to advancing the sport in Asia globally.

He also stated that he would focus on organizing Asian tournaments during his term.

Notably, Al-Gharib has an extensive history in squash, having held multiple sports leadership positions and overseen various international tournaments in Kuwait.

As a player, he represented Salmiya Club and the Kuwait



KUNA photo Adel Al-Gharib, Member of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Squash Federation and Vice President of the Asian Squash Federation.

national team in numerous Gulf, Arab, and international championships. He was the Kuwait and Gulf champion from 1987 to 1997.

Salah penalty seals victory

Liverpool survives Wolves' fightback to maintain lead

LONDON, Feb 16, (AP): Liverpool restored its seven-point lead at the top of the Premier League with a 2-1 win against Wolverhampton on Sunday.

But Arne Slot's team had to hold off a fightback from relegation-threatened Wolves at Anfield, which included a brilliant long-range goal from Matheus Cunha.

First-half strikes from Luis Diaz and Mohamed Salah secured the win for Liverpool and ensured it maintained its advantage over second-placed Arsenal.

Liverpool failed to register a single shot on target after the break as Wolves dominated the chances.

Diaz bundled the ball over the line from close range in the 15th minute to give the home team the lead. And Salah doubled the advantage from the penalty spot in the 37th after Diaz was brought down.

It was the Egypt international's 28th goal of an outstanding season.

But if the home crowd was expecting a routine victory against Wolves, it was anything but.

Cunha's drag-back and curled finish from around 20 yards (meters) in the 67th came after a sustained period of pressure from the visitors.



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah, scores a goal that was later disallowed by a VAR decision during the English Premier League soccer match between Liverpool and Wolverhampton Wanderers at Anfield Stadium in Liverpool, Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025. (AP)

Before that Marshall Munetsi was denied when through on goal - it took a crucial block in front of goal from Jarell Quansah to prevent him from converting late on.

Iran, Uzbekistan advance to AFC U20 Asian Cup quarters

SHENZHEN, Feb 16, (Xinhua): Iran cruised past 10-man Yemen 6-0, while Uzbekistan defeated Indonesia 3-1 in Group C of the AFC U20 Asian Cup on Sunday.

With back-to-back wins, both Iran and Uzbekistan have secured spots in the quarterfinals, with Iran leading the group on goal difference.

In Group B, Amir Faisal's goal gave Iraq a 1-0 victory over Saudi Arabia,

while Ibrahim Sabra scored twice to lead Jordan to a 2-1 win over DPR Korea.

Iraq now tops the group with four points, one ahead of Saudi Arabia and Jordan, while DPRK sits at the bottom with one point. All four teams remain in contention with one round left to play.

Meanwhile, Japan and South Korea will play their second Group D matches on Monday against Syria and Thailand, respectively.



Uganda's Jacob Kiplimo celebrates his world record of 7 minutes and 26.64 seconds after winning the men's 3000m competition at the Golden Gala Pietro Mennea IAAF Diamond League athletics meet in Rome, Thursday, Sept. 17, 2020. (AP)

Ugandan Kiplimo sets men's half-marathon world record

BARCELONA, Spain, Feb 16, (AP): Ugandan Jacob Kiplimo set a men's half-marathon world record on Sunday and also became the first runner to go under 57 minutes.

The 24-year-old Kiplimo set a time of 56 minutes, 41 seconds at a road race in Barcelona, smashing the previous record of 57:30 by Ethiopian distance runner Yomif Kejelcha last year

in the Spanish city of Valencia.

World Athletics said it was the greatest single improvement on the men's half-marathon record, and that Kiplimo benefited from ideal weather conditions of 13 degrees Celsius (55 Fahrenheit) with no wind.

Kiplimo won a bronze medal in 10,000 meters at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.