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Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah joins senior military officials, grieving families, and citizens in honoring the fallen soldiers at a solemn military funeral on Thursday.

## **Amir offers condolences as Kuwait** mourns martyred Army personnel

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (Agencies): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has extended his deepest condolences to the families of Major Sergeant Ahmad Farhan Harat and Sergeant Musaad Dhahi Saleh, Kuwait Army personnel who lost their lives during a live-fire training exercise on Wednesday. He also wished a swift recovery for the two injured

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Ahmad Al-Sabah sent similar messages, expressing their sympathies to the bereaved families and support for the wounded

Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah, along with senior Ministry of Defense officials, mourned the fallen soldiers, emphasizing their sacrifice in the line of duty. The Army's Chief of the General Staff also extended condolences and confirmed that an official investigation into the incident is underway

Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Jasem Al-Budaiwi joined in offering condolences to the leadership and people of Kuwait, affirming solidarity with the nation and wishing

In response to the tragic accident, Kuwait's Ministry of Defense announced on Thursday the formation of a Kuwaiti-US technical team to investigate the circumstances surrounding the 'Desert Observer' military exercise incident. The decision follows directives from Minister of Defense Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah, reflecting ongoing military cooperation and a shared commitment to safety standards in joint training exercises.

The minister visited the accident site in Al-Adarea and later checked on the injured soldiers at Al-Jahra Hospital, where he received updates on their conditions and wished them a full re-

Meanwhile, Kuwait laid to rest Major Sergeant Ahmad Farhan Harat and Sergeant Musaad Dhahi Saleh at the Sulaibikhat Martyrs' Cemetery in a solemn military funeral on Thursday.

Defense Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Sabah, senior military officials, grieving families, and citizens gathered to honor the sacrifices of the fallen soldiers. Attendees expressed their prayers for the martyrs and support for their injured colleagues, highlighting the nation's deep respect for those who serve in uniform.

#### **Peace festival pulls** huge number of participating bodies and public

**Zain strategic partner** of 15th International **Invention Fair** 



**NBK** hosts its annual Graish event to celebrate employees



underwater heritage

E-visas praised

#### **Iraq mulls citizenship** restoration requests

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The Ambassador of Iraq to Kuwait Al-Munhal Al-Safi praised the decision that came into effect on Tuesday to allow Iraqi citizens to obtain electronic tourist entry visas to

In a press statement issued on the sidelines of the Japanese embassy's National Day celebration, Ambassador Al-Safi explained that this step is the result



The decision followed the success of the 26th Gulf Cup Football Championship and aims to further strengthen the bilateral relations between the two sisterly

Al-Sabah.

Regarding the visa acquisition process, Ambassador Al-Safi explained that the same mechanism used by Kuwaiti authorities during the Gulf 26 Championship is being followed. Visas can be obtained through the Ministry of Interior's website by completing the visa application form and meeting the necessary requirements. The conditions include a hotel reservation or a residential address in Kuwait. The tourist visa is valid for one month.

In another development, the Iraqi ambassador praised the outcomes of the eighth meeting of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi Technical Legal Committee, which took place on Sunday in Kuwait.

He said the meeting was held in a positive atmosphere and followed the regular bi-monthly meeting schedule in the capi-

tals of the two countries. Ambassador Al-Safi stressed that the meetings are ongoing and each one opens new opportunities, indicating that advancing these negotiations reflects the strong desire of both nations to continue developing a clear roadmap for future co-

**Continued on Page 5** 

## Wallets feel pinch as Kuwait drug bust nabs 8 traffickers inflation climbs 2.5% in Jan

Food, fashion, and education get costlier

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (KUNA): Kuwait's consumer price index (CPI) rose by 2.5% at the end of January on an annual basis, according to data from the Central Statistical Bureau released Thursday.

The data, reported by the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), also showed a 0.15% monthly increase compared to December 2024. The year-on-year rise was attributed to higher prices in key sectors, particularly food, clothing, and education, while transportation costs declined.

The food and beverages category saw the highest increase, up 5.19% from January 2024. Clothing prices followed with a 4.81% rise, while education costs increased by 0.71%. Meanwhile, housing services rose by 0.9%, and household furnishings saw a 2.98% uptick.

Healthcare costs climbed by 3.99%, while the transport sector was the only category to register a decline, dropping by 1.26% year-on-year. Other categories showing annual increases included communications (0.88%), entertainment and culture (2.64%), and restaurants and hotels (2.03%). Prices for miscellaneous goods and services rose by 5.17%.

Excluding food and beverages, Kuwait's inflation rate stood at 1.86% year-

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The Ministry of Interior announced that the Drug Control General Department, during intensive security campaigns in various areas of Kuwait, arrested eight individuals - four Kuwaitis and four Bedoun residents - in possession of large quantities of narcotic substances, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

- The confiscated items included: ■ 50 kilograms of hashish
- 25,000 capsules of Lyrica
- 5 kilograms of Shabu (methamphet-
- 1 kilogram of Chemical ■ 2,000 Captagon tablets
- Two sensitive weighing scales
- A big quantity of empty sachets The ministry stated that the street value

of the seized items is estimated at around KD 220,000.

**Continued on Page 5** 

## **US-Kuwait ties shine in** liberation photo exhibit

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The American Embassy, in cooperation with the National Council for Culture, Arts Letters (NCCAL) organized the 'Allied Effor Documentation of Liberation' exhibition on Thursday at the National Museum.

The exhibition focused on the role of the United States of America in supporting Kuwait during the invasion. It was a reflection of the strength of relations between the two countries and a commemoration of the heroic moments during the liberation period.

In his speech at the event, Secretary General of the NC-CAL Dr. Mohammed Al-Jassar pointed out that the National Museum is not just a building; as it is rather a living testimony to Kuwait's steadfastness and strong will.

He pointed out that the establishment of the museum is aimed at telling the story of Kuwait throughout the ages -- from its ancient history extending to more than 7,000 years up to the modern era, including the Al-Sabah Collection, which is one of the most prominent Islamic collections in the world. "Today, a new chapter is added to this narrative -- the events of the liberation and the subsequent reconstruction and renaissance," he stated.

Meanwhile, American Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara said the photographs displayed at the exhibition shed light on the pivotal role of the United States in liberating Kuwait during the Gulf War.

**Continued on Page 5** 



Photo by Mohammad Morsi

US Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara reflects on a powerful image from the exhibit commemorating Kuwait's liberation during the Gulf War.

## Salwa detectives seize 350 illegal exhausts, arrest four

#### By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Just four days after the Ministry of Interior threatened to take strict action against vehicles producing disturbing noises and to immediately shut down companies supplying vehicles with disruptive exhaust systems, informed security sources revealed Salwa detectives, based on the directives of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, arrested four expatriates in possession of approximately 350 noisy exhaust devices stored in garages in Shuwaikh Industrial.

They affirmed the garages were closed in coordination with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

**Continued on Page 5** 



Photo by Samer Shiqer Performers captivate the audience with a vibrant cultural presentation at the Diplomatic Day event, held at the Heritage Village of the Seas under the patronage of Information and Culture Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi. — See Page 2

#### **Newswatch**

KUWAIT CITY: The General Traffic Department announced the commencement of the fourth phase of maintenance work at the intersection of the Fourth Ring Road and Maghreb Road on Thursday, reports

Al-Seyassah daily.
In a press statement, the department explained that the sub-exit from the Fourth Ring Road towards Hawally will be closed for road users coming from Salmiya heading to Shuwaikh, and traveling towards Kuwait City via the Maghreb Expressway.

It advised drivers to use alternative routes, such as Fahaheel Expressway, King Faisal Expressway, Damascus Street, and Baghdad

KUWAIT CITY: Central bank governors from within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) bloc assembled for talks in Kuwait on Thursday, presided over by Kuwaiti central bank chief Basel Al-Haroon.

The gathering aims to ratchet up financial and monetary cooperation across the six-member bloc, Kuwait's central bank said in a statement, citing a slew of pressing matters on the agenda for the talks, chief among them cybersecurity and the latest financial technology practices.

Regional efforts to clamp down on money laundering and terrorism financing were also discussed, according to the statement, underlining that the talks are part of routine gathering that seek to bolter cooperation between GCC central

### Scattered showers give way to mild weekend in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (KUNA): The acting Director of the Kuwait Meteorological Department, Dhirar Al-Ali, stated that the country experienced varying levels of rainfall on Wednesday evening due to the extension of an air depression, coupled with a deep depression in the upper atmospheric layers. The highest amount of rainfall recorded was 3.85 mm at Kuwait International Airport, while the lowest was 0.26 mm in the Abdali area.

Al-Ali told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on Thursday that monitoring stations recorded varying levels of rainfall, from light to moderate, in different

parts of Kuwait, revealing that rainfall amounts included 3.65 mm in Wafra, 3.03 mm in Jal Al-Layah, 2.6 mm in Rabiya, and 1.17 mm in Salmiya.

Regarding the weather over the weekend, Al-Ali explained that Friday will be warm, with winds shifting from northwesterly to variable directions, light to moderate, at speeds ranging from 8 to 30 kilometers per hour. The expected maximum temperatures will range between 23 to 25 degrees Celsius, and the sea will have light to moderate waves, with heights ranging from one to five feet.

**Continued on Page 5** 



Motorists navigate rain-soaked roads in Kuwait on Thursday.

Expected weather for next 24 hrs: By Day: Warm with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of

By Night: Cold with light variable wind to light to moderate southeastWeather

erly wind, with speeds of 08-30 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas and some areas and some scattered clouds will appear. **Station** 

**Max Exp Kuwait City Kuwait Airport** 

Abdalv Babyan Jahra Failaka Island Salmiyah Ahmadi Jal Aliyah Nuwaisib



A view of the festival parade as it begins.

Photo by Rizk Taufiq

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Minister of So-

cial Affairs, Family and Childhood Af-

fairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah stressed that the funds of shareholders in coop-

erative societies are a "red line", and that

the ministry will continue to protect them

and ensure all decisions are implemented.

boards of directors of cooperative societies at the

Ministries Complex, Al-Huwailah said, "You come

from respectable families, and the people of Kuwait

In an open meeting with the chairpersons of the

## **Peace festival pulls huge number** of participating bodies and public

#### By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Kawthar Al-Jouan, head of the Women's Institute for Development and Peace, expressed her appreciation for the participation of national, public and Gulf bodies and institutions in the Eighth Peace Festival.

The festival, launched Wednesday in Mishref under the slogan "Our strength is in our unity ... stay proud, my country," will continue until Feb 24.

In a statement to the newspaper, Al-Jouan disclosed the festival was launched eight years ago and it reflects the Women's Institute's interest in raising community awareness and promoting the sense of belonging and loyalty to Kuwait.

She pointed out the increasing participation of governmental and civil entities year after year with more than 37 government, public and Gulf entities and institutions participating in the eighth edition.

'Shareholder funds red line'

People of Kuwait trust you: Dr. Al-Huwailah

Photo by Rizk Taufiq Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Af-

fairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah talking to board mem-

bers of cooperative societies

She highlighted the importance of removing obstacles,

adding, "The Ministry of Social Affairs is not against

anyone but is, in fact, a supporter. However, some coop-

This year, the festival includes the participation of the military band, Moral Guidance Department, Ministry of Defense for the first time.

The slogan of the festival for 2025 is consistent with the expansion efforts to include Jahra Governorate and various national institutions this year.

The eighth edition of the festival is exceptional, as it is coinciding with the celebration of the national holidays and preparations for the holy month of Ramadan.

The festival consists various types of national and heritage events, and its activities will conclude in Jahra Governorate Feb 23, with distinctive national events that recall the Kuwaiti heroism of men and women in resisting the brutal Iraqi invasion, in parallel with the celebration of the passage of 64 years after the liberation.

Al-Jouan expressed her appreciation for the achievements of Kuwaiti creators in the festival and called on Kuwaiti citizens and expatriates to participate in the celebration of national occasions in Mishref and Jahra



Ministry of Information Undersecretary Nasser Al-Muhaisen and other diplomats visit the British stall managed by the UK envoy to

#### **62 envoys attend Diplomatic Day**

#### Embassies display their culture, handicrafts to Kuwaiti citizens

#### By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The Diplomatic Day was held recently at the Heritage Village of the Seas under the patronage of Information and Culture Minister Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi.

A total of 42 stalls were established for the event with 62 ambassadors in attendance.

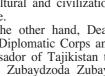
The event was organized through the coordinated efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Deanship of the Diplomatic Corps and UN-Habitat in Kuwait. It coincided with Kuwait's celebration of its declaration as the Capital of Arab Culture and

Ministry of Information Undersecretary Nasser Al-Muhaisen pointed out that the event provided a platform for embassies to showcase their cultural products and handicrafts to the Kuwaiti public, fostering cultural sharing and cooperation.

wait's image as supporter of cultural events, as well as its rich cultural and civilization heritage.

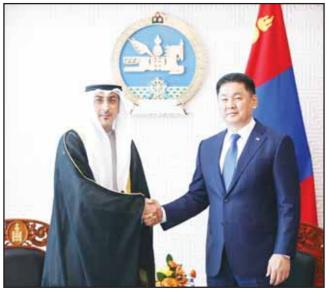
Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait Zubaydzoda Zubaydullo greeted the Kuwaiti leadership and people on the occasion, wishing Kuwait continued progress and pros-

Al-Hassan described the event as a model of cultural diplomacy, promoting dialogue and understanding between peoples . She emphasized the role of culture and heritage in achieving sustainable development and commended Kuwait's commitment to cultural



Head of UN-Habitat Amira

diversity and openness. Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Totonji considers the exhibition an opportunity to develop rapport between peoples and celebrate the diversity of cultures.



## The Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Mongolia Mutlaq Al-Thuwaimer presents his credentials as Ambassador Extraordi-nary and Plenipotentiary to Mongolia. **Kuwait envoy takes charge in**

Mongolia, offers credentials

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (KUNA): Kuwait Ambassador to Mongolia Mutlaq Al-Thuwaimer presented his credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary in Mongolia to President Khurelsukh Ukhnaagiin during a ceremony held at the

Mongolian parliament. Kuwait Embassy in Mongolia said in a statement, received by KUNA, that Ambassador Al-Thuwaimer conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Mongolian President.

Al-Thuwaimer praised the bilateral relations and expressed the wish to develop them on all levels and in various fields, especially since this year marks the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between the two friendly countries.

The statement conveyed the Mongolian President's welcome to Al-Thuwaimer and wished him success, expressing pride in the relations between his country and Kuwait, and the mutual desire to develop the ties.

He also highlighted Ku-

On the other hand, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and

## Brazil envoy extends felicitations to Kuwait on 64th National Day

On behalf of Brazil, it is my pleasure to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the government and the people of Kuwait on the auspicious occasion of the 64th National Day of the State of Kuwait and the 34th anniversary of Kuwait's Liberation. I

also have the honor of



Rodrigo Gabsch

extending Brazil's best wishes for health, prosperity and happiness to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah.

Since the establishment of relations between Kuwait and Brazil in 1968, both nations have been working together under the same values of friendship and cooperation to make the world a better place. The year 2025 is also special for marking the 50th anniversary of the opening of resident embassies of Brazil and Kuwait in their respective capitals. This connection is further strengthened by our joint commitment to the common goals of national development and a prosperous future.

> Rodrigo Gabsch, Ambassador of Brazil

#### **Settlements of disputes eyed**

#### Kuwait takes part in UN meetings putes between investors and countries.

trade law.

NEW YORK, Feb 20, (KUNA): Officials from Kuwait's Department of Legal Advice and Legislation took part in meetings of UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) in New York

The meetings, which took place on February 17-19, touched upon possible reforms in settlement of disputes between investors and nations, the Department said in a statement to KUNA late Wednesday.

The Department officials, attornies Nouf Al-Mashaan and Humoud Al-Dabbous, exchanged views with other delegates about operation of an advisory center tasked with settling international investment-related disputes, it said.

They also discussed a multi-party

accord related to the settlement of dis-

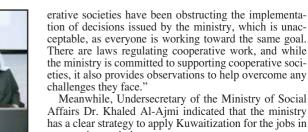
cles to international trade by progressively modernizing and harmonizing trade law. It prepares legal texts in a number of key areas such as international commercial dispute settlement, electronic commerce, insolvency, international payments, sale of goods, transport law, procurement and infrastructure development.

UNCITRAL is the core legal body of

Its mandate is to remove legal obsta-

UN system in the field of international

UNCITRAL also provides technical assistance to law reform activities, including assisting member states to review and assess their law reform needs and to draft the legislation required to implement UNCITRAL texts.



cooperative societies He affirmed the ministry's readiness to discuss all pro-

posals and suggestions. In addition, the Assistant Undersecretary for Coop-

erative Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs Ahmad Al-Enezi highlighted the issue of non-compliance with ministerial decisions by some cooperative societies, emphasizing that all parties share the common goal of developing the national economy.

#### 'Serve your homeland'

### Kuwaiti cultural offices abroad keen to celebrate national days

#### By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari

chose you because they trust you.'

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education Lamia Al-Milhem confirmed that the Kuwaiti cultural offices in various countries are keen to organize National Day and Liberation Day celebrations with the participation of Kuwaiti students, to instill in them the spirit of belongingness and pride in the homeland as such activities reflect the national spirit, make students happy, and motivate them to give more to serve their homeland.

In an exclusive statement to the newspaper on the sidelines of the celebration that the ministry organized on the occasion of national holidays under the slogan, "National Ambassadors," Al-Malhem revealed the ministry intends to lay down a new scholarship plan to add modern specializations that are in line with the needs of the State and the labor market. She said the ministry is currently organizing meetings with students in public and private schools to introduce them to the most important specializations and help them choose the appropriate academic

She added the meeting is renewed in these blessed days to celebrate the National Day and Liberation Day; embodying the meanings of pride, honor, national spirit and determination, and "to contribute to building a homeland that deserves all that is beautiful from us, through you, the national arms of the constellation of the sons of Kuwait."

She greeted HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah, Minister of Higher Education Dr. Nader Al-Jalal, ministry employees and all Kuwaitis as a whole on the occasion of the national holidays.

"May Almighty Allah grant our beloved country security and safety. I cannot miss extending my sincere appreciation to all those who contributed to the success of this annual celebration, especially the Public Relations Department at the ministry for their tremendous efforts in organizing the National Day and Liberation Day celebrations. Every year, Kuwait and its people are safe, secure, prosperous and flourishing, she concluded.



Swiss Assistant Foreign Minister speaks at the function.

## **Kuwait is beacon of progress,** stability in region - Schmutz

BERN, Feb 20, (KUNA): Swiss Assistant Foreign Minister for the Middle East and North Africa Monika Schmutz praised Thursday the State of Kuwait, describing it as "a beacon of progress and stability in the region.

This came during a speech delivered by Schmutz at the reception held by the Kuwaiti Embassy in Switzerland on the celebrations of the 64th anniversary of independence and the 34th anniversary of Liberation Day.

"Kuwait's vibrant culture, dynamic society and steadfast commitment to peace and development inspire not only its people but also friends and partners around the world," said Schmutz.

The Swiss official expressed her pride in participating in Kuwait's national celebrations, lauding the distinguished bilateral relations between the two countries.

In turn, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Switzerland Zeyad Al-Mashaan hailed the historical relations between Kuwait and Switzerland, which will celebrate their sixtieth anniversary next year, stressing the compatibility of the two countries' approaches towards strengthening preventive diplomacy, supporting mediation and peaceful solutions to resolve disputes and conflicts.

The Ambassador also stressed the strength of the economic partnership between the two countries, crowned by the Kuwaiti Sovereign Fund's investments in Switzerland exceeding USD 15 billion, which reflects Kuwait's high confidence in the investment environment provided by the Swiss Confederation through a distinguished legal system and economic facilities for foreign investors.

The celebration witnessed a large participation of a group of officials, diplomats and prominent figures, including the Director General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Patricia Danzi.

## **'Kuwait on track to produce 30%** renewable energy by year 2030'

#### **By Mohammad Ghanem**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Ahmad Al-Dosari, Director of the Renewable Energy Department at the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency, confirmed that Kuwait is on track to produce 30 percent of renewable energy by 2030.

This ambitious goal, which exceeds the targets set by some other countries, highlights Kuwait's leadership and commitment in using renew-

able energy. Al-Dosari outlined a program of projects that rely on national talent, including long-term projects like Shaqaya, short-term projects like Abdaliyah, and smaller projects implevation Code, which mandates that all facilities generate 10 percent of their electricity from renewable sources. The private sector will play a role

mented through the Energy Conser-

in developing small renewable energy projects, and there's a push to promote renewable energy use in the industrial sector, supported by the Industrial Bank. Ongoing training programs are

ensuring that national employees are fully equipped to work in the renewable energy field. The Shaqaya renewable energy

project is being implemented through the Public-Private Partnership Au-The first phase, producing 1,100

megawatts, is in the bidding stage, while the second phase, producing 500 megawatts, is nearing the close of bidding.

## diwaniya 👉 چیوانیة

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

### Back to square one as gov't output queried one year on

"A year has passed since the dissolution of the National Assembly and the absence of its oversight. The government administrative leadership previously justified its weak performance by attributing it to the presence of the legislative body, accusing the latter of disrupting governmental work." Adel Al-Jarallah Al-Kharafi wrote for Al-Sevassah daily.

"Today, there is no longer room or

justification poor performance. All of us are looking forward to solutions to existing problems, such as the administrative complexity, poor services, delayed transactions, poor human development performance, and the weakness that affected infrastructure.



Adel Al-Kharafi

"This is just a little of a lot, so what has happened in terms of addressing all these issues? Can the administrative leadership tell us what they have been doing so far?

"The financial analysts pointed out the low percentage of capital spending from the budget -- approximately KD1.9 billion. I am not a financial analyst, but I believe that this amount is considered huge compared to the low ability of the government administration to implement projects, as experience has shown so. Will the executive leadership be able to implement projects during the fiscal year with this large amount, which is difficult to predict?

"In addition, according to the Ministry of Finance, the Public Debt Law will be issued soon, and that loans will cover infrastructure and service projects. This puts new burdens on our administrative leadership, considering there are two aspects in the implementation of this law -- first is conducting studies for the projects, as it is not right to start borrowing without looking into the feasibility of projects that are ready for implementation. Second is laying down realistic repayment plans. If such plans are not ready and the debt will cover current spending, there will be a risk of gradually entering the 'debt trap'.

'Today, the government administrative leadership is at stake, as the challenges are many and the required tasks are daunting. These tasks should not be ignored and blaming one another for the lack of achievement must stop.

"In all of this, lack of achievement must be subject to questioning and accountability, because it is not right to hear statements about important projects, and then not see them on pround. This has happened many times in the past and we hope it will not be repeated.

"Allah is the Giver of success."

#### Also:

"After Kuwait was liberated from the brutal Iraqi invasion, a small number of Kuwaitis with properties decided to sell their assets in Kuwait and move them abroad. They believed that Kuwait would not survive the aftermath of the invasion and occupation. They sold their homeland at the first opportunity, and purchased properties in America, thinking it was a safer choice. However, over the years, America faced the mortgage crisis, causing the value of their properties to decline, while the properties they had sold in Kuwait skyrocketed in value. This is Kuwait, ladies and gentlemen - enduring and blessed", columnist Dr. Khaled Ah-

mad Al-Saleh wrote for Al-Rai daily. "The government is selling its shares in private companies and making bold decisions that have caused some unease. It has resulted in the circulation of frustrated expressions, as though Kuwait were an unstable foundation. Worries rise in the hearts of the youth, and false narratives are being spread by those who seek to sow doubt, as they assess the material value of a nation that its people love and cherish. It is a losing equation and a misguided measure.

'Some continue to repeat the flawed claim that Kuwait is a land of migration and that there are no true Kuwaitis. But Kuwait's history spans over three hundred years, longer than many nations. Every person on Earth has roots elsewhere, for migration has always been a part of human history. Despite the detractors, they will fail, just as they have failed before.

"Kuwait will remain strong as long as the sun rises in the East. It is our beloved homeland, the place where we are content with little. It carries the weight of exile for us, protects us from the sorrow of loss, helplessness, and the loss of dignity. Our homeland, Kuwait, remains steadfast in its glory.

"Dear youth, have faith in your homeland. No matter how much the corrupt may spread their influence, or how loud the voices of the malicious may grow, or how many the unjust may become, they are nothing more than scum floating on the sea of Kuwait, destined to be removed by Kuwait's enduring strength.

"Kuwait will endure and rise. Just as those who sold their properties after the invasion lost, so will those who doubt it. But those who believe in it, work for it, and contribute sincerely

will succeed. My country will forever be the pearl of nations, the most beautiful of lands. My heart will always tremble with love for it, and my eyes will tear up whenever it welcomes me back after a journey or time apart. It is Kuwait, my eternal homeland, above all disagreements, higher than any concern, and nobler than any struggle. My homeland, Kuwait, remains se-

cure in glory. 

"There is no doubt about Saudi Arabia's efforts to bridge divides and resolve conflicts in various regions in the past. It has consistently worked on healing rifts between nations, with its most recent initiative focused on Sudan. In this case, Saudi Arabia tirelessly worked to address the crisis between opposing factions by organizing numerous conferences and meetings. These efforts had a significant and positive impact, and led to meaningful progress toward a solution," columnist Dr. Essa Mohammad **Al-Amiri** wrote for **Al-Anba** daily.

"Saudi Arabia's dedication to these causes stems from its deep belief that such efforts not only serve the Arab world but also enhance its global standing.

"We highlight this to draw attention to another major global event - the upcoming summit bringing together the leaders of the world's two largest nations, Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump, in an effort to resolve the grave global crisis—the Ukraine conflict. This conflict is expected to find its resolution on Saudi soil, and help avert the far-reaching global consequences of the war.

"Moreover, hosting such a summit in Riyadh affirms the pivotal international role Saudi Arabia plays. This is due to several factors, including the esteemed political stature of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, who enjoys a prominent standing with the leaders of both nations. This summit further exemplifies Saudi Arabia's ongoing commitment to resolving the Russia-Ukraine crisis and working toward a fair and enduring peace in the region.

"In addition, Saudi Arabia has consistently championed many peace initiatives to bridge divides and bring opposing parties together in conflict zones around the world. Its policies are widely trusted and respected by the world's largest powers, and its strategic position in international diplomacy allows it to effectively support and lead global peace efforts.

"Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's internal stability and growth enhance its influential leadership role on the world stage. May Allah grant success.'

"The government of Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah remained silent for a long time, but when it spoke, it spoke with action. The announcement of the signing of the contract to begin the execution of the and an event that should be celebrated and praised," columnist Abdul Latif Al-Duaij wrote for Al-Jarida daily.

"The project, as envisioned by its primary architect, the late Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad, aims to restore Kuwait's pioneering role as an investment and commercial hub in the region. It is part of a grand vision known as "New Kuwait 2035". We hope that the current governmental efforts to execute the project are sincere and that this marks a true beginning for the implementation of the "New Kuwait 2035" vision. "If we are serious about executing this

vision, economic and legal changes are necessary. More importantly, it demands social and cultural



Al-Duaij

transformations, essentially a complete revolution in the mindset, mentality, and institutions of the state and society.

"For Kuwait, or any other country, to become an attractive financial and commercial hub, it

must adopt an open spirit, strong capabilities, and a mentality that is able to accept others without com-

plications or conflicts with new ideas. "It is impossible to plan to become a hub for others and their capital while doubting everything they represent or even their outward appearance. No one will want to invest in an isolated place, and no one there will want them. It would be better for such a place to remain closed off, isolated, and drowning in its own problems, as we are today.

"The Kuwaiti merchant who once made Kuwait a commercial center in the region was a sailor who traveled the world, interacted with all types of people, and accepted diverse and understandable customs and traditions, while coexisting with foreign, and even unconventional, practices and innovations.

"The government of Sheikh Ahmad can look at the experience of Saudi Arabia, which set a 2030 plan, like us, perhaps after us, but they have outpaced us in its implementation, preparing the psychological, social, and economic atmosphere to accept it. Their achievements are unfolding steadily and successfully, with results that inspire admiration.

"Restoring our status as a commercial and investment hub means reclaiming what we lost, whether due to the reliance on oil or the regressive policies followed by previous governments. Simply put, we need to regain our openness and acceptance of the new, and return to the ambition and capabilities of the Kuwaiti people, which were undermined by the comforts of oil wealth."

> **Compiled by Mahmoud Attiyeh/** Simi K. Kutty



Group photo of the forum participants with Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

### Women play vital role in security sector: Sheikha Jawaher

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs held on Wednesday an educational forum entitled (Women in the Security Sector. Inspiring Achievements and Renewed Aspirations) under the patronage and attendance of Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. This forum enhances Kuwait's role and



efforts in human rights, which emerged from the Committee for Monitoring the Development Plan and the Government's Action Program, in cooperation with the National Committee for Implementing Security Council Resolution No. 1325 entitled Women, Peace and Security.

In a press statement on the sidelines of the forum, Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ambassador Sheikha Jawaher Ibrahim Duaij Al-Sabah said that women have a vital and essential role in all fields, especially the

In turn, the Representative of the UN Secre-

tary-General and Resident Coordinator in Kuwait, Ghada Al-Taher, praised the valuable efforts made by the Government of Kuwait and women leaders in the security sector and the GCC countries, and their commitment and wonderful

efforts in promoting peace and security.

She also noted that Kuwait, along with other GCC countries, has shown remarkable progress in enhancing the role of women in the security sector, as the launch of the National Action Plan to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 in Kuwait in 2021 is a fundamental step towards institutionalizing security policies that respond to women's empowerment.

## Murders, money-laundering dip

#### Public Prosecution issues statistics

#### **Al-Seyassah Report**

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Attorney General Justice Saad Al-Safran on Thursday confirmed the release of the annual report about the work of the Public **Prosecution in 2024.** 

The report included statistics on case indicators, in a way that enhances the principle of transparency and helps the concerned authorities take decisions related to combating crimes, ensuring community security and serving public

According to the report, the prosecution re-

corded 46,250 cases last year -- more than double of the total number recorded in the last five years. It added that the number of prosecution members totaled 480 and 18.4 percent of whom are women -- an increase of 1.6 percent compared to 2023.

The number of premeditated and attempted murder cases reached 10 -- 35 percent lower than the number recorded in 2023, cases of officials who failed to implement judicial rulings reached 426 -- an increase of 10.3 percent compared to 2023, money laundering cases reached 188 -- 11.3 percent lower than the previous year, embezzlement of public funds reached 221 -- an increase of 4.7 percent, juvenile crimes reached 5,870 -an increase of 17.7 percent, forgery of bank documents reached 2,651 -- an increase of

4.7 percent, dud-cheque cases reached 2,906 -- an increase of 1.3 percent, and domestic violence cases reached 2,405 -- an increase of 3.7 percent.

The total number of defendants presented to the prosecution reached 51,428 and 56 percent of whom are Kuwaitis, while most of those who committed crimes belong to the age group 30-39 years or 29 percent of

The completion rate of cases reached 95.8 percent -- 59 percent were referred for criminal trial, 33.9 percent were closed and 7.1 percent were transferred to the concerned courts as the courts where they were initially referred to were found to have no jurisdiction over them; while the conviction rate of judicial rulings issued last year reached 79 percent.

#### Stores selling fake gifts, luxury items, shoes, watches shut

#### By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

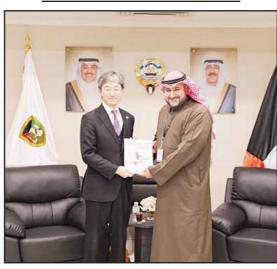
KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has issued 22 closure decisions for commercial establishments in Hawally that violated regulations, and referred them to the Commercial Prosecution.

Director of the Commercial Control Department at the ministry Faisal Al-Ansari explained mendations from the inspection committee.

Among the establishments closed were two advertising companies. One of the companies had been promoting health insurance policies for specified amounts tied to each health insurance card. However, consumers were surprised to find that when they visited medical clinics, the cards were either suspended or did not carry the agreedupon amounts. Many consumers also complained

that these decisions were made based on recom- about not receiving their cards on the specified date, despite having paid in advance.

The decisions included the closure of 13 stores selling counterfeit goods, including gifts, luxury items, shoes, watches, bags, and accessories. In addition, seven domestic labor recruitment offices were shut down for violating ministerial regulations prohibiting cash transactions. These offices were found to have accepted cash payments instead of using electronic payment devices such as Knet.



#### Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah, meets the Japanese Ambassador to the country, Mukai Kenichiro, and Japanese military attaché, Colonel Ryo Tatsukawa.

Military ties part of talks

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (KUNA): Defense Ministry Undersecretary Sheikh Dr. Abdullah Mishal Al-Sabah met recently with Japanese Ambassador Mukai Kenichiro and Japanese Military Attache Colonel Ryo Tatsukawa to discuss important issues of mutual inter-

A statement by the ministry said the meeting involved friendly exchanges and discussions about military-related issues.

### 10 years jail awarded to real estate firm's top tier

#### By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Ahmed Al-Sadi, sentenced the chairman and two board members of a major real estate company to ten-year imprisonment each, along with a fine totaling KD 14 million. The Public Authority for Minors Affairs holds shares in the company. The court also ordered the convicted individuals to repay

The Public Prosecution had charged the three defendants of causing damage to the company's funds by facilitating an illegal share transaction worth KD 7 million in favor of a board member.



**LOCAL** 

## PAHW's housing grants near 100K as major infrastructure progresses

Completion rates exceed expectations

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Recent statistics from the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) revealed that the number of housing grant applications is close to touch-

99,402 in January. The newspaper obtained a copy of the statistics, showing that the completion rates in the infrastructure project contracts affiliated with the housing until January were ahead of the timetable.

ing 100,000 barrier, as it reached

It indicated that remarkable progress was achieved in the infrastructure of South Sabah Al-Ahmad and South Saad Al-Abdullah housing projects; since the actual completion rates exceeded the specified contractual rates. It stated that South Sabah Al-Ahmad housing project witnessed a remarkable development in the implemented works.

The actual completion rate reached 43.21 percent compared to the assumed contractual rate of 32.4 percent, which means the actual progress rate exceeded the contractual rate by 11 percent -- a manifestation of intensive efforts to complete the works at a faster pace.

In the South Saad Al-Abdullah housing project, the actual completion rate reached 20 percent, while the assumed contractual rate was 6.9 percent, so actual progress rate exceeded the contractual rate by 13 percent or three times the contractual rate.

The authority indicated that the affordable housing project is still in the trial period for the first and second contracts for the construction of housing units; pointing out that 151 public buildings are still under construction, including 80 buildings in Mutla'a and 31 in South Abdullah Al-Mubarak.

On the other hand, the authority, in cooperation with the Commercial Arbitration Center at Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, concluded a training program for its employees with the theme, "Alternative Means of Dispute Resolution and Legal Skills" under the slogan "Empowerment."

Present at the event were Deputy Director General for Public Relations and Development Omar Al-Ruwaih and Secretary General of the Commercial Arbitration Center Dr. Anas Al-

The authority revealed in a press statement that the training program extended for nine weeks, with a total of 180 training hours and the participation of more than 45 employees and 13 lecturers in many fields.

Digital transformation

## **Kuwait backs Awqaf** modernization push

laysia on Wednesday pushed forward with plans to form a central Islamic endowments body, also known as Awqaf, given its increasing significance towards sustainable development.

The seminar, sponsored by Kuwait's Awqaf General Secretariat, in the Malaysian capital is tantamount to a launchpad for the formation of a digital Awqaf body, its chief organizer Reham Bukhawa told KUNA, citing such a measure as aiming to regulate and organize the process.

Such a move should also ensure financial transparency and outline with clarity the notion of digital Islamic endowments, the participants collectively agreed, citing the launch of campaigns to generate awareness about the measure before it comes to fruition.



Group photo of researchers, participants and attendees at the conclusion of the 'Digital Endowments' symposium in Kuala Lumpur, organized and sponsored by the General Secretariat of Endowments in the State of Kuwait.



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Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al Mutairi and Chairman of the UAE National Media Office and Chairman of the Emirates Media Council Sheikh Abdullah Al Hamed view the contents of the center.

#### Al-Mutairi and UAE Media Office Head tour Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Minister of Information and Culture, Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi and the UAE National Media Office Head and Chairman of the Emirates Media Council Sheikh Abdullah Al-Hamed visited Wednesday Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center.

The visit included a comprehensive tour of the center's halls, including the various exhibitions it offers, covering the fields of science, history, arts, and Islamic culture. The center is considered one of the most prominent cultural landmarks in Kuwait and aims to spread knowledge and enhance cultural awareness among members of society.



Rana Al Zahhar - Art teacher & Nesrine Charrad - Student.



Khalid Ali - Art Coordinator.



Students engaged in the Exhibition.

#### **Celebration of creativity and confidence**

#### Dasman Bilingual School empowers students in Premier Arts Competition

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Kuwait's Dasman Bilingual School recently organized its highly anticipated Premier Arts Competition, bringing together young, talented artists from various divisions to showcase their creativity and passion for

The event, designed to encourage artistic expression and innovation, featured a diverse range of works, including paintings, digital art, crafts, and multimedia

The competition aimed to empower students by providing them with a platform to express themselves freely and build confidence in their artistic abilities. The school ensured that students from all learning backgrounds -- including those with special needs -- were given the opportunity to participate, making the event an inclusive celebration of talent.

Arts teacher Ms. Rana Al-Zahhar emphasized the importance of nurturing students' creativity, stating, "Through this competition, we are preparing our students for a future where they can apply their artistic skills in various professions, whether as artists, architects, engineers, or designers. It's about fostering selfconfidence and expression without fear or hesitation."

One of the standout participants, Nesrine Charrad, shared her experience of working with different artistic mediums.

"I love experimenting with colors and textures" she said, "whether it's alcohol markers, pastels, or acrylics, I always look for new ways to bring my ideas to

Nesrine, working with a black canvas presents both a challenge and an opportunity. "It can be tricky for the eye, but the key is to make the colors stand out clearly and harmoniously," she explains.

"You have to ensure that the colors don't overwhelm or strain the viewer's eyes. Sometimes, that means reversing the colors to achieve the right balance.'

Her passion for art extends to exploring various materials and techniques. "I get excited every time I try something new. I love working with alcohol markers, pastels, poster markers, acrylics and watercolors -- I like to experiment with everything. I hate remaining idle," she

When it comes to inspiration, Nesrine describes her creative process as instinctive. "Once an idea is born in my mind, I immediately start working on it. I don't rely heavily on visuals, but if certain details are tricky, I might use a reference for

accuracy."

With her fearless approach to color and technique, Nesrine embodies the spirit of artistic exploration, constantly pushing boundaries and refining her craft.

"Today marks the opening of the highly anticipated Premier Art Exhibition, an inspiring showcase of creativity and talent from students across all divisions, including special needs, middle and high school," Khalid Ali – Art Coordinator.

Speaking at the event, the art coordinator highlighted the growing number of emerging artists among the students this year. "We discovered a remarkable number of new artists, many of whom are picking up a brush for the first time.

"Some have been with us for a couple of years, gradually developing their passion for art through various mediums," he

He went on to say, "The exhibition is designed to mirror the excitement of a movie premiere, providing young artists with a platform to present their work without fear or hesitation. "Our goal is to empower students, al-

lowing them to proudly display their art to parents, friends, staff, siblings and teachers, fostering confidence and selfexpression," Ali added. Beyond artistic expression, the event

also encourages students to explore entrepreneurship, helping them recognize the potential of their work as a profession or a source of inspiration for others. This year's exhibition, he said, focuses

primarily on multimedia art, featuring a diverse range of works, including paintings, drawings, digital art, crafts and heritage-inspired pieces. With its largest participation yet, the

Premier Art Exhibition celebrates the students' creative journeys, marking a significant milestone in their artistic growth.

The Premier Arts Competition not only highlighted the incredible artistic potential within the school but also encouraged students to consider art as a viable career path or a lifelong passion. Parents, teachers, and fellow students attended the exhibition, celebrating the young artists' hard work and dedication.

With the overwhelming success of this year's event, Dasman Bilingual School plans to expand the competition in the coming years, further fostering a culture of creativity and artistic excellence among its students.



Secretary-General of the Kuwaiti Writers Association, Hmaidi Al-Mutairi with Sheikha Afrah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, the award's sponsor, during a press conference held to announce the award.

#### **Elevating literary excellence**

#### Kuwait Writers Association launches poetry, novels, short stories contest

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (KUNA): The Kuwait Writers Association on Wednesday launched its contest in the fields of poetry, novels, and short stories in order to raise the level of literary works to an international scale.

The contest sponsor Sheikha Afrah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah said during a press briefing that what is distinctive of this contest is that it coincides with the national days and Kuwait's celebration of the "Kuwait Capital of Arab Culture and Media 2025

She added these awards are meant to help encourage the progressions in the quality and value of Kuwaiti literary works and seek to strengthen Kuwait writers association on the Arab and international cultural scene.

Secretary-General of the Kuwaiti Writers Association, Hmaidi Al-Mutairi said "the ceremony aims to raise the literary and artistic heights of our literary works and standards in Kuwait in order to reach world-class levels".

In order to apply for the contest one must have a valid membership at Kuwait Writers Association and that no more than three years have passed since the publication of his works, written in classical Arabic.

The contest categories are Best Kuwaiti novel, Best Kuwaiti collection of poetry, best theatrical text, Best children's story, Best short story, and the Best critical article dealing with a Kuwaiti literary work. Established in 1964, Kuwait Writers Association consisted of poets, story writers, and novelists, and aims to foster the intellectual movement and literary renaissance in Kuwait and the trend in literature to serve the Arab community and to develop national and patriotic awareness.



The White Hands Volunteer Project is one of the association's projects.

#### Kuwait's Tamayuz Charity expands humanitarian aid in Nigeria, Benin

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Tamayuz Charity announced several projects aimed at bettering individual's lives and promoting sustainable development in Nigeria and

Deputy Chair of Board of Directors, Khalil Al-Hamadi, told KUNA of the charity's core belief in creating a comprehensive educational, healthy, and social environment.

He pointed to recent achievement of inaugurating Abdullah Al-Musallam village in Nigeria, home to mosque with a capacity for 300 persons, a school for 600 student, an orphanage for 40 orphans and a farm to ensure sustainability of resources.

Al-Hamadi also spoke of a sharia and Arabic Language College, orphanages, farm and mosque, as well as performance of 300 eye surgeries.

Ambassador praises bilateral bonds and vision for peace

## **Kuwait Embassy in Doha marks National Days**

DOHA, Feb 20, (KUNA): The Embassy of Kuwait in Doha celebrated on Thursday the 64th Independence and 34th Liberation Days in the presence of a number of ministers, ambassadors, and foreign and local dignitaries.

Ambassador of Kuwait to Qatar Khaled Al-Mutairi praised at the ceremony His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. He pointed out that the celebrations are an opportunity to display Kuwait's vision of peace, cooperation, and friendship among all countries and peoples

Al-Mutairi stressed Kuwait's keenness to strengthen cooperation with the GCC and all Arab countries, in addition to supporting the efforts of the international community towards establishing international peace and security.

He praised the distinguished Qatari-Kuwaiti relations on all levels linked by a strong relationship throughout history, thanks to the care and wise directives of the leaders in both coun-



Part of the ceremony of the Embassy of the State of Kuwait in Qatar. Inset: Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Qatar Khaled Al-Mutairi delivers speech at the event.

Al-Mutairi pointed out the Sixth Qatari-Kuwaiti Joint Supreme Committee that sought to

strengthen bilateral cooperation, relations, and development in various sectors, by signing a number of beneficial agreements.

## **Kuwait leads regional push** for 'clean energy' solutions

Bushehri calls for strengthened cooperation

**By Mohammad Ghanem** Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, Dr. Mahmoud Bushehri said the 24th meeting of the Regional Renewable Energy Council reflects everyone's commitment to support regional cooperation and the transition towards more sustainable energy systems to achieve sustainable development goals and fulfill commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions towards carbon neutral-

In his speech during the opening of the meeting, Bushehri explained that energy production focuses on two main axes: supply, meaning the production and generation of energy from renewable sources, and demand that is related to energy consumption. He pointed out that improving energy efficiency



KUNA photo Kuwaiti Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, Dr. Mahmoud Bushehri, during his par-

leads to reducing consumption, which limits the production of electricity using traditional methods that is positively reflected on the environment.

ticipation in the conference.

He added the meeting tackled renewable energies and their localization and the optimal use of electricity, while stressing the need to develop policies and mechanisms that enhance investment in renewable energies and their efficient use in various economic sectors like private housing, invest-

ment, commercial, industrial and agricultural sectors.

He pointed out that the meeting is being held at a time there is a struggle to adopt clean energy technologies and enhance energy efficiency as basic pillars of sustainable development. He highlighted the vital role of the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency in supporting countries in the region by exchanging experience, developing capabilities and presenting plausible recommendations to formulate applicable national and regional policies.

He stressed the importance of direct investment in renewable energy, localizing modern technology, qualifying and training national and Arab workforce, and raising community awareness on the importance of energy efficiency to rationalize consumption and ensure its sustainability.

He also announced that Kuwait, represented by the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, will host the Kuwait Sustainable Energy Week from May 11 to 13, which includes a conference and exhibition organized by the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency with the participation of global and regional entities from the public and private sectors.

#### **Projects collide**

Metro and oil fields block housing plan

By Inaas Awadh Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Kuwait

Municipality has rejected the Municipal Council's proposal to allocate land for the implementation of a housing project in the south of the 6.5 Ring Road and south of West Abdullah Al-Mubarak. The decision is due to the con-

flict of the proposed site with the road right-of-way for future railway and metro projects, as confirmed by the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART). Kuwait Oil Company also apolo-

gized for not approving the project due to the conflict between the proposed land and its oil fields, wells and existing services. After the rejection, the council

is expected to close the file on the transaction, especially since the request to find alternative sites for the metro and train stations was rejected by PART and the Ministry of Communications

The Public-Private Partnership Projects Authority also stated that it is not responsible for any procedures or works related to the Rapid Transit Systems Project-Kuwait Metro, as the Supreme Committee for Partnership Projects canceled the procedures for studying and offering the project under the partnership system.

## KFAED renews support for engineers, architects ABK announces Abdulstar Abdulsamad

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) has renewed its support for national employees by continuing the "Training and Qualifying Kuwaiti Engineers and Architects" program, which was first launched in 2004, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement issued during its participation in the 24th Engineering Admissions Exhibition, organized by the Office of the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at the College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University,

KFAED explained that the program aims to equip Kuwaiti engineers and architects with the skills needed to achieve a high professional level in the shortest time possible. The training course will be held for approximately 13 months and is divided into three phases.

Its participation in this exhibition aims to familiarize high school students with the outcomes of the training and qualification program for newly graduated Kuwaiti engineers and

## Al Safar as Alfouz weekly draw winner

## **Continued from Page 1**

#### **Iraq mulls**

In response to a question regarding the restoration of Iraqi citizenship for those affected by the decision to revoke Kuwaiti citizenship under Article 8, Ambassador Al-Safi revealed that the Iraqi embassy had been informed via a memoranda from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the withdrawal of nationality from a number of wives of Kuwaiti men.

He affirmed that these cases are being examined to determine the legal procedures necessary to restore Iraqi

citizenship. Ambassador indicated that it is possible for those who previously renounced their Iraqi citizenship to regain it by submitting a request to the Iraqi Minister of Interior through the consular section at the Iraqi Embassy in Kuwait, in order to initiate the required legal procedures.

#### **Kuwait drug**

It revealed that the suspects and the seized items were referred to the Drugs and Alcohol Prosecution for legal ac-

The ministry affirmed that DCGD will continue its intensive campaigns to apprehend drug smugglers and dealers to ensure the security and safety of

#### Salwa detectives

The ministry disclosed last Saturday that as part of ongoing efforts to combat negative phenomena which disturb public comfort and affect road safety; the General Traffic Department (GTD). in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, affirmed the continuation of intensive traffic campaigns through the establishment of fixed and mobile checkpoints in order to impound vehicles whose exhausts were modified illegally and emit annoving sounds, in addition to the immediate closure of garages that supply vehicles with illegal exhausts.

#### **US-Kuwait**

She added it is a unique documentation of the moments of courage, resilience and solidarity that formed the deep bonds between the two coun-

She continued: As we look forward to the future, let us recall moments from the past when there was a man named Saddam Hussein who wanted to erase the identity of Kuwait. Tanks came and tried to do so, but after 34 years, all we see here is the true, unique and independent identity of Kuwait. There is a famous

saying,
'The best revenge is to live a prosperous life.' I believe that Kuwait lives a very prosperous life. So, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to participate in this important event.

Diplomacy officer at the American Embassy Stuart Turner said the reason behind displaying such photos now is that they were kept inside the embassy and were not available to the

On military cooperation, he disclosed there is a foreign military sales (FMS) program between the United States and Kuwait, and the details of which are being discussed through the Office of Military Cooperation.

He stressed that Kuwait is always keen on obtaining the latest military technologies, while affirming the continuation of joint training between the Kuwaiti and American armies using advanced American equipment.

He revealed "when I contacted Eng. Bashar Al-Salem -- the organizer of the event at 'Gardenia', to discuss ways for us to participate in a special event, it immediately came to my mind to display these photos because of the strong indications they carry about the extended partnership between our two countries. The timing of the exhibition is also ideal, coinciding with Kuwait's national and liberation celebrations.

He talked about the recent developments in the cooperation of the two countries - citing the opening of offices of major companies like Microsoft and Google in Kuwait, in addition to many technical partnerships that reflect the American role in supporting development in Kuwait, such as the transition to renewable energy, oil extraction or educating the next generation of Kuwaitis.

He confirmed that the United States, as a global leader in the field of artificial intelligence, is keen on strengthening cooperation with Kuwait in this field as well.

#### **Scattered showers**

In the evening, the weather is expected to be cooler, with winds shifting to southeasterly, light to moderate, and speeds of 8 to 30 kilometers per hour. There will be a chance of fog forming in some areas, with some scattered clouds appearing. The expected minimum temperatures will range between 9 to 11 degrees Celsius, and the sea will have light to moderate waves, with heights ranging from one to three feet.

The weather on Saturday will be warm and partly cloudy, with southeasterly winds turning to northwesterly, light to moderate, and occasionally gusty, ranging from 12 to 45 kilometers per hour, which may cause dust in open areas. The expected maximum temperatures will range between 22 to 24 degrees Celsius, and the sea will experience light to moderate waves, with heights occasionally rising from two to six feet.

The weather on Saturday evening will tend to be cool, with winds shifting from southeasterly to northwesterly, light to moderate, and speeds ranging from 8 to 38 kilometers per hour. Some scattered clouds are expected, and the minimum temperatures will range between 10 to 12 degrees Celsius. The sea will have light to moderate waves, ranging from two to five feet.

#### KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is excited to announce Abdulstar Abdulsamad Al Safar as the winner of the Alfouz KD 10,000 weekly draw on Monday, 17 February, 2025. The draw took place in the presence of a Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative, ensuring transparency.

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

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als, among others.



Alfouz 2025 Weekly Winner.

monthly draw, the Alfouz account continues to surpass expectations and deliver even more customer satisfaction.

To top it off, ABK has simplified the ability to open the account and win! Customers can enter the draws and get extra entry chances for every KD 10

The more you save, the higher your chance to be the next Alfouz winner!

ABK encourages everyone to open an Alfouz draw account or increase their balance to participate in the upcoming draw, which is scheduled to take place on Monday, 24 February,

Open an Alfouz account today and enjoy increased opportunities to win the lifestyle you've been waiting for!

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





In this image taken from video, plane debris seen from above at Marana Regional Airport after a deadly crash in Marana, Ariz. on Feb 19. (AP)

#### **Arizona small plane collision kills 2**

A midair collision involving two small planes in southern Arizona killed two people Wednesday

morning, authorities said. Federal air-safety investigators said each plane had two people aboard when they collided at Marana Regional Airport on the outskirts of Tucson.

A Cessna 172 landed uneventfully and a Lancair 360 MK II hit the ground near a runway and caught fire, according to the National Transportation Safety Board, which is leading the investigation and cited preliminary information before its investigators had arrived. (AP)

### GOP pursues separate paths to get Trump's priorities thru Hill

WASHINGTON, Feb 20, (AP): US Senate Majority Leader John **Thune** teed up a vote this week on a budget plan that sets the stage for a massive boost in defense and border secu-

rity spending, leaves and looming tax cut fight for later this year.

The move designed to give President Donald Trump



win and put pressure on House Republicans to join rather than pursue a separate, more comprehensive effort that also risks taking far longer to pass,

Trump undercut the Senate GOP's efforts on Wednesday, calling on both chambers to pass the House budget resolution. "The House Resolution implements my FULL America First Agenda, EVERYTHING, not just parts of it," Trump wrote on social media.

Yet Thune is proceeding as planned, despite Trump's stated preference for the House effort.

"If the House can produce one big beautiful bill, we're prepared to work with them to get that across the finish line, but we believe the president also likes optionality," Thune said.

The resolution is not a bill and does not get signed into law by the president, but its passage unlocks a process that allows Republicans to enact their priorities later this year even if Democrats unanimously oppose it.

The budget resolution, authored by Sen. Lindsey Graham, the Republican chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, sets the stage for about \$342 billion in increased spending on border security, defense and the Coast Guard.



In this image provided by the US Geological Survey (USGS), geologist deployed to the rim looking over the evening views of lava fountaining from Haleumaumau Crater at the summit of Kilauea volcano inside Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii on Feb 11. (AP)

#### Kilauea spews lava again

Kilauea volcano began shooting lava into the air once again Wednesday on the Big Island of Hawaii.

Kilauea, one of the world's most active volcanoes, has been erupting on and off for nearly two months since it burst to life on Dec. 23. The eruption has been taking place at the volcano's summit crater inside Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. No residential areas have been threatened by lava.

The latest release of molten rock began 8:22 p.m. Fountains of lava reaching 300 to 400 feet (91 to 122 meters) have spurted out of the volcano's north vent. (AP)

'US commanding the world's most powerful military'

## Trump's freeze on foreign aid could give China opening on world stage

WASHINGTON, Feb 20, (AP): US President Donald Trump's restrictions on foreign aid and targeting of a key agency funding programs around the world may be offering an opening to America's biggest adversary - China.

From the dismantling of the US Agency for International Development to quitting international groups, Trump's drastic "America First' moves have raised concerns among some lawmakers and experts about whether the US is ceding global influence to its rivals, especially at a time when Washington is fretting over Beijing's growing clout at the cost to American interests.

Foreign assistance offered the US a source of "soft power" - allowing it to cultivate goodwill, build alliances and counter adversaries in a bid to shore up national security without having to dispatch troops, weapons or other more coercive measures.

In Cambodia, the contrast could not be sharper than China sending \$4.4 million to support demining operations, as Trump halted a \$6.3 million grant from

the State Department's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement partly meant to clear "US origin unexploded ordnances as the remnants of war.'

Administration officials say it's past time to review how America spends money abroad.

Asked if the US was giving China and Russia an opening for greater global influence, national security adviser Mike Waltz denied that, telling NBC's "Meet the Press" recently that "all too often, these missions and these programs ... are not in line with strategic US interests like pushing back on China."

In Panama, the Trump administration got the government to quit the Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing's flagship overseas development program, prompting condemnation from China.

Experts and lawmakers disagree on the impact of the US taking a step back from foreign aid. Lawsuits are challenging the administration's freeze on foreign assistance and moves against USAID, with temporary holds on some of those efforts.

"The second Trump administra-



US President Donald Trump, (right), chats with Chinese President Xi Jinping during a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Nov 9, 2017. (AP)

tion will deliver the goal for China" of wielding greater global influence, Feng Zhang, a visiting scholar at Yale Law School's Paul Tsai China Center, said at a recent debate in Washington.

Sen. Andy Kim, a Democrat from

New Jersey, was worried for the same reason. "China doesn't even need to fight for their influence around the world now because of our own effort," Kim said recently on "Meet the Press."

Rep. John Moolenaar, a Republican from Michigan who chairs the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, said it could be time for change on foreign assistance.

"I think as we dig into this, we're going to find out what's been working and what hasn't been working," he said. "And then how do we innovate to a new way of promoting American interests, American values and being clear on what those values are.'

Dennis Wilder, a senior fellow at the Initiative for US-China Dialogue on Global Issues at Georgetown University, said global influence goes beyond foreign aid, with the US commanding the world's most powerful military and its

dollar dominating the financial system. Let's not "accept at face value that China is ready or able to step in where the US may be leaving a vacuum,'

The Chinese embassy in Washington said Beijing is "willing to work with all countries and parties, including the US, to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in the field of development, so as to promote common development and prosperity among all

countries." The two countries - the primary players in global development - are spending foreign assistance differently. Most Chinese money is issued as debt and typically spent on energy and infrastructure projects.

Most US funds were disbursed as grants or loans with low or no interest rates in areas like public health and humanitarian aid, said AidData, an international development research lab at William & Mary University's Global Research Institute.

In Peru, Chinese money helped build the \$1.3 billion megaport in Chancay, which opened in November during a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping. US foreign aid in Peru, by contrast, was used to finance coffee and cacao as alternatives to cocaine production.

## Russia seems to have time on its side as war in Ukraine reaches its third year

MOSCOW, Feb 20, (AP): When Russian troops rolled into Ukraine three years ago, they brought their parade uniforms with them on the push to Kyiv. President Vladimir Putin expect-

ed a quick victory. What Putin dubbed the "special military operation" has turned into Europe's largest conflict since World War II. Tens of thousands have been killed, entire cities have been reduced to smoldering ruins, millions of Ukrainians became refugees, and Russia was isolated from the West.

Now as senior Russian and US officials are talking again and setting the stage for summit meeting, Putin appears closer than ever to cementing Moscow's gains of about a fifth of Ukraine's territory and keeping it out of NATO.

President Donald Trump sharply reversed the three-year US policy of isolating Russia when he called Putin and said afterward they agreed "to work together very closely" to end the war. He said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy "will be involved" in negotiations but didn't elaborate.

Trump also expressed understanding of Putin's key demand on the pivotal issue of Ukraine's prospective NATO membership that the US and other alliance members previously described as irreversible. "They've been saying that for a long time that Ukraine cannot go into NATO," Trump said of Russia. 'And I'm OK with that."

Putin invaded on Feb. 24, 2022, after demanding that NATO abandon membership for Ukraine and pull back the alliance's troops on NATO's eastern flank - actions rejected by the West.

He claimed his move was necessary to safeguard Russia's security interests and protect Russian speakers in Ukraine. Kyiv and its allies denounced his move as an unprovoked act of aggression. Ukrainians saw it as Moscow's attempt to destroy their national sovereignty and identity

Russian troops reached the outskirts of Kyiv early in the invasion but pulled back a month later amid heavy losses and Ukraine's attacks on supply lines. More humiliating setbacks came in

September and October 2022, when Ukrainian counteroffensive forced Russia to pull back from large parts of the Kharkiv region in the northeast and the Kherson region in the south.

Fortunes changed in 2023 when a Ukrainian counteroffensive in the south failed to cut Russia's land route to the Crimea Peninsula, which Moscow ille gally annexed from Kyiv in 2014.

Russia seized the combat initiative last year with offensives along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front, making slow but persistent gains. In the fall, Russian forces captured the most territory since the opening of the war.

Moscow also pummeled Ukrainian infrastructure with waves of missiles and drones, destroying much of its power generating capacity.

Ukraine struck back in August with an incursion into Russia's Kursk region to try to distract Moscow's forces in the east and gain more leverage in potential peace talks. Ukraine still holds some of those gains, but its limited resources are stretched, making it difficult to defend strongholds in the east.

While Zelenskyy earlier demanded Russia's full withdrawal from all occupied areas as a precondition for talks. he later acknowledged Kyiv can't immediately reclaim all its territory. He said Ukraine won't abandon its goal of joining NATO - even though Trump dismissed that as "impractical" - and Zelenskyy emphasized needing reliable Western security guarantees and a robust European peacekeeping force to prevent Russian attacks.

Trump's call with Putin and ensuing Russia-US talks in Saudi Arabia shattered the Biden administration's "nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine" policy. Trump blamed Kyiv for failing to make a deal with Moscow that could have prevented the war, praised Russia's military might and even suggested that Ukraine "may be Russian someday. Zelenskyy said Ukraine won't ac-

cept any deal negotiated without Kyiv and insisted that European allies must participate in peace talks.



Servicemen stand at the end of the Steadfast Dart 2025 exercise, involving some 10,000 troops in three different countries from nine nations and represent the largest NATO operation planned this year, at a training range in Smardan, eastern Romania on Feb 19. (AP)

US stance on Europe shifts under Trump

## **NATO** holds large-scale combat exercises

SMARDAN, Romania, Feb 20, (AP): NATO members continued their largest combat exercises of 2025 on Wednesday, testing their ability to rapidly deploy large-scale forces on the 32-nation alliance's eastern border as worries grow over its most powerful member, the United States.

The drills in Romania, which borders Ukraine, come as a shaken Europe grapples with a new US course under President Donald Trump. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has demanded that allies dramatically ramp up military spending and said US security priorities lie elsewhere — casting doubts on Washington's longstanding security guarantees provided to Europe.

Days before the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Steadfast Dart 2025 drills comprise about 10,000 military personnel from nine nations as part of NATO's new Allied Reaction Force. They are taking place over six weeks in Romania, Bulgaria and Greece.

Although the Trump administration has not announced plans to pull US forces from the region, Hegseth's remark that "European allies must lead from the front" left NATO partners contemplating a potential new reality in which the U.S. is no longer the powerful, nuclear-armed backstop for the continent's security.

Radu Tudor, a defense analyst in Bucharest, said a US rollback of its military presence in Romania would be 'a gift" to Russian President Vladimir

"The whole eastern flank of NATO (would) become weaker in front of

Russia's aggressive behavior," he said, adding that it would push Romania to ask NATO allies to contribute troops and weapons to plug the gap left by several thousand American troops.

Adm. Stuart B. Munsch, commander of the Allied Joint Force Command, said threats to NATO "have become increasingly complex and unpredictable' over the past decade.

"To address this complex security environment, NATO has undergone a significant war-fighting transformation. We have taken our defensive plans from concept to reality," Munsch told reporters at the training

base on Wednesday. "This exercise .. represents the culmination of our efforts and the beginning of our new force that will defend every inch of al-

liance territory."

#### **Europe**

**Fico secures more ministries:** The three parties of Slovakia's ruling coalition said Wednesday they have agreed on a reshuffle to stabilize the government, in a move boosting the power of the Smer (Direction) party of populist Prime Minister Robert Fico.

According to the agreement, the coalition's two junior partners - Hlas, or Voice, party and the ultranationalist Slovak National Party - will give up control of one ministry each

With the addition of the ministries overseeing Investments, Regional Development and Information and Tourism and Sports, Smer will have control of nine ministries, Hlas will have six and the Slovak National Party two.

risked its parliamentary majority. The coalition had 79 seats in the 150-seat parliament known as the

A recent crisis in the coalition

National Council before four Hlas lawmakers and three from the



Slovak National Party parted from their parliamentary factions. The lawmakers did not join the opposition have demanded posts in the government, parliament and

state institutions in exchange for their

Spanish authorities on Wednesday announced the discovery of a suspected drug smuggling tunnel linking Morocco with the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, in North Africa. The tunnel, which was found dur-

**Drug-smuggling tunnel found:** 

ing an operation targeting hashish trafficking, was fitted with basic lighting and measures 12 meters deep (39 feet), police said. It was located during a search at a warehouse in an industrial part of the tiny Spanish ter-

Spain's El País newspaper reported that the tunnel stretched for 50 meters in the Spanish section, and that the mouth of the tunnel was found in a former marble factory that closed in 2020. The passageway was hidden by a trapdoor that gave way to a stairway descending into the tunnel, the newspaper reported. (AP)

lutely incomprehensible and horrible act," he posted on X. The motive for the attack was not immediately known. Police say the situation was under control and there was no danger to the public. No other details were immediately

Knife attack kills two, teen

detained in Czech Republic

PRAGUE, Feb 20, (AP): Two women have died in a knife

attack on Thursday at a shopping center in the Czech Repub-

with the stabbings in a store in the city of Hradec Kralove,

Reports initially said the victims had been injured, one

A 16-year-old Czech national was detained by police

Prime Minister Petr Fiala offered his condolences to the

"What has happened in Hradec Kralove today is an abso-

of them seriously, but police later said both had died. They

about one 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) from the scene, shortly

after the attack. A knife was found nearby.

Police say they detained a teenage suspect in connection

lic, officials said.

were not identified.

relatives of the dead.

some 100 east of Prague.

In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Services on Feb 20,

rescuers clear the rubble from a multi-story building which was heavily

damaged by a Russian strike on a residential neighbourhood in Kherson,

Ukraine. (AP)



Police and ambulances are seen in a shopping area in Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic, where two women died after a knife attack on Feb 20. (AP)

'No doubt that this is, not unprecedented, but unusual event'

## Australian, New Zealand militaries monitor 3 Chinese warships off Australia

MELBOURNE, Australia, Feb 20, (AP): The Australian and New Zealand militaries were monitoring three Chinese warships moving unusually far south along Australia's east coast on an unknown mission, officials said Thursday.

The Australian government revealed a week ago that the warships had traveled through Southeast Asia and the Coral Sea and were approaching north-

Defense Minister Richard Marles said Thursday that the Chinese ships - the naval frigate Hengyang, cruiser Zunyi and replenishment vessel Weishanhu were "off the east coast of Australia."

Defense officials did not respond to a request for comment on a Financial Times report that the task group from China's military, the People's Liberation Army, was 150 nautical miles (278 kilometers) east of Sydney.

There is no doubt that this is, not unprecedented, but an unusual event," Marles told Sky News television.

Marles said Australian navy ships and air force planes were monitoring the Chinese ships' movements through international waters that are in Australia's exclusive economic zone, the area beyond its territorial waters where a nation has exclusive economic rights.

'They're entitled to be where they are; Australia is also entitled to be prudent and we are monitoring very closely what the activities of the task group are," Marles told reporters.

"What we will do whenever this mission is over on the part of the Chinese task group is engage in a full assessment of what the Chinese were seeking to achieve in respect of this mission," he added.

In Beijing, China's foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun was asked at a media briefing on Wednesday about the Chinese warships' location and replied he was not aware of the situation. The Chinese Embassy in Australia did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday.

Marles said Âustralia had engaged with its nearest neighbor Papua New Guinea over its response because the Chinese had traveled around the South Pacific island nation's coast on their way to Australia's exclusive economic zone.



In this photo provided by the Australian Defense Force, the People's Liberation Army-Navy Jiangkai-class frigate Hengyang travels in the Torres Strait off Australia's coast, on Feb 11. (AP)

Australia was also "working very closely" with New Zealand, which is separated from the Australian east coast by the Tasman Sea, he said

New Zealand's military was also monitoring the Chinese ships by sea and air "in coordination with Australia," New Zealand Defense Minister Judith Collins said in a statement.

"We have not been informed by the Chinese government why this task group has been deployed into our region, and we have not been informed what its future plans are," she added. "We will continue to monitor these vessels.' Jennifer Parker, an expert associate of Australia's National Security College and a former Australian naval officer, said Chinese warships rarely traveled so far south along the nation's east coast.

This is part of a broader power projection from the PLA-Navy and we should expect to see more of this in the Pacific and in the Indian Ocean," Parker

The Chinese deployment comes as the head of US Indo-Pacific Command Adm. Samuel Paparo visits Australia this week

Parker said the timing was likely coincidental given the Chinese deployment would have been planned well in advance and the United States doesn't release information about their senior officers' travel until close to the visit.

Without knowing exactly where the ships are going, the point of this deployment, I think, is to demonstrate to Australia that they have the capability to come down and operate in our maritime domain," Parker said.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told a news conference he was not worried by reports of Chinese warships off Sydney.

The Chinese naval ships are complying with international law, but as we do, we are monitoring the situation and observing what is going on, as you would expect," Albanese said.

Three Chinese warships visited Sydney Harbor in 2019. But their voyage had been approved by the Australian government.

Australia's diplomatic and trade relations with China have improved in recent years, but relations between the two militaries are dangerous. Australia protested what it described as an unsafe interaction last week over

the South China Sea where a Chinese fighter is accused of releasing flares that endangered an Australian military surveillance plane.

Guo, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, accused the Australian aircraft of "deliberately" intruding into airspace over the disputed Paracel Islands, which China claims.

## **Impeached president Yoon appears in 2 different** S.Korea courts while defending martial law decree

SEOUL, South Korea, Feb 20, (AP): Traveling around Seoul in a prison transport vehicle, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol appeared in two different courts on Thursday, contesting his arrest on rebellion charges in one and fighting an effort to remove him from office in the other.

Both cases - one on criminal charges, one an impeachment - are related to his brief imposition of martial law in December.

Security was heightened at the Seoul Central District Court as the motorcade transporting Yoon arrived for a preliminary hearing that involved discussions of witnesses, proposed evidence and other preparations for his criminal trial

The court, which scheduled another preliminary hearing in March, was also reviewing a request by Yoon's lawyers to cancel his arrest and release him from custody. Such challenges are rarely successful. The court was expected to make a decision later Thursday.

Yoon next traveled across the capital to the Constitutional Court, which is nearing a decision on whether to formally remove him from office after was impeached by the National Assembly. Yoon temporarily left the courtroom when Prime Minister Han Duck-soo appeared as a witness. Yoon's lawyer explained to the justices



South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol, (left), attends the tenth hearing of his impeachment trial over his short-lived imposition of martial law at the Constitutional Court in Seoul on Feb 20. (AP)

that his client believed it would damage the country's image if both were seen in court together.

Han supported Yoon's claim that the liberal opposition, with its legislative majority, had disrupted state affairs through pushing for impeachments of senior officials and undermining the government budget. However, Han repeated his previous statements to lawmakers and investigators that Yoon had violated constitutional requirements by failing to deliberate in a formal Cabinet meeting before declaring martial law on Dec. 3. Han said he didn't know of any Cabinet member who expressed support of Yoon's step.

Yoon returned to the courtroom as

the justices called another witness, Hong Jang-won, former first deputy director of South Korea's spy agency. Hong has said that Yoon ordered him to help a defense counterintelligence unit detain key politicians, including National Assembly speaker Woo Won Shik and opposition leader Lee Jae-

Yoon was indicted Jan. 26 on rebellion charges, which carry a potential punishment of death or life in prison. In South Korea, presidents have immunity from most criminal prosecutions, but not on charges of rebellion or treason.

The indictment alleges his imposition of martial law was an illegal attempt to shut down the National Assembly and arrest politicians and election authorities. The conservative Yoon has said his martial law declaration was intended as a temporary warning to the liberal opposition and that he had always planned to respect lawmakers' will if they voted to lift the measure.

Yoon's presidential powers were suspended when he was impeached Dec. 14, leaving him to fight for his political life at the Constitutional Court.

Martial law was lifted about six hours after Yoon declared it but has caused political turmoil, disrupted high-level diplomacy and tested the resiliency of the country's democracy.

#### S.Korea and US forces conduct exercise involving B-1B bomber

SEOUL, South Korea, Feb 20, (AP): The US and South Korean militaries conducted an aerial exercise involving at least one US B-1B bomber and multiple fighter jets in the allies' first joint air force drill of President Donald Trump's second term.

Seoul's Defense Ministry said South Korean F-35 and F-15 fighter jets and American F-16s were involved in the exercise over the Korean Peninsula, but it didn't specify how many. The training was conducted to demonstrate the US deterrence capabilities against North Korean nuclear and missile threats and improve interoperability between South Korean and U.S. forces, the ministry said in a statement.

South Korea and the United States in recent years have expanded their combined military exercises and joint three-way drills with Japan in the face of growing North Korean nuclear threats, while also sharpening their defense strategies built around US strategic assets. The drills have increasingly involved advanced U.S. weapons systems, such as long-range bombers, aircraft carriers and submarines. Tensions are at their highest in years as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un continues to flaunt his military nuclear capabilities and align with Russia over President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine, while ignoring calls by the United States and Asian neighbors to resume denuclearization negotiations.



In this photo provided by South Korea Defense Ministry, US. Air Force B-1B bomber, (top center), F-16 fighter jets and South Korean Air Force F-15K fighter jets, (right bottom), fly over the Korean Peninsula, South Korea during a joint aerial drill between South Korea and the United States on Feb

Delegates attend a planned signing ceremony of the Sudan Founding Charter aimed at establishing a unity government involving leaders of political forces, armed groups, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC) in Nairobi on Feb 18. (AP)

#### **Kenya reaffirms commitment to peace**

Kenya's foreign ministry said it is ready to support peace efforts in Sudan, a day after Khartoum accused Kenya of violating its sovereignty by hosting a meeting of Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Force, RSF, in the capital, Nairobi.

In a statement, Sudan called Kenya's move to host Tuesday's meeting "tantamount to an act of hostility," particularly as it preceded a planned announcement of a parallel government by the RSF.

RSF Deputy Commander Abdel-Rahim Hamdan Dagalo led the Sudanese delegation at the governmentowned Kenyatta International Conference Center in Nairobi, stating a significant announcement would be

made on Friday. Kenya's foreign ministry said the country hosts many Sudanese refugees and has a history of facilitating dialogue "without any ulterior motives.

However, Macharia Munene, a professor of international relations at the United States International University-Africa, said Kenya risks international isolation due to this "foreign policy blunder." He argues that Kenva's foreign policy has become a "one man show" with the president leveraging his friendship with RSF's Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, popularly known as Hemedti, without considering "Kenya's national interests.

While Hemedti was not present at Tuesday's event, he enjoys a close friendship with Kenya's President William Ruto and his brother has met the president on several occasions. The ongoing conflict in Sudan between the military

and the RSF has killed more than 24,000 people and driven over 14 million people - about 30% of the population - from their homes, according to the United Nations. An estimated 3.2 million Sudanese have escaped to neighboring countries.

Sudanese authorities on Tuesday said recent attacks by the RSF had killed more than 400 civilians, including infants after the paramilitary was "overwhelmed by its devastating defeat" by the Sudanese army. Haydar Abdul Karim, a Sudanese peace activist and freelance journalist now residing in Kenya, told The Associated Press that regional governments should not take sides. (AP)

key parties show that "the risk of a regional conflagration is more real today than ever before," said Huang Xia, UN special envoy for Africa's Great Lakes region, which includes Congo, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. (AP)

Besigye appears in court: Ugandan opposition figure Kizza Besigye appeared briefly in a civilian court Wednesday as attorneys tried to secure his freedom, but a judge said he was too unwell to follow proceedings.

A visibly frail Besigye, who has been detained since November, was driven back to a maximum-security prison in Kampala, the Ugandan capital.

Besigye's continued detention is attracting more attention as his supporters, activists and others warn that he needs medical care and should be removed from prison conditions. They say any harm to him while in custody could trigger deadly unrest in this east African country. (AP)

#### Mexico prez says govt requested US surveillance drone flights

MEXICO CITY, Feb 20, (AP): Mexico President Claudia Sheinbaum said that surveillance drone flights by the US government over Mexico are occurring in collaboration with and at the request of her government. They come as US President Donald Trump's administration has increased pressure on Mexico to do more to stop the production of the synthetic opioid fentanyl that is smuggled north to the United States.

Earlier this month, Trump threatened, then postponed 25% tariffs on Mexican imports that he said were meant to push Mexico to take more action against its drug cartels. Trump also ordered on his first day in office the designation of some of Mexico's drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations. Those designations will be published in Thursday's edition of the Federal Register, according to a notice Wednesday.

Mexico responded to the tariff threat by sending 10,000 National Guard troops to the northern bor-

The drone flights were reported Tuesday by the New York Times as a Central Intelligence Agency program aimed at locating fentanyl labs in northwestern Mexico.



Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum gives her daily morning press conference at the National Palace in Mexico City on Feb 3. (AP)

The flights follow U.S. military statements that it had increased surveillance capabilities along the countries' shared border. The CIA declined to comment in response to questions about the drone flights.

Mexico's Defense Secretary Ricardo Trevilla addressed the flights by US military planes last week, saying that they had not entered Mexican airspace, but that he couldn't rule out they were spying because he didn't know what they were doing.

#### **BLA claims killing** of / in bus attack

QUETTA, Pakistan, Feb 20, (AP): A Pakistani separatist group claimed responsibility on Thursday for the killing of seven bus passengers in an attack earlier this week, saying the victims were affiliated with the military and intelligence services. The attack occurred late Tues-

day night when ethnic Baloch militants armed with guns intercepted several passenger buses on a highway in southwestern Pakistan The outlawed

Baloch Liberation Army group said in a state-

ment its fighters attacked the buses and killed the men in Rakhni, a town in Balochistan province.

But local authorities dismissed the claim, saying the slain individuals were civilians with no ties to security forces. Pakistan's prime minister is Shehbaz Sharif.

Though BLA mainly operates in Balochistan, it has also targeted Chinese nationals working on multi-billiondollar projects in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

## Indian prime minister's party names woman as top government official in New Delhi

NEW DELHI, Feb 20, (AP): India's ruling Hindu nationalist party on Wednesday named a woman as the top government official in New Delhi, which includes the country's capital, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi moves to consolidate his party's hold there after winning the local election. Former party student leader Rekha Gupta, 50, was named New Delhi chief minister, Bharatiya Janata Party leader Ravi Shankar Prasad announced.

The party won the most seats in the high-stakes New Delhi polls earlier this month for the first time in 27 years. With 48 seats in the 70-member local assembly, Bharatiya Janata Party ousted the Aam Aadmi Party, which won 22 seats.

Gupta thanked the party and said she would work hard to meet the challenges ahead. She faces significant tasks in tackling air and river pollution and poor infrastructure in the Indian capital. Before elections, her party had offered to revamp government schools, give free health services, free electricity, and a monthly stipend of over 2,500 rupees (\$29) to poor women in Delhi. Gupta is the fourth female chief minister in Delhi, but it is still rare for Indian political parties to name women to top positions. The only other woman who is chief minister of a state currently is West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee, of the All India Trinamool Congress party.

A law for India's legislatures to have 33% female membership is expected to be implemented by 2029. Women hold about 14% of parliamentary seats now, India's highest proportion since independence but far below the global average of 26.5%.



Bharatiya Janata Party leader Rekha Gupta, (right), and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi greet their supporters during swearing in ceremony of former as Delhi state chief minister at Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi, India on Feb 20. (AP)

Gupta, a former BJP general secretary, started out as a student leader at Delhi University in 1992. She is known for initiatives on the welfare of women and children, as well as

support for impoverished female students. The BJP has not run Delhi for over a quarter of a century. It yielded power to the Congress party that ruled Delhi from 1998 to 2013, until the AAP burst onto the scene on an anticorruption platform.

#### **Africa**

'Risk of regional war increasing': Top United Nations officials in Africa warned an emergency meeting of

the UN Security Council on Wednesday that the offensive of Rwandabacked rebels in mineral-rich eastern Congo is threatening peace in the wider region.

"It is imperative that this council takes urgent and decisive steps to avert a wider regional war," said Bintou Keita, UN special envoy for

The seizure of major cities in eastern Congo by the M23 rebel group in recent weeks and statements by



#### Kuwait crude oil price jumps to \$79.78 pb

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (KUNA): Kuwait crude oil leaped USD 1.43 during Wednesday's trading to reach USD 79.78 per barrel compared with USD 78.35 pb the day before, Kuwait Pe-

troleum Corporation (KPC) said Thursday. Brent futures edged 20 cents higher to USD 76.04 pb and West Texas Intermediate rose 40 cents to USD 72.25 pb.

# Business



Invest GB team during the hospital visit.



Group photo of Invest GB team.

#### 'InvestGB' reinforces its community commitment with a visit to hospitalized children

As part of its corporate social responsibility efforts to support activities that benefit the community and promote a spirit of engagement and compassion, a team from Gulf Capital Investment Company, "InvestGB", the investment arm of Gulf Bank, visited the pediatric wards at Al Amiri Hospital and Ibn Sina Hospital. The visit was coordinated in collaboration with the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospitals (KACCH) and Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice (BACCH). During the visit, the InvestGB team met with the children and their families, spreading joy by distributing gifts in

a heartwarming and uplifting atmosphere filled with optimism and kindness. Commenting on the initiative, Mr.Nazem AlGhabra, Director of Marketing and Corporate Communications at InvestGB, emphasized the company's commitment to community service. He stated: "We were delighted to bring smiles to the children's faces. This initiative aligns with our broader vision of corporate social responsibility, and we will explore further collaborations with nonprofit organizations to expand our community impact.'

AlGhabra further highlighted that InvestGB remains dedicated to support-

## **Boursa Kuwait closes** higher with 0.49% gain

Major 50 Index gains 0.68%

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait ended Thursday's trading session on a positive note, with the general index rising 39.71 points, or 0.49%, to close at 8,142.94 points.

Market activity saw 480.5 million shares traded through 21,303 transactions, with a total value of 157.2 million dinars (approximately \$484.17 million).

The Main Market Index edged up 11.82 points, or 0.16%, to 7,477.56 points, with 346 million shares changing hands across 12,425 transactions worth 103.2 million dinars (around \$317.8 million).

Meanwhile, the Premier Market Index advanced 48.71 points, or 0.56%, to reach 8,711.36 points, supported by the trading of 134.5 million shares in 8,878 transactions worth 53.9 million dinars (\$166 million).

The Major 50 Index also gained 51.87 points, or 0.68%, closing at 7,625.82 points, with 284.5 million shares traded through 8,718 transactions, totaling 95.8 million dinars (\$295 million).

#### Duqm Refinery boosts capacity by 10% to 255K barrels per day

#### By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Duqm Refinery's maximum refining production capacity recently increased by 10 percent -- from 230,000 to 255,000 barrels per day, reliable sources told the newspaper.

Sources said this growth is expected to continue, with another 10 percent increase projected for 2026. The refinery's rapid development, despite its recent establishment, is attributed to increased global demand and its strategic location, they added.

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's (KPC) marketing efforts and the refinery's proximity to the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea have also contributed to its success, sources pointed out.

The Sultanate of Oman has placed special emphasis on Dugm Refinery due to disruptions at the Omani Sohar Refinery and the Dugm Refinery's consistent production. With an investment value of approximately \$9 billion, it has become a major player in the Middle East and North Africa region, sources affirmed.

The refinery has also captured a significant share of the African market, exporting roughly 50 percent of its diesel production to the continent. It exports high-quality materials to European and Asian markets, with over 110 shipments sent globally last year. Its products, including diesel, naphtha, liquefied petroleum gas, jet fuel, petroleum coke, and sulfur, are all free of environmental pollutants and meet international standards. It has helped increase Oman's total refining capacity to over 500,000 barrels per day, leading to record-high petroleum derivative export shipments last year, sources explained.

While feasibility studies for a petrochemical complex near the Duqm Refinery, in partnership with Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia, have been completed; the project's start date remains uncertain as Kuwait and Oman await a final response from Saudi Arabia, sources added.

Airline to surge flights, targets 40K+ by '25

## **Kuwait Airways aims for 25%** revenue increase in 2024/'25

#### **By Najeh Bilal**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The Board of Directors of Kuwait Airways, headed by Abdul Mohsen Al-Faqan, aims to achieve better revenues and operational efficiency while providing the best services to customers around the

Sources revealed it is expected that the revenues of the airline in the 2024/2025 fiscal will increase by about 25 percent compared to last year's profits, which amounted to around KD 335 million (2023/2024).

Asked if the airline's seventh spot among the best revenues for Gulf airlines in fiscal 2023/2024 according to statistics from the Arab Union for Tourism Media meets the expectations of the Board of Directors, sources responded "our achievement of this position, although good, is not the ambition of the board. The current board aims to achieve very high profits for the company, especially since it is keen on achieving unprecedented revenues in the 2025/2026 fiscal, which will begin in early April."

They explained that such an ambition will be realized by increasing the number of destinations, which will reach 58 in summer. "Kuwait Airways aspires to reach 65 destinations in the summer of 2026. It aims to increase the number of its annual passengers from 5.5 to 6 million in the current year," sources added.

Sources revealed the airlines is also keen on increasing its flights to reach more than 40,000, especially in 2025, so that the highest percentage will be reached next year. They indicated that the completion of Terminal 2 at Kuwait International Airport in 2027, "the airline's profits will reach limits that reflect the efforts exerted by the incumbent board of directors, which assumed responsibility under difficult circumstances.

Sources also pointed out that the efforts exerted by the State in expanding its economic structure and implementing many development and service projects, which have been active under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Al-Jaber Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah, are among the main factors for increasing revenues. They said that allowing family visits and the 60-year-old expatriates to renew their residency permits without paying the previous health insurance fees for those who do not hold university qualifications also contributed to increasing the revenues.

ing and developing the community through various initiatives, including youth empowerment, workplace enhancement, and environmental awareness. Through training and development programs, the company provides students and graduates with practical opportunities to acquire the skills needed for the job market, reinforcing its commitment to investing in human capital as a cornerstone of sustainable growth. Additionally, InvestGB seeks to foster an innovative and supportive work environment that promotes responsible practices, further strengthening its role in driving sustainable development.

#### Under the patronage of H.H. the Crown Prince

## Zain strategic partner of 15th International Invention Fair

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Zain has announced its strategic partnership with the 15th edition of the International Invention Fair in the Middle East, organized by the Kuwait Science Club with support from the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). The event, which brought together 180 inventors from 42 Arab and international countries, was held under the esteemed patronage of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Zain participated in the exhibition's opening ceremony, attended by H.H. the Crown Prince's representative, H.E. the Minister of Education Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei, alongside Chairman of the Scientific Club and President of the Exhibition's Organizing Committee Talal Al-Kharafi, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, as well as numerous diplomats, academics, and members of the scientific community.

Zain continues its annual support for this pioneering scientific event, taking pride in being part of its success story since its inception. The company considers fostering innovation and supporting creative minds as integral to its vision, and this partnership reaffirms its commitment to empowering scientists, inventors, and innovators in their pursuit of excellence.

The patronage of H.H. the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah reflects Kuwait's deep commitment to advancing science and its scholars, reinforcing the country's standing in the global scientific



Minister Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei with Talal Al-Kharafi, Waleed Al-Khashti, Zain's team, and organizers at the company's booth.

community and its contributions to international scientific pro-

Zain firmly believes that investing in creative minds is an investment in the future and that supporting scientific research and innovation is the key to achieving sustainable development and positioning Kuwait as a hub for knowledge and creativity.

For Zain, this partnership is more than just a corporate commitment—it is a national responsibility. The company is dedicated to inspiring young minds and enabling visionary thinkers to realize their ambitions.

Over the years, the exhibition has earned significant recognition, showcasing Kuwait's rich intellectual and cultural contributions on regional and global scientific platforms. It has established itself as the largest of its kind in the Middle East and the second largest worldwide.

The International Invention Fair in the Middle East attracts substantial interest from the Arab, regional, and global scientific communities. It serves as a platform to highlight the ingenuity of young Arab and, particularly, Kuwaiti inventors, reinforcing Kuwait's leadership in fostering innovation for the benefit of humanity.

Through its continued support of this initiative, Zain seeks to contribute to creating an environment that nurtures Arab and Kuwaiti youth-especially Kuwaiti inventors—enabling them to showcase their talents and scientific potential alongside global participants who travel from various countries to present groundbreaking ideas and inventions that serve diverse aspects of life.

#### New tools to support economic trends & SDG tracking

## Arab Fund and UN-ESCWA join forces to upgrade data portal for sustainable development in the Arab region

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance the Arab Development Portal, a key online data resource for Arab countries. This collaboration aims to speed up Arab countries' progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The portal is a regional knowledge and data platform providing access to reliable development data from various credible sources. The upgraded version will include tools powered by artificial intelligence tools, user-friendly dashboards and predictive analytics, offering valuable insights into economic trends, global benchmarks, and SDG

"This collaboration with the Arab Fund, representing ACG institutions, marks a pivotal step in strengthening data-driven, evidence-based decision-making across the Arab region. By enhancing data dissemination and accessibility, we empower policymakers and researchers with the insights needed to address critical challenges in economic development, public health, unemployment, climate resilience, and other key areas aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals," said Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of UN-ESCWA.

The Arab Development Portal was established by the Arab Coordination Group (ACG), an alliance of 10 Arab development institutions includ-

ing the Arab Fund.
"Partnership is at the core of our new strategy to maximize our impact on social and economic development across member countries," said Bader Alsaad, Arab Fund's Director General and Chair-



MoU signed to advance data-driven decision-making in Arab region.

man of the Board of Directors. "Together with UN-ESCWA we will use our expertise and resources to create a data-driven approach that helps policymakers make informed decisions."

The three-year partnership will include handson workshops, the creation of knowledge shar-

ing resources, and the development of innovative strategies to improve development indicators. It will also strengthen connection between the portal and its sources and will offer specialized training on AI tools to boost skills in data management and

ARAB TIMES, FRIDAY-SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21-22, 2025

**BUSINESS** 





Part of the executive management's participation in one of the competitions during the ceremony.

novation

diverse departments.

■ NBK Remains Committed to Strengthening Family Tradi-

■ The Bank is Committed to Inspiring Employees and Foster-

ing a Work Environment that Encourages Creativity and In-

On this special occasion, NBK sought to cultivate a spirit of ca-

maraderie and excitement among its employees by hosting a series

of engaging competitions throughout the event. The celebration was

further elevated with the distribution of prestigious prizes, creating an

Acknowledging employees' dedication and cultivating strong interpersonal connections form the foundation of NBK's strate-

gic vision. This commitment underscores the importance of seam-

less communication, values individual contributions, and fosters a

culture of teamwork, productivity, and synergy across the bank's

NBK firmly believes that its employees are its greatest asset and the

driving force behind its continued success. No institution can achieve its strategic objectives without the dedication, active participation, and

commitment of its people. With this in mind, the bank continuously strives to inspire its employees, foster their professional growth, and

unlock their full potential. The strong team spirit that unites NBK's workforce across all departments serves as the foundation of its

achievements, enabling the bank to deliver world-class banking ser-

NBK places great emphasis on social and cultural initiatives that

strengthen employees' sense of belonging and job satisfaction while fostering a spirit of collaboration and teamwork. By cultivating an inspiring work environment that encourages creativity and innovation,

the bank ensures that these values translate into exceptional service

quality, reinforcing its commitment to delivering an unparalleled

vices that rival those of leading global institutions.

banking experience to its customers.

atmosphere brimming with energy, anticipation, and joy.

tions and Values in the Kuwaiti Society

Honoring their vital contribution to the bank's ongoing success

## NBK hosts its annual Graish event to celebrate employees

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: As the holy month of Ramadan approaches, symbolizing unity and gratitude, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) reaffirmed its appreciation for its employees' dedication by celebrating them at the annual Graish ceremony. This year's event took place at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center, in the presence of the bank's executive management.

Through this event, NBK seeks to uphold the rich traditions and family values deeply rooted in Kuwaiti society, foster stronger connections among employees across all departments, and recognize their vital contributions to the bank's ongoing success.

The event commenced with a brief address by Mr. Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman & Group Chief Executive Officer of National Bank of Kuwait, who extended his congratulations to all employees in anticipation of the holy month of Ramadan.

In his speech, Al-Sager emphasized NBK's long-standing tradition of organizing Graish ahead of Ramadan each year as a tribute to employees' dedication and contributions. He highlighted that their unwavering commitment and collective spirit have been instrumental in maintaining the bank's leadership in the banking sector.

Attended by over 1,700 employees, the ceremony provided a vibrant setting for colleagues to exchange Ramadan greetings and celebrate the cherished Kuwaiti tradition of Graish. This annual gathering not only honors cultural heritage but also reinforces NBK's commitment to fostering a strong family spirit across the organization.

The two-and-a-half-hour ceremony featured a variety of activities, including entertainment segments, musical performances, and engaging competitions, along with exciting prize draws. The event was met with great enthusiasm from attendees, creating a lively and memorable experience.

The Graish celebration organized by NBK for its employees this year was elevated by the enchanting presence of high-end music. A musical ensemble, led by maestro Dr. Khaled Nouri, captivated the audience with a selection of renowned songs and distinctive melodies, creating a magical ambiance. The evening became even more memorable as a group of NBK employees joined the band in playing and singing, adding a personal and heartfelt touch to the



Mr. Isam Al-Sager giving his speech.



Executive management participates in competitions during the ceremony.





Part of the audience.



The ceremony witnessed distinctive musical and singing segments.



Part of the party activities.





National talents added a fun atmosphere to the party.



National Bank of Kuwait employees in a group photo.



Abu Alhous and Duaij Alsaleh

Group photo after signing the agreement.

For the first time in Kuwait and through KFHonline app

## KFH signs agreement to launch transfer service to KCC via KFHonline

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: As part of its leadership in digital transformation and offering the latest innovative banking solutions, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has signed agreement to launch of a new service in collaboration with Kuwait Clearing Company (KCC). The new service, which is rolled out for the first time in Kuwait, allows customers to securely and easily transfer funds online to their trading account at KCC through

Following the signing of the agreement with the CEO of the Kuwait Clearing Company (KCC), Duaij Alsaleh, KFH Group's Chief Operations Officer, Abdulla Abu Alhous, said that the newmoney transfer service to trading account through KFHonline offers numerous advantages. Customers are able to access the service 24/7without any fees, reflecting KFH's success in offering maximum convenience to its customers, through a seamless, secure, and high-quality banking experience.

Abu Alhous emphasized that KFH is strengthening its efforts to enhance customers' experience and facilitate a comprehensive range of banking operations that meet their evolving needs and expectations amid rapid technological advancements. This is achieved by leveraging the KFH's outstanding technological and digital infrastructure.

Kuwait Clearing Company CEO, Duaij Alsaleh, appraised the efforts made to ensure the success of the service. He further added that the agreement with Kuwait Finance House will help improve the quality of services provided by KCC and is an important addition to its service ecosystem, which aims to provide users with comfort, flexibility, and security. Alsaleh acknowledged all efforts aimed at improving the company's approach and service delivery. The company is committed to digitizing its services by implementing cutting-edge automated systems, ultimately



Abu Alhous signs the agreement with a KCC representative.

#### **Abu Alhous:**

- The service confirms our continued leadership in offering innovative digital solutions
- Alobaid: ■ The new service is accessible online 24/7
- A significant addition to clearing services

enhancing customer and user satisfaction.

Meanwhile, KFH Executive Manager Digital and Alternative Channels, Meshal Alobaid, said that the service reinforces KFH's leadership in delivering innovative digital solutions that meet customer expectations and enhance their banking experience. He noted that the new service is available on iPhone, Android, and Huawei devices."Through KFHonline app, customers can transfer amounts to KCC within one working day in a quick and secure manner,"he further explained.

10

Alobaid added: "KFH continues to take the lead in launching a range of digital services that provide an unparalleled banking experience. These include the digital e-signature for personal financing transactions, AFAQ payment serviceenabling customers to instantly transfer money from their accounts to GCC banks participating in the AFAQ service, and Wamd serviceallowing customers to send and request money from other customers instantly and free of charge using their phone numbers linked to their bank accounts 24/7

It is worth noting that KFH has also introduced other digital services such as launching the instant card printing service for the first time worldwide, cardless cash withdrawal and deposit, buying and selling gold, instant gold biscuits delivery, facilitating online payments using smart watches, and online cheque deposit. Additionally, KFHonline offers over 150 banking services, in addition to other 50 services offered through XTM and KFH Go smart branches. In total, KFH offers about 200 online banking services through different apps and e-channels, making it the preferred destination for digital banking

#### Dean celebrates students' success in H.I. Innovation Program

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The team representing the College of Business at the Australian University (AU) secured second runner up place in the highly regarded H.I. Innovation Program hosted by the Kuwait International Bank (KIB). Competing against top talent from other universities in Kuwait, the AU team developed a cutting-edge banking solution designed to enhance customer engagement and reduce churn rates.

The AU student's innovative product demonstrated immediate applicability and showcased a clear strategic vision, strong functionality, and a compelling return on investment. Their professional presentation and ability to articulate objectives with precision set them apart from competition. The students representing AU during the competition were: Alizaa Hassan, Khaled Al Otaibi, Mishari Al Ameeri, and Abdulaziz Al Jaian.

Ms. Nourah Al Humaidi, a representative from KIB's Digital Innovation and Data Intelligence department, praised the team for their dedication and ingenuity, stating: "Their dedication, creativity, and problem-solving skills were truly inspiring. We were amazed by their ability to tackle challenges with such



Australian University students at the H.I. Innovation Program.

enthusiasm and innovation, and we have no doubt that they have bright

futures ahead.' Commenting on the success of the students, Dr. Farid Abdullah, Dean of the College of Business at AU, said: "We are immensely proud of our students for this remarkable achievement. Their success in the KIB H.I Innovation Program is a testament to their talent, dedication, and ability to develop real-world solutions. This accomplishment reflects the excellence we strive for and reaffirms our commitment to nurturing future business leaders.'

'Global corp. to set up research centers'

## AU team secures second runner- Kuwait Oil Company signs MoUs up in prestigious KIB competition for Al-Ahmadi Innovation Valley

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20, (KUNA): Kuwait Oil Company signed memoranda of understanding with Baker Hughes, SLP Oilfield Services, Weatherford International, Halliburton Co., and the National Energy Services Reunited Corp. (NESR) to develop Al-Ahmadi innovation valley - a leading initiative in the field of digital transformation.

KOC CEO Ahmad Jaber Al-Eidan inked the deals with by representatives of the five corporations on Wednesday, according to a statement from KOC.

Under the deals, each of the five corporations will set up a world-class research center at Al-Ahmadi innovation valley to offer solutions to KOC in the areas of exploration for, and

Al-Ahmadi innovation valley, to be provided with efficient energy experts and the latest technologies, is designed to be one of the national assets aiming to push the energy sector forward, the statement quoted Al-Eidan as saying.

It will be a big stride towards strengthening Kuwait's status as a regional poser in the fields of energy and digital transformation, he noted.

Working with global partners, KOC is building an integrated system that could help achieve the company's targets for technological excellence and sustainable energy, Al-Ei dan added

#### 'Eng. Suha Isaac highlights successful partnership'

## KIBS celebrates 3-year partnership with FranklinCovey for leadership excellence

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS) celebrated the ongoing success of its partnership with FranklinCovey Middle East which has spanned three years, with the goal of empowering leaders and enhancing their leadership skills. This was highlighted during the closing meeting of the Leadership Excellence Program where leaders from three groups held in the 2024-2025 training year gathered to share their experiences and benefit from outstanding training content.

Eng. Suha Isaac, Head of Training at KIBS, welcomed the

attendees and expressed her pride in the fruitful collaboration with FranklinCovey. She also extended her gratitude to Mr.Stéphane Gervais Senior Consultant at Franklin Covey, for his inspiring presentation, which provided valuable lead-

ership insight. The event featured an interactive Q&A session where participants exchanged ideas and experiences. This event served as an inspiring milestone in leadership development and a message of appreciation to successful leaders who contribute to building a promising future.

'\$32 bln in insurance operations over 50 years'

## Saudi Arabia hosts Dhaman's 50th anniversary celebration in Riyadh

RIYADH, Feb 20: Under the patronage of His Excellency Minister of Finance Mr. Mohammed bin Abdullah Aljadaan, the Arab Investment & Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (Dhaman) celebrated its Golden Jubilee as the first multilateral investment guarantee body in the world.

Held in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on Wednesday (February 19, 2025) evening, the celebration was attended by a large number of Their Highnesses and Their Excellences princes, ministers, diplomatic missions' representatives and chairmen of organizations, chambers, unions, Arab and international government and private bodies and public fig-

Addressing the event, the Minister Aljadaan congratulated in his speech delivered on his behalf by His Excellency Mr. Khaled Bawazier, Saudi Deputy Minister of Finance for International Relations, the Corporation and Member Countries, and commended Dhaman's contribution, since it was established, to strengthening economic integration and achieving sustainable development in Member Countries.

He said during the celebration, where the Corporation's former board chairmen and directors-general were honored, that the Kingdom's hosting of this exceptional event affirmed its unwavering commitment to supporting pan-Arab action institutions in general, and promoting Dhaman's role in developing investment, trade, finance and insurance sectors in a manner that backs the Arab region's economic development process.

His Excellency the Minister underlined the Kingdom's continued support for the Corporation's strategies, plans and programs in the coming period, along with its directions to broaden the scope of its sectoral and geographical activities through its headquarters in the State of Kuwait and its regional office in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, in a bid to strengthen its presence to serve Member Countries and ensure that it keeps providing its services and helping achieve

growth and prosperity. Minister Aljadaannoted in his speech that this backing offered by the Kingdom is an extension of being one of the Corporation's largest shareholders, as it spearheaded efforts



Dhaman celebrates 50th anniversary under Minister Aljadaan's patronage.

to enhance its financial capabilities in the context of the initiative of the late Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud - May Allah have mercy on him - during the Riyadh Economic Summit in 2013, to boost the capital of Arab financial institutions

Considering the rapid regional and global economic and political developments, the Minister underlined the significance of consolidating cooperation and integration in the coming period in order to achieve common goals and promote sustainable development in various domains, pointing out the importance of the concerted efforts of the region's countries to cope with these developments through deliberate, objective and implementable plans at various levels.

He, further, stressed the significance of cementing and beefing up our local and regional institutions to enable them to face challenges and strengthen their roles in serving Arab economies and peoples, adding, "We are confident that continued cooperation between all parties will contribute to achieving further successes and progress in the future.'

For his part, the Corporation's Board Chairman, H.E. Dr. Naif bin AbdulRahman Al-Shammari, thanked H.E. the Saudi Minister of Finance, Mr. Mohammed bin Abdullah Aljadaanfor patronizing the celebration, and welcomed the representatives of Member Countries, regional and international bodies and governmental and private agencies, who were keen on partaking in the celebration of this exceptional

Dr. Al-Shammari commended what has been achieved by Dhaman to serve the regional economies, its customers and partners in various areas of investment, trade, finance and insurance throughout its long history, noting that it has doubled the volume of its insurance operations in the region against political and commercial risks with a cumulative value exceeding \$32 billion since its establishment until the end of 2024. He added that what really gives rise to optimism is the fact that more than 90% of these operations were carried out during the past couple of decades, which culminated in the conclusion of commercial and financing deals and investment projects whose value is much higher than that of

He added that the Corporation has backed many national exportcredit insurance agencies in Arab countries, and pro-

vided them with extra insurance capabilities through various reinsurance mechanisms. The Corporation has also developed its activity in the field of improving the investment and business climate in the region by means of offering consultations, technical and training support, publishing more than 600 specialized publications and periodicals, and organizing and attending hundreds of relevant events.

The Corporation's Board Chairman elaborated that despite its operational success and commitment to its developmental role towards Member Countries, the Corporation could maintain a strong financial performance to hike up its reserves to more than \$230 million thanks to its sustainable reliance on its own resources.

Dr. Al-Shammari ascribed this achievement to the continued backing of Member Countries for plans to develop and diversify their services and broaden the scope of its operations to cover hundreds of investors, exporters and financial institutions from over 120 countries in the region and the world, in addition to the conclusion of hundreds of contracts and cooperation agreements. He also pointed out the commitment of the Corporation's successive boards of directors and executive managements to applying effective regulatory policies and governance standards, while maintaining its high credit rating of A+ grade since 2008.

Al-Shammari underscored Dhaman's absolute commitment to attaining its objectives by means of developing carefully considered strategies, flexible annual plans and effective mechanisms implemented by qualified staff so as to maintain its leading status in the region as a reliable partner for regional, governmental and private entities in developing the region's economies and backing the development of trade, investment, finance and insurance sectors.

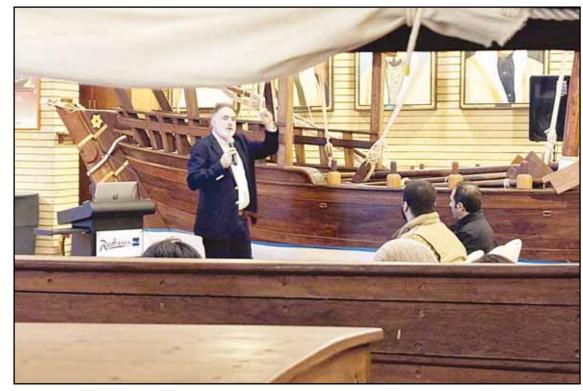
The Corporation's Director-General, H.E. Mr. Rashed Ahmed Al-Haroun, thanked H.E. the Minister of Finance, Mr. Mohammed bin Abdullah Aljadaan, for patronizing the Corporation's most significant occasion since Arab governments decided to establish it fifty years ago, with the State of Kuwait having hosted its headquarters and sponsored its

# Features

FRIDAY-SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21-22, 2025



From left to right: Dr. Ali Al-Mousawi, Dr. Fahad Al-Senafi, Dr. Arafat Al Shuabi, Dr. Mohammad Al-Jassar, Dr. Timmy Gambin and Talal Al-Muhanna at Marine Science Center, Al-Fintas, Kuwait.



Dr. Timmy Gambin delivering a talk on an ancient Phoenician shipwreck at the Marine Museum in Al-Bida'a, Kuwait. In the audience, scuba diver Abdullah Alkhashty (left) and Khalid Salim of Kuwait's National Museum (right).

3D-Q8 brings global experts to Kuwait for maritime research

## Dive into Kuwait's rich underwater heritage

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: From February 15 to 17, archaeologists, heritage professionals, marine scientists, scuba divers, and university students convened in Kuwait to discuss maritime archaeology, underwater excavation techniques, and 3D technologies in underwater research. Under the rubric "3D-Q8," the project served as a platform for education, training, and exchange that included a lecture series, a halfday workshop, and an interactive virtual reality seminar led by underwater archaeology specialists from Malta.

The multi-day initiative emerged from a partnership between the University of Malta, Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL), and the Department of Marine Science at Kuwait University. Professor Timmy Gambin, an associate professor of maritime archaeology in the Department of Classics and Archaeology at the University of Malta, led the Maltese team, accompanied by John Wood, a 3D photogrammetry expert and technical rebreather diver. Talal Al-Muhanna, a Kuwaiti filmmaker and postgraduate student of maritime archaeology at the University of Malta, coordinated the collaboration effort.

#### UNESCO

UNESCO defines Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH) as "all traces of human existence having a cultural, historical, or archaeologial character that have been partial ly or totally underwater, periodically or continuously, for at least 100 years." This definition encompasses a wide range of potential artifacts from prehistoric Stone Age tools to ancient harbors and commodities transported by ships over thousands of years. As Gambin et al. noted in a 2021 article for Remote Sensing: "The seabed can be considered as the world's largest museum, and underwater sites explored and studied so far provide priceless information on human interaction with the

Al-Muhanna – whose MA Talal dissertation is being supervised by Dr. Gambin - stated: "Ever since Kuwait ratified the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage, a robust framework for maritime archaeology has become available to prospective maritime archaeologists in Kuwait." Indeed, with its comprehensive guidelines for researching, recovering, preserving, protecting, and managing underwater cultural heritage, UNESCO's 2001 Convention is gradually establishing a global standard in underwater archaeology. Al-Muhanna added: "As a State Party to the 2001 Convention, Kuwait can reap positive benefits. At the same time, like all States Parties, ratification implies fulfilling various obligations too.'

#### Marine archaeology in Kuwait

To date, marine archaeology in Kuwait has focused on identifying and examining archaeological features along the shoreline, primarily on Failaka Island. From 2013 to 2019, under the auspices of Kuwait's National Council, the Kuwaiti-Polish Archaeological Mission (KPAM) conducted coastal surveys around Failaka Island, identifying numerous archaeological features such as stone tidal weirs (fish traps). The KPAM archaeological team, which included Polish marine archaeologist Magdalena Nowakowska, determined that some of the studied features were built during the Early Islamic Period, while specific fishing practices related to these features continued to be used by island inhabitants into the early 20th century.

#### **Building bridges to the past**

In a time when environmental factors such as ocean acidification, marine pollution, and rising sea levels threaten the integrity and sustainability of Kuwait's maritime landscapes, aquatic resources, and underwater cultural heritage, Project 3D-Q8



Dr. Timmy Gambin delivering a talk on underwater archaeology and marine ecology at the Marine Science Center in Al-Fintas, Kuwait.



Dr. Fahad Al-Senafi (right) and Dr. Timmy Gambin (left) at Marine Science Center in Al-Fintas, Kuwait.



Marine science students and recent graduate Fares Al-Fayez from Kuwait University try out Virtual Reality headsets from Underwater Malta's Virtual Museum



Photo courtesy of Dr. Timmy Gambin Phoenician shipwreck

aims to rejuvenate discussions about underwater archaeology in Kuwait and foster interdisciplinary connections between local and international institutions with shared sustainability goals and scientific interests. Dr. Fahad Al-Senafi, Acting Head of the Marine Science Department at



Professionals representing various institutions attending Dr. Timmy Gambin's talk on Underwater Cultural Heritage at the Marine Science Center, Al-Fintas, Kuwait.



Marine Science Center, Al-Fintas, Kuwait



Dr. Fahad Al-Senafi (left) and Dr. Timmy Gambin (right) at Marine Science

Kuwait University, commented: "It is time to initiate a deeper exploration of the region's rich history, right here in our own backyard in Kuwait.

In the face of a changing climate, it is valuable to examine how ancient civilizations adapted to past environmental shifts, as this knowledge can help inform our strategies for the future"

With top-notch facilities at its coastal campus in Al-Fintas, the Marine Science Centre boasts numerous classrooms, research laboratories, a library, a lecture hall, and direct access to the ocean. Al-Senafi, whose expertise and interests span physical oceanography, ocean modeling, and climate dynamics, added: "This region, once closely connected to Mesopotamian civilization, has long been shaped by the rivers that once flowed into Kuwaiti waters. Over time, these waters have accumulated historical remnants in our seabed, preserving a record of the past beneath layers of sediment, waiting to be explored."

#### 3D-Q8 programme

Project 3D-Q8 launched on February 15 with an invitation-only workshop for scuba divers, underwater photographers, remote sensing technicians, heritage workers, and university students interested in underwater surveying techniques. The workshop was followed by a public lecture at the Marine Museum at the Radisson Blu Hotel, wheretopics related to underwater archaeology in Maltese waters were discussed. On February 17, the Marine Science Centre in Al-Fintas hosted public talks. A set of morning lectures by Dr. Gambin focused on the protection and management of underwater cultural heritage and the environmental factors impacting underwater archaeology.Later that day, John Wood led a highly popular interactive seminar featuring Virtual Reality (VR) headsets. Visitors, staff, and students were offered VR. and students were offered VR experiences. Dr. Mohammad Al-Jassar, Secretary General of the National Council for Culture, Arts & Letters (NCCAL), expressed enthusiasm for the initiative and emphasized the importance of promoting Failaka Island in line with sustainable tourism, as evidenced by NCCAL's ongoing project in collaboration with the World Monuments Fund.

#### Failaka

Between the two days of public talks offered by Project 3D-Q8, the University of Malta team took an excursion to Failaka Island, guided by local heritage worker Hasan Al-Failakawi. As one of the Gulf's key archaeological sites, 3D photogrammetry expert John Wood and Kuwaiti drone operator Ahmad Albeh-behani conducted preliminary aerial surveys of select sites. The results will include 3D models and orthographic photographs.

#### **Future prospects, new horizons**

"My visit to Kuwait has been an enriching experience", Gambin declared. "The state-of-the-art facilities are truly impressive, but what stands out most is the dedication and expertise of the heritage and marine sciences specialists. Their commitment suggests that Kuwait has the potential to become a leading force in underwater research and a catalyst for innovation in the field, not only in its territorial waters but also across the broader region." Gambin's positive interactions led him to conclude, "The future bodes well for collaborative efforts between the University of Malta, Kuwait University, and the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters." Indeed, strengthening research ties and fostering new opportunities in maritime heritage and marine scientific exploration could create common ground.

#### **Funding**

Project 3D-Q8 was funded by a Research Networking Scheme (RNS) grant from Xjenza Malta (Science Malta). The project sought to enhance understanding and appreciation for underwater archaeology by fostering knowledge development, improving capacity building, and facilitating professional networking. The Ambassador of Malta to Kuwait, Prof. Dr. George Said-Zammit, provided additional support.

#### 'She looks so powerful and majestic'

## Melania Trump becomes an unlikely icon in China

WASHINGTON, Feb 20, (AP): Joyce Yip, a 39-year-old entrepreneur in southern China's Guangzhou, has a new celebrity crush: Melania Trump.

The two-time first lady has become an online celebrity in China, especially among women. That may be surprising, given her husband's hostility toward China, but social media posts reflect an admiration for her independence,

her taste in fashion and how she's raising her teenage son. And, perhaps most importantly, her stoic allegiance to President Donald Trump despite his misogynistic comments, allegations that he's had extramarital affairs and his being found liable for sexual abuse in a civil suit brought

by a New York advice columnist.

"She looks heroic, elegant and resolute, so powerful and majestic, loving it so much," Yip wrote on the Instagram-like platform Xiaohongshu after the inauguration last month.

After the first lady wore a wide-brimmed hat to the inauguration, similar products appeared on online shops and knitting influencers on Xiaohongshu posted videos showing people how to make their own within 48 hours.

By China's conventional standards, women are expected to be supportive of their husbands and to focus on raising children. But Melania Trump's streaks of independence also appeal to Chinese fans, as does her ascent from small-town Slovenian roots to the top of the world's social ladder.

"Chinese fans like her having both traditional and modern sides of a woman," said Jingsi Wu, an associate professor of media studies at Hofstra University in New York. Both sides are on display in a 4-year-old video that showed Melania Trump refusing to hold her husband's hand as they disembarked from Air Force One. The video has scored more than 5 million "likes" on Douyin, the Chinese version of Tik-Tok, and still generates views and comments.

Around half a million people liked a November post on Xiaohongshu that joked about how unwilling the usually reserved Melania Trump must be to return to the very public life of a first lady. A satire in The New Yorker magazine meant to be critical of her marriage to the president received 1 million views on Bilibili, a YouTube-like platform, and only seemed to boost her popularity.

#### Relationship

Almost 30,000 people liked a November post about a years-old interview Melania Trump and her husband did on The Ellen DeGeneres Show, saying their relationship was "super sweet."

Ge Yahan is among Melania's fans. The 24-year-old from Zibo on China's eastern coast calls Melania a mysterious lady who was brave enough to follow her dreams from a small town in Slovenia to the United States.

Her celebrity crush brings in a bit of pocket money too. She has been selling unauthorized copies of Melania's new self-titled memoir translated to Mandarin by AI on China's social media underground for eight yuan (\$1.10).

Donald Trump has been openly critical of China's economic practices as barriers to America's financial success. He launched a trade war during his first term by imposing hefty tariffs on Chinese imports, adding more after he returned to office last month. He mocked the deadly coronavirus as the "Kung Flu," a racist term for COVID-19. Earlier this year, Trump claimed, without evidence, that thousands of Chinese immigrants are flooding the US to build an "army" and attack America.

But Wu, the academic, said people in China often see US politics as akin to a soap opera.

Pouring over details of leader's lives is a novelty to many in China, where top leaders tend to appear only in tightly stagemanaged public settings. Chinese First Lady Peng Liyuan, who was a well-known singer before marrying Xi Jinping, has kept a higher profile than the wives of previous leaders, but the couple's lifestyle is still so little known that it's not clear where they live or whether they have a pet.

Rose LuQiu, an associate professor at School of Communication in Hong Kong Baptist University, said fans see Donald Trump as a winner, whose success the first lady shares.

"The more independent and accomplished she is - but still unwaveringly loyal to (Donald) Trump - the more it reflects his perceived success as a man," she said.

Huang Li, who works in public relations for the fashion industry and sells Melania Trump's memoir online on the side, says she doesn't care about politics, but says she likes Trump for his hard work and the courage he showed by yelling "fight, fight, fight" after being shot during an assassination attempt in July.



US First Lady Melania Trump walks along the Mutianyu Great Wall section in Beijing on Nov. 10, 2017.



This image released by Sony Pictures shows the character Paddington, voiced by Ben Whishaw, in a scene from 'Paddington in Peru.' (AP)

## 'Paddington in Peru' is buoyant and bright

#### By Jake Coyle

In the 11 years of what we can fairly call "the Paddington era," the bear, himself, hasn't changed so much as a toggle on his blue duffle coat. Paddington's great appeal, in an otherwise often fearfully changeable world, is that he stays exactly the same. He's just as optimistic, prone to pratfalls and marmalade-mad as ever.

And that's made Paddington not just a dearly beloved bigscreen icon but something like the mascot to modern Britain - another guileless Pooh deserving of his own "The Tao of" bestseller.

But if "Paddington 2" ascended to the ranks of all-time great sequels like "Toy Story 2" and "The Godfather Part II" (and it did), the new third installment, "Paddington in Peru," has the challenge of keeping up the good cheer for ever-darker times.

As if to accentuate this point, the "Paddington in Peru" screening that I attended at an AMC featured almost exclusively R-rated trailers – not just trailers for R-rated movies, but R-rated trailers – sending mothers and children fleeing images of horror and blood before they returned, relieved, for the cuddlier and more heartening feature attraction. Paddington, more than ever, is a refuge.

What has changed in "Paddington in Peru," which is currently showing in theaters, is the director. The principle font of whimsy from the first two movies, Paul King, has moved on. In his directorial debut, Dougal Wilson steps in and soldiers on, but he can't quite summon the same comic spirit. Still, "Paddington in Peru," bright and buoyant, will do. If some of King's Wes Anderson-inspired pop-up book designs and skill with fine character actors is missing, the bedrock earnestness and unflaggingly good manners of its ursine protagonist remain charmingly unaltered. "Paddington in Peru," which the opening credits de-

scribe as a Marmalade Pictures release, takes the same basic structure as "2." Life has again moved along for the Brown family in Windsor Gardens, with montages to check in on everyone's developments. The kids, who have always been curiously uninvolved in these films, are growing up. Judy (Madeleine Harris) is applying to colleges. Jonathan (Samuel Joslin) is a bedroom-bound gamer. Mary Brown has changed entirely, with Emily Mortimer replacing Sally Hawkins as the mother. (Mortimer is a perfectly fine replacement but the switch inevitably has threequel-overkill vibes.)

Henry Brown (Hugh Bonneville) has a new American boss who touts embracing risk, rather than mitigating it. So when

Paddington (voiced by Ben Whishaw) gets a call from the Reverend Mother (Olivia Colman) at a retired bears home in Peru telling him Aunt Lucy (voiced by Imelda Staunton) isn't herself and badly misses him, Mr. Brown jumps at the chance to fly Paddington and the whole family to Peru.

The Browns could use some bonding, too. A through line in "Paddington in Peru" is the difference between the ties of family and of tribe, as Paddington, finding Aunt Lucy missing, goes on a jungle adventure looking for her in his childhood stomping grounds.

You can feel the formulas of the first two movies a little more obviously this time. Following in the footsteps of "Paddington 2" standouts Hugh Grant and Brendan Gleeson (both of whom deserve honorary Oscars - no, Nobel Prizes for their previous efforts), those supporting roles this time go to Colman, as an obviously distrustful singing nun, and Antonio Banderas, as the river guide Hunter Cabot.

Hunter and his teenage daughter Gina (Carla Tous) ferry the Browns and Paddington into the Peruvian forest in a quest for Aunt Lucy that soon combines with his family's generations-long hunt for the mythical city of El Dorado. Just as Grant donned many disguises in the last film, Banderas plays his Spanish ancestors, figments of his increasingly unhinged imagination. (AP)

Freedom of speech on trial

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## **Outrage over Indian YouTuber** triggers calls for 'regulation'

NEW DELHI, Feb 20, (AP): A famous You-Tuber in India is facing public outrage and a police investigation after he made an allegedly obscene remark on a YouTube show, raising questions about freedom of speech in a country where digital creators in the past have come under fire for their content.

The controversy began last week when social media influencer and YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia made remarks to a participant on a comedy show about his parents' personal relationship. The joke was quickly condemned by social media users, public figures and political leaders.

Multiple police complaints were filed against Allahabadia and Samay Raina, who hosts the show "India's Got Latent." Both of them, along with some other participants on the show, were summoned by police for questioning and the issue was also raised in

Allahbadia, who has interviewed senior Indian ministers and Bollywood celebrities on his YouTube channel, has since apologized for the comments. Raina, meanwhile, has removed all videos of the show from his YouTube channel and said he was "fully cooperating" with the authorities.

India's Supreme Court on Tuesday shielded Allahbadia from arrest but said his conduct showed "lack of responsibility" and was "condemnable.

"There is something that is dirty in his mind that has been vomited by way of this program," the judge hearing the case said.

The court also ordered Allahbadia to surrender his passport at a police station and barred him from leaving the country.

The case, however, prompted a parliamentary panel to write to the country's Information Technology Ministry seeking steps to amend existing laws to clamp down on such content.

One lawmaker also asked Parliament to enact a law to regulate social media platforms, raising fears that the controversy will be used by the federal government to regulate online content.

Indian content creators on social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram and X are worried after the government last year proposed draft legislation that aims to overhaul and regulate broadcasting services in the country. The legislation, if enacted into law, would apply to all content creators in-

cluding YouTubers. Many content creators, journalists and digital experts say it could lead to censorship, stifle free speech and significantly expand the government's powers to regulate

digital media content.
"I think we are facing a threat that this particular



point for obscenity laws," said Nikhil Pahwa, a digital policy analyst and founder of the tech website MediaNama. Allahbadia's In

incident

might be a trigger

case, observers say the controversy was blown out of proportion and could lead to a chilling effect on India's comedy scene.

"The morality of the audience and the current political atmosphere is a very strong determining factor that decides whether our jokes are acceptable or not. And once a perception has been made about your content, no one can control its outcome. It is troubling," said Anurag Minus Verma, a cultural critic based in New Delhi.

This is not the first time Indian comedians have come under fire for their jokes and faced police crackdowns or their shows being cancelled.

Stand-up comedy has become hugely popular in recent years in India, but a swelling tide of nationalism under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rule has also put comedians under scrutiny for making fun of politicians or making references to religion or national icons.

In 2021, comedian Vir Das faced police complaints for his "I Come from Two Indias" show, which was critical of India over its fight against COVID-19, crimes against women and crackdowns on comedians. During his show, Das described India as a country where people "worship women during the day but gang rape them

#### Celebrities

Burden of fame

#### Kim's death highlights pressure on 'K-stars'

SEOUL, South Korea, Feb 20, (AP): In the about 1,000 days between her drunken-driving crash in May 2022 and her death, South Korean mainstream news organizations published at least around 2,000 stories on film actor Kim Sae-rom.

They illustrate how the local media often cover a celebrity's fall from grace. Previously one of the brightest young stars in South Korean cinema, Kim was condemned and ridiculed for driving drunk; for talking about her financial struggles after losing roles; for taking a job at a coffee shop; for attempting a comeback in theater; for going out with friends instead of "showing remorse"; and for being seen smiling on set while shooting an indie movie.

After the 24-year-old actor was found dead at her home Sunday, the headlines predictably swung to calling for changes to the way celebrities are treated in the public arena.

Kim's death, which police consider a suicide, adds to a growing list of high-profile celebrity deaths in the country, which some experts attribute to the enormous pressure celebrities face under the gaze of a relentlessly unforgiving media that seizes on every misstep.

Here's a look at the intense pressure faced by South Korean celebrities who fall from grace.

South Korea is notoriously harsh on its celebrities, particularly women.

Kim rose to stardom as a child actor with the 2010 hit crime thriller "The Man from Nowhere" and garnered acclaim and popularity for her acting in movies and TV dramas for years.

But that changed after May 18, 2022, when Kim crashed a vehicle into a tree and an electrical transformer while driving drunk in southern Seoul. She posted a handwritten apology on Instagram and reportedly compensated around 60 shops that lost power temporarily because of the crash, but that did little to defuse negative coverage and she struggled to find acting work.

#### **Fears**

When a Seoul court issued a 200 million won (\$139,000) fine over the crash in April 2023, Kim expressed her fears about the media to reporters, saying many articles about her private life were untrue. "I'm too scared to say anything about them,"

In the wake of Kim's drunken-driving crash, celebrity gossip channels on YouTube began posting negative videos about her private life, suggesting without providing evidence that she was exaggerating her financial straits by working at coffee shops, and arguing that social media posts showing her socializing with friends meant she wasn't showing enough remorse.

Other entertainers, especially female, have struggled to find work after run-ins with the law, including drunken driving or substance abuse, and experts say many of them are reluctant to seek treatment for mental health problems like depression, fearing further negative coverage.

Kwon Young-chan, a comedian-turned-scholar who leads a group helping celebrities with mental health issues, said celebrities often feel helpless when the coverage turns negative after spending years carefully cultivating their public image. Kwon, who stayed with Kim's relatives during a traditional three-day funeral process, said her family is considering legal action against a YouTube creator with hundreds of thousands of subscribers for what they describe as groundless attacks on Kim's private life.

Peter Jongho Na, a professor of psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine, lamented on Facebook that South Korean society had become a giant version of "Squid Game," the brutal Netflix survival drama, "abandoning people who make mistakes or

fall behind, acting as though nothing happened."

The National Police Agency said officers found no signs of foul play at Kim's home and that she left no note.

But a spate of high-profile deaths has sparked discussions about how news organizations cover the private lives of celebrities and whether floods of critical online comments are harming their mental health. Similar conversations happened after the 2008 death of mega movie star Choi Jin-sil; the death of her former baseball star husband, Cho Sung-min, in 2013; the deaths of K-Pop singers Sulli and Goo Hara in 2019; and the death of "Parasite" actor Lee Sun-kyun in 2023.



South Korean actor Kim Sae-ron arrives at the Seoul Central District Court in Seoul, South Ko-rea, Wednesday, April 5, 2023. (AP)

#### Al upgrades and sleek design

## Apple unveils souped-up, expensive version of its cheapest iPhone

NEW YORK, Feb 20, (AP): Apple has released a sleeker and more expensive version of its lowest priced iPhone in an attempt to widen the audience for a bundle of artificial intelligence technology that the company has been hoping will revive demand for its most profitable product lineup.

The iPhone 16e unveiled Wednesday is the fourth-generation of a model that's sold at a dramatically lower price than the iPhone's standard and premium models. The previous bargain-bin models were called the iPhone SE, with the last version coming out in 2022.

Like the higher-priced iPhone 16 lineup unveiled last September, the iPhone 16e includes the souped-up



Apple's iPhone 16e. (AP)

computer chip needed to process an array of AI features that automatically summarize text, audio and create on-the-fly emojis while smartening up the device's virtual assistant, Siri. It will also have a more powerful battery and camera.

All those upgrades will translate into a higher starting price for an iPhone 16e at \$600, a 40% increase from \$430 for the last iPhone SE. But iPhone 16e will be more affordable than the cheapest standard iPhone 16 at \$800. The new phone will be available in stores Feb. 28, but can be pre-ordered beginning Friday.

"We're so excited for iPhone 16e to complete the lineup as a powerful, more affordable option to bring the iPhone experience to even more people," said Kaiann Drance, an Apple vice president in charge of promoting a device lineup that accounts for more than half of the company's

But Apple is also trying to balance its desire to offer a more affordable iPhone that will lure more people into its sphere of product against its self interest in maximizing its profits from selling higher price products, according to Forrester Research analyst Dipanjan Chatterjee.

"The problem with a lower-end product in a luxury portfolio is that you want it to be good but not so good as to cannibalize the crown jewels," Chatterjee said.

Although Apple has been hyping its foray into AI since last June, the complete set of features still haven't been released in the US and the technology still isn't even available in some parts of the world.

The delays in making the iPhone's AI - dubbed "Apple Intelligence" more widely available through free software updates dinged the Cupertino, California, company during the past holiday when sales of the device dipped slightly from their 2023 lev-

Apple has primarily been losing the ground in China, where it hasn't yet specified when the iPhone's AI technology will be available. But the company recently struck an AI partnership with Alibaba in China that could pave the way for the technology coming to iPhones in that country this spring.

Besides being able to handle AI for the first time, the iPhone 16e has a different look from previous SE models. It boasts a 6.1-inch display screen, slightly larger than the 4.7-inch display on SE model and no longer has a home screen button like the SE had. The new iPhone 16e will rely include a facial recognition option for unlocking the device, just like the higher priced models do.

Apple's shares edged higher Wednesday to close at \$244.87, below the stock's peak of roughly \$260 reached in late December.

#### 'Prioritize mental health'

## linked to eating disorder

CANBERRA, Feb. 20, (Xinhua): A new Australian research published on Thursday showed health and fitness apps can lead to disordered eating. body image concerns and excessive exercise, highlighting the responsibility that app developers have when designing these apps to prioritize mental health alongside fitness goals.

"Diet and fitness apps are marketed as tools to improve health, however, they may also have unintended negative consequences, such as creating pressure to meet goals, concerns about body image as well as provoking feelings of guilt if goals aren't achieved,' said Isabella Anderberg of the Flinders University's College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, who is lead author of the research.

The use of diet and fitness apps which is common among young adults, can be effective in increasing physical activity, tracking meals, calories, and exercise, Anderberg said.

Those who use health and fitness apps regularly are more likely to have problematic habits related to food and exercise, according to research published in the Journal of Body Image.

After reviewing 38 studies to examine the links between the use of diet and fitness apps and the risk of users becoming obsessive about weight loss, body image, calorie counting, and excessive exercise, the study found that young adults who use diet and fitness apps have greater disordered eating symptoms, such as harmful or restrictive diets, and have negative thoughts about body image when compared to those that do not

"While some users reported positive experiences such as increased awareness and motivation, the broader implications for mental health need careful consideration, especially among vulnerable populations like adolescents," Anderberg said.

Prof. Ivanka Prichard of the Flinders University said as more people turn to apps for guidance in their wellness journeys, they should ensure that they are prioritizing mental health along-side fitness goals.

Vaccine concerns linger

## **US** state pushes bill allowing patients to supply own blood

SALT LAKE CITY, Feb 20, (AP): Utah may soon loosen its B.Y.O.B. rules, but not in the way some might hope. The acronym has taken on a new meaning in the state Legislature: "Bring Your Own Blood."

Health care facilities in Utah would be required to let patients use their own blood for procedures or choose their own donor under a bill that passed the state House with unanimous support Wednesday, despite concerns from the American Red Cross.

Directed donations, which typically involve a patient's friend or family member giving blood for their procedure, are allowed under federal law. But the requests undergo a rigorous screening process that the bill's sponsor, an outspoken opponent of vaccines, said does not give patients enough personal choice in their medical decisions.

Hospitals and blood collectors like the American Red Cross currently have broad discretion to decide whether it's safe and feasible for a patient to use their own blood or that of a chosen donor. Many facilities saw a rise in requests during the COVID-19 pandemic due to concerns about vaccine transmission that medical professionals say

are unfounded.

The Republican proposal, which now heads to the Senate, makes it so Utah health providers can no longer block someone from supplying their own blood, except in emergencies. Hospitals would not be liable for any injuries or deaths that may result from using the blood.

Similar legislation is being considered in Texas and was floated in past legislative sessions in Iowa and Kentucky, but did not pass.

"This bill was brought to me by patients who have requested to use directed blood donation, including their own blood, at Utah hospitals and have been denied," said freshman Rep. Kristen Chevrier, the bill's sponsor. "Their situations are serious and delicate."

The Republican from Highland argued patients should be able to receive blood from people they trust, rather than go through blood banks that do not disclose to patients their donor's medical history.

Before her election to the Legislature, Chevrier led multiple anti-vaccine organizations that warned against taking COVID-19 shots and fought against vaccination requirements imposed by schools and employers.

## Study warns fitness apps Forget no pain, no gain: This year's fitness trend is all about 'recovery'

Expert warns against overtraining

NEW YORK, Feb 20, (AP): If you ever turned on the TV in the 2000s after midnight, you might have seen an informercial for P90X.

The exercise program promised shredded abs and bulging biceps for anyone who pushed themselves to their limits for 90 days of 90-minute workouts. So it may come as a surprise that its creator, Tony Horton, now preaches the benefits of rest and warns against overtraining.

"I didn't know then what I know now," said Horton, who had spent the '90s training celebrities. "Back then it was all about warm-ups and cooldowns, and telling them to eat better and get off the hooch."

His evolution reflects a broader shift in the exercise industry away from a 'no pain, no gain" mentality that once dominated but often led to injury. Instead, the current buzzword in fitness is "recovery."

Horton - who at 66 still exudes a boyish exuberance - noted that P90X did include recovery days with stretching and low-impact movement such as yoga. But these days, he prioritizes mindfulness as much as exercise, and the time between workouts is filled with plenty of good sleep, plunges in frigid water baths, using foam rollers on tight muscles, relaxing in a sauna, and other activities in the name of re-

"If you don't get the recovery and the rest part right, then you're never going to be able to be consistent with the fitness end of things," Horton said.

Before Horton, Jane Fonda had pushed home exercisers to "feel the burn," while bodybuilders lifted weights to the point of muscle failure. Now, the American College of Sports Medicine and the National Academy of Sports Medicine, two of the largest



Jacob Bullard lifts a weight as part of his physical therapy at WashU, Monday, Dec. 16, 2024, in St. Louis. (AP)

organizations certifying personal trainers, emphasize recovery methods.

NASM's "Fitness and Wellness" certification includes training in "holistic health and wellness including physical, mental, social and emotional

The industry has learned from research that shows the benefit of proper rest, said Stan Kravchenko, founder of the OneFit personal training platform. During deep sleep, the body repairs muscle tissue, and studies show that well-rested people perform better and

are less likely to get injured. But rest is only part of recovery. Kravchenko said personal trainers used to focus only on specific exercises a client could do during their workout. Now, they're more like life coaches who also give exercise ad-

"It's more about your lifestyle, how you eat, how you sleep," he said. "Are you stressed? What do you do for living? Are you working from a desk? So it's taking a little bit more like a broad

The "no pain, no gain" motto is great for athletes who can handle intense workouts and are looking to get stronger, but not everyone needs to push themselves that hard, Horton said. It depends on the goal.

Michael Zourdos, chair of exercise science and health promotion at Florida Atlantic University, said lifting weights "until failure" may build bigger muscles, but isn't needed to increase strength. "There is a difference between training for health and training for elite performance benefits," he

To realize the health benefits of a workout, it's still necessary to push yourself, Horton said: "In the muscles, the lungs, your heart, there's gotta be a certain amount of strain.'

#### **Tests show 'slight improvement'**

## Pope Francis recovering from pneumonia

ROME, Feb 20, (AP): Pope Francis is continuing his recovery from pneumonia, eating breakfast out of bed on Thursday morning after a sixth peaceful night at the hospital, the Vatican said.

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni issued a new update after confirming late Wednesday that new blood tests showed a "slight improvement" in some inflammation indices for the 88-year-old pontiff, who had an acute case of pneumonia in 2023 and is prone

to respiratory infections in winter. Francis was visited Wednesday by Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, his first known VIP visitor. She reported after their 20-minute visit that Francis was in good spirits and had "joked

around as always.3 Francis was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital Feb. 14 after a bout of bronchitis worsened. Doctors on Tuesday diagnosed pneumonia in both lungs, on top of a polymicrobial infection in his respiratory tract, meaning a combination of bacteria, viral and other organisms. He is taking a combination of antibiotics and cortisone for

Paediatric visual assessment

Diabetic Retinopathy Screening

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Foreign Body removal

what doctors also diagnosed as asthmatic bronchitis.

Doctors say pneumonia in such a fragile, elderly patient makes him particularly prone to complications given the difficulty in being able to effectively expel fluid from his lungs. While his heart is strong, Francis isn't a particularly healthy 88-year-old. He isn't physically active, uses a wheelchair because of bad knees, had part of one lung removed as a young man, and has admitted to being a not-terriblycooperative patient in the past.

#### **New varieties**

#### Moon seeds to grow on Earth

URUMQI, Feb. 20, (Xinhua): Herders in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region may have the chance to feed their cows and sheep with out-of-this-world grass, as a group of new varieties will be developed from seeds that survived a trip to the moon.

Four packages of grass seed samples, weighing 200 grams and originating from northwest China, were carried aboard the Chang'e-6 lunar probe, which was launched to the previously unexplored far side of the moon in May last year and returned to Earth in late June.

The trial planting of these seeds on Earth will commence in early March this year, Xinjiang's Academy of Animal Science told Xinhua Thursday.

Scientists say that the seeds, exposed to the conditions of deep space, will induce genetic mutations that may create superior varieties on Earth.

The moon-bred seeds, which are commonly found in Xinjiang, include species such as camel thorn and alfalfa. These seeds exhibit remarkable tolerance to saline-alkaline conditions, cold temperatures, and drought, said Zheng Wenxin, vice president of Xinjiang Agricultural University and the lead researcher of the program.

Some species have high nutritional value and strong survival ability in harsh environments, playing a key role in preventing grassland degradation and combating salinization and desertification in arid agricultural areas.

Space breeding refers to exposing seeds and strains to cosmic radiation and microgravity during a spaceflight mission to mutate their

When the space-bred samples are brought back to Earth, scientists will examine and evaluate their mutations. Compared with naturally bred types, some are positive, conferring properties such as greater yields, shorter growth periods, and better resistance to diseases.

In June 2022, four species of grass seeds from Xinjiang were sent aboard the Shenzhou-14 manned spaceship for a trip to China's orbiting Tiangong space station.

The returned seeds showed significant changes, with yields apparently one-third higher than those of ordinary seeds, and they also exhibited greater resilience, Zheng noted.

Such results exceeded scientists' expectations. Zheng and his team saw the potential in spacebred grass seeds and looked forward to exploring this line of research further.



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## Hornets stun Lakers after Luka struggles

LeBron misses 2 late shots to tie it

LOS ANGELES, Feb 20, (AP): Miles Bridges scored 29 points, LaMelo Ball added 27 and the Charlotte Hornets stunned LeBron James and Luka Doncic with a 100-97 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers on Wednesday night.

James scored 16 of his 26 points in the fourth quarter, but missed two 3-point attempts right before the buzzer. Doncic had 14 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists in his third game for the Lakers, who bookended the All-Star break with losses to Utah and Charlotte, two of the NBA's worst teams.

After Nick Smith Jr. hit a go-ahead 3-pointer with 48 seconds left, Rui Hachimura missed two free throws. Ball drove for a finger-roll layup with 14.2 seconds left. James hit a 3-pointer with 6.8 seconds left, but Ball hit two free throws and James missed twice to seal the Hornets' second win in 11 games.

Mark Williams had 10 points and nine rebounds in his first game since the Lakers acquired the center in a trade and then rescinded the deal.

Hornets trailed 65-53 with four minutes left in the third quarter before making a 22-1 run. Los Angeles missed 10 straight shots in a 6:39 span.

Lakers had their seven-game home winning streak ended. Austin Reaves was ejected by referee Rodney Mott late in the third quarter after a brief exchange of words, and Charlotte went on a massive run immediately afterward.

Doncic put the Lakers ahead with a putback basket with 1:03 to play, but Smith coolly answered with an open 3-pointer – his fourth of the night after an ice-cold start.

Doncic was 5 of 18 from the field and 1 for 9 on 3-pointers in a game rescheduled from January due to the devastating wildfires in Southern California .

"Obviously, it's going to take a little time," Doncic said. "Today, a lot of rustiness from my part. Started the game with like four or five turnovers. That can't



Charlotte Hornets guard LaMelo Ball (1) shoots the ball while under pressure from Los Angeles Lakers center Jaxson Hayes during the first half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday, Feb. 19, 2025, in Los Angeles. (AP)

happen. Just got to play basketball the right way."

The evening was clearly frustrating to Doncic, who was playing only his third NBA game following a 6 1/2-week absence due to a calf strain incurred on Christmas. On a couple of occasions when this normally electrifying scorer managed to make a shot against the Hornets, Doncic reacted with a visible mix of relief and frustration.

Doncic is 16 for 45 from the field in his three games with the Lakers, but just 5 for 24 on 3-point attempts including 2 for 16 in his two home games, where fans have buzzed with anticipation of each shot and then groaned at each clank.

Back-to-back losses to cellar-dwelling Utah and Charlotte are grim results for a team that had won 10 of 11, but the 40-year-old James also isn't concerned about Doncic's start in purple and gold.

"It's his third game since Christmas, and it's his third game with us," James said. "He still doesn't know all the plays. He doesn't know all the defensive coverages, all the signals and things that we've built up since September. Obviously, we're trying to fast-track it on the fly. He's coming back from his injury. He's getting back into form, so we're working through it together."

Not everything was grim about Doncic's performance against Charlotte, his first in which he didn't have a minutes restriction since his injury return. He led Los Angeles in rebounds, and his plus-13 rating was the Lakers' best number despite his turnovers

"He's got to be comfortable being himself, because he's one of the best players in the world," said Austin Reaves, whose third-quarter ejection was swiftly followed by the Hornets' 22-1 run. "We need him to be him, and it's just going to take a couple of games, a couple of weeks to figure out what that best looks like. But we can figure it out fairly quickly."

#### **Oklahoma State dominates UCF**

## Auburn overcomes rough offensive performance to beat Arkansas, Alabama suffers second straight loss

AUBURN, Ala., Feb 20, (AP): Johni Broome had 16 points and 13 rebounds and No. 1 Auburn overcame a rough offensive performance to beat Arkansas 67-60 on Wednesday night.

After winning at Alabama on Saturday in a game between the top teams in the poll, Auburn (24-2, 12-1 Southeastern Conference) avoided its second straight home loss.

Chad Baker-Mazara added 15 points for the Tigers, and Chaney Johnson had 14.

Adou Thiero led Arkansas (15-11, 4-9) with 16. Johnell Davis had 14. The teams combined to hit seven of 43 3-point attempts.

Mark Mitchell scored a career-high 31 points, Caleb Grill had 25 points and matched his career high with 10 rebounds and No. 15 Missouri handed No. 4 Alabama its second straight loss, 110-98.

Missouri coach Dennis Gates headed off a court-storming celebration by taking the public address microphone and imploring the crowd to stay back. "Please, do not rush the court! Please, do not rush the court!" Gates said to the fans.

Anthony Robinson II added 14 points, and Tamar Bates had 13 to help Missouri (20-6, 9-4 Southeastern Conference) win its third straight and improve to 5-3 against ranked teams.

Bryce Thompson scored 14 of his career-high 25 points in the second half and Oklahoma State beat UCF 104-95 despite 34 points from Keyshawn Hall.

Thompson made 10 of 15 shots in leading the Cowboys (13-13, 5-10 Big 12). Abou Ousmane added 17 points



Alabama's Mark Seas has the ball knocked away by Missouri's Tony Parkins and Tamar Bates during NCAA basketball game. (AP)

despite sitting out much of the second half before fouling out. Arturo Dean scored 16 points, Khalil Brantley 15 and Marchelus Avery 10.

Malique Ewin made 10 of 10 from the field and scored a career-high 24 points, 15 in the second half, Jamir Watkins finished with 16 points and eight rebounds and Florida State beat

Chandler Jackson scored 11 points for Florida State (16-10, 7-8 ACC). Watkins, the team's leading scorer at 18.0 per game, was 2-of-12 shooting but made 11 of 14 from the free-throw line - 7 of 10 in the final three minutes.

Lynn Kidd finished with 14 points and 11 rebounds for Miami (6-20, 2-13) and Matthew Cleveland also scored 14. Kidd, who scored 16 with 15 rebounds in a loss at Pittsburgh on Saturday, has back-to-back doubledoubles and a team-high six this sea-

## Bayern prepares for tough test

DUESSELDORF, Germany, Feb 20, (AP): Harry Kane's fitness is dominating the buildup to Bayern Munich's tricky game against third-placed Eintracht Frankfurt in the Bundesliga.

The England captain went off at halftime with a calf problem on Tuesday in the second leg of Bayern's 3-2 aggregate win over Celtic in the Champions League. The club says he'll "take a break from training" because of

It's been a bruising few days for Kane, who needed treatment on an injury to his face following a collision against Bayer Leverkusen last week. Bayern's game against Frankfurt on Sunday will be a test of fitness after Bayern came through two gruelling games against Celtic and a 0-0 draw with Leverkusen. Goalkeeper Manuel Neuer called the run "exhausting."

Frankfurt's only game in that time was a 3-1 stroll against Holstein Kiel. Borussia Dortmund is 11th as it hosts Union Berlin on Saturday and new Dortmund coach Niko Kovac is still searching for a first Bundesliga win after two losses.

Leverkusen needs goals against Kiel on Saturday after Xabi Alonso's

team did a good job shutting down Bayern last week but couldn't score. If Kane can't play, Jamal Musiala will likely be expected to take on a bigger role attacking through the center, possibly in combination with Michael Olise, Serge Gnabry or the experienced Thomas Müller.

Dortmund striker Serhou Guirassy is the Champions League top scorer with 10 but needs to start scoring more in the Bundesliga. Guirassy has nine goals from 19 German league games. Only two came since the start of December

Stuttgart is set to welcome back Jacob Bruun Larsen after the Danish winger missed two games with illness. He could play on Sunday against his former club Hoffenheim. Forward El Bilal Touré, who's been out with a broken foot since November, is back in light training.

United States midfielder James Sands suffered a broken leg and torn ankle ligament while playing for St. Pauli last week on loan from New York City.

German media have reported Leverkusen is considering making defender Nordi Mukiele's loan deal from Paris Saint-Germain permanent. Mukiele was impressive against Bayern last week.

"We've had a decent season in the Champions League so far. We want to win the game here at home on Saturday. We know that we have a lot to make up for in the Bundesliga." - Borussia Dortmund captain Emre Can to broadcaster DAZN after beating Sporting Lisbon in the Champions League playoffs on Wednesday.

Lyon fully rested after not playing in the Europa League this week

#### Bentaleb's remarkable return could inspire Lille's run for CL spot

PARIS, Feb 20, (AP): If Lille needs further motivation in its drive to qualify for the Champions League next season, then it need only look at Nabil Bentaleb's remarkable return.

The Lille midfielder scored four minutes after going on last Sunday in a 2-0 win at Rennes and was mobbed by his teammates.

It wasn't that he scored so soon after going on that made the goal so special, but rather because Bentaleb started training again only this month after suffering a cardiorespiratory arrest in mid-June.

The 30-year-old was put into an artificial coma and fitted with a pacemaker-defibrillator days later. Doctors doubted the Algeria international would ever play again let alone resume his career at the

#### Change Name

I, KUTBUDDIN, holder of Indian Passport Number: Z3201161
Permanent Address house Sarkar Castle, 3rd Floor, Flat No 303,
Chimbai Road, Sent Andrews Church Bandra West, VTC: Bandra PO: Bandra West Sub District: Andheri District: Mumbai Suburban, State: Mahatashtra, PIN Code: 400050
Do hereby Correct my Name. Given Name: KUTBÜDDIN Surname: BHADSORAWALA



Lille's Nabil Bentaleb in action during the French League One soccer match between Lille and Marseille at the Pierre Mauroy stadium in Villeneuve d'Ascq, northern France. (AP)

top level.
"It's a story worthy of a

movie. It brings Nabil even more joy and emotion because he is a boy who is very well liked in the group," coach Bruno Genesio said. "It's pretty rare to experience this. It's a moment that will remain engraved in the history of the club."

Bafodé Diakité said the atmosphere in the dressing room after last Sunday's win was something special.

"I had never experienced anything like that," he said. "It goes beyond football."

Now Bentaleb and his teammates must focus on catching Monaco and Nice in the Ligue 1 race for a top-four Champions League spot.

Fifth-placed Lille is only two points behind Monaco and Nice in third, so things could change on Saturday when Lille hosts Monaco.

Third place is a realistic ambition for all three sides, given that unbeaten leader Paris Saint-Germain seems too far ahead and free-scoring Marseille is six points clear in second place.

When Nice takes on rock-bottom Montpellier on Sunday, former strike partners Gaëtan Laborde and Andy Delort are set to face each other amid contrasting circumstances.

trasting circumstances.

Laborde has nine league goals for Nice this season, while Montpellier signed Delort on loan from Alge-

rian side MC Alger to help in its desperate relegation battle.

Laborde and Delort enjoyed three full seasons together at Montpellier from 2018-21 and formed a strong partnership, with Laborde netting 33 league goals and Delort getting 38.

They began the next season together before both left. Their paths quickly met again when they played half of the 2022-23 season together at Nice - before Delort joined Nantes and angered Nice fans.

PSG has not lost anywhere since Nov. 26 at Bayern Munich in the Champions League.

But Lyon will threaten that. Lyon will be fully rested after not playing in the Europa League this week. It is also resurgent after eight goals in the past two games under new coach Paulo Fonseca. PSG played on Wednesday when it trounced Brest 7-0 in the Champions League.

Rayan Cherki has found top form for Lyon in recent weeks and Fonseca has unearthed a surprising finisher.

Veteran midfielder Corentin Tolisso has scored in all three games since Fonseca took over and is enjoying his best scoring season since the 2017-18 campaign with Bayern.

#### **Both teams struggle to find consistency**

## Messi goal makes up for bitter cold, Inter Miami win in Champions Cup

KANSAS CITY, Kan., Feb 20, (AP): Lionel Messi did what Lionel Messi

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner scored from the right side of the box in the 56th minute to lift Inter Miami past Sporting Kansas City 1-0 on a bitterly cold in the first leg of the CONCACAF Champions Cup's first round.

"There's one guy that can turn the game over, and he did," Sporting KC manager Peter Vermes said. Miami head coach Javier Mascher-

Miami head coach Javier Mascherano simply described Messi's effort as "fantastic."

Both teams struggled to find consistency on the hard, slick field for much of the night in front of 15,178 bundled-up fans at Children's Mercy Park, where the game-time temperature was 3 degrees F (minus 16 C) with a wind speed of 9 mph, resulting in a wind chill of minus 11 F (minus 24 C).

"(I'm) very proud because I think it's impossible to play in these conditions," Mascherano said. "Is not human, you know. So I'm very proud, because they gave me 100%."

On his goal, Messi collected a pass

On his goal, Messi collected a pass from Sergio Busquets, let it fall to his feet, eluded the nearest defender and then fired it past Sporting KC keeper John Pulskamp.

"Maybe for the people that know him it's normal because he did goals like this 1,000 times," Mascherano said. "But we are very lucky to have him here."

Vermes was proud of Sporting KC's effort to slow the Miami attack. "Outside of that (goal), I thought we were really good," he said. "We



Sporting Kansas City midfielder Memo Rodríguez, left, and Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi compete for the ball during the first half of a CONCACAF Champions Cup soccer match in Kansas City, Kan. (AP)

had some really good opportunities. I can't say enough about our first performance, especially with such a young group of guys being on the field, really good."

Vermes went as far as saying that Messi does things few other players ever have been able to do.

"It's not just us, it's everybody," he said. "I mean, it's the whole world. Nobody ever plays well against him. He can change the game himself. And there's really not many players that you can say that about in the world's game and over generations, there's just not a lot of them. Two of them happen to come from Argentina, him and (Diego) Maradona.

Sporting KC stayed on the front foot the rest of the game in an attempt to tie the match, but Oscar Ustari stopped both of the team's second-half shots on goal. The best chance came when Dániel Sallói got open behind the Miami defense, but his shot attempt was right at Ustari.

Erik Thommy's attempt to tie it in the 78th minute hit off the left post, but it wouldn't have counted as Sallói was ruled offside.

Inter Miami nearly took an early lead, but Luis Suarez's shot from just inside the box went wide. Inter Miami had another opportunity in the 33rd minute, but Tadeo Allende's shot, coming off a lob from Messi, was wide.

Combined prize money of over 1 million euros shared equally between men's and women's competitions

## **Kuwait selected as host for historic first edition of FIP World Cup Pairs**

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Kuwait is set to take centre stage in the world of professional padel as it hosts the first-ever edition of the FIP World Cup Pairs powered by BNK Holding and in collaboration with Premier Padel – from November 3-9, 2025. The major new event for the 2025 season will award the winners the first-ever title of "FIP World Champion," 2,000 FIP ranking points and a combined prize money of over □1 million shared equally between men's and women's competitions.

The choice of Kuwait as the first host for this historic new tournament is driven by the resounding success of the Kuwait City Premier Padel P1 event held in November 2024 - establishing the country as a rising force in international padel – and the positive feedback received by all players on every aspect of the tournament organisation and the exceptional playing conditions.

This extraordinary debut edition sees the prestigious "The Arena Kuwait" in Zahra, in the Hawalli Governorate area, host the centre court, with additional playing facilities at the 'Rafa Nadal Academy'. In addition to last year's Kuwait City Premier Padel P1, the country also hosted a successful CUPRA FIP Tour tournament (Rise) in November 2023 and held the Asia-Africa qualifications for the 2024 FIP World Padel Championships in Kuwait City in September, further demonstrating the rapidly growing passion for padel in the country.

Eligibility for the FIP World Cup Pairs will be decided by players' position in the 2025 FIP Ranking following the Milan P1 tournament from 6 to 12



Officials of the FIP World Cup Pairs.

October 2025. It will feature a qualification round and a main draw of 48 male and 40 female pairs, formed by players of the same or different nationalities, who will compete in the main draws. The pairs that win the World Cup title in both categories will be awarded 2,000 FIP ranking points, while the finalists will earn 1200 points.

CARRARO "Kuwait is a special place", said FIP President Luigi Carraro, "It has already written important chapters of our sport. If looking back is essential to moving forward and shaping the future, then choosing this venue for the inaugural FIP World Cup Pairs perfectly aligns with Kuwait's passion and dedication for Padel. A huge thank you to BNK Holding Chairman Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Premier Padel, and the National Federation. I am confident that our teamwork and collaboration will ensure the delivery of an extraordinary event.'

AL-KHARAFI "This marks a new era for padel in Kuwait and the region, as we proudly host the FIP World Cup Pairs, reflecting our unwavering commitment to the future of sports in the Middle East. Let's make history together." added Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, CEO and Chairman of BNK Holding KSCC.

SUGDEN: "Last year's Premier Padel tournament was a spectacular event for players and fans that firmly placed Kuwait on the global stage. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from players - praising the world-class facilities and seamless organisation – played a pivotal role in securing its place as the venue for one of the sport's most significant events in 2025 and reiterates our commitment to providing exceptional opportunities for players." commented David Sugden, CEO, Premier Padel.

## India dominates Bangladesh to start Champs Trophy campaign



India's Shubman Gill hits a boundary during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match between India and Bangladesh at Dubai International Cricket Stadium in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. (AP)

#### Pakistan fined for slow over rate against New Zealand

**DUBAI**, United Arab Emirates, Feb 20, (AP): Shubman Gill's unbeaten century helped India finish off Bangladesh by six wickets to start their Champions Trophy campaign on Thursday.

Fast bowler Mohammed Shami took 5-53 as Bangladesh was dismissed for 228 runs. At one stage, the Tigers were 35-5 in the ninth over but Towhid Hridoy's maiden international hundred helped them escape embarrassment.

In reply, Gill steered India's chase with an eighth one-day international hundred and was unbeaten on 101 off 129 balls. India finished on 231-4 with

21 balls to spare. Gill hit nine fours and two sixes. He shared 69 off 59 balls with Rohit Sharma for the first wicket and 87 off 98 with Lokesh Rahul, who was 41 not

out and hit the winning runs, a hook for six. Bangladesh won the toss and opted to bat at Dubai International Cricket Stadium but was in

trouble almost immediately. Pakistan cricketers were docked 5% of their match fees for a slow over rate against New Zea-

land during the opening game of the Champions

Pakistan was one over short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration as New Zealand won by 60 runs in the Group A game on Wednesday, the ICC said on Thursday.

Pakistan captain Mohammad Rizwan pleaded guilty to the offense with no formal hearing required thereafter, the ICC added.

Captain Hashmatullah Shahidi has dismissed political calls to boycott Afghanistan's cricket games on the eve of their first Champions Trophy match.

Politicians in England and South Africa urged their cricket authorities to forfeit the Champions Trophy group games against Afghanistan because of the Taliban's ban on women's sport and erosion of women's rights.

South Africa Sports Minister Gayton McKenzie said that if the ultimate decision was his then the South Africa-Afghanistan match "certainly would not happen." But it's scheduled to go ahead on Friday in Karachi, as is the Afghanistan-England game next Wednesday in Lahore.

"As a sportsman, our job is to play cricket and we don't care what's going on outside of the cricket," Shahidi said on Thursday.

"We only control things inside the ground, so that's our job and other things cannot put us under

Afghanistan's last group game is against Australia on Feb. 28 in Lahore, and its record in recent major tournaments gives it hope of an upset or two.

It beat England and Pakistan at the 50-over World Cup in India in 2023, and beat Australia and New Zealand to reach the 20-over World Cup semifinals in 2024. Afghanistan has also won its last four one-day international series, including

against South Africa last September.
"We are definitely 100% looking to win this event because we've played a lot of quality cricket for the last two years," Shahidi said. "It's a good chance for us because the boys are very experienced and these conditions also suits us ... hopefully we start with a win and we go with the same momentum throughout the tournament.'

Shahidi also hoped there will be sizeable support for his team at the newly upgraded National Bank Stadium in Karachi.

"A lot of Afghans live here and, last time in the Asia Cup, we saw some Afghan fans coming here. I know that a lot of Pashtuns also live here in Pakistan and hopefully the stadium will be full."

#### Kuwait's 16-year-old cricket sensation makes mark in India

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Angel Gabriella D'Costa is a true child prodigy in the world of cricket, making remarkable strides at a young age. At just 16, she has already etched her name in history as the first Kuwaiti-born player to represent Goa State in cricket, showcasing her immense talent and determination. From being selected as an opening bowler at the Goa State Cricket selection camp to debuting for the Kuwait Senior Women's Cricket Team in the ICC World Cup Asia Qualifiers, Angel's journey is a testament to her dedication and passion for the sport. Her rapid rise through the ranks of cricket, along with her impressive performances in both domestic and international competitions, positions her as one of the brightest young stars in Indian cricket.

Determined to represent India, Angel made the bold decision to relocate to India in 2022 at just 14, training rigorously for 4-5 hours daily under expert coaches, focusing on strength and functional fitness. Her unwavering commitment and versatility across multiple sports have set her apart as an exceptional athlete. At just 15, Angel debuted for the

Kuwait Senior Women's Cricket Team in the ICC World Cup Asia Qualifiers in Malaysia, proving her talent as a right-arm pace bowler and all-rounder on the international stage. Her sporting journey began even earlier, excelling in multiple disciplines. At age 5, she won a bronze medal in



16-year-old cricket sensation, Angel Gabriella D'Costa.

Taekwondo at the Goa State Championship, and by 8, she had already made her mark in basketball, playing as a forward in interschool tournaments. She later earned recognition as the Player of the Team in a throwball competition and secured second place in a 100-meter sprint with a remarkable 14-second finish in 2018.

Angel's story is one of perseverance, sacrifice, and immense talent. With her unwavering dedication, she continues to inspire young athletes, proving that with passion and hard work, no dream is too far out of reach. Kuwait stands behind her, cheering her on as she strives for even greater achievements in the world of sports.

#### **Japan reaches U20 Asian Cup quarters**

SHENZHEN, Feb 20, (Xinhua): Japan secured the last ticket in the AFC U20 Asian Cup quarterfinals after drawing 1-1 with South Korea in the third round of Group D here on Thursday.

Soma Kanda opened the scoring for Japan in the 28th minute, only for substitute Kim Tae-won to find the

South Korea topped the group with

seven points and will meet defending champions Uzbekistan in the quarterfinals, while Japan will face Iran.

In the other match, Thanawut Phochai scored in the 73rd and 81st minute as Thailand came from two-goal be-

#### Chelsea searches for consistency

## Liverpool and Manchester in spotlight in Premier League

LONDON, Feb 20, (Xinhua): The neighboring cities of Liverpool and Manchester will take center stage in the Premier League this weekend in what promises to be two fascinating games between Everton and Manchester United and Manchester City and Liverpool.

David Moyes' arrival at Everton has ended all talk of relegation after four wins and a draw from their last five games. That run has even lifted them above Manchester United, who sit in 15th place ahead of their last-ever visit to Goodison Park on Saturday

While Everton is flying and morale is sky-high after a successful test event at their new stadium in midweek, every passing week seems to bring a new setback for Manchester United coach Ruben Amorim.

Amorim has lost Amad Diallo and Lisandro Martinez for the rest of the season and has doubts over Kobbie Mainoo, Manuel Ugarte and Cristian Eriksen to add to his problems, and another defeat against the side coached by the man who replaced Sir Alex Ferguson at Old Trafford could be a fitting way to resolve the club's current on and off-field issues.

Manchester City also has issues ahead of their game at home to league leaders Liverpool on Sunday after they were dumped unceremoniously out of the Champions League by Real Madrid in midweek. City saw John Stones added to their injury list, which includes Rodri and Manuel

Akanji, while Jack Grealish and Erling Haaland have to be considered doubts after not playing on Wednesday. Liverpool was held to a thrilling 2-2 draw away to Aston Villa on Wednesday night and their lead at the top of the table could be down to just five points by

kick-off if Arsenal wins their London derby at home to West Ham on Saturday. Arsenal is hindered by injuries in attack, but Mikel Merino performed well as a 'false 9' last week away to Leicester City, and they start as clear favorites against a side that is still searching for an identity under Graham Potter after three defeats and a draw in their last four games.

Third-place Nottingham Forest travel to Newcastle and both sides need a reaction after last weekend's defeats against Fulham and Manchester City, with Newcastle especially looking to improve after a 4-0 thrashing.

The game should show an interesting contrast between in-form strikers Alexan-

der Isak for Newcastle and Forest's Chris Wood. Bournemouth could move into the top-four with a win at home to Wolverhampton Wanderers and much will depend on how an improving Wolves is able to deal with Bournemouth's pressing and if Wolves striker Matheus Cunha has a good day. Chelsea's search for consistency away to Aston Villa is hindered by a long

injury list, which includes striker Nicolas Jackson, Wesley Fofana and Marc Guiu. Tottenham travels to play Ipswich Town, where Liam Delap and Jayden Philogene will carry the hopes of the relegation-threatened home side, Fulham and Crystal Palace play a mid-table London derby.

Finally, Leicester City coach Ruud van Nistelrooy is under increasing pressure as his side entertains Brentford after nine defeats in their last 10 league games in

which they have scored just four goals and conceded 25.

#### **Best of the Rest**

#### **Ex-RFEF** chief guilty of assault:

Luis Rubiales, former president of the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF), was found guilty of assault on Jenni Hermoso and given a fine of 10,800 euros (11,283 U.S. dollars).

The Spanish High Court (Audiencia Nacional) ordered Rubiales to pay 20 euros a day to Hermoso for 18 months.

The former RFEF president was

also bound not to go within 200 meters of Hermoso or attempt to contact her for 12 months. (Xinhua) 



Milan goalkeeper Yann Sommer has a broken right thumb ahead of key games in Serie A and the Champions

Inter said the Swiss 'keeper's injury was revealed in tests on Thursday and "necessary therapy will be decided in the coming days." (AP)

#### Referees under spotlight

## Key weekend in La Liga for both title race, relegation

MADRID, Feb 20, (Xinhua): Matchday 25 in La Liga looks to be vital in the battle for the title and to avoid relegation as several sides close to the top take on rivals from close to the bottom.

After Celta Vigo and Osasuna get things underway on Friday night, relegation is on the agenda on Saturday lunchtime as second-bottom Alaves entertains Espanyol, who is currently 15th in the table.

Alaves coach Eduardo Coudet desperately needs a win after a run of poor results and although Espanyol is unbeaten at home for four months, it has

the worst away record in La Liga. Rayo Vallecano then faces Villarreal in a match between the sides sixth and fifth in the table. Rayo was unlucky not to get anything from Monday's visit to Barcelona which ended its nine-game unbeaten run, but again showed its attractive, high-energy football, while Villarreal was held to a 1-1 draw at home to Valencia and has lost striker Gerard Moreno for a month with a mus-

Valencia remains third from bottom after the draw in Villarreal but is improving under coach Carlo Corberan and has a fascinating home game against third-place Atletico Madrid.

Atletico missed the chance to go top when it was held by Celta a week ago and

is without the suspended Pablo Barrios 
the table on goal difference on Monday and the injured Koke, which should see Conor Gallagher start in central midfield.

Five defeats in six games have dropped Las Palmas right back into the relegation dogfight and it could find itself second from bottom when it kicks off at home to Barcelona if Alaves and Valencia's results go against it.

Barcelona went back to the top of

night and will have Fermin Lopez back after suspension.

Barca faces Atletico Madrid in the first leg of its Copa del Rey semifinal on Tuesday night and both coaches will bear this in mind with their starting elevens, with Ferran Torres maybe starting in the Barca attack.

Fourth-place Athletic Bilbao is at full



Barcelona's Gavi kicks the ball during a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Barcelona and Rayo Vallecano at the Lluis Companys Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

strength for the visit of bottom of the table Valladolid, who has former B-team coach Alvaro Rubio in the dugout after Diego Cocca's sacking last week. Valladolid will hope Rubio can instill

to be in freefall towards the second division, but it will be hard against a rival unbeaten in its last 15 league games. Real Madrid impressed at home to Manchester City on Wednesday night

some fighting spirit into a side that looks

and will be favorite to beat a Girona side that is nice to watch, but lacks steel in defense. Yangel Herrera is suspended for Girona for a game where the referee will be under the spotlight after Real

Madrid's continued complaints against

officials reached a crescendo after Jude

Bellingham's red card last week. Bellingham is suspended for two games, and Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti may make some more changes in the face of his side's packed fixture calendar.

Getafe defend its unbeaten record in 2025 at home to a Betis side that has plenty of attacking talent, including Antony, but who tend to blow very hot and cold.

Real Sociedad will be without the suspended duo Igor Zubeldia and Sheraldo Becker for their home match against Leganes, who could also be in the bottom three by kick-off.



Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe celebrates with Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham, right (unseen), after scoring his side's third goal during the Champions League playoff second leg soccer match between Real Madrid and Manchester City at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

# borts

Championship set to begin on Saturday

## **Kuwait's veterans ready for Gulf Cup opener against Oman**

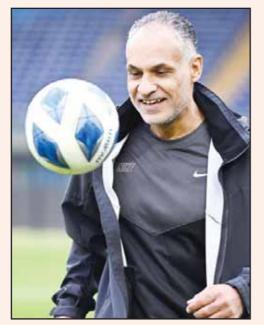
KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: The Gulf Cup for Veterans Football Championship is set to begin on Saturday, at Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium, running until next Wednesday. The tournament will feature four matches on the opening day.

The Kuwait will launch its campaign against Oman at 7:45 pm, while Qatar and the UAE will face off at 9:15 pm in Group One. Earlier in the day, Iraq will take on Yemen at 4:45 pm, followed by a Group Two clash between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain at 6:15 pm.

The tournament features eight teams, divided into two groups based on the Gulf 26 Cup draw, which Kuwait hosted from December 20 to January 4. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semi-finals.

Today, a press conference will be held for the coaches of the participating teams. The Group One coaches will speak at 3:00 pm, followed by the Group Two coaches at 3:45 pm.

Meanwhile, officials from the Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation have arrived in Kuwait and conducted inspections of Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Stadium, team accommodations, and other logistical arrangements to ensure the success of the event, which has drawn significant me-



Muhammad Binyan

dia and public interest.

Muhammad Binyan, Director of the Kuwait team for Veterans, affirmed that "The Blues" are fully prepared for the championship following a successful preparation phase. The team played three friendly matches, showing gradual improvement, culminating in an impressive performance in their final warm-up game.

Binyan expressed gratitude to the tournament organizers, highlighting the event's significance in bringing together former Gulf football stars during Kuwait's national holiday celebrations in

He emphasized that the Gulf Veterans Cup presents a great opportunity for fans to witness legendary players in action. With all four matches played on the same day – each lasting 40 minutes with two halves – spectators at Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Stadium can enjoy a full day of football featuring the region's former stars.

Binyan also noted that despite some injuries during training, the medical team provided excellent care to ensure the players' readiness. He concluded by wishing success to the Kuwait team and all participating nations in making the tournament



Kuwait veterans hold their final training session for the champion-

## Mbappé runs riot as Real eliminates City



Real Madrid's Raul Asencio, right, controls the ball as Manchester City's Omar Marmoush tries to stop him during the Champions League playoff second leg soccer match between Real Madrid and Manchester City at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

#### **Al-Rayyan stands in Kuwait Club's path** to the Gulf Handball Championship final

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

MUSCAT, Feb 20: Kuwait Club will compete in the semi-finals of the 41st Gulf Handball Championship for Cup Champions Clubs, facing Qatar's Al-Rayyan at 3:30 pm. The tournament, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, runs until February 24 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat.

Following this clash, the second semi-final match will take place at 5:30 pm, featuring Qatar's Âl-Arabi against the winner of the Group One decider between Saudi Arabia's Al-Noor and Oman's Al-Seeb, which was played yesterday.

Kuwait Club secured its spot in the semi-finals by finishing second in Group Two, behind Al-Arabi of Qatar. Despite a loss to Al-Arabi, "Al-Abyad" earned victories over the UAE's Dibba Al-Hisn and Oman's representative, ensuring its progression. Meanwhile, Al-Rayyan of Qatar topped Group One, with the second qualification spot contested between Al-Seeb and Al-Noor, with the latter having the edge.

Additionally, matches to determine the fifth to seventh place rankings will also take place tomorrow.



Kuwait Club player tackles an opponent during the Zain Premier Laegue match.

Sameh Al-Hajri, leader of the Kuwait Club delegation, expressed his hope that the team would deliver strong performances that reflect Kuwaiti sports' reputation. He emphasized the significance of this championship in uniting GCC nations through sports and providing players with valuable experience on the regional stage.

### Kuwait Club faces tough challenge against Al-Salmiya

**By Hassan Mosa** Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: League leader Kuwait Club will face a tough test in its championship pursuit as it takes on Al-Salmiya at 7:05 pm at Jaber Al-Mubarak Stadium in the 16th round of the Zain Premier League. Earlier in the day, Al-Arabi will meet Yarmouk at 4:50 pm at Abdullah Al-Khalifa Stadium.

Kuwait Club, sitting atop the standings with 40 points, aims for its 14th league victory as it pushes towards another league title. The team is well-equipped with a strong squad capable of maintaining its lead. However, "Al-Abyad" is aware that any dropped points could jeopardize its position, especially with Al-Arabi trailing just two points behind. Adding to the challenge, Al-Salmiya proved to be a formidable opponent in its first-leg encounter, where Kuwait Club narrowly won 4-3.

On the other hand, fourth-placed Al-Salmiya (27 points) enters the match with high ambitions. The team seeks redemption against Kuwait Club and aims to climb to third place, hoping for a slip from Al-Qadisiya (29 points), who will face Al-Nasr on Sunday. However, Al-Salmiya has struggled with consistency in recent matches, drawing 2-2 with Al-Fahaheel, losing 2-1 to Al-Qadisiya, and securing a narrow 1-0 win over Khaitan.

In the second match of the day, Al-Arabi (38 points) looks to return to winning ways after a goalless draw against Kuwait Club in the previous round. The team hopes to secure another victory over Yarmouk, having defeated it 2-0 in its first-leg encounter. With only eight rounds left in the season – three in the second phase and five in the championship round – Al-Arabi cannot afford any setbacks in its title chase.

Despite a significant 33-point gap between the two teams, Al-Yarmouk is expected to put up a fight. The bottom-placed side (5 points) has already secured its place in the relegation playoffs but will aim to end a 15-match winless streak (10 losses, 5 draws) and begin its survival bid on a strong note against

#### PSG and Dortmund advance in CL

MADRID, Feb 20, (AP): Kylian Mbappé scored a hat trick, Erling Haaland stayed on the bench injured and Real Madrid dumped Manchester City out of the Champions League.

Mbappé's stellar trio of goals in the fourth, 33rd and 61st minutes in a 3-1 win gave Madrid a 6-3 victory on aggregate over the 2023 champion in their two-leg knockout playoff.

This has been the complete performance - attack, defense, with the ball and without the ball, we showed such high levels of quality," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "Almost the perfect night."

One superstar striker was watched by another from the sidelines. Haaland was not fit to start for an ultimately overmatched Man City because of a knee injury sustained late in a Premier League game Saturday.

Paris Saint-Germain beat French rival Brest 7-0, to run up a 10-0 aggregate score, and will play either Liverpool or Barcelona in the round of 16.

PSV Eindhoven ousted Juventus in the only one of the eight playoffs this week that went to extra time. Defender Ryan Flamingo scored in the 98th minute for a 3-1 win on the night and 4-3 on aggregate. United States international Timothy Weah scored for Juventus. "Honestly, we slipped up," Weah said. "I felt like they were more aggressive on

the night and we lacked a bit of aggression and hunger. In the early game, Borussia Dortmund started with a 3-0 lead at home to Sport-

ing Lisbon and was barely stretched in a 0-0 draw. Sporting's Champions League campaign imploded after coach Ruben Amorim left for Manchester United in No-Mbappé's first goal of the two-leg playoff in Manchester was a lucky miscue, a

looping effort off his shin to level at 1-1 in what ended a 3-2 win. His three goals in Madrid were classy and decisive. A first-time lob over City

goalkeeper Ederson - who perhaps advanced too far, too soon - was followed by a low shot after leaving defender Joško Gvardiol on the turf. The third was a powerful left-footer from the edge of the penalty area when he

had lured six Man City players toward encircling him. "I have always said I didn't come here simply to complete a dream," said Mbap-

pé, a boyhood Madrid fan who never won a Champions League at Monaco and PSG. "I want to play well, I want to mark an era." Coach Pep Guardiola's injury-hit side - with Ballon d'Or winner Rodri out since

September and Kevin De Bruyne now rarely starting - has looked like a shadow of the heavyweight rival that met Madrid in each of the past three seasons, when each time the winner went on to lift the trophy.

PSG has not lost anywhere since a Champions League defeat at Bayern Munich

three months ago, and the playoff against Brest proved a total mismatch

Brest had impressed in its first European season but went out with a whimper at

Parc des Princes, after a 3-0 loss in the home leg.
Wingers Bradley Barcola and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scored in the first half. Midfielder Vitinha, Desiré Doué, left back Nuno Mendes, striker Ramos and Senny Mayulu netted after the break. PSG also beat Brest 5-2 in a French league game

### **Al-Tadamon sweeps Al-Sahel** for first volleyball league win

**By Khaled Al-Enezi** 

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 20: Al-Tadamon Club secured its first victory in the Kuwait Volleyball League, defeating Al-Sahel 3-0 (25-22, 25-21, 25-19) in the 13th round at the Games Union Hall in Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex. In another match from the same round, Kuwait Club dominated Al-Yarmouk with a straight-set win (25-15, 25-20, 25-16).

Following the conclusion of the 13th round, Kazma remains at the top of the standings with 18 points from six matches, followed by Al-Shabab with 12 points from five matches.

Kuwait Club holds nine points from three matches, while Burgan and Al-Nasr are tied with six points each from four and six matches, respec-

Al-Qadsiya and Al-Arabi both have six points from three and four matches, respectively,



Players battling for the ball during the volleyball league.

while Al-Sulaibikhat sits at six points from seven matches. Al-Tadamon climbs to three points from five matches, while Al-Yarmouk has two points from five matches, and Al-Sahel remains at the bottom with one point from six matches.

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