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SYRIAN AUTHORITIES CALL FOR UNITY AFTER DAMASCUS TAKEOVER



Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Iran expelled from four Arab capitals, and Houthis are revolting

AFTER 54 years of authoritarian rule, such a quick collapse of the Assad regime was unexpected. However, it proves that the will of the people is stronger than tyranny.

After the signing of the Sykes-Picot Treaty in 1917, which divided the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, the history of the Levant, especially Syria, has been marked by unforeseen events.

As a result, these countries have long been unstable, with many becoming battlegrounds in recent decades for external powers that seek to carry out their own agendas, often through bloodshed and destruction, and sometimes by enticement and shifting social values.

This has led to growing resentment among the people of four Arab countries towards Iran's influence over them. It began in Iraq, which still bears the scars of chaos, and then spread to Syria, a country once known for its rich cultural heritage. Lebanon, once referred to as the "Switzerland of the East", has also felt this influence, as has Yemen, which was known to be the capital of wisdom, but is now trapped in a tunnel of ignorance.

Tehran and Hezbollah carried out massacres under the pretext of defending the shrine of Lady Zainab (May Allah be pleased with her). However, the true objective was about exporting their so-called "revolution", seizing control of Syria's resources, and subjugating its ancient civilization. What was once a proud nation has now descended into a tragic state, one that

no self-respecting Syrian can tolerate today.

Syria has long been regarded as the key to the stability of the Middle East. Any interference with it has the potential to destabilize the entire region. Unfortunately, the fleeing ruler ignored this fragile balance, clinging to his alliance with the Persian regime that had already lost its power, rather than seeking common ground with his people. This disregard for the situation only accelerated the uprising against him.

Today, Syria is free from Assad's rule, and when the opposition entered the capital, Damascus, their first statement was polite and respectful. They called for reconciliation, urging against any retribution or triumphalism, and they invited the current Prime Minister to address the country's future.

While many variables still shape the region, one thing is clear: there is no Iranian presence in Beirut, Baghdad, or Damascus. Sanaa remains the last stronghold that Iran has boasted of controlling, with officials claiming to rule over four Arab countries at the heart of the Arab world, countries whose national security they have threatened for years.

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Jubilation sweeps Syria as Assad's regime ends

President Bashar Assad, officials whereabouts unknown



Syrians celebrate the fall of Bashar Assad's government in the town of Bar Elias, Lebanon, near the border with Syria, Dec 8, 2024. (AP)

By Faris Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Tamim Al-Madani, Chargé d'Affaires of the Syrian Embassy in Kuwait, has announced that the embassy is continuing to provide most of its regular services to Syrian citizens.

In a statement to Al-Seyassah, Al-Madani explained that while general embassy operations remain unaffected, passport issuance is currently suspended.

The temporary halt in passport services is due to the need for approval from the Immigration and Travel Department in Damascus. Al-Madani expects this service to resume within days, once employees in Damascus return to work and reestablish the necessary connections.

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Scheme reveals calculated strategy

1,425 Indian loan defaulters in Kuwaiti bank's crosshairs

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: A Kuwaiti bank is pursuing legal action against 1,425 Indian citizens, including 800 nurses from the state of Kerala, India for defaulting on loans amounting to an estimated 25.5 million Kuwaiti dinars, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

These individuals reportedly fled Kuwait without repaying their debts, according to various Indian media outlets.

Many of the defaulters allegedly used the borrowed funds to finance migration to foreign countries or to purchase properties in Kerala.

Reports from the Indo-Asian News Agency re-

veal that some of them moved to nations such as the UK, Canada, the US and Australia.

The fraudulent activity involved a calculated strategy where borrowers initially secured small loans, repaid them promptly to gain the bank's trust and then obtained larger sums before fleeing Kuwait without leaving any trace.

The bank has lodged a formal complaint with the Assistant Director General of Kerala Police. In response, Kerala state police are reportedly considering assigning the case to the Inspector General of the Southern Region to ensure a comprehensive investigation.

According to a report on the Indian website Manorama, the bank has shared detailed information about the defaulters with Kerala police.

Subsequently, cases have been registered against the accused in Kerala and suspicions have arisen regarding the involvement of intermediaries or agents, given the scale of the fraud. At least 10 cases have already been recorded in Kerala's Ernakulam and Kottayam districts following visits by bank officials seeking assistance from local police.

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Quick recovery, all will be well

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Hamad Mohammad Al-Bahar, the CEO of the National Bank of Kuwait, was recently admitted to a hospital after experiencing a health issue, but has since been discharged.

Dear Abu Mohammad, the Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers wish you a speedy recovery and continued good health.



Al-Bahar

Kuwait FM attends Doha Forum 2024

Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya participated in the Doha Forum 2024 on Saturday, in the company of a number of heads of state, foreign ministers, and important figures and officials.

The forum, which kicked off today Saturday, is under the patronage and presence of Qatar's Amir Ta-

mim bin Hamad Al-Thani.

The forum dealt with many regional and international political topics, most notably, ways to find innovative solutions against repercussions, frameworks for alleviating tension in the region, and ways to support peace and sustainable development. (KUNA)



KUNA photo
Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya at the Doha Forum 2024.

Addresses of 119 removed from list

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) has announced, through the official gazette Kuwait Alyoum, the cancellation of the residential addresses of 119 individuals, either based on a declaration from the property owner or due to the demolition of the building.

PACI stated that these individuals must visit the authority to update their addresses, and provide the necessary supporting documents within 30 days from the date of the announcement.

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Day by Day

IT'S time to dust off the neglected laws left unrati-fied or unresolved by the National Assembly. Reports indicate that approximately 400 bills remain dormant in the drawers of the National Assembly.

These bills require careful review, amendments and updates. Outdated legislation should be discarded and replaced with modern, efficient alternatives that better serve the needs of the people and state institutions.

... Yet, tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

Initiatives recognized by UN

'Kuwait spotlights women in shaping resilient economies'

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8, (KUNA): United Nations Representative of the Secretary General and Resident Coordinator in Kuwait, Ghada Al-Taher, stated Sunday that Kuwait is increasingly highlighting the decisive role of women in creating flexible economies that promote national development for upcoming generations.

Al-Taher expressed this during a discussion panel organized by UN's mission to the country in cooperation with Foreign Ministry and French embassy on countering violence against women as part of annual women empowerment campaign.

There are many opportunities to seize in Kuwait for economic reform and innovation to empower women through creating safe work environments, addressing discriminatory laws and challenging outdated social norms, Al-Taher

reflected.

On her part, Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Right Affairs Sheikhha Jawaher Al-Sabah, she stated that Kuwait's participation in this annual campaign goes hand in hand with principles of Islamic religion.

She conveyed the state of Kuwait's deep concern with the mounting violence against women as statistics indicate that 736 million women are victims of physical or sexual violence, and around 70 percent of women living in war zones or humanitarian crises, are also victims of violence.

This requires intensified international efforts to counter this phenomenon, via creating safe and fair communities where women can live with dignity and actively contribute to development, Al-Sabah added.

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KUNA photo
Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Right Affairs Sheikhha Jawaher Al-Sabah speaks during a discussion panel organized by UN's mission to the country.



5 Al-Jarallah hosts Brazilian envoy, strengthens media co-op in talks

8 'BBB' issue rating affirmed with a Stable Outlook for Markaz's Senior Unsecured Bond due 2025

9 KFH concludes 4th edition of training program for individuals with special needs



10 NBK's innovative digital strategy strengthens its leadership in FinTech

Prayer Timings			
Fajr	05:05	Asr	14:31
Sunrise ..	06:30	Maghrib ..	16:50
Zohr	11:40	Isha	18:11

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:
By Day: Warm, clouds and chance of rain will decrease gradually with light to moderate southeasterly wind changing to northwesterly wind, with speed of 08-35 km/h.
By Night: Rather cold to cold

Weather			
with light variable wind to light to moderate freshening at times over coastal areas northwesterly wind, with speed of 08-42 km/h.			
Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	
Kuwait City	26	16	
Kuwait Airport	26	09	

Abdaly	26	09
Jahra	27	12
Fallaka Island	27	14
Salmiyah	24	17
Ahmadi	26	11
Jal Aliyah	26	10
Nuwaisib	26	13
Wafra	26	11



Officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs accompanied by a delegation from the Bahraini Abdul Rahman Kanoo Social Club.



Farah Specialized Center hosts visitors and residents, accompanied by officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Farah Center sets standard for regional care

Bahraini delegation commends Kuwait's holistic approach to elderly welfare

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: The acting Assistant Undersecretary for the Social Welfare Sector at the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Jassem Al-Kandari says the Farah Specialized Center for the Care of the Elderly serves as an integrated model that reflects Kuwait's commitment to providing exceptional social and humanitarian services to the elderly.

Al-Kandari said this during a visit by a delegation from the Abdulrahman Kanoo Social Club for Parents' Care from the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Farah Center for the Care of

the Elderly affiliated to the Social Welfare Sector.

In a press statement, Al-Kandari stressed that the Farah Center plays a major role in realizing the State of Kuwait's vision to provide a decent life for elderly citizens through comprehensive housing, health, and psychological services.

Regarding the services provided to the elderly by the Social Welfare Sector, he explained that the Elderly Care Department serves over 35,000 beneficiaries, including 19 at the Farah Shelter Center, which accommodates both men and women. Also, 3,946 people benefit from mobile care services, which cover all areas of Kuwait.

The ministry has issued 35,917 "priority" cards that grant

elderly citizens various privileges to facilitate their transactions. Also, 6,926 elderly men and women have benefited from the elderly parking card, in line with the Elderly Care Law No. 18/2016.

Al-Kandari affirmed that the visit underscores the deep and historic fraternal relations between the two countries, and opens new opportunities for cooperation and the exchange of expertise in the field of social care.

Meanwhile, the Chair of the Abdul Rahman Kanoo Social Club Yousef Al-Muhammad praised Kuwait's pioneering role in elderly care, describing Farah Center as a model for the Gulf countries to emulate.

He revealed that the visit allowed the Bahraini delegation to explore the comprehensive services offered by the center, including physical therapy programs, as well as psychological and social care, all of which reflect Kuwait's commitment to a humanitarian approach in meeting the needs of the elderly.

Al-Muhammad affirmed the importance of strengthening joint Gulf cooperation in the field of social welfare, enabling the sharing of successful experiences like that of Kuwait.

He highlighted that the relationship between Kuwait and Bahrain goes beyond diplomatic ties, extending into community partnerships aimed at serving vulnerable groups and enhancing their psychological and social stability.

Germany, Kuwait celebrate 60 years of diplomatic ties

By Fares Al-Abdan

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: The Ambassador of Germany to Kuwait Hans-Christian Freiherr von Reibnitz praised the depth and strength of the German-Kuwaiti relations, which he described as "historic and advanced in all areas of cooperation", revealing that the two countries are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations this year.

In statements to journalists on the sidelines of the German-French musical concert, which he hosted at his residence, Ambassador Reibnitz indicated that the embassy's celebration of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Germany and Kuwait officially began in April with a musical concert, and it is concluding now with a similar concert.

He highlighted that the visit of Deka Potzel, the Director General of the Department of Crisis Prevention, Stabilization, Post-Conflict Peacebuilding, and Humanitarian Assistance at the German Foreign Ministry, and Special Envoy for Humanitarian Aid in the Middle East, is a testament to the strength and durability of bilateral relations.

He explained that Germany has long been one of the largest donors in the humanitarian field. The country is committed to strengthening its relationship with Kuwait in this area, as both nations share strong ties and common humanitarian values and principles.

He revealed that the three experts involved are of German and French origin, indicating that next year will feature joint events with the French Embassy to celebrate the 60th anniversary of friendship between Germany and France.



Von Reibnitz

MoCI reforms industrial standards, auction laws

Event licensing streamlined

By Marwa Al-Bahravi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: The Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel has reconstituted the Permanent National Committee for the Electrical and Electronic Specifications Sector at the Public Authority for Industry.

The committee will be chaired by the Deputy Director General for Industrial Specifications and Services, with 18 members representing various organizations, including the Public Authority for Industry, the Kuwait National Petroleum Company, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, Kuwait University, the Ministry of Electricity and Water, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Public Works, the Competition Protection Agency, the Public Authority for Housing Welfare, and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences.

The committee is responsible for developing and overseeing annual plans for sector specifications, creating, drafting, and adopting technical regulations and standard specifications for electrical and

electronic devices related to energy efficiency, updating technical regulations and standard specifications older than five years within its scope, and suggesting the establishment of technical sub-committees and specialized working teams as needed.

Meanwhile, Al-Ajeel also issued resolution No. 226/2024 for amending certain provisions of ministerial resolution No. 421/2019 regarding the regulations for organizing fish auction markets.

Article 1 of the new resolution stipulates that individuals wishing to participate in auctions must obtain a "Visiting Participant" card from the auction supervisor, after registering their details in the participant registry.

The resolution further mandates that representatives of legal entities such as companies, restaurants, and stall owners must submit an official request to obtain a maximum of two cards for their sponsored employees, at a fee of KD 30 per card. These cards will be valid for one calendar year and are renewable annually for KD 15.

Representatives of legal entities are required to pay a security deposit of KD 20 one hour before the auction begins. This deposit is refundable at the end of the auction, unless the offer is withdrawn after the auction is awarded. The broker is also obligated to submit a detailed daily report to the ministry, including the sale data.

Kuwait Al-Yaum newspaper has published a ministerial decision amending resolution No. 27/2015 concerning the issuance of the executive regulations of law No. 39/2014 on consumer protection.

Other Voices

Dear Deputy Prime Minister

By Ahmed alsarraf

I extend to you, in your capacity as Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of Defense, my sincere thanks for your trust, and I believe that I have lived up to your expectations.

The truth is that I have sensed in you credibility, sincerity and determination to work hard and continuously, without hesitation, despite the minor shortcomings that I have fallen into. Logic says that the only way to avoid making mistakes is to not do any work.

We congratulate you on the leadership's confidence in you, and you seem to be the man of the moment, the moment of cleaning up files and removing all the impurities, faults and mistakes that have tarnished the country's reputation over the past several years, as a result of government laxity and the exploitation of that laxity by many members of previous National Assembly to achieve their personal interests and the interests of their voters.

We also understand the logic that says that we no longer have the luxury of time and the ability to distinguish between clean citizenship files that meet the conditions and others, due to the long wait and the accumulation of cases.

Therefore, the wise decision came to withdraw, lose and immediately cancel all citizenships, based on suspicion or because the decision to grant citizenship violates the laws, while keeping humanitarian aid for those whose citizenships were withdrawn as is, until the issue of each process is decided by the grievance committees.

We do not want to reject the judiciary, but we only want clarity in it, and to know it in advance, with our full acceptance of it. This is not a favor, but rather a right upon us from our wise leadership, which knows things better than us, and what is in our interest.

The number of those whose nationality has been withdrawn, dropped or lost has approached ten thousand, and

the rest are on the way, until this boil that has greatly affected the social fabric of the state, exhausted the state budget, and spread political and administrative corruption in an unprecedented manner is finished.

The wait to finish it has been very long, after it has been saturated with debate, research and talk for decades, without a firm and clear decision! As long as the wheel of withdrawal, dropping and loss has begun its journey, we hope that Your Excellency will achieve the following matters, and clarify others:

"First: In order for troubled souls to calm down and know where they stand, the matter requires the issuance of a clear decision regarding the withdrawal of the citizenship of "every" foreign wife for whom a ministerial decision has been issued to naturalize her.

"Second: We also hope to specify the time period that the withdrawal will include. Does it start from the date of issuance of the Nationality Law, or from the period after liberation, or what?

"Third: Clear emphasis that the work of the grievance committees will be in conjunction with the work of the committees for withdrawing and losing citizenship.

This will greatly reduce the confusion and consequences, and will make it easier for the families concerned to arrange their affairs and apply to the embassies of their former countries that relinquished their citizenships to request their return.

This usually takes a lot of time and effort, in addition to what is required in terms of visits to various government departments to obtain the required certificates and statements.

"Fourth: The grievance structure should consist of several committees, not one committee, composed of civilian and military figures, in order to expedite the consideration of grievances and restore citizenship to all those who deserve it, before these people, if possible, enter into the consequences and procedures of withdrawal, and the family, judicial and commercial problems that will be caused, which are difficult for many families to limit or deal with.

"Your positive stance on these matters and proposals will be praised, appreciated and comforting to all citizens."

□ □ □

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Legal memo cites jurisdiction limits

Municipal exec body rejects council's query

By Enaas Awad

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: The executive body of the Kuwaiti municipality has declined to respond to a query submitted by Municipal Council member Fahd Al-Abduljader regarding the operations of the Administrative Development and Training Department.

The refusal was accompanied by a detailed legal memorandum outlining the division of competencies among the Municipal Council, the executive body and the Minister of Municipality.

The legal memorandum, approved

by Hussein Al-Ajmi, Director of the Legal Department in the Municipality, emphasized that the Municipal Council's powers are strictly defined by law and pertain solely to municipal facilities and affairs.

It clarified that these powers do not extend to overseeing the executive body's internal work systems or management.



Al-Abduljader

The memorandum further stated that council members' questions must be confined to matters explicitly within the council's jurisdiction.

Member Fahd Al-Abduljader's inquiry, which sought information on the performance of the Development and Training Department in relation to official missions, assignments and study leave policies, was deemed beyond the council's scope of authority.

The executive body argued that such questions constitute interference in the management of the executive body, which is outside the purview of the Municipal Council.

KIB launches special Al Dirwaza draw to celebrate official reopening of Derwaza Al-Abdulrazzaq intersection

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: In celebration of the official reopening of the Derwaza Al-Abdulrazzaq intersection in the city, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) launched a special draw campaign for its Al Dirwaza account holders, allowing even more customers to enjoy the rewards of an investment savings account that carries a name of cultural and architectural significance. The special draw came as part of the Bank's ongoing efforts to engage its diverse customer base through various campaigns throughout the year, driven by its promise of being a "Bank for Life".

The draw took place in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, crowning 10 lucky customers KD 500 each. The lucky customers included Alyaa Ab-

dulrahman Khaled Alghunaim, Dhari Hakem Mekhleef Alshammari, Raja Mohammad Hasan Alarbash, Sanaa Hamad Jaber Ghanam, Rabaah Marzouq Mekhleef Alazmi, Sami Hayef Omair Alshammari, Abolhassan Muratadha Khalvati, Pushpa Lili Thomas Violet, Mohammad Sanhat Dhaidan Alqahtani, Mohammad Jassim Abd Ali Alkhalifah.

Commenting on the special draw, Othman Tawfege, General Manager of the Retail Banking Department at KIB, said: "At KIB, we believe in celebrating milestones that matter and are constantly on the lookout for meaningful ways to connect with our customers.

The reopening of the Derwaza Al-Abdulrazzaq intersection marked an important and positive development for Kuwait City, and we saw it as a



KIB poster

perfect opportunity to commemorate this moment. Through our exclusive Al Dirwaza draw, we were able to share this significant development with

our valued customers, enriching their banking experience while reinforcing our deep connection to the progress of Kuwait."

It serves to note that Al Dirwaza account is a savings account for individual customers, based on the Wakala investment principle, launched by KIB as one of its banking products for individuals. The account is currently the best of its kind in the sector, with annual expected profits of up to 2% disbursed on a monthly basis, where the customer gets an expected profit of 2% for the first 3 months from the account opening date and up to 1% expected rate onward. The expected profits are automatically deposited into the customer's account within the first day of the beginning of each month.

Al Dirwaza account holders are

eligible to enter the weekly, monthly and annual draws on the condition of maintaining at least KD 100 in their account. For the weekly and monthly draws, each KD 1 that has completed a full month's cycle in the account will count for one chance, and chances are calculated based on the lowest monthly balance preceding the draw. As for the mega draw, chances are calculated for each KD 1 that completes a two-month cycle in the account – based on the lowest two monthly balances prior to the draw.

Al Dirwaza account is also in compliance with the provisions of Islamic Sharia and approved by the KIB's Sharia Supervisory Board. Furthermore, the account comes with a wide range of benefits, including the ease of opening the account, which does not require

a salary transfer, and the customer's ability to open it remotely without visiting a branch through KIB Online on the Bank's website or KIB Mobile application on smartphones.

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

For more information on the Al Dirwaza account, its benefits and how to open it, customers can contact the Bank's Call Center or reach out via WhatsApp and receive the needed help around the clock.

diwaniya

ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Citizenship laws, violations and broader consequences

“LAST week, three writers in separate articles explored the implications of the measures currently being undertaken by the state regarding citizenship laws, violations of these laws and their broader consequences,” columnist **Suad Fahad Al-Moajel** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

“Colleague Ahmed Al-Sarraf discussed the unprecedented risk faced by many Kuwaiti citizens due to misinterpretations of Article 8 of the Nationality Law.

“He highlighted the potential for individuals, after years of marriage, childbirth and renouncing prior nationalities, to be deprived of their citizenship.

“Hassan Al-Essa noted that issues surrounding the withdrawal or cancellation of nationalities have dominated both the press and social media, creating widespread anxiety.

“Many citizens now live in fear, uncertain about when their own status might be questioned, threatening their sense of identity and belonging.

“Muzaffar Abdullah examined the rise in divisive rhetoric fueled by the government’s naturalization policies, pointing out how such discourse has extended beyond legal discussions to attacks on origins, roots and neighboring countries -- touching on matters forbidden by religion and Sharia.

“These observations underscore a broader debate about nationality, its laws and its societal consequences, raising fundamental questions about identity and belonging.

“This issue is particularly sensitive in societies with dominant tribal or sectarian structures, where civil institutions, democratic principles and freedoms are often in decline -- characteristics frequently seen across Arab countries. In such contexts, national identity and belonging remain contentious and unresolved, both at the societal level and within governmental frameworks.

“The West, by contrast, has addressed these challenges through the concept of the social contract, establishing civil laws that prioritize equality over race or sect.

“By embedding identity and citizenship within a legal framework, Western nations have successfully integrated diverse populations, including large influxes of refugees from varied ethnic and religious backgrounds, without compromising their security or sovereignty.

“Historically, Europe moved from the blood-and-belief ties of the Dark Ages to a more inclusive civic identity during the Enlightenment. This transformation enabled the coexistence of diverse peoples under laws rooted in justice and equality, rather than race or religion, fostering modern, stable societies.

“In Kuwait and across the Arab world, national identity and citizenship remain unresolved issues. While temporary measures, such as the current withdrawal of citizenships in Kuwait, may address immediate concerns, long-term solutions require a fundamental shift in how citizenship is perceived and legislated.

“European experiences offer valuable lessons. Immigrants from all over the world, including Arabs, Africans and Asians, have integrated into host countries that base citizenship on clear, consistent laws rather than arbitrary decisions.

“These legal frameworks have fostered societies where individuals live in stability and peace, assured of justice and equality.

“In contrast, many Arab countries rely on identity-based protections rather than robust laws, leaving citizens vulnerable to fear and uncertainty.

“To overcome this, the Arab world must prioritize justice and equality through comprehensive legal reforms that transcend tribal and sectarian divides, ensuring security and belonging for all.”



Al-Moajel

Also:

“Some of my dear brothers have mentioned that certain individuals praise our recent stance on the withdrawal of the nationalities of Kuwaiti mothers and wives, claiming that we have changed,” columnist **Ahmed Bager** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

“Such statements reveal ignorance and a lack of understanding, as our positions have always been consistent and unwavering.

“We have never aligned ourselves with the government unless its stance was correct and we have opposed it when we believed it to be wrong. Numerous examples illustrate this principle.

“Regarding the nationality issue, our position has always been clear: we support granting citizenship to those who meet the requirements and oppose forgery and dual nationality.

“Consequently, we have called for the preservation of the nationalities of mothers and wives who meet the legal conditions. Similarly, we have consistently opposed unconstitutional or frivolous interpellations, such as the one directed at me when I served as Minister of Justice in the 2001 government, as well as interpellations of ministers who had not yet taken office or the constitutional oath.

“While some supported all interpellations indiscriminately, even those violating the constitution, we have been selective, focusing on accountability where it matters.

“For example, we submitted significant interpellations, including those against the Ministers of Transportation and Endowments, which resulted in the recovery of millions of dinars.

“Our commitment to accountability began with our first motion of confidence in the 1985 Council and continued through the 2006 Council, the last in which I was elected.

“Beyond interpellations, we supported critical legislation, such as laws protecting public funds, ensuring judicial independence and enabling the trial of ministers. We collaborated with Hamad Al-Jouan, may God have mercy on him, to introduce these vital reforms.

“However, we have also taken firm stances against certain measures, such as the women’s law, increases in fees for citizens and hikes in electricity and water prices for private housing.

“We opposed the shortcomings in the armament budget and the security agreement, which have since proven problematic.

“Similarly, we resisted amendments to the 2006 publishing and printing law, emphasizing that freedom must operate within the bounds of the law. The Constitutional Court validated this principle, asserting there is no absolute freedom without legal frameworks.

“We were among the first to warn about the dangers of fake accounts, a concern now echoed by the Minister of Interior. Notably, several countries, including Australia, are set to ban certain communication platforms starting in January 2025.

“We stood against illegal demonstrations while supporting regulated seminars and lectures, a stance later affirmed by the Constitutional Court, which ruled demonstrations without permission or a license to be unlawful.

“Furthermore, we have opposed populist laws detrimental to public finances, a position supported by specialized economic reports from both within and outside Kuwait.

“We remain steadfast against constitutional violations, insults to the judiciary, encroachments on the Emir’s authority to appoint ministers and breaches of parliamentary bylaws, including the use of offensive language.

“History has proven the soundness of our positions, even if some chose not to heed our warnings. The days are demonstrating the correctness of our principles, rooted in the tenets of commanding good and forbidding evil and pursuing reform through legitimate parliamentary methods.

“Thanks be to God, our commitment to these values remains unchanged, as the events around us continue to validate our approach.”

– Compiled by PFX Fernandes

Kuwait sets new standards in safety and efficiency

DGCA drives civil aviation modernization

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Kuwait’s Acting Director General of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Duaij Al-Otaibi, emphasized on the administration’s commitment to achieving the highest standards of security and safety in collaboration with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and other global and regional entities, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

Speaking to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) during the celebration of International Civil Aviation Day on December 7, Al-Otaibi highlighted Kuwait’s progress in developing its air transport infrastructure and adopting world-class standards in the civil aviation industry.

These advancements have en-



KUNA photo
Duaij Al-Otaibi – Acting Director General of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation

hanced the efficiency of air services, improved passenger experiences, and raised safety and comfort

levels on flights.

Al-Otaibi noted that the DGCA has spearheaded major projects, including a new cargo city, a state-of-the-art runway, and a specialized administrative building.

Moreover, Kuwait has introduced the Middle East’s most advanced air traffic control simulator to train and develop air navigation personnel. A new control tower equipped with cutting-edge global systems has also been established, with plans to bring in an international operator to manage the facility and train Kuwaiti aviation professionals.

He underscored the DGCA’s adoption of a forward-looking strategy aligned with ICAO standards, aiming to bolster national talent, enhance state revenues from

the aviation sector, and prioritize aviation safety and security.

Al-Otaibi expressed optimism that proposed legislation to transform the DGCA into an independent technical body would soon be approved.

This transition, he said, would bring about a qualitative leap in the civil aviation sector, aligning with the strategic goals for its growth and modernization.

The International Civil Aviation Organization, established in April 1948 as part of the United Nations, is headquartered in Montreal, Canada. It plays a pivotal role in advancing air navigation technologies, planning, and promoting the global aviation industry’s security, safety, and development.

Mol arrests Egyptian national, seizes 60 kilograms of hashish

2 men acquitted of drug and firearm possession

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: The Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Abdullah Al-Asimi, acquitted two individuals who were charged with possessing narcotics and psychotropic substances with intent to trade and use. In addition, the first defendant was charged with possessing a firearm and ammunition without a license, and driving under the influence of hashish.

During the court session, the defendants were represented by Lawyer Bashar Al-Nassar, who submitted a memorandum requesting the summoning of a witness to prove the incident and the attachment of the register of the Drug Control General Department.

In response, the court summoned the second witness and ordered the attachment of a copy of the civil status register for the requested period. The court also granted the defense lawyer Bashar Al-Nassar the opportunity to review the document.

When the witness was questioned by the court about the incident, he stated that he had prior investigations and information regarding the first defendant. The truth behind this information was confirmed after the defendant’s arrest and referral by the patrols.

He explained that the source of his confirmation was a secret informant, whom he considered reliable. He had also verified the information by visiting the defendant’s residence and speaking with the building’s security guard, who corroborated the details.

During the pleading session, lawyer Bashar Al-Nassar highlighted the circumstances surrounding the incident, and requested the court to acquit the accused of all charges.

He contended that the arrest, search, and subsequent procedures were invalid, as there was no evidence of a flagrante delicto situation, which undermined the validity of the actions taken.

It is worth explaining the incident in the following manner: While patrolling Mahboula, the officer noticed the first accused, who was accompanied by the second, violating traffic laws as the vehicle’s windows were completely blacked out. After stopping the vehicle to issue a citation and asking the occupants to identify themselves, the officer observed a strange-colored used cigarette in the cup holder. After asking the accused to step out of the vehicle and conducting a search, he found a silver machete and a sum of money. The officer arrested the two individuals and referred them with the seized items to the concerned authority.

While the accused were in custody, information was received from a confidential source, alleging that the accused possessed a quantity of narcotic and psychotropic substances at his residence. After verifying the accuracy of this tip, the officer obtained a search warrant from the Public Prosecution to search the accused’s residence. Acting on this warrant, the officer, accompanied by a team from the department, proceeded to the residence. During the search, they discovered nylon sachets containing suspicious substances, a scale, a firearm, and a large box containing ammunition.

Also:

The Ministry of Interior has announced the conclusion of a significant security operation, leading to the arrest of an Egyptian man and seizing 60 kilograms of hashish, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

According to the CID men, this large quantity of narcotics had been readied for distribution inside the country.

The authorities also seized from the suspect a sensitive scale and scores of empty sachets intended for packaging drugs.

This operation underscores the severity of the crime and the potential harm it could have inflicted on society. The arrest was made possible due to the vigilance, efficiency and dedication of the anti-drug enforcement personnel.

The Ministry of Interior reaffirmed its commitment to combating the scourge of drugs, emphasizing that addressing this issue remains one of its highest priorities.

Meanwhile, the ministry continues to intensify efforts through strategic security operations, constant surveillance and targeted interventions aimed at eradicating drug-related crimes.

These ongoing initiatives reflect the ministry’s dedication to safeguarding the security and well-being of the community, ensuring that such threats are effectively neutralized.



Mol photo
Egyptian poses with the contraband found in his possession.

Fatal collision on 7th Ring Road claims two lives and injures five

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Two individuals died and five others sustained injuries when a sand dumper collided with a garbage truck on the Seventh Ring Road on Saturday evening.

According to a press release issued by Kuwait Fire Force (KFF), when the Control Room of KFF received information about the accident on Saturday evening, firefighters from the Istiglal Fire Station rushed to the accident site, and discovered that the accident resulted in two fatalities and five injuries.

Paramedics referred the injured victims to the nearest hospital for treatment. The deceased were referred to the Forensics Medicine Department. The site was handed over to the relevant authorities. Investigations have been launched to determine the circumstances surrounding the accident.



KFF photo
The garbage truck involved in the collision on the Seventh Ring Road.



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‘First Hope Bridge Ship’ on way to Gaza

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Dr. Khaled Al-Subaihi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Human Excellence Society, has

highlighted the significance of the “First Hope Bridge Ship,” which recently departed from the port of Limassol in Cyprus and is

en route to the northern Gaza Strip, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

This initiative conveys a powerful and heartfelt message of solidarity and support from the people of Kuwait to their brothers and sisters in Gaza.

Dr. Al-Subaihi emphasized that this marks the start of an extensive campaign aimed at easing the hardships faced by the Palestinian people in the region.

The vessel is carrying essential humanitarian aid, including food staples such as flour, lentils, chickpeas, and sugar.

In addition, it is equipped with vital supplies like tents, blankets, and winter clothing to help combat the severe cold of the season. These provisions are intended to provide immediate relief and warmth to those enduring the difficult conditions in Gaza.

This humanitarian gesture reaffirms Kuwait’s unwavering commitment to standing in solidarity with the Palestinian people and supporting their resilience during challenging times.



Kuwaiti relief aid sent to Gaza.

Al-Seyassah photo



Photos by Samer Shiger

Ministry committed to building a sustainable economy

She concluded by stressing that the Nour Festival is not merely a temporary market but a national message promoting the culture of favoring local products and supporting the national economy. She reiterated the ministry's commitment to continuing its support for initiatives that contribute to achieving food security and building a sustainable economy.

He expressed confidence that the Prime Minister's directives will help translate the conference's recommendations into actionable initiatives to strengthen Kuwait's role in sustainable innovation.

LOCAL

Kuwait's Amir congratulates newly elected Namibian Prez

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday sent a cable of congratulation to the newly elected President of Namibia Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah on winning the election.

His Highness the Amir wished success and wellbeing to the President, and the friendly people of Namibia further progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Crown

Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, on Sunday, sent a cable of congratulation to the newly elected President of Namibia Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah on winning the election.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent, Sunday, a cable of congratulation to the newly elected President of Namibia Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah on winning the election.

Iran expelled

Continued from Page 1

The rhetoric surrounding Iran's power and its sectarian militias in the region has begun to fade with the fall of the Baath regime in Syria. This marks the beginning of a significant shift in Tehran's influence, signaling that the region may soon be liberated from the 45-year-old practice of state-sponsored terrorism.

For decades, Syria was regarded as the only country in the world that was not indebted to anyone, and where people lived in stability and security. However, the oppressive practices of the security services, coupled with Iranian interference in even the most basic aspects of daily life, drove the Syrian people into poverty and hunger. As a result, millions were forced to flee the country in search of a better life abroad.

Following this great change in the Levant, those responsible for committing horrific crimes against the Syrian people must be held accountable. Also, Lebanon must begin to rid itself of the nightmare of Hezbollah, a group that has turned the country into a war-torn state that is enduring its worst conditions.

With the collapse of the so-called "Iranian axis", there is now an opportunity for Yemen to free itself from the "Houthi group" that has brought devastation upon its people, and severed their ties with the Arab world. This could pave the way for regional stability and accelerate the development that the region has long been deprived of for decades.

Addresses of

Continued from Page 1

Failure to do so will result in penalties as outlined in article 33 of law No. 32/1982, which includes a fine of up to KD 100, multiplied by the number of individuals involved.

'Kuwait spotlights

Continued from Page 1

She reassured Kuwait's keenness on creating safe spaces for women, expressing pride in Kuwait's ranking as the world's safest country as per Gallup's 2023 report.

As for French Ambassador to the country, Olivier Gauvin underlined combating violence against women in all its forms whether physical, mental, economic, or digital as it violates all basic rights.

He stated that putting an end to this is not only out of moral obligation but is an essential step towards building fairer safer and more inclusive societies.

1,425 Indian

Continued from Page 1

The investigation revealed that the scheme began unraveling three months ago when payment delays triggered suspicions. Further inquiries exposed the involvement of over 1,400 individuals.

The majority of the fraudulent activities reportedly occurred between 2019 and 2022, as noted by the bank's lawyer, who was quoted by The Indian Express.

The scheme came to light post-2022 when officials noticed significant defaults and began tracing defaulters across various countries.

This large-scale fraud has prompted concerns about regulatory weaknesses and the role of intermediaries in enabling such schemes.

The investigation will likely focus on holding the defaulters accountable, recovering the funds and implementing safeguards to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

The case underscores the risks faced by financial institutions when dealing with expatriate clients and highlights the need for robust measures to mitigate loan-related fraud.

Jubilation sweeps

Continued from Page 1

Despite the ongoing political situation in Syria, where a caretaker government is in place, the embassy in Kuwait will continue to serve Syrian citizens. Al-Madani emphasized that all other embassy services remain available and uninterrupted.

The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called Sunday for unity to rebuild Syria, as its first reaction following the Syrian opposition's announcement of overthrowing the Bashar al-Assad regime after a 24-year rule.

In a statement published on its official website, the ministry said that a new page in Syria's history "is being written," inaugurating a national era and a charter that unites Syrians rather than divides them, to build a unified country characterized by jus-

tice and equality.

The ministry added that its diplomatic missions abroad would remain committed to serving all fellow citizens and managing their affairs, adhering to its responsibility of representing the Syrian people.

Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Al-Jalali, responding to a question from Al-Arabiya News Channel about Assad's whereabouts, stated that he has no information about Assad's location or when he left, adding that his last communication with Assad was on Saturday evening.

Al-Jalali also said that they have communicated with the "command of military operations" and agreed on the importance of preserving institutions, noting that most ministers are in Damascus.

He added that discussions occurred with Al-Julani regarding managing the current period, referring to the leader of the Syrian opposition Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) faction, Abu Mohammad Al-Julani, who has started using his real name, Ahmad Al-Shara.

Syrian Minister of Industry, Mohammad Samer Al-Khalil stated in a similar statement to Al-Arabiya that meetings are underway to ensure government services continue, saying that several facilities in Aleppo have resumed operations.

Al-Shara issued a statement, reported by media outlets, warning that approaching public institutions was prohibited, adding that these institutions would remain under Al-Jalali's supervision until they are officially handed over.

This comes after recent political and military developments, clashes between opposition factions and government forces led to the opposition seizing control of several areas in the north of Syria.

The opposition announced early Sunday that they have seized the strategic city of Homs before advancing into and taking control of the capital, Damascus.

Meanwhile, Syrians poured into streets echoing with celebratory gunfire on Sunday after a stunning rebel advance reached the capital, putting an end to the Assad family's 50 years of iron rule but raising questions about the future of the country and the wider region.

Joyful crowds gathered in central squares in Damascus, waving the Syrian revolutionary flag in scenes that recalled the early days of the Arab Spring uprising, before a brutal crackdown and the rise of an insurgency plunged the country into a nearly 14-year civil war.

Others gleefully ransacked the presidential palace and the Assad family residence after President Bashar Assad and other top officials vanished, their whereabouts unknown. Russia, a close ally, said Assad left the country after negotiations with rebel groups and had given instructions to transfer power peacefully.

Abu Mohammed al-Golani, a former al-Qaida commander who cut ties with the group years ago and says he embraces pluralism and religious tolerance, leads the biggest rebel faction and is poised to chart the country's future direction.

The end of Assad's rule deals a major blow to Iran and its allies, already weakened by over a year of conflict with Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israeli troops had seized a buffer zone in the Golan Heights dating back to 1974, after Syrian troops abandoned their positions in the latest unrest.

The rebels now face the daunting task of healing bitter divides in a country ravaged by war and still split among different armed factions. Turkey-backed opposition fighters are battling U.S.-allied Kurdish forces in the north, and the Islamic State group is still active in some remote areas.

Syrian state television aired a video statement early Sunday by a group of rebels saying that Assad had been overthrown and all prisoners had been set free. They called on people to preserve the institutions of "the free Syrian state." The rebels later announced a curfew in Damascus from 4 p.m. to 5 a.m.

The rebels said they freed people held at the notorious Saydnaya prison, where rights groups say thousands were tortured and killed. A video circulating online purported to show rebels breaking open cell doors and freeing dozens of female prisoners, many of whom appeared shocked and confused. At least one small child could be seen among them.

Rebel commander Anas Salkhadi, who appeared on State TV later in the day, sought to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic minorities, saying: "Syria is for everyone, no exceptions. Syria is for Druze, Sunnis, Alawites, and all sects."

"We will not deal with people the way the Assad family did," he added.

Residents of Damascus gathered to pray mosques and to celebrate in the squares, chanting "God is great." People also chanted anti-Assad slogans and honked car horns. Teen boys picked up weapons that had apparently been discarded by security forces and fired them in the air.



The Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah receives the Brazilian Ambassador to Kuwait H.E. Rodrigo d'Araujo Gabsch at Al-Seyassah Press House. Also present at the meeting were Eng. Faisal Al-Jazzaf and Saud Al-Farhan.

Al-Jarallah hosts Brazilian envoy, strengthens media co-op in talks



Ahmed Al-Jarallah welcomes H.E. Rodrigo d'Araujo Gabsch.

THE Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah received in his office at Al-Seyassah Press House the Brazilian Ambassador to Kuwait H.E. Rodrigo d'Araujo Gabsch.

During the meeting, they discussed a number of issues of mutual interest, particularly in the media sector, reflecting the keenness of both parties to strengthen cooperation, enhance mutual understanding, and present an accurate portrayal of current affairs.

Also present at the meeting were Eng. Faisal Al-Jazzaf and Saud Al-Farhan.



Photos by Rezk Tawfiq
Ahmed Al-Jarallah and H.E. Rodrigo d'Araujo Gabsch discussing number of issues of mutual interest.

PAAET and MEW to boost nat'l workforce

Advances energy efficiency goals

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

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Director General of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) Dr. Hassan Al-Fajjam affirmed the importance of enhancing cooperation and partnerships with state institutions to fulfill PAAET's role in providing qualified national talent for the technical and professional work required for achieving the goals outlined in New Kuwait 2025 vision.

Dr. Al-Fajjam explained that the PAAET, through the College of Technological Studies, has signed a cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy that focuses on energy efficiency in facilities and buildings, and the economic operation of water generation and distillation stations.

This partnership will yield direct benefits and further the shared goals between the two institutions, which will support the implementation of national strategies and play a key role in advancing sustainable development in Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Head of the Department

of Mechanical Power and Cooling Technology at the College of Technological Studies, stated that the agreement aims to directly employ the graduates of the Energy Efficiency Technology Diploma Program at the college.

He explained that the agreement will enhance the program's effectiveness by ensuring the availability of qualified national talent for the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy in this important field. The collaboration will provide technical and advisory support, offer specialized courses and technical lectures on the economic operation of power and water stations, and contribute to scientific research published in international journals and conferences related to energy and water technologies.

The partnership will improve the quality of scientific publications within the authority, improve the academic reputation and raise Kuwait's profile in global scientific platforms. It will also contribute to updating the energy conservation code in line with the latest international best practices for improving energy efficiency in facilities and buildings.

The agreement was signed by Acting Undersecretary Engineer Haitham Al-Ali on behalf of the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, with senior officials from both sides in attendance.

Other Voices

Syria after Assad

By Nasser Al-Hajeri

After over a decade of conflict, the Assad regime in Syria has finally crumbled, marking the end of a dictatorship defined by oppression, war, and humanitarian catastrophe. The fall of Bashar al-Assad's government represents both an opportunity and a serious challenge for the Syrian people as they seek to rebuild a nation ravaged by years of civil war. This determining moment demands a unified and forward-thinking approach to restore stability, foster reconciliation, and lay the foundation for a democratic transition of power.

The Assad regime's downfall was the culmination of years of internal and external pressures. A combination of international sanctions, widespread protests, and military defeats significantly weakened the regime's grip on power. Corruption, economic mismanagement, and human rights abuses eroded public trust, while alliances with foreign powers like Iran and Russia proved increasingly costly. The tipping point came when key military and political figures defected, leaving the regime isolated and vulnerable.

With Assad's departure, Syria stands at a crossroads. The immediate priority is addressing the humanitarian crisis. Over 13 million Syrians have been displaced, both internally and externally, and the country faces widespread poverty, destroyed infrastructure, and a fractured healthcare system. Providing food, shelter, and medical aid to those in need must be a top priority, with support from the international community.

Political reconciliation is equally crucial. The years of war have deepened sectarian and ethnic divisions, with distrust running high among various factions. An inclusive national transitional dialogue is essential to bridge these divides and establish a representative government. Transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth commissions and accountability for war crimes, can help heal wounds while ensuring that the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

Economic recovery is another pressing challenge. Rebuilding Syria will require substantial investment in infrastructure, education, and job creation. International donors and organizations must play a role, but so too must the Syrian diaspora, whose expertise and resources can help drive recovery. Transparent governance and anti-corruption measures will be critical to ensure that aid reaches those who need it most.

Ultimately, Syria's future depends on the resilience and determination of its people. The fall of the Assad regime is an opportunity to turn the page on a dark chapter in the nation's history. By prioritizing unity, justice, and development, Syria can begin the difficult but necessary journey toward peace and prosperity.



Al-Hajeri

KD 2 million grand prize winner to be revealed on February 13, 2025

Gulf Bank announces 10 winners of Al-Danah monthly draw

KUWAIT CITY, Nov 8: As part of its commitment to rewarding customers, Gulf Bank announced the 10 winners of the November monthly draw, each receiving a prize of KD 1,000. The winners are:

- Entisar Mansour Ibrahim Al-sayegh
- Anwer Hussain Abd Alrasoul Al-bather
- Anwer Abdulmehsen Fahad Alkhamees
- Hanaa Abdullateef Mohammad Shaheen Alghanim
- Mona Abdulmohsen Badi Alshameri
- Nashmia Faraj Alabdullah
- Amna Hussain Qolom Dashti
- Khaled Khalifah Zarei
- Ghaliah Farhan Naser Saleh Alshammari – Minor
- Mohamed Abdelhamid Meghawry Saleh

This draw follows a special event held on October 17, 2024, where 100 winners were selected, each receiving KD 1,000. This was the first time the bank organized such a draw, following its decision to distribute the quarterly



A part of the draw under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

prize fund of KD 100,000 among 100 winners, rather than awarding the en-

tire amount to a single winner.

In addition, the bank increased the value of its annual grand prize from KD 1.5 million to KD 2 million, which has since been recognized by the Guinness World Records as the largest cash prize tied to a bank account globally. The grand prize winner will be announced on February 13, 2025.

There have been updates to the Al-Danah Millionaire Account, which has been active since 1998 and is now in its 26th year. The account now features two major annual draws: a grand prize of KD 2 million and a semi-annual prize of KD 1 million. Additionally, there are monthly draws awarding KD 1,000 to 10 winners, and a quarterly draw offering a prize of KD 100,000.

The Al-Danah account is one of the top savings accounts in Kuwait, offering regular draws with valuable prizes and numerous benefits for account holders. In addition to the monthly, quarterly, and semi-annual draws, the account offers the unique benefit of carrying over chances to win from one year to the next, giving loyal custom-

ers more opportunities to win.

To increase their chances of winning, customers must maintain a minimum deposit of KD 200 in the account or increase their balance to improve their odds of winning in the monthly, quarterly, and annual draws.

Gulf Bank aims to be Kuwait's leading bank, fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace to deliver exceptional customer service while contributing sustainably to the community. Through its extensive branch network and innovative digital services, the bank empowers customers to conduct banking transactions conveniently and efficiently, ensuring a seamless experience.

In alignment with Kuwait Vision 2035, "New Kuwait," and its commitment to fostering collaborative partnerships, Gulf Bank is dedicated to driving robust sustainability initiatives across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions. The bank is committed to implementing strategically selected and diverse sustainability programs both internally and externally.

Incoming aides meeting with future foreign counterparts

Trump isn’t back in office but already pushes agenda, negotiates with leaders

NEW YORK, Dec 8, (AP): He’s making threats, traveling abroad and negotiating with world leaders.

Donald Trump has more than a month and a half to go before he’s sworn in for a second term. But the Republican president-elect is already moving aggressively not just to fill his Cabinet and outline policy goals, but to achieve them.

Trump has threatened to impose a 25% tariff on goods from Canada and Mexico, prompting emergency calls and a visit from Canada’s prime minister that resulted in what Trump claimed were commitments from both US allies on new border security measures.

The incoming president has warned there will be “All hell to pay” if Hamas does not release the hostages being held in Gaza before his inauguration on Jan 20, 2025.

And this weekend, Trump returned to the global stage, joining a host of other foreign leaders for the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral five years after it was ravaged by a fire. There, he was welcomed like a sitting dignitary, with a prime seat next to French President Emmanuel Macron.

Absent in Paris: lame duck President Joe Biden, who has largely disappeared from headlines, except when he issued a pardon of his son, Hunter, who was facing sentencing for gun crimes and tax evasion. First lady Jill Biden attended in his place.

“I think you have seen more happen in the last two weeks than you’ve seen in the last four years. And we’re not even there yet,” Trump said in an over-the-top boast at an awards ceremony Thursday night.

For all of Trump’s bold talk, though, it is unclear how many of his efforts will bear fruit.

The pre-inauguration threats and deal-making are highly unusual, like so much of what Trump does, said Julian Zelizer, a political historian at Princeton University.

“Transitions are always a little complicated in this way. Even though we talk about one president at a time,” he said, “the reality is one president plus. And that plus can act assertively sometimes.”

Zelizer said that is particularly true of Trump, who was president previ-



French President Emmanuel Macron, (center), poses with President-elect Donald Trump, (left), and Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the Elysee Palace, on Dec 7 in Paris. (AP)

ously and already has relationships with many foreign leaders such as Macron, who invited both Trump and Biden to Paris this weekend as part of the Notre Dame celebration.

“Right now he’s sort of governing even though he’s not the president yet. He’s having these public meetings with foreign leaders, which aren’t simply introductions. He’s staking out policy and negotiating things from drug trafficking to tariffs,” Zelizer said.

Trump had already met with several foreign leaders before this weekend’s trip. He hosted Argentinian President Javier Milei in Florida at his Mar-a-Lago club in November. After the tariff threat, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made a pilgrimage to Mar-a-Lago for a three-hour dinner meeting. Canadian officials later said the country is ready to make new investments in border security, with plans for more helicopters, drones and law enforcement officers.

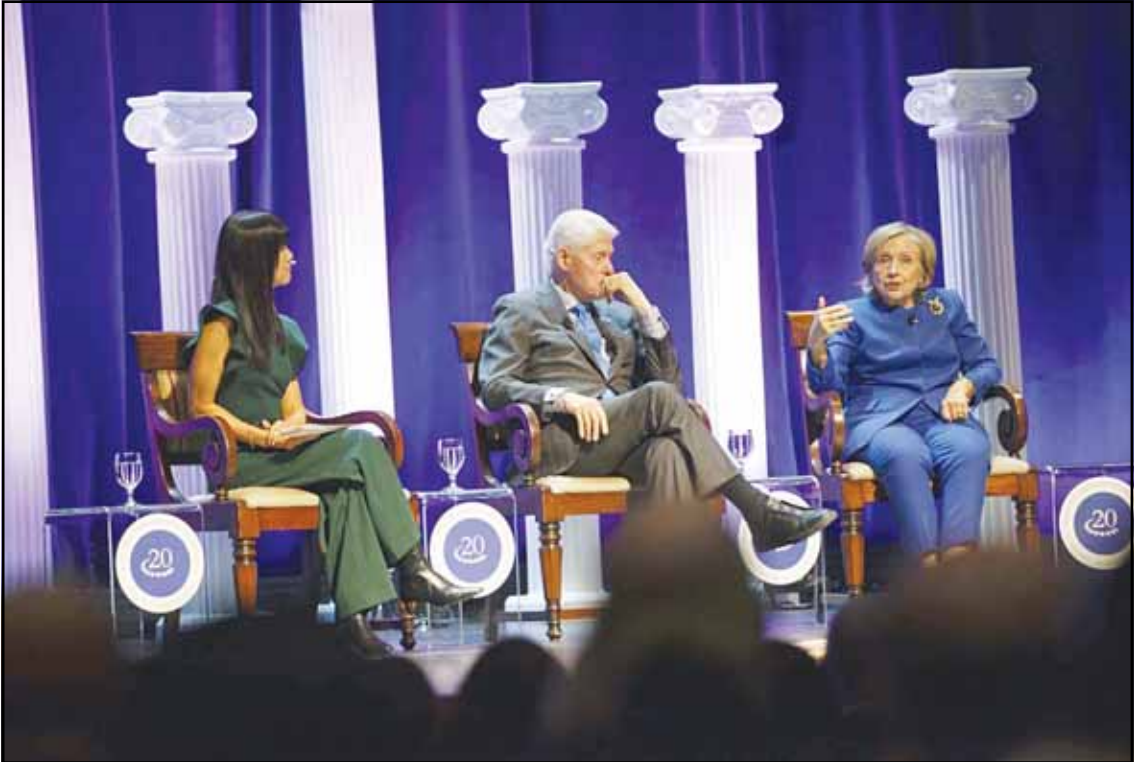
Incoming Trump aides have also been meeting with their future foreign counterparts.

On Wednesday, several members of Trump’s team, including incoming national security adviser Mike Waltz, met with Andriy Yermak, a top aide to Zelenskyy, in Washington, as Ukraine tries to win support for its ongoing efforts to defend itself from Russian invasion, according to a person familiar with the meeting. Yermak also met with Trump officials in Florida, he wrote on X.

That comes after Trump’s incoming Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, traveled to Qatar and Israel for high-level talks about a cease-fire and hostage deal in Gaza, according to a U.S. official familiar with the efforts, meeting with the prime ministers of both countries. The official was not authorized to publicly discuss the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity.

There is no prohibition on incoming officials or nominees meeting with foreign officials, and it is common and fine for them to do so - unless those meetings are designed to subvert or otherwise impact current U.S. policy.

Trump aides were said to be especially cognizant of potential conflicts given their experience in 2016, when interactions between Trump allies and Russian officials came under scrutiny. That included a phone call in which Trump’s incoming national security adviser, Michael Flynn, discussed new sanctions with Russia’s ambassador to the United States, suggesting things would improve after Trump became president. Flynn was later charged with lying to the FBI about the conversation.



Former US president Bill Clinton and former secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton respond to audience questions on Dec 7 at the Robinson Center auditorium in Little Rock, Ark. (AP)

Clintons urge voters agitated by today’s politics to remain involved in public service

LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas, Dec 8, (AP): Voters dejected by the presidential election results need to find a way to give back and remain involved, Bill and Hillary Rodham Clinton said Saturday as they celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Clinton presidential library.

The former president urged audience members in a packed theater to remain engaged and find ways to communicate with those they disagree with despite a divisive political time. The two spoke about a month after former President Donald Trump’s win over Vice President Kamala Harris in the presidential election.

“We’re just passing through, and we all need to just calm down and do something that builds people up instead of tears them down,” Bill Clinton said.

Hillary Clinton, the former secretary of state who was defeated by Trump in the 2016 election, said she understands the next couple of years are going to be challenging for voters who don’t agree with the decisions being made.

“In addition to staying involved and staying aware, it’s important to find something that makes you feel good about the day because if you’re in a constant state of agitation about our political situation, it is really going to shorten your life,” she said.

The Clintons spoke during a panel discussion with journalist Laura Ling, who the former president helped free in 2009 when she was detained in North Korea with another journalist. The event was held as part of a weekend of activities marking the 20th anniversary of the Clinton Presidential Library’s opening in Little Rock. The library is preparing to undergo an update of its exhibits and an expansion that will include Hillary Clinton’s personal archives.

Hillary Clinton said part of the goal is to modernize the facility and expand it to make it a more open, inviting place for people for convene and make connections.

When asked about advice he would give for people disappointed by the election results, Bill Clinton said people need to continue working toward bringing people together and improving others’ lives.

“If that’s the way you keep score, then you ought to be trying to run up the score,” he said. “Not lamenting the fact that somebody else is winning a different game because they keep score a different way.”

“And in addition, figure out what we can do to win again,” Hillary Clinton added, eliciting cheers.

The program featured a panel discussion with cast members of the hit NBC show “The West Wing” and former Clinton White House staffers.

The weekend amounted to a reunion of former Clinton White House staffers, supporters and close friends, including former Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe and adviser James Carville.

McAuliffe said he and Carville ate Friday at Doe’s Eat Place, a downtown restaurant that was popular with Clinton aides and reporters during Clinton’s 1992 White House run. He said he viewed the library and its planned expansion as important for the future.

Trump calls for ‘immediate ceasefire’ in Ukraine after meeting Zelenskyy in Paris

KYIV, Ukraine, Dec 8, (AP): US President-elect Donald Trump on Sunday called for an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine, shortly after a meeting in Paris with French and Ukrainian leaders, claiming Kyiv “would like to make a deal” to end the more than 1,000-day war.

In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump claimed that Moscow and Kyiv have both lost hundreds of thousands of soldiers in a war that “should never have started.”

“There should be an immediate ceasefire and negotiations should begin. Too many lives are being needlessly wasted, too many families destroyed,” he said, as he called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to act to bring the fighting to an end.

Trump’s remarks came after a meeting Saturday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his French counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, that Zelenskyy later described as “constructive”.

Speaking to reporters later that day, Zelenskyy insisted that any peace deal “should be just” for Ukrainians, “so that Russia and Putin or any other aggressors will not have the opportunity to return.”

In a separate social media update Sunday, Zelenskyy asserted that Kyiv has so far lost 43,000 soldiers since Moscow’s all-out invasion on Feb 24, 2022, while a further 370,000 have been wounded.

Both Russia and Ukraine have been reluctant to publish official casualty figures, but Western officials have said that the past few months of grinding positional warfare in eastern Ukraine have meant record losses for both sides, with tens of thousands killed and wounded each month.

Meanwhile, the United States will provide nearly \$1 billion more in longer-term weapons support to Ukraine, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Saturday as the Biden administration rushes to spend all the congressionally



US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin speaks during a meeting with Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan at the Pentagon on Dec 5 in Washington. (AP)

approved money it has left to bolster Kyiv before Trump takes office next month.

The latest package will include more drones and munitions for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, that the US has provided. While these weapons are critically needed now, they will be funded through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which pays for longer-term systems to be put on contract.

The weapon systems purchased are often intended to support Ukraine’s future military capabilities, not make an immediate difference on the battlefield.

The \$988 million package is on top of an additional \$725 million in US military assistance, including counter-drone systems and HIMARS munitions, announced Monday that would be drawn from the Pentagon’s stockpiles to more quickly get to the front lines. The US has provided Ukraine with more than \$62 billion in military aid since Russia’s invasion in February 2022.

“The baton will soon be passed,” Austin said. “Others will decide the course ahead. And I hope that they will build on the strength that we have forged over the past four years.”

Ukraine is facing an intensified onslaught by Russia, which is now using thousands of North Korean troops to augment its fight to take back the Kursk region. Moscow also has launched an intermediate-range ballistic missile and regularly strikes Kyiv’s civilian infrastructure.

With questions about whether Trump will maintain military support to Ukraine, the Biden administration has been trying to spend every dollar remaining from a massive foreign aid bill passed earlier this year to put Ukraine in the strongest position possible.



Demonstrators use laser flashlights towards the police during a rally to protest against the government’s decision to suspend negotiations on joining the European Union in Tbilisi, Georgia on Dec 7. (AP)

Germany, Poland condemn use of force against Georgia protesters

The foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland have strongly condemned “the disproportionate use of force” against peaceful protesters and the targeting of the opposition and media representatives in Georgia.

Mass protests in Georgia fueled by the governing party’s decision to suspend negotiations on joining the European Union entered a second week on Thursday, with police cracking down on demonstrators with increasing force.

In their joint statement, the three foreign ministers called for the immediate release of opposition members. They demanded that “fundamental rights, including freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, must be upheld and protected as per Georgia’s constitution and international commitments.”

The ruling Georgian Dream party retained control of parliament in a disputed Oct. 26 election, a vote widely seen as a referendum on Georgia’s EU aspirations. The opposition and the pro-Western president, Salome Zourabichvili, have accused the governing party of rigging the vote with neighboring Russia’s help and have boycotted parliament sessions.

Opposition protests gained new momentum after the Georgian Dream’s decision last Thursday to put the EU accession talks on hold.

Riot police have used water cannons and tear gas to disperse the rallies and beat scores of protesters, who threw fireworks at police officers and built barricades on the Georgian capital’s central boulevard. Hundreds have been detained and over 100 people have been treated for injuries since the start of the clashes. (AP)

Georgescu denounces Romania court ruling

BUCHAREST, Romania, Dec 8, (AP): Romania’s defiant far-right presidential candidate Calin Georgescu on Sunday stood outside a closed polling station to denounce a top court’s unprecedented decision to annul the first round of the vote in which he emerged as frontrunner.

The Constitutional Court on Friday canceled the election after a trove of declassified intelligence alleged Russia organized a sprawling campaign across social media to promote Georgescu.

“Today is Constitution Day and there is nothing constitutional in Romania anymore. I am here in the name of democracy,” Georgescu, 62, he told media in Mogosoaia, outside Bucharest. “By canceling democracy, our very freedom is canceled.”

The court cited the illegal use of digital technologies including artificial intelligence, as well as undeclared sources of funding. Without naming Georgescu, the court said one candidate received “preferential treatment” on social media platforms, distorting voters’ expressed will.



Calin Georgescu, (center), an independent candidate for president who won the first round of presidential elections, speaks to media outside a voting station demanding to be allowed to vote after Romania’s Constitutional Court annulled the first round of presidential elections, in Mogosoaia, Romania on Dec 8. (AP)

America

Ex-W.Virginia AG McGraw dies: Darrell V. McGraw Jr., a former longtime West Virginia attorney general and state Supreme Court justice who fought back against the state’s drug overdose crisis, died Saturday. He was 88.

Jared Hunt, a spokesman for the state Supreme Court, said in an email that McGraw died of a heart attack.

The West Virginia Democratic Party called McGraw “a tireless advocate for justice, fairness, and the people of our great state.”

“His legacy of service and commitment to our state will never be forgotten,” it said in a statement. “Darrell’s work made a lasting impact on our state, and his spirit of public service will continue to inspire generations to come.”

A Democrat, McGraw won a 12-year term on the Supreme Court

in 1976. He was elected attorney general in 1992 and re-elected four times before losing to Republican Patrick Morrisey in 2012. McGraw lost a bid to return to the Supreme Court in 2016.

“My prayers and sympathies go out to the family and friends of Darrell McGraw for their loss,” Morrisey said in a statement on the social platform X.

In 2001, McGraw accused Purdue Pharma in a lawsuit of dishonestly marketing the painkiller OxyContin in West Virginia. The company agreed to a \$10 million settlement in 2004. (AP)



McGraw

Alabama shooting kills 1: One man was killed and six juveniles were injured Friday night in a shooting in coastal Alabama.

The victims were attending a bonfire, Mobile police said, at an address that business and property records identify as a body shop and trucking company. The business is in an industrial part of Theodore, south of the Mobile city limits.

Witnesses told WKRG-TV that roughly 100 people were at the party. They said people drove away shooting guns from their vehicles.

One man, whom police haven’t identified, was killed. Two victims younger than 18 were taken to hospitals by ambulance, police said, while four other victims younger than 18 arrived at hospitals in personal vehicles. The seriousness of their injuries is unknown.

Police said they are still investigating what happened. (AP)

Prosecutors detain ex-defense chief over martial law imposition

South Korea’s opposition plans to vote again to impeach Yoon on Dec 14

SEOUL, South Korea, Dec 8, (Agencies): South Korea’s main opposition party said Sunday it will push for another vote on an impeachment motion against President Yoon Suk Yeol on Dec 14.

The remarks came a day after Yoon survived an impeachment motion in parliament as members of his ruling party boycotted the vote.

Meanwhile, South Korean prosecutors on Sunday detained a former defense minister who allegedly recommended last week’s brief but stunning martial law imposition to Yoon, making him the first figure detained over the case.

The development came a day after Yoon avoided an opposition-led bid to impeach him in parliament, with most ruling party lawmakers boycotting a floor vote to prevent the two-thirds majority needed to suspend his presidential powers. The main opposition Democratic Party said it will prepare a new impeachment motion against Yoon.

On Sunday, ex-Defense Minister Kim Yong Hyun was taken into custody at a Seoul detention facility after undergoing an investigation by prosecutors, a law enforcement official said, requesting anonymity in line with privacy rules.

The official gave no further details. But South Korean media reported that Kim voluntarily appeared at a Seoul prosecutors’ office, where he had his mobile phone confiscated and was detained. The reports said police searched Kim’s former office and residence on Sunday.

Repeated calls to Seoul prosecutors’ offices and police agency were unanswered.

Senior prosecutor Park Se-hyun said in a televised statement Sunday that authorities launched a 62-member special investigation team on the martial law case. Park, who will head the team, said the probe would “leave no suspicions.”

Yoon accepted Kim’s resignation offer on Thursday after opposition parties submitted a separate impeachment motion against him.

Kim is a central figure in Yoon’s martial law enforcement, which led to special forces troops encircling the National Assembly building and army helicopters hovering over it. The military withdrew after the parliament



Participants stage a rally demanding South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's impeachment outside the National Assembly in Seoul, South Korea on Dec 8. (AP)

unanimously voted to overturn Yoon’s decree, forcing his Cabinet to lift it before daybreak Wednesday.

In Kim’s impeachment motion document, the Democratic Party and other opposition parties accused him of proposing martial law to Yoon.

Vice Defense Minister Kim Seon Ho told parliament that Kim Yong Hyun ordered the deployment of troops to the National Assembly.

The Democratic Party called Yoon’s martial law imposition “unconstitu-

tional, illegal rebellion or a coup.” It has filed complaints with police against at least nine people, including Yoon and Kim, over the alleged rebellion.

In a statement Wednesday, Kim said that “all troops who performed duties related to martial law were acting on my instructions, and all responsibility lies with me.”

Prosecutor General Shim Woo Jung told reporters on Thursday the prosecution plans to investigate the rebellion charges against Yoon following complaints. While the president mostly has immunity from prosecution while in office, that does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason.

The Defense Ministry said it has suspended three top military commanders over their alleged involvement in the martial law imposition. They were among those facing the opposition-raised rebellion allegations.

On Saturday, Yoon issued an apology over the martial law decree, saying he won’t shirk legal or political responsibility for the declaration. He said he would leave it to his party to chart a course through the country’s political turmoil, “including matters related to my term in office.”

Since taking office in 2022 for a single five-year term, Yoon has struggled to push his agenda through an opposition-controlled parliament and grappled with low approval ratings amid scandals involving himself and his wife. In his martial law announcement on Tuesday night, Yoon called parliament a “den of criminals” bogging down state affairs and vowed to eliminate “shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces.”

The declaration of martial law was the first of its kind in more than 40 years in South Korea. The turmoil has sparked alarm among key diplomatic partners like the U.S. and Japan.

The scrapping of Yoon’s impeachment motion is expected to intensify protests calling for his ouster and deepen political chaos in South Korea, with a survey suggesting a majority of South Koreans support the president’s impeachment. Yoon’s martial law declaration drew criticism from the conservative ruling party, but it is determined to oppose Yoon’s impeachment apparently because it fears losing the presidency to liberals.

Beijing labels Lai separatist

Taiwan reports 14 Chinese warships, 4 balloons near island

TAIPEI, Taiwan, Dec 8, (AP): China sent 14 warships, seven military aircraft and four balloons near Taiwan between Saturday and Sunday, according to Taiwan’s Defense Ministry, as Beijing ramps up pressure on the island it claims as its own.

China’s military activities come amid speculation Beijing might organize military drills around the island in response to Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te’s recent visit to Pacific allies, including US stops in Hawaii and Guam.

China claims Taiwan, a self-ruled democracy of 23 million people, as its own territory, and bristles at other countries’ formal exchanges with Taiwan. The United States, like most countries, doesn’t recognize Taiwan as a country but is its main unofficial backer and sells it arms.

The Chinese government has pledged to annex Taiwan, through military force if necessary, and sends ships and military planes near the island almost daily.

The 14 warships, seven military planes and four balloons were reported over 24 hours between 6 am on Saturday and 6 am on Sunday, according to Taiwan’s Defense Ministry. The ministry said six of the aircraft crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait, an unofficial demarcation zone between Taiwan and China.

One of the balloons brushed over the island’s northern tip, according to the ministry.

Lai on Friday called on China to refrain from threats and said Beijing’s military exercises “will not be able to win the respect” of neighboring countries.

Lai’s first overseas trip since taking office in May included visits to the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Palau, three of the 12 countries that have diplomatic ties with Taiwan. The rest of the world, including the U.S., has official ties with China.

Lai’s stops in Hawaii and Guam - from where he had phone calls with US Congress leaders - angered China, which opposes US arms sales and military assistance to Taiwan.

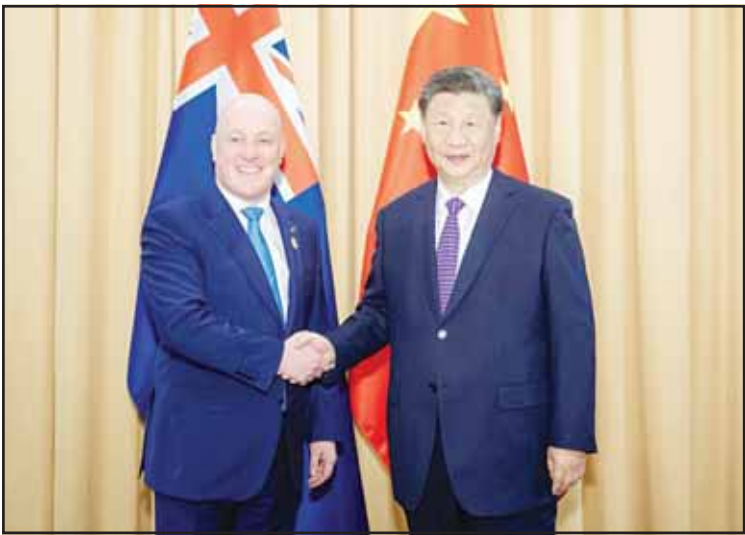
There was widespread speculation China might organize war games around Taiwan in response to the visit, though it was unclear when they might start.

In October, China held drills around Taiwan involving a record one-day total of 153 aircraft, 14 navy vessels and 12 Chinese government ships in response to a Lai speech in which he rejected Beijing’s claims over Taiwan.

Beijing has labeled Lai a separatist and refuses to speak to him.



Taiwanese people demonstrate their unwavering commitment to protect their homeland during a march in Taipei, Taiwan on Dec 8. The signs read reading ‘Stand rather than kneel, Sovereignty cannot be surrendered’ and ‘Stand up as Taiwan.’ (AP)



Chinese President Xi Jinping meets with New Zealand’s Prime Minister Christopher Luxon on the sidelines of the 31st APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting in Lima, Peru on Nov 15, 2024. (Xinhua)

‘Ties with China very important’

Former New Zealand prime ministers John Key and Chris Hipkins have said that a sound New Zealand-China relationship is very important to their country.

At the “Vision 2025” business event held by the China Chamber of Commerce in New Zealand on Friday, Key said China remains New Zealand’s largest trading partner and a major source of tourists, students, and investment. Relationship with China is crucial for New Zealand’s economic future, said the former prime minister.

Hipkins, who is also the current opposition leader, echoed Key’s statement on the importance of the bilateral relationship.

“I think New Zealanders increasingly do understand that the relationship between New Zealand and China is the cornerstone of New Zealand’s economic and social prosperity. It’s a relationship of mutual respect and shared economic benefits,” said Hipkins.

Chinese Ambassador to New Zealand Wang Xiaolong introduced China’s latest adjustment of its visa-free policy for New Zealand, and urged the two sides to strengthen communication and cooperation in various sectors. (Xinhua)



Supporters of Bangladesh's former prime minister Khaleda Zia and her Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) shout slogans outside the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, Bangladesh during an anti-India protest on Dec 8. (AP)

Supporters of BNP march in protest at attacks in India

DHAKA, Bangladesh, Dec 8, (AP): Thousands of members of three youth and student bodies belonging to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party marched toward the Indian High Commission in the country’s capital on Sunday to denounce attacks on a diplomatic mission and alleged desecration of Bangladeshi flags in India.

The protests came a day before India’s foreign secretary, Vikram Misri, is due to visit Dhaka amid growing tension between the two neighbors in recent months.

It will be the first high-profile diplomatic visit by an Indian official since the fall of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is in exile in India, in August.

Bangladesh, which is predominantly Muslim, has accused the majority Hindus in India of attacking the Assistant High Commissioner’s office at Agartala in the Indian state of Tripura and desecrating Bangladeshi flags in Kolkata in West Bengal state.

India said it regretted the attacks and pledged to take action against those responsible. Bangladesh’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs also summoned the Indian High Commissioner and protested formally.

On Sunday, thousands of supporters of the BNP, which is headed by former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, marched toward the Indian High Commission, but police stopped them by setting up barbed wire fences. They later allowed a team of six leaders of the three associate bodies of the party to hand in a letter to the High Commission.

The BNP last ruled Bangladesh in 2001-2006 in partnership with the Jamaat-e-Islami party. In the absence of Hasina, Zia’s party is the main force and it is expected to win the next election if it happens sometime soon.

Hasina, whose party is seen as more secular than the BNP, is highly regarded by India as a trusted friend. Most

Hindus in Bangladesh are considered to be supporters of Hasina’s Awami League party.

The BNP supporters chanted slogans such as “Delhi or Dhaka? Dhaka, Dhaka!” and “Agents of India, be careful, be careful!” They also carried banners reading “We have friends overseas, but not masters.”

The protesters said India has been trying to instigate communal riots in Bangladesh to achieve political mileage since the ouster of Hasina, who fled to India following a mass uprising that ended her 15-year rule. Hasina’s party is struggling to get back on the streets while Hasina herself is facing arrest warrants on charges of crimes against humanity involving the deaths of hundreds of protesters during the uprising in July and August.

Over the past few weeks, some smaller Islamist groups and the BNP have protested against India over the attacks in Tripura and urged the interim government, led by Nobel peace laureate Muhammad Yunus, to officially raise concerns.

The situation started becoming tense after authorities in Bangladesh last month arrested a prominent Bangladeshi Hindu leader and jailed him, pending further legal procedures.

India had earlier officially raised concern over allegations of attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh after the fall of Hasina. Yunus and his close aides said the reports were exaggerated.

Bangladesh has been navigating crucial challenges since August amid mob violence, rising commodity prices, street protests and an unstable economy. The presence of Islamist groups has been visible more than ever in recent months.

The police are demoralized because many of their colleagues were killed in the protests and law and order remains a major concern, with rights groups also calling for ensuring press freedom.

Burkina Faso ruling military junta appoints new premier

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso, Dec 8, (AP): Burkina Faso’s ruling military junta appointed a new prime minister, a day after dissolving the government without providing any reason.

Rimtalba Jean Emmanuel Ouedraogo, until now communications minister and spokesperson of the government, will be the West African country’s new prime minister, junta leader Ibrahim Traore said in a presidential decree read on state television Saturday.

Traore had issued a decree Friday dismissing Prime Minister Apollinaire Joachim Kyelem de Tambela and announcing the dissolution of the national government. No reason was given for the move.

The junta in Burkina Faso seized power in September 2022 by ousting the military rule of Lt. Col. Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba about eight months after it staged a coup to remove democratically elected President Roch Marc Kaboré.

The country is one of several West African nations where the military has recently taken over, capitalizing on popular discontent with previous democratically elected governments over security issues.

However, since its inception, the junta has struggled to end Burkina Faso’s security challenges - the very reason that it claimed had prompted it to take power.

Growing attacks by extremists linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group have devastated Burkina Faso, where thousands have been killed in recent years and more than 2 million people have been displaced, half of them children.

Around half of Burkina Faso’s territory remains outside of government control, analysts say.

The country’s transitional government has been running under a constitution approved by a national assembly that included army officers, civil society groups and traditional and religious leaders.

Under pressure from West Africa’s regional bloc, ECOWAS, the junta had set a goal to conduct an election in July 2024 to return the country to democratic rule. However, in May it extended its transition term for five more years, the duration of one presidential term.

Alongside the coup-hit nations of Niger and Mali, Burkina Faso has severed ties with longstanding Western and regional partners, including former colonial ruler France and ECOWAS, which they all quit early this year.



Ouedraogo



Election officials count the ballots after polls closed in the general elections in Accra, Ghana on Dec 7. (AP)

Ghana VP concedes defeat in poll

ACCRA, Ghana, Dec 8, (AP): Ghana’s vice president and ruling party candidate, Mahamudu Bawumia, conceded defeat Sunday to opposition candidate and former President John Dramani Mahama in the West African nation’s tightly contested presidential election.

Ahead of the official announcement, Bawumia told reporters that he respects the decision of Ghanaians to vote for change. “I’ve just called His Excellency John Mahama to congratulate him as president-elect of the Republic of Ghana,” he said.

Celebrations broke out in parts of the country including the capital, Accra. The election was held against the backdrop of the country’s worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation and seen as a litmus test for democracy in a region shaken by extremist violence and coups.

Bawumia was running as the flag-bearer of the ruling New Patriotic Party, or NPP, which has struggled to resolve the economic crisis under outgoing President Nana Akufo-Addo.

Mahama’s win is viewed following the latest trend of elections around the world, favoring opposition parties against incumbents, from the United States to European countries - such as Britain and France - as well as South Africa.

Fourteen people injured

Explosives-laden motorcycle detonates in Colombia killing 1



A forensic investigator inspects the remains of a man who died when a motorcycle loaded with explosives detonated at a police checkpoint in Las Peñas community of Jamundi, Colombia on Dec 7. (AP)

BOGOTA, Colombia, Dec 8, (AP): A motorcycle loaded with explosives detonated at a police checkpoint in southwestern Colombia on Saturday, killing the driver and injuring 14 others, authorities said.

Officers had been conducting inspections in the community of Las Penas in the Jamundi municipality to prevent possible violence by illegal armed groups, commander of the Cali Metropolitan Police Col. Carlos Oviedo told journalists.

The driver “became scared” and detonated the explosives after being called to the checkpoint, Oviedo said, killing himself and injuring seven civilians and seven police officers. One of the officers has a “reserved prognosis,” he added.

Criminal groups consider Jamundi strategic because of its plantations of coca leaf, which is transformed into cocaine, and because it is connected to the port of Buenaventura.

The organized crime group Jaime Martinez is active in the area. It is composed of dissidents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known by its Spanish acronym FARC, that did not accept the 2016 peace deal with the state.

Attacks with explosives against military and police officers, which authorities attribute to illegal armed groups, have continued despite efforts by Colombian President Gustavo Petro to negotiate peace deals with the irregular armies under a strategy known as total peace. The Ombudsman’s office expressed concern over growing violence in Jamundi and urged authorities to guarantee the protection and security of citizens.

	Change	Closing pts		Change	Closing pts
SAUDI-TASI	+0.20	11,955.24			
EGYPT-EGX	+0.72	31,060.51			

Company continues to maintain a good debt maturity profile

‘BBB’ issue rating affirmed with a Stable Outlook for Markaz’s Senior Unsecured Bond due 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Kuwait Financial Centre “Markaz” announced that Capital Intelligence Ratings (CI Ratings or CI) has affirmed the ‘BBB’ issue rating assigned to Markaz’s KWD35mn Senior Unsecured Bond due 2025. The Outlook on the rating remains Stable.

The issue rating is driven by Markaz’s resilient financial metrics in terms of both liquidity and debt profile with the latter improving in 2023 through a significant reduction of bank borrowings. Other supporting factors are the good debt maturity profile, the high level of unencumbered assets and the maintenance of substantial unutilised – but committed – funding lines. The rating also reflects the issuer’s well-established franchise and good reputation in the

region, especially in Kuwait. The experienced management team has demonstrated its ability to effectively navigate the Company through many challenging operating environments and market cycles. As the bond does not contain any structural credit enhancements or result in a degree of effective subordination, the issue rating is in line with our assessment of the issuer’s general capacity to meet its senior unsecured obligations.

Notwithstanding its relatively small size, Markaz has a strong reputation as a fund manager in Kuwait. Its portfolio of AUM continued to grow in 2023 and accelerated in H1 24 with the recovery of the financial markets. It has retained its sound market share and its position among the topfund managers domestically.



While financial markets were subdued in 2023, real estate market conditions were generally more favourable especially in the GCC. Consequently, the Company exited and disposed of a number of investment properties. Together with a large drop in cash balances and deposits with banks, its asset base contracted sharply in 2023. There were also some shifts between asset classes as a number of financial investments were reclassified to investment in associates. Nonetheless, the asset composition in 2023 was stable with the portfolio of financial assets at

Issue Rating – KWD35mn Senior Unsecured Bond	
Long-Term	Outlook
BBB	Stable

FVTPL forming close to half of total assets. This portfolio is fairly liquid as reflected by the high proportion of Level 1 and 2 fair value investments.

Liquidity and Short-Term Debt Repayment Capacity

Notwithstanding the negative operating cash flow, the Company’s liquidity position is considered good and remains supported by its large portfolio of fairly liquid financial assets at FVTPL. It also continues to maintain a substantial amount of unutilised but committed lines and its assets remain

largely encumbered. The Company continued to maintain a good debt maturity profile. Its short-term debt obligations were more than covered by cash balances and deposits with banks in both 2023 and H1 24.

As for earnings, due to its business model and given the large portfolio of financial assets at FVTPL, Markaz’s earnings will remain volatile in line with the movements of the financial markets. While fee and asset management income declined in 2023, net profit nearly doubled on the back

of the large gain from the disposal of investment properties. Going forward, the Company is expecting a solid net profit for this year given the still bullish financial markets, as well as some smaller sales of investment properties. Profitability metrics have remained erratic in line with the trend of the industry, and better than those of its immediate and largest peer in Kuwait.

Rating Outlook

The Stable Outlook indicates that the issue rating is likely to remain unchanged over the next 12 months. The outlook balances challenges relating to the effect of financial markets volatility against the Company’s generally sound financial standing, solid liquidity, and well-established franchise and market reputation.

Real estate financing in Kuwait sees strong momentum in 2024

Accumulated balance of realty financing fell slightly by 0.3%



Officials pose for photo during the visit.

Bid to witness their HSE performance

ASSP Kuwait Chapter visits Equate Petrochemical Company

By Mahmoud Shendi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Real estate financing from Kuwaiti banks has seen significant growth since the beginning of 2024, fueled by investor activity in the local real estate market.

The first ten months of 2024 saw real estate financing reach approximately 6.3 billion dinars, marking a substantial uptick amid sustained market demand.

According to recent data from the Central Bank of Kuwait for October 2024, the local banks’ real estate financing decreased by 56 million dinars (5.3 percent) in October compared to the previous month, totaling 6.984 billion dinars.

On an annual basis, financing for the real estate sector increased by 473.5 million dinars (92.7 percent), up from 510 million dinars in October 2023.

The accumulated balance of real estate financing fell slightly by 0.3 percent, or 38 million dinars, from 10.165 billion dinars in September to 10.127 billion dinars in October 2024.

However, this still represents a 3 percent increase annually, up from 9.831 billion dinars in

October 2023.

The real estate sector liquidity in October totaled 347.3 million dinars, up by 7.4 percent compared to 323.4 million dinars during October 2023. This marks an increase of 23.9 million dinars.

Private housing trading totaled 165.59 million dinars, a 10.3 percent increase from 150 million dinars in October 2023.

Average transaction value in the residential sector fell slightly to 426.8 thousand dinars, a 1.8 percent decrease from 434.8 thousand dinars, although the number of transactions increased from 345 to 388.

The investment sector’s trading increased by 20.4 percent, reaching 90.8 million dinars, up from 75.4 million dinars.

Conversely, the commercial sector’s trading saw a decline, falling from 83.6 million dinars in October 2023 to 69.1 million dinars, a 17.3 percent reduction.

Additionally, two craftsman properties were traded at 2.53 million dinars, marking a 75.9 percent decrease compared to the previous year, when these properties totaled 10.5 million dinars.

Loans to residents and non-residents increased by 2.81 billion dinars, bringing the total cumulative balance of credit facilities to 56.37 billion dinars by the end of October, represent-

ing a 5.2 percent increase over December 2023 levels (53.55 billion dinars).

Loans to residents amounted to 49.06 billion dinars, a 2.9 percent increase compared to 47.67 billion dinars in December 2023.

Loans to non-residents totaled 7.31 billion dinars, a 24.3 percent increase compared to 5.88 billion dinars at the end of December 2023.

Housing loans for purchasing, building, or renovating private homes increased by 427 million dinars, or 2.66 percent, to reach 16.44 billion dinars.

Consumer loans rose by 95 million dinars, reflecting a 4.8 percent increase, reaching a cumulative balance of 2.06 billion dinars by October.

The total balance of personal facilities stood at 19.22 billion dinars by the end of October, reflecting an increase of 457 million dinars, or 2.4 percent, from 18.76 billion dinars at the end of December 2023.

The uptick in real estate financing and credit facilities highlights a recovery in investor sentiment and the continued demand for housing and development in Kuwait.

A combination of long-term investment opportunities, favorable economic policies and increased access to financing has spurred this real estate and credit growth momentum, signaling optimism for the market’s future.

US manufacturing PMI at 48.4 in Nov, up from 46.5 in Oct

Resilient job growth, PMI recovery and mixed global economic trends

By National Bank of Kuwait

United States manufacturing PMI
The U.S. manufacturing PMI rose to 48.4 in November, up from 46.5 in October, marking a five-month high but still indicating contraction. Notably, new orders exceeded 50 for the first time in eight months, signaling a potential rebound in demand. However, the sector remains under pressure from weak backlogs and ongoing supply chain issues, despite lower input costs. Optimism has grown with hopes for business-friendly policies, yet fundamental challenges persist. Construction spending also increased by 0.4% in October, providing a modest boost to broader economic activity.

Job Openings

Job openings in the U.S. increased by 372,000 to 7.74 million in October, while layoffs dropped sharply by 169,000, reflecting ongoing resilience in the labor market. However, hiring slowed by 269,000 to 5.313 million, signaling caution among employers. With the ratio of job openings to unemployed rising to 1.11, worker confidence remains strong. While wage growth continues to fuel consumer spending, the Federal Reserve may weigh these dynamics as it considers further rate adjustments.

ISM Services PMI

The ISM Services PMI for the US fell to 52.1 in November 2024, down from 56 in October and below the forecast of 55.7, marking the slowest growth in three months. The decline was driven by slower growth in business activity (53.7), new orders (53.7), employment (51.5), and supplier deliveries (49.5). Inventories (45.9) and backlogs (47.1) also decreased, while price pressures edged up slightly (58.2). ISM Chair Steve Miller noted that comments were mixed, with seasonal factors, election outcomes, and tariffs influencing cautious industry outlooks.

Non-Farm Employment Change

The total nonfarm payroll employment in the U.S. increased by 227,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, while the unemployment rate ticked up to 4.2%. Job growth was driven by gains in health care (+54,000), leisure and hospitality (+53,000), and government employment (+33,000). Social as-

sistance and transportation manufacturing also saw notable increases, with the latter reflecting workers returning from strikes. Meanwhile, the retail sector shed 28,000 jobs, particularly in general merchandise stores. Average hourly earnings rose by 0.4% to \$35.61, highlighting continued wage growth. These figures underscore a resilient labor market amid ongoing economic uncertainties.

The US Dollar index closed the week at 106.055.

Europe

Switzerland Inflation

Switzerland’s Consumer Price Index (CPI) fell by 0.1% from the previous month to 106.9 points, while annual inflation remained modest at +0.7%, according to the Federal Statistical Office. The decline was driven by lower prices for hotels, international package holidays, and new cars, along with seasonal drops in certain food categories like vegetables. However, these decreases were partially offset by rising costs in housing rentals and air transport. Core inflation, excluding volatile items, held steady, reflecting underlying price stability. With imported product prices falling -2.3% year-on-year.

The USD/CHF currency pair closed the week at 0.8784.

United Kingdom Construction PMI

The latest S&P Global UK Construction PMI for November 2024 reported a robust rise in overall construction activity, with the headline index climbing to 55.2, the highest in five months. Growth was driven by a surge in commercial construction, which experienced its strongest expansion in over two years, and solid performance in civil engineering. However, housebuilding continued to struggle, declining at its sharpest pace

since June, as rising costs and weakened demand weighed on the sector. Business confidence dropped to its lowest since October 2023, with concerns about economic uncertainty and input cost pressures. Despite these challenges, commercial demand and infrastructure projects remain key drivers of growth.

The GBP/USD currency pair closed the week at 1.2742.

Asia-Pacific Australia Retail Sales

Australia’s retail sales rose 0.6% month-on-month in November to AUD 36.7 billion, beating the forecasted 0.4% increase. Year-on-year growth reached 3.4%, with strong performance in non-food categories like electronics, which offset declines in clothing and department stores. Food-related sectors also showed steady growth, with cafes, and restaurants leading gains. The results reflect solid consumer demand, setting a positive tone ahead of the holiday season.

Australia Gross Domestic Product Australia’s

GDP grew by 0.3% in the September quarter, below the expected 0.5%, as weak economic momentum persisted despite higher government spending. Annual growth slowed to 0.8%, the weakest since 2020, while per capita GDP declined for the seventh consecutive quarter. The Reserve Bank of Australia may revise its 1.5% annual growth forecast as the slowdown raises the likelihood of early rate cuts. With inflation still a concern, the central bank faces pressure to support growth and household spending.

The AUD/USD currency pair closed the week at 0.6389.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30725.

	Previous Week Levels				This Week’s Expected Range		3-Month
Currencies	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	Forward
EUR	1.0575	1.0459	1.0629	1.0568	1.0415	1.0675	1.0591
GBP	1.2742	1.2614	1.2811	1.2742	1.2620	1.2860	1.2737
JPY	149.73	148.63	151.22	150.03	148.60	151.20	148.38
CHF	0.8807	0.8734	0.8889	0.8784	0.8690	0.8900	0.8698

Report highlights mounting concerns about oil price volatility

Kuwait faces economic challenges as oil revenues drive 2025/’26 budget charting

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Kuwait is preparing to draft its general budget for the upcoming fiscal year 2025/2026, with oil revenues as the primary source of funding, according to Al-Shall Economic Weekly Report.

However, the Al-Jarida daily said, the report highlighted mounting concerns about oil price volatility and global economic pressures that could challenge the nation’s financial stability.

The report noted that reviewing oil price trends from the past fiscal year 2024/2025 is crucial. Al-Shall indicated that oil prices are likely to continue their downward trend, compounded by the diminished prospects of increased oil production in the near future.

During the first quarter of April to June 2024, the average price of a barrel of Kuwaiti oil stood at \$86.8, bolstered by OPEC+ production cuts and geopolitical instability in regions like the Red Sea.

Nonetheless, by the second quarter (July to September 2024), this number dropped to \$79.9, marking a 7.9% decline from the first quarter. This decline was largely influenced by OPEC+ decision to postpone plans to restore 1.8 million barrels per day of lost production from October 2024 to January 2025, reflecting the oil market’s weakness.

In the months of October and November 2024, oil prices saw further declines, averaging \$74.3 per barrel. This represented a 7.0% decrease from the second quarter average and a 14.3% drop from the first quarter.

The Al-Shall report attributed these trends to several factors, including the global trade war risks and shifting monetary policies.

The report also pointed to the possibility that the world’s largest economies may enter a trade war, exacerbated by the new U.S. administration beginning its term on January 20, 2025. This trade war, if it materializes, would hinder global economic growth. Additionally, the report noted that high inflation rates could return, leading to tighter monetary policies globally.

Al-Shall warned that these two risks would dampen the performance of global financial markets, where Kuwait’s sovereign reserves are invested. A combination of economic uncertainty and falling oil revenues could lead to significant financial strain for Kuwait’s budget and public finance system.

The report highlighted that Kuwait faces structural challenges in its finances. With 90% of public expenditures being current expenses, primarily salaries and wages, there is little flexibility to adjust spending. The report suggested that a

detailed investigation into wasteful spending is necessary to address the rising fiscal deficit.

The report emphasized that unless Kuwait adopts a clear vision with defined objectives and timelines to diversify income sources and improve public expenditure efficiency, the nation’s economic sustainability could be at serious risk. Short-term solutions, such as cutting expenditures slightly, could only provide temporary relief but will not resolve the deeper structural issues.

The challenges Kuwait faces are multifaceted, driven by volatile oil markets, global economic uncertainty, and structural financial weaknesses.

The report made it clear that long-term strategies must be implemented to ensure economic resilience. Without decisive reforms to diversify income and improve fiscal policies, the budget deficit is expected to grow significantly.

Kuwait now stands at a pivotal moment, with its economic policies and future direction dependent on its ability to adapt to these evolving pressures. Al-Shall’s conclusion serves as a call to action for government administrators: prioritize clear planning, strategic diversification, and fiscal reform to mitigate the mounting risks and secure economic stability for the future.

Boursa closes lower across all indices

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait ended Sunday’s trading session in negative territory, with all indices registering declines. The general index fell 13.54 points, or 0.19 percent, to close at 7,275.70 points. Trading volume was robust, with 347.18 million shares changing hands through 15,192 cash transactions, valued at KD 52.3 million (USD 160 million).

The main market index dropped 5.73 points, or 0.09 percent, settling at 6,652.80 points. It saw 256.3 million shares traded through 10,222 cash transactions, worth

KD 25.3 million (USD 77.16 million). Similarly, the premier market index declined 16.27 points, or 0.21 percent, to 7,792.10 points, with 90.8 million shares traded through 4,970 transactions, valued at KD 26.9 million (USD 82 million).

The Main 50 index also retreated, falling 10.31 points, or 0.16 percent, to reach 6,570.95 points. This index saw 139.6 million shares traded through 5,434 cash transactions, with a total value of KD 14 million (approximately USD 42.7 million).

In collaboration with Kuwait Society for the Handicapped

KFH concludes 4th edition of training program for individuals with special needs

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has concluded the fourth edition of its training program for students with special needs, in collaboration with the Kuwait Society for the Handicapped (KSH).

Held at KSH's headquarters, the graduation ceremony was attended by Acting Group Chief Executive Officer,Abdulwahab AlRushood,and KFH Group Chief Human Resources and Transformation Officer, Zeyad Abdullah AlOmar, KSH Chairperson, Sabeeka Al-Jasser, and other officials from both sides.

KFH Group Chief Human Resources and Transformation Officer, Zeyad Abdullah AlOmar said: "It is with great pleasure that we celebrate the graduation of another group of students from KFH's training program, conducted in collaboration with KSH for the fourth consecutive year. This aligns with KFH's Corporate Social Responsibility and its commitment to support and empower individuals with special needs."

He added:"This year, we were honored to train and supervise an exceptional group of trainees with special needs. Their dedication was evident in various departments, including branches, cards, products, and others, as they successfully completed one hundred hours of work under this program."

AlOmar highlighted that this first-of-its-kind initiative in Kuwait's



Abdulwahab AlRushood, Zeyad Abdullah AlOmar, Sabeeka Al-Jasser and a number of officials with the graduating students.

banking sector contributes to supporting and empowering students with special needs to engage with society, learn new skills, and gain experience through direct interaction with employees and customers.It also enriches their knowledge through hands-on experience, essential for achieving their goals and contributing to society, especially given their training at a globally leading Islamic financial institution.

He explained that KFH is committed to supporting individuals with special needs at all levels, including employment and training. He emphasized that KFH places significant importance on the quality of services offered to its customers with special needsinclud-

ing sign language-trained staff at our branches, designated parking spaces, wheelchairs, accessible entrances, ATMs equipped with accessibility features such as audio assistance, and Braille-printed account opening forms and contracts.

"As part of its commitment to sustainability, inclusion, and diversity, KFH has successfully integrated employees with special needs into its workforce at the Group level. In 2023,

KFH established a dedicated workspace equipped with all necessary facilities to ensure the comfort, safety, and accessibility of 234 employees with special needs across the Group," AlOmar said.

He thanked the Kuwait Society for the Handicapped for their collaboration and expressed his appreciation to all involved in preparing and implementing this program, wishing all participants continued success.

KSH Chairperson

The Chairperson of the Kuwait Society for The Handicapped, Sabeeka Al-Jasser, praised KFH for its unwavering efforts and continuous support for KSH's members.

Al-Jasser expressed satisfaction with the training program progress in integrating individuals with special needs into the workplace, reflecting a shared commitment to empowering this valued group. This success is due to divine support and fruitful collaboration with KFH, which focuses on skill development and capacity building.

Al-Jasser added that a key feature of this development is the diverse training courses offered by KFH, which include both professional, practical, and creative skills. A notable artistic course was organized to highlight students' talents and boost their self-confidence.

Additionally, a first aid course in collaboration with Al-Salam Hospital provided trainees with essential life skills, promoting responsibility towards themselves and their community.

Al-Jasser highlighted that the initiatives not only prepare this generation for promising careers but also foster their societal integration, enabling them to become active, influential membersofsociety, noting that continued success is assured through the support of dedicated partners and the efforts of everyone involved.



A for sale sign stands outside a residence in Chicago, Ill., Monday, Nov. 25, 2024. (AP)

Average rate on a 30-year mortgage in US falls to 6.69%

NEW YORK, Dec 8, (AP): The average rate on a 30-year mortgage in the U.S. eased again this week, slipping to its lowest level since late October.

The rate dropped to 6.69% from 6.81% last week, mortgage buyer Freddie Mac said Thursday. A year ago, the rate averaged 7.03%.

Borrowing costs on 15-year fixed-rate mortgages, popular with homeowners seeking to refinance their home loan to a lower rate, also eased this week. The average rate fell to 5.96% from 6.1% last week. A year ago, it averaged 6.29%, Freddie Mac said.

Mortgage rates are influenced by several factors, including the moves in the yield on U.S. 10-year Treasury bonds, which lenders use as a guide to price home loans.

The average rate on a 30-year mortgage is now at its lowest level since October 24, when it was at 6.54%.

Mortgage rates have been mostly rising in recent weeks since sliding to a two-year low of 6.08% in late September after the Federal Reserve cut its benchmark interest rate from a two-decade high for the first time in more than four years. While the central bank doesn't set mortgage rates, its actions and the trajectory of inflation influence the moves in the 10-year Treasury yield.

Many expect that the Fed will cut its main interest rate again when it meets in two weeks.

Elevated mortgage rates and rising home prices have kept home-

ownership out of reach of many would-be homebuyers. U.S. home sales are on track for their worst year since 1995.

Despite an overall uptick in mortgage rates since September, applications for a home loan have been rising. Mortgage applications rose 2.8% last week from the previous week, adjusting for the Thanksgiving holiday, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association.

And the MBA's seasonally adjusted index of purchase loan applications rose for the fourth week in a row last week, reaching its highest level since January.

"The recent strength in purchase activity continues, supported by lower rates and higher inventory levels, which are giving prospective buyers more options compared to earlier in the year," said Joel Kan, MBA's deputy chief economist.

Still, with home prices near all-time highs and still rising nationally, albeit more slowly, many would-be homebuyers are likely holding out for mortgage rates to ease further in coming months.

But there may not be much relief, given that many housing economists predict the average rate on a 30-year mortgage will generally hover around 6.5% next year.

"With home prices expected to rise and rates projected to remain in the 6s through 2025, many of those buyers will still be priced out," said Lisa Sturtevant, chief economist at Bright MLS.

Kuwait strengthens infrastructure quality with Emirates collaboration

Two sides sign MoU

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: In a significant move aimed at enhancing the quality of infrastructure projects in Kuwait, the Ministry of Public Works is strengthening its collaboration with the Fujairah Natural Resources Corporation (FNRC) of the UAE, reports Al-Anba daily.

The memorandum of understanding (MoU), signed between the two parties last August, is now entering the implementation phase, paving the way for improved technical standards in the import of construction materials such as gravel (salbookh) and supporting major development projects.

Sources revealed to the daily that the MoU outlines clear plans to elevate the standards of mining and the import of raw materials, ensuring high-quality outcomes for Kuwait's developmental projects, particularly in road construction and in-

frastructure.

FNRC will conduct stringent inspections of shipments destined for Kuwait, ensuring they meet precise technical specifications. Additionally, periodic geological analyses will be performed on exported rock materials.

The collaboration marks a turning point, with mining facilities in Fujairah required to adhere to rigorous standards, particularly in producing asphalt and concrete, aligning with global benchmarks.

The MoU prioritizes mining facilities owned by Kuwaiti investors within Fujairah, fostering investment opportunities and reducing raw material import costs.

Furthermore, a coordinated pricing mechanism for salbookh based on specific density criteria has been established for the next four years, ensuring cost stability and greater project efficiency.

In addition to technical objectives, the agreement emphasizes capacity building by facilitating joint training programs. Kuwaiti engineers and

technicians will participate in field visits and skill exchange initiatives in both countries.

The MoU, valid for four years with renewal options, includes precise provisions such as independent third-party inspections to verify salbookh quality and limits on density variation to no more than 1%. Geological compositions will also be re-evaluated every six months to ensure consistent product quality.

A Ministry of Public Works official stated that this partnership aligns with Kuwait's strategy to enhance infrastructure quality. "The collaboration with FNRC will ensure the provision of high-quality raw materials, positively impacting project efficiency and supporting Kuwait's Vision 2035 for sustainability," the official said.

This partnership not only underscores the robust Kuwait-UAE ties but also serves as a model for leveraging shared expertise to drive sustainable development. It is a pivotal step toward positioning Kuwait as a regional leader in construction and infrastructure standards.

Political chaos in France and Germany means it may be slower in coming

Europe's economy needs a dose of help

BRUSSELS, Dec 8, (AP): Even before the French and German governments collapsed, Europe's economy had enough difficulties. Tepid growth and lagging competitiveness versus the U.S. and China. An auto industry that's struggling. Where to find billions for defense against Russia? And now Donald Trump threatening tariffs.

Solutions will be harder to find while the two countries that make up almost half of the eurozone economy remain stuck in political paralysis well into 2025.

Where once there was the so-called French-German axis to push Europe ahead, now there's a vacuum. French Prime Minister Michel Barnier resigned Thursday after losing a vote of confidence, and while President Emmanuel Macron will appoint a successor, the new head of government will lack a majority. Elections are not constitutionally permitted until at least June.

Germany's coalition led by Social Democratic Chancellor Olaf Scholz with the Greens and pro-business Free Democrats fractured in November, triggering an early election on Feb. 23. Talks to form a new government could last into April.

At least Germany's likely new chancellor, conservative opposition leader Friedrich Merz, appears open to loosening constitutional restrictions

on borrowing to enable pro-growth spending and investment, said Mujtaba Rahman, managing director Europe at Eurasia Group.

France, however, could be facing "complete paralysis on the economic question," Rahman said. "It's highly unlikely they're going to get a political equilibrium that has a mandate to implement a credible fiscal course correction."

"And that's obviously a problem for Europe because it means the great potential of the European economy is not what it otherwise should be, because you don't have France and Germany firing on all cylinders," he said.

Then there's Europe's lagging business environment, dissected by former European Central Bank head Mario Draghi in a report that contains recommendations such as common borrowing to support public investment; EU-wide industrial policy; and integrating financial markets to help startups raise capital. Yet "nothing can move in Europe without Franco-German alignment," Rahman said.

Meanwhile, Europe's auto industry has sought a review of tough EU emissions standards in 2025 instead of 2026, saying slackening demand for electric cars means they won't be able to avoid heavy fines and that the money would be better used to develop

new electric vehicles.

Anne-Laure Delatte, a French economist and head of research at the National Center for Scientific Research, said financial markets remain cautious but are not overly alarmed by France's political instability. But economic weakness in France and Germany could have broader implications for the European Union.

"This could either weaken Europe's position globally or shift power and influence to other European countries like the Netherlands or Spain, which are performing well at the moment," she said.

France is expected to see growth of 1.1% this year and 0.8% next year, while Germany's economy is expected to shrink 0.1% this year, the second consecutive year of contraction, and rebound modestly with 0.7% next year. Germany faces headwinds from a shortage of skilled labor, excessive bureaucracy and higher energy prices, and efforts to address those issues have been stalled by squabbling in Scholz's coalition.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, head of the EU's executive arm, is equipped with serious powers, especially on trade, a key EU authority delegated to Brussels by member countries. But there's only so much von der Leyen can do with-

out political backing from the two biggest member countries, whose national budgets are bigger than the EU's.

The most urgent matter may be how to respond to U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office Jan. 20. European officials are trying to defuse a potential trade conflict involving new U.S. tariffs or import taxes on European goods that would seriously ding the continent's export-focused economy.

Europe could decide not to retaliate to any U.S. tariffs, thus avoiding a mutually destructive tit-for-tat cycle. The bloc could also commit to buying U.S. liquefied natural gas to mollify Trump, or spend billions more on defense for Ukraine to answer his complaint that European countries don't meet NATO commitments on defense spending.

Europe is seeing only modest growth as consumers pummeled by inflation remain cautious about spending. The economy is expected to expand 0.8% this year and 1.3% next year for the 20 EU member countries that use the euro currency, according to the European Commission.

While the direct impact on growth is small, the political logjam means Europe is missing an important opportunity to engage Trump, said Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg Bank.

China's securities regulator vows further opening-up of futures mkt

SHENZHEN, Dec 8, (Xinhua): China will further open up the futures market to enable qualified foreign institutional investors to trade more types of derivatives, according to a senior official.

The country will gradually and orderly expand the varieties of derivatives in which qualified foreign institutional investors can participate within commodity futures and options trading, Chen Huaping, deputy head of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, said Saturday at a forum in the city of Shenzhen, south China's Guangdong Province.

Chen said the commission will continue to push forward reforms in accordance with market principles and the law, and promote the high-standard opening-up of the futures market.

This comes amid China's continued efforts to promote the all-round institutional opening-up of its financial markets, deepen the interconnectivity of domestic and foreign markets, and support more foreign institutions to invest here.

In other news, sales revenue of home appliances under the policy-backed trade-in program reached

201.97 billion yuan (about 28.11 billion U.S. dollars) as of Friday, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Products with the highest energy efficiency level contributed to over 90 percent of the sales revenue, the data showed.

According to the ministry, a total of 29.64 million consumers have enjoyed subsidies for their home appliance purchases, lifting the sales volume by 45.85 million units.

The home appliance trade-in program is part of China's efforts to boost domestic demand and support economic growth.

The State Council released an action plan in March to initiate large-scale equipment upgrades and trade-ins of consumer goods -- nearly 15 years since the last such round of renewals.

At the end of 2023, people in China owned some 336 million civilian automobiles and over 3 billion major household appliances, including refrigerators, washing machines, and air conditioners. It is estimated the upgrading drive will create market demand worth more than 1 trillion yuan.

US applications for jobless benefits up last week but remain at low levels

WASHINGTON, Dec 8, (AP): The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose last week but remains at historically healthy levels.

Jobless claim applications rose by 9,000 to 224,000 for the week of Nov. 30, the Labor Department reported Thursday. That's more than the 214,000 analysts were forecasting.

Continuing claims, the total number of Americans collecting jobless benefits, fell by 25,000 to 1.87 million for the week of Nov. 23. That's down from the three-year high levels it had been at the past few weeks.

The four-week average of weekly claims, which quiets some of the weekly volatility, rose by 750 to 218,250.

Weekly applications for jobless benefits are considered a proxy for U.S. layoffs.

While the job markets has shown some softening recently, it remains



A help wanted sign is displayed at a restaurant in Chicago, Ill., Monday, Nov. 25, 2024. (AP)

healthy and has exceeded most expectations considering that interest rates have been elevated in recent

years. The Federal Reserve jacked up rates in 2022 and into 2023 in an attempt to squelch the sky-high in-

flation that developed when the U.S. economy rebounded from the brief but sharp pandemic recession.

The Fed has cut its benchmark rate at its last two meetings in response to receding inflation, which has fallen close to the U.S. central bank's 2% target.

Earlier this week, the government reported that U.S. job openings rebounded to 7.7 million in October from a 3 1/2 year low of 7.4 million in September, a sign that businesses are still seeking workers even though hiring has cooled.

In October, U.S. employers added a paltry 12,000 jobs, a total that economists say was crimped by the effects of strikes and hurricanes that left many workers temporarily off payrolls.

Analysts forecast that the government will report on Friday that U.S. employers added 215,000 jobs in November, a healthy figure more in line with recent months.

NBK's innovative digital strategy strengthens its leadership in FinTech

With the Operations & IT Group steering NBK's digital transformation to new heights in 2024



Mohammad Yousef Al-Kharafi, Head of Operations and Information Technology Group at NBK



NBK Tower



Mohammad Al-Kharafi receives an award from Global Finance magazine in recognition of NBK's achievements in the fields of innovation and digital transformation.

Al-Kharafi:

- NBK remains committed to staying ahead of global digital trends shaping the banking sector, continually monitoring and adapting to industry innovations
- The Operations & IT Group's strategy is anchored on three key pillars: customer centricity, operational efficiency, and data-driven decision-making
- We have established a clear roadmap with a phased approach to achieving our goals, emphasizing digital empowerment, innovation, seamless integration, and continuous development
- Operations & IT Group translates the bank's digital vision into clear objectives
- Our goal extends beyond meeting customer needs and expectations; we aim to surpass them by proactively anticipating future needs and preferences
- We have redefined our technology approach by launching a transformational initiative aimed at enhancing organizational resilience
- Robust investments in technology continue to strengthen NBK's leadership both locally and regionally
- NBK leverages its headquarters' capabilities to enhance digital operations across its overseas branches, reinforcing its presence and competitiveness
- Significant progress in the digital transformation of NBK's overseas branches has played a key role in strengthening its market share
- Fikrah innovation Platform fosters a collaborative environment that nurtures employee creativity and drives innovative solutions
- NBK offers leading international transfer services with over 90% executed instantly
- Proactive cybersecurity framework ensures resilient response to emerging threats
- Going forward, NBK will continue pioneering a future of innovation with AI-powered solutions designed to elevate the customer experience

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: The Operations and Information Technology Group at National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) serves as the driving force behind the bank's digital transformation, a cornerstone of its long-term strategy. Acting as the bank's central hub of innovation and strategic thinking, the group spearheads efforts to reinforce NBK's leadership in delivering cutting-edge banking solutions and exceptional digital products and services. This commitment ensures the bank stays at the forefront of the rapid technological advancements reshaping the global banking landscape.

Throughout 2024, the Operations and Information Technology Group sustained its trajectory of success, introducing several innovative projects across various markets. These initiatives significantly enhanced the quality and scope of services and products offered by the Bank, reinforcing its commitment to delivering exceptional value to its customers.

Mr. Mohammad Yousef Al-Kharafi, Head of Operations and Information Technology Group at NBK, emphasized that NBK's strategy is built on three core pillars. The first pillar is customer centricity, leveraging technology to deliver personalized, intuitive, and seamless experiences across all touchpoints. The second pillar focuses on operational efficiency, achieved through intelligent process automation, optimization, and the development of scalable platforms to reduce costs and enhance flexibility. The third pillar emphasizes data-driven decision-making, with a strong focus on building robust data analytics capabilities to derive actionable insights, improve decision-making, and unlock new business opportunities.

Al-Kharafi added that NBK's Operations and Information Technology Group has outlined a clear roadmap and a phased approach to achieving its goals, which consists of three key stages. The first phase is digital empowerment, focused on modernizing platforms and building a robust IT infrastructure to support future innovation. The second phase centers on innovation and integration, expanding the bank's digital offerings through advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), while ensuring seamless integration across various channels. The final phase is continuous development, fostering a culture of flexibility and innovation where technology, processes, and people continuously adapt to evolving customer needs and market dynamics.

He also pointed out that in 2024, NBK successfully upheld its leadership in Kuwait and the region. This achievement follows substantial investments in technology and digital banking services over recent years. He also highlighted the bank's commitment to anticipating the future of financial technology and staying aligned with the latest global advancements in the sector.

Moreover, Al-Kharafi emphasized that earlier this year, the bank launched a transformational initiative designed to reshape its technological approach, strengthening institutional resilience through agile methodologies. He explained that this initiative resulted in a thorough restructuring of the group's technology ecosystem, significantly boosting the bank's capacity to swiftly and efficiently respond to the dynamic demands of its diverse business sectors.

"This step marks a significant milestone in the bank's journey towards realizing one of its core objectives: becoming a more agile and responsive organization. It reinforces our optimism about the transformative impact of these changes,



WAMD service on mobile



NBK Mobile Banking



Figures and indicators:

- NBK Mobile Banking App introduced 90 new features in 2024, four times the enhancements rolled out the previous year
- The NBK Mobile Banking App stands as Kuwait's top-rated digital banking platform, setting the benchmark for innovation in the digital banking landscape
- Digital Transaction Ratio (including all self-service channels): 97.9%
- 102 RPA processes throughout NBK, attaining a program success rate of 98%
- The automation initiative has led to a reduction of 6.3 million sheets of paper, saving over 200,000 hours of time, improving turnaround time by 90%, and significantly reducing carbon emissions
- WAMD managed three times the volume of standard KWD transfers conducted across all channels

which are poised to enhance the bank's future success. By improving operational efficiency, these transformations will further reinforce NBK's position as a leading institution locally, regionally, and globally," Al-Kharafi said.

He further explained that the Operations and Information Technology Group is committed to translating NBK's digital transformation strategy into clear objectives. In addition, to prioritizing training and knowledge sharing, the bank's strategy emphasizes fostering a digital culture and mindset across the entire organization, with over 7,000 employees actively engaged. The strategy also includes providing all employees with access to a digital learning library, covering key topics such as innovation, digital product development, digital payments, fintech, open banking, agile methodologies, and digital customer experience.

Al-Kharafi also highlighted the Group's dedication to tracking the latest global digital trends impacting the banking sector and creating insightful research and reports that capture the trends shaping the industry, including global best practices, gaps, and opportunities. In partnership with the Bank's Design Center, the Operations and Information Technology Group prioritizes delivering an outstanding user experience tailored to the specific needs of the bank's users. This approach also includes conducting market research and user testing to identify the most relevant products and services for NBK's customers.

"These initiatives are designed to enhance service efficiency, allowing our employees to meet and often exceed customer expectations, thereby solidifying our reputation as a leading fintech organization through the rigorous application of our digital strategy. Our goal is not only to meet the needs and expectations of our customers, but to exceed that by anticipating their future needs and preferences," Al-Kharafi added.

He emphasized that NBK possesses unique strengths that set it apart from other financial institutions. As a dynamic leader in the banking sector, NBK boasts a diversified and ever-evolving portfolio of products and services. The bank's leadership is reinforced by its strong presence in international markets, coupled with its commitment to attracting, developing, and investing in top banking talent. This dynamism reflects the bank's unwavering focus on continually enhancing its products and services, while providing innovative solutions that effectively meet customer needs.

Building on Success, One Milestone at a Time

The Operations and Information Technology Group contributed significantly to NBK's digital transformation journey with several key achievements in 2024.

As part of the International Banking Group (IBG) blueprint, in 2024, the Operations and Information Technology Group has embarked on a mission to utilize the bank's digital technology assets in Kuwait to deploy state-of-the-art digital channels for its international branches, thus enhancing customers banking experience regardless of their location. This exemplifies NBK's steadfast commitment to innovation and its role as a leader in the digital banking landscape, not only locally but also across its international locations.

NBK has made substantial progress in the digital transformation of its overseas branches by adopting advanced technologies and digital channels to streamline banking operations and enhance the customer experience. The bank's digital initiatives have received positive feedback, leading to a notable increase in its market share in the banking sectors of the countries where it operates.

As part of its ongoing efforts to improve customer experience through self-service channels, and under the guidance of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), NBK launched the WAMD service in July 2024 via the NBK Mobile Banking App. This service offers the fastest payment transfer system in Kuwait, processing three times the volume of standard KWD transfers across all channels.

Furthermore, in its ongoing efforts to modernize its ATM fleet, NBK has introduced a new service that transforms the customer banking experience. This service provides a personalized experience for various customer segments, offering flexible dispensing options, the ability to update KYC details using Kuwait Mobile ID, along with the full range of traditional banking transactions for NBK customers.

NBK Mobile Banking App

The NBK Mobile Banking App, Kuwait's highest-rated mobile application for digital banking, underwent significant enhancements in 2024. These improvements focused on refining existing services and introducing new features, all driven by the newly implemented agile methodology, to better serve the bank's customers.

This year, the NBK Mobile Banking App saw a fourfold increase in new launches compared to the previous year, with nearly 90 new services and application enhancements. These updates have significantly advanced the bank's digital channels, ensuring continued uptime, availability, quality, and secure operations.

To support this growth, the bank has also upgraded its technology portfolio, reinforcing its capacity to meet the needs of an expanding customer base.

Underscoring the strong trust in NBK's digital channels, 97.9% of total banking transactions were conducted through the bank's digital platforms (including all self-service channels).

AI and Automation

NBK has launched the "Open Text Workflow" for Request Approval Workflow process Automation, marking significant step forward in streamlining the bank's workflow.

Moreover, NBK has reached a significant milestone by implementing 102 RPA processes and attained a program success rate of 98%. NBK is set to implement RPA automation in various regions, having already established RPA in three international locations. The automation initiative has significantly advanced NBK's ESG goals, leading to a reduction of 6.3 million sheets of paper, saving over 200,000 hours of time, improving turnaround time by 90%, and decreasing carbon emissions.

Fikrah Platform

NBK's Operations & Information Technology Group has recently introduced the Innovation Platform, Fikrah. This platform will facilitate the sharing of ideas among participants, with the system assisting in the generation of creative concepts through various brainstorming techniques and customized prompts. This initiative is designed to foster a dynamic environment for the presentation of innovative ideas.

The platform integrates gamification by assigning points to staff for their submitted ideas, which they can subsequently use for redemption purposes.

International Transfers

Leveraging the outstanding regulatory and supervisory framework provided by the Central Bank of Kuwait, which sets a benchmark for excellence in the banking sector, NBK has achieved an impressive STP rate exceeding 90% for international transfers, positioning it among the region's leaders in seamless and efficient cross-border transactions. NBK leverages cutting-edge technology to enhance transparency and convenience for customers in tracking their transfers. The bank utilizes the GPI tracker for outbound transfers and the Swift4C tracker for inbound transfers, enabling customers to receive real-time status updates on their fund transfer transactions through online channels at any time.

Combined Outgoing FCY+ KWD Incoming STP Rates stood at 97%, while Combined Incoming FCY+ KWD Incoming STP Rates were 96%.

Building on the Central Bank of Kuwait's guidance, NBK has further enriched its banking services with the introduction of the 24/7 WAMD settlement mechanism for low-value transfers, alongside the innovative AFAQ service. This new feature, available through the NBK Mobile Banking App, provides near-real-time settlement of funds transfers to the GCC.

Cybersecurity and Anti-Fraud

In line with the Central Bank of Kuwait's Strategic Framework for Cybersecurity for the Banking Sector issued in February 2020, NBK is adopting a proactive cybersecurity framework that aligns with the highest international standards.

The bank strengthens this framework with a comprehensive strategy focusing on data governance, privacy, and security. The bank also utilizes advanced security technologies to safeguard its digital interfaces, which undergo regular assessments by both internal and external auditors. Additionally, NBK ensures continuous monitoring of its digital channels through its Security Operations Center, backed

by integrated and well-defined response plans to efficiently manage any potential cyber incidents.

In a proactive effort to strengthen customer protection and combat financial fraud, the Virtual Room (VR) was launched on December 7, 2023. Operating 24/7, under the guidance of the CBK, it offers immediate and comprehensive support for fraud-related cases, underscoring the vital role of banks in ensuring financial security.

The VR operates in close coordination with the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and local banks to address fraudulent cases efficiently and promptly, 24/7. Legal restrictions are enforced as directed by the Public Prosecution, with meticulous monitoring of fraud-related transactions across both NBK and non-NBK bank accounts. Additionally, advanced systems are employed to detect and report suspicious activities.

A notable example of the VR's efforts involved combating sophisticated scams where fraudsters exploited Kuwait Mobile ID App to breach customers' phones and transfer their lines from traditional SIM cards to eSIMs, granting access to sensitive information. Additionally, the VR has identified other fraudulent tactics, including fake links, phishing emails, and deceptive phone calls.

Complementing its control measures, NBK, in collaboration with the Central Bank of Kuwait, launched a series of intensive awareness campaigns under the slogan "Let's Be Aware." These initiatives aimed to enhance customer vigilance against potential risks, featuring appearances on prominent TV and radio programs such as 360 FM Radio and Kuwait News Channel. The efforts also extended to producing and sharing educational clips across the bank's social media platforms.

NBK underscores the importance of customer vigilance in safeguarding their financial security. It advises caution when interacting with unverified links or calls, encourages the use of authorized apps for transactions, and warns against falling for enticing but dubious social media offers. The bank also stresses the need for immediate reporting of suspicious activities, reaffirming its dedication to protecting customer funds and ensuring the security of their banking transactions.

NBK Tech Academy

In collaboration with the Operations and Information Technology Group and the Human Resources Group, NBK launched the NBK Tech Academy last year to stay ahead of advancements in technology, information, and data security. The academy's inaugural batch of 10 trainees achieved remarkable success, and this year, it aims to qualify 15 trainees as part of its continued growth and development.

In 2024, the focus shifted to nurturing internal talent while also recruiting new Kuwaiti graduates from the first cohort of the NBK Tech Academy. These graduates were integrated into the development teams within the Operations and Information Technology Group, where they played a significant and effective role in enhancing and innovating current and future services. Their contributions have helped further develop the services provided to customers, enriching them with new features and improving overall service offerings.

Attracting Female Presence

Demonstrating NBK's commitment to attracting women in the technology sector, the Operations and Information Technology Group has recently initiated the "Women in Technology" program, which aims to promote leadership and enhance diversity within the organization.

In 2024, NBK has observed a significant rise in the representation of women at different levels, including both technical and leadership roles. This progress is consistent with NBK's commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion, acknowledging that diverse teams have a positive and sustainable impact on business results.

IT Infrastructure

As NBK continues to innovate and enhance its technological and digital services by unifying its infrastructure and technologies, investing in new initiatives, and adopting the latest cybersecurity systems, infrastructure technology remains the cornerstone driving the bank's technology and digital agendas.

In 2024, the Operations and Information Technology Group focused on stabilizing the infrastructure of the Bank's Tier III certified Data Center by making strategic investments in technology modernization and upgrading digital components and systems. Furthermore, the Group is advancing infrastructure automation and adopting a self-service model to accelerate and streamline user requests.

The Group is placing strong emphasis on proactive monitoring by consistently investing in cutting-edge technology in this area, while also exploring a new infrastructure architecture design aimed at simplifying and unifying the Bank's data centers.

Going forward, NBK plans to adopt more innovative initiatives, including AI, generative AI, and other cutting-edge technologies that will drive business growth, enhance customer experiences, and accelerate service delivery in the market.



This image released by Sideshow and Janus Films shows a scene from the animated film 'Flow.' (AP)

'Flow' is a beautiful, wordless reflection on nature and survival

A cat parable on climate change is 2024's best animated movie

LOS ANGELES, Dec 8, (AP): Of all the post-apocalyptic landscapes we've been treated to over the years, none is as beautiful nor peaceful as that of "Flow."

In Gints Zilbalodis' wondrously shimmering animated fable, a solitary black cat, after escaping a cataclysmic flood, navigates a water world. What brought things to this point is never explained. We're left to look upon this strange, verdant and overgrown landscape through the amber eyes of our unnamed feline protagonist. Humans are completely absent, and it's part of this beguilingly meditative film to wonder not just about what role we played in the flood, but to ponder the grace of the animal life left to inherit the Earth.

As much as I didn't have a wordless Latvian animated movie on my 2024 bingo card, "Flow" - an expected Oscar contender currently in theaters - is quite easily the best animated movie of the year and one of the most poetic ecological parables in recent memory. It's an all-audiences movies, and by that, I'm tempted to include not just young and old, but cats and dogs, too.

When the waters rise, the cat encounters a friendly Labrador, a long-legged secretary bird, a dozing capy-



Gints Zilbalodis, director of 'Flow,' winner of the European Animated Feature Film award, speaks at the gala at the 37th European Film Awards at the Culture and Convention Center KKL in Lucerne, Switzerland, Saturday, Dec. 7. (AP)

bara and a bauble-hoarding ring-tailed lemur. Cute as they are, they aren't quite your typical animated animals. Part of the allure of "Flow" is seeing animal

characters that would normally be anthropomorphized and voiced by celebrity actors - the lemur, in particular, has until now been ruled by Sacha Baron Cohen's King Julian of "Madagascar" - move and sound authentically.

Well, mostly. Circumstances bring these five together aboard a small sailboat, an ark sans Noah. And while "Flow" doesn't exactly go for realism - the secretary bird, for instance, proves an especially adept captain in steering the rudder - it is most decidedly drawn in closer harmony to the natural world than your average animation. Together they sail through mountain tops-turned-islands and an abandoned city with rivers for streets.

That "Flow" is made with computer generated animation adds to its dreamy, curiously real surrealism. Zilbalodis created "Flow" with Blender, the free, open-source graphics software tool. His camera moves less with the prescribed, storyboarded form of traditional animation than as a nimble, roving perspective within a virtual world. That such a natural and sensory movie is made possible by cutting-edge technology is one reason why the dystopic world of "Flow" always feels more hopeful

than it ought to.

Another reason is the animals. Though they come from different species and have little means of communication, they together form an odd partnership. The cat is initially wary of each, but they slowly form an evident bond. Their survival hinges on their cooperation, which is occasionally threatened by the self-interest of others (there's a pack of less community-minded dogs) or the cat's own timid reluctance. Staying to face a problem or trust another animal, rather than scampering away, goes against its nature.

In that way, these two- and four-legged creatures, digitally rendered in a human-less future, are both worthy heirs to the planet and furry figures of inspiration for today.

Reflections run through "Flow" - in a mirror clutched by the lemur, in the water the cat peers into - but none more so than the image of ourselves gazing back at it.

"Flow," a Sideshow and Janus Films release is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association for peril and thematic elements. Running time: 84 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four.

Unknown buyer to pay \$32.5m

Stolen 'Wizard of Oz' ruby slippers sell for \$28 million

MINNEAPOLIS, Dec 8, (AP): A pair of iconic ruby slippers that were worn by Judy Garland in "The Wizard of Oz" and stolen from a museum nearly two decades ago sold for a winning bid of \$28 million at auction Saturday.

Heritage Auctions had estimated that they would fetch \$3 million or more, but the fast-paced bidding far outpaced that amount within seconds and tripled it within minutes. A few bidders making offers by phone volleyed back and forth for 15 minutes as the price climbed to the final, eye-popping sum.

Including the Dallas-based auction house's fee, the unknown buyer will ultimately pay \$32.5 million.

Online bidding, which opened last month, had stood at \$1.55 million before live bidding began late Saturday afternoon.

Display

The sparkly red heels were on display at the Judy Garland Museum in her hometown of Grand Rapids, Minnesota, in 2005 when Terry Jon Martin used a hammer to smash the glass of the museum's door and display case.

Their whereabouts remained a mystery until the FBI recovered them in 2018. Martin, now 77, who lives near Grand Rapids in northern Minnesota, wasn't publicly exposed as the thief until he was indicted in May 2023. He pleaded guilty in October 2023. He was in a wheelchair and on supplementary oxygen when he was

sentenced last January to time served because of his poor health.

His attorney, Dane DeKrey, explained ahead of sentencing that Martin, who had a long history of burglary and receiving stolen property, was attempting to pull off "one last score" after an old associate with connections to the mob told him the shoes had to be adorned with real jewels to justify their \$1 million insured value. But a fence - a person who buys stolen goods - later told him the rubies were just glass, DeKrey said. So Martin got rid of the slippers. The attorney didn't specify how.

Appearance

The alleged fence, Jerry Hal Saliterman, 77, of the Minneapolis suburb of Crystal, was indicted in March. He was also in a wheelchair and on oxygen when he made his first court appearance. He's scheduled to go on trial in January and hasn't entered a plea, though his attorney has said he's not guilty.

The shoes were returned in February to memorabilia collector Michael Shaw, who had loaned them to the museum. They were one of several pairs that Garland wore during the filming, but only four pairs are known to have survived. In the movie, to return from Oz to Kansas, Dorothy had to click her heels three times and repeat, "There's no place like home."

As Rhys Thomas, author of "The Ruby Slippers of Oz," put it, the sequined shoes from the beloved 1939 musical have seen "more twists and turns than the Yellow Brick Road."



Ruby slippers once worn by Judy Garland in the 'The Wizard of Oz,' are displayed at a news conference, Sept. 4, 2018, at the FBI office in Brooklyn Center, Minn. (AP)

Film



Jury members, (from left to right), Virginie Efira, Ali Abbasi, Patricia Arquette, Santiago Mitre, Luca Guadagnino, Nadia Kounda, Andrew Garfield, Zoya Akhtar and Jacob Elordi, pose during the opening ceremony of the 21st Marrakech International Film Festival, in Marrakech, Morocco, Friday, Nov. 29, 2024. (AP)

Jury prizes for Somalia and Argentina

Marrakech Fest bestows Palestinian film Happy Holidays with top award

MARRAKECH, Morocco, Dec 8, (AP): The Marrakech International Film Festival bestowed its top prize Friday on "Happy Holidays," a Palestinian drama set in Israel whose screenplay won an award at the Venice Film Festival in September.

The film, directed by Scandar Copti, follows Israeli and Palestinian characters facing familial and societal pressures in present-day Haifa and stars both professional and non-professional actors. It is the first Palestinian film to win Marrakech's Etoile D'Or award.

Screenwriter Mona Copti in an acceptance speech said the film team's joy at winning was tempered by war in the Middle

East and she denounced what she called the dehumanization of Palestinians.

Eight features, each a director's first or second film, competed in the festival. The winning films tackled social issues through the lens of family, a theme that the festival's artistic director Remi Bonhomme underlined at its opening.

The festival awarded its jury prize to two additional films from Somalia and Argentina. The nine-member jury awarded Mo Harawe's "The Village Next to Paradise" - a story about a family living under the threat of drone strikes dreaming of a better life - and Silvina Schnicer's "The Cot-

tage" about children who commit an unspeakable act at a rich family's summer vacation home.

"The Village Next to Paradise" participated last year in the Marrakech festival's Atlas Workshops, an initiative to develop filmmakers from Morocco, the Middle East and Africa and promote their work. In his acceptance speech, Harawe lauded the film's Somali cast and crew and highlighted the significance of the award for Somalia.

Cecilia Rainero, the lead actor of "The Cottage," thanked the jury and said it was meaningful amid Argentinian President Javier Milei's moves to defund the country's film industry.

Variety

HAVANA: Ernest Hemingway has returned to Cuba... in a way.

Eighteen white-bearded men who resemble the late US author arrived in Havana to visit some of his favorite places when he lived on the island decades ago.

The members of the Hemingway Look-alike Society on Saturday visited the author's favorite bar in Havana, "El Floridita," where the music immediately picked up, and tourists and locals gathered around to take photos.

Earlier, they went to the San Francisco de Paula municipality and Finca Vigia, a former home to Hemingway that is now a museum. There, they played baseball with children.

"That is the reason for our visit: the kids and their families," said Joe Maxy, from Tennessee, who is one of the bearded men honoring the author of "The Old Man and the Sea."

The visit comes as Cuba and the United States are in the midst of tense relations. Washington maintains sanctions on the islands, and things are unlikely to change as Donald Trump prepares to assume the presidency in January. (AP)

□ □ □

ATLANTA: The president of Atlanta-based Tyler Perry Studios died Friday night when the small plane he was piloting crashed on Florida's Gulf Coast.

The studio confirmed on Saturday that Steve Mensch, its 62-year-old president and general manager, had died.

"We are incredibly saddened by the passing of our dear friend Steve Mensch," the studio said in a statement. "Steve was a cherished member of our team for more than eight years and well-beloved in the community of Atlanta. It's hard to imagine not seeing him smiling throughout the halls. We will miss him dearly. Our heart goes out to his family as we all send them our prayers."

The crash happened in Homosassa, about 60 miles (100 kilometers) north of Tampa. Photos from the scene show the plane having come to rest upside down on a road. The Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board are investigating. (AP)



Perry



An inside view of Milan's Opera House La Scala, Italy, prior to the start of the opening of the 2024-25 season. (AP)



Italian Senate President Ignazio La Russa and his wife Laura De Cicco arrive at Milan's Opera House La Scala, Italy, Dec 7. (AP)



People watch a screen at the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II during the opening of the 2024-25 season featuring Giuseppe Verdi's 'La Forza del destino.' (AP)

Anna Netrebko and Brian Jagde shine

La Scala's premiere overcomes bad-luck vibes with Verdi

MILAN, Dec 8, (AP): Milan's storied Teatro alla Scala presented Giuseppe Verdi's "La Forza del Destino" for its gala season premiere Saturday for the first time in 59 years, determined to shake the opera's reputation for bringing bad luck.

The production conducted by Riccardo Chailly and featuring Russian soprano Anna Netrebko, American tenor Brian Jagde and French baritone Ludovic Tezier received 13 minutes of applause, and a smattering of boos from the upper balconies.

"No one booed after my arias," Netrebko retorted, with an air kiss.

The premiere is a highlight of the Milan cultural calendar, attracting top figures from the world of politics, business and the arts, although this year, both President Sergio Mattarella and Premier Giorgia Meloni, who have attended in the past, instead traveled to Paris for ceremonies marking the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral.

Netrebko sang the role of Leonora to American tenor Brian Jagde's

Don Alvaro, lovers whose future is determined by a tragic accident. Jagde was brought in on short notice to substitute for German tenor Jonas Kaufmann, who dropped out for family reasons.

"I have never felt like this in my life," Jagde said backstage. "It really is so exciting to be on stage in this place, with these people, on this day."

It is Jagde's fourth time singing the role of Don Alvaro this year alone, and his third La Scala performance, the second alongside Netrebko.

Netrebko called the score of "La Forza del Destino" a "masterpiece," but confessed recently that she could not identify with her character, Leonora, "as a woman of the 21st century."

"If you are looking at the story, it is basically nonsense, sorry," she told a recent press conference. "If we are being serious and trying to follow the story, and try to understand, especially the character of Leonora, hunted by fear, guilt, desperation, and in the end what did she find?"

The opera is an ill-fated love story between Don Alvaro and Leonora set against the background of a wars, which has resonance in current global turbulence. A pro-Palestinian protest gnarled traffic in the center of Milan just ahead of the VIP arrivals at La Scala. Unions also traditionally protest the lavish event in the piazza opposite the opera house.

"La Forza del Destino" has not opened the La Scala season since 1965, and has not been performed by La Scala's orchestra for 25 years.

The opera has been dogged by superstition that it brings bad luck, so much so that some in Italy will not say the full title aloud.

But La Scala general manager Dominique Meyer said the reason so much time had passed is that "there aren't always singers up to it."

"We need to understand something, that singers like Anna Nebrenko come once in a generation."

He dismissed the superstition as "folklore," adding, "we applaud folklore, but we remain calm."

Film



Winners pose for a group photo at the end of the European Film Awards gala at the Culture and Convention Center KKL in Lucerne, Switzerland, Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024. (AP)

A formulaic yet uplifting sports drama in 'Unstoppable'

Jerome, Lopez deliver in wrestling biopic

LOS ANGELES, Dec 8, (AP): Anthony Robles' story seems almost tailor made for a Hollywood film. Born with only one leg, his right, he overcame the prejudices of those around him and his own physical limitations to become a champion wrestler. Though coaches at the top wrestling programs couldn't see his potential, he was undeterred, coasting on his own determination and his mother Judy's (Jennifer Lopez) unwavering belief in him.

The film version is aptly titled "Unstoppable," and it's getting a limited theatrical release starting Friday before it streams on Prime Video on Jan. 16. Directed by William Goldenberg, the Oscar-winning editor of "Argo" making his feature directorial debut, "Unstoppable" has all the makings of a rousing sports drama that's sure to have audiences cheering in theaters or on their couches. You'd have to be a certain kind of grinch not to get swept up in the hurdles and triumphs, especially with such a compelling lead performance from Jharrel Jerome. And yet for a story about a guy who shattered expectations, the film itself is rather conventional.

Eschewing the temptation to tell his story from birth, "Unstoppable's" arc begins at the end of high school. He chose long ago to not rely on a prosthetic and is comfortable in his body. His sport is wrestling, which he'll joke later that he chose because it was the only one where the other guy couldn't run away from him.

Though he's winning at the high

school level, the exciting college programs, like Iowa, are not interested in taking a chance on him. His best offer is a full ride at Drexel in Philadelphia, which everyone agrees is better than walking on at one of the better-known schools. But complications on the home front force his hand and soon enough he's walking on at Arizona State Uni-

versity, trying to prove himself to a coach, Sean Charles (Don Cheadle), who had already advised him to go elsewhere.

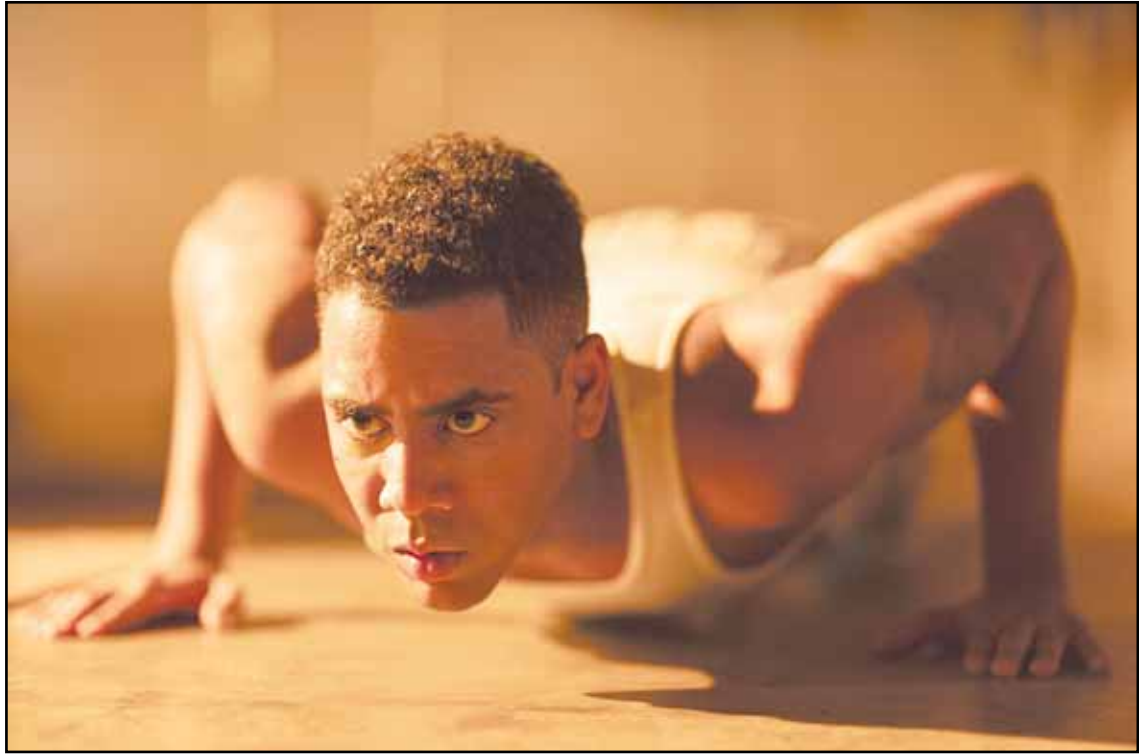
Mom as eldest son's biggest cheerleader isn't, but Judy has a lot going on. She had Anthony at age 16 and, when we meet up with them, is married and has four young children with Rick (Bobby Cannavale), a toxic

husband and father who goes long on the virtues of making the right choices and being a man and providing for his family (which, spoiler, he doesn't). It's a very one-note role for Cannavale, just a shorthand villain who's always just around the corner ready to ruin things, whether it's dinner or Anthony's plans to move across the country.

Regardless of how much this is true, "Unstoppable" relies too heavily on the cliches of a working-class domestic drama and Rick's vileness which perhaps is a little insulting to Judy's experience. This is a woman who managed to achieve incredible things (revealed at the end) despite being a single mother to five. While Lopez is magnetic as always, it's hard not to wonder what this character might have looked like if one of the three credited screenwriters had been a woman. Judy does get her own arc and demonstrates her agency in a mic drop kind of scene, but it seems like a rather small moment to concentrate on once you've learned what she went on to accomplish.

The film is really best when it's about the sport, the impossible training including a run up a rocky hill that Anthony does on his crutches, the matches, and Anthony's relationships with his coaches who become de facto father figures for him. Michael Peña, as his high school coach, is particularly impactful in his limited scenes, and Cheadle is always a joy. But it's ultimately Jerome's show, and a good one at that. Let's hope it's the first of many leading film roles for him.

"Unstoppable," an Amazon MGM Studios release in select theaters Friday and streaming on Prime Video on Jan. 16, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for "some strong language and thematic material." Running time: 116 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.



This image released by Amazon/MGM shows Jharrel Jerome in a scene from 'Unstoppable.' (AP)

Variety

STOCKHOLM: South Korean author **Han Kang**, this year's winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, spoke passionately on Saturday about the process of writing and her evolution as a writer - all the way back to when she was 8 years old.

Han, the first Asian woman and the first South Korean writer to win the Nobel literature prize, was delivering her Nobel lecture in Stockholm, the Swedish capital. She described in a soft-spoken voice how in January she found an old shoe box containing several diaries dating back to her childhood.

Among the stack of journals, she found a poem about love she had written. "The lines penned by my eight-year-old self were suitably innocent and unpolished," she said.

Han was awarded for her novels, including "The Vegetarian" and "Human Acts," that explore the pain of being human and the scars of Korea's turbulent history. She is known for her experimental and often disturbing stories that incorporate the brutal moments of modern South Korea.

The Nobel Committee praised Han "for her intense poetic prose that confronts historical traumas and exposes the fragility of human life."

The author spoke Saturday about how she involves all of her senses in the creation of some of her best known works.

"When I write, I use my body," she said. "I use all the sensory details of seeing, of listening, of smelling, of tasting, of experiencing tenderness and warmth and cold and pain, of noticing my heart racing and my body needing food and water, of walking and running, of feeling the wind and rain and snow on my skin, of holding hands." (AP)

Kang

LONDON: It was neither Britain's biggest tree nor its oldest. But the majestic sycamore that stood for 150 years along a stretch of Hadrian's Wall in northern England was one of the most beloved.

Perched symmetrically in a dip between two hills, the Sycamore Gap tree had been the site of first kisses, wedding proposals and even a place where the ashes of loved ones were scattered.

When local residents and admirers woke to the news last fall that it had been cut down in the dark of night, they wanted to know why and who could have committed such a senseless act.

On Monday, prosecutors are expected to start providing those answers.


Two men are scheduled to go on trial in Newcastle Crown Court on charges related to toppling the tree and damaging the ancient wall built by Emperor Hadrian in A.D. 122 to protect the northwest frontier of the Roman Empire.

Little has been said about the case, including a possible motive, to protect the integrity of the trial and rights of the accused.


Daniel Graham, 39, and Adam Carruthers, 32, have pleaded not guilty to two counts each of criminal damage. Prosecutors said the value of the tree exceeded 620,000 pounds (\$790,000) and damage to the wall was assessed at 1,100 pounds (\$1,400). (AP)

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Roma earns first win under Ranieri

Juventus and Bologna draw as coach Motta sent off for protests

ROME, Dec 8, (AP): Juventus needed a late equalizer from 20-year-old Samuel Mbangula to finish 2-2 at home with Bologna in Serie A after coach Thiago Motta was sent off for protests.

Mbangula curled in a shot from beyond the area in stoppage time.

Dan Ndoye and Tommaso Pobega put Bologna 2-0 ahead, and Teun Koopmeiners pulled one back for Juventus.

Motta guided Bologna to a fifth-place finish last season and the Champions League, and left in the summer for Juventus. He was shown a straight red card shortly before Pobega's goal.

Juventus remained sixth while Bologna moved level on points with seventh-placed AC Milan,



Roma's Paulo Dybala, top, shoots at goal during the Serie A soccer match between Roma and Lecce at the Olympic stadium in Rome, Italy. (AP)



Bologna's Benjamin Dominguez, right, and Juventus' Danilo fight for the ball during the Italian Serie A soccer match between Juventus and Bologna at the Allianz Stadium in Turin, Italy. (AP)

five points behind.

It was Juventus' fourth straight draw in Serie A and the Champions League, and the Bianconeri are due to host Manchester City on Wednesday.

Also, Roma earned its first win under Claudio Ranieri by 4-1 over visiting Lecce.

Alexis Saelemaekers, Gianluca Mancini, Niccolò Pisilli and Manu Kone scored for the Giallorossi, who hadn't won since October.

Genoa and Torino drew 0-0. Genoa extended its unbeaten streak to five matches, with the last three coming since Patrick Vieira replaced Alberto Gilardino as coach. Torino was 11th and Genoa 13th.

Norris wins season-ending Abu Dhabi GP to seal constructors' title for McLaren

Hamilton finishes 4th

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates, Dec 8, (AP): Lando Norris ended McLaren's 26-year wait for the Formula 1 constructors' title as he won the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday.

There was drama at the start as champion Max Verstappen collided with Oscar Piastri's second-place McLaren at the first corner, sending both cars into a spin. With Piastri dropped to the back of the field, McLaren's title hopes depended on race leader Norris.

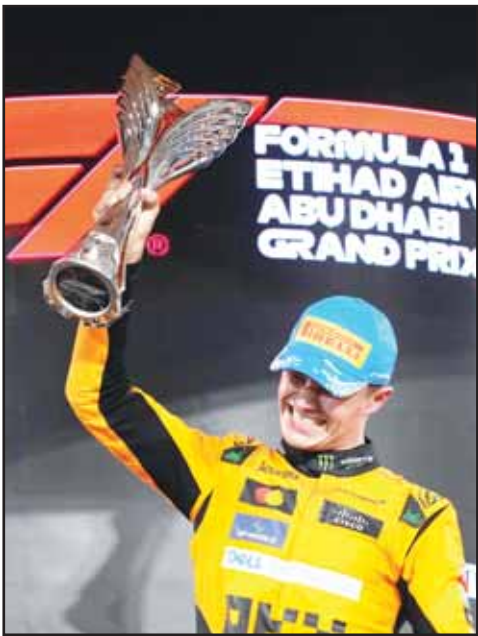
"Incredible, well done everyone, so proud of you all. You all deserve this," Norris, who was runner-up to Verstappen in the drivers' standings, told his team over the radio. "It's been a special year. Next year's going to be my year too."

Norris held on for the win with Ferrari's Carlos Sainz Jr. in second and Charles Leclerc surging up to third from 19th on the grid. While Sainz didn't get close enough to try to overtake Norris, it was a tense finish for McLaren chief executive Zak Brown, aware that any technical fault on the car would hand the title to Ferrari.

"That was the most miserable two hours of my life," Brown joked while awaiting the trophy ceremony.

Seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton was fourth in his 246th and last race for Mercedes before joining Ferrari next year after overtaking teammate George Russell on the last lap.

"We dreamed alone but together we be-



McLaren driver Lando Norris of Britain stands on the podium after winning the Formula One Abu Dhabi Grand Prix at the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi, UAE. (AP)

lieved," Hamilton told his engineer Peter Bonnington over the radio before spinning the car in "donuts" to cheers from the crowd.

Russell was fifth, with Verstappen sixth and Pierre Gasly seventh for Alpine. Nico Hulkenberg finished eighth in his last race for Haas before joining Sauber for 2025, while

Fernando Alonso was ninth for Aston Martin and Piastri recovered to place 10th.

Winning the constructors' title completes a once-unlikely turnaround for a team with plenty of F1 history but which was mired in ninth in the standings just seven years ago. When Norris joined McLaren in 2019, he didn't finish higher than sixth in any race in his debut season.

McLaren started the season far off the pace but made a leap forward with upgrades to the car at the Miami Grand Prix in May, rewarded instantly with a first career win for Norris.

Red Bull's Verstappen won the drivers' title but the team was only third in the constructors' standings thanks to consistently poor results from his teammate Sergio Perez, whose race Sunday ended with an early retirement after he was pushed into a spin by Sauber's Valtteri Bottas. That poor form left McLaren and Ferrari, which hasn't won the constructors' title since 2008, to battle it out.

Norris steadily cut into Verstappen's lead in the second half of the season in a series of increasingly uncompromising on-track battles, but the British driver's challenge for the drivers' title was dealt a heavy blow by a win for Verstappen in the rain in Brazil in October.

Verstappen sealed his fourth successive title in Las Vegas last month, leaving Norris to focus on bringing team success back to McLaren.



Al-Hisar Family training ahead of the Khaleeji Zain 26 at the Academy of Arts and Media for Youth at Kuwait.

'Challenging step'

Volunteers kick off training for Khaleeji Zain 26 in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Preparations were in full swing for the Khaleeji Zain 26, with the volunteer training kicking off ahead of the big Opening Ceremony in Kuwait City on December 21.

Hundreds of enthusiastic citizens and residents became the first batch from an expected volunteer workforce of up to 5,000 people to undergo professional training to welcome the tens of thousands of fans set to pour in from across the Arabian Gulf for the 14-day tournament.

Volunteers of all ages from 18-60 years have stepped forward to represent their country and they are being put through theoretical and practical sessions to prepare them for their vital tournament-time roles.

Here's what they said:

Hajar Jamal

"I volunteered with the aim of helping to present an honourable and beautiful image of my country, Kuwait, by providing services and assistance to the fans and help them while they cheer on their teams in the tournament that we love. We want to provide a welcome for them to their second country, Kuwait."

Musaeed Al-Humaida

"I was motivated to be involved in this beautiful football event by my love and duty to raise the name of Kuwait, and I will seek to provide help and comfort for the supporters to be happy at every match they watch from the stands."

Saad Al-Rashidi

"I am honoured to be part of this large volunteer team to serve the tournament and its fans. I have seized the opportunity to volunteer and assist the fans at the two stadiums and ensure their experience is smooth and enjoyable."

Mubarak Al-Dhafiri

"I am so happy to be undergoing this volunteer experience in my country and to present a positive image of Kuwaiti youth and our ability to organise a major event and gain experience."

Yahya Jassim

"Volunteering is an important and challenging step for me in my life as it will teach me new skills and harness them for the benefit of the volunteer team to serve the fans."

Wael Shafi

"Volunteers will play a vital role in the success of the tournament and that is why I felt I had to get involved and play my part."

The Al-Hisar Family (Mahdi Al-Hisar)



Hajar Jamal training ahead of the Khaleeji Zain 26.



One of the volunteers, Yahya Jassim.

"I am volunteering with my son, Mohammed, and my daughter, Jana, to be a team of one family who will welcome many families attending Khaleeji Zain 26. We want to do what we can to provide all the help and assistance that they need so that they can enjoy the beautiful matches. This is the first time we have done something like this and it is wonderful to be able to do it together."

The Khaleeji Zain 26 will see hosts Kuwait joined by Oman, UAE and Qatar in Group A, with the reigning champions Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia contesting Group B.

The top two from each group will go through to the semi-finals before the final is played at the 60,000-capacity Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium on January 3. The city's Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium will also host matches.



McLaren driver Lando Norris of Britain leads at the start during the Formula One Abu Dhabi Grand Prix at the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi, UAE. (AP)

Morant scores 32 to help Grizzlies beat Celtics

Wizards overcome career-high 56 by Jokic, snap skid

WASHINGTON, Dec 8, (AP): Jordan Poole scored 39 points, and the Washington Wizards overcame a career-high 56 by Nikola Jokic to beat the Denver Nuggets 122-113 on Saturday night and snap their 16-game losing streak.

Jamal Murray (hamstring), Aaron Gordon (calf) and Dario Saric (ankle) were all out for Denver, which left Jokic as something of a one-man show for the Nuggets. He took 38 shots from the field - also a career high - and had 16 rebounds and eight assists.

But Washington always had an answer.

The Wizards (3-18) won for the first time since Oct. 30. Their 16-game skid tied a franchise record.

Poole made a career-high nine 3-pointers, and Washington as a team made 16. Denver went 5 of 24, which

is why the Nuggets couldn't fully take advantage of Jokic's dominance.

Memphis 127, Celtics 121

In Boston, Ja Morant had 32 points, nine assists and nine rebounds, and the Memphis Grizzlies snapped a 10-game losing streak in Boston with a win over the Celtics.

Jaren Jackson Jr. added 27 points and nine rebounds for Memphis, which won in TD Garden for the first time since Nov. 27, 2013. The Grizzlies have won eight of their last nine.

Jrue Holiday had 23 points for the Celtics, who went 18 for 60 from the 3-point line. Jaylen Brown and Payton Pritchard each finished with 22 points.

Mavericks 125, Raptors 118

In Toronto, Luka Doncic's 79th career triple-double moved the Dallas Mavericks star past some impressive NBA talent.

Doncic had 30 points, 13 rebounds and 11 assists for his second straight triple-double as the Mavericks extended their winning streak to seven games with a win over the Toronto Raptors.

This triple-double moved Doncic past Wilt Chamberlain and James Harden on the NBA's all-time list and into sole possession of seventh place.

Next in Doncic's sights? Mavericks head coach Jason Kidd, who had 107 triple-doubles in his 19-year NBA career.

Heat 121, Suns 111

In Miami, Bam Adebayo scored 25 points, Jimmy Butler added 24 and the Miami Heat moved back over the .500 mark by beating the Phoenix Suns.

Adebayo finished with 12 rebounds and eight assists for the Heat (11-10). Duncan Robinson scored 19 and Tyler Herro added 17 points, eight rebounds

and seven assists for Miami, which outscored Phoenix 68-53 after halftime.

Royce O'Neale had 23 points for Phoenix (12-10). Devin Booker scored 21 and Grayson Allen finished with 16. Bradley Beal had 15 points for the Suns, who were outscored 62-32 in the paint.

The Suns played again without Kevin Durant (left ankle sprain) and Jusuf Nurkic (right thigh contusion).

Thunder 119 Pelicans 109

In New Orleans, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 16 of his 31 points in the first quarter and Jalen Williams added 27 to power the Oklahoma City Thunder to a victory over the New Orleans Pelicans.

The Thunder built a 77-51 halftime lead by dominating New Orleans in the paint and in transition, and won for the seventh time in eight games.

Ashworth leaves Man Utd after less than six months

MANCHESTER, England, Dec 8, (AP): Manchester United sporting director Dan Ashworth is leaving the club by mutual agreement, less than six months after taking over the role as part of an overhaul by minority owner Jim Ratcliffe.

United announced his departure on Sunday - the morning after a 3-2 loss to Nottingham Forest left the club 13th in the Premier League standings and eight points adrift of the top four.

"We would like to thank Dan for his work and support during a transitional period for the club and wish him well for the future," United said in a statement. It did not disclose plans to replace Ashworth, who was one of the big hires

under Ratcliffe after the British billionaire paid \$1.3 billion for a 27.7% stake in the storied club in February.

Ashworth, one of the most highly regarded sporting directors in soccer, was hired from Premier League rival Newcastle and had to serve a period of gardening leave during months of negotiations before taking up his new role in July.

Along with new chief executive Omar Berrada and Jason Wilcox as technical director, he was one three appointments seen as key to Ratcliffe's overhaul.

But on-field progress has been slow, with manager Erik ten Hag fired in October after the club made its worst start to a season in the Premier League era.

‘All participants are winners’

SFL Amateur League concludes fifth season

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: The fifth season of the SFL Amateur League ended on a high note, with a vibrant ceremony that brought together elite athletes, football enthusiasts, professional club players, and a passionate audience. The event reflected the league’s spirit of camaraderie and celebration of the sport.

Omar Al Ansari, President of the SFL, expressed his gratitude to everyone who contributed to the league’s success, including players, coaches, organizers, and fans. He commended their pivotal roles in making the league a standout example of young people’s passion for sports.

“Sports are more than just competitions,” Al Ansari stated. “They convey values like teamwork, commitment, and solidarity. The SFL Amateur League serves as a platform for discovering and nurturing talents while promoting societal values such as discipline and unity.”

He highlighted the importance



Omar Al Ansari

of investing in youth, calling them the nation’s true wealth. “By channeling their energy into sports, we pave the way for a brighter future,” he said.

Al Ansari congratulated the season’s standout teams:

Al Rawda Diwaniya, winners of the Super Cup

The Blues, crowned league champions

He emphasized that all participants were winners, thanks to the sportsmanship and dedication displayed throughout the season.

Encouraging teams to continue their sporting journey, Al Ansari described the season’s conclusion as a new chapter filled with even greater ambitions. He reiterated the league’s vision of supporting youth and organizing tournaments that foster unity and brotherhood.

“As we look forward to the sixth season with renewed determination and enthusiasm, the SFL Amateur League has cemented itself as a prominent sporting event, inspiring young athletes to chase their dreams,” Al Ansari concluded.

With the anticipation of another thrilling season, the SFL remains a beacon of passion and opportunity for the region’s football community.



Winners crowned.

Australia routs India to level series



Australia’s Nathan McSweeney plays a shot during day three of the second cricket test match between Australia and India at the Adelaide Oval in Adelaide, Australia. (AP)

Cummins bounces out the Indian lower order

ADELAIDE, Australia, Dec 8, (AP): Australia bounced back from a heavy home defeat to level the Border-Gavaskar test series at 1-1 after a comprehensive 10-wicket win in the second test against India on Sunday.

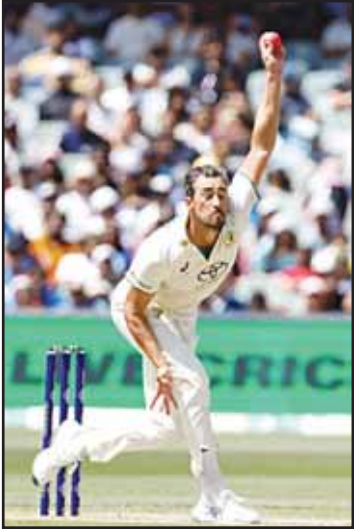
Pat Cummins took 5-57 as he bounced out the Indian lower order, with the visitors crashing to 175 all out in its second innings for a slender 18-run lead.

Usman Khawaja and Nathan McSweeney then guided Australia safely to a ten-wicket victory to ease the pressure that had been building since the hosts were humbled by 295 runs in the 1st test at Perth.

“This week we were back to our best,” Cummins said. “That’s the team that I remember and how we want to play our cricket, so really satisfying.”

“I think being one down, no doubt there’s a little bit more on it trying to level up the series.”

Resuming at 128-5 in the second



Australia’s Mitchell Starc bowls a delivery during day three of the second cricket test match between Australia and India at the Adelaide Oval in Adelaide, Australia. (AP)

innings, India needed a near-miracle from Rishabh Pant to have any hope of setting a testing fourth innings target for Australia to chase.

But Mitchell Starc had other ideas,

as he had Pant (28) caught at slip from the sixth delivery of the afternoon.

Cummins then got into the act using the short ball tactic against the Indian lower order to great effect.

Ravichandran Ashwin (7) was caught behind trying to pull, while Harshit Rana (0) couldn’t fend off a rising delivery and was caught at backward point.

Nitish Reddy top scored for India with 42 off 47 balls and was out caught off Cummins again trying to score quick runs.

It was the skipper’s first five wicket haul at the Adelaide Oval and went a long way to assuring Australia’s winning streak in day-night tests at the venue remained intact.

Mohammed Siraj was last man out, caught off Scott Boland who finished with 3-51 in his return to the team in place of the injured Josh Hazlewood.

None of the Indian batters passed 50 across the two innings - India previously suffered the same fate in the 2021 world test championship final against New Zealand at Southampton.

Needing just 19 runs to win the

test and level the series, McSweeney (10 not out) and Khawaja (12 not out) saw Australia home safely in 3.2 overs.

“There’s definitely a way for us to get back into the game, and we need to find that within ourselves,” India captain Rohit Sharma said. “There are a lot of individuals in that dressing room who have played a lot of cricket, won a lot of games, have come back from difficult situations in the past.

“We hope that everyone stands up to that challenge and takes the team through whenever it’s required.”

India was bowled out for 180 runs in the first innings on the back of Starc’s career best figures of 6-48. Travis Head scored a blistering 140 off 141 balls to propel Australia to 337 runs in reply and take a 157-run lead.

Australia’s quicks then dismantled India’s top order in the second innings under lights to leave the match strongly in the hosts favour heading into the third day.

The teams will play a third test beginning Dec. 14 in Brisbane followed by matches in Melbourne starting Dec. 26 and in Sydney from Jan. 3.

Kuwait Club aims to solidify lead

By Hassan Mosa
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: Kuwait Club aims to solidify its position at the top of the Federation Volleyball Championship standings as it faces Burgan tonight at 7:00 pm in the eighth round of the competition.

Another match in the round will see Kazma take on Al-Shabab at 5:00 pm. Both games will be held at the Federation Hall in Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Indoor Halls Complex.

Kuwait Club leads the table with 18 points, followed by Qadsia with 15 points, narrowly ahead of Kazma, which shares the same point total but sits in third place due to point differences. Burgan holds fourth place with 14 points, while Al-Shabab follows in fifth with 10 points. The standings are rounded out by Al-Arabi (9 points), Yarmouk (3 points), and Al-Sulaibikhat and Al-Nasr, both yet to earn a point.

Kuwait Club has already secured its place in the second round. Meanwhile, Burgan faces a critical challenge to maintain its qualification hopes, with Al-Arabi still holding a slim chance to clinch a semifinal spot. Qadsia and Kazma are nearly assured of advancing to the next

stage.

Kuwait Club enters its clash with Burgan riding high after a decisive 3-1 victory over Qadsia in the previous round. With their top spot secured and a semifinal ticket already in hand, Kuwait Club looks to extend its dominance.

For Burgan, the stakes are high as they strive for a positive result to stay in contention. Failure to secure points against Kuwait tonight and against Qadsia in the final first-round match could jeopardize their chances of advancing.

In the second match of the evening, Kazma will aim to confirm its qualification by defeating Al-Shabab. A win would solidify Kazma’s spot in the semifinals.

The championship is played in a single-round league system, with the top four teams advancing to the semifinals. The first-ranked team will face the fourth, while the second takes on the third. The winners of these matchups will progress to the final.

With intense competition and high stakes, tonight’s matches are pivotal in shaping the semifinal lineup as teams vie for the coveted championship title.



Kuwait seeks to maintain lead.

Best of the Rest

Monterrey cruises into final: Monterrey scored five second-half goals on Saturday to cruise into Mexico’s Liga MX final with a 5-1 home victory over San Luis.

Oliver Torres put the host ahead in the second leg of the semifinal with a 47th-minute strike and German Berterame doubled the lead shortly after.

The visitor reduced the deficit through Sebastian Salles-Lamonge’s 75th-minute penalty, but Daniel Guillen gifted Monterrey a third goal seven minutes later when he inadvertently turned the ball into his own net.

Torres added a fourth goal by curling a free-kick into the top left corner and Brandon Vazquez completed the rout with a long-range effort after combining with Sergio Canales. (Xinhua)

□ □ □

Velez stumbles: Elias Gomez scored an own goal as Velez Sarsfield missed the chance to move closer to the Argentine Primera Division title on Saturday with a 1-0 loss at Union Santa Fe.

Gomez inadvertently turned the ball into his own net just before the hour to hand Union its 11th win of the campaign and condemn his side to just its fourth loss.

The result leaves Union sixth in the 28-team standings with 39 points from 26 outings while Velez remains top, three points clear of second-placed Talleres Cordoba.

The latter has two games remaining in the season and Velez only one. (Xinhua)

England beats New Zealand to take unassailable series lead

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, Dec 8, (AP): England conquered the Wellington gale Sunday to seal a 323 run win over New Zealand on the third day of the second test and to take a 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Joe Root completed his 36th century as England batted for less than 30 minutes in the morning before declaring with a lead of 582 runs and New Zealand crumbled under the weight of the deficit and was all out for 259 in its second innings

England’s win followed its comprehensive eight wicket win in the first test at Christchurch, capping its first series victory in New Zealand since 2008 ahead of the final test in Hamilton which begins on Saturday.

The third day differed from the first two in Wellington which were warm and sunny. It was cool, gloomy and windy but otherwise England’s thorough command of the series continued.

Root resumed on 73 with England already 533 ahead. He sped to his century from 127 balls with 10 boundaries and then was out for 106 at which point Ben Stokes declared England’s second innings at 427-6.

Stokes left himself high and dry at 49 not out, just short of his 49th half century.

Chris Woakes had the job at first of bowling into the Wellington wind and he was rewarded with the wickets

of Devon Conway (0) and Kane Williamson (4) as New Zealand slumped to 59-4 by lunch.

Brydon Carse removed captain Tom Latham (24) and Rachin Ravindra (6) before the break to lift his tally of wickets for the series to 16 at an average of 12.8.

New Zealand showed more resistance in the afternoon



England’s Jacob Bethell takes a catch to dismiss New Zealand’s Matt Henry during play on day three of the second cricket test between New Zealand and England at the Basin Reserve in Wellington, New Zealand. (AP)

and evening as wicketkeeper Tom Blundell, under pressure to hold his place, compiled his fifth test century from 96 balls.

Blundell put on 94-run partnership with Nathan Smith which saw England having to chase leather for the first extended period in the series. He was out for 115 which included 13 fours and five sixes and Smith followed for a career-bet 42 just before the end.

Carse and Harry Brook have been in the engine room for England throughout the series. Brook’s 171 at Hagley Oval in the first test and Carse’s 10-106 - his 4-64 in the first innings and 6-42 in the second - propelled England’s to its emphatic win.

Brook then scored 123 from only 115 balls in the first innings at Wellington to lead England’s recovery from 43-4 to 280.

“It’s amazing to be stood here winning the series and particularly after being 40-4 on day one and I think looking back to the start of this game I think that’s a huge reason why we have (won).” Stokes said.

“Harry Brook and Ollie Pope were just amazing on day one to play like that. That wicket in cricket terms was what we call a snake pit. Especially on day one it was doing plenty and providing a lot of assistance for the bowlers.”

“To have the bravery and the backing of your own abil-

ity and to also have the skill to go out and play like that was just absolutely phenomenal.”

Carse took 4-46 and Gus Atkinson took 4-31 including a hat-trick as New Zealand was bowled out for 125, giving England a lead of 155.

Atkinson took the last three New Zealand wickets to become the first England bowler since Moeen Ali in 2017 to compete a test hat-trick.

England’s second innings of 427-6 in the second innings included contributions of 96 by Jacob Bethell - out just short of a maiden century - 92 by Ben Duckett, 55 by Brook and then Root’s 106. Brook has scored 349 runs in the series so far at an average of 116 and now has three centuries and three half centuries in four tests against New Zealand.

After a stunning 3-0 series win away in India last month, New Zealand has slumped in this series, particularly with the bat and changes may be considered before the final test.

“We’re obviously hurting,” Latham said. “It’s disappointing to lose in that fashion.

“I think after the first innings, putting them under pressure, Harry Brook played a fantastic innings there. Obviously when you only score 125 in the first innings you’re on the back foot. It hurts and it’s not our best.”



Leicester City's Jamie Vardy, center left and Brighton's Pervis Estupinan vie for the ball, during the English Premier League soccer match between Leicester City and Brighton and Hove Albion at the King Power Stadium, in Leicester, England. (AP)

Sports

Ibrahim and Nasser undergoing treatment

Kuwait to test Khaleeji Zain 26 readiness in friendly against Yemen

DOHA, Dec 8: Kuwait will play its first friendly match at 6:00 pm today, meeting Yemen at the Abdullah bin Khalifah Stadium in Al-Duhail Club, as part of its preparatory camp in Doha, Qatar.

Kuwait is set for another friendly match against Lebanon on December 12, with plans underway to arrange a third match during its camp, which began on November 28. These matches are part of Kuwait's preparation program for the upcoming "Khaleeji Zain 26", scheduled to take place in Kuwait from December 21 to January 3.

In the draw, Kuwait was placed in Group One alongside Qatar, the UAE, and Oman, while Group Two comprises Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Yemen.

Led by Argentine coach Juan Pizzi, Kuwait's national team consists of 30 players,

including:

Suleiman Abdul Ghafoor, Khaled Al-Rashidi, Abdulrahman Al-Fadhli, Saud Al-Hoshan, Rashid Al-Dosari, Sami Al-Sanea, Moaz Al-Dhafiri, Fahad Al-Hajri, Mishari Ghannam, Hassan Hamdan, Nasser Khader, Khaled Ibrahim, Eid Al-Rashidi, Reda Hani, Ahmed Al-Dhafiri, Faisal Zayed, Sultan Al-Enezi, Mohammed Daham, Hamad Harbi, Fawaz Aayed, Moaz Al-Aseema, Yousef Majed, Ali Khalaf, Salman Al-Awadhi, Yousef Nasser, Montaser Abdulsalam, Mubarak Al-Fanini, Bandar Bursali, Mahdi Dashti, and Khaled Al-Kharqawi.

Defender Khaled Ibrahim and forward Yousef Nasser are currently undergoing treatment for muscle injuries, ruling them out of the friendly matches. Ibrahim is

working on his recovery to be fit for the Gulf Championship, while Nasser has been absent from recent training sessions since late November.

Coach Pizzi and his staff aim to use these friendly matches to evaluate the readiness of all players and finalize the squad of 23 for the championship. A number of players, including Reda Hani, Suleiman Abdul Ghafoor, Mishari Ghannam, and Mahdi Dashti, are also recovering from minor injuries but have joined intensive treatment programs. They are expected to have a chance to play in today's match.

The Al-Azraq squad remains focused on refining its preparations, with Pizzi determined to assess the largest number of players to ensure a competitive start to its campaign.



Pizzi seeks to involve the largest number of players against Yemen.



Nabila Al-Ali poses with champions of the Grand Prix round.

Strong start for British showjumper Channing in the Equestrian League

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 8: British showjumper Nick Channing, representing Hawally Club, clinched victory in the first round of the fourth edition of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation League, which concluded recently at the Kuwait Equestrian Center.

Channing secured first place in the tenth and final round, the "Grand Prize" category, featuring a jump height of 140 cm. He was followed by Abdulrahman Al-Fuzaie, Yara Al-Hunaidi, Madi Al-Khamis, Abdullah Al-Awadhi, and Hamad Al-Hajri in the rankings.

In the ninth round, the "Small Prize" at a height of 130 cm, Channing once again triumphed, outperforming Abdullah Al-Awadhi, Aws Al-Tanak, Hamad Al-Hajri, and Madi Al-Khamis in a de-

cisive round of distinction.

The winners were crowned by Nabila Al-Ali, Secretary-General of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation, and Sufyan Buqmaz, the federation's Administrative Director.

Al-Ali highlighted the strong competition witnessed in the championship's opening round, with intense performances by male and female jockeys in the top categories. The beginner rounds also saw record participation, showcasing the growing popularity of the sport.

The referees committee, led by Nadar Al-Mustafa, included Nabila Al-Ali, Lama Abdel-Al, and Julia Fronko. The course was designed by Yaqoub Al-Nasrallah, assisted by Abdullah Al-Mahna, with Badr Al-Haifi serving as the field referee.

Galaxy holds off Red Bulls for record sixth 'MLS Cup'

'It's finally back where it belongs'

CARSON, Calif., Dec 8, (AP): The LA Galaxy finished 26th in the 29-team Major League Soccer standings just one season ago, and its biggest supporters boycotted certain matches to protest a decade of poor performance. The most successful club in league history seemed light years away from its luminous prime.

When the Galaxy raised the MLS Cup again Saturday amid confetti and fireworks, its spectacular transformation was complete. In only one year, a team that was profoundly lost had rediscovered its peerless championship pedigree.

"We won this trophy, and it's finally back where it belongs," striker Dejan Joveljic said.

Joseph Paintsil and Joveljic scored in the first half, and the Galaxy won their record sixth MLS Cup championship with a 2-1 victory over the New York Red Bulls.

After striking twice in the first 13 minutes of the final, the Galaxy nursed its lead through a scoreless second half to raise their league's biggest trophy for the first time since 2014.

MLS' most successful franchise struggled through most of the ensuing years, but everything changed after LA spent

smartly in the offseason to build a high-scoring new lineup topped by Paintsil, Joveljic and Gabriel Pec. The Galaxy finished second in the Western Conference and streaked through the postseason with an MLS playoff-record 18 goals in five games to win another crown.

The Galaxy even won this title without perhaps its most important player. Riqui Puig, the playmaking midfielder from Barcelona who ran their offense impressively all season long, tore a ligament in his knee last week in the conference final.

Puig watched this game in a suit, but the Catalan catalyst's teammates hadn't forgotten him: After his replacement, Gastón Brugman, set up LA's opening goal with a superb pass in the ninth minute, Paintsil held up Puig's jersey to their roaring fans during the celebration.

Just four minutes later, Joveljic sprinted past four New York defenders and chipped home his 21st goal.

Brugman was named the MLS Cup MVP after a commanding performance in midfield. The Uruguayan hadn't started a match for the Galaxy since Oct. 5 after an injury-slowed season, playing only as a postseason substitute before the final.

Sean Nealis scored for the seventh-seeded Red Bulls, whose improbable postseason charge ended one win shy of their first Cup championship. With the league's youngest roster, New York fell just short of becoming the lowest-seeded team to win the tournament under first-year German coach Sandro Schwarz.



The Los Angeles Galaxy lift the winners' trophy after defeating the New York Red Bulls in the MLS Cup championship soccer match in Carson, Calif. (AP)

Mbappé and Bellingham score

Real moves within two points of Barcelona

BARCELONA, Spain, Dec 8, (AP): Jude Bellingham and Kylian Mbappé helped Real Madrid close on Barcelona after it rolled to 3-0 win at Girona. Coach Hansi Flick was sent off for protesting a penalty decision and Barcelona was held at Real Betis to 2-2.

Barcelona has dropped points in four of the last five rounds. Its latest slip in Seville let Madrid close to within two points with a game still to play.

Bellingham rifled in a loose ball for the 36th-minute opener and set up Arda Güler to double Madrid's lead in the 55th when he threaded a long ball through Girona's defense.

But about five minutes later the England midfielder needed to be substituted for an apparent left-thigh injury.

Mbappé capped the victory with a goal from a tight angle, helping him rebound from his failure to score a penalty in a loss at Athletic



Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappé is challenged by Girona's Bojan Miovski during a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Girona and Real Madrid at the Montilivi stadium in Girona, Spain. (AP)

Bilbao midweek.

Madrid lost left back Ferland

Mendy to an apparent leg issue as well. Madrid was already missing defenders Éder Militao and Dani Carvajal to serious leg injuries, and coach Carlo Ancelotti said David Alaba won't be fit to play until January.

Madrid visits Atalanta on Tuesday in the Champions League, where it has lost three of five matches.

After outscoring opponents 29-5 during a run of seven straight wins that included big victories over Real Madrid and Bayern Munich, Barcelona has hit its first dip in form since Flick's arrival last summer. The skid over the past month includes its first home loss to the modest Las Palmas in over 50 years and wasting a 2-0 lead in a draw at Celta Vigo.

Valencia's disgruntled supporters jeered their team after a 1-0 loss to Rayo Vallecano left it in the relegation zone.

Las Palmas also beat last-placed Valladolid 2-1.

Leicester stages a late recovery to draw 2-2 at home

Arsenal drops points in Premier League title chase

LONDON, Dec 8, (AP): Arsenal could only muster another goal from a corner in a 1-1 draw at Fulham on Sunday as Mikel Arteta's title-chasing team dropped two points in its bid to reel in Premier League leader Liverpool.

William Saliba - one of two scorers from corners in Arsenal's 2-0 win over Manchester United on Wednesday - repeated the trick in the 52nd minute against Fulham to earn his team a point at Craven Cottage. Raul Jimenez put Fulham ahead in the 11th.

It helped Arsenal trim the gap to Liverpool to six points but will go down as a wasted opportunity, with the leaders inactive this round after the Merseyside derby against Everton was postponed on Saturday because of stormy weather.

Bukayo Saka had what looked like being a winning goal for Arsenal ruled out for offside against Gabriel Martinelli in the 88th.

There were late goals in the other two early matches, however.

Jamie Vardy scored in the 86th and set up another goal in the first minute of stoppage time as Leicester staged a late recovery to draw 2-2 at home to Brighton in Rüdiger van Nistelrooy's second match

in charge. He won his first, against West Ham, 3-1 on Tuesday.

Bournemouth scored in the 87th and again in the fifth minute of added-on time through Dango Ouattara to win 2-1 at Ipswich, which stayed in the relegation zone with just one victory this season.

Manchester City's Premier League title defense took another blow after drawing with Crystal Palace 2-2 on Saturday.

Four-time defending champion City ended a seven-game winless run on Wednesday by beating Nottingham Forest, but dropped more points with the draw at Selhurst Park.

It could have been worse for City as Palace led twice.

Pep Guardiola's team is fourth in the standings and eight points behind leader Liverpool, which has a game in hand after its derby with Everton was postponed because of Storm Darragh.

Nottingham Forest was fifth after stunning Manchester United 3-2 at Old Trafford for the first time in 30 years.

Aston Villa beat last-placed Southampton 1-0, and Brentford won against Newcastle 4-2.

A win would have lifted City to

second and cut the gap to Liverpool to six points, but it was behind after four minutes when Daniel Muñoz scored for Palace.

Erling Haaland leveled by halftime with a header, but Maxence Lacroix restored Palace's lead in the 56th.

Rico Lewis equalized again for City in the 68th and was sent off in the 84th for a second yellow card.

"I like everything about my team, when we're in the situation we're in," Guardiola said. "We have a lot of problems within the squad. We fought incredible, we gave everything, we take the point."

"The season started difficult and will all season be difficult. We have to survive this season in every game, try to take points to win games and move forward."

Ruben Amorim is getting an idea of just how big a job he has on his hands at Manchester United after a second straight loss.

Goalkeeper Andre Onana's second-half blunder against Forest proved costly. At 1-1, two minutes after the break, Onana misjudged Morgan Gibbs-White's tame shot from outside the box. He dived the wrong way and watched the ball roll in.