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National pride unfurled as Amir leads historic flag ceremony



Amiri Diwan photos

Left: HH the Amir honors Kuwait's flag with a heartfelt kiss during the flag-hoisting ceremony. Right: HH the Amir receives a commemorative gift from the Armed Forces.



Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Kuwait needs to open the doors of its officials

A SENIOR official is like a physician who must always be on standby. Some Gulf countries adopt this principle, as they are racing against time to achieve the highest levels of progress and prosperity for their people. In these countries, every employee, from top to bottom, works hard on development, driven by the belief that opportunity is like a bird that a skilled hunter should never miss.

As a result, institutions in these countries often operate on a two-shift or even a three-shift system, ensuring work continues 24/7 when necessary. This approach has enabled these countries to surpass us in development and achieve excellent results in many sectors, particularly in the economic sector, which is the backbone of a successful state.

Officials in these countries, including ministers, under-secretaries, and directors, are constantly working, even on holidays. Their office doors are always open to meet with people. A notable example is the visit by the Vice President of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid to one of the ministries. When he found the officials' doors closed, he immediately ordered

a carpenter to remove all the doors. His reasoning was that officials should focus on serving the people, and listening to their complaints and opinions, instead of enjoying the privileges of their positions. That same year, the UAE ranked 17th in the world on the Happiness Index.

What about Kuwait? Since 1992, Kuwait has faced the dilemma of conflict-of-interest among members of the National Assembly, ministers, and some influential figures. This has had a negative impact on society and development, leading to a decline in various public service indicators. A clear example of this is the miserable condition of the country's roads.

Many public institutions and ministries have been turned into personal farms for the benefit of certain ministers or MPs.

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KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2, (KUNA): A flag-hoisting ceremony was held at Bayan Palace on Sunday under the patronage and in the presence of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The event was attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad

Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, President of the Supreme Judicial Council and Head of the Court of Cassation Adel Bouresli and senior state officials.

The motorcade of His Highness the Amir arrived at the venue, given a 21-gun salute and warm welcome by the personnel of the Army, Police and National Guard. His Highness the Amir then hoisted the flag and the National Anthem was played.

Electricity subsidies on Kuwait chopping block

Energy costs set to rise as tariff reform gains momentum



PM Diwan photo

An extraordinary Cabinet meeting was held Sunday under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — See Page 5

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: With the issuance of Decree Law No. (1) of 2025 on January 18, allowing government entities to set fees, costs and usage charges for public facilities and services based on cost and usage criteria, the path has been paved for the re-pricing of numerous services -- especially energy costs, including electricity and fuel, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

This aligns with announced economic reform plans aimed at reducing the budget deficit and increasing non-oil revenues.

In this context, the Baker Institute for Public Policy in Washington has emphasized the "necessity of restructuring state subsidies for electricity in Kuwait."

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Silicon print fraud exposed

Mol dismantles fake attendance scheme involving ministry staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: In its ongoing efforts to combat counterfeiting and forgery crimes, the Ministry of Interior announced the arrest of seven individuals employed by the Ministry of Justice, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The suspects are accused of forging attendance records leading to the misappropriation of public funds.

The Criminal Security Sector, through its Counterfeiting and Forgery Crimes Combating Department, discovered that the accused had been

using fake silicon fingerprints on attendance devices to falsely record the presence and departure of other employees.

The operation led to the seizure of seven fake silicon fingerprints in the possession of the suspects.

The authorities are now coordinating with other relevant agencies to identify any additional similar cases.

The accused individuals, along with the seized items, have been referred to the Public Prosecution for further legal action.

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: The Amiri Diwan on Saturday mourned the passing away of Sheikh Duaij Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Ibrahim Al-Sabah at the age of 38.

The funeral service was to take place at 3:30 p.m. local time Sunday. (KUNA)

KUWAIT CITY: An Amiri decree was issued on Sunday appointing Prof. Dr. Dina Musaed Youssef Al-Mailem as Director of Kuwait University with an excellent degree for a period of four years, renewable once.

Kuwait's Cabinet approved the appointment last Tuesday.

Al-Mailem was previously the Assistant Dean for Research and Laboratory Affairs at the University's College of Science. (KUNA)

CAIRO: Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abu Al-Gheit has urged scholars, on Sunday, to draft a regulatory framework for Artificial Intelligence (AI) that aligns with Arab values and interests. Speaking at the opening session of the Arab Dialogue Circle on Artificial Intelligence in the Arab World, tackling innovative applications and ethical challenges, held at the League's headquarters in Cairo, Abu al-Gheit emphasized the importance of leveraging AI responsibly to serve regional priorities.

He noted the rapid developments in AI, particularly in Large Language Models and generative AI, describing the field as a technological competition among global powers to develop more efficient and cost-effective AI systems. (KUNA)

The sources highlighted the efficiency of airport procedures, which facilitated seamless passenger movement.

Dedicated teams assisted travelers from arrival to departure, ensuring a smooth experience. Efforts extended beyond procedural facilitation to enhancing logistical services and maintaining operational safety during peak travel periods.

A proactive operational plan was implemented for the holiday, with intensified efforts and strategically assigned teams to accommodate the increased passenger flow.

Kuwait airport powers through 'holiday traffic' with 850 flights

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Kuwait International Airport experienced a surge in air traffic during the Isra and Miraj holiday, handling an average of 850 scheduled flights over three days.

Airport sources told Al-Seyassah that Dubai, Jeddah, Doha and Cairo were the top travel destinations.

The airport operations ran smoothly, with teams working around the clock to ensure the best services for travelers.



Egyptian Pres.
receives Kuwaiti
Deputy PM



'KFH tops the
Kuwaiti banking
sector in net
profits'



NBK achieves record
profits, leveraging a
strategic expansion,
says Al-Sager

Death penalty for citizen who killed and dismembered wife

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: The Court of Cassation sentenced a citizen, in his 50s, to death for deliberately killing his compatriot wife in July 2024; dismembering her body and throwing the parts in several garbage bins in different areas of the country.

The horrific crime was discovered when another citizen filed a report that her sister has been missing since October 2022; suspecting that her husband harmed her, especially since her mobile phone was turned off and she did not attend the wedding of two of her sister's children.

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Students participate in the flag ceremony as over 500,000 students return to class Sunday morning, marking the start of the second semester after a two-week mid-year break. — See Page 2

Prayer Timings			
Fajr	05:16	Asr	15:05
Sunrise ..	06:37	Maghrib ..	17:27
Zohr	12:02	Isha	18:46

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hours:
By Day: Mild and clouds will increase gradually with light to moderate northwesterly wind to light variable wind, with speeds of 06-30 km/h.

Weather			
By Night: Cold and partly cloudy with light variable wind, with speeds of 06-20 km/h.			
Station	Max Exp	Min Rec	
Kuwait City	22	11	Bubyan 23 06
Kuwait Airport	22	08	Jahra 23 10
Abdaly	23	07	Failaka Island 23 10
			Salmiyah 20 14
			Ahmadi 25 08
			Jal Aliyah 21 07
			Nuwaisib 23 10



KUNA photo
Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi receives First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah as part of his official visit to Cairo.

Egyptian Pres. receives Kuwaiti Deputy PM

CAIRO, Feb. 2. (KUNA): Egyptian President Abdelfattah El-Sisi welcomed Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Interior Minister, Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, along with his accompanying delegation, during their official visit to Cairo on Sunday.

According to an Egyptian defense ministry statement, Sheikh Fahad Al-Yusuf conveyed warm greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness

the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, wishing President Al-Sisi good health and more progress and prosperity for the brotherly people of Egypt.

The reception focused on the long-standing relations, and ways to further cooperation in various sectors to serve mutual interests.

The two sides also exchanged views on latest regional and international developments, as well as matters of shared concern.



Kuwait national flag is raised in Al-Ahmadi Governorate.

Photo by Rizk Taufiq

Kuwait flag-hoisting marks start of national festivities

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2, (KUNA): Marking the celebration of the State of Kuwait's 64th National Day and 34th Liberation Day, the country's governorates held flag-hoisting ceremonies on Sunday, marking national celebrations.

The Governors all congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and all nationals and residents on this occasion.

Governor of Al-Ahmadi Sheikh Humoud Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah recalled the efforts of the ancestors and the sacrifices of the mar-

tyrs in building a homeland and preserving it.

He called the celebrations an important marker of the beginning of the development of the modern state, an emblem of national unity and renewal of loyalty to the country.

Hawalli Governor, Ali Al-Asfar on his part voiced his pride of this significant occasion, evoking the inspiring stories of its history, and its prosperity.

Governor Sheikh Abdullah Salem Al-Sabah of Al-Asimah (Capital) Governorate commented saying that the national celebrations ignite a sense of loyalty and enforce fidelity to the homeland.

Governor Al-Sabah highlighted hard work and devotion as main factors behind the build-

ing of the state and its development.

Farwaniya Governor, Athbi Nasser Al-Sabah underlined the national celebrations as an enforcement of the sense of unity.

Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governor, Sheikh Sabah Bader Al-Sabah stated that this is a reflection of Kuwait's long history, the unity of its people and their sacrifices.

Governor of Al-Jahra, Ahmad Al-Habashi, reflected on the flag hoisting ceremony held on Sunday saying it carries sincere sentiments and appreciation. Al-Habashi extended his congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

US embassy launches new visa appointment system

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: The US Embassy in Kuwait has announced the launch of a new and improved visa appointment system, effective February 8, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a statement posted on its official X account, the embassy highlighted that the new system will streamline the process by allowing applicants to schedule interview appointments, pay application fees online and ac-

cess customer support.

Applicants are reminded that the process will be conducted through the official U.S. visa application website at <http://ustraveldocs.com>.

The embassy also noted that during the transition period from February 5 to 7, some visa services will be temporarily unavailable, however, all previously scheduled interviews will proceed as planned.

Gulf Cancer Week ... noble goals

Early awareness on cancer ups disease recovery rates

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: The Assistant Undersecretary for Health Care Affairs at the Ministry of Health Dr. Nadia Al-Jumaa stated that cooperation between GCC countries through the Gulf Cancer Awareness Week highlights a positive aspect of joint efforts, bringing together both governmental and non-governmental organizations to support health and preventive development.

In a speech delivered on behalf of the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi during the opening ceremony of the 10th Gulf Cancer Awareness Week titled "Your Health in Your Awareness", Dr. Al-Jumaa said the continued success of this event reflects progress and advancement in cancer awareness and prevention.

She explained that the Gulf Federation for Cancer Control, established in 2002, unites Gulf civil societies working in the field of cancer control. It has implemented several joint programs and initiatives that have had a positive impact at both the regional and national levels.

The World Health Organization's strategy, in collaboration with the Gulf Health Council, focuses on two main goals - educating Gulf citizens about the risk factors that may lead to cancer, and promoting the importance of early detection. The aim is to encourage the public to recognize the early signs of these diseases, thereby increasing recovery rates through timely diagnosis.

The Gulf Cancer Awareness Week has been highly successful over the past years in raising awareness in Gulf societies about cancer and the associated risk factors, as well as the importance of early screenings.

Dr. Al-Jumaa highlighted the forma-

tion of a coordinating committee in Kuwait, which includes relevant organizations and associations, to carry out awareness activities during this week.

Meanwhile, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Cancer Aware Nation Dr. Khaled Al-Saleh stated in his speech that the Gulf Cancer Awareness Week has achieved noble goals since its inception.

He explained that the initiative has helped change the perception of cancer, moving it away from old stereotypes and re-educating society to understand that cancer is a chronic disease, not the terminal condition it was once thought to be.

The campaign has raised awareness about the risk factors associated with cancer and their prevention, as well as increasing health literacy on the importance of early detection. This includes recognizing early signs of cancer and training individuals in self-examination.

Dr. Al-Saleh highlighted the cooperation of 20 Gulf associations working in cancer awareness, treatment, and psychological support under the umbrella of the Gulf Federation for Cancer Control.

He said, "Since the launch of Gulf Cancer Awareness Week, these associations have implemented more than 2,200 activities in all Gulf countries."

In addition, the founder and chair of the board of directors of the Sidra Association for Psychological Care for Cancer Patients Sheikhha Azza Jaber Al-Sabah stated that the celebration achieves the goals of the Gulf Federation for Cancer Control in combating and preventing cancer in the Gulf countries.

She highlighted that Sidra is the first non-profit public benefit association in Kuwait and the Gulf region to provide psychological and emotional support to cancer patients and their caregivers throughout all stages of the disease.



Students start their day in the new semester with the school assembly.

KUNA photo

Over 0.5 m students return to classes starting 2nd semester

Focus on modern teaching methods: minister

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

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: After a two-week mid-year break, over 500,000 students in public and private schools resumed classes this morning, marking the official start of the second semester.

The school administrations have finalized preparations, ensuring the smooth implementation of study plans and curricula.

The schedules have been distributed to teachers via WhatsApp work groups, allowing lessons to proceed seamlessly from day one.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has completed the printing and distribution of school books across all educational stages, assuring that all necessary materials are available without shortages.

However, the educational sources emphasized the importance of student attendance and discipline from the first day, as the second semester plays a critical role in completing curricula and preparing for final exams.

In coordination with the academic return, the Ministry of Interior has intensified efforts to manage traffic around schools, ensuring smooth movement and minimizing congestion.

The Ministry of Education is committed to fostering a stimulating learning environment that enhances academic achievement and develops students' personal skills, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, Minister of Education Jalal Al-Tabtabaei congratulated students, parents

and educational and administrative staff on the commencement of the second semester, wishing them a successful and productive term.

He highlighted the ministry's focus on modern teaching methods that promote deep understanding and a passion for learning.

The minister underscored the importance of student activities -- scientific, cultural and sports-related -- as vital tools for character-building, self-confidence and talent development, ultimately contributing to higher academic performance.

Al-Tabtabaei emphasized that achieving educational goals requires collaboration between educators, administrators, parents and students. He stressed that teamwork between school and home significantly impacts the success of the educational process, aligning with the ministry's vision for advancing education.

He acknowledged the critical role of teachers, describing them as more than just knowledge providers but also mentors who instill positive values and prepare students to tackle future challenges.

Additionally, he urged students to embrace responsibility, work diligently and actively engage in available learning opportunities to enhance both academic and personal growth.

Recognizing the pivotal role of parents as partners in education, Al-Tabtabaei called for ongoing communication between families and schools to foster a love for learning and encourage student

participation in extracurricular activities.

Looking ahead, he expressed confidence in a semester filled with progress and achievement, emphasizing that the education sector continues to move forward under the guidance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled and the support of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah.

Reaffirming the ministry's commitment to educational reform, Al-Tabtabaei vowed to enhance curricula to align with global advancements and future requirements.

He also reiterated his dedication to administrative reform and eliminating violations, stressing integrity and quality as fundamental pillars of an advanced education system.

The minister called on all Ministry of Education employees to strengthen teamwork and collaboration, ensuring the success of the educational process.

He emphasized the ministry's commitment to leveraging all available resources to achieve sustainable education, preparing future generations to contribute effectively to Kuwait's progress and prosperity.

Students at the Kuwait University also began the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year on the first day of classes, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The student attendance was high across various university colleges at Sabah Al-Salem University City in Shaddadiya.

The lectures kicked off at 8:00 am, with faculty members emphasizing the importance of attendance and the consequences of absences on the first day of school.



Photo by Rizk Taufiq
Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Cancer Aware Nation Dr. Khaled Al-Saleh and other dignitaries at the event.

Replacing subsidies to cash payment needs more study

“THE issue of subsidies has long been a subject of debate in Kuwait, and the recent discussions surrounding potential reforms have reignited the conversation,” columnist **Faisal Rashid Al Ghaiss** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

“While government support for essential commodities is intended to ease the financial burden on citizens, the current rationing system has undeniable inefficiencies that need urgent attention.

“However, any proposed alternative must be carefully assessed to avoid creating new challenges.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor has been considering replacing the existing food rationing system with a home delivery model based on prior appointments.

“Though this may seem like an improvement, it is unlikely to resolve the fundamental inefficiencies of the current system.

“Instead, it could lead to increased bureaucratic overhead, traffic congestion, and additional costs associated with delivery logistics, staffing, and vehicle maintenance.

“Moreover, the financial benefits of the rationing system to citizens are marginal, as the difference between the subsidized prices and market prices for food commodities is relatively small.

“Given these realities, I believe that rather than replacing the system with another costly alternative, it should be abolished altogether. If necessary, the government could consider providing direct cash assistance to families in place of these subsidies.

“Rather than focusing solely on food subsidies, Kuwait should adopt a broader strategy that addresses all forms of government support, including subsidies for fuel, water, and electricity.

“These three categories consume far more government resources than food subsidies, given the high percentage of financial assistance provided and the administrative costs involved.

“A more effective approach would be to replace all four types of subsidies with a structured cash allowance system.

“A well-calibrated monthly payment to Kuwaiti families would allow them to manage their consumption more efficiently while eliminating unnecessary government expenditures.

“Shifting from direct subsidies to cash allowances offers multiple benefits:

- * Cost Efficiency – The government would save billions in administrative costs, salaries, and logistics.
- * Consumer Choice – Citizens would have the freedom to buy what they need instead of relying on predetermined supply allocations.
- * Workforce Optimization – Reducing the need for rationing infrastructure would decrease reliance on both local and expatriate labor.
- * Fraud Prevention – Eliminating direct subsidies would curb smuggling, fraud, and corruption associated with the current system.
- * Encouraging Conservation – Without artificially low prices, citizens would be incentivized to use resources like fuel, water, and electricity more responsibly.
- * Targeted Benefits – The government could ensure that subsidies are directed only toward Kuwaiti citizens, thereby cutting unnecessary expenditures by approximately 70%.

“To ensure the success of a cash-based subsidy system, two precautionary measures must be adopted:

* The cash allowance should be deposited into citizens’ bank accounts under a designated category such as ‘support allowance,’ separate from their regular salary. This would prevent it from being perceived as an automatic entitlement and instead encourage mindful spending.

* The Ministry of Commerce must enforce strict price controls on essential goods to prevent inflation and exploitation by suppliers.

“As Kuwait moves toward a more sustainable economic model, the government must prioritize efficiency and fairness in subsidy distribution.

“Simply replacing one flawed system with another is not the solution, rather, a complete overhaul is required. A well-planned transition to direct financial assistance can achieve the goals of subsidy reform while maintaining the welfare of Kuwaiti citizens.

“This perspective is offered with the hope of contributing to the national dialogue on economic reform. By fostering open discussions and considering alternative solutions, we can work toward a stronger and more resilient Kuwait.”

Also:

“Perhaps, the first good deeds of US President Donald Trump, as he assumes his position in his second and final presidential term, are his social and moral decisions, his rejection of gay marriage and abortion, his statement that there are two genders in America, and his ban on men wearing tight pants,” journalist **Hassan Ali Karam** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“Trump, who is approaching 80, is no longer a teenager. He will not be accused of sexual harassment and assault, as times have changed. What was

acceptable in youth has become unacceptable, and even a defect in old age.

“Any decision taken by an American president -- whether Trump or others in the future -- will reflect on us, just as the decisions of previous presidents reflected on us.

“Short dresses or tight pants are considered deviant fashion, and are only suitable for deviant elements or idiots, those who are fond of imitating others, and those who are mindless and outside of public taste. The short dresses and high heels fashion that spread after World War II, and almost destroyed all of humanity, was a response to a new global situation that emerged after the war.

“Morals do not change from one environment to another, or from one society to another. Nevertheless, other things -- other than customs and traditions -- affect the mind, and consequently, the taste. Without a doubt, religion plays an important role, while nature and weather play the most important role in determining or choosing the type of clothing that should be worn at home, outside or in places of worship (mosques, churches, etc.)

“Determining the type of clothing is a measure of a person’s taste. For example, it is not tasteful to enter mosques in shorts, nor is it tasteful for women to wear short clothes, exposed shoulders and chests, or short pants, whether in markets and at official or social occasions. It has nothing to do with personal freedom, because your freedom is in your home and within yourself. Even at home, you are obligated to adhere to public taste, among your children, spouse or others.

“Undoubtedly, religion is a refinement of the human soul. When Allah Almighty removed Satan from Adam and his wife and revealed their private parts. He did not want to leave them in this miserable state, but made them cover their private parts with the leaves of Paradise to cover their nakedness, and that would be the first rule of morality and taste, and what follows from that of covering the body, because they are human beings, not animals. Allah has commanded us to cover the private parts.

“Conclusion: No matter how much a person advances in Science, taste and beauty, personality remains, it does not change. It is said in the proverbs: ‘Eat what you desire and wear what people desire.’

“Perhaps, we should thank Donald Trump for his moral decisions that undoubtedly reflect on other societies and fashion houses, so they do not slip into nudity or be outside public taste.”

“Small enterprises are one of the important sectors in every economy. They constitute a large percentage of the business, industrial, agricultural and service sectors. Based on this importance, economic policies focus on these enterprises, as they provide job opportunities for young people who are new to the labor market. They also contribute to meeting the basic needs of consumers, in addition to their role in developing the national economy and reducing the employment pressure on the government administration,” Kuwaiti lawyer and writer **Dr. Abdullah Mohammad Al-Taraiji** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

“In light of this importance, the National Fund for the Care and Development of Small and Medium Enterprises was established as per Law No. 98/2013, which regulates the small and medium enterprises (SMEs), as well as the methods and rules for financing them.

“The fund faced challenges, including changes in its management, lack of an investment map for financing operations and long period of project evaluation, among others; which led to a role and results that were below the expectation.

“Perhaps, one of the most difficult challenges for small national enterprises is foreign franchising, which usually has great potential; thereby, reducing the competitiveness of small enterprises in their economic activity. Although this is the nature of the free economy, it requires protecting small national enterprises against such type of investment.

“I am not here to underestimate the importance of this fund, as it is a required financing institution in an important sector; but the problem lies in the performance and effectiveness in achieving the goals set by the law on its establishment.

“The importance of this fund lies in the hope and expectation of Kuwaiti youths to obtain job opportunities, establish their own businesses and secure their future.

“This importance necessitates effective institutional organization, a clear vision on the requirements of the national economy in terms of investment and activities, expanding the scope of financing, simplifying procedures, and prioritizing productive enterprises to replace imports. In my opinion, if none of these is available, it must be provided.”

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes / Mahmoud Attiyeh

Pledge to keep Wafra clean

Al-Ahmadi Municipality clears 178 loads of agricultural waste

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: The Public Relations Department of Kuwait Municipality announced that the Cleaning and Road Occupancy Department team in Ahmadi Governorate conducted a large-scale cleaning campaign in the Al-Wafra agricultural area.

The operation resulted in the removal of 178 truckloads of agricultural waste, which were transported to the landfill using 89 pieces of equipment and machinery, with the support of 90 cleaning workers, reports Al-Seyassah.

Sa’ad Al-Khreinij, Director of the

General Cleanliness and Road Occupancy Department, emphasized that these intensive field inspection campaigns aim to monitor violations and enforce regulations.

He highlighted that his team is committed to enhancing cleanliness in the areas under their jurisdiction, ensuring the removal of waste and any elements that detract from the region’s aesthetic appeal.

He also noted that regular field tours are conducted to maintain the orderly and civilized appearance of the governorate.



Municipality trucks loaded with waste, ready for disposal.

Drugs found on man speeding on highway

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: The Jahra security forces have arrested a young man in his twenties last night after he was caught driving under the influence on the Al-Subbiya highway, reports Al-Anba daily.

The man was found in possession of drugs and drug paraphernalia. An official source stated that a patrol noticed a vehicle traveling at an extremely high speed.

When the officers attempted to stop the vehicle, the driver tried to flee. The officers then called for support and forced the man to pull over to the side of the road.

Upon inspection, it was found that the driver was under the influence of drugs.

Drunk driving accident: A collision between two vehicles in the West Abdullah Mubarak area revealed the accident was caused by a young driver who was allegedly under the influence of alcohol or drugs, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to a security source, a report was received regarding the collision between a Japanese jeep and another four-wheel-drive vehicle.

Upon arrival the security personnel found the crash was caused by a young man born in 1999, who was in an abnormal state. The accident only resulted in material damage, with no injuries reported.

Feb 23 trial date: The Court of Cassation, presided over by Judge Sultan Boursli, has set the session of Feb 23 for the trial of former MPs Hussein Al-Qallaf, Waleed Al-Tabtabaei, and Hamad Al-Alyan in State Security cases.

It is worth noting that the Court of Appeals had previously sentenced Al-Tabtabaei and Al-Qallaf to two-year imprisonment for challenging and interfering with the powers of His Highness the Amir. The court overturned the two-year prison sentence issued against Al-Alyan on charges of challenging the rights of the Amir, and instead refrained from pronouncing a punishment against him.

Mol eyes maintenance of solitary confinement prisons

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: The Ministry of Interior has floated a tender for the maintenance of the security system and doors of solitary confinement prisons Nos. 5-6, including their control systems, inside the prison complex under the General Administration of Security Systems, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The announcement, published in the Official Gazette today, invites specialized companies and institutions to visit the General Administration of Financial Affairs, Tenders Department in Al-Ardhiya Industrial Area to obtain documents for this tender for a non-refundable fee of 1,000 Kuwaiti dinars.

The companies are also required to submit an initial guarantee of 25,000 dinars, valid for 90 days.

The closing date for bid submissions is set for Monday, March 17, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm, and no late submissions will be accepted.

The bids must be submitted to the envelope opening committee at the Ministry of Interior building in the East District.

A preliminary meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 19, at 10:00 am at the General Department of Security Systems headquarters to answer inquiries from the participating companies.

Can access cases on ‘Sahel’: Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait announced the launch of the first Constitutional Court ser-

vices via the “Sahel” application, enabling users to access a list of Constitutional Court cases in which they are involved and obtain copies of verdicts, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Al-Sumait highlighted that the “Constitutional Court Ruling Image” service is now part of the Ministry of Justice’s offerings on the “Sahel” app, reinforcing the ministry’s commitment to digital transformation.

He emphasized that these efforts aim to enhance public accessibility and streamline judicial services.

The minister reaffirmed the ministry’s dedication to expanding digital services and facilitating the public’s access to legal and judicial resources through innovative technological solutions.



KUNA photo
Chairman of the Board of Directors and Director General of the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition Dr. Reem Al-Fulaij is briefed on the test method by a laboratory technician inside the mobile van.

PAFN opens first mobile food testing lab at airport

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2, (KUNA): The Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) has officially opened Kuwait’s first mobile food testing laboratory today at the Kuwait International Airport.

This new initiative is part of the country’s ongoing development projects aimed at ensuring food safety and streamlining customs procedures to facilitate trade.

Dr. Reem Al-Fulaij, Chairman of the Board of Directors and Director General of the Authority, explained that the laboratory’s establishment aims to accelerate the clearance of food products, especially perishables, by conducting testing directly at the airport.

This eliminates the need to transport goods to the main laboratory in Shuwaikh, ensuring faster and more efficient testing.

The mobile lab is designed to maintain food safety protocols and can be relocated to other outlets as necessary.

This flexibility helps reduce operational costs while improving quality and effectiveness. Dr. Al-Fulaij highlighted that establishing individual labs at each outlet would require significant resources, both financially and in terms of time and effort.

The laboratory is equipped with advanced testing devices capable of conducting chemical analyses, such as detecting pesticide residues and harmful microorganisms in food products. A dedicated technical team operates the lab around the clock to ensure timely results.

Additionally, the lab is electronically linked with relevant authorities, allowing for seamless communication.

Once shipments arrive at the Inspection Department, laboratory staff promptly collect and examine samples.

Importers can track the progress of their sample examination and receive updates through the Raqib platform, ensuring transparency and efficiency in the process.

SAYING HI 🍌 , HELLO 🍌 , AND SHARING EMOJIS 😊

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EPA rejects ‘land allocation’ proposal in West Qairawan

Site deemed unsuitable

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Kuwait Municipality revealed that the Environment Public Authority (EPA) rejected a proposal from the Chair of the Municipal Council Abdullah Al-Mahri, his deputy Khaled Al-Mutairi, and members Saud Al-Kandari, Abdullah Al-Enezi, Fahd Al-Abdul-Jader, Dr. Hassan Kamal, Nasser Al-Jadaan, Fahed Al-Muwaizri, and Nassar Al-Azmi regarding the allocation of land in West Qairawan to the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW).



Al-Mahri

In its statement to the Municipal Council, which was approved by Acting Director General of the municipality Manal Al-Asfour, it was explained that the site was presented to the Subcommittee for Public Facilities and Services during its meeting in December, and that EPA rejected the proposal.

EPA explained its refusal, stating that the proposed residential site is located on a landfill in West Qairawan to the west of Sulaibiya and east of Amghara. The site has been closed and inactive since 2012.

After conducting a survey of the landfill as part of a project to create a comprehensive waste management database, three key points mentioned by EPA in its letter became clear. First, there are seven million square meters of household waste and 2.36 million square meters of mixed waste (household and construction waste). Second, the results of the environmental assessment of the landfill located west of Al-Sulaibiya and east of Amghara show that the waste decomposition process is still ongoing, despite the landfill's closure more than 15 years ago in 2005. Thirdly, the risk analysis study identified high risks related to gas migration and soil pollution.

Regarding the municipality's request to study the rehabilitation of the proposed site, EPA explained that this would require assigning an environmental consulting office specialized in closed waste landfill rehabilitation to prepare an environmental feasibility study. This study would assess the suitability of the proposed site for residential use, including laboratory tests, field measurements of the soil, and geotechnical studies to examine the specifications of the buried materials and the potential spread of gases. Complete waste removal from the landfill would take between six to ten years, and preventive measures would be necessary to protect the surrounding areas during the removal process.

The municipality's request to study the rehabilitation of the proposed site requires the involvement of an environmental consulting office specialized in closed waste landfill rehabilitation.

The office would conduct an environmental feasibility study to assess the site's suitability for residential use. The study would include laboratory and field tests of the soil, as well as geotechnical studies to evaluate the buried materials and the potential for gas emissions.

EPA affirmed that complete waste removal would take six to ten years, and that preventive measures would be necessary to protect the surrounding areas during the process.

Kuwait-Tajikistan to hold 4th round of talks

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan Dr. Zubaydullah Zubaydov said the fourth round of meetings of the bilateral committee between Kuwait and his country in the trade and economic field will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday; affirming that the delegation will arrive on Sunday, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

begins its work at the level of senior officials and will continue until Feb 5, is headed by the Kuwaiti side, specifically Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Noura Al-Fassam, and on the Tajik side by their Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

He said the committee will discuss various items in its agenda; stressing that the political relations between the two countries are excellent, and that there is

coordination between them in international and regional forums. "However, the trade and economic relations have yet to rise to the required level, and there is a common desire on both sides to develop these relations," he added.

He pointed out that the visit made by President Emomali Rahmon to Kuwait in November last year focused on the possibility of developing economic and trade cooperation between the two countries.



Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser takes part in First Annual Public Health Marathon at Jaber International Stadium.

Farwaniya Governor leads public health marathon

Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah participated this morning in the first annual public health marathon organized by the Farwaniya Health Zone, with the cooperation of the Public Authority for Sports, at Jaber International Stadium.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the marathon, which was organized based on an initiative presented by the Director of Farwaniya Health Zone Dr. Muhammad Rashid Al-Rashidi, witnessed the participation of the Chairman and members of the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies.

The event was attended by the Director of the Farwaniya Health Zone Dr. Muhammad Rashid Al-Rashidi, Acting Director General of the Public Authority for Sports Bashar Abdullah, Director of the Public Health Department Dr. Fahd Al-Ghamlas, marathon organizer and head of the Health Department in Farwaniya Dr. Ahmed Al-Mutairi, Chairman of Al-Rabya Cooperative Society Thuwaimer Hamoud Al-Thuwaimer, and several

officials from participating entities in the Farwaniya Governorate.

The marathon also witnessed participation from three important categories - the elderly, people with special needs, and athletes.

Sheikh Athbi Al-Nasser praised the efforts and excellent organization of the event, which contributes to promoting health awareness, community culture, and encouraging physical activity for all ages.

The governor expressed his interest in attending such events, and highlighted the importance of repeating them, as they serve as a type of health education, sports motivation, and community participation for the people of Farwaniya Governorate.

Meanwhile, Director of the Farwaniya Health Zone Dr. Muhammad Rashid Al-Rashidi thanked the governor for accepting the invitation, attending the marathon, and supporting such important social, health, and awareness initiatives.

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Shift a new era or new risks?

Kuwait signs landmark energy deal; concerns grow over pricing, control

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah /Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: The Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with a company for the establishment of a power generation station to produce 300 megawatts under the 'independent supplier' system.

This is the first agreement of its kind in the field of electricity production, contributing to the involvement of the private sector in the implementation of development projects and alleviating the financial burdens of the State in terms of building such stations.

However, the agreement raised concerns among some interested in the production of traditional and renewable energy; warning that this trend might prompt the private sector to control the prices of electricity and water in the future, among other concerns.

To determine the logic of these concerns, the newspaper asked for the opinion of several experts.

Former Minister of Electricity and Water Mohammed Bushehri confirmed that using an 'independent supplier' to produce energy is practiced in many countries due to its positive economic return; such as reducing the burden on the general budgets of countries, considering the huge sums allocated for the construction of power generation stations.

He said this could lead to speedy completion, away from the long documentary cycle that the procedures for implementing and building these stations take. He sees no harm in using an independent supplier to produce energy in the country, provided it is in accordance with the relevant laws in order to avoid any negative effects in the future.

He explained that the need imposes the use of non-traditional solutions such as the independent supplier, especially since the network is currently suffering from lack of productivity. "We have to increase productivity in order to face challenges and the steady increase in consumption annually as a result of the expansion of new residential cities. We have to meet the needs of the growing productive sectors and this requires the involvement of the private sector, so the latter must be given the role it deserves in the field of energy production. This project is included in the development plan and the Kuwait 2035 vision, which made one of its main axes empowering the private sector and involving it in the desired development, but according to clear legislative and legal rules," he elaborated.

Renewable energy expert Suad Al-Hussein pointed out that expediting the approval of the law on purchasing energy from the independent solar energy supplier can have a direct positive impact on the labor market through several main axes, the most important of which is generating job opportunities.

She believes that the development of the solar energy sector will lead to an increase in demand for jobs in certain fields like electrical engineering, renewable energy, installation and maintenance of solar energy systems.

She added that project management and planning for sustainable energy will provide job opportunities for Kuwaitis in the technical and engineering sectors, which helps reduce unemployment and support small and medium enterprises (SMEs). She suggested that SMEs can participate in the installation and maintenance of solar systems, which enhances entrepreneurship in this field and encourages start-ups to invest

in renewable energy technologies; such as smart storage systems, network control and developing local skills.

She clarified that Kuwait will need training and qualification programs to develop national manpower specialized in solar energy, which creates opportunities for vocational training and university education in the fields of renewable energy and partnership between the government and the private sector to develop the skills of the workforce and attract foreign investments. She stated that creating an encouraging regulatory environment will motivate international companies to implement solar energy projects in Kuwait, and will lead to the transfer of knowledge and technology.

"These companies will also employ local manpower and conduct specialized training courses that will improve the efficiency of Kuwaiti workers and reduce reliance on expatriate workers in some sectors, taking into consideration the availability of job opportunities for Kuwaitis in the field of renewable energy. Reducing reliance on foreign workers in some traditional sectors can also encourage Kuwaiti youths to engage in value-added jobs in the future economy," she asserted.

She then pointed out that the independent supplier supports localization plans and the Kuwait 2035 vision; while the renewable energy sector will contribute to the realization of this vision, which aims to achieve a diversified and sustainable economy and enhance the role of citizens in modern and advanced sectors, instead of focusing on traditional government jobs.

She stated that certain challenges must be addressed as follows: the need for clear training and qualification plans for national manpower in the fields of solar energy, providing incentives to attract citizens to work in this sector instead of relying on expatriate labor, and supporting innovation and entrepreneurship in the field of renewable energy by granting financing and other facilities to small and medium companies in general.

She indicated that expediting the issuance of the required law will move the labor market towards more sustainable sectors and create opportunities for Kuwaitis in the green economy.

She also stressed the need to define the legislative and regulatory framework by setting clear laws that specify the mechanism for purchasing energy, pricing and contracts with companies; and ensuring the establishment of an infrastructure that leads to the development of the electricity grid to accommodate renewable energy efficiently.

She went on to say that financial support and incentives must be provided to attract investors, such as tax exemptions or guaranteed tariffs; emphasizing that the rapid enactment of the law will smoothen Kuwait's transformation into a more sustainable economy, and provide significant benefits for the State, private sector and society as a whole.

She recommended the allocation of KD 200,000 for real estate financing to enable citizens to install solar panels to generate energy on the roofs of homes; thus, reducing the power consumption bill for the citizen and the cost of installing the panels that will be paid to specialized companies.



Bushehri

Calls for stronger judicial control

Municipal Council member demands action on disability access violations

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Municipal Council member Farah Al-Roumi on Saturday submitted questions to the Kuwait Municipality regarding the activation of monitoring and inspection mechanisms to guarantee compliance with the conditions to facilitate access for people with disabilities.

In the preamble of her questions, Al-Roumi underscored the need to activate the abovementioned monitoring and inspection systems.



Al-Roumi

Following are the questions she presented to the Municipality:

- What is the mechanism followed to conduct inspection campaigns to investigate violations regarding requirements to facilitate access for people with disabilities?
- Is there judicial control over the violations? If no, why judicial control has not been activated in this regard? If yes, please provide the number of judicial seizures, period since their activation, mechanism for following them up, and types of violations uncovered.
- The Municipality is requested to provide analytical studies on the effectiveness of judicial seizures regarding the violations.
- Number of technical staff who obtained a judicial seizure license and their geographical distribution in the governorates.



PM Diwan photo
Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah met Sunday at Bayan Palace with Egypt's Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade, Hassan Al-Khatib, and his delegation, in the presence of Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel, during the minister's visit to Kuwait.

PM welcomes Egypt's Investment Minister

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah met with visiting Egyptian Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade Hassan Al-Khatib and his accompanying delegation at Bayan Palace on Sunday.

Kuwaiti Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel attended the encounter.

During the meeting, they discussed close relations between Kuwait and

Egypt and ways of promoting bilateral trade and industrial cooperation to serve the interests of both countries and their peoples.

His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Chief Abdulaziz Al-Dakheel, Egyptian Ambassador in Kuwait Osama Shaltout and CEO of the Egyptian General Authority for Investment and Free Zones Hossam Heiba were present at the meeting. (KUNA)

Bangladesh Embassy holds blood donation drive

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: On January 31, 2025, as part of the celebration of the 50th anniversary (Golden Jubilee) of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Kuwait and the 'Youth Festival-2025,' a blood donation campaign was organized at the Kuwait Central Blood Bank in Jabriya through a joint collaboration between the Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait and UN HABITAT Kuwait.

The Ambassador of Bangladesh to Kuwait, Major General Syed Tareq Hussain OSP, awc, psc, and the Country Manager of UN HABITAT in Kuwait, Dr. Ameera Al Hassan, jointly inaugurated the Blood Donation Campaign.

The Ambassadors of Nepal, Myanmar, and Laos to

Kuwait, a number of Bangladeshi expatriates living in Kuwait, representatives of Bangladeshi print and electronic media, and embassy officials were present at the campaign.

The noble campaign began with the donation of blood by the Ambassador of Myanmar to Kuwait. Over 300 Bangladeshi expatriates donated blood throughout the day.

Additionally, through the organization of this campaign, the Bangladesh Embassy also celebrated the 'Youth Festival-2025' to motivate the younger generation of Bangladeshi expatriates living in Kuwait to engage in various humanitarian, social, and cultural activities.



Group photo during the blood donation campaign.

Cabinet greenlights 2025/2026 budget with KD 6.3 bln deficit

Projected revenues expected to reach KD 18.231 bln

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2, (KUNA): On Sunday, February 2, 2025, the Cabinet convened an extraordinary meeting at Bayan Palace, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. After the meeting, His Excellency Sherida Abdullah Al-Maousherji, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of Interior, provided the following statement:

The Cabinet began by offering its sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the people of Kuwait, in celebration of the flag-raising ceremony held earlier at Bayan Palace. This marks the commencement of Kuwait's 64th National Day and 34th Liberation Day festivities. The Cabinet wished for continued glory, prosperity, and stability

for the nation.

The Cabinet then reviewed a visual presentation by His Excellency Noura Suleiman Al-Fassam, Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment, alongside officials from the Ministry of Finance. The presentation detailed the draft decrees regarding the fiscal year 2025/2026 budget for ministries, government agencies, attached bodies, and independent institutions. Projected revenues are expected to reach 18.231 billion Kuwaiti dinars, while projected expenses are 24.538 billion Kuwaiti dinars, resulting in an anticipated deficit of 6.306 billion Kuwaiti dinars. The Cabinet approved the draft decrees for submission to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

The Cabinet commended Minister Al-Fassam and the Ministry of Finance for their dedicated efforts in preparing the draft decrees. Their approval reflects the government's ongoing commitment to timely approval of budgets for all entities, enabling effective project implementation and operational continuity.

Lastly, the Cabinet tasked Minister Al-Fassam with releasing further details on the draft decrees related to the 2025/2026 fiscal year budgets.

Ministers discuss investment, economic cooperation

Kuwait, Egypt forge new trade paths in joint ministerial talks

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel received the Egyptian Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade Hassan Al-Khatib, during his official visit to Kuwait for the first session of the Kuwaiti-Egyptian Joint Ministerial Trade Committee.

The two officials discussed ways to enhance trade and investment cooperation between the two nations and reviewed the agenda of the joint committee, which aims to advance economic collaboration, remove obstacles for investors, and boost trade exchange between Kuwait and Egypt.

During the meeting, Al-Ajeel affirmed Kuwait's commitment to strengthening its economic partnership with Egypt, highlighting the importance of the joint committee in creating new opportunities for cooperation between both governments and private sectors.

He highlighted Kuwait's support for initiatives that contribute to developing bilateral trade and investment relations.

In turn, Minister Al-Khatib ex-



Undersecretary of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ziad Al-Najem, and Head of the Agreements and Foreign Trade Sector at the Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade in the Arab Republic of Egypt, Dr. Amani Al-Wasal Abdel-Hafiz.

pressed his gratitude for the warm reception and emphasized the importance of the committee in facilitating investment and enhancing cooperation in various economic sectors.

He highlighted the promising investment opportunities in Egypt that

Kuwaiti companies can capitalize on.

Meanwhile, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Ziad Al-Najem reiterated Kuwait's sincere desire to strengthen bilateral trade, industrial, and investment relations with Egypt, which will positively impact the people of both countries.

During the first session of the Kuwaiti-Egyptian Joint Committee held yesterday, he revealed that the meeting was held in line with article 8 of the Trade and Industrial Cooperation Agreement signed between the two countries in 2014, which mandates the formation of a joint trade committee.

Al-Najem stressed that the committee's work is an extension of the meetings of the Joint Higher Committee, with the most recent held in September 2024 in Egypt.

In addition, Head of the Agreements and Foreign Trade Sector at the Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade of Egypt Dr. Amani Al-Wasal stated that the number of Kuwaiti companies operating in Egypt has reached approximately 1,500, with a total contribution valued at USD 3.9 billion in various sectors, including finance, industry, and construction.

Kuwait needs

After the Iraqi invasion, Kuwait needed officials who were dedicated to working for the nation, not for their personal gain or the benefit of their friends.

The focus should have been on abandoning the policy of favoritism. Officials were expected to hire only competent individuals who should have been ready at all times to work, make sound decisions, and prioritize the nation's needs over any personal interests.

This unfortunately did not happen. Instead, we became entangled in the dangerous web of satisfying personal interests, a game that has come at a high cost for the people, one that they continue to pay for.

What transpired over the past three decades was the complete opposite of everything Kuwaitis had hoped for.

The citizens longed for a glimmer of hope to build their future upon, but they instead witnessed huge conflicts over trivial matters.

Senior officials and MPs competed to undermine the country's supreme interests in order to preserve their own personal benefits.

Corruption reached such heights that it is now impossible to deal with it without a painful surgical operation.

Today, the leadership of the new era has made it clear what is required of everyone: Kuwait must regain its leading position.

With ministerial and assistant positions now stabilized, there is no excuse for officials not to work hard around the clock.

Active morning and evening shifts should be implemented, and afternoon shifts must be productive, not exploited for personal gain. Certain departments must work all day.

The devastation and decline in all sectors require the entire country be transformed into a large 24/7 workshop that is focused on recovery and progress.

Similarly, all officials responsible for amending laws must work full-time. Wasting time is an unforgivable mistake, as time shows no mercy.

Kuwait has been lagging behind for years, and citizens have grown tired of empty slogans and unimplemented ministerial programs. It is now time for serious work programs to become a reality.

While we have heard many ministers and officials repeat the usual slogan that their doors are open, this has yet to be reflected in action.

Given that citizens are placing their hopes in the new era, officials must rise to the responsibility entrusted to them and be fair enough to make the right decisions, even if it means going against their own interests.

Electricity subsidies

The institute suggested that "it is possible to fully eliminate electricity subsidies and impose market prices while providing a monthly cash payment to every Kuwaiti homeowner based on average household consumption." These electricity reforms would be implemented gradually over a period of three to five years.

A recent study by the institute, titled "The Distorted Effects of Low Electricity Prices in Kuwait and the Need for Fair Reform," revealed that Kuwait has provided electricity to its citizens at a fixed rate of 7 cents per kilowatt-hour since 1966, making it the sixth-lowest electricity price in the world.

This tariff covers only 5 percent of the cost incurred by the state to supply electricity and due to inflation, the real value of residents' contributions to electricity costs has declined by 800 percent.

The study further noted that in 2022, the government spent \$13.7 billion to provide electricity services to a population of 4.3 million, which equates to \$3,200 per person and \$16,000 per family.

Additionally, the residential sector in Kuwait consumes 58 percent of the total electricity produced.

According to the report, electricity subsidies for the residential sector alone amounted to \$7.2 billion in 2022.

It highlighted that 99 percent of Kuwait's electricity is generated using fossil fuels, resulting in 24.9 metric tons of carbon emissions -- more than five times the global average.

The continuation of government subsidies poses a significant challenge to achieving the goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2060.

The Baker Center pointed out that the existence of parliament has historically made electricity subsidy reforms difficult, as it has obstructed tariff increases.

However, the dissolution of parliament presents an opportunity to streamline decision-making in Kuwait, including the adoption of electricity tariff reforms.

The report cited other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, that have successfully implemented electricity subsidy reforms, leading to reduced demand growth.

Additionally, the report criticized Kuwait's inefficient electricity billing system, which results in revenue losses in some years.

For instance, in 2022, there were \$460 million in unpaid electricity bills. The report also highlighted the slow adoption of smart meters,

which could enhance billing accuracy.

The study also observed that subsidy reforms introduced in Kuwait in 2017 led some consumers to move from apartments to villas to benefit from the lower electricity rates offered to standalone homes.

The following are the key findings:

- The state provides electricity to citizens at 7 cents per kilowatt-hour, the sixth-lowest rate globally.

- The current tariff covers only 5 percent of actual costs and its real value has declined by 800 percent due to inflation.

- The government spent \$13.7 billion on electricity in 2022, equating to \$3,200 per person.
- The residential sector consumes 58 percent of total electricity production.

- Electricity subsidies for the residential sector alone cost \$7.2 billion in 2022.

- Ninety-nine percent of Kuwait's electricity is generated using fossil fuels, resulting in carbon emissions exceeding five times the global average.

- The inefficiency of electricity billing led to \$460 million in unpaid bills in 2022.

As Kuwait moves toward economic reform, the government faces a crucial decision on whether to continue its heavy subsidies or transition toward a more sustainable, market-driven pricing model for electricity.

See Also Page 4

Death penalty

A security source reported that the husband was arrested after the victim's sister reported him, but he initially denied knowing anything about her disappearance. After intensifying the investigation, he admitted to killing her by strangulation, following disagreements between them.

The source reported that the perpetrator confessed to cutting the victim's body into 20 pieces and throwing them in containers that he had earlier identified to hide traces of the crime.

He also got rid of her clothes, belongings and mobile phone; so the security forces did not find anything that belonged to her except traces of blood and hair in his vehicle.

It is worth mentioning that the court asked the accused during the first session of his trial about deliberately killing his wife inside the marital home in Kairouan, but he denied it, claimed ignorance of her disappearance and that he did not know anything about her whereabouts.

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NEWS

The crew had a verbal reaction: Banning

Data from deadliest US air accident in generation show conflicting altitude readings

ARLINGTON, Va., Feb. 2, (AP): Preliminary data from the deadliest US aviation accident in nearly 25 years showed conflicting readings about the altitudes of an airliner and Army helicopter when they collided near Reagan National Airport in Washington, killing everyone aboard both aircraft, investigators said Saturday.

Investigators also said that about a second before impact, the jet's flight recorder showed a change in its pitch. But they did not say whether that change in angle meant that pilots were trying to perform an evasive maneuver to avoid the crash.

Data from the jet's flight recorder showed its altitude as 325 feet (99 meters), plus or minus 25 feet (7.6 meters), when the crash happened Wednesday night, National Transportation Safety Board officials told reporters. Data in the control tower, though, showed the Black Hawk helicopter at 200 feet (61 meters) at the time.

The roughly 100-foot (30-meter) discrepancy has yet to be explained.

Investigators hope to reconcile the altitude differences with data from the helicopter's black box, which is taking more time to retrieve because it became waterlogged after it plunged into the Potomac River. They also said they

plan to refine the tower data, which can be less reliable.

"That's what our job is, to figure that out," said NTSB member Todd Inman, who grew increasingly agitated with reporters' questions seeking more information and clarity about the readings during a Saturday evening news conference.

He acknowledged that there was dis-sension within the investigative team about whether to release the information or wait until they had more data.

Officials say the helicopter's maximum allowed altitude at the time was 200 feet (61 meters).

No one survived the collision, which occurred as an American Airlines flight from Wichita, Kansas, with 64 people on board was preparing to land at Ronald Reagan National Airport, just across the Potomac from the capital. The Army Black Hawk helicopter, which apparently flew into the jet's path, had three soldiers on board.

"This is a complex investigation," said Brice Banning, NTSB investigator in charge. "There are a lot of pieces here. Our team is working hard to gather this data."

Banning also discussed the last moments from the jet's two black boxes, which captured sound in the cockpit



Police and coast guard boats are seen around a wreckage site in the Potomac River as an American Airlines plane passes in the foreground at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on Feb 1, in Arlington, Va. (AP)

and flight data.

"The crew had a verbal reaction," Banning said, with the data recorder showing "the airplane beginning to increase its pitch. Sounds of impact were audible about one second later, followed by the end of the recording."

Inman expressed frustration, too,

that accidents like these occur, noting that the board has made "several hundred" recommendations to improve aviation that have not been acted upon.

"From tragedy we draw knowledge to improve the safety for us all. That's what we're doing right now, we're dealing with tragedy, but we need to

improve safety," he said.

"You want to do something about it? Adopt the recommendation of the NTSB. You'll save lives," he said, adding that he has spent hours with victims' families since the crash. "I don't want to have to meet with those parents like that again."

The families, he said, are struggling. "Some wanted to give us hugs. Some are just mad and angry," Inman said. "They are just all hurt. And they still want answers, and we want to give them answers."

Earlier Saturday, recovery crews and divers searched the river and cleared wreckage. A Coast Guard cutter outfitted with a crane waited nearby, as occasional recovery team members slipped into the water amid a group of smaller emergency boats.

The remains of 42 people had been pulled from the river as of the afternoon, including 38 that have been positively identified, Washington emergency officials said. They expect to recover all of the remains, though the plane's fuselage will probably have to be pulled from the water to get the rest.

Also Saturday, the Army identified Cpt. Rebecca M. Lobach, of Durham, North Carolina, as the third soldier who died in the crash. The names of

the other two were released Friday, but Lobach's name was withheld at the time at the request of her family.

Army officials have said the helicopter crew was highly experienced and familiar with the congested skies around the city. Military aircraft frequently make such flights to practice routes they would use if key government officials need to be evacuated during an attack or major catastrophe.

Investigators are examining the actions of the military pilot and air traffic control. The Federal Aviation Administration has long struggled with a shortage of controllers.

Full NTSB investigations typically take at least a year, though investigators hope to have a preliminary report within 30 days.

More than 300 responders were taking part in the recovery effort at a given time, officials said. After a rainy Friday, clear skies and warmer temperatures made for better conditions Saturday for workers in the field. Two Navy salvage barges were also deployed to lift heavy wreckage.

"This is heartbreaking work," Washington Fire Chief John Donnelly Sr. told reporters told reporters Friday. "It's been a tough response for a lot of our people."

'We're coming, this is a new Democratic Party'

Dems elect Martin as national chair after 2024 losses

OXON HILL, Md., Feb. 2, (AP): Democrats elected Ken Martin, the party leader in Minnesota, as the national chair, turning to a low-profile Midwestern political operative to coordinate their resistance to Donald Trump's presidency.

Martin succeeds Jaime Harrison of South Carolina atop the Democratic National Committee. Harrison did not seek another term after the 2024 election when Trump became the first Republican to win the popular vote in two decades and made modest gains with core Democratic constituencies - African Americans, Latinos and working-class voters, among them.

Martin offered a warning to Trump and his Republican allies after the vote was announced: "We're coming. This is a new Democratic Party. We're taking the gloves off."

Martin now becomes one of the most important players in the Democratic Party's comeback attempt as Trump pushes the limits of presidential power. While Martin promised bold changes, he said he could not discuss specific actions until the party conducted a postelection review to determine what went wrong in November.

It is unclear how long the process might take. Martin said it would be



DNC chair candidate Ken Martin speaks at the Democratic National Committee Winter Meeting at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Md. on Feb 2. (AP)

completed "as quickly as possible" and then released publicly.

The party leadership election played out in suburban Washington as more than 400 DNC members from every state and US territory assembled at the DNC's winter meeting.

Martin's ascendance comes less than two weeks after Trump's inauguration and as Democrats struggle to

confront the sheer volume of executive orders, pardons, personnel changes and controversial relationships taking shape in the new administration. At the same time, public perception of the Democratic Party has hit rock bottom.

Just 31% of voters have a favorable opinion of the Democratic Party, according to a Quinnipiac University

poll released this week. Forty-three percent of voters have a favorable opinion of the Republican Party.

Martin, 51, easily defeated Wisconsin party chair Ben Wikler, who had earned the backing of leading Democratic donors and leaders in Congress, including the top Democrats in the House and Senate.

Ultimately, Martin's relationships with DNC members helped him overcome Wikler's higher-profile alliances. Martin is one of the longest serving state party chairs, having led the Minnesota Democratic-Labor-Farmer Party since 2011.

While the Democrats inside the cavernous hotel ballroom cheered Martin's election, not every one was convinced that he alone can lead the party's resurgence.

Jeanna Repass, the Kansas Democratic chair and an unsuccessful candidate for DNC vice chair, described Martin as "a workhorse" instead of "a champion."

"Your workhorse pulls the plow, and you need that. But we don't have that voice, that champion, to get out in front of us," Repass said.

"Donald Trump, for all of his faults, is able to get up there and lie with impunity and do it convincingly, and I don't hear or see that voice in our party."



A man walks past boxes of USAID humanitarian aid at a warehouse at the Tienditas International Bridge on the outskirts of Cucuta, Colombia on Feb 21, 2019, on the border with Venezuela. (AP)

USAID site goes offline

The website of the US Agency for International Development went offline without explanation Saturday as thousands of furloughs, layoffs and program shutdowns continued in President Donald Trump's freeze on US-funded foreign aid and development worldwide.

Congressional Democrats battled the Trump administration increasingly openly, expressing concern that Trump may be headed toward ending USAID as an independent agency and absorbing it into the State Department. Democrats say Trump has no legal authority to

eliminate a congressionally funded independent agency, and that the work of USAID is vital to national security.

Trump and congressional Republicans say much of foreign aid and development programs is wasteful. They single out programs they say advance liberal social agendas.

The fear of even tougher administration action against USAID comes two weeks into the administration's shutdown of billions of dollars of the United States' humanitarian, development and security assistance. (AP)



In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service, firefighters put out fire in an apartment building following a Russian rocket attack in Poltava, Ukraine on Feb 1. (AP)

Russia, Ukraine trade blame over attack on boarding school in Kursk

Competing claims emerged over a deadly attack on a boarding school in Sudzha, a city in Russia's Kursk region that has been under Ukrainian control for five months, with Ukraine and Russia accusing each other of carrying out the strike.

The General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces said Saturday night that four people were killed and a further four seriously wounded in the strike, with 84 people rescued by Ukrainian servicemen from the rubble of the building. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Moscow had bombed the boarding school where civilians were sheltering and preparing to evacuate.

The General Staff said those in need of additional medical assistance were evacuated to medical facilities in Ukraine.

The Russian Ministry of Defense claimed in the early hours of Sunday that it was Ukrainian forces that had launched a missile strike on the school, saying that the missiles were launched from Ukraine's Sumy region.

Meanwhile, the death toll from a Russian missile strike on an apartment block in the Ukrainian city of Poltava on Saturday rose to 14, including two children, local officials said Sunday. Seventeen people were injured in the attack on the five-story building, Ukraine's State Emergency Service said.

Moscow sent 55 drones into Ukraine overnight into Sunday, Ukrainian officials said. According to Ukraine's Air Force, 40 drones were destroyed during the overnight attacks. A further 13 drones were "lost", likely having been electronically jammed. (AP)

Excluding Ukraine from US-Russia talks about war 'very dangerous': Zelenskyy

KYIV, Ukraine, Feb 2, (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that excluding his country from talks between the US and Russia about the war in Ukraine would be "very dangerous" and asked for more discussions between Kyiv and Washington to develop a plan for a ceasefire.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press, Zelenskyy said Russia does not want to engage in ceasefire talks or to discuss any kind of concessions, which the Kremlin interprets as losing at a time when its troops have the upper hand on the battlefield.

He said U.S. President Donald Trump could bring Russian President Vladimir Putin to the table with the threat of sanctions targeting Russia's energy and banking system, as well as continued support of the Ukrainian military.

"I think these are the closest and most important steps," he said in the interview in the Ukrainian capital that lasted for more than an hour.

Zelenskyy's remarks followed comments Friday by Trump, who said American and Russian officials were "already talking" about ending the war. Trump said his administration has had "very serious" discussions with Russia, but he did not elaborate.

"They may have their own relations, but talking about Ukraine without us - it is dangerous for everyone," Zelenskyy said.

He said his team has been in contact with the Trump administration, but those discussions are at a "general level," and he believes in-person meetings will take place soon to develop more



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy gestures as he speaks during an interview with The Associated Press in Kyiv, Ukraine on Feb 1. (AP)

detailed agreements.

"We need to work more on this," he said, adding that Trump understandably appeared to be focused on domestic issues in the first weeks after his inauguration.

The nearly three-year war in Ukraine is at a crossroads. Trump promised to end the fighting within six months of taking office, but the two sides are far apart, and it is unclear how a ceasefire deal would take shape. Meanwhile, Russia continues to make slow but steady gains along the front, and Ukrainian forces are enduring severe manpower shortages.

Most Ukrainians want a pause in fighting to rebuild their lives. The country faces near-daily Russian attacks on

homes, and strikes on power systems have plunged entire cities into darkness.

Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced, unable to return to their homes after vast tracts of the country's east have been reduced to rubble. Nearly a fifth of Ukraine is now occupied by Russia. In those areas, Moscow-appointed authorities are swiftly erasing any hint of Ukrainian identity.

With Trump back in the White House, Ukraine's relationship with the U.S., its largest and most important ally, is also at a tipping point.

In an initial phone call with Trump during the presidential campaign, Zelenskyy said, the two agreed that if Trump won, they would meet to discuss the steps needed to end the war.

Europe

3 dead in Paris fire: Three people have been killed in a fire that broke out in a retirement home near Paris on Saturday, according to the town mayor.

The three victims were residents aged 68, 85 and 96, the Val-d'Oise prefecture said, adding that they died as a result of smoke inhalation.

A further nine people were injured in the blaze at the residence located in the town of Bouffémont.

The nine injured included seven residents and two staff members who inhaled the smoke, the prefecture added. Eight of them were transported to various hospitals in the Paris region. (AP)

□ □ □

Pope Francis stumbles: Pope Francis tripped while entering the Vatican auditorium for an audi-

ence Saturday after the handle of his walking stick snapped, but he avoided falling.

The 88-year-old pope often has to use a wheelchair or a cane because of bad knees and has fallen twice in the past two months.

After Saturday's slight stumble, two aides helped him to his chair on the stage and the audience proceeded without incident.

After he recovered someone in the audience shouted "Viva il Papa" and the audience applauded. Earlier in January, Francis fell and hurt his right arm. It wasn't broken, but a sling was put on as a precaution.

On Dec 7, the pope whacked his chin on his nightstand in an apparent

fall that resulted in a bad bruise.

The pontiff has long battled health problems including long bouts of bronchitis. He uses a walker or cane when moving around his apartment in the Vatican's Santa Marta hotel. (AP)

□ □ □

Belgium set for new govt: Belgium's King Philippe met with Bart De Wever, the federal government's lead negotiator, at the Royal Palace in Brussels on Friday. During the meeting, De Wever presented a detailed report on the coalition agreement reached by the future governing partners.

The king extended De Wever's mandate until the new government is officially appointed, with the swearing-in date yet to be announced.

As he left the palace, De Wever declined to comment to the media. This meeting marks a crucial step toward forming a stable governing coalition after months of political deadlock. (Xinhua)



The Norwegian-owned ship Silver Dania, suspected of cable sabotage in the Baltic Sea, has been brought into the port of Tromsø, Norway, for investigation on Jan 31. (AP)

Norway releases ship Silver Dania

OSLO, Norway, Feb 2, (AP): A Norwegian-owned and Russian-crewed ship that authorities initially suspected may have been involved in damage to an underwater fiber optic cable connecting Latvia and the Swedish island of Gotland has been released.

Norwegian police said late Friday that no findings had been made that would have linked the ship, the Silver Dania, "to the act."

"Tromsø police district has now conducted a number of investigative steps and secured what we see as necessary considering the request from Latvia. The investigation will continue, but we see no reason for the ship to remain in Tromsø any longer," Tromsø police attorney Ronny Jørgensen said late Friday.

Australian premier wishes for stronger ties with China

MELBOURNE, Feb 2, (Xinhua): Australian Prime Minister **Anthony Albanese** on Saturday expressed the wish to see stronger ties between Australia and China. Speaking at a Chinese New Year celebration event in Melbourne, Albanese said it is in the interest of both Australia and China to be “great friends and that the Australian government is committed to stabilizing relations and cooperation between the two sides.

The prime minister said that economic ties between the two countries are very important as Australia exports products such as beef, lobsters and wine to China. He stressed that in comparison with the economic ties, the relationship between the two peoples is even more important.



Albanese

“Chinese culture has enriched Australia and broadened our horizons,” he said, adding that the Chinese New Year celebrations are part of Australia’s cultural heritage. At the event, Australia’s opposition leader Peter Dutton said the Chinese New Year is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate a connection between Australia and China. “The future, which is the most important element of this relationship, is brighter than it’s ever been before,” Dutton said. The event was held by the Asian Business Association of Whitehorse, a non-profit organization to promote and facilitate trade and investment between Australia and China. Meanwhile, one person has died and residents of several suburbs have been told to evacuate within hours amid widespread flooding in Australia’s northeast. Authorities in the state of Queensland said one person died after a State Emergency Service (SES) boat capsized while assisting members of the public in Ingham, about 100 kilometers north of Townsville on Sunday.



Tourists take a cruise to enjoy the night scenery in Yuzhong District of southwest China’s Chongqing during the Spring Festival holiday on Jan 31. (Xinhua)

Peace prospects look bleak as a civil war rages

EU calls for end to all forms of violence in Myanmar, release detained individuals

BRUSSELS, Feb 2, (Agencies): The European Union (EU) re-condemned Saturday Myanmar’s military coup on its fourth anniversary, calling for ending all forms of violence and releasing all arbitrarily detained individuals, including President U Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi. In a statement, the EU considered the coup to have plunged Myanmar into a “serious political, economic, social, human rights, and humanitarian crisis,” stressing the need for “accountability for those responsible for all the atrocities committed in Myanmar.”

According to the EU, the number of people in need of assistance in Myanmar has increased since 2021, reaching approximately 20 million, while the conflict has caused internal displacement for over 3.5 million people.

The statement accused the military regime of restricting access to humanitarian aid, calling on the Myanmar military, in particular, and all other armed groups to allow independent humanitarian organizations to operate and ensure full, safe, and unhindered access to all people in need.

The EU considered the crisis in Myanmar a significant threat to regional stability that must be addressed urgently and called for an inclusive dialogue leading to the restoration of a peaceful and democratic path, guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of all. The Union expressed deep concern over the “continued forced recruitment

of civilians across the country, including Rohingya and other minorities, by both the military and some other armed groups.”

The EU also called for a global arms embargo on Myanmar “to prevent further violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses.” (end)

Peace prospects look bleak in Myanmar as a civil war rages despite international pressure on the military four years after it seized power from an elected civilian government.

The political situation remains tense with no negotiation space in sight between the military government and the major opposition groups fighting against it.

The four years after the army’s takeover on Feb. 1, 2021, have created a profound situation of multiple, overlapping crises with nearly half the population in poverty and the economy in disarray, the U.N. Development Program said.

The U.N. Human Rights Office said the military ramped up violence against civilians last year to unprecedented levels, inflicting the heaviest civilian death toll since the army takeover as its grip on power eroded.

The army launched wave after wave of retaliatory airstrikes and artillery shelling on civilians and civilian populated areas, forced thousands of young people into military service, conducted arbitrary arrests and prosecutions,



Passengers ride a ferry boat to cross Yangon river on Feb 1, in Yangon, Myanmar. (AP)

caused mass displacement, and denied access to humanitarians, even in the face of natural disasters, the rights office said in a statement Friday.

“After four years, it is deeply distressing to find that the situation on the ground for civilians is only getting worse by the day,” U.N. human rights chief Volker Türk said. “Even as the military’s power wanes, their atrocities and violence have expanded in scope and intensity,” he said, adding that the retaliatory nature of the attacks were designed to control, intimidate, and punish the population.

countries and risk broader instability. “The current trajectory is not sustainable for Myanmar or the region,” the countries said in the joint statement that also included Australia, Canada, South Korea, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland.

The military’s 2021 takeover prompted widespread public protests, whose violent suppression by security forces triggered an armed resistance that has now led to a state of civil war. Ethnic minority militias and people’s defense forces that support Myanmar’s main opposition control large parts of the country, while the military holds much of central Myanmar and big cities including the capital, Naypyidaw.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which keeps detailed tallies of arrests and casualties linked to the repression of the military government, said that at least 6,239 were killed and 28,444 were arrested since the takeover. The actual death toll is likely to be much higher since the group does not generally include deaths on the side of the military government and cannot easily verify cases in remote areas.

Aung Thu Nyein, director of communications for the Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar think tank, told The Associated Press that Myanmar’s current situation is at its worst with peace and development being pushed back. “What’s worse is that the sovereignty which ever-proclaimed by the

military is losing, and the country’s borders could even shift,” Aung Thu Nyein said in a text message.

Myanmar’s army suffered unprecedented battlefield defeats over the past year, when a coalition of ethnic armed groups won victories in the northeast near the Chinese border and in the western state of Rakhine.

The ethnic rebels were able to quickly capture several towns, military bases and two important regional commands, and their offensive weakened the army’s grip in other parts of the country.

The ethnic minorities have been fighting for decades for greater autonomy from Myanmar’s central government and are loosely allied with the People’s Defense Force, the pro-democracy armed resistance formed after the army’s 2021 takeover.

The U.N. Human Rights Office and rights groups including Amnesty International also made rare allegations in recent statements that armed groups opposing the military have also committed human rights violations in areas under their control.

In pursuit of a political solution, the military government is pushing for an election, which it has promised to hold this year. Critics say the election would not be free or fair as civil rights have been curtailed and many political opponents imprisoned and the election would be an attempt to normalize military control.

Rubio visits Central America

Petro calls for migrants to leave jobs in US

BOGOTA, Colombia, Feb 2, (AP): Colombia’s president is calling on his compatriots working without legal status in the United States to leave their jobs and return home as soon as possible.

“Wealth is only produced by the working people,” Gustavo Petro said i post on the X platform. “Let’s build social wealth in Colombia.”

The leftist president said his government would provide loans to those who take up his offer to return home and enlist in one of its programs to start a business.

Petro made his comments following a bitter feud over immigration last weekend with US President Donald Trump that nearly triggered a trade war and rupture in diplomatic relations between the US and its historic ally in South America.



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, (third from right), is received by Panamanian Foreign Minister Javier Martínez-Acha, (second left), and John Barrett, Chargé d'affaires, at the international airport in Panama Pacifico on Feb 1. (AP)

US conducts strikes against IS operatives in Somalia

WASHINGTON, Feb 2, (AP): The US military has conducted airstrikes against Islamic State operatives in Somalia, the first attacks in the African nation during President Donald Trump’s second term.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Saturday that the strikes by US Africa Command were directed by Trump and coordinated with Somalia’s government. An initial assessment by the Pentagon indicated that “multiple” operatives were killed. The Pentagon said it assessed that no civilians were harmed in the strikes. Trump, in a post on social media, said a senior IS planner and recruits were targeted in the operation.

“The strikes destroyed the caves they live in, and killed many terrorists without, in any way, harming civilians. Our Military has targeted this ISIS Attack Planner for years, but Biden and his cronies wouldn’t act quickly enough to get the job done. I did!” Trump said. “The message to ISIS and all others who would attack Americans is that “WE WILL FIND YOU, AND WE WILL KILL YOU!”



In this photo provided by US Africa Command, the US military conducts coordinated airstrikes against Islamic State operatives in Somalia on Feb 1. (AP)

Also:

PANAMA CITY: US Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** is on his first foreign trip in office, arriving in **Central America** on Saturday to press President **Donald Trump**’s top priority - curbing illegal immigration - and to bring the message that the US wants to reclaim control over the Panama Canal despite intense resistance from regional leaders.

It’s an unusual destination for the maiden voyage of America’s top diplomat, whose predecessors have generally favored **Europe** or **Asia** for their initial outings. It reflects not only the personal interest that Rubio - the first Hispanic to hold the nation’s most senior Cabinet post - has in the region but also the Trump administration’s intent to focus much of its foreign policy energy close to home.

“It’s no accident that my first trip abroad as secretary of state will keep me in the hemisphere,” Rubio wrote in The Wall Street Journal on Friday.

Limiting immigration and fighting narcotics smuggling are major elements of that effort, but another key priority will be curbing **China**’s growing influence in the Western Hemisphere, topped by reasserting US control over the Panama Canal. The American-built canal was turned over to the Panamanians in 1999 and they object strongly to Trump’s demand to hand it back.

Mass migration, drugs and hostile policies pursued by **Cuba**, **Nicaragua** and **Venezuela** have wreaked havoc, Rubio said in the Journal opinion piece. “All the while, the Chinese Communist Party uses diplomatic and economic leverage - such as at the Panama Canal - to oppose the U.S. and turn sovereign nations into vassal states.”



People fleeing M-23 rebel advances arrive by boat in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo on Jan 22. (AP)

773 dead in weeklong fighting as military tries to repel M23 rebels, says Congo

GOMA, Congo, Feb 2, (AP): At least 773 people were killed in eastern Congo’s largest city of Goma and its vicinity this week amid fighting with Rwanda-backed rebels who captured the city in a major escalation of a decade-long conflict, Congolese authorities said Saturday. The rebels’ advance into other areas was slowed by a weakened military that recovered some villages from them.

Authorities confirmed 773 bodies and 2,880 injured persons in Goma’s morgues and hospitals, Congolese government spokesman Patrick Muyaya told a briefing in the capital, Kinshasa, adding that the death toll could be higher.

“These figures remain provisional because the rebels asked the population to clean the streets of Goma. There should be mass graves and the Rwandans took care to evacuate theirs,” said Muyaya.

Hundreds of Goma residents were returning to the city on Saturday after the rebels promised to restore basic services including water and power supply. They cleaned up the neighborhoods littered with debris from weapons and filled with the stench of blood.

“I’m tired and don’t know what to go. On every corner (there) is a mourner,” said Jean Marcus, 25, one of whose relatives was among those killed in the fighting.

M23 is the most potent of more than 100 armed groups vying for control in Congo’s mineral-rich east, which holds vast deposits critical to much of the world’s technology. They are backed by around 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, far more than in 2012, when they first captured Goma and held it for days in a conflict driven by ethnic grievances.

Asia

Malaysia floods displace over 13K:

Flooding in Malaysia’s northern Borneo states of Sarawak and Sabah worsened on Sunday with over 13,000 people displaced, according to local authorities.

In Sarawak, 11,840 evacuees were housed in 63 flood relief centers, while Sabah reported 1,453 evacuees as of 4 p.m. local time, according to the country’s social welfare department.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister **Fadillah Yusof** urged those affected to register their names to receive aid, adding that tackling the disaster this

time is quite challenging, especially the floods in Bintulu district, due to logistical difficulties and limited personnel.

The meteorological department has issued warnings of continuous heavy rain until at least Feb. 4, particularly in several districts in Sarawak. (Xinhua)



Yusof

Copter crash kills pilot:

A helicopter crashed in a northern Philippine province, killing its pilot, who was the only person on board after she transported a passenger to a nearby city, Philippine officials said Sunday.

The four-seat helicopter owned by a domestic carrier took off from the Philippine capital, Manila, on Saturday for the northern mountain resort city of Baguio, where it dropped off the passenger, the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines said.

From Baguio, the helicopter landed at an airstrip in Binalonan town in nearby Pangasinan province to refuel on its way back to Manila. (AP)

KPC announces LNG prices for Feb

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2, (KUNA): Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) announced on Sunday its new liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices, namely propane and butane, for February. In a press release sent to KUNA, the KPC added that a propane met-

ric ton would be sold for USD 635 and a butane metric ton for USD 625 during February.

Both liquefied natural gases, propane and butane, are used in petrochemical industry, cooking and heating purposes, it added.

Business

In an interview with CNBC Arabia

‘KFH tops the Kuwaiti banking sector in net profits’

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Group Chief Executive Officer, Khaled Yousef AlShamlan, said that all key financial indicators for KFH showed an overall increase in 2024 compared to the previous year. He added that KFH maintains its net profit leadership within the Kuwaiti banking sector, with a net profit of approximately KD 601.8 million attributable to the bank’s shareholders for 2024, representing a 3% increase compared to 2023.

In an interview with CNBC Arabia TV, AlShamlan added that net financing income reached around KD 1.15 billion; an increase of nearly 18.7%. AlShamlan stated that total operating income increased due to the surge in all core activities, reaching over KD 1.6 billion, an increase of 11.6%.

Meanwhile, net operating income reached over KD 1 billion, an increase of 9%, “This increase confirms KFH’s successful strategy, solid capital base, and strong operating performance,” he added.

He said: “The acquisition of Ahli United Bank – Bahrain contributed to KFH Group’s strong profits in recent finan-

cial periods, making them the highest in the Kuwaiti banking sector. KFH also led all banks and companies listed on Boursa Kuwait with a market capitalization of approximately KD 13.4 billion (around USD 43.6 billion). Furthermore,



AlShamlan

Regarding the new visual identity of Kuwait Finance House, AlShamlan explained that it aligns with global trends and the institution’s developed vision, opening new opportu-

KFH was ranked among the top five MEA banks by market capitalization in the latest S&P rankings, he emphasized the ongoing commitment to maintaining KFH’s leading position locally, regionally, and globally. AlShamlan revealed that Group non-performing financing (NPF) ratio reached roughly 1.74% (as per CBK calculation) and provisions coverage ratio for KFH-Kuwait is approximately 343% and about 275% for the Group.

nities and horizons for growth and future expansion.

It embodies a strong focus on technology and digitization while maintaining adherence to Islamic banking values.

He emphasized the importance of the Egyptian market to the Group, highlighting its significance and promising growth opportunities. AlShamlan noted that KFH’s presence in Egypt represents a historic milestone that will significantly contribute to the development of Islamic banking and strengthen the national economy, leveraging KFH’s expertise and leadership in the field.

Meanwhile, the Board of Directors considered the distribution of cash dividends to shareholders of 22% (including 10% in H1 2024). The Board of Directors also considered the distribution of bonus shares of 8% after the approval of the General Assembly and the competent authorities.

It is worth noting that the capital adequacy ratio reached 19.89% as of December 31, 2024, compared with 18.18% as of December 31, 2023. This demonstrates KFH’s strong capital base.



A KFH branch.

6th LNG line to increase KNPC output by 40%

KNPC expands production capacity to meet local and export demands

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) intends to increase the production capacity of five liquefied gas lines in its gas plant in Mina Al-Ahmadi to reach four billion standard cubic feet of gas per day over the next two years, instead of its current daily production of about 3.012 billion standard cubic feet.

Sources confirmed this is in light of the country’s recent marine discoveries to accommodate the potential and anticipated increase in the quantities of gas from Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGO), as part of its plan to increase annual profits in order to add new income for Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC).

Sources pointed out that the entry of new liquefied gas lines into the gas plant affiliated with KNPC expands its production capacity, indicating that the daily gas production before the entry of the fifth line at the end of 2022 was around 2,320 million cubic feet of gas, but the entry of the fifth line into the production line increased the daily production quantity to 3.12 billion per day, as the fifth liquefied gas

line added 30 percent to the liquefied gas plant.

Sources expect that the sixth liquefied gas line, once implemented, will provide the factory with a production capacity of not less than 40 percent; especially since the company aims to expand its production capacity in order to meet the needs of the local market and the possibility of exporting due to the rising number of users of domestic gas cylinders with the continuous increase in the country’s population.

Sources disclosed that the company, through its liquefied gas plant, is preparing for the possible increase in the quantity of gas supplied to it by KOC due to the recently announced huge marine discoveries, in addition to that of KGO.

Sources confirmed that the two national oil refineries -- Mina Abdullah and Al-Ahmadi -- produce high-quality petroleum products, as they apply all technological standards that depend primarily on reducing harmful emissions during operations. “For this aspect, KNPC conducted studies that aim to reach the ‘zero’ point in the rate of gas flaring for the two refineries, as well as the recovery of gases produced during refining operations to reuse them as a source of energy,” sources added.

Bids for solar power connection project due by Feb 11

Kuwait Ministry opens tender for 400kV overhead lines for Shaqaya solar power

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: The Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy has opened a tender for the supply and installation of 400 kV overhead lines, which will connect the Shaqaya (Z)SGRE solar power conversion station to the Subiya power generation station.

The Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) is over-

seeing the tender process, with bids due by February 11.

After the deadline, the tender will be submitted to the State Audit Bureau for review. Once approved, the contract will be finalized, and implementation will begin.

The overhead lines will enable the transfer of 70 megawatts of renewable electricity from the Shaqaya station to the Subiya power station, boosting the electricity grid’s capacity, particularly during peak summer months when demand is high.

Robust growth in industrial loans amid broader financial resilience

Kuwait’s industrial financing hits KD 1.2 bln in 2024

By Mahmoud Shendi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: The local banks in Kuwait saw a notable increase in financing for the industrial sector during December 2024, marking a significant rise both on a monthly and annual basis.

The total financing for both residents and non-residents surged by 41.4 million dinars, or 39 percent, reaching 148.3 million dinars compared to 106.9 million dinars in November 2024.

On a year-on-year basis, the growth was even more impressive, with an increase of 72.3 million dinars, or 95.1 percent, from 76 million dinars in December 2023.

Overall, the total financing allocated to the industrial sector by local banks in 2024 amounted to approximately 1.2 billion dinars.

However, the cumulative balance of industrial financing in December 2024 showed a slight decline of 28 million dinars, or 1 percent, compared to the previous month.

The financing balance decreased from 2.769 billion dinars in November 2024 to 2.741 billion dinars in December. Despite this monthly drop, the accumulated financing showed a 3.5 percent increase, rising by 95 million dinars from 2.646 billion dinars in December 2023.

Throughout 2024, the peak level of financing for the industrial sector occurred in October, reaching 257.9 million dinars, followed by August with 118.7 million dinars. The lowest level of financing for the year was recorded in April, with just 25.3 million dinars.

In 2023, local banks provided a total of 1.033 billion dinars in financing to the industrial sector, which was a decline of 31 percent from the 1.499 billion dinars allocated in 2022.

The sector’s financing peaked in December 2023, reaching 198.9 million dinars, reflecting the challenges

faced by industries, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The industrial sector was severely impacted by the suspension of company operations, disruptions in the supply chain and a decline in demand for new projects.

The key challenges identified by the sector include the shortage of developed industrial plots for new projects, bureaucratic delays in industrial transactions, a lack of support for national products, difficulties in exporting Kuwaiti goods and high factory rental prices.

These hurdles significantly hindered the sector’s growth and the financing it received throughout 2023.

In contrast, the data from the Central Bank of Kuwait showed positive trends in deposit growth and by the end of December 2024, the volume of deposits for both residents and non-residents increased by 1.5 percent, totaling 53.823 billion dinars up from 53 billion dinars in December 2023.

The government deposits also saw an increase, rising by 390 million dinars to reach 5.083 billion dinars.

The private sector deposits grew by 795 million dinars, reaching 41.485 billion dinars. Additionally, the total balance of bank credit facilities for various economic sectors saw a substantial increase of 3.6 billion dinars, reaching 57.17 billion dinars by the end of 2024. Personal loans also increased by 560 million dinars to a total of 19.321 billion dinars.

Despite these positive figures, there were some negative developments in the broader financial landscape.

The money supply (liquidity) slightly decreased by 0.2 percent to 40.6 billion dinars, while private sector deposits in foreign currencies fell by 1.6 percent to 1.9 billion dinars.

The total claims of local banks on the Central Bank of Kuwait in the form of central bonds also declined by 16.5 percent, amounting to 1.4 billion dinars.

This shift in financial trends underscores the ongoing challenges faced by the industrial sector, while also highlighting the resilience of the financial system in supporting other areas of the economy.

ECB cuts refinancing rate from 3.15% to 2.90%

Fed holds interest rates steady, defying Trump’s call for cuts

By National Bank of Kuwait

United States

US CB Consumer Confidence

US consumer confidence declined for the second straight month in January, with The Conference Board’s index dropping to 104.1 from 109.5 in December, below economists’ forecast of 105.8. The gauge for short-term expectations regarding income, business, and the job market also fell to 83.9, nearing the below 80.0 level that could signal a potential recession. Despite this, the proportion of consumers anticipating a recession in the next year remained low. While confidence has waned, consumer spending has stayed resilient, supporting the US economy. In December, the government reported a robust 3.1% annualized GDP growth for the third quarter, driven by strong consumer spending and increased exports. Consumer spending, which makes up about two-thirds of economic activity, has helped sustain GDP growth above 2% in eight of the last nine quarters.

Federal Funds Rate

The Federal Reserve kept interest rates unchanged, ignoring Donald Trump’s call to lower them. The Fed maintained the policy rate between 4.25% and 4.5% and indicated no changes were coming soon. Powell said they were in no rush to adjust policy as expected, due to ongoing concerns about inflation. In its announcement, the Fed acknowledged that inflation remains “somewhat elevated” at 2.9%, down from its 9.1% peak in June 2022 but still above the central bank’s 2% target. This decision follows three consecutive rate cuts in late 2024, totaling a full percentage point, and comes as the US economy continues to show strength, with 3.1% annualized growth in the third quarter of last year.

Unemployment Claims

The number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits last week were lower than expected, showing that layoffs are still low, but finding a job is getting harder. Claims dropped by 16,000 to 207,000 for the week ending January 25, lower than the 220,000 economists predicted. Even though the job market is steady, people are feeling less confident about job opportunities. A recent survey found that fewer people think jobs are easy to find, while more believe they’re hard to get. Companies are hiring less due to high interest rates and uncertainty over President Trump’s economic plans, like tax cuts, tariffs, and deportation policies. Some experts worry these policies could increase inflation. The Federal Reserve kept interest rates at 4.25%-4.50% after cutting them over the past few months but no longer says inflation is improving.

Previous Week Levels					This Week’s Expected Range		3-Month
Currencies	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	Forward
EUR	1.0485	1.0349	1.0532	1.0362	1.0255	1.0435	1.0482
GBP	1.2474	1.2382	1.2523	1.2390	1.2300	1.2475	1.2386
JPY	155.71	153.71	156.24	155.18	154.50	156.80	153.56
CHF	0.9053	0.8962	0.9115	0.9107	0.9045	0.9200	0.9013

Meanwhile, the number of people still getting unemployment benefits dropped by 42,000 to 1.858 million, showing job openings are shrinking. The unemployment rate was 4.1% in December.

Core PCE Price Index m/m

The personal consumption expenditure (PCE) price index increased by 0.3% in December, following an unchanged 0.1% rise in November, according to the Commerce Department’s Bureau of Economic Analysis on Friday. This figure aligned with economists’ predictions from a Reuters poll. On an annual basis, the PCE price index grew by 2.6% in December, up from 2.4% in November. Meanwhile, excluding food and energy, the core PCE price index rose 0.2% in December after an unchanged 0.1% increase in November. Year-over-year, core inflation remained at 2.8% in December, the same as in November. The U.S. Federal Reserve monitors PCE price measures to guide monetary policy. On Wednesday, the Fed’s policy statement omitted previous language about inflation making “progress” toward the 2% target, and no rate cuts are anticipated before June.

The Greenback surged the week, last trading at 108.370

Europe

ECB Press Conference

The European Central Bank (ECB) lowered their deposit facility rate by 25 bps to 2.75%, and indicated that further cuts could be possible, prioritizing economic growth over concerns about ongoing inflation. ECB President Christine Lagarde explained that decisions are made on a meeting-by-meeting basis, depending on economic data, and the bank is not committing to a specific path. She could not say whether rates would drop below the “neutral rate” to stimulate the economy, as future actions will depend on new data and staff analysis. Lagarde dismissed fears of stagflation, clarifying that while growth stagnated in the last quarter, the overall yearly picture

is different. She also addressed concerns about trade tariffs, explaining that their effects on inflation are complex but will likely have a negative global impact. Despite these challenges, she expressed optimism that consumer spending will rise and help drive economic recovery.

The EUR/USD currency pair last seen trading at 1.0362

Asia Pacific

China’s Manufacturing PMI

China’s factory activity unexpectedly shrank in January, partly due to the usual slowdown before the Lunar New Year, reversing three months of growth and increasing calls for more government support to boost the economy. Official data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed that the Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) dropped to 49.1, below the 50.1 forecast by economists. A PMI above 50 signals growth, while below 50 indicates contraction. Over the previous three months, the index had remained above 50, with readings of 50.1 in December, 50.3 in November, and 50.1 in October. China’s services and construction sectors also showed mixed results. The non-manufacturing PMI, which tracks services and construction, dropped to 50.2 in January from 52.2 in December. While the services sector grew slightly at 50.3, supported by strong holiday travel demand in industries like public transport, hotels, and restaurants, the construction PMI fell to 49.3 as activity slowed ahead of the festival.

The USD/CNY currency pair last seen trading at 7.2507

Australia’s NAB Business Confidence

Australia’s NAB business confidence index improved slightly to -2 in December 2024 from -3 in the previous month, marking the second consecutive month of negative readings. Despite this, business conditions strengthened, rising to 6 from 3 in November, driven by strong year-end activity. Sales, profitability, and employment all saw gains, with notable

- US CB Consumer Confidence Index came in at 104.1 vs expectations of 105.7.
- US Federal Reserve Kept Interest Rates unchanged between 4.25% and 4.5%.
- US Unemployment Claims came in at 207K vs expectations of 224K.
- US Core PCE Price Index m/m came in at 0.2% in line with market expectations.
- ECB lowered their Refinancing interest rates on Thursday from 3.15% to 2.90%.
- China’s Manufacturing PMI came in at 49.1 vs expectations of 50.1.
- Australia’s core inflation rate y/y came in at 2.5% in line with market expectations.

growth in retail for the first time since November 2023. However, transport, utilities, construction, and wholesale sectors continue to lag. Capacity utilization rose to 82.8%, while purchase cost growth increased to 1.5% quarterly. While businesses are showing resilience, NAB’s chief economist Alan Oster noted that cost pressures remain a challenge in the current economic environment.

Australia’s Core Inflation

Australia’s core inflation rate has dropped to a three-year low of 3.2% in the December quarter, down from 3.5%, strengthening the argument for a potential interest rate cut next month. This reduction could provide a boost to the government as it approaches an election focused on cost-of-living issues. The headline consumer price index, which factors in government-subsidized electricity costs, also decreased to an annual rate of 2.4%, down from 2.8%. The decline in overall inflation is attributed to lower electricity and fuel prices, as well as moderated increases in housing costs, partly due to government relief measures. The monthly CPI inflation increased to 2.5% year-over-year in December, matching expectations and rising from the previous reading of 2.3%. Treasurer Jim Chalmers acknowledged significant progress in managing inflation but cautioned that the challenge is not fully resolved. Since November 2023, the official cash rate has remained at 4.35%, with markets pricing in a 76% probability of a 25 basis point reduction in the upcoming February RBA meeting.

The AUD/USD currency pair last seen trading at 0.6211.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30825.

Historic earnings reflect Group’s operational excellence and business diversification

NBK achieves record profits, leveraging a strategic expansion, says Al-Sager

The Kuwaiti banking system is well-prepared to take on a central role in addressing the housing issue

Mr. Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), announced that the Group achieved a record net profit of KD 600.1 million for 2024, marking its highest-ever annual performance. He credited the 7% profit increase compared to the previous year to the Group’s exceptional operating performance and the ongoing expansion of its diversified business model.

In an interview with CNBC Arabia, Al-Sager attributed the robust net profit performance to increased business volume and the relatively high average interest rates throughout much of 2024, compared to 2023. He also highlighted the strong performance of fees and FX income across various business sectors and regions where the Group operates.

Al-Sager explained that in 2024, NBK Group saw an 8.3% year-on-year growth in net interest income, while operating income rose by 7.2% to KD 1.3 billion. He attributed this positive performance to the strong growth in the Group’s loan portfolio, which expanded by 6.4% compared to 2023. This growth was seen across both domestic and international markets, encompassing both conventional and Islamic banking services.

“We have consistently upheld healthy levels of cost of risk, primarily driven by a 16% decrease in provisions for credit provisions and other impairments in 2024. The Group remains committed to its prudent approach in managing credit exposure,” Al-Sager noted.

International Operations & Wealth Management

Al-Sager highlighted the strong performance of NBK Group’s international operations and wealth management, emphasizing the Group’s distinctive advantage among Kuwaiti banks. He noted the strategic geographical spread through international banking services, along with the ability to conduct business in both Conventional and Islamic Banking.

He further noted that in 2024, the International Banking Group (IBG) contributed 24% of the Group’s net operating income and 23% of its profits, underscoring the robust performance across these segments. Additionally, NBK Wealth contributed 9% to operating income and 11% to profits, reinforcing the effectiveness of the Group’s strategic diversification efforts.

The Future Outlook

Al-Sager conveyed a confident outlook for NBK’s performance in 2025, driven by several pivotal factors. He underscored the influence of monetary and fiscal policies, notably the anticipated gradual pace of interest rate cuts, which are poised to support margins. Furthermore, he emphasized the ongoing momentum in projects award in Kuwait and the favorable climate for the enactment of several crucial economic laws, all of which are anticipated to further bolster the local operating environment.

Interest Rate Trajectory and Margin Impact

In response to a question about interest rates and their impact on margins, Al-Sager stated, “With uncertainty surrounding the scale of future rate cuts, intensifying competition, and a challenging global operating landscape, we anticipate some pressure on margins. Consequently, we expect net margins in 2025 to edge slightly lower, by a few basis points, compared to year-end 2024 levels.”

“However, it is important to consider that the expansion in business activity driven by a low-interest-rate environment could help offset margin pressures. With a well-diversified business model and an increased focus on fee-based income, we continuously hedge against



Al-Sager highlights strategic expansion behind record profits.

- NBK’s loan portfolio expanded by 6.4% in 2024, reflecting growth across Kuwait and international markets, encompassing both conventional and Islamic banking services
- The Group delivered strong performance in fees and FX income across its diverse business segments and global footprint
- Provisions for credit losses and other impairments declined by 16% year-on-year, underscoring improved asset quality
- International Banking contributed 24% to net operating income and 23% to the Group’s profit, reflecting a strong operating performance
- NBK Wealth contributed 9% to the Group’s net operating income and 11% to its profit, highlighting its growing strategic role
- The outlook for 2025 remains positive, driven by a measured pace of rate cuts, sustained project award momentum, and a regulatory environment increasingly supportive of business growth
- The increased volume of our business activities, driven by the low-interest rate environment, has the potential to offset margin pressures
- Our diversified business model and focus on fee-based services ensure we effectively hedge against interest rate fluctuations
- We are used to operating in highly competitive markets, and banking mergers are often followed by challenges that can provide us with opportunities to seize
- The project awards in Kuwait by the end of 2024 reached their highest level in nearly eight years and are expected to sustain strong momentum into 2025
- The adoption of pivotal laws, such as the real estate financing and public debt laws, will be instrumental in driving the acceleration and modernization of the Kuwaiti economy, fostering a more efficient and robust financial environment
- The implementation of the domestic minimum top-up taxes (DMTT) will be advantageous for Kuwait, ensuring that revenues remain within the country rather than being diverted abroad
- The Real Estate Financing Law represents the most effective practical solution to Kuwait’s housing challenges

interest rate fluctuations, ensuring resilience in varying market conditions,” Al-Sager explained.

Market Consolidation and Its Implications

Assessing the impact of ongoing mergers in the Kuwaiti banking sector, Al-Sager stated: “As one of the largest banks in the region, NBK is well accustomed to operating in highly competitive markets. However, these dynamics do not impose any pressure on us, as we remain steadfast in pursuing our strategic objectives.”

“We are years ahead of the current wave of mergers, having successfully expanded through strategic acquisitions in earlier growth phases. These expansions

strengthened our business diversification and service integration. Today, we are capitalizing on the success of our expansion strategy, having mitigated the risks of business consolidation and sharpened our focus on delivering exceptional services across all the markets in which we operate,” he added.

Al-Sager emphasized that banking mergers are often followed by challenges that can provide NBK with opportunities to seize.

He further emphasized NBK Group’s commitment to expanding its presence in regional markets, reaffirming its readiness to pursue acquisition opportunities that

strengthen service integration and drive added value for shareholders.

Projects Award

Commenting on the projects market in Kuwait, Al-Sager expressed optimism due to the strong activity in the market, noting that the awarding of development projects by the end of 2024 reached its highest level in nearly eight years. He anticipates this momentum to persist into 2025.

He emphasized the widespread consensus on the importance of prioritizing major development projects and enhancing Kuwait’s appeal as an investment hub. This includes the urgent need to approve a set of long-awaited laws that would align with and support ongoing economic reform efforts.

“With decision-making now solely in the hands of the government, we no longer face the disruptive entanglements of the past, and this will positively impact the anticipated economic reforms,” Al-Sager noted.

“We are witnessing meaningful discussions on the adoption of key laws, such as the real estate financing and public debt laws. The enactment of these laws would serve as a crucial catalyst, driving the Kuwaiti economy toward smoother and faster growth,” He stated.

Multinational Corporate Tax

Commenting on Kuwait’s recent enactment of the Domestic Minimum Top-Up Taxes (DMTT) on multinational enterprises (MNEs), effective 2025, Al-Sager explained that this corporate tax follows a global standard already in place in many countries where NBK Group operates. He emphasized that its local implementation would benefit Kuwait by ensuring these revenues stay within the country, rather than flowing to other nations.

In response to a question regarding the potential impact of the tax implementation on the bank’s profits, Al-Sager stated: “Naturally, there will be an impact on our profits in 2025, with an anticipated increase in the tax applied to the Group’s profits by approximately 8 to 15%. However, this impact is expected to be temporary, as the base year 2025 marks the introduction of the tax.”

Real Estate Financing Law

Commenting on the Real Estate Financing law, Al-Sager stated: “We view the real estate financing law, or housing finance, as the most effective practical solution to Kuwait’s housing crisis. With over 97,000 pending housing applications at the Public Authority for Housing Welfare and approximately 10,000 new applications each year, this issue has only intensified without any tangible resolution.”

He highlighted the recent positive developments supporting the adoption of the law, noting that this comes at a time when the government has clearly stated that re-financing Kuwait Credit Bank is challenging due to the anticipated ongoing budget deficit. He also emphasized that the Kuwaiti banking system is in an excellent position, with high levels of liquidity and capitalization, and is well-equipped to play a crucial role in addressing the housing issue.

Al-Sager expressed strong confidence that the right legislative and regulatory framework will empower banks to take a central role in resolving the housing crisis, using financing mechanisms akin to those in neighboring markets. He highlighted this as a major growth opportunity for Kuwaiti banks, especially given the substantial backlog of housing applications and the steady influx of new applicants each year. Additionally, he pointed out that Kuwait’s youth demographic, which makes up the majority of the population, adds urgency to the need for effective solutions.

On the sidelines of the 2024 Analyst Conference

‘NBK’s agility & resilience drive its success in navigating a shifting global landscape’

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Mr. Isam Al-Sager, Vice Chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), stated that despite the continuing challenges arising from macroeconomic and geopolitical tensions; NBK demonstrated its strength and adaptability in navigating a dynamic global landscape towards achieving robust financial performance in 2024.

On the sidelines of the 2024 Analyst Conference, Al-Sager revealed that NBK reported net profits of KD 600.1 million for the year 2024; growing by 7% on an annual basis. As for the three-months ended December 2024, net profits grew by 10.5% year-on-year.

He highlighted that net operating income grew by 7.2% year-on-year to reach KD 1.3 billion; mainly underpinned by the growth recorded in net interest income, higher fees & commission and FX income.

Al-Sager further emphasized that NBK continued excelling with its successful diversification strategies and harnessing technological innovation to further seize emerging opportunities across different segments and geographies while demonstrating agility, resilience, excellence in creating long-term value for all stakeholders. Return on average assets for the period reached 1.55% while our return on average equity reached 15.1%.

“We remain committed to delivering exceptional value to our clients by introducing innovative products and services tailored to their diverse needs. As such, we will continue to prioritize innovation and leverage technology to preserve our leadership, foster sustainability while capitalizing on emerging opportunities and our unique access to Islamic banking,” Al-Sager emphasized.

“Beyond Kuwait, our international business continued to expand its offerings in key markets further diversifying our income streams, mitigating risks and optimizing costs. Likewise, our wealth management business continued broadening its presence and offerings to enrich our client experience,” he continued.

Al-Sager also highlighted that in 2024, NBK distinguished itself through its unwavering commitment to sustainability, demonstrating a strong dedication to environmental stewardship.

“During the year, we became the first bank in Kuwait to join the Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials (PCAF) and the lead issuer of the first green bond out of Kuwait. This testifies to the Group’s progress towards a more sustainable future and its commitment to play a pivotal role in shaping the future by mobilizing the necessary capital to drive the transition,” he confirmed.

When asked about whether the bank currently has acquisition plans, Al-Sager responded, “We continue executing against our current strategy and monitoring the market for opportunities. However, with any potential plans it must be of added value to our shareholders and stakeholders.”

Kuwait’s Economic Landscape

Discussing Kuwait’s economy, Al-Sager noted that in Kuwait, although headline activity was relatively subdued in 2024, the near-term outlook implies a strong rebound in 2025. With an expected unwinding of voluntary production cuts by OPEC+, a modest recovery in consumer spending, credit growth, projects awards and a possible rise in public investment.

He explained that GDP growth in Kuwait should recover to reach 3.0% in 2025. On the other hand, inflation continued to trend lower to average 3.0% in 2024 and is expected to continue the same stance with headline rate averaging 2.5% in 2025.

As for domestic project activity, Al-Sager noted that Kuwait witnessed a strong rise in the awards of each quarter throughout 2024 that boosted the yearly total to KD 2.74 billion, exceeding the value of awards in 2023 by 45%. The momentum foreseen is expected to carry in 2025 as the government continues to push with the execution of its development agenda. Moreover, an estimate value of KD 7.8 billion worth of awards is in the pipeline for the year.

Public Debt & Real Estate Financing Laws

Responding to a question about Kuwait’s potential return to the global bond markets, Al-Sager pointed to the government’s recent confirmation that it is targeting to develop the domestic economic landscape via various financial instruments, with a particular focus on the debt law. He affirmed that while the debt law is expected to go through, the government issuances will depend on the market conditions.

As for the real estate financing law and its mechanism, Al-Sager noted that



NBK Headquarters

discussions are ongoing between various stakeholders including banks indicating good progress in finalizing the initial draft very soon, confirming that other than the mentioned, there are no material updates on the law, but serious steps are in place to passing the law with some adjustments under discussions that may allow its implementation soon.

GCC & Global Economy

Al-Sager remarked that GCC economies fared relatively well to recent economic shocks while poised for accelerated growth this year on the back of the roll-out of reforms and diversification efforts that are supporting business activity. On the contrary, significant geopolitical developments could disrupt supply chains in the global oil and gas sector and increase its volatility on the demand and pricing side.

Regarding the global economic outlook, Al-Sager noted that it continues to be characterized by moderate growth projections as performance and monetary policy diverged across regions. Additionally, potential inflation pressures, heightened regional conflicts and uncertain policy direction continued to dominate the scene.

Stable Economic Environment

Meanwhile, Mr. Sujit Ronghe, Group CFO of NBK, stated that although, global and regional geopolitical situation remained unstable in 2024, an overall stable operating environment in Kuwait and the higher interest rate regime for a significant part of the year, have generally benefitted the Bank.

He highlighted that the strong bottom-line performance was driven by a combination of business volume growth, a relatively high-interest rate environment, and solid fee and foreign exchange income, all contributing to a robust operating performance. Investment securities also recorded a year-on-year growth of 10.8% compared to December 2023.

Ronghe stated that profit before provisions and taxes for 2024 stood at KD783.2m, a growth of KD42.9m, +5.8% over 2023. Net operating income increased by KD84.4m, while net interest income stood at KD980.1m for 2024, a growth of 8.3% over 2023.

Robust Financial Position

Ronghe emphasized that the Group’s Balance Sheet remains strong with stable credit quality. NBK’s capital base, along with the ability to generate healthy operating profits, provides a strong credit loss-absorption capacity. He also confirmed that NBK Group continues to benefit from its unique position amongst Kuwaiti banks in terms of geographical spread through International Banking and the ability to conduct business in both Conventional and Islamic Banking.

Al-Sager:

- NBK has consistently demonstrated leadership by excelling through its successful diversification strategies and leveraging technological innovation to capitalize on emerging opportunities
- We remain committed to innovation and technology, reinforcing our leadership, delivering exceptional value to our customers, and embedding sustainability at the core of our operations
- Our international operations continue to expand their offerings, while our wealth management business continued to broaden its presence and offerings to enrich our client experience
- In 2024, NBK distinguished itself through its unwavering commitment to sustainability, demonstrating a strong dedication to environmental stewardship
- We continue executing against our current strategy and monitoring the market for opportunities
- The near-term outlook signals a strong recovery in domestic macroeconomic activity in 2025
- GDP growth is projected to reach 3% this year
- The momentum of project awards is expected to persist this year as the government advances its development agenda
- The public debt law is anticipated to be enacted soon, but government issuances depend on market conditions
- Significant progress is being made toward the adoption of the real estate financing law, with potential amendments that could accelerate its implementation

Ronghe:

- Underlying drivers for the robust bottom-line performance are a combination of growth in business volumes, relatively higher interest rates, together with strong fees and fx income
- Consumer Banking contributed 21% and 17% to the Group’s net operating income and profit respectively
- Corporate Banking contributed 13% and 19% to the Group’s net operating income and profit
- International Banking contributed 24% to net operating income, 23% to the Group’s profit, and 44% of its assets
- Boubyan Bank contributed 23% to Group’s total assets, while NBK Wealth contributed 9% and 11% of the Group operating income and profit respectively

Moreover, he emphasized that NBK’s diversified business segments serve as key pillars of strength, offering a competitive edge and reinforcing the Group’s earnings resilience. Consumer Banking accounted for 21% of net operating income and 17% of profit, while Corporate Banking contributed 13% and 19%, respectively. Meanwhile, International Banking delivered 24% of net operating income and 23% of profit, reflecting a solid operating performance.

He further added that the Group’s Islamic banking subsidiary Boubyan Bank delivered a net profit of KD96.8m, up 20.3% on 2023, contributing 44% and 23% respectively to Group’s total assets enforcing the diversification agenda of the Group. In the meantime, NBK Wealth contributed 9% and 11% of the Group operating income and profit respectively.

When asked about his forecasts for 2025, Ronghe stated: “Given the ongoing regional and global geopolitical landscape, we remain cautiously optimistic that while challenges persist, the overall operating environment will remain broadly stable in 2025.”

Demonstrating its commitment to achieving the highest international standards in Compliance Management

stc becomes first Kuwaiti company to earn ISO 37301:2021 certification

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it has earned the ISO 37301:2021 certification for Compliance Management Systems, becoming the first company in Kuwait to reach this significant milestone. The recognition demonstrates stc’s commitment to maintaining the highest standards of compliance both locally and on an international level.

The ISO 37301:2021 certification reflects stc’s dedication to upholding a robust culture of compliance, adhering to laws and regulations, and building trust amongst stakeholders, including customers, shareholders, and regulators. Throughout its years operating in the Kuwaiti market, stc maintained a high standard when it comes to complying with regulators and

strictly adhering to all requirements set by governing and regulatory bodies, whether within the telecom or other sectors that are related to the Company’s activities. By achieving this certification, stc is further solidifying its role as a telecom pioneer, on a regional and internal scale, especially as one of the select few companies in the GCC region to hold this certification.

Commenting on this achievement, Issam Al Asousi, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at stc, said, “Earning the ISO 37301:2021 certification is a testament to stc’s ongoing commitment to uphold the highest standards in compliance. This milestone reflects the hard work and dedication placed forth by our dedicated Compliance Team in strictly adhering to ethical and operational standards, ensuring that stc continues to build trust and deliver exceptional value to its stakeholders. As we continue to set new benchmarks



Issam Al Asousi – Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at stc

Al Asousi:

■ This milestone reflects the hard work and dedication placed forth by our dedicated Compliance Team in strictly adhering to ethical and operational standards



‘stc is the first in Kuwait’ flyer

in the industry, we are proud to be recognized as a trusted pio-

neer in Kuwait and throughout the region.”

As a listed company on Boursa Kuwait’s Premier Mar-

ket, this certification enhances the Company’s reputation as a compliant and ethical pioneer in the telecom sector that ensures the highest standards of accountability, and trust are upheld across all aspects of its operations. The ISO37301:2021 certification also signifies stc’s proactive approach in integrating compliant practices into its business operations, ensuring sustainable growth while aligning with international best practices.

Al Asousi added, “In recognition of this certification, I would like to commend our Compliance Team for their dedication and effort to ensure full implementation of the rigorous standards set by ISO 37301:2021. Their meticulous approach and commitment to excellence have been pivotal in achieving this significant milestone, further strengthening stc’s compliance framework and reinforcing our leadership in the industry.”

381,000 Kuwaitis visit UAE hotels in '23

Kuwait, UAE event to strengthen trade, investment & cooperation

DUBAI, Feb 2, (KUNA): Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will Monday hold an event full of activities during which the two countries would shed light on economic and cultural opportunities for the private sector, as well as reviewing trade relations.

Kuwait-UAE Week, patronized by Vice-President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, is yet another venue to further boost relations at different levels.

Kuwait and the UAE enjoy solid decades-long economic ties, which include trade, investment and energy. Non-oil trade exchange was over USD 12.4 billion in 2023, or four percent more than the year before.

The UAE is the world’s largest Kuwaiti non-oil products’ importer, or 22 percent.

Kuwait is the UAE’s 12th trade partner in 2023 globally, and the third amongst the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) after Saudi Arabia and Oman. Kuwait is the 9th importer of UAE’s non-oil products.

In tourism, the number of Kuwaitis who booked hotels in the UAE in 2023 was more than 381,000 against 250,000 in 2022, while number of Emiratis visiting Kuwait in 2023 amounted to 42,000.

Kuwait Consul General in Dubai Khaled Al-Zaabi, speaking to KUNA Sunday, said the event was a reflection of the strong bond between the two Gulf nations.

“Our common history and rich culture reflect on this week. We will work together to strengthen cooperation in trade, investment and culture,” he said.

“The Kuwait-UAE Week,” he added, “aimed at cementing cooperation between the public and private sectors in both countries.”

Al-Zaabi hoped the week would be a platform bringing together companies and businessmen to build further partnerships.

Feras Al-Salem, Chairman of Kuwait Business Council in Dubai, said the event was an economic and cultural platform, during which the two sides explore economic and trade ties.

Rules in Kuwait and the UAE,



Kuwait Consul General in Dubai Khaled Al-Zaabi



Feras Al-Salem – Chairman of Kuwait Business Council in Dubai

he told KUNA, allowed transfer of national or foreign capitals which would thus promote trade and investment relations

He said 300 government officials, businessmen and companies’ representatives are expected to attend the two-day event. “This will be the largest economic delegation from Kuwait visiting the Emirates in recognition and appreciation of patronage of Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum,” he added.

UAE journalist Mohammad Al-Raisi said these events contribute to fostering relations and cooperation in many fields, including economic, trade and culture.

Al-Raisi told KUNA investors in both sides could contribute to cementing trade and economic relations.

The two-day event is expected to witness meetings between public and private entities, and signing of cooperation agreements.

Kuwait equities outperform GCC & global markets, reports Markaz

S&P GCC composite index up by 3.0% in Jan 2025

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Kuwait Financial Centre “Markaz” released its Monthly Market Review report for January 2025. Kuwait equities outperformed global and GCC markets driven by the anticipation of strong earnings of banking stocks and the increased deal activity in the energy and real estate sectors, with most sectors closing the month in positive territory. Kuwait’s All Share Index posted a monthly gain of 5.7%, outperforming other GCC equity indices.

This was supported by the movement in key sectors like oil & gas, real estate, consumer discretionary and banking sectors which gained 11.7%, 11.1%, 7.6% and 7.3% respectively during January 2025. Among the real estate stocks, Commercial Real Estate Co and Kuwait Real Estate Company were the biggest gainers, with a monthly return of 33.1% and 28.9% respectively. During the month, Kuwait Real Estate Company launched ‘Tilal Al Tai’ project in Sharjah with a value of AED 3.5 billion (KWD 294 million).

The company also obtained approval from the Capital Market Authority (CMA) to deal in treasury shares. Commercial real estate company got qualified to enter the tender regarding the Mubarakia Market Development project and received approval to develop the Salmiya Boulevard Park. Kuwait Oil Company’s discovery of hydrocarbon resources at the Al-Jlaia offshore field has been a notable progress in Kuwait’s energy industry. Kuwait is also planning to consolidate its oil companies in the beginning of 2025-26 fiscal year as a part of its restructuring program. Among banking stocks, Warba Bank and Burgan Bank were the biggest gainers, with a monthly return of 22.9% and 17.6% respectively. Warba Bank acquired a 32.75% stake in Gulf Bank that was previously held by Al Ghanim trading company while Burgan Bank is set to wholly acquire United Gulf Bank by the first quarter of 2025. As a result, Gulf Bank and Boubyan Bank have mutually agreed to call off their potential merger. Kuwait’s Main Market Index increased by 5.1% during January 2025, while the premier market index recorded a return of 5.9%. Kuwait’s inflation accelerated to 2.5% y/y in December 2024, compared to 2.36% y/y in November 2024. The uptick can be attributed to the cost increase in miscellaneous goods & services, clothing & footwear and food & beverage industry.

The S&P GCC Composite index rose by 3% in January with all major GCC markets ending posi-



Markaz logo

tively. Saudi equity index gained 3.1% during the month. Saudi Telecom Company and Etihad Etisalat Company were the top gainers among Saudi blue chips, with gains of 8.7% and 8.4% respectively during January 2025. On the other hand, Saudi Aramco dipped by 0.9% during the month, due to the delay in phasing out OPEC+ cuts. Abu Dhabi’s equity index gained 1.8% in January 2025, supported by the strong performance of the banking sector stocks. Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank gained 14.9% during January 2025 supported by a 26% increase in net profits for 2024. Qatar and Dubai indices gained 0.9% and 0.4%, respectively, during the month. Bahrain’s index fell by 5.4% during the month due to the decline of Aluminum Bahrain (Alba)’s stock by 18.5%, after officially terminating the proposed deal with Saudi Arabian Mining Company (Ma’aden).

GCC is undergoing a major fiscal transformation through the implementation of new tax regimes. As a part of OECD’s global minimum tax rate agreement with around 136 signatories, a minimum tax rate of 15% is to be levied on large multinational corporations with global turnover of over EUR 750 million, irrespective of their region of operation. Kuwait, UAE and Bahrain executed the new tax law with effect from 1st January 2025. Qatar and Oman have started working towards adoption of the new tax law. President Trump’s retaliation against the global minimum tax regime has spurred uncertainty in relation to its implications on OECD’s further strategies. Lack of US participation in this framework might affect the global application of such law.

U.S. Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting was held on 29th January 2025 during which it was decided to hold the interest rates steady. The FOMC committee stated that the labor market conditions remain stable, and a balance has been obtained between inflation and employment targets, which led to its neutral stance in changing the policy rates. The central banks in GCC have also aligned with the U.S. Fed’s decision to hold the interest rates.

Global markets remained positive during January 2025. MSCI World and S&P 500 indices gained 3.5% and 2.7% respectively. Microsoft shares rose by 4.1%, while Apple declined by 5.09%. Deepseek, China’s Artificial Intelligence (AI) model created turbulence in the U.S. stock market by triggering more volatility among the technology stocks. Deepseek’s R1 AI model claims to match the performance of other western AI models, at a significantly lower cost, which has raised question marks over the current AI

models that consume very high computing power. NVIDIA’s core business revolving around advanced AI models felt the shockwaves caused by Deepseek, which led to a 10.58% dip in its shares during January 2025. The emergence of Deepseek acts as a threat to the U.S. dominance in generative AI. The MSCI EM index gained 1.7% during the month, despite a 3% fall in Chinese markets. The MSCI EM index gain was supported by South Korea and Taiwan markets, whose main indices gained 4.9% and 2.1% respectively during the month.

U.S. inflation was at 2.9% y/y in December 2024, a slight increase compared to 2.7% y/y in November 2024. This can be primarily attributed to the 2.6% and 0.3% rise in energy index and food price index respectively during December 2024. The yield on the 10-year US treasury notes stood at 4.55% at the end of Jan 2025, up by 3 basis points from December 2024 due to the Federal Reserve’s decision to hold interest rates steady. The 10Y yield registered a high of 4.79% during the month as an immediate reaction towards President Trump’s policy comments.

Brent crude oil closed the month at USD 76.8 per barrel, which is a 2.8% increase from December 2024. This move was driven by the U.S. energy sanctions against Russian entities. Further clarity on Trump’s trade policies, possible increase in production from the U.S., and the recovery of demand from China will determine the further course of oil prices. Gold prices closed at USD 2,759.3/oz, a gain of 6.8% from December 2024 driven by the increase in purchases by Central banks.

The outlook of global asset classes in the coming months could be shaped by Trump’s trade policies and possible changes in the Fed’s rate cut trajectory. Trump’s conservative trade policies could largely affect emerging markets, triggering capital outflows to the U.S., leading to further depreciation of their currencies against the U.S. Dollar. With China being in the crosshair of Trump’s tariffs, oil prices could take a hit if the demand recovery from China weakens. Weakness in oil prices could alter OPEC+ plans to unwind production cuts, which would in turn affect GCC economies and markets.

About Kuwait Financial Centre “Markaz”

Established in 1974, Kuwait Financial Centre K.P.S.C “Markaz” is one of the leading asset management and investment banking institutions in the MENA region with total assets under management of over KD 1.39 billion (USD 4.56 billion) as of 30 September 2024. Markaz was listed on the Boursa Kuwait in 1997. Over the years, Markaz has pioneered innovation through the creation of new investment channels. These channels enjoy unique characteristics and help Markaz widen investors’ horizons. Examples include Mumtaz (the first domestic mutual fund), MREF (the first real estate investment fund in Kuwait), and Forsa Financial Fund (the first options market maker in the GCC since 2005), all conceptualized, established, and managed by Markaz.

Bank's training focuses on agriculture's role in climate change mitigation

Gulf Bank hosts sustainable farming workshop at Sadeer Farms

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: As part of its ongoing commitment to environmental sustainability, Gulf Bank organized a training session titled “A Day at Sadeer Farms”, in collaboration with sustainable agriculture experts Alzainah Al-Babtain, Dana Al-Mutawa, and Sherifa Al-Sabah, aimed to educate participants on sustainable farming practices, and provide them with the practical skills to adopt eco-friendly agricultural methods that promote environmental health and enhance quality of life.

Thirty participants, with a keen interest in agriculture and sustainability, were selected for the workshop through a social media competition on Gulf Bank’s platforms, which garnered enthusiastic participation from followers.

The event is part of Gulf Bank’s wider initiative to promote environmental conservation and the significance of sustainable farming. It emphasized agriculture’s vital role in creating a healthier, more sustainable environment – not only in food production but also in addressing climate change and enhancing overall ecosystem health. Hosted at Sadeer Farms, the Training session offered hands-on sessions led by experts in agricultural food and cosmetic practices. Participants had the opportunity to explore techniques like modern irrigation, eco-friendly soil enhancement, and the use of renewable energy in farming. The program also included discussions on the role of agriculture in



Najla Al-Essa in a group photo with the lecturers and participants in the course.

improving air and water quality, combating climate change, and ensuring food security.

Gulf Bank highlighted that environmental sustainability is a key pillar of its corporate strategy. Initiatives such as this workshop demonstrate the Bank’s dedica-

tion to sustainable development and its alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in areas like biodiversity conservation and environmental protection.

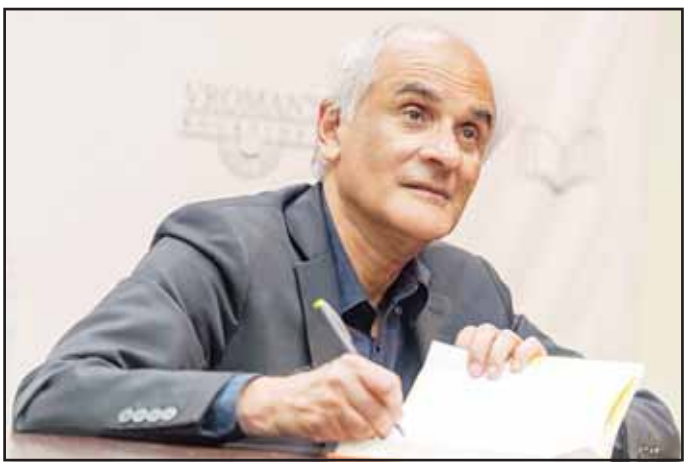
The Bank invites individuals who are passionate

about sustainable agriculture and environmental protection to take part in similar initiatives, reinforcing its commitment to building a community that is both environmentally conscious and resilient, ready to tackle future challenges.



Sherifa Al-Sabah provides attendees with an insightful overview of the farm's key components.

Books



Pico Iyer, the bestselling author of 'The Art of Stillness,' presents his new book 'Aflame: Learning from Silence' at Vroman's bookstore in Pasadena, Calif., on Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2025. (AP)

'Fire liberated me'

Author's story of coping hits home for LA victims

PASADENA, Calif., Feb 2, (AP): On a quiet summer evening in June 1990, Pico Iyer sat in his family home in Santa Barbara, California, when suddenly, he was surrounded by walls of flames five stories high.

Thirty-four years after that conflagration turned his life upside down, Iyer returned to Southern California to share how it transformed his life, nudging him toward what he now values - simplicity, silence, solitude and love. The novelist and essayist addressed about 80 people Tuesday at Vroman's Bookstore in Pasadena, the very community devastated by the deadly Eaton Fire earlier this month.

Now intimately familiar with a wildfire's destructive powers, many who came to hear Iyer speak clutched his book with a fiery orange cover titled "Aflame: Learning from Silence."

During his hour-long conversation with violinist and social justice advocate Vijay Gupta, Iyer admitted that soon after the fire, all he could see was loss. But now, he says, he sees "all those doors that have gradually opened." As they conversed, a poster for Octavia Butler's novel "Parable of the Sower," considered prophetic by some in its depiction of a dystopian future where Los Angeles is ravaged by climate change among other ills, graced the background.

Iyer said the fire "liberated" him in many ways.

"To write a different way, to live more simply, to remember what is really important in life. Today, I wouldn't say it was a calamity, but a dramatic wake-up call for me."

Iyer's story resonated with Jeremy Hunter, an Altadena resident whose historic home burned in the Eaton Fire. His feelings after the blaze are mixed: purified and liberated by losing his possessions, but also grieved. Hunter said listening to Iyer has inspired him to figure out his family's next act.

Manuscript

"I guess the key is to let that pain pass through you," he said. "That way, you're less afraid of the pain."

In 1990, Iyer, then 33, an author and columnist for Time magazine, grabbed his mother's aging cat and his latest manuscript, jumped in his car and tried to flee the fire. But, he was trapped in the area for three hours, watching, as it turned everything in his childhood home to ash - furniture, stuffed toys, notes for his next three books. Iyer escaped thanks to a Good Samaritan with a water truck.

Safe but shaken, he wrote an essay that night. It appeared in Time magazine with the title "California: In the Blazing Eye of the Inferno." He ended it with a poem by the 17th century Japanese poet, Mizuta Masahide, describing how destruction can sometimes bring clarity:

My house burned down.

Now I can better see

The rising moon.

Eight months after the fire, Iyer took his friend's suggestion to stay for a few days at the New Camaldoli Hermitage, a Benedictine monastery nestled in the Santa Lucia Mountains of Big Sur, California. The Catholic order, founded by St. Romuald in the late 10th century, is known globally for its austere way of life and keenness to engage in interfaith and ecumenical dialogue. At the hermitage, Iyer paid \$30 a day for a room, shower, food - and so much more.

The tranquility of the grounds with its tolling bells, lavender-covered hills, panoramic ocean views, and the compassion of the monks, eventually, proved life changing. The silence and solitude gave him clarity to make sense of his life and work.

A repeated visitor to this spiritual oasis, Iyer says the hermitage helps him remember what he loves and what matters the most. One of his 100 or so visits motivated him to get married and move into a small, two-room apartment with his wife in Nara, Japan, where he still resides, splitting his time between that country and California.

And somehow, he lives without a cell phone.

The monks helped him understand "how luxury is defined not by what you have but what you don't need."

"Moving into that tiny apartment didn't seem like a hardship and being without a car and cell phone actually seems like a luxury," Iyer said.

The hermitage has become a kind of soul-sustaining medicine, even though he says he is not religious. He was born into a Hindu family, and his parents were Indian immigrants, both professors and followers of the Theosophical movement, which combines Eastern and Western beliefs. In the book, Iyer also speaks about his close relationship with the Dalai Lama and singer Leonard Cohen who lived for several years as a Zen Buddhist monk.

Vulnerable

While he has grown spiritually thanks to them, Iyer says his Benedictine brothers - and fire itself - have helped him understand how to cope with death and impermanence. Just like his family home, his happy place in Big Sur is also vulnerable to wildfires.

"There is no safe place in this world that is immune to impermanence or reality," Iyer said. "The fact that these monks live unflinchingly in the midst of that acute vulnerability and go about their regular business even as they are encircled by flames, is powerful to witness."

His book's title comes from a quote by Abba Joseph, an early Christian hermit who told a young monk as they traversed the Egyptian desert: "If you will, you can become all aflame." The hermit meant that fully committing to a spiritual life would mean being completely consumed by God's love and transformed to a state of radiant holiness.

"It's about kindling the internal fires as a response to the external fires," Iyer said. "My monk friends see fire as an act of God, which is not something they quarrel with, but simply act with."

Iyer still turns away when he sees footage of wildfires on television. "Being stuck in that fire for three hours, I had a visceral sense of how powerful those flames were. But then, coming that close to losing my life made losing my possessions much easier."

He said several who stood in line at Vroman's to get his book signed talked about their recent loss. The Eaton Fire killed at least 17 people, destroyed thousands of structures and scorched over 14,000 acres. Iyer said he started to write a "bright message" for one woman who appeared positive and smiling when she told him: "Oh, I just lost everything I had."

"I was taken aback and as we continued the conversation, she seemed so strong, clear and unrattled," he said. "I was touched and inspired by her presence."

This week's book event was already scheduled when the Eaton Fire started burning. The timing was uncanny for some, including Suzanne McDonnell, a Glendale resident whose friends lost their homes in the recent fires.

"I thought it was providential," she said about Iyer's talk. "There can be so much hope, even in suffering."

Beyoncé leading all nominees at a show shaped by LA wildfires

Grammys to have a different tone this year

LOS ANGELES, Feb 2, (AP): The 67th Grammy Awards will take place Sunday but with a dramatically different tone this year.

As Los Angeles continues to recover from fires that destroyed more than 14,000 structures and displaced tens of thousands, the Recording Academy has reformatted its award show to benefit to help wildfire victims.

Since the fires began, the Grammys and its affiliated MusiCares charity have distributed \$2 million in emergency aid and pledged more than \$4 million to help those in the music industry impacted by the wildfires.

The Grammys on Sunday will seek to add to those donations.

Viewers and attendees will still see trophies handed out and a bespoke concert experience - but they will also watch the show raise awareness, drive donations and resources to funds that benefit people in need.

Comedian Trevor Noah will host for a fifth year in a row and history could be made when some of the biggest names in music gather. Here's some

key things to know ahead of Sunday's show at the Crypto.com Arena:

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

The award show can also be watched through live TV streaming services that include CBS in their lineup, like Hulu + Live TV, YouTube TV and FuboTV.

The premiere ceremony, hosted by songwriter Justin Tranter, will take place at 3:30 p.m. Eastern/12:30 p.m. Pacific at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles on Sunday. It can be streamed at the Recording Academy's YouTube channel and on live.GRAMMY.com.

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

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

Is it finally her time to take home the top prize? If she wins the album of the year, she'll become

the first Black woman to do so in the 21st century.

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

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

Carpenter, Eilish, Roan, Shaboozey, Charli xcx, Doechii, RAYE, Benson Boone, Shakira, Teddy Swims, Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars will perform at the 2025 Grammys.

Stevie Wonder, Janelle Monáe and Will Smith will pay tribute to the late, legendary producer Quincy Jones.

Brad Paisley, Brittany Howard, Coldplay's Chris Martin, Cynthia Erivo, Herbie Hancock, Jacob Collier, John Legend, Lainey Wilson, Sheryl Crow and St. Vincent will also appear.

Taylor Swift, who last month wrapped her massive Eras tour, will be a presenter.

Other presenters will include Smith, Cardi B, Gloria Estefan, Olivia Rodrigo, Queen Latifah, SZA, Victoria Monét and the Red Hot Chili Peppers' Anthony Kiedis and Chad Smith.

Music



Joni Mitchell performs during the Pre-Grammy Gala on Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025, at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, Calif. (AP)

Fire relief and Quincy Jones tributes take center stage

New talent energizes pre-Grammy gala

LOS ANGELES, Feb 2, (AP): Fifty years ago, the music mogul Clive Davis threw a party to celebrate the release of Arista Records' first Grammy record of the year nominee: Barry Manilow's "Mandy." Stevie Wonder showed up. So did John Denver and Elton John.

What was a one-off celebration for an enduring hit morphed into one of the best-known and most exclusive parties of the year: the annual pre-Grammy fundraising event hosted by Davis, held every year on the Saturday before the Sunday award show.

At the 2025 benefit gala, once again held at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, California, Manilow performed his 1975 classic. He was introduced with a short video depicting him doing the same five decades prior.

"Can you believe I looked like that," Manilow joked after attendees watched both versions. "Can you believe Clive looked like that?"

There was a lot to celebrate across five decades, but in the direct aftermath of the devastating Los Angeles-area wildfires that destroyed more than 14,000 structures and displaced tens of thousands of people, efforts to raise awareness and donations punctuated the night.

A QR code was placed at every table and flashed on screens to encourage contributions to the Recording Academy and its affiliated MusiCares charity to aid the relief efforts. The evening, infamous for running into the wee hours of the morning, concluded at a respectable 11:30 p.m. to avoid distracting from the cause.

"This one is a little different," Recording Academy CEO Harvey Mason Jr. said in his opening remarks. "We knew we could use this platform" to honor first responders and celebrate "the resilience of this community."

Since launching LA wildfire relief efforts, the academy has raised "almost \$5 million in aid," he announced.

The tonal shift came as no surprise. The annual event was one of the few 2025 Grammy week events not canceled due to the fires.

Many performers and industry veterans used their time on stage to drive attention to relief efforts.

"Please take care of the people kicking ... on the front lines, the first responders," the charismatic Post Malone said after a stripped-down arrangement of his 2018 track "Sunflower," the first double-diamond certified single at 20x platinum, which he described as his "only good song."

Talent

Sets were a mix of legendary talent, like Joni Mitchell moving some to tears with "Both Sides Now," and newer voices including Samara Joy and the 2025 best new artist nominees Doechii, Shaboozey, Teddy Swims and Benson Boone, the latter of which ended his performance with an athletic flip.

Sprinkled throughout the performances were tributes to the late, great producer Quincy Jones.

Michael Bublé covered "Fly Me to the Moon," Jennifer Hudson belted through Aretha Franklin's "You Make Me Feel Like A Natural Woman" and gospel singer Yolanda Adams ended the night with a powerfully heartfelt rendition of Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You."

Jody Gerson, chairman and CEO of Universal Music Publishing Group, was honored with the 2025 Grammy Salute to Industry Icons Award at the star-studded event.

"I have a confession. There were a few times early in my career where I crashed this party," she

said, noting she received her first invitation in the early 2000s and being honored "deeply, deeply touched" her.

"Music can brighten our darkest days," Gerson said. "And we need artists to bring light now more than ever."

Gerson has broken the glass ceiling throughout her career. She is the first chairwoman of a global music company and the first woman named CEO of a major music publisher. The long list of superstars she has worked with include Malone, Bad Bunny, Justin Bieber, Lana Del Rey, Ariana Grande, Coldplay, Drake, Billie Eilish, Elton John, Kendrick Lamar and, of course, Taylor Swift.

"She is a true industry icon who rightly deserves celebration," said Universal Music Group CEO Lucian Grainge, who introduced Gerson. "She has completely transformed Universal Music Group publishing."

Gaining admittance to Davis' event is notoriously challenging. The A-listers who made the cut this year included Jennifer Lopez, Babyface, Gayle King, Nancy Pelosi, Jack Antonoff, TEMS, Willow Smith, Berry Gordy, Paris Hilton, Alicia Keys, Swizz Beatz, Diane Warren, Gracie Abrams, John Stamos and Justin Tranter.

Who wouldn't want a ticket to "Clive Davis' event," comedian Jimmy Kimmel asked before announcing the man of the hour.

"He's a living legend," Kimmel said.

Considering Davis' singular influence in the music industry through his work with Houston, Billy Joel and Bruce Springsteen, just to name a few, it was no wonder so many were excited to attend. But this year, the gala was less of a party and more of a reflection of what can happen when the music industry comes together to support each other and the community after a disaster.

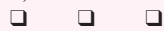
Variety

NEW YORK: Rumaan Alam's "Entitlement," Ian Frazier's "Paradise Bronx" and Lisa Ko's "Memory Piece" are among 14 finalists for the Gotham Book Prize, a \$50,000 award for outstanding fiction or nonfiction writing about New York City.

The prize was established in 2020 by businessman-philanthropist Bradley Tusk and political strategist Howard Wolfson, who said at the time that the pandemic gave them a heightened sense of the importance of literature.

Other nominees announced Friday include Xochitl Gonzalez's "Anita de Monte Laughs Last," Prihi Kanakamedala's "Brooklynites," Guy Trebay's "Do Something," Joel Leon's "Everything and Nothing at Once," Muriel Leung's "How to Fall in Love in a Time of Unnameable Disaster" and Nicole Gelinas'

"Movement." (AP)



LOS ANGELES: Fresh off the release of a new album, "Hurry Up Tomorrow," **The Weeknd** has announced a massive North American stadium tour - not an easy feat for a contemporary solo act and further confirmation of his popularity.

The "After Hours 'Til Dawn" tour kicks off May 9 in Phoenix at the State Farm Stadium and concludes in San Antonio on Sept. 3 at the Alamodome.

The tour will also hit Detroit; Chicago; East Rutherford, New Jersey; Foxborough, Massachusetts;



Weeknd

Minneapolis; Denver; Inglewood, California; Las Vegas; Santa Clarita, California; Seattle, Vancouver, Canada; Edmonton, Canada; Montreal; Toronto; Philadelphia; Landover, Maryland; Nashville, Tennessee; Miami; Atlanta; Orlando, Florida; Arlington, Texas, and Houston.

He will be joined by Atlanta rapper Playboi Carti and Mike Dean.

Tickets can be purchased through the artist pre-sale, which will begin Wednesday at 10 a.m. local time and run until Thursday at 9 a.m. local time. The general sale will begin on Feb. 7 at 10 a.m. local time via theweeknd.com/tour.

"Hurry Up Tomorrow" is the final album in The Weeknd's record-breaking trilogy that began with 2020's "After Hours" and 2022's "Dawn FM." It features a number of all-star collaborations, including Future on "Enjoy the Show," Anitta on "São Paulo," and Lana Del Rey on "The Abyss." (AP)

Fast writer has no plans for retirement

Roberts is happily defying genres, 250 books in

NEW YORK, Feb 2, (AP): Nora Roberts is so prolific she had to take up a pen name so her publisher could release more books by her each year.

“I’m a fast writer,” Roberts told The Associated Press in a rare interview. She typically releases four books a year, and has for more than four decades.

It’s not just about her speed. It’s her range, too. She’s written more than 250 books, from romantic one-offs and fantasy-themed trilogies to a police procedural series she’s been writing for three decades. The 60th book of the “In Death” series, “Bonded in Death”, is being released in this month.

Roberts has left her mark on the literary world, and she has no plans to stop anytime soon. She talked about the art of writing, why she won’t have the main characters in her “In Death” series have kids, and her thoughts on the romance genre - including why she doesn’t see herself as part of it anymore.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

AP: You write under two different names – Nora Roberts and J.D. Robb. Why?

Roberts: I’m a fast writer. I didn’t like the idea of taking a pseudonym until my agent said to me one day, ‘Nora, there’s Pepsi, there’s Diet Pepsi, and there’s caffeine-free Pepsi.’ And that hit home. I drink Diet Pepsi and I’ve realized it’s marketing and I could be two brands.

So I said I would do that if I could write something completely different.

AP: You’re coming out with your 60th book in the “In Death” series. You’ve been writing two books per year for the series since 1995. What is your vision for the series at this point?

Roberts: I can’t imagine ending it and I still have ideas for where they’re going next. They’re not just books about murders. They’re about interaction and relationships and the evolution of characters.

AP: Do you have an ending in mind, or was there an ending that you had in mind at one point that you’ve gone past?

Roberts: I never had an endpoint. It just sort of happened that I got to 60 books. I’m very invested in these characters. So I like to tell their stories.

AP: You’ve said that if Roarke and Eve were ever to have a child, you would see that as the end of the series because their lives would be so changed by that. Is that true?

Roberts: That is an internet truth. Children change everything. How are they going to be out there in the middle of the night chasing bad guys or working on a case or having that wild attraction?

AP: Speaking of the wild passion, that’s a good transition to romance as a genre. It has evolved a lot in the last couple of years. Where do you see yourself in the pantheon of that genre?

Roberts: I don’t at all. My roots are in romance and I have a lot of respect. But I don’t write romance anymore. I do write relationships.

I’ve been writing for a really long time now, and the romance genre evolves and it

changes. And it did when I was working in it, and it just got to a point where I didn’t want to go where it was evolving. I wanted to go in a different direction. So my roots and foundation are there, and gratitude. But that’s not what I’m doing now.

AP: How would you describe what you’re doing now?

Roberts: I write novels. It’s that simple - suspense, thrillers, fantasy.

AP: You like to write in trilogies. Even with “In Death,” you sometimes write in threes. Why do you think that works narratively as a writer and for your audience?

Roberts: I think of it as one big book and three parts. Something has to happen that cannot be resolved until the last book. That’s when good overcomes evil. Love conquers all and whatever. But you can’t do that until book three. It’s challenging and it’s fun and I hope it’s fun for the reader, too.

AP: How many hours do you spend writing on an average day?

Roberts: Six to eight.



Nora Roberts

Film

Festival ends with a mix of escapism and reflection

Breakout films from Sundance festival

PARK CITY, Utah, Feb 2, (AP): Film wasn’t the only thing on people’s minds at this year’s Sundance Film Festival, which comes to a close Sunday in Park City, Utah (and online).

The effects of the wildfires in Southern California loomed large, as did the bittersweet knowledge that this year will be the second to last Sundance based in Park City. Some films offered an escape from reality; others were a pointed reminder of the domestic and international political landscape, from transgender rights to the war in Ukraine.

Here are some of the key takeaways from the 41st edition of the festival.

The wildfires were still burning in parts of Los Angeles when Sundance began last week and reminders of its devastation were everywhere, even on screen. Max Walker-Silverman’s “Rebuilding,” starring Josh O’Connor as a cowboy who loses his ranch in a wildfire and forms a community with fellow survivors in a FEMA camp, hit close to home for many.

Filmmakers Meena Menon and Paul Gleason lost their home in Altadena where they filmed some of their zombie apocalypse movie “Didn’t Die.” Sundance artist labs head Michelle Satter lost her Palisades home as well. Satter had an audience of Sundance Institute donors in tears early in the festival while accepting an honor at a fundraising gala.

“It’s a deeply devastating time for us and so many others, a moment that calls for all of us coming together to support our bigger community,” Satter said. “As a friend recently noted, and I have to listen to this, ‘Take a deep breath ... We lost our village, but at the end of the day we are the village.’”

Conversation

It was a topic bound to come up in nearly every conversation: The festival’s new home in 2027. “Where do you think it will go? How do you feel about it leaving Park City? What would Sundance in Ohio even look like?” No one had any answers, but everyone had an opinion about the fact that next year will be the last year in which the center of activity is in Park City. Sundance Institute leadership has narrowed the finalist cities to Salt Lake City, Utah, Boulder, Colorado, and Cincinnati, Ohio, and is expected to announce the winner before spring.

Actor Tessa Thompson, who serves on the institute’s board, was hopeful about a new city.

“I think that Sundance has more to do with the spirit and community, and I think that’s evergreen,” Thompson said. “Regardless of where Sundance is, Sundance will always be.”

In the early days of US President Donald Trump’s second administration, politics were also a main topic of private discussions at least. Several films (mostly documentaries) had direct relevance to recent news, like “Heightened Scrutiny,” about transgender lawyer Chase Strangio and the media coverage of transgender issues amid a pending Supreme Court case.

Even “Kiss of the Spider Woman” filmmaker Bill Condon quoted Trump’s “two genders” mandate before his film screened.

“That’s a sentiment I think you’ll see that the movie has a different point of view on,” Condon said.

There also wasn’t the spirit of public protest that was unavoidable eight years ago when Trump first took office, when A-listers took to the streets to march for women’s rights. But audiences at Q&As for films like “The Alabama Solution,” about the abusive Alabama prison systems which the AP has reported extensively on, were curious how they could help change things.

There have been essentially two major deals out of the festival so far: Netflix took “Train Dreams,” Clint Bentley’s lyrical Denis Johnson adaptation, with Joel Edgerton and Felicity Jones, and Neon acquired the Dave Franco and Alison Brie relationship body horror “Together.”

As always, some films came in with distribution in place: Focus Features with “The Ballad of Lullis Island”; A24 with “If I Had Legs I’d Kick You,” “Opus,” and “The Legend of Ochi”; Bleecker Street with “The



This image released by Sundance Institute shows Eva Victor in a scene from ‘Sorry, Baby,’ an official selection of the 2025 Sundance Film Festival. (AP)



This image released by the Sundance Institute shows Rose Byrne in a scene from ‘If I Had Legs I’d Kick You’ by Mary Bronstein, an official selection of the 2025 Sundance Film Festival. (AP)



This image released by the Sundance Institute shows Dylan O’Brien, (left), and James Sweeney in a scene from ‘Twinless,’ by James Sweeney, an official selection of the 2025 Sundance Film Festival. (AP)

Wedding Banquet”; Nat Geo with the Sally Ride documentary “Sally”; MUBI with “Magic Farm”; and Apple with “Deaf President Now!”, HBO Documentary Films with “The Alabama Solution” and “Enigma.”

Most deals happen after the festival ends, but there have been private grumbings that the market this year was weaker than usual, and the films were not commercial enough. Several insiders singled out Condon’s adaptation of “Kiss of the Spider Woman” with Jennifer Lopez as being too expensive for anyone but a streaming service. But there are also plenty of deals in the works, some of which will be finalized soon, while others may be settled at the Berlin Film Festival market.

As festival programmers like to say, Sundance isn’t the end of the story for new films - it’s just the beginning. Last

year’s program had over 100 films distributed to audiences through traditional means, and only a small fraction of those were announced during the festival.

Discovery

Perhaps the biggest discovery of the festival is “Sorry, Baby,” from writer-director-star Eva Victor in her feature debut. This funny and quietly piercing film is about Agnes, who was sexually assaulted by her thesis advisor. Instead of making it about depicting the incident itself (Victor keeps the camera firmly planted outside of the home where it occurs, showing the passage of time through light), Victor, who could be the next Greta Gerwig and/or Phoebe Waller-Bridge, stays focused on how it affects Anges.

Filmmaker James Sweeney also scored a big win with “Twinless,”

which picked up the US dramatic audience prize and a special award for his star Dylan O’Brien. The movie is about a bromance between two men in a twin bereavement group.

On the documentary side there was much chatter about “André Is an Idiot,” a documentary about a “brilliant idiot” who is dying because he didn’t get a colonoscopy and trying to live out his final days happily.

The in-person experience at Sundance is also a good reminder that reviews are only part of the equation when it comes to judging the response to a film. Hailey Gates’ war satire “Atropia” got mixed reviews from critics, but premiere audiences were very enthusiastic (as was the US dramatic jury who gave it the festival’s top prize).

As of publication, all are still seeking distribution.

Media

Kabas’ scoop makes wavest

Independent journalists redefining media world

NEW YORK, Feb 2, (AP): First word of the Trump administration’s since-rescinded order to freeze spending on federal loans and grants came not from a major news organization, but from a woman working alone in her Brooklyn apartment.

Marisa Kabas’ scoop this past week was a key moment for a growing cadre of journalists who work independently to gather and analyze news and market themselves as brands. Many are refugees from legacy outlets while others are scrappy newcomers like Kabas, who found traditional career paths unappealing or out of reach.

“This week has been career-changing,” Kabas said in an interview. “In a sense, my job has changed overnight.”

She was sitting at her kitchen table last Monday, sifting through emails on her laptop, when a source forwarded her a copy of a memo announcing the freeze sent by the Office of Management and Budget’s acting director. Kabas has her own website, the Handbasket, but to give the story wider visibility, she posted a screen shot of the memo on the social media site Bluesky.

Then she waited.

Her stomach was in knots. She calmed herself with a walk on a frigid night. Despite her belief in independent journalism - and her own work - she recognized that to many, news only becomes “real” when it appears in a major outlet. Three hours later, The Washington Post published its story, with a hat-tip to Kabas.

The directive caused such an uproar that the administration walked back its order two days later.

Kabas, 37, kicked around in various journalism and publicist jobs and freelanced for outlets like MSNBC.com, the Huffington Post and New Republic. She started her website in 2022 primarily for personal writing and decided to go “all in” with journalism the next year.

The advantage to going it alone is that “I get to write about things that I care about,” she said. “I don’t have to work on assignments that are given to me that I don’t care about.” The down side is she’s all alone, dependent upon her own hustle.

Kabas wrote on ex-congressman George Santos, the raid on a weekly newspaper in Kansas and Elon Musk, although much of her writing was essays instead of reported work.

Like many in the independent journalism world, she doesn’t hide her opinions. She wrote that the OMB memo was “a truly unheeded document that sounds like it was written by the world’s most petty 4Chan poster.”

Personality

“She’s got attitude, she’s got personality,” said Greg Munno, a journalism professor at Syracuse University. “I think attitude and personality help these independent journalists connect with readers and potentially sources.”

A wide variety of independent journalists have made their mark, often working on publishing platforms like Substack and Beehiiv.

Seamus Hughes’ Court Watch pulls together interesting legal documents from around the country. Heather Cox Richardson’s Letters From an American explores the intersection of history and today’s politics. Peter Geoghegan’s Democracy for Sale investigates money in politics.

Casey Newton, a former editor at The Verge, looks at the tech world on Platformer, and this past week urged people worried about the A.I. company DeepSeek to take “a few long, deep breaths.” Molly Knight’s The Long Game writes smartly about sports and even admits to her clunkers, like recently revisiting her prediction that the



This undated photo provided by Marisa Kabas shows Kabas holding up a press credential on Oct. 4, 2024 in Pittsburgh. (AP)

Texas Rangers would repeat as American League champions.

Oliver Darcy left CNN to break news and offer commentary about the media on his own site, Status. Two former Washington Post journalists have set up their own shops: opinion writer Jennifer Rubin’s site, The Contrarian, boasts the tagline “Not owned by anybody,” and tech writer Taylor Lorenz’s User Mag broke its own news last week on conservative influencer Candace Owens’ new venture.

Days ago, CNN anchor Jim Acosta announced he was setting up shop at Substack after quitting the network rather than accept a transfer to a middle-of-the-night time slot.

Accountable

“Independent journalism is now the way forward,” Dan Rather, the former CBS News anchor and perhaps quintessential old-school journalist, posted on Facebook Thursday. “Sadly, we can no longer rely on legacy media to hold the powerful accountable.”

Expand the definition of independent journalist more broadly, and you can include the exploding world of podcasts, many of which played a key role in the presidential election, and TikTok or YouTube influencers who comment on the news.

The more that traditional news outlets shrink or die, “something is going to fill that gap,” said Jeremy Littau, a Lehigh University journalism professor. “There is going to be a need for it.”

It’s exciting for those who seek variety and new voices, particularly with legacy media lagging in public esteem. The danger comes in figuring out who to trust in a world where a single person often performs the role of reporter, editor, sales person and business manager.

That’s particularly important with breaking news, Littau said. Who is out there cutting corners, or repackaging things they see online without the standards that a traditional news organization imposes?

Munno is skeptical about how much support there is in the marketplace.

“I don’t think the consumer’s appetite for news is high enough to support a really deep pool of independent journalists that would be able to create an audience and make a living,” he said.

Kabas cobbled together what she considered a typical journalist’s living - translation: modest - before this past week. Her earnings through the Handbasket come through subscribers who pay \$8 a month or \$80 annually. This week alone, she jumped from 800 paid subscribers to about 1,500.

Her scoop is making her rethink the purpose of her work, that now the pressing need is to report deeply on how the country is changing as the result of its new government. She’s even thinking of hiring another reporter to help.

Dr. Al-Awadhi stresses innovation in critical care at Arab Conference

Health ministry highlights crucial role of intensive care services

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2, (KUNA): Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi emphasized Kuwait’s commitment to promotion of intensive care services given their crucial role in lifesaving.

This came during the opening of the 20th International Arab Society of Critical Care Medicine Conference, where he re-affirmed Kuwait’s dedication to innovation and scientific progress, praising the conference’s return as a testament to this commitment.

Al-Awadhi stressed that innovation in critical care is a responsibility not a choice, urging professionals to turn ideas into actions, as well as investing in human resources as it is essential for sustainable health-



A number of conference participants.

KUNA photo

care development. Al-Awadhi highlighted national achievements in critical care, including advancements in infrastructure, technology, treatment, and digital transformation, underscoring the importance of emergency medical

services and air ambulances in enhancing healthcare beyond hospital settings.

He emphasized expanding healthcare facilities, increasing intensive care beds, and equipping hospitals with advanced technology.

For his part, Chairman of the conference and Head of the Anesthesia Department at Al-Amiri Hospital Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Fares emphasized the events role in showcasing the latest technological advancement in intensive care.

He also expressed hopes for unifying intensive care unites across hospitals through digital database, to improve efficiency, reflecting Kuwait’s progress in intensive care and international recognition.

WHO donates 2,160 vaccine doses

Uganda to begin Ebola vaccine trial

KAMPALA, Uganda, Feb 2, (AP): Ugandan officials are preparing to deploy a trial vaccine as part of efforts to stem an outbreak of Ebola in the capital, Kampala, a top health official said Sunday.

A range of scientists are developing research protocols relating to the planned deployment of more than 2,000 doses of a candidate vaccine against the Sudan strain of Ebola, said Pontiano Kaleebu, executive director of Uganda Virus Research Institute.

“Protocol is being accelerated” to get all the necessary regulatory approvals, he said. “This vaccine is not yet licensed.”

The World Health Organization said in a statement that its support to Uganda’s response to the outbreak includes access to 2,160 doses of trial vaccine.

“Research teams have been deployed to the field to work along with the surveillance teams as approvals are awaited,” the WHO statement said.

The candidate vaccine as well as candidate treatments are being made available through clinical trial protocols to further test for efficacy and safety, it said.

The vaccine maker wasn’t immediately known. There are no approved vaccines for the Sudan strain of Ebola that killed a nurse employed at Kampala’s main referral hospital. The man

died on Wednesday and authorities declared an outbreak the next day. Officials are still investigating the source of the outbreak, and there has been no other confirmed case.

Uganda has had access to candidate vaccine doses since the end of an Ebola outbreak in September 2022 that killed at least 55 people. Ugandan officials ran out of time to begin a vaccine study when that outbreak, in central Uganda, was declared over about four months later, Kaleebu said.

A trial vaccine known as rVSV-ZEBOV, used to vaccinate 3,000 people at risk of infection during an outbreak of the Zaire strain of Ebola in eastern Congo between 2018 and 2020, proved effective in containing the spread of the disease there.

Uganda has had multiple Ebola outbreaks, including one in 2000 that killed hundreds. The 2014-16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa killed more than 11,000 people, the disease’s largest death toll.

Tracing contacts is also key to stemming the spread of Ebola, which manifests as a viral hemorrhagic fever.

At least 44 contacts of the victim in the current outbreak have been identified, including 30 health workers and patients, according to Uganda’s Ministry of Health.

Confirmation of Ebola in Uganda is the latest in a series of outbreaks of

viral hemorrhagic fevers in the east African region. Tanzania declared an outbreak of the Ebola-like Marburg disease earlier this month, while in December Rwanda announced that its own outbreak of Marburg was over. The ongoing Marburg outbreak in northern Tanzania’s Kagera region has killed at least two people, according to local health authorities.

Kampala’s outbreak could prove difficult to respond to, because the city has a highly mobile population of about 4 million. The nurse who died had sought treatment at a hospital just outside Kampala and later traveled to Mbale, in the country’s east, where he was admitted to a public hospital. Health authorities said the man also sought the services of a traditional healer.

Ebola is spread by contact with bodily fluids of an infected person or contaminated materials. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle pain and at times internal and external bleeding.

Scientists don’t know the natural reservoir of Ebola, but they suspect the first person infected in an outbreak acquired the virus through contact with an infected animal or eating its raw meat.

Ebola was discovered in 1976 in two simultaneous outbreaks in South Sudan and Congo, where it occurred in a village near the Ebola River, after which the disease is named.



Photo from the event.

KUNA photo

Awareness raised about bleeding disorders

Kuwait plans hemophilia patient registry

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Dr. Ali Mulla Ali, Director of the National Bank of Kuwait Specialized Children’s Hospital and Consultant of Hematology and Pediatric Cancer at the Ministry of Health, said Kuwait has between 200 and 250 patients diagnosed with hemophilia and hereditary bleeding disorders.

Dr. Ali revealed that efforts are un-

derway to create a national registry to track hemophilia patients in the country.

In a statement during the launch of the fourth awareness day dedicated to hemophilia and hereditary bleeding diseases, Dr. Ali emphasized the Ministry of Health’s commitment to providing the latest treatments for hemophilia patients.

The event’s goal is to raise awareness about treatment protocols and equip healthcare providers with updated insights and tools to offer the best

care possible for patients.

Dr. Hadeel Saleh, a consultant in blood diseases, cancer, and coagulation disorders for children, highlighted that hemophilia is a hereditary bleeding disorder caused by a genetic defect affecting the body’s blood clotting ability.

Dr. Saleh noted that hemophilia treatment in Kuwait follows the latest international protocols, with continuous efforts to stay updated on scientific advancements in collaboration with the World Federation for Hemophilia.

High-risk populations targeted

Uganda launches mpox vaccination

KAMPALA, Feb. 2, (Xinhua): Uganda on Saturday launched mpox vaccination campaign targeting high-risk populations in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, the current epicenter of the virus outbreak in the east African country.

Charles Olaro, director general of Health Services at the Ministry of Health, told Xinhua by telephone that phase one of the vaccination exercise, which targets high-risk populations and health workers, aims to stop human-to-human transmission of the highly infectious virus.

The vaccination started in areas intertwined with a web of commercial sex activity, bar attendants, commuter taxi drivers, commercial motorcyclists and roadside vendors

in Kawempe and Makindye divisions of Kampala, according to the ministry and World Health Organization (WHO). The exercise will roll out to the other three divisions of Kampala and the central districts of Wakiso and Mukono.

“This vaccination campaign targets the high-risk populations, close contacts of confirmed cases and our frontline health workers currently based in areas with active transmission,” said Olaro.

According to health authorities, Uganda has some 2,000 doses of the vaccine donated by the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that will cover up to 1,000 individuals.

Uganda, which confirmed the

outbreak of the disease last August, had so far recorded 2,479 laboratory-confirmed mpox cases and 16 deaths as of Jan. 28, with the majority of the deceased having underlying medical conditions such as HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, diabetes, and sickle cell disease.

WHO in August declared mpox a public health emergency of international concern, sounding the alarm over its potential for further international transmission.

Mpox, also known as monkeypox, is an infectious disease caused by the monkeypox virus that is spread through close contact, with symptoms including fever, swelling of the lymph nodes, sore throat, muscle aches, skin rash, and back pain.

38 types of cancer identified in Bangladesh

Cancer causes 12pct of annual deaths

DHAKA, Feb 2, (Xinhua): One hundred and six people out of 100,000 people in Bangladesh suffer from cancer in Bangladesh, with the disease currently causing 12 percent of total deaths in the country, said a Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) study report released here Saturday.

“Thirty eight types of cancer have been identified in Bangladesh while most of these found to be breast, mouth, stomach, respiratory tract, and cervical cancers,” BSMMU public health and informatics department’s principal researcher and associate professor Dr Md Khalequzzaman said.

National news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) quoted Khalequzzaman as saying that the

country witnesses a growing number of cancer cases with the detection of 53 patients among a population of 100,000 every year.

The report was revealed at a seminar titled “Burden of Cancer in Bangladesh: Population-Based Cancer Registry” at the BSMMU’s Super Specialized Hospital. BSMMU conducted the study on the overall situation of population-based cancer in the country.

Khalequzzaman said 93 percent of cancer patients are aged between 18 and 75 years, 2.4 percent are children and 5.1 percent are over 75 years of age.

The study was carried out among 201,668 participants from 46,631 households, with 48.4 percent being male and 51.6 percent female.

The study was launched in July 2023 on 200,000 people while the data was collected through interviews using specially developed internet-based cancer registration software. The team follow-up visits began in July 2024 on completion of the study.

Among female cancer patients, 19 percent of the cases were related to the reproductive system, including 11 percent cervical cancer, 5 percent ovarian cancer, and 3 percent uterine cancer.

The study found 60.6 percent of female cancer patients are smokeless tobacco users, while 46 percent of patients have a relationship with e-tobacco consumption, 60 percent of cancer patients received combined treatment and 7.4 percent of patients received no treatment.

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Scotland produces brilliant backline moments to subdue Italy

Ireland opens bid for record third straight Six Nations title by beating England

DUBLIN, Feb 2, (AP): Ireland got off to a five-point start to its bid for an unprecedented third straight outright Six Nations rugby title, overpowering England in a second-half recovery to rack up a 27-22 victory in Dublin on Saturday.

Trailing 10-5 at halftime after constantly coughing up scoring opportunities, the Irish were more accurate - and rampant for a while - after halftime and ran in tries through Bundee Aki, Tadhg Beirne and Dan Sheehan against an increasingly ragged England to secure an attacking bonus point.

England started twins for the first time in its men's team and flankers Tom and Ben Curry contributed to an impressive scrambling defensive effort in the first half, during which the visitors had an early converted try for debutant Cadan Murley and a 40th-minute penalty from Marcus Smith.

All Ireland could muster amid its territorial dominance was a try from scrumhalf Jamison Gibson-Park that came about following a missed tackle from England scrumhalf Alex Mitchell on James Lowe on the left wing. That score came in the last seconds of a sin-binning for Smith that England weathered gamely.

But the English couldn't maintain it, and were steamrolled by Ireland for much of the second half at Aviva Stadium. England at least gained a losing bonus point courtesy of tries from Tom Curry in the 76th - by which time his brother had been replaced - and Tommy Freeman.

In the 142 years of the tournament, which started out as an event for the home unions before the additions of France and then Italy, no team has won the title outright for three straight years. Ireland is over its first big hurdle and heads to Murrayfield next weekend to play Scotland, which opened with a 31-19 win over Italy.



Ireland's Hugo Keenan is tackled by England's Tommy Freeman during the Six Nations rugby union match between Ireland and England at the Aviva Stadium in Dublin. (AP)

England, meanwhile, has lost seven of its last nine games, with the only wins coming against Japan.

The pressure is building on coach Steve Borthwick and it won't get

any easier next week when Antoine Dupont and France visit Twickenham. Inspired by Dupont, France crushed Wales 43-0 in the tournament opener on Friday.

Lowe didn't score a try but the left winger was key to Ireland's fightback against England.

It was Lowe who shrugged off Mitchell for Gibson-Park's 35th-minute try that undid so much good work by the English defense in an intense first half that started with Murley running onto Henry Slade's grubber kick and getting ahead of Josh van der Flier to ground.

Moments of brilliance by a backline shorn of its best player spared Scotland from a second straight humbling by Italy in Six Nations rugby .

Scotland won 31-19 at Murrayfield thanks to two tries by center Huw Jones after Italy rallied to tie the score at 19-19 going into the last quarter.

Right wing Darcy Graham conjured a break from nowhere in the 61st minute for Jones to score the tiebreaker. Then replacement center Tom Jordan's huge miss-out pass unleashed Jones again in the 66th to bash through three defenders for the clincher.

Jones' first test hat trick was a mild surprise considering he was without his regular midfield partner Sione Tuipulotu, the captain and form back who was out of the tournament after damaging a pectoral muscle last month.

Without Tuipulotu's sharp edge, Scotland's forwards carried more in a narrow attack while the backline struggled to flow. Scotland's bogey team Ireland will be a much bigger hurdle next weekend at Murrayfield.

For a while, Tuipulotu wasn't missed as Scotland blasted off to 14-0 inside nine minutes and 19-9 by halftime. Tries by Rory Darge, Jones and Ben White promised a party.

James dazzles at MSG; LA Lakers trade for Doncic steals the show



Los Angeles Lakers' LeBron James (23) drives past New York Knicks' Precious Achiuwa (5) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in New York. (AP)

Wiggins scores career-high 41 as Thunder rout Kings

NEW YORK, Feb 2, (AP): LeBron James had 33 points, 12 assists and 11 rebounds in his 10th triple-double of the season, enjoying another memorable night at Madison Square Garden and leading the Los Angeles Lakers to a 128-112 victory over the New York Knicks on Saturday.

James' big night was quickly overshadowed by news that Luka Doncic is headed to the Lakers in a blockbuster three-team trade that will send Anthony Davis to Dallas.

A person with knowledge of the agreement said early Sunday that Doncic, Maxi Kleber and Markieff Morris are headed to the Lakers, while Davis and Max Christie are going to Dallas. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because neither team can announce the deal while it awaits league approval.

James improved to 23-8 at his favorite arena to visit, easily surpassing the 28 points per game he had been averaging in the building. He also became the seventh NBA player with 2,500 3-pointers. James made three of the Lakers' 19, one off their season high.

Thunder 144, Kings 110

In Oklahoma City, Aaron Wiggins had a career-high 41 points and 14 rebounds, and the Oklahoma City Thunder rolled past the Sacramento Kings.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander added 29 points and nine assists for the Thunder (38-9), who set a season best for points and rebounds (70), including 14 by center Isaiah Hartenstein, 13 by Jaylin Williams and 11 by Kenrich Williams.

Wiggins, starting in place of injured forward Jalen Williams, made 16 of 30 field goal attempts and shot

6 of 14 on 3-pointers. He scored 14 points in the fourth quarter.

Lu Dort had 20 points and eight rebounds for Oklahoma City, which scored 82 points in the first half to take control.

De'Aaron Fox had 20 points for the Kings (24-24). Malik Monk added 19 points and seven assists, and DeMar DeRozan scored 17.

Wizards 105, Timberwolves 103

In Minneapolis, Kyle Kuzma scored a season-high 31 points and the Washington Wizards beat the short-handed Minnesota Timberwolves to end a 16-game losing streak.

Jordan Poole scored 19 points, Bilal Coulibaly had 14 and Jonas Valanciunas added 13 points and 10 rebounds to help Washington win for the seventh time this season.

In Washington, which led by seven with under four minutes to play, turned the ball over with 11 seconds left clinging to a two-point lead. But a 3-point try by Minnesota's Nickeil Alexander-Walker rimmed out with three seconds left. Corey Kispert grabbed the rebound and the Wizards ended a 21-game road slide.

Trail Blazers 127, Suns 108

In Portland, Deandre Ayton had 24 points on 11-of-12 shooting against

his former team and the Portland Trail Blazers opened a two-game set against the Phoenix Suns with a 127-108 victory.

The teams will meet again Monday night in Portland.

Jerami Grant added 20 points for Portland, and Toumani Camara had 18 points.

Devin Booker led Phoenix with 37 points, and Kevin Durant had 22. The Suns were on the second night of a back-to-back after beating Golden State 130-105 on Friday.

Heat's 105, Spurs 103

In San Antonio, Bam Adebayo hit a 19-foot jumper as time expired to cap a 30-point, 13-rebound outing and give the Miami Heat a 105-103 victory over San Antonio on Saturday night with Spurs star Victor Wembanyama sitting out because of an undisclosed illness.

Miami guard Terry Rozier added 19 points in his first game since being named in a federal investigation looking into unusual betting patterns surrounding his play in March 2023 while with the Charlotte Hornets. Nikola Jovic had 14 points and Jaime Jaquez Jr. added 10.

Keldon Johnson led San Antonio with 19 points and Devin Vassell had 18.



Washington Wizards guard Jordan Poole, left, controls the ball as Minnesota Timberwolves guard Nickeil Alexander-Walker defends during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Minneapolis. (AP)

Nuggets 107, Hornets 104

In Charlotte, Nicola Jokic had 28 points, 17 assists and 13 rebounds for his 22nd triple-double of the season to help the Denver Nuggets beat the Charlotte Hornets.

Christian Braun added 24 points and 11 rebounds, Jamal Murray scored 20 points and Michael Porter Jr. had 15 points and 10 rebounds. The Nuggets were coming off a 137-134 victory in Philadelphia on Friday night.

Miles Bridges had 24 points and 12 rebounds for Charlotte, and Mark Williams had 20 points and 15 rebounds. The Hornets have lost four straight.

Jazz 113, Magic 99

In Salt Lake City, Collin Sexton scored 22 points and John Collins added 19 to help the Utah Jazz snap an eight-game losing streak with victory over the Orlando Magic.

Sexton also dished out seven assists for the Jazz, who won at home for just the fourth time this season. Walker Kessler had 15 rebounds while Lauri Markkanen added 12 points, 11 rebounds, and three blocks.

Franz Wagner led Orlando with 37 points, while making a career-high 18 free throws. Cole Anthony added 23 for the Magic, who have lost six straight away from home and eight of their last nine games overall.

Pacers 132, Hawks 127

In Indianapolis, Pascal Siakam made a key 3-pointer late in the fourth quarter and finished with 20 points, nine rebounds and five assists to help the Indiana Pacers beat the reeling Atlanta Hawks 132-127.

Andrew Nembhard had 19 points for the Pacers, who have won three straight. Obi Toppin added 18 points and nine rebounds, and Tyrese Haliburton had 17 points and nine assists.

Trae Young scored 26 of his 34 points in the second half, leading the Hawks back from an early 18-point deficit to retake the lead midway through the third quarter. He also had 17 assists. Dyson Daniels finished with 23 points as Atlanta lost its eighth in a row.

Upset win for Britschgi

Fa's reign as Euro figure skating champion ends

TALLINN, Estonia, Feb 2, (AP): Adam Siao Him Fa's bid to win the European men's figure skating title three years running ended with a bronze medal after Lukas Britschgi produced a stunning upset to take gold.

The second surprise champion in two days after Niina Petrokina of Estonia won the women's event, Britschgi had been eighth after the short program. He's the first European men's champion from Switzerland since 1947.

"Thank you for this unforgettable night," he told the crowd, and apologized for not having prepared a speech. Asked what his next goal would be, he said simply, "Celebrating."

Despite his troubled short program on Thursday, Britschgi's clean skate on Saturday, with two quadruple jumps, gave him a total of 267.09 points. It proved enough for gold amid a succession of mishaps for other contenders.

Like Petrokina on Friday, France's Siao was skating to the soundtrack of the movie "Dune," but without the same success. Siao fell on his opening quad toe loop, missing what would have been a high-scoring combination, and was marked down for shaky landings on other jumps.

Nikolaj Memola of Italy had been fifth in the short program but improved to take the silver medal on 262.61, ahead of Siao on 257.99.

Also, Italian ice dancers Charlene Guignard and Marco Fabbri won their event for the third year in a row.

Skating in their 13th Europeans together, Guignard and Fabbri had the lead from Friday's rhythm dance and delivered an assured free dance with a robot theme to score a total of 212.12



Gold medalist Lukas Britschgi of Switzerland poses with his medal during the victory ceremony for the men's free skating competition at the ISU European Figure Skating Championships in Tallinn, Estonia. (AP)

points and stay clear of a close contest for the other medals.

The next target for the Italians is the world championships in Boston in March as they aim to improve on their best result of a silver medal in 2023.

"Some time off and then back again at work," Fabbri said.

Barely a point separated second from fourth place. France's Evgeniia Lopareva and Geoffrey Brissaud won their first European medal with silver on 206.76 to beat Britain's Lilah Fear and Lewis Gibson, who danced to a Beyoncé medley, on 206.06. Finland's Juulia Turkkila and Matthias Versluis missed the podium by just .33.

The European figure skating championships, which began on Wednesday, have been overshadowed by the deaths of skaters, coaches and their families in a mid-air collision between a passenger jet and military helicopter near Washington, D.C.

Cruz outlasts Fierro

Benavidez dominates Morrell

LAS VEGAS, Feb 2, (AP): David Benavidez unified the light heavyweight championship by earning a unanimous decision over challenger David Morrell on Saturday night to keep his interim WBC belt and win the WBA title.

Judges Patricia Morse Jarman and Steve Weisfeld both scored the fight 115-111 while Tim Cheatham scored it 118-108.

Cheatham's scorecard was much more indicative of what took place in the ring, as Benavidez (30-0) dominated nearly every round, outside the third and 11th.

"This is 'El Monstro's' world," said Benavidez, nicknamed The Mexican Monster. "Shout out to Morrell. I knew he'd be tough and that's why I prepared so hard for this. I'm happy we were able to give the fans a great show tonight."

Using his length and an arsenal loaded with an array of punches from every angle, Benavidez went from the head to the body, while continuing to pepper both of Morrell's eyes.

Per CompuBox, Benavidez landed 48% of his power punches, while 76 of his 224 landed punches were body shots.

"I prepared for everything, I knew he was a great fighter," Benavidez said. "This is the biggest win of my career cause look at all the people who came out and supported me."

Seemingly cruising to the win, though, Benavidez was caught off-balance in the 11th round when Morrell landed a right hand. Benavidez stumbled and because his gloves touched the canvas it was ruled a knockdown. But, Morrell was deducted a point when he threw a punch to Benavidez's head after the bell.

Benavidez said he wasn't fazed.

"I wasn't surprised by anything he did because I knew he was a great fighter and that I had to prepare for everything," Benavidez said. "I knew my defense had to be good. I actually thought he'd hit harder once we were in here."

"He was easier to hit than I expected. Every opportunity that I saw, I went for it."

Morrell (11-1) suffered the first loss of his career after dominating since turning pro in 2019.

"It was a good fight," Morrell said. "This is boxing, some days you win and some days you lose. Tonight was my turn. I'm young and I'll keep pushing for another opportunity."

Benavidez, who's from Phoenix and lives in Las Vegas, closed a -350 favorite at BetMGM Sportsbook.

"This is the biggest win of my career so far because of all the people who came out here to support me," Benavidez said. "This is a dream come true for me. I just want to be the best of my era. Whoever I need to fight next, I'll be ready for them. I want to unify all four titles, so if that's next, then that's next."

In the co-main event, Stephen Fulton Jr. (23-1) outpointed champion Brandon Figueroa (25-2-1) to win the WBC featherweight belt by unanimous decision. It marked the second time Fulton beat Figueroa, the first by majority decision on Nov. 27, 2021. Judges David Sutherland and Zachary Young both scored the bout 116-112, while Max DeLuca had it 117-111. Figueroa closed a 3-to-1 favorite.

In a wire-to-wire, action-packed super lightweight brawl, Isaac Cruz (27-3-1) outlasted Angel Fierro (23-3-2) with a unanimous decision in 10 rounds. Per CompuBox, the boxers combined to land 486 of 1,410 punches thrown. Judge Eric Cheek scored the fight 98-92. Don Trella had it 97-93. And, Steve Weisfeld had the closest score, at 96-94. Cruz closed a 9-to-1 favorite.

Middleweight Jesus Ramos Jr. (22-1, 18 KOs) defeated Jeison Rosario (24-5-2) when referee Bob Hoyle stepped in to stop it at the 2:18 mark of the eighth round in what was scheduled for 10 rounds. Ramos was winning unanimously on all three judges' scorecards when the fight was stopped.

Seasoned players and newcomers come together for spirited fun and competition

IBAK successfully hosts intra-club tournament

By Paulo Francisco X. Fernandes

Arab Times/Al-Seyassah Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: The Indian Badminton Association – Kuwait (IBAK) successfully organized its Intra-Club Badminton Tournament on January 30 and 31, 2025, bringing together members for two days of exciting competition and camaraderie.

The event, held at the IBAK Salwa Gym, saw over 100 players of all skill levels participating in various categories, including Flight 1 Professional Doubles (Russian Roulette), Flight 2 Advanced Doubles, Flight 3 Intermediate Doubles (Open to All), Flight 4 Lower Intermediate Doubles (Open to All), and PCP & Advanced Coaching (Russian Roulette).

A highlight of the tournament was the introduction of the “Russian Roulette” category, which added a unique twist to the competition. In this format, players faced random challenges that tested their adaptability and resilience, quickly becoming a crowd favorite.

The tournament kicked off with a vibrant atmosphere, as players showcased exceptional sportsmanship and determination. Spectators cheered on their fellow members throughout the day, with thrilling rallies and intense matches that kept everyone on the edge of their seats.

“This year’s tournament was a huge success, not only in terms of competition but also in fostering a stronger sense of community within our club,” said Dr. Manimara Chozhan, Chairman of IBAK. “It was incredible to see both seasoned players and newcomers come together for spirited fun and competition.”

The event wrapped up with an awards ceremony, where winners, runners-up, and semifinalists were presented with trophies.



Winners of the intra-club tournament.

IBAK also took the opportunity to recognize the efforts of their committee members and volunteers, whose hard work was vital to the tournament’s success.

PCP & Advance Coaching (Russian Roulette): A1 First -- Santhosh Alan; Second -- Muniswamy

Sanjeev Flight 1 - Professional Men’s Doubles (Russian Roulette): P1 First -- Akbher; Second -- Pratap; Third -- Anilkumar Aaditya

A2 First -- Subin Angel; Second -- Tony Angela; Third -- Karim



The closing ceremony in progress.

Zoya; Third -- Hisham
P2 First -- Chandra; Second -- Vasu; Third -- Faheem

Flight 2 -- (Advance Men’s Doubles) Winner -- Manual Justin & Joseph Shiroj; Runner-up -- Santhosh Alan & Titto Liyan; Semifinalist 1: Anilkumar Aaditya & Pradeep Advay; Semifinalist 2 -- Varughese Bobby & Simon Deepu

Flight 3 (Intermediate Doubles Open to all) Winner -- Praveen Ks Muhammed & Vijay K; Runner-up

-- Jeswin Jose & Lijo Jose; Semifinalist 1 -- Santhosh Alan & Titto Liyan; Semifinalist 2 -- Anilkumar Aaditya & Pradeep Advay
Flight 4 (Lower Intermediate Open to All): Winner -- Nizam & Syed Mubeena; Runner-up -- Rajani Bala & Kesavan Vijayaraj; Semifinalist 1 -- T. Akber & Ajaykumar Shaina; Semifinalist 2 -- Aparna Anna Kurian & Biju My

IBAK can be reached on www.ibakwt.org or ibakcommittee@gmail.com

PSG runs riot at Brest, Dembélé nets hat trick

Monaco holds onto third

PARIS, Feb 2, (AP): Ousmane Dembélé scored a second straight hat trick as run-away Ligue 1 leader Paris Saint-Germain won at Brest 5-2.

Dembélé is enjoying the best scoring campaign of his career and followed up his treble against Stuttgart in the Champions League on Wednesday.

PSG broke the deadlock when speedy left winger Bradley Barcola got behind the defense and gave Dembélé an easy finish after 29 minutes.

PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma was beaten by midfielder Romain Del Castillo’s curling strike in the 50th as PSG failed to deal with a high ball.

Brest also made a mess of a long ball six minutes later and it found Dembélé, who tucked it away from the edge of the penalty area. He then swept in a clever pass from Lee Kang-in to move onto 14 league goals and 19 overall this season.

But PSG still concedes too easily and struggles under high balls. Brest pulled a goal back in the 71st through imposing striker Ludovic Ajorque, who again got the better of defender Wilfried Pacho.

Ajorque will be Brest’s dangerman when the sides meet again this month in the Champions League play-offs to reach the round of 16.

Striker Gonçalo Ramos scored twice late on as PSG punished Brest with quick breaks.

New signing Mika Biereth grabbed a hat trick in eight second-half minutes as Monaco beat Auxerre 4-2 to hold onto third place.

Monaco led in the 35th through left back Thilo Kehrer’s fine finish into the top left corner, but Auxerre’s equalizer was even better as defender Sinaly Diomandé drove an unstoppable shot into the top right.

Brazilian center back Jubal converted a penalty deep into first-half stoppage time after Monaco captain Denis Zakaria was punished for tugging a shirt.

Biereth turned the game on its head.

He equalized in the 57th with a cool finish from Breel Embolo’s pass, and his second in the 63rd was even bet-



PSG’s Bradley Barcola, centre right, celebrates with Desire Doue after scoring the opening goal during the Champions League opening phase soccer match between VfB Stuttgart and Paris Saint-Germain in Stuttgart, Germany. (AP)

ter as he deftly volleyed a dipping cross from Brazilian Caio Henrique into the opposite corner.

Auxerre’s defense couldn’t pick the 21-year-old Danish striker’s clever runs and he finished off another move two minutes later.

After scoring six against Feyenoord in the Champions League, fourth-placed Lille beat lowly Saint-Etienne 4-1.

Georgia forward Zuriko Davitashvili put visiting Saint-Etienne ahead early with a penalty. Jonathan David leveled from the spot for Lille with his 20th goal in all competitions, including six in the Champions League.

The game changed completely after Saint-Etienne defender Dylan Batubinsika was sent off in the 48th.

Substitute Osame Sahraoui scored twice and left back Gabriel Gudmundsson once as Lille stayed two points behind Monaco. Defeat put Saint-Etienne 15th.

Harbin embracing Games with mass participation

9th Asian Winter Games torch relay begins

HARBIN, Feb 2, (Xinhua): With less than a week out from the official opening of the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin, the torch relay of the games will officially commence in the “Ice City” on Monday.

Li Na, head of the Torchbearer and Volunteer Management Team of the Torch Relay Command Center, said that the relay will last for one day, covering a total route of approximately 11 kilometers and consist of a launch ceremony, a closing ceremony, and community performances along the route.

“The selection of torchbearers was conducted with an emphasis on inclusiveness, representation, and fairness, with participants from the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), the Chinese Olympic Committee, the AWG organizing committee, and various cities across Heilongjiang Province, as well as representatives from the event’s sponsor enterprises,” Li said, adding that a total of 120 torchbearers will participate in the event.

The torch relay route, which passes through multiple landmarks in Harbin, has been designed to meet the requirements of being simple, safe, and spectacular while also showcasing the natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and urban charm of the host city.

The ninth Asian Winter Games will take place in Harbin from Feb. 7 to 14. Over 1,270 athletes from 34 countries and regions across Asia will participate, making this edition the largest in terms of participating delegations and athletes.

As preparations for the ninth Asian Winter Games in Harbin enter the final stretch, public enthusiasm for winter sports in the “Ice



This photo taken on Jan. 20, 2025, shows the flame lighting ceremony for the 9th Asian Winter Games at the Sun Island Scenic Area in Harbin, northeast China’s Heilongjiang Province. (Xinhua)

City” has reached a new peak.

This marks the second time the northeastern Chinese city hosts the event, following its staging of the third edition in 1996.

Bai Zhiguo, deputy secretary-general of the organizing committee and director of the Harbin Sports Bureau, said that over 300 mass winter sports events are scheduled this winter, attracting tourists from home and abroad.

He added that the city has designed 10 themed travel routes under the title “Travel with the Games,” linking Asian Winter Games competition venues with winter sports activities and tourist attractions.

Wang Keshuai, deputy director

of the Yabuli competition venue, noted that in addition to the 32 official events during the Games, the venue will also host more than 20 professional and mass events, aiming to boost Yabuli’s reputation.

He emphasized that actively hosting high-level ice and snow competitions helps accelerate infrastructure upgrades and diversify the range of winter tourism products.

The ninth Asian Winter Games will take place in Harbin from Feb. 7 to 14. Over 1,270 athletes from 34 countries and regions across Asia will participate, making this edition the largest in terms of participating delegations and athletes.

Best of the Rest

Boost for Wolves as Cunha pens new deal: Wolverhampton Wanderers’ battle to avoid relegation received a major boost with the news that Brazilian striker Matheus Cunha has signed a new contract until 2029.

The news means Wolves has held off interest from several clubs, including Arsenal to keep the 25-year-old striker, who has scored 11 goals in 23 Premier League games for the club this season and is arguably the main factor in keeping it out of the bottom three. (Xinhua)

Serginho joins CSL club Beijing Guoan: Chinese Super League (CSL) club Beijing Guoan announced on Sunday that it has signed Brazilian midfielder Serginho from fellow CSL side Changchun Yatai.

The 29-year-old, who will wear the No. 7 shirt in the upcoming 2025 season, spent five seasons at Changchun, netting 30 goals and contributing 23 assists as a core player.

Beijing Guoan also confirmed the arrivals of Brazilian midfielder Dawhan, midfielder Li Ruiyue, and defender Wu Shaocong on the same day. (Xinhua)

Union signs Ljubicic: Union Berlin, the team with the worst attack in the Bundesliga, is signing Croatian forward Marin Ljubicic to address the problem.

Union said Sunday that the 22-year-old Ljubicic was arriving from Austrian team LASK. It did not give the length of his contract.

Ljubicic scored 28 goals in 75 matches in Austria’s Bundesliga for LASK after joining the club from Croatian club Hajduk Split in 2022. (AP)

Milinkovic-Savic denies Atalanta again as Torino secures draw

MILAN, Feb 2, (AP): If Atalanta’s title bid falters in Serie A, it will be forgiven for blaming Torino goalkeeper Vanja Milinkovic-Savic.

The Serbia international saved an Atalanta penalty for the second time this season to help his team to draw 1-1 on a soggy night in Bergamo.

Atalanta remained third and was three points behind Inter Milan, which plays AC Milan in a derby match on Sunday, and six below league leader Napoli, which goes to Roma on Sunday.

Berat Djimsiti headed Atalanta into the lead in the 35th minute with his first goal in nearly three years, but Guillermo Maripan headed Torino level just five minutes later. It was the Chile captain’s first goal in Serie A.

Atalanta could have gone 2-1 up with 16 minutes remaining when it was awarded a penalty after Torino midfielder Adrien Tameze hauled



Juventus’ Kenan Yildiz, left, vies for the ball with Empoli’s Mattia De Sciglio during the Serie A soccer match between Juventus and Empoli at the Juventus Stadium in Turin, Italy. (AP)

down Matteo Retegui by the shirt.

However, Milinkovic-Savic fingertipped Retegui’s spot kick away

at full stretch. The Torino keeper celebrated but was booked for taunting Atalanta fans, who responded by

launching objects at his goal.

It was the third penalty Milinkovic-Savic saved this season. One was against Bologna in December, and the other was against Atalanta in August - with Torino going on to win 2-1.

A comical own goal saw Hellas Verona earn a crucial 1-0 victory at bottom club Monza.

Suat Serdar appeared to offer little danger in the 13th when he rolled the ball across from the right. Monza defender Stefan Lekovic had plenty of time and space to control or clear, but the youngster instead shinned it into an empty net.

Verona’s first win of 2025 lifted the club three points above the relegation zone. Monza was eight points from safety.

One of Monza’s brightest players, Daniel Maldini, completed his move to Atalanta shortly before kickoff.

Bologna beat 10-man Como 2-0.



Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski, right, prepares to shoot during a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Barcelona and Alaves at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

Sports

Relegation-threatened Espanyol stuns Madrid

Barcelona moves closer to top

MADRID, Feb 2, (Agencies): Real Madrid's winning run ended in stunning fashion after losing at relegation-threatened Espanyol 1-0 in La Liga.

Defender Carlos Romero's late goal beat the La Liga leader and moved Espanyol out of the bottom three.

Espanyol inched two points clear of the drop zone, while Madrid's lead was cut to one point after Atletico Madrid beat Mallorca 2-0 earlier.

Madrid, which found out on Friday that it will face Manchester City in the Champions League knockout playoff round, travelled to Espanyol with 10 victories in its last 11 matches in all competitions. It dominated and Vinicius Junior thought he gave the visitors the lead in the 21st minute but it was ruled out due to a foul by Kylian Mbappé on Espanyol midfielder Pol Lozano.

Madrid was made to pay for its missed opportunities five minutes from time when Romero volleyed in Omar El Hilali's cross, much to the home fans' raucous - and surprised - delight. Atletico went into its match against seventh-placed Mallorca having lost both of its last two league matches and with only two wins in its last four games after a run of 15 consecutive victories.

It took the lead in the 26th minute when Giuliano Simeone sprinted down the right before rolling the ball across the edge of the area for Samuel Lino to fire into the bottom right corner.

Rodrigo Riquelme hit the crossbar with a free kick two minutes from time and provided the through ball for substitute Antoine Griezmann to run onto and delightfully chip the goalkeeper and seal the match in stoppages.

Fifth-placed Villarreal crushed bottom club Real Valladolid 5-1 and Getafe drew with Sevilla 0-0. Real Madrid suffered a major injury blow on Saturday after German central defender Antonio Rudiger injured his right hamstring. The German international was forced out in the 13th minute of his side's surprise 1-0 defeat to Espanyol.

"Following tests carried out on Antonio Rudiger by Real Madrid's medical services, the player has been diagnosed with an injury to the biceps femoris in his right leg. His progress will be monitored," the club announced on Sunday.

Although no timeframe was given for his recovery, hamstring injuries typically require at least three weeks of treatment. That makes it likely Rudiger will miss his team's second La Liga Madrid derby of the season against Atletico Madrid next weekend. Real Madrid then visits Manchester City on February 11 in the first leg of the play-offs for a last-16 place, with the return leg a week later. Rudiger is set to miss all three high-profile matches.

The setback comes at a particularly difficult time for Real Madrid, who already lost Eder Militao to a season-ending knee injury and has David Alaba still working his way back from a similar problem over a year ago.

Rudiger has been crucial this season, starting 34 of his side's 36 matches so far - totaling 2,891 minutes - making him the most used outfield player in the squad, ahead of Fede Valverde with 2,847 minutes.

Robert Lewandowski scored a second-half winner as Barcelona beat Alaves 1-0 on Sunday to move within four points of rival Real Madrid at the top of the Spanish league.

Madrid lost 1-0 at Espanyol on Saturday after a run of 10 victories in its last 11 matches in all competitions.



Real Madrid's Lucas Vazquez, center left, jumps for the ball with Espanyol's Urko Gonzalez, centre right, during a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Espanyol and Real Madrid at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain. (AP)

Third-placed Barcelona is three points behind second-placed Atletico Madrid, which ended a two-match winless streak in the league with a 2-0 victory against Mallorca on Saturday.

"We knew we had to win this match," Lewandowski said. "We needed the victory. We had lost too many points in the league already."

It was the fourth goal in as many matches for Lewandowski across all competitions, and his seventh in the last eight games.

The Poland striker scored from close range after a volley by Lamine Yamal from inside the area deflected off a defender.

It was an unusually low-scoring game for Barcelona, which had claimed 14 goals in its last three matches - including a 7-1 rout of Valencia in the league.

"It's not every time that we will be able to score three, four or five goals in a game," Lewandowski said. "We had to be patient and in the end we did what we had to do, which was to score one more goal than our opponent."

Kuwait's ice hockey team eyes strong start against Kyrgyzstan

HARBIN, China, Feb 2, (KUNA): Kuwait's ice hockey team is set to take on Kyrgyzstan on Monday in the 9th Asian Winter Games, held in Harbin, China, from February 7-14. The match is part of Group B, which also includes Bahrain and Singapore.

The Blues completed their final training session on Sunday at the tournament's ice rink, showcasing high spirits and strong support from the technical and executive staff.

Speaking to the accompanying Kuwaiti media delegation, the team's German coach, Andreas Bartkevich, expressed confidence in his players, noting that it possesses the skills to secure positive results despite the tough competition.

He emphasized that the squad is well-prepared, crediting its recent training camp in the UAE for fostering greater harmony and teamwork among the players.

Team captain Jasem Al-Awadhi echoed the coach's optimism, stating that all players are determined to give their best in their opening match against Kyrgyzstan.



KUNA photo
Kuwait national team coach, Andreas Bartkevich.

He highlighted the UAE training camp and previous preparations in Kuwait as crucial in implementing the coach's strategies effectively.

Kuwaiti athletes are competing in four disciplines at the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin: ice hockey, figure skating, speed skating, and curling.

Aisha becomes 1st Kuwaiti female handball player to go pro abroad

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Kuwait national handball team player and Salwa Al-Sabah Club star Aisha Al-Saad has made history as the first Kuwaiti female handball player to compete professionally abroad. She played a pivotal role in leading Omani club Masirah to victory in the second edition of the Omani Women's Sports Games, held last October, where they secured the handball title after defeating Salalah Club in the final.

Al-Saad's groundbreaking achievement marks a significant milestone for Kuwaiti women's handball, potentially paving the way for more players to pursue professional careers overseas.

Her journey in handball began in 2014 with Salwa Al-Sabah Club's youth team. She later made her debut with Kuwait's national women's team in 2019, showcasing impressive performances that earned her a spot in the Gulf Women's Games in Kuwait. She also represented Kuwait at the 2023 West Asian Championship in Jordan, where she was named the tournament's best left-back.

Speaking to Al-Seyassah, Al-Saad shared that playing professionally had been a long-standing goal, and when the right opportunity arose, she seized it by joining Masirah in Oman.



Aisha Al-Saad honored after her brilliance in Oman.

"I am delighted with this experience, which has given me greater confidence and determination to pursue professionalism. It will undoubtedly enhance my performance when representing Kuwait in international competitions," Al-Saad said.

She further expressed her openness to future professional opportunities, stating, "If another opportunity arises and I receive approval from Salwa Al-Sabah Club, I have no objection to taking on a new challenge." She also wished success for her fellow Kuwaiti players and hoped to see more of them competing professionally on the international stage.

Al-Qadsiya signs Bulgarian star to bolster squad for the season

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, Feb 2: Al-Qadsiya Club has officially signed Bulgarian professional Grozdanov to strengthen its volleyball team for the remainder of the 2024-2025 season. Grozdanov replaces Dutch player Ter Horst, who suffered a foot fracture requiring a prolonged recovery period.

Currently, Al-Qadsiya is holding an external training camp in Doha, Qatar, which began on January 21 and runs until February 5. This intensive camp serves as preparation for the upcoming 3rd West Asian Men's Volleyball Clubs Championship, set to take place in Manama, Bahrain, from February 7-15. The tournament will feature Al-Qadsiya and Kuwait Club as Kuwait's representatives.

The tournament draw has placed Al-Qadsiya against Kuwait Club in their opening match on February 7 at Isa bin Rashid Hall in Riffa. The championship features eight competing clubs:

Kuwait Club (Kuwait), Al-Qadsiya (Kuwait), Al-Arabi (Qatar), Al-Rayyan (Qatar), North Refineries (Iraq), Al-Salam (Oman) Al-Ahli (Bahrain)

The teams will compete in a sin-



Al-Qadsiya prepares for the West Asia Volleyball Championship.

gle-round league format to determine the champion.

Al-Qadsiya's delegation to the tournament is led by club board member and volleyball team head Dr. Hussein Al-Qabandi. The squad includes team manager Ismail Dashti, administrator Mohammed Al-Damkhi, Bahraini head coach Redha Ali, assistant coach Dordi Begic, physical trainer Idris Jakich, therapist Nicola, equipment manager Samir Malana, and 15 players.

With Grozdanov's arrival and a well-structured training camp, Al-Qadsiya aims for a strong showing in Bahrain as they compete for the West Asian title.

Tottenham beats Brentford

Man United loses to Palace as Rashford edges toward departure

LONDON, Feb 2, (AP): On the day Marcus Rashford edged closer to a departure from Old Trafford, Manchester United lacked a cutting edge up front in a 2-0 home loss to Crystal Palace in the Premier League.

There was more bad news Sunday for United with a tearful Lisandro Martinez carried off on a stretcher with a left knee injury - the latest injury to afflict the Argentina defender.

Jean-Philippe Mateta scored both goals in the second half for Palace to end United's three-match winning run in all competitions - a streak coming after Ruben Amorim had called his team "the worst team, maybe, in the history of Manchester United."

Amorim fielded a team with no out-and-out striker and failed to create many good chances against Palace, which picked off United on the counterattack. Mateta's goals came in the 64th and 89th minutes.

United was overtaken by Palace and dropped to 13th in the standings - one place and two points ahead of Tottenham, which won 2-0 at Brentford to end a four-match losing run in the league and ease some pressure on manager Ange Postecoglou.

Vitaly Janelt scored an own-goal at a corner to put Tottenham ahead and Pape Sarr added the second goal in the 87th.

Rashford was reportedly undergoing a medical examination at Aston Villa on Sunday ahead of a loan move from Manchester United, where he has fallen out with recently hired manager Ruben Amorim.

The move would be with a view to a permanent transfer for 40 million pounds (\$50 million), according to the Press Association and other sections of the British media, who also reported that Villa will pay a loan fee and cover the majority of Rashford's salary, reportedly worth nearly \$400,000 a week.

Neither Villa nor United was commenting publicly on the deal.

The 27-year-old forward, one of the most famous players in the Premier League, had not played for United, his hometown club, since Dec. 12 amid concerns from Amorim about Rashford's commitment to training. He has also been overlooked for recent England squads and didn't play at the European Championship last year, after a season when he was dropped by United on one



Crystal Palace's Daniel Munoz blocks Manchester United's Alejandro Garnacho during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester United and Crystal Palace at Old Trafford stadium in Manchester, England. (AP)

occasion for disciplinary reasons.

There was speculation about a move to Italy or Saudi Arabia, but Rashford will stay in England in a bid to reignite his career and now needs to prove to Villa manager Unai Emery he deserves playing time.

Villa sold Colombia striker Jhon Duran to Saudi club Al-Nassr for a reported fee of 64 million pounds (\$80 million) on Friday so needed an attacking player to provide competition for Ollie Watkins.

Rashford scored 30 goals in the 2022-23 season, the most prolific of his career after bursting onto the scene early in 2016 at the age of 18, but hasn't approached that level since. He has seven goals in all competitions this season.

Amorim recently said he would rather put United's 63-year-old goalkeeping coach in the squad ahead of someone who isn't fully committed in training, as he perceives Rashford.

"The reason is the training, what I think a footballer should do in training, in life and every day. If things don't change, I will not change," he said. "It's the same situation for every player. If you do the maximum and the right things then we can use every player."

At one point, Rashford even acknowledged he was "ready for a new challenge." A problem for Rashford and United was that he is only a year-and-a-half into his lucrative contract.

Only wealthy clubs could afford to match that salary and offer the sort of transfer fee United would demand. Duran's departure to Saudi Arabia likely helped.

Rashford has made more than 420 appearances for United, scoring 138 goals, and made a name for himself for his off-the-field work during the pandemic when his lobbying led to the British government agreeing to keep funding meals for poor students after initial resistance.